

**Difficulties in Translating English Idiomatic Multi-Word Units into Arabic
by Yemeni Tertiary Learners: A Case Study**

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Abstract

The present study attempted to investigate the reasons behind these difficulties found in translating English sentences consisting of idiomatic multi-word units with reference to Yemeni tertiary learners of English at the College of Education Toor Al-Baha, Aden University. (50) learners who took the translation courses in academic year (2018 – 2019) were selected for this study and twelve (12) teachers of translation. Two instruments were used to collect the required data for this study. These two instruments were questionnaire designed for the teachers of translation and test for 4th year B.A. learners of English. The result revealed that the Yemeni EFL tertiary learners encounter some difficulties in translating sentences consisting of multi-word units from English into Arabic.

Keywords: Translation, multi-word units, idiomatic meaning.

1. Introduction

Translation is the process of rendering the meaning of words, sentences or texts from the source language into the target one. There are many difficulties and problems encounter the Yemeni learners of English when translating from English into Arabic and vice-versa. Due to the syntactic and semantic differences between the two languages, learners commit many mistakes in translation. Although translation is an interesting work, it is difficult. The meaning of some English words sometimes differs from one sentence into another. In other words, some English words give a particular meaning and when they are collocated with others, the meaning is completely changed. Such causes, Yemeni tertiary learners face big difficulties in English-Arabic translation. The multi-word units can have literal and idiomatic meaning. The literal meaning of multi-word units is easy to be translated because it can be

understood directly. On the other side, the idiomatic meaning of the multi-word units is difficult to be translated because the meaning cannot be expected directly. The knowledge of the Yemeni tertiary learners of English language is not sufficient in translating such combination of words with others.

2. Literature Review

This study intends to survey the relevant literature review pertaining to the translation of the English sentences consisting of idiomatic multi-word units into Arabic language. Multi-word units are a combination of different words. In other words, the term multi-word units refers to words that combine with other words or particles to give unpredictable meaning that is different when they are not collocated with them in other contexts. Namely, the verb "**give**" has a particular meaning that is "**to hand**" but when it is combined with the adverb "**up**" it gives a different meaning and it means "**to stop trying to do something**". This type of combination is called phrasal verb. The other type of multi-word units is called "idioms"; namely "**get off lightly**" which means "**to avoid serious punishment or trouble**".

2.1 Definitions of Translation

Translation is the process of transferring the meaning or reproducing the original written text of the target language. According to Catford (1965), translation refers to the process of re-expressing the written texts of the source language by equivalent written text in the target one. Moreover, Steiner (1975) states that "translation is formally and pragmatically implicit in every act of communication, in the emission and reception of each and every mode of meaning, be it in the widest semiotic sense or in more specifically verbal exchange" (p. xii). Also simply, McGuire (1980) argues that "the structures of the source language will be preserved as closely as possible, but not so closely that the target language structures will be seriously distorted" (p. 2). Similarly, Newmark (1981) clarifies that translation is the skill of shifting the written, ideas, thoughts or messages of the source language by the same ideas, thoughts or messages in the target language.

Furthermore, Hleil (1990) states that "translation is the process to transfer written or spoken source language (SL) texts to equivalent written or spoken target language (TL) texts" (p. 16). Additionally, Baker (2001) defines translation as "a process of intercultural communication, whose end product is a text which is capable of functioning appropriately in

specific situations and contexts of use" (p. 3). Similarly, Ghazala (2006) points out that the term translation indicates to the approaches that intend to reproduce the meaning of the written text(s) of the source language text into another written text(s) in the target language. In the same sense, Basalamah (2007) points out that "translation results from an understanding of a source text (the original) from its reading and thus from its interpretation" (p. 118).

2.2 Definitions of Idioms

The term of idiom refers to expressions formed from a collection of different words and it should be treated as single unit. The meaning of this collection of words is unexpected and it cannot be dealt individually. According to Alexander (1987), "idioms are multi-word units which have to be learned as a whole, along with associated sociolinguistic, cultural and pragmatics rules of use" (p. 178). Also simply, Leech (1989) defines an idiom as a combination of a set of words that should be dealt as one unit. The meaning of the idiom cannot be arrived through the meaning of individual words. Furthermore, Richards and Schmidt (1990) indicate that "idiom can be an expression which functions as a single unit and whose meaning cannot be worked out from separate parts" (p. 246). Additionally, Baker (1992) points out "idioms are frozen patterns of language which allow little or no variation in form, and in the case of idioms, often carry meaning which cannot be deduced from their individual components" (p. 63). In addition, Joodi (2012) states that "an idiom is a sequence of words which is semantically and syntactically restricted, so that they function as a single unit. From a semantic point of view, the meanings of the individual words cannot be summed to produce the meanings of the idiomatic expression as a whole" (p. 1).

2.3 Definitions of Phrasal Verb

There are some particles (i.e. prepositions and adverbs) combine particular verbs to give different meanings. The combination of verb with prepositions and adverbs is called phrasal verb. The meaning of the phrasal verbs is unpredictable. According to Turton and Manser (1985) phrasal verbs are those forms that include verb and particle(s) such as; preposition or adverb or both of them. These forms give unpredictable meaning. Also, Leech (1989) states that the structure of the phrasal verb encompasses of verb and that gives an idiomatic meaning. American Heritage College Dictionary (1993) defines the phrasal verb as

"an English verb complex consisting of a verb and one or more following particles that act as a complete syntactic and semantic unit, as **go on** in what is **going on**?" (p. 1030).

Likewise, in Collins Cobuild Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs, Sinclair et al. (1998) point out phrasal verbs as "combinations of verbs with adverbial or prepositional particles" (p. iv). Furthermore, Ghazala (2006) indicates that phrasal verbs are the result of a verb combining with different particles such as adverb or preposition to give another meaning. Also, Aldahesh (2009) explains that phrasal verb as a single unit of a verb + preposition / adverb, its meaning cannot be recognized from its separate items.

3. Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

- 1- Investigate the difficulties of translating English sentences consisting of idiomatic multi-word units (IMWU) into Arabic.
- 2- Highlight the different types of IMWU.
- 3- Enhance the students' awareness in using of the MWU by providing some remedial measures to overcome such problems.

4. Methods of Data Collection

This study employed a translation test and questionnaire to collect the required data for this study. That is, this study depended on the data gathered through a test designed for the learners of English at the College of Toor Al-Baha, University of Aden and questionnaire designed for the teachers of translation.

5. Participants

The participants of this study were fifty (50) students of English language of the 4th year undergraduates at the College of Education, Toor Al-Baha, University of Aden. They were thirty two (32) males and eighteen (18) females. The second sample was (12) teachers of translation in all colleges of education, University of Aden, they were (10) males and (2) females.

6. Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that the knowledge level of learners of English language in translating English idiomatic multi-word units into Arabic is insufficient. This is due to the teachers of English language who avoid using such idiomatic expressions while teaching English in general. In addition, the courses of English as well as translation for students of English language pay less attention. These are the main reasons which make the students of English language unable to overcome the problems of translating English sentences containing idiomatic multi-word units into Arabic.

7. Instruments

Two instruments were used to collect data of this study. The first instrument which was used in this study is a translation test and the second one is questionnaire for teachers of translation.

7.1 Translation Test

Translation test was used to investigate the learners' level in translating English sentences or texts containing idiomatic multi-word units into Arabic. It consisted of two sections. Each section consisted of two tasks.

7.1.1 Results of Task One

The result revealed that only nine (9) respondents that is (18%) manage to get the pass mark and that forty one (41) respondents that means (82%) failed to translate English sentences containing IMWUs into Arabic properly. The following table summarizes the discussion in this paragraph:

Number of respondents (total)	No. of respondents who got the pass mark	No. of respondents who fail to translate MWU properly
50	9	41
100%	18%	82%

Table (1): Respondents' results in task one

7.1.2 Result of Task Two

The result of task two revealed that only fourteen (14) respondents, which estimates (28%) managed to get the pass mark and that thirty six (36) respondents, that equals (72%) failed to translate English sentences containing IMWU into Arabic properly. The following table summarizes the discussion in this paragraph:

Number of Respondents (total)	No. of Respondents who get the pass mark	No. of Respondents who fail to translate MWU properly
50	14	36
100%	28%	72%

Table (2): Respondents' results in task two

7.1.3 Result of Task Three

The result revealed that fifteen (15) respondents that indicates (30%) managed to get the pass mark and that thirty five (35) respondents which is (70%) failed to choose the correct alternative for each item of this task (i.e. items (one and two) have different verbs followed by the same particles, whereas items (three, four & five) have the same verb followed by different particles). The following table summarizes the numbers and percentages of the respondents who got the pass mark and those who cannot provide the proper translation:

No. of Respondents	No. of Respondents who get the pass mark	No. of Respondents who fail to choose the correct alternative
50	15	35
100%	30%	70%

Table (3): Respondents' result in task three

7.1.4 Result of Task Four

The result revealed that only ten (10) respondents that interprets (20%) managed to get the pass mark and that forty (40) which estimates (80%) of the respondents failed to choose the correct translated alternatives for each English sentence containing IMWU. The following table summarizes the numbers and percentages of the respondents who got the pass mark and those who cannot provide the proper translation:

No. of Respondents (total)	No. of Respondents get the pass mark	No. of Respondents fail to choose the correct translation
50	10	40
100%	20%	80%

Table (4): Respondents' result in task four

7.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was the second instrument used in this study to collect further information related to the difficulties of translating IMWU by Yemeni learners of English. The participants of this study were twelve teachers of English courses at Faculties of Education – Toor Al-Baha Aden University. The participants were ten males and two females. The questionnaire involves five items.

- 1. Do you think that translating English sentences containing IMWUs into Arabic is more difficult than other sentences?**

The responses to this question, nine (9) participants which estimates (75%) think that translating sentences containing IMWUs is more difficult than other the sentences which are

not containing IMWUs, while three (3) of them that is (25%) comment by saying that there are other sentences are more difficult to be translated from English into Arabic and vice versa such as; proverbs.

2. Yemeni tertiary learners of English seem to be non – proficient in translating the IMWUs into Arabic at sentence level?

The responses to this question, seven (7) participants which indicates approximately (75%) strongly agree that 4th year B.A. learners in the Department of English seem to be non - proficient in translating IMWUs into Arabic at sentences level while four (4) of them that is (16.66%) of them agree with this point of view. Only one (1) of the participants that estimates (8.33%) strongly disagrees with this view point.

3. As a teacher of translation courses, how often do you use the IMWUs when you teach?

The responses to this question, eight (8) of the participants that is (66.67%) sometimes use IMWUs when they teach, while four (4) of them that equals (33.33%) use IMWUs rarely. The chart shows that none of them use those IMWUs during their teaching at all. It can be deduced from these responses of teachers of English in general and translation in particular that the teachers do not have a positive role in enhancing the levels of their learners when encountering sentence containing IMWUs.

4. Does the idiomatic meaning of MWUs confuse the learners of English language when translated into Arabic?

In responses to this question, seven (7) participants that indicates (91.67%) strongly agree that the idiomatic meaning of MWUs is one of the biggest problems that face students of English in translation, while one (1) of them which is (8.33%) disagree that the idiomatic meaning of MWUs do not confuse the students of English language when translating into Arabic.

5. In your opinion, the IMWUs should take a specific consideration in the translation courses.

The responses to this question, three (3) participants which interprets (25%) strongly agree with the idea given in the question, while nine (9) of them which means (75%) tick the variant 'agree'. No one of participants disagrees with this point of view. The courses which are given to students of English are one of the problems they encounter. So, if translation courses which are given to the learners of English language contain IMWUs, the problem will be minimized when they are required to translate English sentences containing IMWUs into Arabic. This issue may help them during the period of their study and after graduation from their colleges.

8. Findings

The findings of the study have revealed that the Yemeni EFL face big problems in translating English idiomatic expressions and their level in this issue is too low.

The findings of the study have revealed that other types of MWU meaning, for instance, the multiple meaning occurs as a consequence of the learners' lack of knowledge in this meaning aspect.

The findings also demonstrate that MWUs with idiomatic meaning cause serious problems that learners of English language encounter when they are required to translate sentences from English into Arabic language.

They denote that MWU combinations are paid less attention in the syllabuses of B.A. English programme in the colleges of education and translation courses in one hand and the teachers as well as learners of English language in the other hand as they neglect to use such verb combinations in their discourse and communication either inside or outside the classroom, have major effect in causing EPVs translation problems.

The findings get from the instruments (i.e. questionnaire and translation test) which are used in this study affirm the hypothesis mentioned in this study.

9. Conclusion

Translating from English into Arabic and vice versa is not a simple process. There are many problems that face Yemeni tertiary learners of English in their study. Translating idiomatic expressions from one language into another causes many problems to the learners. This study treated with the problems of translating English sentences including multi-word units into Arabic language. It was revealed in this study that Yemeni tertiary learners of English encounter difficulties in translating English sentences consisting of IMWU into Arabic. Here, teachers of English should give a special interest to the idiomatic expressions and use them while teaching and they should not be neglected. IMWUs should be taken in consideration in the courses of translation.

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