

## An Investigation of English-Persian Translation of Formulaic Expressions in Electrical Instruction Manuals

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***Abstract:** Formulaic expressions cover a range of prefabricated linguistic units from idioms and proverbs to conversational greeting, collocations, some phrasal verbs, and many expressions. Although some authors like Britton (1974), Pinchuck (1977), and Cabré (1999) have claimed that technical texts must be written in an objective style which would exclude the use of such expressions, in this study the researcher indicates that formulaic expressions exist in technical fields. This paper investigates in depth the Persian translations of English formulaic expressions in 15 electrical home appliance instruction manuals. The researcher also recognizes different types of such expressions in the corpus. The findings were showed that Persian translations of all formulaic expressions were accurate and there were marked difference between frequencies of different types of formulaic expressions.*

***Key words:** Formulaic expressions, Instruction manuals, Idioms, Technical texts*

### 1. Introduction

Translation is the communication of the meaning of a source language text by means of an equivalent target language text. Because of the needs of business documentation consequent to Industrial Revolution that started in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, some translation specialties have become formulated and developed, with particular schools and professional organization (Wikipedia, 2013).

Technical translation is a type of specialized translation (Newmark, 1988) involving the translation of documents produced by technical writers (owner's manuals, etc.), or more specifically, texts which relate to technological domain or texts which are about the practicality of scientific and technological information.

In this study, formulaic expressions accepted as a broader concept than traditional idiom. Although, some authors are discussing formulaic language recently, they have not researched the translation of such expressions in instruction manuals, or even in technical subjects in general. In

the study of such expressions has been usually paid attention on everyday written or spoken language (Fernandez-Parra, 2008).

This research tries to evaluate current state of Persian translation of formulaic expressions through a contrastive study and also, finds out that what types of formulaic expressions mostly are used in instruction manuals.

## 2. Research questions and hypotheses

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. How is the current state of Persian translation of formulaic expressions in electrical instruction manuals?
2. What types of formulaic expressions occur most frequently in instruction manuals?

On the basis of the above research questions; the following research hypotheses are presented:

1. The quality of translation of formulaic expressions in electrical instruction manuals is good.
2. Different types of formulaic expressions in instruction manuals occur with the same frequency.

## 3. Importance of formulaic expressions

Study of formulaic language is one of the newest areas in applied linguistics. It is an important part of language learning and use. Normal discourse, both written and spoken, has large percentages of formulaic language (Schmitt, 2005). Erman and Warren (2000) measured formulaic expressions in normal discourse and found out that 52-58% of the language they analyzed was formulaic, and Foster (2001) showed a figure of 32% using different procedures and criteria.

If formulaic language formed much of every day discourse, then this suggests that proficient language users know a large number of formulaic expressions (Schmitt, 2005). Pawley and Syder (1983, p.213) suggest that the number of "sentence-length expressions familiar to the ordinary, mature English speaker probably amounts, at least, to several hundreds of thousands". The result of a small corpus study of spoken language in a TV quiz show asserts that people may know at least as many as formulaic sequences as single words (Jackendoff, 1995). Melčuk (1995), who uses the term 'phraseology', states even greater overall importance for such sequences.

There is little empirical work to prove the idea that proficient language users know numerous formulaic sequences. However, these claims match with Sinclair's (1991) view that language as a whole is organized according to two main structuring principles: "an open choice principle and

an idiom principle”, with the latter containing the widespread use of formulaic stretches of words. In addition, this store of formulaic sequence is dynamic and is constantly changing to meet the needs of the speaker (Wray, 2002).

### 3.1 The fuzzy boundaries of formulaic expressions

Formulacity is not a very clear phenomenon. It sometimes covers lexical forms and may contain other lexical forms. For example, all expressions named idioms may be included as a subclass of formulaic language, but not all formulaic expressions may be idioms. Among formulaic expressions there can also be “collocations (e.g. teething problems), conventionalized greeting (good morning, safe journey), and many other expressions”. Formulaic language may also cover some “phrasal verbs (e.g. carry out [a task])” but some phrasal verbs may not take into account as formulaic “(e.g. take out)”. In technical corpus, some terms could also be considered formulaic “(e.g. terms and conditions)” (Fernandez-Parra, 2008).

### 3.2 Definition of formulaic expressions

There is a general agreement on basic definitions of what makes formulaic sequence and what features such sequences share that make them different. The opinion that each scholar seems to accept is that “they are multiword units of language that are stored in long-term memory as if they were single lexical units” (Wood, 2002). Here are some other definitions of formulaic language:

Pawley and Syder (1983) referred to formulas as “sentence stems” which are lexicalized, that is which are “regular form-meaning pairings”(p.192), and this notion of lexicalization is echoed by Nattinger and Decarrico(1992) in an influential work that focuses on lexical phrases, an alternate term for formulaic language units:

Lexical phrases [are] form/function composites, lexico-grammatical units that occupy a position somewhere between the traditional poles of lexicon and syntax: they are similar to lexicon in being treated as units, yet most of them consist of more than one word, and many of them can, at the same time, be derived from the regular rules of syntax, just like other sentences. (p.36)

Hickey (1993) clearly expressed definition of formulaic language in terms of process, referring to multiword or multiform strings produced and recalled as a chunk like a single lexical item rather than being produced from individual items and rules. Wray (2002) defined formulaic sequence as multiword units of language as:

A sequence, continuous or discontinuous, of words or other meaning elements, which is , or appears to be , prefabricated : that is stored and retrieved whole from memory at the time of use, rather than being subject to generation or analysis by language grammar. (p. 9)

Based on the above definition, Fernandez-Parra (2008) proposed 5 criteria. She has claimed that when these criteria used together, they can separate formulaic expressions from non-formulaic expressions to a large extent. So in this study a formulaic expression is an expression which:

is prefabricated,

has a non-compositional, or partly compositional meaning,

shows conventionalization,

allows a restricted exchangeability of component words, and

shows a degree of fixedness in its word order (Fernandez-Parra, 2008, p. 53).

### 3.3 Classification of formulaic expressions

Formulaic expressions were generally classified to *sentences (or pseudo-sentential phrases)*, for example proverbs, saying, maxims, prayers, commandments, notices, clichés, social formulae, quotation, etc. and *sub-sentential phrases*. *Sub-sentential phrases* could be divided into *variable* and *invariable expressions*. *Invariable expressions* contain foreign phrases, dual phrases, triple phrases, comparisons, adjectival, adverbial, nominal, participial, prepositional, discourse markers, and other invariable expressions. *Variable expressions* could be classified with respect to the part that is inflectionally variable. There are expressions with variable verb, variable noun, variable determiner, variable pronoun or variable possessive (M. A. Fernandez-Parra, personal communication, November 19, 2013).

## 4. Instructions

Instructions are one of the main parts of technical communication. Technical writers will probably write more instructional documents than any other type of document (Markel, 2002). When talking about instructions, we simply remember user guides. There are, in fact, different types of instructional documents each with its own particular content, format and audience (Byrne, 2006).

### 4.1 Instruction manuals

Fernandez-Parra states “Instruction manuals have special features in common that set them apart as a subtype of technical texts, and warrant their study as a relatively homogeneous unit” (2008, p. 54). Newmark (1993) states: “Instruction manuals differ from the mass of technical writing in being addressed to a general readership, and with a particular sense of urgency and explicitness” (p.147). They clearly contain technical terms, but they include a large amount of “imperatives, repetition, pseudo-sentential phrases” too (Fernandez-Parra, 2008). “The English

passive, so common in technical writing, frequently gives way to the imperative form of address” (ibid., p.147).

Another feature that is important for writing a technical texts, where instruction manuals can be included, and some authors like Cabré (1999), Pinchuck (1977), Britton (1974), and Gangewere (1972) have claimed is that they should be written in “neutral and impersonal style”, or in other words “objective style” which would exclude the use of many expressions. However, the researchers show contrary to these claims, formulaic expressions play a very important role in the corpus.

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Analysis of the first research question

- The first question of this research was as follows:

*How is the current state of Persian translation of formulaic expressions in electrical instruction manuals?*

- This research question was a qualitative one. The researcher recognized formulaic expressions with regard to 5 criteria proposed by Fernandez-Parra (2008). Fernandez-Parra (2008) has claimed these criteria are useful in separating formulaic expression from non-formulaic expressions in the corpus to a large extent.

For the sake of reliability, data labeling was undertaken by the present researcher, as the first rater, and another expert in translation (holding a Ph.D. degree), as the second rater. Having labeled each piece of data, the whole analysis was passed to the second rater who reviewed the whole analysis and gave it a final check. When the views of the two raters were the same on a specific item, that label was considered as final. In contrast, when their views were different they discussed it together to reach a compromise. Both raters are native speakers of Persian and with the help of their English knowledge they are supposed to be able to judge the accuracy of each translation. No doubt, this sort of evaluation is qualitative and cannot be deemed as mistake-free.

The total number of words in English instruction manuals were 50500, that the researcher extracted 518 English formulaic expressions from these manuals and checked their translations to see whether all Persian translation of such expressions in the corpus were accurate or not. All English translations of formulaic expressions are from Longman Dictionary Online (2013). There are some example bellow:

1. If the supply cord is damaged, it must be replaced by the manufacturer or its service agent in order to avoid a hazard.

اگر سیم برق آسیب ببیند، باید به منظور احتراز از خطر توسط سازنده یا تعمیرکار آن تعویض شود.

*In order to* is formulaic expression that is translated correctly into به منظور. *Order* means “the way that several things, events, etc. are arranged or put on a list, showing whether something is first, second, third etc.”, but *in order to [do sth]* means “for the purpose of doing something”. Here, the translator identifies the expressions as formulaic and the translation is perfect and natural sounding.

2. Do not disassemble or repair the refrigerator by yourself.

یخچال را خودتان باز یا تعمیر نکنید.

*By yourself* is a formulaic expression too. The translator recognized it as formulaic, and translated it into خودتان. Word for word translation of this expression into target text was not natural sounding.

3. In the event of a power failure, call the local office of your Electricity Company.

در صورت قطعی برق، به اداره محلی شرکت برق خود زنگ زده

Along similar line is the translation of *in the event of* with در صورت. *Event* means “something that happens, especially something important, interesting or unusual”. The translation of this expression is correct too, because the translator recognizes it as formulaic and translates it with another formulaic expression.

4. After this, turn on the appliance & clean the dust.

سپس، دستگاه را روشن کرده، گرد و غبار را تمیز کنید.

*After this* is a formulaic expression too. It is correctly translated into سپس. In this case, the transparency of this expression might lead a translator to translate it word for word into Persian. Word for word translation of this expression into target text is not natural sounding.

## 5.2 Analysis of the second research question

In this thesis, the first research question was a qualitative one and hence all the discussions reported there were tentative. In the second research question, however, use was made of non-parametric statistic, chi-square test, to check for significance of differences observed between different sub-classes of formulaic expressions.

- The second question was as follows:

*What types of formulaic expressions mostly do occur in instruction manuals?*

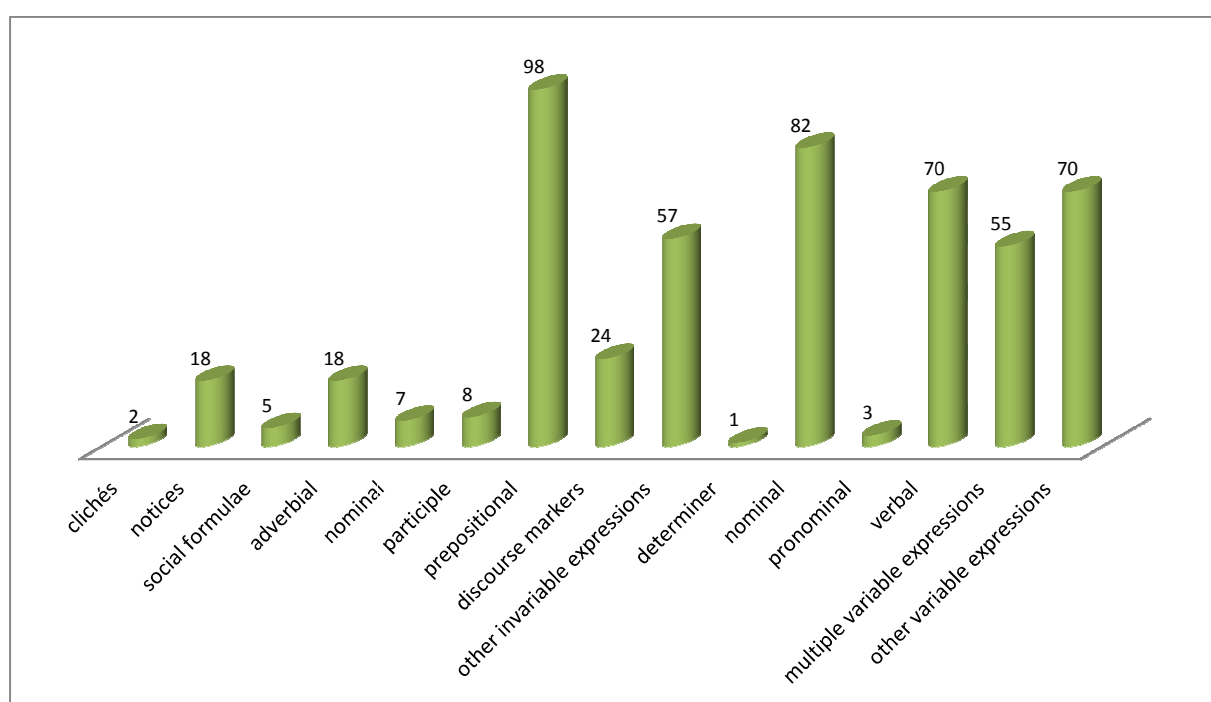
In this part, in order to classify different types of formulaic expressions, the researcher used Fernandez-Parra's (M. A. Fernandez-Parra, personal communication, November 19, 2013) classification of such expressions. Frequencies and percentages of different types of formulaic expressions are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Frequencies of sub-classifications of formulaic expressions**

Different types of formulaic expressions	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
clichés	2	.4	.4	.4
notices	18	3.5	3.5	3.9
social formulae	5	1.0	1.0	4.8
adverbial	18	3.5	3.5	8.3
nominal	7	1.4	1.4	9.7
participle	8	1.5	1.5	15.6
prepositional	98	18.9	18.9	34.6
discourse markers	24	4.6	4.6	39.2
other invariable expressions	57	11.0	11.0	45.8
determiner	1	.2	.2	45.9
nominal	82	15.8	15.8	61.8
pronominal	3	.6	.6	62.4
verbal	70	13.5	13.5	83.6
multiple variable expressions	55	10.6	10.6	94.2
other variable expressions	70	13.5	13.5	100.0
Total	518	100.0	100.0	

As illustrated in the above table, among all sub-classes of formulaic expressions, the most frequent one was invariable prepositional expressions with the frequency of 98, and percentage of 18.9%, followed by variable nominal expressions with the frequency of 82, and percentage of 15.8%. Variable verbal expressions and other variable expressions stood at the third position of this ranking, with the frequency of 70, and percentage of 13.5%. Other invariable expressions sat

at the next position of this ranking, with the frequency of 57, and percentage of 11%. The fifth frequent sub-class was multiple variable expressions with the frequency of 55, and percentage of 10.6%, followed by discourse markers with the frequency of 24, and percentage of 4.6%. Then, there were invariable verbal expressions with the frequency of 23, and percentage of 4.4%, and notices and invariable adverbial expressions with the same frequency of 18, and percentage of 3.5%. Participle was another formulaic expression with the frequency of 8, and percentage of 1.5%, followed by invariable nominal expressions with the frequency of 7, and percentage of 1.7%. There were social formulae with the frequency of 5, and percentage of 1%, and clichés with the frequency of 2, and percentage of 0.4%. The least frequent formulaic expression was determiner with the frequency of 1, and percentage of 0.2%.



**Chart 1: Frequencies of Sub-classifications of formulaic expressions**

To clarify the meaningfulness of the difference observed between the sub-classes, a chi-square procedure was used. The results obtained from the chi-square were showed that the amount of chi-square is 460.52 (df=16), which mean there is a meaningful differences observed between the frequencies of subclasses.

## 6. Discussion

It is very important to note that a formulaic expression in a source text does not translate with another formulaic expression in target text automatically, especially because there could be an absence of equivalent in another language. And sometimes there could be an equivalent to



formulaic expression in the target text but it is better, the translator paraphrases the whole section of the source text (Fernandez-Parra, 2008).

There was not any error in the translation of a formulaic expression into Persian. In this context, error means a completely unacceptable translation of a particular formulaic expression into target language (Fernandez-Parra, 2008). Although, there are some Persian translations of these expressions that could be better, the researcher does not consider them as error. There are many examples of good translations of formulaic expression in the corpus.

Many formulaic expressions in the corpus have non-compositional, or partly compositional meaning, and literally translation of these expressions become incorrect. *In order to, in regard to, in the event of, carry out* were examples of formulaic expressions that were correctly translated with formulaic expressions. However, some formulaic expressions had clear meaning (Biber et al., 1999, as cited in Schmitt, 2005). For example, *for future reference* was a formulaic expression that although translator translated it literally; *برای مراجعات بعدی* it sounds natural and native-like in the target text. Translations of these expressions, *inside or outside* and *up or down* were word for word too. The first one translated to *داخل یا بیرون* and the second one translated to *بالا یا پایین*. Both translations were correct too.

Although there were many outstanding examples of translations across the corpus, in 10 cases, the translator could translate formulaic expressions better. There are some example bellow:

1. There is a risk of death from suffocation if children put them over their head.

در صورتی که کودکان آنها را روی سر خود بگذارند، خطر مرگ به علت خفگی وجود دارد.

There is not translation of this formulaic expression in the dictionary. Although the translation seems correct, it is better the translator translates this formulaic expression to *دور کردن خود بیچند* with regard to translation of next sentence.

2. It is your responsibility to use common sense, caution, and care when installing, maintaining and operating your washer.

شما مسؤول هستید که در هنگام نصب، نگه داری و استفاده از ماشین لباس شویی، قضاوت صحیح، احتیاط و مراقبت را مد نظر داشته باشید.

*Common sense* means “the ability to behave in a sensible way and make practical decisions” and in Persian dictionaries translates to “عقل سلیم”. So it is not sensible to translate this formulaic expression to *قضاوت صحیح*.

In 19 cases, it seems that the translator omitted the formulaic expressions, for example *as illustrated* which appears in the following passage:

If you stop cleaning for a while, you can store the hose and extension wands by using park position as illustrated.

اگر کار با جارو را برای مدتی متوقف می کنید ، با استفاده از جایگاه نصب لوله امتداد ، آن را در وضعیت آماده قرار دهید.

The finding of the research is equal to what it is hypothesized at the beginning of the research. So *the quality of translation of formulaic expressions in electrical instruction manuals is good*. Because from 518 instances of formulaic expressions in the corpus only in 10 cases the translator could translate better and other translations of formulaic expressions, except in 19 cases the translator omitted them, are correct and acceptable.

The second hypothesis that is; *Different types of formulaic expressions in instruction manuals occur with the same frequency, is not accepted*. Because as illustrated in Table 1, many classes of sentential and pseudo-sentential had no token in the corpus, such as proverbs, prayers, commandments, etc., and only subclasses with tokens are shown in the table, like notices, social formulae and clichés. Under the invariable sub-sentential heading, some sub-classes like foreign phrases, dual phrases, triple phrases, and comparisons had no token in the corpus too. In the variable sub-sentential heading, different sub-classes had different frequency.

## 7. Conclusions

Despite claims that technical writing inclines to be “neutral and impersonal, avoiding emotiveness”, which implies a lack of formulaic expressions (Britton 1974; Pinchuck 1977; Cabré 1999), in this study the researcher showed that such expressions exist in the texts belonging to technical fields.

In this corpus from 15 instruction manuals, the researcher extracted 518 formulaic expressions. By checking the Persian translation of such expressions, the researcher found that translation of all formulaic expressions into target text is accurate, since the translators (who remain anonymous) only in 10 cases that constituted only 1.93% of all formulaic expressions in this corpus, could have better translation, and just small portions of the source text (only 19 cases that constituted 3.66% of the formulaic expressions in this research) were left untranslated.

Although some formulaic expressions like; *as well as, in the event of, in order to, carry out, and by yourself* had non-compositional, or partly compositional meaning, Persian translation of formulaic expressions like; *up or down, inside or outside, and for future reference* were indicated that a translator could translate these expressions literally. Thus, this claim that formulaic expressions must have non-compositional, or partly compositional meaning is not true about translation of all formulaic expressions into Persian.

One feature of formulaicity that is noticeable in the target text and has not been said in literature is its “power”. The correct translation of formulaic expressions in the target texts

seemed to extremely make the overall quality of the target text better. The correct positioning of formulaicity in the target text appeared to make the text much more “native-like” and “natural-sounding” (Fernandez-Parra, 2008). So based on this claim, it seems that overall quality of Persian translation of instruction manual is good, because quality of translation of formulaic expressions in the corpus is good.

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