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## Strategies of Translating Arabic Religious Idioms into English

**Rihab Salam Yousif Mahmood\***

Tikrit University /College of Arts / Translation Department

[Irhabvosif24@gmail.com](mailto:Irhabvosif24@gmail.com)

&

**Asst. Prof. Dr. Marwah Kareem Ali**

Tikrit University /College of Arts / Translation Department

[Marwakareem16@tu.edu.iq](mailto:Marwakareem16@tu.edu.iq)

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### Abstract

Translating religious idioms from Arabic into English is regarded as a challenging task for translators. The hard nature of this task may indicate a significant misapprehension and misinterpretation of the original text in the process of translation. This, in turn, forms a problem to translators as how to translate these idioms appropriately. Therefore, this study aims, to identify the strategies faced by translators when translating religious idioms into Arabic. Additionally, the study aims to identify the strategies employed in translating such expressions. It hypothesizes. Translators frequently employ strategies when translating religious idiomatic expressions into English. The translation of opaque idioms presents a greater challenge compared to transparent idioms. Practically, the study

\* Corresponding Author: Rihab Salam, Email: [Irhabvosif24@gmail.com](mailto:Irhabvosif24@gmail.com)

Affiliation: Tikrit University - Iraq

sample includes a total of (4) religious idioms, selected from Arabic theses conducted of department of Islamic sciences and Arabic language at University of Tikrit. These (4) idioms were translated by (4) MA student in the department of translation, College of Arts, University of Tikrit. This study employs two models for date analysis, one is proposed by Moon (1998), which encompasses four distinct categories of idiomatic expressions, namely transparent, semi-transparent, opaque, and semi-opaque. Nida's (1961) proposed translation strategies differentiate between two approaches, namely the formal and dynamic equivalence methods. The study reveals that M.A. students encounter numerous obstacles when translating religious idioms, primarily due to lack of understanding regarding the cultural disparities between the English and Arabic language.

**Key Word** : Translation, Strategies, Idioms .

## استراتيجيات ترجمة المصطلحات الدينية العربية الى اللغة الانجليزية

رحاب سلام يوسف

جامعة تكريت /كلية الآداب/قسم الترجمة

و

ا.م.د. مروه كريم علي

جامعة تكريت /كلية الآداب/قسم الترجمة

### المستخلص

تعد ترجمة التعبيرات الدينية من العربية إلى الإنجليزية تحدياً صعباً يواجه المترجمون. فالصعوبة التي تتطوي عليها هذه المهمة تشير إلى حدوث سوء فهم وتصير غير صحيح للنص الأصلي أثناء عملية الترجمة وهذا بدوره، يشكل مشكلة للمترجمين في كيفية ترجمة هذه التعبيرات بشكل مناسب. لذا، نهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى تحديد المشاكل التي يواجهها المترجمون عند ترجمة التعبيرات الدينية العربية إلى الإنجليزية. وبالإضافة إلى ذلك، تحديد الاستراتيجيات المستخدمة في ترجمة هذه التعبيرات تقترض الدراسة الحالية أن المترجمين يستخدمون بشكل متكرر استراتيجيات رسمية وديناميكية عند ترجمة التعبيرات الدينية إلى الإنجليزية كما أظهرت الدراسة أن ترجمة التعبيرات الغامضة تشكل تحدياً أكبر مقارنة بالتعبيرات الواضحة. وبالنسبة لعينة الدراسة، تم اختيار 15 تعبيراً دينياً من رسائل الماجستير التي أجريت في أقسام العلوم الإسلامية واللغة العربية في جامعة تكريت. تم ترجمة هذه التعبيرات من قبل 7 طلاب ماجستير في قسم الترجمة في كلية الآداب في جامعة تكريت. اعتمدت الدراسة نموذجين لتحليل البيانات النموذج

اللغوي الذي اقترحه مون (1998) ويشمل أربع فئات متميزة للتعبير، هي الواضحة، وشبه واضحة، والغامضة، وشبه الغامضة و النموذج الثاني هو نموذج نايدا (1961) للمكافآت الرسمية والديناميكية بينت الدراسة أن طلاب الماجستير يواجهون العديد من المشاكل عند ترجمة التعبيرات الدينية، حيث يعانون من عدم فهم معنى التعبير الديني، وذلك بشكل أساسي بسبب عدم فهم الاختلافات الثقافية بين اللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية. وإضافة إلى ذلك، يعد تفسير التعبير في اللغة الهدف أمراً حاسماً، بدلاً من الاعتماد على إعادة الصياغة كوسيلة لترجمة التعبير. وأخيراً، فإن فهم استراتيجيات الترجمة بشكل شامل يمكن أن يعزز قدرة الطلاب على تطبيق هذه الاستراتيجيات بفاعلية.

**الكلمات الدالة:** التعبيرات الدينية من العربية إلى الإنجليزية، التعبير في اللغة، ترجمة التعبيرات

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Catford (1965: 20) states that "translation is the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL). Newmark (1981:7) as maintained, that "translation is craft consisting in the attempt to replace written message or statement in one language by the same message and/or statement in another language.". Nida (1964) also adds that "the role of translation is the facilitate the transfer of the message, meaning and cultural element from one language into another and create an equivalent response to the receivers". The implementation of translation strategies is deemed essential as it allows translators to effectively address any obstacles that may arise during the translation process (Dweik&Thalji, 2016).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 The concept of Translation

According to Nida (1964: 9), translation is a procedure that involves the transfer of meaning from one language to another while preserving the original meaning. As an example, it is necessary to translate a text composed in the source language into the target language with the understanding that both languages convey equivalent meanings. Therefore, two essential elements are required in the translation process. Firstly, it is imperative to choose a precise and accurate equivalent in the target language. Secondly, feel of honesty in translation must be adopted.

Nida and Taber (1969:12), say that translation can be defined as the process of producing the most similar natural equivalent of the source language message in the target language, with a focus on both meaning and style. In contrast, McGuire (1980:2) asserts that the intended meaning of the source text is comparable to that of the target text. Additionally, the structure of the source language will be maintained as much as possible, without adhering too closely to the structure of the target language. Newmark (1981:7), states that translation is a skill that involves the endeavor to substitute a written communication and/or declaration in one language with an equivalent communication and/or declaration in another language. Furthermore, the utilisation of translation is essential for the advancement of a society's political, scientific, and cultural domains. Aissi (1997:4) asserts that the translation of foreign language texts has been a crucial human endeavor throughout history, as part of the same research topic. The evolution of languages is closely linked to the diverse experiences and environments of individuals. Language serves as a fundamental tool for the transmission of culture, theoretical knowledge, and applied sciences. The need for translation is primarily driven by the proliferation of languages, rendering it a crucial task, particularly for a nation seeking to gain insights into the experiences of other countries and to learn about the histories and cultures of diverse peoples. The evolution of translation has been a fundamental aspect of human communication since the inception of civilization, primarily driven by the human need to effectively convey information. Nevertheless, the objective persists identical, as translation encompasses more than mere substitution of words or sentences from one language to another. Juma'a (2014:10), involves the identification of an appropriate equivalence that satisfies the target language's specifications an interpretation of its meaning are the primary factors of importance in the translation process.

## **2.2 Definition of Idioms**

Healey (1968), defines idioms as any group of words whose meaning cannot be deduced from the meanings of the individual words. Idioms refer to, Ball (1968:1), the use of familiar words in an unfamiliar sense. this shows idioms' semantic properties. The well-known components of the idiom "kick the bucket". are "kick" and "bucket". These elements have an entirely distinct meaning than kick and bucket; "kick the bucket". Similarly, Palmer (1976. p.98) defines idioms as a distinct form of language whose meaning is typically obscure. He argues that idioms are not single grammatical units and cannot be characterized semantically as single words; therefore, it is incorrect to break them down into their component components. Strässler (1982) defines idioms as a collection of words whose idiomatic meaning is derived from their order. Newmark (1988.p.104), state that idioms "The first function is called

cognitive, while the other is aesthetic" are extended metaphors, "an idiom has two main functions: pragmatic and referential. The pragmatic function is to appeal to the sense, to interest, surprise, to delight". The referential function is " to describe a mental process or state, a concept, a person, an object, a quality or an action more comprehensively and concisely than is possible in literal or physical language". Moreover, idioms are fixed patterns of language that permit little or no variation in form and frequently convey meanings that cannot be deduced from their component parts.

### **2.3 Types of Idioms:**

Moon (1996), categorizes idioms as follows:

#### **1.Transparent idioms**

This category of idioms closely resembles the literal meaning. This type of idiom derives its meaning from the meanings of its constituents. Therefore, it is not difficult to comprehend or translate these idioms such as "to see the light" means to understand.

2- **Semi-transparent idioms:** Idioms that usually have figurative meaning and their constitutive parts which have a few functions in understanding the whole meaning of the expression. E.g. Break the ice means "to reveal the tension"

This type of idiom has a metaphorical meaning, and the meaning of its constituents plays a minor role in acquiring and understanding the overall meaning of the expression, such as break the ice means to reveal the tension.

3- **Semi opaque idioms:** They are idioms whose figurative meaning is unrelated to the literal meaning of their component words. Thus, the idiomatic expression is divided into two parts: one with a literal meaning and the other with a figurative meaning, such as knowing the ropes means to know how a particular job should be done).

4- **Opaque idiom:** Opaque idioms are the most challenging type of idioms because their meaning is not equivalent to the literal meaning and cannot be derived from the meaning of its individual parts of their constituents. Therefore, it would be impossible to deduce the meaning of an idiom from its constituents, as the components of an idiom contain cultural references, such as to torch one's boat means to make retreat impossible (Juma'a, 2014:14-15).

### **2.4 Arabic Religious Idioms**

The decision to retain or eliminate idiomatic elements can significantly influence the resulting target text. The translator's efforts to preserve the idiomatic nature of the source text results in the manifestation

of various elements in the target text, particularly, which may possess distinct social and cultural connotations. Newmark (1988:24) indicate the employment of ST idiomatic structures results in a level of naturalness that is suitable for all types of situations. Besides, idioms exhibit “religious beliefs, culture-specific items, superstitions, and different ideologies of the people from diverse societies and nations. They are necessary to any language in order to keep the local and cultural color of that language (Oualif, 2017: 23).

### **2.5 Strategies of Translating idioms**

Baker (1992:26-43), presents a set of strategies aimed at facilitating the translation of idiomatic expressions. These strategies can be succinctly summarized as follows:

**1.Using an Idiom with Similar Meaning and Form:** This strategy implies substituting the SL idiom by an equivalent TL that has accurately the same meaning and virtually equivalent lexical items. However, Baker (1992) advocates that this strategy cannot be recurrently attained, as determining the right ST type, genre, style, rhetorical effect target readership, while trying to pin down the same structure and lexical items is not easy task.

**2.Using an Idiom with Similar Meaning but Different Form:** The strategy involves attempting to locate a comparable idiom in the target language, even if it differs in terms of lexical and syntactic structure. Discovering an idiom that conveys a comparable connotation but possesses contrasting linguistic characteristics, while not currently feasible, remains a feasible objective, e.g. " forbidden fruit sweetest" translated to "مرغوب ممنوع كل"

**3.Borrowing the Source Language Idiom:** While not a widely used strategy in the field of idiomatic language, certain translators may employ this strategy as a means of round the challenge of preserving source language idiomatic expressions.

**4.Translation by Paraphrasing:** Baker (1992:74), thinks that this strategy is the most recurrent in translating idioms in cases of difficulty in finding a corresponding TL idiom or inappropriateness of using idiomatic structures for stylistic considerations. Paraphrasing does not always involve explaining the meaning of individual idioms, but rather replacing the referential, pragmatic meaning of the SL by another TL connotative referent (Allam, 2019 :60). e.g. "you mark my words" means افكاري تقرا انت.

**4.Translation by Omission:** In this strategy an idiom may sometimes be omitted altogether in target text and this omission may have no close match in the target language, it cannot be easily paraphrased.

**5. Translation by Omission of Entire Idiom:** This suggests the complete removal of the source text expression from the target text. There are various factors that may contribute to this exclusion, such as the lack of a comparable term in the target language or a substitute for paraphrasing, the insignificance of the expression in the source text within its given context.

**7. Strategy of Compensation:** This strategy entails the possibility for the translator to eliminate the idiomatic expression at a specific juncture in the target text (TT), and subsequently clarify it at subsequent junctures within the TT (Baker, 2018: 77-87).

Nida & Taber (1969) suggests two types of translation:

**1. Dynamic equivalence:** Is the quality which characterizes a translation in which the message of the original text has been transposed into other language that the response of the receptor is essentially like of the original receptors. That means the relationship between Receiver and TL message should aim at being the same as that between the original receivers and SL message.

**2. Formal equivalence:** focuses attention on the message itself. in both form and content in such a translation one is concerned with such correspondence as a poetry to poetry, sentence to sentence and concept to concept. (Nida, 1964:159). For example, "out of the frying pan into the fire" كان كالفاز من المقلاه \_\_\_ الى النار formal equivalence/ semantic translation.

كان كالمستجير من الرمضاء بالنار \_ dynamic equivalence/ communicative translation.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

Qualitative approach is used to explain the translation of religious idioms in term of illustrative explanation, qualitative approach study things in their natural setting trying to make sense of expressions. "Qualitative approach connects a researcher describing distinguishing of people or incident" without comparison them using numbers (Mcdowell, 1998:15). While the quantitative approach is used to clarify the subject under study through using numbers that clarify the frequencies and percentage of the strategies employed in translating religious idioms.

#### 4. Data Analysis

SL Religious Idiom (1): اهل القبلة

T1 People of the qiblah

T2 The people of makka

T3 kiss faithful

T4 People who follow the Kaaba of Islam

#### Discussion:

The idiom (اهل القبلة) means people who follow the Kaaba in Islam first just not people in Makka". The type in this religious idiom is transparent. As for the first translator succeeded in providing the correct translation for the SL religious idioms. The translators followed dynamic method in translating this idiom into English. T (1) translated it as "People of the qibla" Third and four translated wrong and inappropriate. They used formal method to translate this idiom, so the type of idiom here was semi-opaque

(T2) translate as " The people of makka". the previous religious idiom (اهل القبلة) means all Muslims who follow the Kaaba when they pray. The (T2) use the expression " The people of makka" to translate it, that means she/he devoted this idiom to the people of Mecca only, so the translation is inappropriate. Furthermore, (T3) has the failed in translation when she/ he translated the meaning with the word "kiss" when translated it into the "kiss faithful" 'the translation inappropriate the translator translates in formal way.

**Table 4.1: Analysis of the first religious idiom.**

Translator No.	SL Idioms	TL Text	Translation Method	
T1		People of the qiblah	Dynamic	
T2		The people of makka		Formal
T3		Kiss faithful		Formal



T4	أهل القبلة	People who follow the Kaaba of Islam		Formal
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**The Suggested Translation is as follows:**

‘‘The people of Qibla’.

**SL Religious Idiom (2): البيت العتيق**

T1: The Kaaba

T2: The old house

T3: old house

T4: The ancient house

This religious idiom (البيت العتيق), means "the Kaaba" or " The Holy house" that found in Makka which Muslims follow it when they pray”, the type of this idiom here is opaque. All the translators failed of this idiom in there rendering when they translated the religious idiom into (The old house, the old house, the ancient house), the translated in word for word and its wrong translation. The first translator has the best translation of the idiom البيت العتيق , is translated as ‘‘ The Kaaba’’ so this translation is accurate and employed dynamic translation. All their translators employed formal method of translation and did not provide accurate translation due the meaning of (TL) is different from the (SL), because the translators misunderstood the intended meaning of this idiom as being an ordinary house. In addition, this indicates the translators lack of knowledge in relation to religious idioms.

**Table 4.2: Analysis of the second religious idiom:**

Translator No.	SL Idioms	TL Text	Translation Method		
T1	البيت العتيق	The Kaaba	Dynamic		
T2		The old house		Formal	
T3		old house		Formal	
T4		The ancient house		Formal	

**The Suggested Translation for this idiom is as follows:**

'The Kaaba'', ''The Holy House''.

**SL Religious Idiom (3):** *يرحم ما فقدتم*

T1: Have mercy on what you have lost

T2: Have mercy on what you have lost

T3: Have mercy on what you have lost

T4: Have mercy on what you have lost

(T1, T2, T3, T4) are successful in this translate and the translators used the dynamic method. There are no grammatical mistakes, no misspelled, and the structure of the translations is coherent. Also, the meaning of the translated idiom is understandable. This means the method which is used by the translators is appropriate. The type of the idiom here is transparent. All four translators are accurate in their translation as they translated this religious idiom (*يرحم ما فقدتم*), into (Have mercy on what you have lost), this idiom is Islamic religious idiom said to people when they lose a person omit.

**Table 4.4: Analysis of the fourth religious idiom**

Translator No.	SL Idioms	TL Text	Translation Method	
T1	<i>يرحم ما فقدتم</i>	Have mercy on what you have lost	Dynamic	
T2		Have mercy on what you have lost	Dynamic	
T3		Have mercy on what you have lost	Dynamic	
T4		Have mercy on what you have lost	Dynamic	

**The Suggested Translation is as follows:** ''May Allah have mercy on your dead'', '' May Allah be merciful to him''.

**SL Religious Idiom (4):** *التقلان*

T1: The human and the jinn

T2: humans and jinn

T3: althiqlan

T4: Heavyweight

This religious idiom ‘الثقلان’ means “The humans and the jinn “(Al-Bani,2001:21). This type of idiom is opaque, because the translators cannot understand the meaning, (T1, T2) are inappropriate in this idiom and these translations employed formal method of the target translation. The(T1) translated it as "The Human and the Jinn", and “Humans and jinn” just the( T2) used the definite articles ‘the’ before the word ‘, finally the (T3 and 4 ) translated it as ‘, this translation is not appropriate ,and the method in this translation is the formal method

**Table 4.5: analysis of the fifth religious idiom**

Translator No.	SL Idioms	TL Text	Translation Method	
	الثقلان			
T1		The human and the jinn	Dynamic	
T2		Humans and jinn	Dynamic	
T3		althiqlan		Formal
T4		Heavyweight		Formal

**The Suggested Translation is as follows:**

‘The Holy Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet’, ‘The human and the jinn’.

## 5. CONCLUSION

- 1.The analysis revealing that the type of idiom impact understanding of idiom’s meaning and supported adequate.
2. Knowing religious idioms and strategies of religious translation facilitates recognition of its meaning and simplification of appropriate translation.
3. The analysis displays that the type of idiom has an unimportant impact on understanding its meaning and support an appropriate translation.

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