

## PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATING THE FIXED PHRASES

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**ABSTRACT:** Fixed expressions can be taken as part of the language used in our daily routine. They are an essential part of language though they can be a problem when it comes to handling them. The fact that not all idioms have a direct equivalent in another language is because these expressions are typical for a certain language and explicit to a single culture. It is very difficult to point out any specific approach in the translation process as many idioms are culture-based, hence the pragmatic meaning should be more valued than the literal meaning. If fixed phrases are to be translated word for word, they can cause a lot of confusion. This study aims at investigating the various obstacles that are encountered in the process of interpreting and translating fixed expressions from a language into another. It presents the definition of fixed phrases, highlights the various difficulties in translating them and finally proposes various theoretical strategies to counter such problems. This study also tries to provide guidelines to both readers and translators of fixed phrases in the translation process. Practical examples of Arabic, Persian, English and Turkish collocations will be used during the course of the study. First, the obstacles in the process of understanding the fixed phrasal meanings will be examined then probable ways of solving these problems will be suggested.

**KEYWORDS:** Fixed phrases, Idioms, Translation, Expressions, Target language (TL)  
Source language (SL)

### INTRODUCTION

Fixed phrases are part of every language. They are an inalienable part of every language and found in great numbers in most languages. They are a specific distinctive trait of the English language. There are some problems that are encountered in both the process of understanding and translating these collocations since their meaning is hard to understand from the superficial meanings of every word-forming them. The translation process of fixed phrases from a language to another is a fine work which requires the one translating to have adequate knowledge of not only the languages but also the cultures involved and also able to identify and adjust accordingly with the contingent issues in the translation process of finding an efficient equal for the inter-lingual fixed expressions (Shojaei).

People from different languages usually use very different expressions to deliver a similar meaning in a way that while a phrase is fully tangible and understandable to the speakers of a specific language, the exact set of words and phrases may seem completely invalid and vague and in some situations nonsense to the interlocutors of the other (Adelnia, and Dastjerdi). This is due to the fact that every language contains some culture-specific items that are very dissimilar from the corresponding items in a different language. Other than that, there are some dissimilarities in factors like religion, social classes of languages, geographical places and different ideologies that make it difficult to understand and translate fixed phrases. Therefore, there are two key problems in this process; understanding the meaning of fixed expressions of a particular language and recreation of the same set of fixed phrases into another language conveying the exact ideas of the previous language.

### **Definition of Fixed Phrases**

Fixed phrases are expressions in which the words are combined to express an idea. A fixed phrase takes on more meaning than the separate words while still retaining a lexical connection (Shojaei). Fixed phrases wordings cannot be altered without sounding odd to native speakers despite maintaining the literal meaning. As a category, fixed expressions also include idioms which are fixed expressions that convey something that is not the same as their literal definition. One cannot substitute the words of idioms just as with other fixed phrases even if their literal meaning would remain the same. However, not all fixed phrases are in the form of idioms.

Idioms and fixed phrases have a wide territory that incorporates various cultural aspects such as ideological differences of individuals from diverse societies and countries, religious beliefs, culture-based items, and superstitions. According to the Collins English Dictionary, idioms are defined as expressions such as similes, whose words do not portray their literal meaning but are put in the category of multi-word phrases that perform in the text as units. Idioms are taken to be figures of speech and defined by Longman Idioms Dictionary as words in a sequence having different meaning as a set from the meaning it would have if one takes each word on its own.

Most scholars agree that fixed phrases, in most cases show no flexibility to alteration in form and grammar. For this reason, Baker quotes that both idioms and fixed expressions are at the verge of the scale from collocation in either or both of these areas: the flexibility of modeling and transparency of meaning (63). They are models of languages that are frozen allowing little or no

changes in the form and in the part of idioms often have meanings that cannot be inferred from their single constituents. Baker also notes that some idioms do not allow any alteration in the form under common situations, hence a translator cannot alter the order of words or delete or add a word to it or replace with another and also cannot vary the structure of the grammar. She also believes that problems encountered in the translation of a fixed expression are largely in the case of idioms (Baker).

Fixed Phrase is a phrase with special meaning that cannot be understood from the direct meaning of its words, nor from their total meaning when taken together. A fixed phrase, on the other hand, is a phrase which always has one single grammatical and lexical form and word order that cannot be changed, interrupted or reversed. In this sense, both idioms and proverbs are special fixed phrases.

One of the major translation problems for translators is the translation of special fixed phrases; idioms, and proverbs in particular the following discussion tackle the problems of translation, starting with idioms.

### **Translation of Idioms:**

fixed phrase is a phrase whose form is generally unalterable and whose meaning is constantly inflexible, figurative and indirect and cannot be caught on from the direct meaning of its expressions not from the whole denotation of them, fixed phrase on the other hand is a phrase which continuously has one single syntactic, lexical form and word order that cannot be reformed, disturbed or unturned, thus idioms and proverbs are fixed phrases,

One of the main challenge which encounter the translator is the translation of fixed phrases, idioms and proverbs specifically.

The discussions of the transferring of English idioms into Arabic can be highlighted through the following:

1-Our dear aunt is at death's door خالتنا العزيزة على أبواب الموت –you scratch my back and I will scratch yours. كل واكل / امسك لى واقطع لك. It was the straw that broke the camel's back كانت القشة التي

, لماذا تنشر غسيلك الوسخ على الملا. Why do you wash your dirty linen in public. قصمت ظهر البعير

Notably , the above mentioned idioms are conveyed into Arabic directly, but should be understood indirectly, that is, they have a figurative meaning. Therefore, They are fixed phrases , the words denote something and its words something different, to clarify this further, the intended, direct meanings of the above mentioned examples can be translated as as following :

1- Our dear aunt is dying *خالتنا العزيزة تموت/ تحتضر* .serve me, so that I serve you. *اخدمنى لخدمك*

It was the light knockout stroke. *كانت الضربة الخفيفة القاضية* . why do you make your own secrets open, *لماذا تفتش أسرارك* (Translation as problems and solutions H. Ghazala p.130)

There are direct explanations of idioms under discussion. However the receptor need to concentrate on translating, not explaining English idioms into Arabic equivalents. Explanation is acceptable only when translation is not possible for good reason .

The problem for the translator is to have access to the equivalent idiom in Arabic. The solution is possibly not difficult for several reasons:

- 1- Such idioms are favourable for the translator as well as for some the receptor. Therefore, their translation is more interesting for both of them.
- 2- The above mentioned idioms have direct identical equivalents in Arabic.

Thus the translator can rely on the literal translation of these idioms. However , when such translation is ambiguous they should realize that literal translation is useless.

### **Phrasal verbs**

Phrasal verbs are well- established, extremely popular idioms, phrasal verb is a combination of a verb + an adverb / preposition, or both an adverb and a preposition ( such as up, down , on, off, over,etc;). It has a special idiomatic meaning that cannot be understood from the individual meaning of the verb and adverb /preposition taken together.

The translator face the problem in translating English phrasal verbs into Arabic, because they are misleading, and usually confused with prepositional verbs( i.e a verb+ a preposition) which are not idiomatic and retain their normal direct meaning. The criterion for distinguishing between the two types of verb is to apply direct translation to both of them to find out if the meaning is altered.

The meaning of English phrasal verbs are mostly unexpectable and unfamiliar to the receptor . however the preposition for instance "on" contains the idea of doing something over a period of time constantly when it associates with verbs, e.g. go on= continue , carry on = continue , driving on = continue , similarly with the adv `off` suggest the notion of cancellation , leaving ,disposing " get off= leave; call off = cancel, take off =undress (( translation as problems andsolution professor H.Gazala. p133)

### Translation of Proverb

Similarly as idioms and phrasal verbs proverbs are fixed phrases unchangeable phrases which have metaphorical meaning , a proverb cannot be understood or translated from the group of it is individual meaning of its terms. Furthermore the proverbs have a figurative meaning, the meaning of its words stand for different meaning. Alongside they are culture- specific. Thus they should not be translated or understood from its individual words " e.g. the grass is greener on the otherside of the hill/fence المزمار الحى لا يطرب , half a loaf is better than no bread الرمد خير من العمى

### Difficulties in the Process of Interpreting Fixed Phrases

As mentioned earlier, there are two types of difficulties that translators face during the translation of fixed expressions. These are difficulties in interpretation and the translation process itself. The first problem in interpretation is that a translator must be aware if she/he is dealing with a fixed expression in a given context or not. Recognition of an idiom sometimes is usually a hard task. Besides cultural reasons, there are other reasons such as linguistic and semantic behind this problem. There are various types of idioms with some more recognizable than others (Baker). These three groups of idioms include:

1. Phrases that violate factual states, example "هيخوُ ابوالعطا قورباغ بز بالا سز ك آب" which literally translates to 'when the water goes up, the frog sings a song' in Persian.
2. Expressions that appear ill-formed since they do not adhere to rules of grammar, for example, "درآوردی رو قضی تو و ت" which literally in Persian is 'to extract the butt and bit of the story.'
3. Phrases that commence with simile-like structures also have a tendency to propose that they should not be taken literally as they are, for example, "است دیز باروی گزگ هئل" which literally in Persian is 'like a rain-seen wolf.'

The fact that a translator cannot make sense of a phrase in a certain context is a clear indication that there is an idiom within the context. Some of the situations that an idiom can be misinterpreted due to lack of familiarity include (Shojaei):

1. In a situation where the idiom may seem transparent since they offer a sensible literal interpretation and their meanings are not essentially signaled in the adjacent text. An example on this case is a Persian idiom "هالیذی ضییز کسی سز" literally meaning 'to curry syrup to someone's head' could be misleading for an interlocutor who is not Persian or has no background knowledge on the source of the idiom as well as unfamiliarity with its connotative meaning. A translator might be misguided to take the surface meaning. Otherwise, if the translator had recognized the idiom and made the correct interpretation, the resulting expression would have been 'to take someone for a ride.'

2. In a situation where an idiom in the original language has a very close counterpart in the final language, appearing very similar but with completely or somewhat different meaning. An example in this case is a fixed expression in English 'to give an exam' which means a teacher/tutor giving a paper to a student to answer translated into Persian will be: "دادی اهتای" meaning the agent (teacher or tutor) like a student is given a paper to hold an exam, which is a whole different connotation from the English expression.

Fixed expressions have collocational patterns that are individual. Together with other items in a text, they result in a collocation as individual units and form lexical sets which are from those of their single words. An instance of a Persian expression where "گذاستی خطاش ب هت" literally translates to 'drill a poppy' means 'to be over nice; split hairs' whereas neither drill nor poppy has any relation to the meaning of the complete pattern.

### **Difficulties in the Process of Translating Fixed Phrases**

On an interpretation of a fixed expression in the right way, the fixed phrase is then translated by finding an equivalent in the target language. The process of translation of a fixed expression for every translator is more difficult than the process of interpretation. Furthermore, the meaning of an expression cannot be inferred from individual words that form it neither recreate a similar meaning through substitution of the target language item for the source language one. The main problem of translation is the equivalence as it is very difficult to find the right equivalent for an

individual word without finding the equivalence for a set of words that bring out one definite meaning. Apparently, there are aspects such as socio-linguistic factors that back up this claim. For instance, idioms may have culture-specific / bound items that can result in problems in the process of translation. Teilanyo notes that the cultural-based problem results from the difficulty of finding suitable target language equivalent especially for words conveying notions that are culture-sensitive in the source language due to the fact that these two languages are very different (16).

Mona Baker classifies difficulties involved in translating fixed phrases into the following subcategories (68):

1. Lack of equivalent for a fixed expression in the target language. Different languages have different worldly views, hence, while a certain language might use a single word to express a specific meaning, another one, might express the meaning through the usage of linguistic items such as fixed phrases or an explanatory sentence. This happens mainly in situations that involve culture-specific items. For instance, while the word, baptize, is fully tangible and understood for a Christian English audience, its completely vague and unknown for a Turk or Persian Muslim. A translator should convey the meaning, a Christian ritual that involves pouring water on the head of the person involved to show that they become Christian Church members. Baker further states that some other forms of fixed expressions that have fixed formulae such as ‘Merry Christmas’, ‘Yours sincerely’ and ‘Yours faithfully’.

2. A fixed phrase could be having similar counterpart but the context of its usage might differ in the target language. For instance, the English idiom ‘to sing a different tune’ means to contradict an opinion which has been previously said or done. In comparison to the Chinese equivalent, ‘to sing different tunes’, (‘chang-dui-tai-xi’) has strong political implications and is more of complementary.

3. An idiom can be applied in both its literal and idiomatic senses concurrently in a source text. Therefore, unless the target language and source language idiom correspond both in the form and meaning, the final idiom can’t be reproduced successfully. An example of such an idiom in Azeri is ‘yorq âniva gôra qiçivi ũzat’ translated ‘crane your leg as long as your blanket’, which is similar to the English idiom ‘don’t bite off more than you can chew’. If there is a variance in the form in the Azeri idiom for any textual reason into yorqâniva gôra qiçivi ũzat yoxsa viralar qiçin

sinar” literally: ‘crane your legs long as your blanket or else people will break your leg’. A problem will arise in recreating an idiom with the same form and meaning in English.

4. The context in which an idiom can be used, the number of times they may be used and the method of usage in written discourse may vary in the target and source languages (Baker,70). Different languages own different ‘rhetorical’ formulae. For example, while a certain language may incorporate a great number of honorifics as a rhetorical means, another language may show a vivid difference between spoken and written discourse whereby the written form is regarded with more formality than spoken. An instance for this is in the Turkish and Persian languages where the written form is of a greater level and formality ignoring some idioms that are spoken and informal as a rule.

## CONCLUSION

Translation of fixed phrases requires some strategies to cope with the fixed Phrases expressions such as phrasal verbs, proverbs and idioms. The translator should be mindful of the original structure of the source text as well as its element which is significant for the translation wording .

The translator should bring the audience to the text meaning that one should not always expect translation of fixed phrases to be precisely as in some cases there will be some modulations. The translator should be able to concentrate on the original meaning of the text and the effect intended on the audience. Scholars summaries various strategies to approaching translation problems as applying fixed phrases with similar form and meaning or using them with similar meaning but a different form, omitting while translating and paraphrasing during translation.

There is no specific cut to which strategy that can be used to cope with fixed phrase translation, however, the type of situation calls for a decision on which strategy to use. One of the most important aspects of translation is that the translator must have a deep knowledge of both the source language and target language, and he suppose to be accurate precise in conveying the SL into TL.

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