

## Translating Idiomatic Expressions from English into Arabic: Difficulties and Strategies

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### Abstract

Translation is the process of rendering aspects and features of a target text semantically, culturally and pragmatically into another language. However, translating idiomatic and culturally-bound expressions has been a challenge for translators as they are culture-bound and involve many cultural elements. This study aims at investigating difficulties encountered by Omani undergraduate students majoring in English language teaching and literature when translating idiomatic and culturally-bound expression from English into Arabic. Additionally, it attempts to identify and demonstrate some of the strategies that they used to translate and overcome such challenges and suggest what could be done to help them handle such challenges and improve their translation skills and competencies. A translation test along with a short survey was administered to 60 Omani undergraduate students majoring in English language and literature at the department of English Language and Literature in a public college in Oman. Reliability and validity for both the translation test and questionnaire were established. The mostsalient challenges difficulties reported by students and the most frequently coping strategies that they were used as strategies in translating idiomatic and culturally-bound expressions and handling them were presented. Some of the study's recommendations and key pedagogical implications were also highlighted and discussed.

**KeyWords:** Arabic culturally-bound expressions, difficulties, English, idiomatic expressions, Omani undergraduate students, strategies, translation

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## 1.1 Introduction

Translation is considered an essential tool that enables people all over the globe to share information, news, culture, literature and sciences among others. Nevertheless, translation is not as an easy task particularly translating idioms and culturally-bound expressions as their translation requires knowledge of both languages, their culture, and knowledge of strategies that are appropriate for rendering and conveying the intended meaning (Dweik&Thalji, 2016). Language and culture are inseparable twins and understanding the culture can be the gateway to understanding the language and vice versa. Idioms are culture-bound and the majority of them have cultural associations, which make them peculiar and difficult to understand and translate (Howwar, 2013). Thus, translators are obliged to pay careful attention to cultural aspects and meaning when translating from one language to another. Translating and rendering cultural elements of the source texts into the target language is significantly important. The translator should replace the textual materials with their equivalent in all levels. In this respect, Catford (1965) states that "translation is the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another language" (p.20). This definition suggests the importance of translating cultural elements in translation in general. This claim is also supported by Newmark (1981) who stresses the importance of cultural elements when translating culturally-bound expressions and idioms. Newmark states that "translation is a craft consisting in the attempt to replace a written message and / or statement in one language by the same message and / or statement in another language." (p.7). Nida (1964) also adds that "the role of translator is to facilitate the transfer of the message, meaning, and cultural elements from one language into another and create an equivalent response to the receivers."(p.13). He further suggests that the message from the source language is shaped and embedded by its cultural context in which it was created. Having competence in actively using idiomatic and fixed expressions is not an easy task and cannot be easily achieved (Baker, 1991, p.77). The cultural role in translation is apparent and it has to be considered by translators when translating idiomatic expressions (Min, 2007, p. 215). These cultural elements have their own implications when translating idioms from English into Arabic due to the differences between the two languages and this would definitely make the process of translating idioms a demanding and difficult task for translators. The present study intends to investigate difficulties faced by Omani undergraduate students majoring in English language and literature when translating idiomatic expressions and the strategies that they adopted to translate idioms and how they handled these challenges.

## 2. Statement of the Problem and Significance of the Study

This study, which is conducted in the Sultanate of Oman, intends to investigate the difficulties encountered by Omani undergraduate students majoring in English language and literature when translating idiomatic and culturally-bound expressions and the strategies that they employed to translate them and overcome such challenges. Idioms are viewed as one class of figurative expressions which occur in all expressions of "at least two words which cannot be understood literally and which functions as a unit semantically" (Beekman and Callow 1974 as cited in Al-Shawi, 2013, p.140). "Idioms are considered as part and parcel of mastering any language and they are a prominent natural part of everyday discourse since they reflect cultural and linguistic boundaries and enabling communication between different cultures" (Howwar, 2013, p.1). However, they constitute a great difficulty for translators. Despite the development in the field of translation theory and application, translating idiomatic and culturally bound expressions is still considered as a serious challenge for translators as well as foreign teachers and

learners (Howwar, 2013, p.1). Idioms are difficult to learn because they are not literal and they do not mean what they say (Mcpartland (19981) as cited Hussien et al. 2000, p.24). The meaning of an idiom is not the sum of the meaning of its parts or its constituents (Hussien et al. 2000, p. 26). A translator has to render the meaning of an idiom over and above the meaning of the words that constitute it. Translator's awareness of an idioms-related meaning and the difficulties that might be encountered and the suitable strategies for translating idioms are of utmost importance in successful idioms translation. Translation strategies are necessary because they usually enable translators to overcome difficulties that might be encountered in the process of translation (Dweik&Thalji, 2016). To the best of the researchers' knowledge, research that investigates difficulties encountered in translating idiomatic and culturally-bound expressions and strategies used to overcome such difficulties in the Omani context is scant. This is expected to contribute to the significance of the present study and its findings and potential implications. Therefore, it is necessary to find ways and strategies to help students and translation practitioners overcome such arising problems and difficulties in translating idiomatic expressions. Two major salient difficulties have been frequently reported in the literature. Firstly, lack of equivalence in the target language as languages vary and they express meanings using different linguistic means such as fixed and frozen expressions, idioms, etc. Therefore it is very hard to find equivalents in the target language. Secondly, the existence of idioms that have similar form but different meaning in two languages might be a source of difficulty in translation (Baker, 1992). The process of translating idiomatic expressions becomes even tougher when a translator embarks on translating a stretch of culturally-bound expressions which include cultural, scientific, literary elements (Adiel&Ahmed, 2016, p37). The difference between English and Arabic also could be one of the factors that contributes to the difficulty in translating idiomatic expressions as Arabic is a semitic language which is quite distant from English which is an-Indo-European language and this may hinder effective rendering of meaning. Having a solid foundation in both cultures -awareness of both the target and the source language will enable the translator to catch the implied meaning of idiomatic expressions (Al-Shawi & Mahadi, 2012).

### 3. Objectives of the Study and Research Questions

The objectives of the study are twofold: Firstly, to investigate the difficulties that Omani undergraduate students encountered when translating some idiomatic and culturally-bound expressions from English into Arabic. Secondly, to identify the strategies that they use to respond and handle such challenges and what could be done to help students overcome such challenges and foster their translation skills in general and translating idiomatic expressions in particular. The study seeks to answer the following questions: What difficulties do Omani undergraduate students majoring in English language encounter when translating idiomatic and culturally-bound expressions? How did they respond and handle these difficulties? What could be done to help them overcome such difficulties?

### 4. Methods

A sample of 60 students was randomly selected from the final year students from the Department of English language and Literature, Rustaq College of Applied Sciences in the Sultanate of Oman. All of the students are Omanis and they have been educated under the same educational system and they have many things in common. Most of them are male students. They have been studying English since their primary schooling. The instruments, which were used to collect the data, were a translation test and a short survey.

#### 4.1 Translation test

The translation test was created by the researchers to specifically test students' difficulties with idiomatic and culturally-bound expressions and the strategies that they used to handle these difficulties and what could be done to help them to further improve their translation competencies and skills and overcome such challenges. The test was validated by experts in translation and all ambiguous items were modified and some examples were reworded. The test consists of 14 sentences which contain four types of idiomatic expressions. The researchers followed the semantic classification of idioms suggested by Fernando and Flavell (1981). The sentences were ordered according to the four categories of idiomatic expressions, namely, three transparent idioms (which have a very close meaning to the literal one), three semi-transparent idioms (which carry metaphorical sense that could not be known only through common use), three semi-opaque idioms (in which the figurative meaning is not joined to the words of the idiom), and four opaque ones (the meaning of the idiom is never that of the sum of the literal meaning of its components) respectively (Leah, n.d). Students were asked to translate these sentences and report the difficulties that they faced and strategies that they used to handle these difficulties. The test reliability was established by using test-retest means to whether the time allocated for this particular test was enough and to determine the clarity of test instructions and questions. The test was administered to five students who share the same characteristics of the participants. The test was administered by the translation teacher who explained the purpose of the study and responded to all queries and questions regarding the test instructions and items. The questionnaire consists of two parts: part one includes a list of strategies which were used to translate idiomatic expressions and the students were asked to tick against the strategies that they used to translate those sentences in the translation test. Part two includes some open ended-questions where students were asked to report the difficulties that they encountered in translating idiomatic and culturally-bound expressions and state why certain translation strategies were used more than the other, and which strategies did they use more frequently to handle these difficulties.

### 5. Notes on Idiomatic and Culturally-bound Expressions

The purpose of this section introduce a theoretical background to the present study on issues such as idiomaticity in both English and Arabic, definitions of idioms, difficulties encountered in translating idioms, strategies used in translating idioms, and reviews of some previous studies and findings from both empirical and non-empirical studies on difficulties encountered by Arab learners when translating idiomatic and culturally-bound expressions.

#### 5.1 Idiomaticity in English

Cultural idiomaticity is deeply inherited in human languages and it differs from one language to another (Ajaaj & Mohammed, 2014). Idiomaticity is considered a common feature in all languages and its appreciation is the cornerstone of learning and mastering a given language. Idiomatic expressions have semantic, syntactic and pragmatic complexity which poses a great challenge for learners and translators (Aldahesh, 2013, p.23). An idiom is defined as " an expression which functions as a single unit and whose meaning cannot be worked out from its separate parts" (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, 246). For example, the meaning of each word in the idiom "it rains cats and dogs" has nothing to do with the meaning of the idiom as a whole.

Moreover, Barkema (1996) defines idioms as " lexicalized expressions with idiosyncratic meanings" (p.127). Larson (1984) defines idioms as " a string of words whose meaning is

different from the meaning conveyed by the individual words". They are translated non-literary as their meaning cannot be predicted from their constituents (Ajaaj& Mohammed, 2014, p.1). The majority of idioms are used interchangeably between spoken and written discourse but they are mostly associated with spoken discourse and therefore, sixty to seventy percent of idioms are associated with spoken language (Maxos, 2003, p.4). The main features of idioms are: idioms are all in all metaphorical and cannot be understood directly; they should not be taken literally as their meaning lies on their constituents rather than individual words; their syntactic form is usually fixed and cannot be changed or described as ungrammatical; their meanings are also invariable and they are mainly cultural and informal (Ghazala, 2003, p.204). They are classified in different ways such as according to grammatical category or parts of speech, according to the concepts or emotion portrayed, according to the image they convey such as body parts, food idioms, and according to their semantic category idioms may occur in such forms: slang, proverbs, allusions, similes, dead metaphors, social formulas and collocations. Additionally, Ghazala (2003) categorizes them into five major types: full and pure idioms, semi-idioms, proverbs, popular sayings and semi-proverbial expressions, metaphorical catchphrases and popular expressions (p.24). Therefore, idioms acquisition and translation constitute a great difficulty for foreign learners and translators due to several factors. Translating idioms and culturally-bound expressions is not an easy task. "Translating idioms is difficult as it is central" (Trosborg, 1997, 109). Larson states that idioms should be translated with great care and the translators must figure out the meaning of the idioms that they intend to translate and then look for an equivalent which can express the whole meaning. Translators should avoid translating idioms literally or word for word translation (Newmark, 1988, p.125). Therefore, idioms should not be translated in isolation; rather translators should search for the real meaning conveyed by that particular idiom and consider the cultural connotation as well.

## 5.2. Idiomaticity in the Arabic language

The Arabic language is an extraordinary rich and complex language. Idioms constitute a significant part of it and they abound in classical Arabic, modern standard Arabic as well as in all of the various dialects across the Arab world. Although old Arabic dictionaries written in the middle ages incorporated a fairly large number of idioms with detailed definitions of their meanings, lexicographers did not have a specific term to describe this linguistic phenomenon. However, in the last a few decades, several comprehensive dictionaries of Arabic idioms emerged such as "A dictionary of idioms in modern Arabic" by WafaKamel(2007) and the term "ta'beeratistelaheya" is now commonly used to describe idiomatic expressions.

Gazalah (2003) describes idioms as mainly informal, but this might not be a universal property of idioms. The Quran, considered by Arabs to be the highest form of Arabic, makes extensive use of idioms. Mustansir Mir (1989), in his book "verbal idioms of the Quran", stresses, "verbal idioms are a significant component of the Quranic vocabulary" (p. 2). The sayings of prophet Mohammed, which are considered a standard to measure the correctness of the language, contain some idioms. For example, he said "the upper hand is better than the lower hand" and he meant that it is better to be a giver of charity rather than a receiver who takes beggary as a habit. Nonetheless, the properties of Arabic idioms are not very dissimilar from other languages. First of all, it is difficult to understand the meaning of the idiom by looking at its constituent parts. Secondly, Arabic idioms are generally metaphorical. For example, the Quran uses the idiom يخفض جناحه which literally means "lower your wing" but the metaphorical meaning is "be humble and

kind". In addition, Arabic idioms have a fixed structure and the constituents cannot be substituted. In the previous idiom, the verb "yakhfodh" cannot be replaced by another verb. Moreover, Arabic idioms contain cultural and historical elements that cannot be understood by people of other cultures. For example, رجع بخفي حنين (literally: he came back with the shoes of Hunian). In summary, Arabic idioms cannot be translated literally and careful attention must be paid to the cultural elements.

Although Arabic is a Semitic language, it is not always difficult to find an equivalent for English idioms in it. A large number of Arabic idioms have similar meanings to their English counterparts but they have dissimilar forms. For example, the Arabic idiom يصيب كبد الحقيقة (literally: to hit the liver of the truth) is an equivalent of the English idiom "to hit the nail on the head". Moreover, some Arabic idioms have the same meaning and the same form as their English equivalent. To take but one example, the Arabic idiom يبلى لسانه has the same form and meaning as the English idiom 'to swallow your tongue' which means to keep silent. However, translators need to be careful because some idioms in the source language may have a very close counterpart in the target language which looks similar on the surface but is totally or partially different. A case in point is the idiomatic expression "to eat your words" which means to admit that you were wrong about something. However, in some Arabic dialects, if someone "eats some letters or words", it means they speak very quickly or they stutter and because of that some letters or words are not uttered. Another example is the idiomatic question has the cat got your tongue? It is used in English to urge someone to answer a question and contribute to a conversation, particularly when their failure to do so becomes annoying. A similar expression is used in French with a totally different meaning; dormer sa langue au chat ('to give one's tongue to the cat'), meaning to give up, for example when asked a riddle. Therefore, translators need to consider these kinds of superficially identical idioms which have rather dissimilar meanings because idioms have individual collocational patterns (Baker, 1991, pp. 79-80). In short, to find a suitable equivalent, which is similar in form and meaning or only in meaning, is not an easy task and it requires a deep knowledge of both languages and cultures. The following section will tackle this issue in depth.

5.3 Difficulties in translating idiomatic and culturally-bound expressions Idioms constitute a problematic area for both foreign learners and translators. When translating idiomatic and culturally-bound expressions from one language to another, translators usually encounter many hurdles and difficulties in stylistic, cultural and even religious ones which are hard to overcome (Smadi, 2015, p.124). Straksiene (2009) claims that one of the problems that translator faces in translating idioms is the lack of equivalence on the idiom level. All languages have idioms but it is not easy to find equivalent in the target language that corresponds to the idiom in the source language both in meaning and form. There are several difficulties which have been reported in the literature with regard to translating idioms and the reasons behind those difficulties. The two interrelated difficulties which may encounter translators when translating idioms are: the ability to recognize and interpret an idiom correctly on one hand, and success in looking for the most suitable equivalent in the target language. Baker (1991, pp.80-85) states that the main difficulties involved in translating idiomatic expressions are: first, idiomatic expressions may have no equivalent in the target language. The way languages use idioms to express different meanings and notions vary from one language to another and that constitutes a great difficulty for translators. The difference of languages in the social and religious cultures might be a cause of

difficulty when translating from English into Arabic (Al-Shawi&Mahadi, 2012, pp. 141-146). Therefore, lack of equivalence in the target language can be a source of difficulty. Idioms and culturally-bound expressions contain culture-specific items which may be untranslatable in some cases. For example, the idiom “feels blue” cannot be understood by Arabic speakers because the color “blue” is never associated with sadness or depression as in American culture. Second, the conventional use of idiomatic expressions is mostly in spoken discourse and it is a matter of style, however, language such as Arabic and Chinese make a sharp distinction between written and spoken discourse in using idioms and they avoid using idioms in a written text mode which is associated with a high level of formality. This kind of differences between language and their use of idiomatic expressions could be a source of difficulty for translators (Baker, 1991, p, 84). There are several studies which have been conducted in the Arab world to investigate difficulties encountered by students when translating idioms and culturally-bound expressions from English into Arabic.

In this regard, many findings were reported such as incapability of translating English idioms correctly due to the lack of idiomatic and pragmatic competence; negative transfer from Arabic; the loss of some shade of meaning; unintelligibility through the use of literal translation; misunderstanding of the meaning in the sentence; students being unconscious of idioms; students’ unfamiliarity with idioms; wide guessing of meaning; poor translation strategy awareness; limited ability to interpret unfamiliar idioms (Hussien et al. 2000; Bataineh&Bataineh 2002; al-Hassan 2007; Badawi, 2008; Kohil 2009; Memaz 2009).

#### 5.4 Strategies used in translating idiomatic and culturally-bound expressions

Idioms translation strategy is defined by Baker (1992) as "... strategy of finding an idiom of similar meaning and similar form in the target language may seem to offer the ideal solution, but that is not necessarily always the case" (p.72). Loescher (1991 p.8) defines translation strategy as "a potentially conscious procedure for solving a problem faced in translating a text, or any segment of it". Baker (1991) suggests four main strategies which can be used by translators to translate idiomatic and culturally-bound expressions. These strategies are: using an idiom with similar meaning and form (total equivalence); using an idiom with similar meaning but different form (partial equivalence); translation by paraphrasing, and translation by omission (pp.85-93). As for the first strategy, total equivalence in form and meaning, this kind of matching can only be arrived at certain occasions, when the source and the target languages belong to the same family and they have cultural similarities. However, there are some English idiomatic expressions which have equivalent in the present-daily Arabic and they are transparent in their meaning and form. For example, to shed crocodile tears *بيكي بدموع التماسيح* this is considered as transparent idiom and meaning and form are similar to greater extent. Regarding the second strategy which is partial equivalence, this involves translating the source language expression (SL) idiom into its equivalent in target language idiom conveys the same meaning, but has different form. Therefore, translator's cultural background competence and awareness is really important here to enable him/her to find equivalent idioms with similar meaning and function in the target language (TL). For example to carry coals to Newcastle, *بيبع الماء في حارة السقاين*, these are considered as partially equivalent as they differ in form but they convey the same meaning and function. This type of strategy is useful in translating semi-transparent idioms. Concerning translating by paraphrasing, this strategy involved giving a brief explanation of the meaning behind idiomatic expression being used in the source language (SL). This is usually used when the translator is encountered

with idiomatic and culturally-bound expressions in the source language (SL) which have no corresponding idiomatic expression in the target language (TL). This strategy is most common and widely used strategy for translating idioms when match cannot be found in the target language (TL) due to the difference in stylistic preferences of the source and target languages. For example, to let the cat out of the bag, *يفشي سرا – يذيع امرا*, this is considered as paraphrasing to the meaning of the idiom in the source language by the equivalent in the target language. Additionally, translation by omission, this involves omitting the idiom in the target text as its meaning cannot be easily paraphrased, or for stylistic reasons. The meaning could be compensated elsewhere in the target text (Baker, 1992, pp.85-93). Finally, translation by using notes: This strategy is usually used when there no close match between the SL and when the translator fails to find equivalent and this is quite common in translating religious texts. Eftekhari (2008, p. 5) points out that "employing 'notes' in translation both as a translation strategy and procedure seems to be essential to foreign language readership could benefit from the text as much as the ST readers do". There is a plethora of empirical and non-empirical research which has been conducted to investigate strategies used in translating idioms and culturally-bound expressions such as (New Mark, 1998; Gaber, 2005; Maxos 2003; Badawi, 2008; Balfaqaeh 2009; Farahani&Ghasemi 2012; Al-Shawi&Mahadi 2012; Shojaei, 2012). The vast majority of these studies dealt with strategies employed in idioms, proverbs and culturally-bound expressions. The most frequently used strategies in translation are paraphrasing, borrowing, literal translation, guessing strategy, equivalence, deletion, using notes, consulting others, and using parallel idiom in the target language.

## 6. Findings and Discussion

This section introduces the findings of the study and provides a discussion of these findings in relation to studies reviewed in the literature. The analysis of data has given the researchers useful insights into the type of difficulties that Omani students faced when translating English idioms and the translation strategies they used to handle these difficulties.

It has been pointed out in the literature that lack of equivalence constitutes one of the main difficulties in translating idioms (Baker, 1992). Nevertheless, the findings of this study reveal that the major difficulty when translating English idioms into Arabic is not the lack of equivalence, but it is in the linguistic ability that enables a translator to find a suitable equivalent. Analysis of the data shows that Arabic idioms of similar meaning were provided to 12 out of the 14 English idioms that students were asked to translate. The study shows that finding a suitable equivalent is not an easy task since many students could not recall Arabic idioms that have similar meanings to their English counterparts. It has been found that this difficulty is more salient when translating opaque idioms than any other types of idioms. None of the students attempted to provide an equivalent to the idiom 'don't spill the beans' and only two out of the thirty students managed to provide an equivalent to 'kick the bucket'; three students found a suitable equivalent to 'butterflies in my stomach'; and only four students succeeded in finding a similar Arabic idiom to translate 'bury the hatchet'. One of the surprising findings is that this inability to find a suitable equivalent, although it is more encountered when translating opaque idioms, it can also occur when translating a transparent idiom. None of the respondents managed to find a suitable equivalent to the English idiom 'you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours', although half of them managed to paraphrase its meaning accurately and succinctly. Those who attempted to provide an equivalent mentioned the Arabic idiom "wahedahbewahedah" which would be a

suitable equivalent to the English idiom “tit for tat” but not for the aforementioned idiom. Since there are several idioms in classical Arabic that convey the same meaning, this difficulty is caused by lack of linguistic knowledge of the mother tongue. As one of the surveyed students indicated, “we need to learn Arabic idioms first in order to be able to translate English idioms”.

As for the translation strategy that most students used to handle this difficulty, paraphrasing the meaning of the idiom was the most common and has been utilized more than 200 times. This finding is consistent with Baker’s (1992) claim that paraphrasing is widely used when translating idioms. Students used paraphrasing to translate all types of idioms, but significantly more when translating the meaning of opaque idioms. Students were capable of finding similar Arabic idioms for several transparent, semi-transparent, and semi-opaque idioms. For example, 24 out of 30 provided an idiom of dissimilar form but similar meaning for the idiom ‘do not beat around the bush’ and 11 students managed to provide an equivalent to “break the ice”. Moreover, 10 students were able to mention the right equivalent for “The law of the jungle”. These findings clearly show that finding a suitable equivalent is more arduous when translating opaque idioms. As mentioned before, paraphrasing is usually used to handle this difficulty. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of it varies from one idiom to another. Analysis of the data shows that when students paraphrased the meaning of transparent, semi-transparent, and semi-opaque idioms, they were more successful than when translating opaque idioms. For example, several students translated the idiom ‘butterflies in my stomach’ as ‘abdominal pain’ or ‘hunger’ and a number of students associated ‘kicking the bucket’ with ‘anger’. However, 29 out of 30 students succeeded in paraphrasing accurately the meaning of ‘raining cats and dogs’. A number of the surveyed students mentioned that the cultural-specificity of some idioms make them very difficult to understand and this explains why it was difficult for them to paraphrase them meaning accurately. Their responses correspond with Howwar’s (2013) description of idioms as being culture-bound and having cultural associations that make them peculiar and difficult to understand and translate. Another strategy that has been used by students when they encounter difficulties is to translate by omission. This strategy is used when it is difficult to paraphrase the meaning. Although this strategy was used 61 times, students who omitted the idiom or part of the idiom could not always compensate the meaning of the idiom elsewhere as some translators do (Baker, 1992). This led to abridged and mutilated translations that lacked the effect, which the idiom had in the source language. The reason why some students omitted the idiom might be their inability to understand it. This is confirmed by their responses to the question about the challenges they faced. Most of them stated that one of the challenges is that they cannot understand the meaning of some idioms, let alone translate them.

Furthermore, this study reveals an interesting finding regarding idiom translation which has not been much discussed in the literature. The analysis of the data shows that some English idioms might cause students to recall Arabic idioms which have dissimilar form and meaning. In more than 10 occasions, students provided idioms of dissimilar form and meaning which they inaccurately assumed were equivalents to the English idioms. For example, when translating the idiom ‘scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours’, they mentioned “wahedahbewahedah” which means ‘tit for tat’. The reason why some students misinterpreted the meaning of some idioms might be their reliance on the context to understand the meaning. When asked about the strategies they used, several students mentioned that they looked at the context to understand the meaning

of the idiom. However, the complexity of some idioms requires more than looking at the context that may or may not be helpful in decoding the meaning.

Moreover, literal translation is another strategy that students used when they could not find a suitable equivalent. Surprisingly, despite the many differences between the Arabic and English language, literal translation could sometimes convey the meaning of the idiom. This finding is not consistent with Howwar's (2013) claim that idioms can never be translated literally. In fact, a literal translation of the idiom 'you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours', and 'flog a dead horse' did not produce meaningless translations. The Arabic reader is still able to grasp the meaning although the effect is not the same. Nonetheless, in some cases, the literal translation was not effective as in the case of 'break the ice', 'it is raining cats and dogs', and 'kick the bucket' since it led to unintelligibility.

In conclusion, the difficulties that students faced are their inability to find a suitable equivalent, misinterpretation of the meaning of the idiom, using literal translation which does not convey the meaning, or omitting the whole or some parts of the idiom and not compensating it elsewhere. As for the strategies used to handle these difficulties, paraphrasing, literal translation and translation by omission are the most common strategies.

## 7. Conclusions, Recommendations and Implications

The findings of this study suggest a number of pedagogical implications. First, although the context is extremely important for interpreting the meaning of idioms, it is not enough to rely on it as it that might lead to misinterpretation. Some students mentioned that they relied on context and that explains why several of them paraphrased inaccurately the meaning of some idioms. Moreover, teachers need to raise students' awareness that idioms are culture-bound, yet it is not always difficult to provide a functional equivalent of many idioms. Furthermore, students' need to know that although paraphrasing is a good translation strategy, providing an idiom of similar meaning and form can be more effective in conveying the meaning. In this study, students relied on paraphrasing even when equivalents existed in their mother tongue. In addition, since literal translation can sometimes convey the meaning of the idiom, teachers need not to discourage them from using it in the absence of equivalents. Nonetheless, Arab students should use their knowledge of their mother tongue to judge whether the translation is intelligible or not. A literal translation of 'scratch my back and I will scratch yours' does not lead to unintelligibility while a literal translation of 'it rains cats and dogs' does. Finally, although omitting some parts of the idiom may be desirable in certain situations, the meaning should be compensated somewhere else in the text in order to avoid abridged and mutilated translations.

Given the findings presented, it could be recommended that culture translation should be taught to undergraduate students to expose them to the cultural differences between languages and which could translation significantly. First, students should avoid using paraphrasing techniques as much as possible. This only recommended when there is no equivalent in the target language. Second, students should be trained on the effective strategies usually used for translating idiomatic expressions. Third Students should avoid using literal translation when translating idiomatic expressions and should use specialized dictionaries in idiomatic expressions. Finally, idioms and culturally-bound expressions should be considered as a part and parcel of foreign

language and translation instruction in order to help students to be familiar with them and understand their exact and diverse meanings and connotations.

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**AppendixA**

**An Investigation into Difficulties Encountered and Strategies Employed by Omani Students when Translating Idiomatic Expressions from English into Arabic**

This survey intends to investigate the difficulties that Omani undergraduate students majoring in English often encounter when translating some idiomatic and culturally-bound expressions from English into Arabic, and the strategies they use to handle these challenges. You are kindly requested to answer the questions in this questionnaire to the best of your knowledge and ability and to provide the researcher with useful ideas and suggestions to overcome such difficulties and improve students' translation strategies and skills. You may be assured that your responses will remain confidential and will be used for research purposes only. Your identity will not be disclosed when reporting my research findings. You may use resources such as internet and dictionaries if needed.

**Thank you very much for your cooperation!**

**Gender:**

**Male**

**Female**

**Part I: Translate the following expressions and idioms from English into Arabic and tick the strategies that you have used while translating.**

No	English Idiomatic Expression	
1.	Thechildwasn'treallyhurt,butsheshedcrocodiletearsanyway.	<b>Transparent Idiomatic Expressions</b>
2.	<i>I do</i> hasomeinformationyoumight <i>be</i> interestedin,butwhatcanyouoffer <i>me in</i> return?Youscratch <i>my</i> backandI'llscratchyours.	
3.	I was brought up on the streets where <b>the law of the jungle</b> applied, so I soon learnt how to look after myself.	
4.	<i>John and David were both a bit uneasy when they first met at the conference, but they broke the ice with coffee before they began discussing business.</i>	<b>Semi-Transparent Idiomatic Expressions</b>
5.	<i>If you want to ask me, just do; don't beat around the bush.</i>	

6.	Those--mailscomplainingaboutyourbosscanlandyou <i>in</i> <b>hotwater</b> .	
7.	You _____ shouldn'tworryaboutSara'stakingoverthatreporter'sjob-shealready <b>knowstheropes</b> .	Semi-Opague Idiomatic Expressions
8.	<i>There's no way they'll be playing at the park, it's raining cats and dogs out there!</i>	
9.	WhenJohncouldstand <i>no</i> more <i>of</i> Mary'sbadtemper, <i>he</i> <b>threw inthetowel</b> andleft.	
10.	He keeps trying to get it published, but I think he is <b>flogging a dead horse</b> .	
11.	I used to get <b>butterflies in my stomach</b> before the school tests	Opague Idiomatic Expressions
12.	There <i>is</i> <i>a</i> surprisepartyforJames <i>on</i> Wednesday. <b>Pleasedon'tspillthebeans</b> .	
13.	Didn'tyouhear? <i>He</i> <b>kickedthebucket</b> - had <i>a</i> heartattack, <i>I</i> think.	
14.	John and Tom <b>buried the hatchet</b> and they are now good friends.	

**Part II: Which of the following strategies did you use to translate these idiomatic expressions?**

No.	Translation Strategies Used	Put them in Order
1.	Using parallel idioms in the target language (TL)	
2.	Literal translation	
3.	Google Translator	
4.	Paraphrasing the idiom	
5.	Word-for-word translation	
6.	Babylon Translator	
7.	Using an idiom of similar meaning and form	
8.	Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form	
9.	Translating by omission	
10.	Borrowing and glossing	
11	Using notes	
12.	Others please specify.....	

**Part III: Answer the following questions.**

**Q1: Why did you use some strategies instead of other ones?**

**Q2: Which strategy would you generally prefer to use and why?**

**Q3: What challenges did you encounter when translating these idiomatic expressions?**

**Q4: Which strategy did you use to handle those challenges?**

**Q5: Any comments or suggestions?**

**Thank you very much for your cooperation!**