

An Investigation of Idiom Comprehension and Translation by Translation Students at KSU

Dania Adel Salamah

Department of English Language and Translation
College of Languages and Translation
King Saud University

Abstract

The study attempted to investigate the problems and difficulties related to idiom comprehension and translation with female English Translation students. In general, EFL learners experience difficulties in understanding the meaning of idiomatic expressions; however, the problem is magnified when learners are required not only to understand the meanings of these expressions, but also to render their meanings in another language. The objective of this study was to investigate whether or not female English Translation students at the College of Languages and Translation, King Saud University faced any difficulties in understanding and translating English idiomatic expressions. The study also aimed to classify the translation strategies the subjects used, as well as, the types of errors they made. The researcher followed a qualitative descriptive design model. The study population was composed of female English Translation students. The sample was made up of two groups of female English Translation students in their fourth and fifth years of study. The findings of the study demonstrated that the subjects generally did not face difficulties in understanding English idiomatic expressions, but they generally did face difficulties in translating these expressions into Arabic. The findings also helped identify eleven error categories and seven translation strategy categories.

Key Words: idiomatic expressions, idiom comprehension, idioms, idiom translation, translation errors, translation strategies

Introduction

Idiom comprehension is considered difficult for many English language learners (LL). Understanding the meanings of idiomatic expressions (IE) is a natural process with native speakers of English. However, it is more intentional with LL. When English LL learn the language in non-English speaking contexts, they lack the opportunity to use it in natural settings. Thus, they are not exposed to the language as it occurs naturally, and they do not interact with native speakers (Abdul Wahhab, 2002). This makes it difficult for them to acquire the meanings of IE.

The main characteristics of idioms that contribute to their difficulty are their fixed structures in addition to their non-literal meanings (Baker, 1992; Fernando, 1996; Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams, 2007). IE are also different from other vocabulary items because they have special semantic features and are processed as single items together with their meanings (Fromkin et al., 2007).

Objectives of the Study

This study attempted to investigate the problems and difficulties relevant to idiom comprehension and translation with female English Translation students at the College of Languages and Translation (COLT), King Saud University (KSU). The researcher attempted to classify the problems and difficulties female English Translation students encounter when dealing with IE in translation, in addition to classifying the translation strategies they used.

Research Questions

This study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. Do female Translation students face difficulties in understanding English IE?
2. Do female Translation students face difficulties in translating English IE into Arabic?
3. What difficulties do the subjects face when they come across IE?
4. How can these difficulties/errors be classified?
5. What strategies do the subjects resort to when dealing with IE in translation?

Significance of the Study

This study was motivated by the fact that LL face difficulties in understanding idioms which is more problematic when LL are required to understand these expressions and translate them into Arabic. It was anticipated that the findings of the study would be useful:

1. To raise student awareness of the problematic areas they may face and the different strategies to follow when dealing with idioms in translation;
2. To raise the awareness of novice translation teachers of the types of difficulties faced by students when translating IE. This knowledge may help teachers in developing methods to better train students on how to deal with these forms.

From a theoretical perspective, it was hoped that this study would shed some light on the reasons students face difficulties with IE in both comprehension and translation. This would be achieved by helping to point out the causes behind the errors committed by the subjects, as well as the translation strategies they followed. This information may be used to educate translation students about the translation strategies that are used when dealing with IE, as well as the types of errors that should be avoided.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to translation from English into Arabic. Thus, the subjects had two obstacles to overcome; first the recognition and comprehension of the English IE, and second, translating these expressions into Arabic.

Literature Review

This section discusses the theoretical and empirical studies related to the comprehension and translation of IE as well as the classification of learners' errors and translation strategies.

Comprehension of IE

Baker (1992) mentioned that the first obstacle facing a translator when dealing with IE is failing to recognize the expression as such. Irujo (1986b, cited in Bataineh, 1996) indicated that IE are difficult due to their non-literal meanings and the difficulty in using them appropriately. She attributed the difficulty of learning IE to the type of language LL are exposed to, since native speakers usually use simple and non-idiomatic language with them.

Abu-Afeefeh (1987) investigated whether or not English students used their native knowledge of Arabic to understand and produce English IE. His findings corresponded to those of Irujo (1986, cited in Abdul Wahhab, 2002) which can be summarized as follows:

1. Identical idioms are the easiest to comprehend and produce by LL.
2. Similar idioms are easy to understand, but there is evidence of native language interference.
3. Different idioms are the most difficult to understand and produce.

Migdadi (1994) found that when it comes to idioms, LL used a number of strategies such as literal translation, approximation, and avoidance. These strategies were caused by lack of comprehension and often resulted in lexical errors.

Abdul Wahhab's (2002) findings indicate that the main reasons LL face difficulties when dealing with IE are their non-literal meanings, fixed word-orders, in addition to the unique word groupings of some IE. He added that lack of cultural knowledge on the part of the learners, as well as learning the language in a non-native speaker environment were also factors that contributed to such difficulties.

Translation of IE

Translation is basically changing a written or spoken text from one language to another. Newmark defined translation as, "rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text" (2003, p. 5). However, differences that exist between languages make it difficult and, in some situations, almost impossible to grasp the exact intended meaning in the ST and render that meaning in the TT. With regards to translating idioms, it is difficult for non-native speakers of English to match the competence of a native speaker in using IE (Baker, 1992). Actually, Baker (1992) explained that IE are problematic in translation for two main reasons: the ability to recognize an expression as an idiom and interpret it correctly; and the difficulty of rendering the different aspects of an idiom's meaning into the TL. Thus, the difficulty lies in both processes; the comprehension of the expression, as well as the interpretation of its intended meaning.

The main difficulties associated with idiom translation can be categorized as follows (Baker, 1992):

1. Lack of an equivalent expression in the TL.
2. A TL equivalent that has a different context of use.
3. Using the SL idiom in its idiomatic and its literal meanings for the purpose of producing a play on meaning.
4. Frequency of IE use in written texts varies from language to another.

In his discussion of translation problems, Ghazala (2003) explained that direct idioms are translated directly/literally but have metaphorical meanings (e.g., stab in the back/ يطعن في الظهر), while indirect idioms are translated indirectly and their meanings must be inferred from the context (e.g., second hand/مستعمل). Al-Hamdalla (1998), on the other hand, explained that translators should try to find an equivalent form for the idiom in the Arabic language, or else they should provide an equivalent explanation.

The problems of translating IE have also been classified into linguistic problems and cultural problems. These problems may be attributed to the large linguistic and cultural gap between Arabic and English since the two languages belong to two language families and two cultures that are completely different (Ayoub, 1994).

On a similar note, Bataineh (1996) investigated the problems resulting from the translation of English IE into Arabic by Jordanian Translation students. She also investigated the reasons behind these problems, the type(s) of IE that are problematic, and the strategies used in translating idioms. She found that any omission or misinterpretation of the idiom led to loss or distortion of the text's meaning and/or coherence. Bataineh explained that the subjects found difficulties with IE mainly because they were culturally-specific. They were also difficult because sometimes learners were unable to identify them as idiomatic, which led to literal translation. Finally, she found that her subjects basically followed the translation strategies outlined by Baker (1992).

Hussein, Khanji, & Makhzoomy (2000) also conducted a study in which they attempted to investigate the problem LL as well as translation students have with English IE. They argued that LL generally have a problem with the comprehension of IE, and thus, they face difficulties translating these expressions into Arabic. They found that the subjects' ability to use IE was weak.

On the other hand, Al-Qahtany (2004) investigated the lexical problems of senior undergraduate translation students at Imam Mohammed bin Saud Islamic University. He managed to classify the translation errors the subjects made into eight categories including omission, paraphrasing, addition, substitution, and literal translation.

Badawi (2008) conducted a study on a number of prospective EFL teachers at the University of Tabouk. He investigated their ability to translate culturally-specific expressions and their awareness of translation strategies. He found that their translation ability was poor, as was their awareness of translation strategies. He also found that they commonly resorted to literal translation.

Some of the strategies commonly used to translate IE can be summarized below (Baker, 1992):

1. Using a TL IE that conveys almost the same meaning of the SL expression, and which also has the same form.
2. Using a TL IE that conveys almost the same meaning of the SL expression, but which has a different form.
3. Paraphrasing the SL expression based on conveying its meaning without adhering to an idiomatic form.
4. Omitting the SL IE.

Error

Since this study dealt with error detection and classification, it was necessary to provide some information related to this issue including defining the notion of error, and discussing the classification of error types.

The notion of error. James (1998) initially defined a language error as "an unsuccessful bit of language" (p.1). Nevertheless, errors may be considered forms that deviate from the acceptable linguistic norm or standard. Usually, a linguistic norm is what a language community considers correct and acceptable (James, 1998). Thus, generally speaking, an error can be defined as any form that deviates from the norm.

Error classification. LL in general face difficulties when dealing with English vocabulary items, and especially when these items are IE. These difficulties are detected in understanding the meanings of IE, as well as producing and using them in speech or writing. Furthermore, many researchers conducted studies that focused on these difficulties trying to indicate their causes. These studies usually aimed to classify the types of errors learners made as well.

While reviewing the literature, the researcher found that the Target Modification Taxonomy (TMT) was the most relevant to this study because this taxonomy refers to instances where learners produce forms deviant from the intended TL form. The taxonomy includes the following categories: omission, overinclusion, misselection, misordering, and blends (James, 1998).

Additionally, the researcher found that different scholars classified lexical errors differently. For example, Zaghlool (1984) found that the errors learners made were mainly substitution, omission, overuse, and insertion. While others, such as Zughoul (1990, cited in Migdadi, 1994), classified lexical errors into 13 categories, such as literal translation, collocation, and the influence of Arabic style. Furthermore, Shudooh (1988) classified the types of errors committed by Arab translation students into: wrong choice of word, collocation, or derivation, literal translation, omission, miscomprehension of the original, and so on.

As for the reasons behind these errors, the researcher found that different researchers had different opinions and classifications based on their investigations. For instance, Zaghlool (1984) attributed lexical errors to elements such as translation from Arabic and lack of knowledge of English. While Migdadi (1994) believed that the errors were caused by the strategies learners use to learn English vocabulary.

Richards (1980) provided a general categorization of the errors LL make. He categorized learners' errors into interlanguage errors caused by interference from the learner's native language, and intralingual and developmental errors caused by elements within the structure of the English language. He further divided intralingual and developmental errors into: overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules, and false concepts hypothesized.

As far as IE are concerned the main cause of their difficulty seems to be their non-literal and culturally-specific meanings, which makes them difficult for LL to understand and use. So they generally avoid using them. Furthermore, native speakers of English also tend to avoid using them when communicating with non-native speakers, which reduces exposure to these forms (Bataneh, 1996).

Therefore, it seems that James's taxonomy (1998) is inclusive of some of the errors mentioned above, such as omission, substitution, insertion or addition, and wrong choice of word or derivation. The studies reviewed above yielded a number of error categories, such as:

- a. omission and insertion (Zaghlool, 1984)
- b. wrong choice of word, collocation, or derivation, omission, redundancy, ambiguity miscomprehension of original, style/register, and literal translation (Shudooh, 1988)
- c. omission, paraphrase, addition, substitution, literal translation, and inappropriate collocation (Al-Qahtany, 2004)

Translation Strategies

As for the notion of strategy, James (1998) explained briefly that strategies are the tools learners resort to when they encounter difficulties learning the TL or using it for communication. He also explained that learner strategies are generally divided by researchers in the field into learning strategies and communication strategies.

Oxford (1990) classified the strategies used by LL into direct and indirect strategies with further sub-classifications. However, the strategies that were found to be most relevant to translation were those she subcategorized as compensation strategies within the category of direct strategies. She explained that compensation strategies are used by learners to make up for lack of grammatical and lexical knowledge. She further divided the category of compensation strategies into two sets: guessing intelligently in listening and reading, and overcoming limitations in speaking and writing. Since both aspects of the process of translation are under investigation in this study (i.e., comprehension and production), both sets apply.

Furthermore, Scarcella & Oxford (1992) listed certain strategies involved in achieving strategic competence. Those that are relevant to this study include paraphrase, circumlocution, transfer, and avoidance. Such strategies are used by LL to enhance communication or to compensate for any weaknesses.

Badawi (2008) attempted to investigate translation strategy awareness by creating a questionnaire which included a number of categories such as, addition, deletion, literal equivalent, paraphrase, reduction, synonymy, and guessing.

Regarding the classification of strategies, the researcher noticed that some of the categories some researchers designated as error types have been used to designate strategies as well. For example, although paraphrasing was considered an error by Al-Qahtany (2004), Baker (1992) considered it a translation strategy. However, both al-Hamdalla (1998) and McGuire (1980, cited in Al-Qahtany, 2004) agreed that paraphrase translation should be used as a last resort when no equivalents are available.

Moreover, literal translation was considered an error in some cases (Shudooh, 1988; Al-Qahtany, 2004), but a translation strategy in others (Ghazala, 2003; Badawi 2004). Similarly, omission was considered an error type by some researchers (Zaghlool, 1984; Shudooh, 1988; Al-Qahtany, 2004), while Baker (1992) considered it a strategy.

Thus, it seems that there is an area of overlap regarding the classification of error types and translation strategies. Interestingly enough, James (1998), referred to a similar area of overlap as he mentioned the similarity that exists between some learning strategies discussed by researchers in the field (i.e., Kasper & Kellerman, 1997, cited in James, 1998) and the error categories he referred to in his TMT. He explained that it was unclear how some strategies were considered strategies, and that they were better explained as causes for strategy use.

Based on the above-reviewed studies, it seems clear that the most commonly-used translation strategies include those outlined by Baker (1992):

1. Using a TL IE that has a similar form and meaning to the SL expression.
2. Using a TL IE that has a similar meaning to the SL expression, but a different form.
3. Paraphrasing the SL IE to render its meaning without adhering to its idiomatic form.
4. Omitting the TL IE.

Conclusion

Based on the studies reviewed above, it is clear that IE are difficult for a number of factors, such as their fixed and culturally-bound meanings, their structural restrictions, the inability to recognize them as IE, as well as interference from Arabic. Furthermore, the literature also demonstrated that when it comes to the translation of IE, learners apply a number of different strategies, such as, omission, literal translation, paraphrase, and using idioms with similar forms and/or meanings.

It is also clear that the study shared similarities with previous research in the field. However, some studies examined the subjects' ability to understand, produce, or learn English idioms (e.g., Abu-Afeefeh, 1987; Migdadi, 1994; Abdul Wahhab, 2002). Others investigated whether or not students faced any difficulties in translating IE and attempted to highlight these difficulties (e.g., Ayoub, 1994; Hussein et al., 2000). In some cases, the studies indicated the causes of these difficulties and/or the types of idioms that were problematic (e.g., Bataineh, 1996). Finally, some studies examined the lexical problems associated with translation (Al-Qahtany, 2004) or idiom translation and translation strategy awareness (Badawi, 2008).

This study differed from most of the studies reviewed above in that it examined two aspects simultaneously: the comprehension of English IE, and the translation of English IE into Arabic, while many of the reviewed studies examined translation from Arabic into English.

Furthermore, this study also aimed to use the subjects' responses to create a classification of the errors made and the translation strategies used.

Methodology

Research Design

As discussed above, the aim of this study was to examine whether or not the subjects faced difficulties in understanding and translating IE, as well as to classify the translation strategies they used and the errors they made. Accordingly, the research followed a qualitative descriptive design model and the collected data was analyzed quantitatively. This section provides more details on the subjects, the instruments, and data analysis.

Subjects

The study population consisted of female students from the English Language Program at COLT, KSU. The sample of the study consisted of two groups of randomly selected students in their fourth and fifth years of study. The first group was composed of 57 subjects, while the second was composed of 46 subjects.

Instruments

In order to investigate the research questions, the researcher collected data from the subjects by administering two sets of tests. The first set was administered to the first group of subjects. However, preliminary analysis of the data collected from the first group of subjects using the first set of tests presented some contradictory findings. Thus, it was necessary to create a second set of tests that were given to a second group of subjects belonging to the same study population as it was not feasible to locate the students who participated in the first group of subjects since they had already graduated at the time.

The first set of tests. This set consisted of three tests: the Translation Test (Test 1), the Sentence Comprehension Test (Test 2), and the Multiple-Choice Recognition Test (Test 3). Each test was composed of 20 items. In Test 1, the subjects were required to translate English sentences containing IE into Arabic. The test aimed to evaluate the subjects' ability to transfer the meanings of IE from English into Arabic. In Test 2, the subjects were instructed to provide a paraphrase (in English) of the underlined IE in each sentence. This test aimed to evaluate the subjects' comprehension of English IE. Finally, in Test 3, the subjects were asked to choose the word or phrase that best represented the meaning of the underlined IE. This test aimed to evaluate the subjects' comprehension of some English IE.

The second set of tests. The second set consisted of two tests: the Multiple-Choice Translation Test (Test 4) and the Multiple-Choice Sentence Comprehension Test (Test 5). It was necessary to create these two additional tests after the preliminary findings indicated the need for further investigation. Each test consisted of 20 items. In Test 4, the subjects were required to choose the most suitable translation from a number of given choices. The aim of this test was to determine whether the errors committed by the first group of subjects on Test 1 were the result of their inability to understand the IE or their inability to produce correct/acceptable translations. In Test 5, the subjects were asked to choose the most suitable paraphrase from a number of given choices. The aim of this test was to determine whether the errors committed by the first group of

subjects on Test 2 were the result of their inability to understand the IE or their inability to produce acceptable paraphrases.

Reliability and validity. The split half procedure was used to establish reliability of the instruments, which were found to be reliable. To establish validity, the tests were rated by a number of faculty members at COLT who have experience in teaching translation. Their constructive comments and remarks were taken into consideration and necessary changes were made accordingly.

Discussion of Results

This section deals with the analysis and interpretation of the collected data. The discussion will be divided according to the research questions.

Research Question One

The first research question was: Do female Translation students face difficulties in understanding English IE? To answer this question the researcher examined the results of Test 2, Test 3, and Test 5 as the main purpose of these tests was to examine the subjects' ability to understand English IE. The researcher also took into consideration the results of Test 4 since it also measures whether or not the subjects understand English IE.

The sentence comprehension test and the multiple-choice sentence comprehension test. After analyzing the subjects' results on Test 2, it was found that 39.2% of the total paraphrases provided by the subjects were excellent, which is not a relatively high percentage. However, 29.64% of the total responses were left blank.

Nevertheless, these results do not necessarily indicate that the first group of subjects had difficulties in the comprehension of IE, as the test involves the skill of paraphrase. Therefore, it was necessary to verify whether the weak or incorrect scores were the result of miscomprehension or mistakes in paraphrasing.

Thus, Test 5 was created using the same sentences in Test 2. The results on Test 5 indicated that 82.71% of the subjects' total responses were correct, which is considered a relatively high percentage.

The multiple-choice recognition test. As for the results on Test 3 taken by the first group of subjects, the analysis revealed that the percentage of correct responses was 68% of the total number of responses which is not considered a relatively high percentage. Note that the items on Test 3 and Test 5 are different which explains the difference in results.

The multiple-choice translation test. The researcher included a discussion of the results of Test 4 taken by the second group of subjects here because the subjects' choices on this test provided an indication of their comprehension of the expressions on the test. As the choices they made were based on their comprehension of the sentences among other factors.

The subjects' performance on this test indicated that the percentage of correct responses was 75.7%, which is a relatively high percentage.

Hence, in response to the first research question, and after analyzing the data collected from the four relevant instruments, it may be concluded that the subjects of the study generally do not face difficulties in understanding IE.

Research Question Two

The second research question was: Do female Translation students face difficulties in translating English IE into Arabic? To answer this question, the researcher analyzed the subjects' results on Test 1 and Test 4.

After analyzing the subjects' translations on Test 1, it was found that 43% of the subjects' total responses were excellent translations, while 27% were incorrect translations.

Having reached these results, it could be inferred that the subjects generally do face difficulties in translating English IE into Arabic. Furthermore, when taking into consideration the subjects' results on Test 4 (i.e., the percentage of correct responses was approximately 75%), it may be also concluded that the relatively low scores can be attributed to difficulties in the process of translation itself, and not the miscomprehension of the IE since the subjects were generally able to choose the most suitable translation when provided with a number of choices.

Research Questions Three and Four

The third and fourth research questions were: What difficulties do the subjects face when they come across IE? And: How can these difficulties/errors be classified?

To answer these questions, the researcher examined the subjects' responses on Test 1. After analyzing the translations, the researcher indicated the major types of errors committed by the subjects. These error categories also helped in inferring the major areas of difficulty.

The errors were found to fall under 11 categories with some categories proving to be more statistically significant than others. Most of the error categories corresponded to those found by Shudooh (1988) and Al-Qahtany (2004). Details of the percentage of the occurrence of each error type are shown in Table 1. Due to the limitations of space, the researcher will only discuss the major error categories in this article.

Table 1

Percentage of the Occurrence of Each Error Type

Error Type	N	%
Miscomprehension of original	239	41.71
Wrong choice of word	131	22.9
Literal translation	88	15.35
Register/style	42	7.32
Omission	25	4.36
Sentence structure	24	4.18
Addition	14	2.44
Ambiguity	5	0.87
Redundancy	3	0.52

Transliteration	1	0.17
Use of exact English expression	1	0.17

Miscomprehension of the original. After examining the subjects' translations, it appeared that most of the errors occurred as a result of the subjects' inability to understand the meaning of the original English sentence (i.e., 41.71%). As a consequence, the translations were incorrect because they expressed meanings other than those intended by the ST.

Shudooh (1988) explained that errors caused by miscomprehension of the ST represent a serious problem as these errors result in sentences with distorted meanings. He also mentioned that these errors were mainly caused by the subjects' weak command of English which prevented them from grasping the intended meaning.

The following sentences are some examples of the occurrence of this error type:

1. The new speed violation laws will go into effect immediately.

أن القوانين الجديدة غير العادلة ستتغير مباشرة.

2. The ideas discussed in the conference were ahead of their time.

القضايا التي تم طرحها في المؤتمر أخذت وقتاً طويلاً.

Wrong choice of word. This error category represents the second major area of difficulty at 22.9%. The subjects made frequent mistakes in their choice of word either due to similarity in form or meaning to another word, wrong choice of derivation, or wrong collocation.

It was noticed in one particular sentence "The new speed violation laws will go into effect immediately", that many of the subjects substituted the word "violence" for the word "violation" because many of the translations contained the word "عنف", which is the Arabic equivalent of "violence".

In some cases, the wrong choice of word was the result of an attempt at yielding an idiomatic expression or collocation. For example, as a translation for "a big fish in a small pond", one of the responses was: نجماً وحيداً في مجتمعه.

Literal translation. Literal translation accounted for 15.35% of the total number of errors. It was noticed that the subjects resorted to literal translation in some sentences more than others. Some examples of the occurrence of literal translation are:

1. With his specialized degree, he was considered a big fish in a small pond.

بشهادته المتخصصة أعتبر كسمكة كبيرة في حوض صغير.

2. The rise in the value of the Euro will work to the advantage of some companies.

سيكون الأرز بقيمة اليورو لصالح بعض الشركات.

Research Question Five

The fifth and final research question was: What strategies do the subjects resort to when dealing with IE in translation? In order to answer this question, the researcher mainly used the responses on Test 1, which was given to the first group of subjects. After the subjects' translations were graded and the error types were classified, the researcher used the responses to create a classification of the strategies they used to translate the SL sentences.

Generally speaking, the strategies used by the subjects of the study corresponded to some of the compensation strategies outlined by Oxford (1990). Namely, with regards to the aspect of comprehension and especially when the meaning of the idiom was unclear, the subjects seemed to resort to guessing which could have been accomplished through linguistic clues since learners use guessing when their lack of knowledge of vocabulary or grammar prevents them from understanding the intended meaning (Oxford, 1990).

As for the translation process, the subjects generally tried to overcome limitations in writing by applying a number of strategies, some of which corresponded loosely to Oxford's (1990), such as:

1. Avoiding communication partially or totally when subjects omitted the translation of IE which was probably because they were unable to understand them.
2. Adjusting or approximating the message when subjects provided near equivalent expressions by rendering expressions that were attempts at creating IE in the TL, or when they used literal translation.
3. Using circumlocution or synonyms when the subjects provided paraphrases of the expressions.

It was found that the subjects mainly used seven strategies: paraphrase, literal translation, use of an idiom or attempting an idiomatic translation, omission, use of a colloquial expression, transliteration, and use of the exact English expression. Details of the percentage of use for each strategy type are further presented in Table 2. Due to the limitations of space, the researcher will only discuss the major strategy categories in this article.

Table 2

Percentage of the Occurrence of Each Strategy Type

Strategy Type	N	%
Paraphrase	774	72.13
Literal Translation	165	15.4
Use of an Idiom/Attempting an Idiomatic Translation	101	9.4
Omission	29	2.7
Use of a Colloquial Expression	2	0.19
Transliteration	1	0.09
Use of Exact English Expression	1	0.09

Paraphrase. As shown in Table 2, paraphrase was the translation strategy most commonly used by the subjects as it represented 72.13%. Callison-Burch clarified that paraphrases are: “alternative ways of expressing the same content” (2007, p. 11). Multiple translations of a ST are considered paraphrases because they express the same meaning (Barzilay, 2003, cited in Callison-Burch, 2007).

Paraphrase is considered a valid communication strategy (Oxford, 1990; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992; James, 1998), and a common translation strategy with regards to IE especially when there is no TL equivalent (Baker, 1992; Ayoub, 1994). Nevertheless, paraphrase translation should only be used if there are no TL equivalents for the ST (McGuire, 1980, cited in Al-Qahtany, 2004; Al-Hamdallah, 1998), since it might not always be useful to use paraphrase because it is strange to replace a word or phrase with a longer rendition (Baker, 1992)

The subjects mostly resorted to paraphrase in the study because many of the expressions used in Test 1 did not have equivalents in the TL. However, not all paraphrases were correct translations since paraphrasing mainly relies on full comprehension of the SL expression and the ability to render this understanding into the TL. Even cases of incorrect or weak paraphrase could not always be definitely attributed to miscomprehension of the IE because the subjects may have understood the idioms but were unable to express their meanings correctly. Below are some examples from the subjects' responses:

1. The thief was caught red-handed.
قبض على اللص متلبساً.
2. The library has a place where you can return books after hours.
يوجد مكان في المكتبة لإعادة الكتب بعد انتهاء ساعات العمل.

Literal translation. Literal translation represented the second major translation strategy at 15.4%. Baker (1992) explained that translators usually resort to literal translation when they are unable to recognize IE as such.

Some commonly occurring instances of the use of literal translation, were: the translation of "after hours" as "بعد ساعات", the translation of "double-edged sword" into "سيف ذو حدين" instead of the common Arabic IE "سلاح ذو حدين", the translation of "window of opportunity" into "نافذة من", and the translation of "a big fish in a small pond" into "سمكة كبيرة في حوض/وعاء صغير".

Findings

It was found that the subjects of the study generally did not face difficulties in the comprehension of English IE, while they generally did face difficulties in the translation of English IE into Arabic. Some of the difficulties faced by the subjects may be attributed to the subjects' inability to recognize IE as such.

As for error types and translation strategies, the error types committed by the subjects of this study fell under the following eleven categories: miscomprehension of original, wrong choice of word, literal translation, register/style, omission, sentence structure, addition, ambiguity, redundancy, transliteration, and use of exact English expression. While the translation strategies they used fell under the following seven categories: paraphrase, literal translation, use of an idiom/attempting an idiomatic translation, omission, use of a colloquial expression, transliteration, and use of the exact English expression.

It was found that among the eleven error categories detected and classified in this study, three were the most serious: miscomprehension of the original at 41.71%, wrong choice of word at 22.9%, and literal translation at 15.35%. It may be argued that miscomprehension and literal translation errors were mainly attributed to the subjects' inability to recognize the expressions as

idiomatic. Errors in wrong word choice were probably caused by the substitution of the correct words with other words either similar in form or meaning, wrong choice of collocation, or wrong derivation.

It was found that among the seven translation strategies used by the subjects in this study, two may be considered the most common: paraphrase at 72.13% and literal translation at 15.4%. The reason behind the high percentage of paraphrase use was probably the fact that many of the idioms in the study did not have clear Arabic idiomatic equivalents. As for literal translation, although it was the second most used translation strategy, in many cases it yielded incorrect or weak translations.

Conclusion

To conclude, it was noticed that the findings of this study contradicted with the findings of some studies, while corresponding to the findings of others as follows:

With regards to the comprehension of IE, the researcher concluded that, generally speaking, the subjects did not face difficulties in understanding IE. This could have been because the expressions used were generally high-frequency idioms that were familiar to the subjects.

However, other studies (Abu-Afeefeh, 1987; Hussein et al., 2000) revealed that learners face difficulties in the comprehension of IE especially those that are not similar or identical between Arabic and English. Furthermore, these studies examined translation from Arabic into English, while the present study examined translation from English into Arabic, and since the subjects of both their studies were non-native speakers of English in addition to the fact that English idioms are generally considered difficult, this probably influenced the subjects' performance.

As for the translation of idioms, the present study showed that the subjects generally faced difficulties in translating English IE into Arabic. This corresponds to the findings of Bataineh (1996), Hussein et al. (2000), and Badawi (2008).

Moreover, while classifying the subjects' errors, the researcher noticed that the errors detected in their translations corresponded to some categories previously outlined by others (Zaghlool, 1984; Zughoul, 1990, cited in Migdadi, 1994; Shudooh, 1988; Al-Qahtany, 2004).

With respect to the three criteria of error level: modality, medium, and level (James, 1998), the subjects' errors can generally be described as follows:

1. Modality: The errors were receptive during the process of reading the items to understand them before translation (e.g., miscomprehension of the original), and they were simultaneously productive during the process of producing the translations of the items (e.g., literal translation and errors of register/style).
2. Medium: The errors were all of written language, since the subjects were required to produce written translations of the items.
3. Level: The significant errors were found to be those in composing and understanding. The researcher also detected lexical errors, such as wrong choice of word, and grammatical errors, such as those found in sentence structure.

As for the strategies detected in this study, the researcher found that the subjects

generally used the translation strategies outlined by Baker (1992), as well as other strategies, such as literal translation and avoidance (Migdadi, 1994). These strategies corresponded to some strategies mentioned by Badawi (2008). The subjects also used some of the learning strategies outlined by Oxford (1990) and Scarcella and Oxford (1992).

Acknowledgement. The researcher would like to thank the Research Center of the Humanities Departments and the Deanship of Scientific Research at King Saud University for the support offered to this research.

About the Author:

Dania Salamah is a lecturer at the Department of English Language and Translation, College of Languages and Translation (COLT), King Saud University. She received her BA in English Translation from COLT in 2003 and her MA in Applied Linguistics from the College of Arts, King Saud University in 2012. Dania started working at COLT in 2004 as a TA, and then as a lecturer in 2012.

References

- Abdul Wahhab, S. (August, 2002). *Understanding and usage of English idioms: A problem encountered by Jordanian EFL learners* (Master's thesis, Yarmouk University, Jordan).
- Abu-Afeefeh, R. (1987). *Transfer in the acquisition of English idioms by Jordanian university students* (Master's thesis, Yarmouk University, Jordan).
- Al-Hamdallah, R. (1998). Problems and approaches to translation with special reference to Arabic. *Journal of King Saud University, Languages and Translation*, 10, 23-38.
- Al-Qahtany, S. (2004). *Lexical problems in Arabic-English translation: A case study of undergraduate students in the College of Languages and Translation, Imam Mohammed bin Saud Islamic University* (Master's thesis, King Saud University, Riyadh).
- Ayoub, Y. (1994). *Some linguistic and cultural problems in translating idiomatic expressions from Arabic into English and vice versa* (Master's thesis, Yarmouk University, Jordan).
- Badawi, M. (2008). *Investigating EFL prospective teachers' ability to translate culture-bound expressions* (Teachers' College, University of Tabouk, KSA). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED503396)
- Baker, M. (1992). *In other words: A coursebook on translation*. New York: Routledge.
- Bataineh, R. (July, 1996). *The ability of Jordanian graduate students to translate English idiomatic expressions into Arabic* (Master's thesis, Yarmouk University, Jordan).
- Callison-Burch, C. (2007). *Paraphrasing and translation* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh). Retrieved November 25, 2011, from <http://www.cs.jhu.edu/~ccb/publications/callison-burch-thesis.pdf>

- Dickins, J., Hervey, S., & Higgins, I. (2002). *Thinking Arabic translation: A course in translation method: Arabic to English*. London: Routledge.
- Fernando, C. (1996). *Idioms and idiomaticity*. Oxford University Press.
- Fromkin, V., Rodman, R., & Hyams, N. (2007). *An introduction to language (8th ed.)*. Boston: Thomson, Wadsworth.
- Ghazala, H. (2003). *Translation as problems and solutions: A coursebook for university students and trainee translators (5th ed.)*. Beirut, Lebanon: Dar wa Maktabat Al-Hilal.
- Hussein, R. F., Khanji, R., & Makhzoomy, K. F. (2000). The acquisition of idioms: Transfer or what? *Journal of King Saud University, Languages and Translation*, 12, 23-34.
- James, C. (1998). *Errors in language learning and use: Exploring error analysis*. London: Pearson Education Limited.
- Migdadi, F. (1994). *Lexical choice: Investigating lexical learning strategies of Arabic-speaking learners of English* (Master's thesis, Yarmouk University, Jordan).
- Newmark, P. (2003). *A textbook of translation*. London: Pearson Education Limited.
- Oxford, R. L. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Richards, J. C. (1980). A non-contrastive approach to error analysis. In J. C. Richards (Ed.), *Error analysis: Perspectives on second language acquisition* (pp. 172-188). London: Longman.
- Scarcella, R. C. & Oxford, R. C. (1992). *The tapestry of language learning: The individual in the communicative classroom*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Shudooh, Y. (1988). *Lexical and syntactic problems in consecutive and simultaneous translation from English into Arabic and from Arabic into English: An error analysis approach* (Master's thesis, Yarmouk University, Jordan).
- Zaghlool, Z. (1984). *An analysis of the English oral lexical errors of Jordanian secondary students* (Master's thesis, Yarmouk University, Jordan).