



The difficulties and problems of non-equivalence posed in translating English color idioms into Arabic

Mrs. Arwa AL-Mommani

MA on Translation /English Language Department, University College of Tayma, University of Tabuk, Saudi Arabia

ABSTRACT. The present study is a linguistic investigation of equivalence above word level. It deals with the difficulties and problems of non-equivalence posed in translating English color idioms into Arabic, and the methods used by the students to find the suitable equivalent in the target language.

This study tries also to suggest solutions and identify strategies that may help to limit or avoid these difficulties. In this respect a test made up of 20 English de-contextualized color idioms is given to the students of English Department to be translated into Arabic, the same test is given to the same students once again but it was within context. The results of the study show that there are potential problems in the process of translating color idioms from English into Arabic. Furthermore, the findings show that the context of use helps the students a lot to guess the appropriate meaning of these idioms. At the end of study the researcher recommends that, students should master the situational occurrences and use the accurate strategies to solve the problems of non-equivalence between the source language and the target language.

Moreover, the students should also be exposed, more and more, to different types of idioms to extend their knowledge.

Introduction

Translation has become an activity of enormous importance in recent decades. We live in an increasingly internationalized world where ever-growing numbers of individuals are in continuous contact with foreign cultures and languages both in their professional lives as well as in more informal contexts , usually via mass media. The more internationalized the world becomes , the greater the importance of translation and qualified translators also grows .

The present study focuses on the difficulties and problems in the translation process of one of the most fascinating and innovative aspects of language which is idioms. Since there is so much idiomaticity in all languages , these language fixed expressions are most certainly worth studying .Throughout this study the researcher will use the following abbreviations:

TR	Transparent Idioms
S-TR	Semi-Transparent Idioms
S- OP	Semi Opaque Idioms
OP	Opaque Idioms

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Idioms have a great extent use in everyday language, and they are considered as one of the most frequently used means of non-literal language.

The problem however, is that despite recent development in the field of translation theory and application, idiomatic expressions still pose a serious challenge for translators and foreign learners. During the process of translation one can come across lots of idioms that are difficult to translate as they have figurative meanings which is at distance of literal ones.

The impressive number and variety of domain-related idioms are factors which have conditioned and determined the selection of only one type of idioms, namely that of color ones.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A few studies have been conducted about the translation of color idioms from English into Arabic. However, this literature lacks studies related closely and directly to the subject of this study. So this study fills in this gaps.

1. Mustonen (2010)

Translating Idioms, A case study on Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* and its Finnish translation.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the translation strategies of idioms on the basis of a prose fiction novel. More specifically, the study

concentrates on Donna Tartt's novel *The Secret History* and its Finnish translation. It aims to collect the English idioms from the original novel and compare them to their Finnish translations in order to examine what kind of strategies the translator has used in translating English idioms into Finnish.

Discussion

Clanak (2009). 1.

Color Idioms In Economic Discourse. In this paper the researcher explains that our conceptual system is fundamentally metaphorical and idiomatic. Expressions operate in a similar way in almost all languages. Economic discourse is a rich source of color idioms, the general meanings of colors and emotions attached to particular colors can help in understanding color idioms in economic discourse.

2. Chapter One (Theoretical background)

Translation Definition

Translation is often regarded as a project For transferring meaning from one language communication that involves a source language and a Target language .

Bell (1991) defines the goal of translation as the transformation of a text originally in one language into an equivalent text in a different language : retaining , as far as possible , the content of the message and the formal features and functional roles of the origin text .

Equivalence and Translation

Translation theorists have focused on equivalence in their attempts to define what translation is .

Catford (1965:20) define translation as " the replacement of textual material in one language (Source Language) by equivalent textual material in another (Target Language) "

Nida (1974) believes that translation is concerned with the reproduction of the closest equivalent of the textual material in the target language .

Idioms Definition

Carter (1987:65) defines idioms as special combinations with restricted forms and meanings that cannot be deduced from the literal meanings of the words which make them up. Accordingly, an idiom is learned and used as a single unit. It should not be analyzed into its constituents; it is unchangeable and always carries a figurative meaning.

Culture and Colors

Newmark (1988) defines culture as "the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language and its means of expression."

There are numerous situations when different cultures share the same view with respect to color symbols. For instance, red is the color commonly accepted as a symbol of love, white is the mark of purity and yellow is the color symbolizing jealousy .Up to 80% of human communication is nonverbal (Zaltman, 1997:424) and subconscious judgments about any new situation or item

is made within 90 second according to the Institute of Color Research. The human brain notices color even before shape or wording (Mortimer, 2004:24).

Idioms Categories

Transparent expressions and semi-transparent idioms are the most representative classes for the cases of shared patterns of idiomacity between English and Arabic .such as, to give green light (permit), to have blue blood (aristocrat).

Furthermore ,mention should be made of the fact that semi-opaque idioms , i.e those metaphor idioms which are not completely unintelligible, are in most cases culture specific, such as: yellow dog(an evil person) blue-jacket (sailor).

Opaque idioms , i.e. the full idioms whose meaning cannot be derived from the meanings of the component words represent a challenge when different language cultures are brought into contact. The number of color-related opaque idioms used in English is quite high, e.g. out of the blue(without any warning) ,white elephant(a useless possession).

The Translation of idioms: strategies

Baker (1992) classifies the strategies for translating idioms as the following:

- 1- Using an idiom of similar meaning and form
3. This strategy involves using an idiom in the target language which conveys roughly the same meaning as that of the source-language idiom .
- 2- Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form
4. It is often possible to find an idiom or fixed expression in the target language which has a meaning similar to that of the source idiom or expression, but which consists of different lexical items.
- 3- Translation by paraphrase
5. This is by far the most common way of translating idioms when a match cannot be found in the target language .

Conclusion

Idioms always cause a lot of problems to learners of a foreign language, they usually find difficulties in recognizing an expression as idiomatic or not.

3. Chapter Two: The Test

Data Collection and Sampling

The sample of this study is chosen randomly to be tested in order to achieve our research objective. It consists of 30 students of English Department. All the selected data have been collected from Websites.

Research Method

The researcher followed the analytical descriptive method in the study.

Data Analysis

Translation of De-Contextualized Color Idioms into Arabic

The students' test aims at examining their degree of familiarity and non-familiarity with color idioms, and the extent of their usage in the process of learning English as a foreign language. The test, as it is stated before, consists of twenty English color idioms; each group of five color idioms represents one

category, chosen randomly from the four categories of idioms (transparent, semi transparent, opaque and semi opaque), and they vary in their difficulty according to the spectrum of idiomaticity, this will be illustrated in the tables below.

Table 1

Category(1)	Number of Correct and Incorrect Answers		Percentage of Category Familiarity
Transparent Color Idioms	Correct Answers	Incorrect Answers	
1- as black as coal	20	10	
2- White lie	24	06	
3- Red – handed	20	10	
4- Get the green light	28	02	
5-Wave a white flag	19	11	
Total	111	39	
Percentage	74%	26%	74%

Table 2

Category(2)	Number of Correct and Incorrect Answers		Percentage of Category Familiarity
Semi -Transparent Color Idioms	Correct Answers	Incorrect Answers	
1- Blue blood	18	12	
2- As white as a ghost	19	11	
3- Green with envy	22	8	
4- Black sheep of (a family)	13	17	
5- Once in a blue moon	10	20	
Total	82	68	
Percentage	54,7%	45,3%	54,7%

Table 3

Category(3)	Number of Correct and Incorrect Answers		Percentage of Category Familiarity
Semi -Opaque Color Idioms	Correct Answers	Incorrect Answers	
1- Blue collar worker	8	22	
2- Blue jacket	6	24	
3- Black guard	9	21	
4- Yellow dog	5	25	
5- Green horn	9	21	
Total	37	113	
Percentage	24.7%	75,3%	24.7%

Table 4

Category(4)	Number of Correct and Incorrect Answers		Percentage of Category Familiarity
Opaque Color Idioms	Correct Answers	Incorrect Answers	
1- A white elephant	04	26	
2- Out of the blue	01	29	
3- Black out	02	28	
4- Red tape	04	26	
5- To see red	02	28	
Total	13	137	
Percentage	8.6%	91.3%	8.6%
Total of all Correct Answers	243	357	
Percentage of all Correct Answers	40.5%	59.5	

3.3.1.1.

Results

The tables above show that the degree of

Results

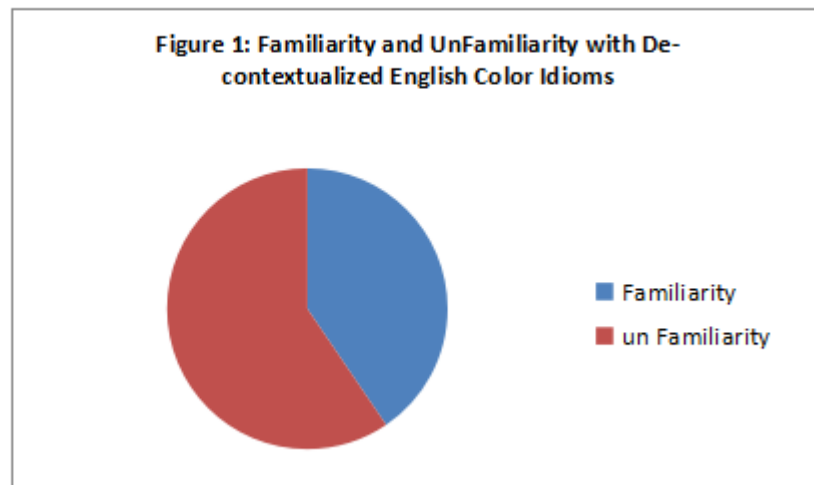
The tables above show that the degree of idiomaticity has a great influence on the percentage of students' familiarity and unfamiliarity with English color idioms. It is observed that the highest score is recorded for transparent color idioms with 74% for familiar idioms and 26% for unfamiliar ones. Semi-transparent idioms recorded an accepted score and come in the second position after transparent idioms with a percentage of 54,7% for appropriate guesses and 45,3% for inappropriate ones. The other two categories of idioms (semi-opaque and opaque) get low scores and hence, they come in the last positions with rates of 24,7% for correct answers and 75,3% for incorrect ones for semi-opaque idioms, and 8,6% and 91,3% for opaque ones. In general we can say that students of English are familiar with English color idioms with a percentage of 40,5% and unfamiliar with them with a rate of 59,5%.

Analysis

Transparent color idioms recorded the highest score because they can be easily understood from their literal meanings this category proves that color idioms cannot always be regarded as strictly culture-bound elements. Moreover, they seem to be the result of commonly shared human experience. Transparent idioms so, are easy to interpret by most students because of the high degree of closeness between their literal and figurative meanings.

So, familiarity decreases as the degree of idiomaticity increases. Semi-transparent idioms or partial idioms, in comparison to transparent ones, are somehow difficult to interpret. This is mainly because the expression is culture-bound term.

In semi-opaque idioms, the percentage of difficulty and unfamiliarity increases to 24,7% together with the degree of idiomaticity making this category nearly in the same position with opaque idioms. In opaque idioms so, the degree of complexity and indirectness increases to the highest level leading to an opaque and ambiguous combination that cannot be understood by students of English unless it is already learned.



Translation of English Color Idioms into Arabic within the Context of Use

Part two of the test consists of the same previous 20 color idioms, but in this case they are used with their context. The outcomes of the test of this part shown in the following tables:

Table 5

Contextualized Color idioms	Number of Correct and Incorrect Answers		Percentage of Category Familiarity
	Correct Answers	Incorrect Answers	
1- My friend's cat is as black as coal .	28	02	
2-I told my supervisor a white lie yesterday and said that I was sick when actually I was not.	30	00	
3- The woman was caught red-handed when she tried to steal some cosmetics	25	05	
4- We got the green light to begin a study of the security problems at our school.	29	01	
5- The soldiers were waving a white flag when they surrendered to the enemy.	28	02	
Total	140	10	
Percentage	93.3%	6.6%	93.3%

Table 6

Contextualized Color idioms	Number of Correct and Incorrect Answers		Percentage of Category Familiarity
Semi - Transparent Color Idioms	Correct Answers	Incorrect Answers	
1-Many of the blue bloods of the town went to the opening of the opera	19	11	
2-My sister became as white as a ghost when she saw the man at the window	22	8	
3-I was green with envy when I heard that my cousin would be going to London for a week	23	7	
4- The man is the black sheep in his family and has not made a success of his life	20	10	
5-We only go out for Italian food once in a blue moon although we enjoy it very much	18	12	
Total	102	48	
Percentage	68%	32%	68%

Table 7

Contextualized Color idioms	Number of Correct and Incorrect Answers		Percentage of Category Familiarity
Semi Opaque- Color Idioms	Correct Answers	Incorrect Answers	
1- I saw the blue – collar worker shouting at his manager.	13	17	
2- The company has been in the red for three years now.	14	16	
3- He always takes bribes ,he is a black guard .	12	18	
4- He is a yellow dog , has never ever done something good.	18	12	
5- The young man is a greenhorn and he has much to learn about his new job.	16	14	
Total	73	77	
Percentage	48,7%	51,3%	48,7%

Table 8

Contextualized Color idioms	Number of Correct and Incorrect Answers		Percentage of Category Familiarity
Opaque- Color Idioms	Correct Answers	Incorrect Answers	
1- The new airport is a white elephant and nobody wants to use it.	10	20	
2- My friend decided out of the blue to quit his job and go to Europe.	13	17	
3- The man blacked out during the parade and he had to sit down and rest	11	19	
4- Many businesses complain about the red tape that they must deal with in order to get anything done with the government	14	16	
5- My boss saw red when I told him that I would not be coming to work today.	14	16	
Total	62	88	
Percentage	41,3%	58,7	
Total of all Correct answers	377	223	
Percentage of all Correct answers	62,83 %	37,17 %	62,1%

Percentage of Students' Answers within the context

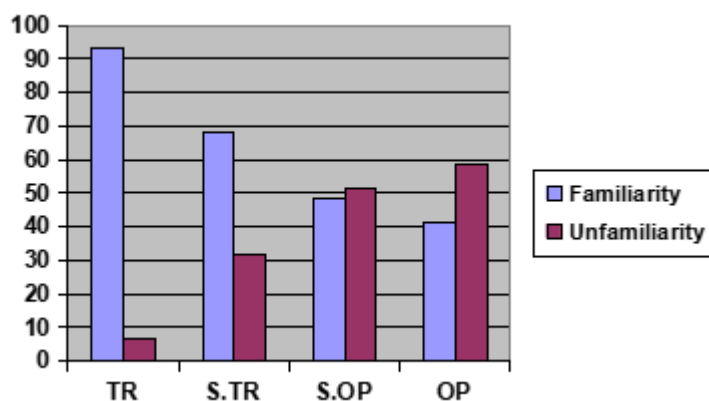


Figure 02: Percentage of Students' Answers within the context
Results and Analysis

By making a comparison between the results in part one and part two, we can notice that the number together with the percentage of correct answers increase. In the first part, where idioms are taken in isolation, the general percentage of familiarity with English idioms is 40.5%. In the second part, however, when these idioms are used in their situational context, the rate of acceptable translations increases to 62.1%. These results show that the context of use has a great impact on the comprehensibility and translatability of idioms.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is concerned with investigating the problems of translating color idioms from English into Arabic. The results show that students of English really find considerable difficulties in guessing the appropriate meaning of such color idioms. Their familiarity with English color idioms is somehow low, and their ability to interpret unfamiliar color idioms is limited. This is mainly due to the fact that idioms are artistic and colorful expressions of the language in which the meaning is not obvious from the meaning of the constituent words.

Hence, one way to understand and interpret an idiom is to see it in context.

The social context has an important role in facilitating the figurative interpretation of idiomatic expressions in English, and hence, providing correct answers. Students' translations of de-contextualized color idioms usually end up with unsatisfactory results simply because an idiom is largely related to the situation that gives it a special meaning. In addition, the findings show that students usually succeed in translating transparent and semi-transparent color idioms, but when it comes to opaque and semi-opaque categories they are totally confused, because this type of idioms has to be taken as a single unit in order to provide acceptable translations.

Consequently, better understanding, using and translating idioms need mastering their situational occurrences and using the accurate strategies to solve the problems of nonequivalence and familiarity with the differences between the source and target languages.

Students should also be exposed, more and more, to idiomatic expressions in schools and universities in order to extend their knowledge.

CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on the intricate challenges involved in translating English color idioms into Arabic, emphasizing the role of cultural and linguistic equivalence in achieving accurate translations. The findings reveal that idioms are more than just linguistic expressions; they are deeply rooted in cultural and contextual frameworks, which significantly influence their comprehension and translation.

The research highlights that transparent and semi-transparent idioms are relatively easier for students to translate due to their closer alignment with literal meanings and shared human experiences. However, semi-opaque and opaque idioms present considerable challenges, often requiring contextual cues and cultural knowledge to decipher their meanings effectively. The comparative analysis of decontextualized versus contextualized idioms underscores the pivotal role of context in facilitating accurate translation and interpretation.

By identifying these difficulties, the study advocates for practical strategies, such as increased exposure to idiomatic expressions, contextual learning, and the application of paraphrasing when direct equivalents are unavailable. These approaches aim to enhance the skills of translators and bridge the gap between source and target languages.

In conclusion, the study underscores the importance of combining linguistic knowledge with cultural awareness in translation practices. Future research could further explore the impact of specific educational interventions and tools in improving idiom translation proficiency among students. This continuous exploration is vital for developing more effective methods of teaching and translating idiomatic language across cultures.

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APPENDIX (1)

Pre-test

Dear Students:

The researcher designed such test in order to explore the difficulties and problems that face students of English in translating color idioms from English into Arabic and their solutions.

You are kindly requested to answer the test seriously in order to assist the students to overcome such difficulties and problems.

1- Translate the following de-contextualized transparent color idioms into Arabic

1- as black as coal.....

2- White lie.....

3- Red — handed.....

4- Get the green light.....

5-Wave a white flag.....

2- Translate the following de-contextualized semi -transparent color idioms into Arabic

1- Blue blood.....

2- As white as a ghost

3- Green with envy

- 4- Black sheep of (a family).....
- 5- Once in a blue moon.....
- 3- Translate the following de-contextualized semi-opaque color idioms into Arabic
 - 1- Blue collar worker.....
 - 2-Blue jacket.....
 - 3- Black guard.....
 - 4- Yellow dog.....
 - 5- Green horn.....
- 4- Translate the following de-contextualized opaque color idioms into Arabic
 - 1- A white elephant.....
 - 2- Out of the blue.....
 - 3- Black out.....
 - 4- Red tape.....
 - 5- To see red.....

APPENDIX 2

Post-test

Dear Students:

The researcher designed such test in order to explore the difficulties and problems that face students of English in translating color idioms from English into Arabic and their solutions.

You are kindly requested to answer the test seriously in order to assist the students to overcome such difficulties and problems.

1- Translate the following contextualized transparent color idioms into Arabic

1-My friend's cat is as black as coal.

2-I told my supervisor a white lie yesterday and said that I was sick when actually I was not.....

3- The woman was caught red-handed when she tried to steal some cosmetics.....

4- We got the green light to begin a study of the security problems at our school.....

5- The soldiers were waving a white flag when they surrendered to the enemy.....

2- Translate the following contextualized semi-transparent color idioms into Arabic

1-Many of the blue bloods of the town went to the opening of the opera.....

2-My sister became as white as a ghost when she saw the man at the window.....

3-I was green with envy when I heard that my cousin would be going to London for a week.....

4- The man is the black sheep in his family and has not made a success of his life.....

5-We only go out for Italian food once in a blue moon although we enjoy it very much.....

3- Translate the following contextualized semi-opaque color idioms into Arabic

1- I saw the blue – collar worker shouting at his manager.....

2- The company has been in the red for three years now.....

3- He always takes bribes ,he is a black guard.....

4- He is a yellow dog , has never ever done something good.....

5- The young man is a greenhorn and he has much to learn about his new job.....

4- Translate the following contextualized opaque color idioms into Arabic

1- The new airport is a white elephant and nobody wants to use it.....

2- My friend decided out of the blue to quit his job and go to Europe.....

3- The man blacked out during the parade and he had to sit down and rest.....

4- Many businesses complain about the red tape that they must deal with in order to get anything done with the government.....

4- My boss saw red when I told him that I would not be coming to work today.....

APPENDIX 3

Meanings of all used color idioms

Color Idioms	Meaning in English	Meaning in Arabic
1- as black as coal	Very black	شديد السواد
2- White lie	A harmless or small lie told to be polite or to avoid hurting someone's feelings	كذبة بيضاء (غير مؤذية)
3- Red – handed	To catch someone in the middle of doing something wrong	متلبسا بالجريمة
4- Get the green light	Get the permission	حصل على إذن (سماح)
5-Wave a white flag	Surrender	لوح بالراية البيضاء (استسلم)
6- Blue blood	The blood of a noble or wealthy or aristocratic family	ذو مقام رفيع
7- As white as a ghost	Very pale because of fear or shock or illness	شاحب الوجه
8- Green with envy	Jealousy	حسود
9- Black sheep of (a family)	A person who is a disgrace to a family or group	شاذ عن العائلة أو المجموعة
10- Once in a blue moon	Very rarely	نادر جدا
11- Blue collar worker	Factory worker	عامل في مصنع
12- Blue jacket	A sailor	بحار
13- Black guard	Dishonest person	شخص غير شريف
14- Yellow dog	An evil person	شخص شرير
15- Green horn	naïve person	ساذج
16- A white elephant	- a useless possession	غير مفيد
17- Out of the blue	Without any warning	بشكل مفاجئ

18- Black out	- to lose consciousness	يفقد الوعي
19- Red tape	- excessive formalities in official business	روتين التعامل الرسمي
20- To see red	To be angry	غضبان