

*Asst. Lect. Alaa Muhy Al-Deen Fadhil



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Asst. Lect. Alaa Muhy Al-Deen
 *Fadhil
 Al-Qalam University College –
 Kirkuk
 English Department
 alaa muhy@mail.ru

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THE CULTURAL GAPS RESULTED IN TRANSLATING SOME SELECTED ARABIC PROVERBS INTO ENGLISH A B S T R A C T

Translation is an instrument of rendition into other realities. It is not just a relationship between two texts as people believe it to be, as much as it is a bond between two cultures. So, translation is the reflection of the spirit of one culture to another. It is an act of passing the spirit of text to receptors of a different culture. When translating proverbs, translation is no longer a reproduction of a given text, rather it transcends the interpretation process and becomes a redefinition of life where it permeates through the others' restraints. However, in a creative text, one is dealing with form and content. Based on Nida's (1964) theory, a text can be dealt with on the basis of formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. The former deals with the form of the text, while the latter deals with the content. Dealing with the content gives the text its cultural creativity in translation. So, the dynamic equivalence is focused on more than the formal equivalence. Besides, this study aims at analyzing some selected Arabic proverbs and cultural-bound expressions. It is to be noted that the data dealt with are standard and colloquial. These data are written in Arabic and then translated into English employing the formal and dynamic equivalents. Finally, the translation of the data have been evaluated employing Nida's (1964) formal and dynamic equivalents in order to see how suitable this translation is regarding the impact of cultural gaps of the proverbs and expressions selected between English and Arabic.

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الثغرات الثقافية الناتجة عن ترجمة بعض أمثال اللغة العربية المختارة إلى اللغة الإنجليزية

م. م. علاء محي الدين فاضل - كلية القلم الجامعة – كركوك - قسم اللغة
 الإنجليزية

الخلاصة : الترجمة عبارة عن وسيلة يمكن من خلالها الاطلاع على حقائق مختلفة. فهي ليست مجرد علاقة بين نصين كما يرى البعض، بقدر ما هي رابطة بين ثقافتين مختلفتين. فهي انعكاس لروح ثقافة في ثقافة أخرى. وهي تمرير روح النص بين ثقافات مختلفة. فعند ترجمة الأمثال، تتجاوز الترجمة عملية التفسير فتصبح صياغة للحياة من خلال تحليلها قيود اللغة الأخرى. فالنصوص الإبداعية – مثلاً – يتم التعامل معها شكلاً ومحتوىً. واستناداً إلى نظرية نايدا (1964)، يمكن التعامل مع النص على أساس التكافؤ الشكلي والتكافؤ الديناميكي. فالأول يتناول شكل النص، بينما يتناول الأخير محتوى النص. والتعامل مع محتوى النص يعطي للنص روحه الثقافية. لذلك، فإن التكافؤ الديناميكي يركز على التوافق ثقافياً أكثر من التكافؤ الشكلي الذي يعنى بالترجمة الحرفية للمفردة. وتهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى تحليل بعض الأمثال العربية المختارة والتعبيرات الثقافية. وأن النصوص التي تم التعامل معها هي نصوص فصحية وعامية. فالنصوص المختارة كتبت أولاً بالعربية ثم تمت ترجمتها إلى الإنجليزية وفق التكافؤ شكلياً وديناميكيًا. وأخيراً، تم تقييم ترجمة النصوص المختارة باستخدام نظرية نايدا (1964) لمعرفة مدى ملائمة هذه الترجمة وتأثير الثغرات الثقافية للأمثال والتعبيرات المختارة بين اللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية.

(*) Corresponding author: Email: **Introduction**

Culture is regarded as an essential factor in translation process, because the communication process is not possible unless the message conveyed is perfectly understood by the interlocutors. Komissarove (1985: 32) sees that "such an understanding can be arrived at if the information contained in language units is supplemented by the background knowledge of facts referred to in the message". Sapir (1929: 67), however, adds that "people belonging to the same linguistic community are members of a particular type of culture. They share certain habits and ways of doing and saying things. They have common knowledge about their country, its history, geography, climate, its social and cultural institutes, its accepted morals, taboos and many other things". All these aspects shape the basis of the communicants' presupposition to perceive and produce messages.

It is evident that "interlingual communication among members of two different cultures may", as Komissarove (1985: 33) believes, "be seriously limited which shall be a hindrance in understanding the message". Equally, the message translated is not only conveyed to a different language, but also to a different culture. This fact culturally sways translation process. Dissipating such a linguistic hindrance urges translators to overcome the cultural gap to acquaint receptors of the target texts with the presupposition needed to comprehend the contents of the message.

To render such cultural gaps in translation, Nida's (1964) formal and dynamic equivalence will be based on in this study. Dynamic equivalence and formal equivalence are two dissimilar techniques of translation used to achieve different levels of literalness between the source language and target language. Nida and Taber (1969: 200) maintain that these techniques are used in biblical translation. The two terms have often been understood basically as sense-for-sense translation (i. e. translating the meanings of phrases or whole sentences) and word-for-word translation (i. e. translating the meanings of words and phrases in a more literal method). For example, the Arabic expression *كانا مثل قيس وليلى* stand for famed figures of deep love in the Arabic literature. However, rendering a culture-bound term denoting a symbolic figure unfamiliar to the target receptor might be dubious. In this situation, the translator has to select one of the equivalents proposed by Nida (1964). Formally, this expression is translated into English as *they were like Qays and Layla*. Since the formal translation does not serve to render the cultural gap between English and Arabic, alternatively the translator has to resort to the dynamic equivalent appreciating the cultural aspect to say *they were like Romeo and Juliette*.

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However, taken into account the significance of the cultural factor, how does culture contribute to translation? What is the relative weight of culture in translation? Do cultural differences entail serious rendering in the message of the source text in order to acquaint the receptors of target text with its contents? Can translation be fulfilled in isolation of culture, or are translation and culture interdependent where each one must imply the other? Can translators preserve their adherence to the contents of source message and look after the receptors' understanding of the target message contents? To answer all these questions, considerable analytical issues will be provided in the following discussion.

The current study aims at accounting for the importance of culture in translation. It seeks to bridge the cultural gaps caused by different cultural backgrounds of the two languages. The current study consists of four sections. Section one is presented as an introduction to the present study. Section two explains the relation between culture and translation and shows that the latter cannot be depended on solely without the former. In section three, an analysis for the data selected will be presented on the basis of employing Nida's (1964) formal and dynamic equivalence to show the strong relation between the culture of a certain country and the proverbs used in that country. Section four is devoted to the main conclusions arrived at throughout this study and some recommendations as well.

1. Culture and Translation

Translation is an intercultural means for exchanges. Translating from one culture to another exposes receptors, as Komissarove (1985: 43) states, "to new ideas and facts in the target culture, open up their cultural horizons, make them aware that other people may have different symbols, customs and beliefs, which other cultures should respect and know". A lot of details about the cultural differences influencing translation process between communities have been dealt with in great number of publications. Based on Casagrande's (1955: 4) formula: "one does not translate LANGUAGES, but CULTURES also", because many translation problems arise due to the "symbolic actions in the source language culture which are absent in the target language culture or have different meanings there". However, the receptors' ability to cope up with "the cultural differences in receiving the source text message should not be underestimated" (cf. House. 1977: 63). To understand a message means interpreting it according to the background knowledge. When such "knowledge is missing due to cultural differences", the translator renders, as Venuti (1995: 30) and Kussmaul (1995: 57) claim, the target language with "what the words in the original message mean in their source language culture". Holman (1999: 123) sees that a translator must provide

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"additional information in the target language to compensate for the lack of the background knowledge in the source language and to bring the original message over to the target language receptor".

Tannen (1960: 51) and House (1977: 63) mention that bridging the gaps resulted from cultural differences between communities is a dynamic task of the translator. Falk (1989: 33) states that Nida's (1964: 73) translation theory offers two different kinds of equivalence: (i) "formal equivalence, when translation is fully oriented towards the source text trying to reproduce it in all possible detail", and (ii) "dynamic equivalence, when translation is fully oriented towards its receptors in the target language trying to produce the desired communicative effect upon them". However, a closer look at these two kinds of equivalence reveals that Nida advocates the latter more than the former, since the "degree of dynamic equivalence should be evaluated on the basis of the receptors' reactions which are greatly dependent on their cultural background" rather than the source text as Dawson (1985: 45) puts it. Nida (1964: 73) cites many samples to state that the cultural gaps necessitate numerous changes in the message in translation. He mentions that "the expression "as white as snow" has no meaning for people living in a tropical country", say Arabs, and must be changed into something Arabs are acquainted with. Such English simile will relatively be difficult to convey into Arabic, because Arabs' experience with "snow" is rare. So, "translators tend to use the non-corresponding but functional Arabic simile "أبيض كالقطن" as Al-Omari (2009: 79) states, or "as white as the feather of egret" as Nida (1964: 75) sees. Besides, Nida mentions that "the biblical expression "to greet one another with a holy kiss" may be misunderstood by the receptors for whom a kiss implies a different kind of relationship and should be replaced with something like "to give a hearty handshake all around" (see also Larson, 1984: 100).

For Sapir (1929: 69) and (1949: 18), the real world is unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever similar enough to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same with different label attached. He maintains that "environment and culture have a considerable influence on the language of speakers as is clearly seen in their vocabulary". Translation from English to Arabic and vice versa reflects the exchange of the cultural values in both languages. Arabic is associated with specific cultural and social norms quite different from those associated with English. Due to cultural differences between English and Arabic, such as history, geography, climate, morals, taboos, a translator will come across many problematic expressions. Some of such expressions have different values

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in both languages, because Arabic and English belong to two different settings and different language families. The former is Semitic, while the latter is Indo-European. They are different syntactically, prosodically, phonologically and semantically, therefore; they are culturally unrelated and alien. Taking into consideration such factors, what may be a connotatively favorable expression in Arabic could have a pejorative or bizarre sense in English and so forth. For example, "Jew" for Muslims is a term of insult due to the Islamic cultural hatred which Muslims have been brought up with, yet it sounds great in Judaism. Likewise, while it reflects intimacy among Black, the term "Negro", when said by White, is a taboo for Black in America. As a result, Mathews (1990: 200) claims that it is culture, not translation, that decides what is acceptable in a particular community and what is not (see also Fawcett 1997: 110). It is culture that directs a translator towards what to translate and how to translate.

To sum up, culture and language are interlinked as there can be no language without culture and vice versa. Language can (i) functionally be viewed as a means of communication for conveying messages of different types, and (ii) structurally as a system of sounds, words, sentences and discourse or conversation. Culture is more general which includes ideas, concepts, practices and ways of life such as art, literature, thought, science, language, habits of all types like styles of cooking, eating, dressing, and so forth are the aspects of culture. Viewed thus, culture is the realization, representation, manifestation of ideas in real life, language is the carrier and translation is a conveyor between the former and the latter. However, in the following section, some Arabic proverbs as well as culture-bound terms will be selected in order to analyze them and show how important the contributions cultural factors make to translation. The proverbs and expressions selected are grounded on Nida's (1964) formal and dynamic equivalence in translation. Accordingly, the proverbs and expressions are translated on the basis of the cultural values that render the cultural gaps between English and Arabic.

2. Data Collection and Analysis

One of the most essential aspects of proverbs is culture. Being culturally oriented, proverbs reflect the cultural aspects of the source language. Since Arabic and English have different cultures, serious cultural gaps would result in translation. Such cultural gaps would cause translation issues. However, the current study aims at evaluating some Arabic proverbs on the basis of Nida's (1964) theory of translation. The Arabic proverbs selected will be translated according to Nida's formal and dynamic equivalence in translation. The proverbs will then be compared and discussed to evaluate the accuracy of Nida's theory in

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translating the Arabic proverbs formally and dynamically. Below are some Arabic proverbs and expressions with their English formal and dynamic equivalents.

To begin with, "أكل الجمل بما حمل" can be translated formally as *he ate the camel and all it carried* and dynamically as *to eat someone out of house and home*. A closer look at this proverb reveals that Arabs employ camels for carrying goods, mainly food such as dates through deserts. Arabs see camels as a prestigious dish in their culture. As a result, "*the camel*" and "*all it carried*" show that what has been eaten is significant. Though the formal translation of this proverb succeeds in conveying the Arabic culture, it fails in rendering the cultural gap between English and Arabic, because neither "*the camel*" nor "*all it carried*" can be looked at as a tasty dish in English. Further, while formal equivalence managed to translate this Arabic proverb at the linguistic level, it failed to convey its cultural meanings. To culturally dissipate such a gap, a translator has to switch to the dynamic translation. Dynamic translation helps the translator transfer the cultural intended meaning into English that guarantees the understanding of the source language message by the target language receptors. However, while satisfying English receptors' need in reflecting the intended meaning of the source message, dynamic equivalent failed in transmitting the culture of the source language and its significance into the target language.

Another proverb is "إذا طاح الجمل كثرت سچاچينه". The formal translation of this proverb is *when the camel falls down, the knives multiply*, while the dynamic translation is *to kick someone when he is down*. Arabs use this proverb to show that if an important man loses their status in the society, others who are less important would attack this man to take advantage of the situation. Translated formally, the English receptor will not be able to create a relation between "*the camel*" and "*the knives*" due to the cultural gap between English and Arabic. Besides, the symbolism of "*the camel*" as a powerful man and "*the knives*" as enemies will not be easily recognized by the English receptors due to their lack of the Arabic cultural background knowledge. So, the meaning of this proverb might be misinterpreted or vague. However, the dynamic translation of such a proverb seems more suitable, as it reflects a similar meaning of the Arabic proverb even though it does not tell that the person kicked is powerful. To compare, though formal equivalent succeeded in reflecting the Arabic culture into English, it was not accurate in transmitting its cultural symbolism into English. Contrariwise, the dynamic equivalent conveys part of the meaning of the Arabic proverb, but it fails in transferring the cultural aspect of the source language into the target language.

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Receiving good news, a native speaker of Arabic might express their inner state saying "خير يثلج الصدر". An expression as such is indeed eccentric to an English receptor. When a translator is required to translate some climate-related Arabic expressions into English, they have to be fully aware of the target ecological equivalent. However, the formal translation of this expression is *news that freezes the chest*, whereas the dynamic translation is *news that warms the cockles of heart*. Bearing in mind such translations, one can easily recognize the shift in the use of the climate verbs "*freezes*" versus "*warms*". Arabs are people mostly live in desert where "snow" or "cold" is something everybody likes. Inversely, English is the language of people mostly living under storms and snow for a great part of the year. Therefore, warmth is something so desirable. While "snow" is a reference to happiness for an Arab, warmth is another reference to happiness of an English person. Besides, the symbolism of affectivity represented by this expression is physically embodied by "*chest*" for the Arabic culture and by "*heart*" for the English culture.

Another traditional Arabic proverb is "إذا درت نياقك فأحتلبها". The formal translation of this proverb might be like *milk your female camels while their udders are full of milk*. The dynamic translation, on the other hand, is *make hay while the sun shines*. It comes from farming communities. It shows that one has to act when an opportunity is only for a limited time. However, the formal equivalent of this proverb does not reflect any cultural aspect in the so-called translation. The target language receptors will be unable to elicit the intended meaning, since they are already aware of the fact that "*female camels*" must be milked "*while their udders are full of milk*". There seems to be nothing worth contemplating for them regarding such translation. Thus, while the formal translation manages to convey the literal meaning of this traditional proverb, it fails in reflecting its cultural connotations into the English receptors. As for the dynamic translation, it relatively succeeds in conveying the semantic idea of this proverb. Besides, the dynamic translation tells that life is similar to weather, because it is uncertain. Accordingly, one should avoid falling into the procrastination habit and delay the things for tomorrow. Instead, he should always be ever ready In order to "*strike while the iron is hot*" and to make sure that opportunities seldom repeat themselves. Having borne that in mind, one can achieve a great deal of success if they honestly try to make the utmost of a promising situation. Even to lesser extent, the dynamic equivalent succeeds in reflecting the semantic and the cultural aspect of this proverb, since such proverb is meant to raise the value of unique chances in life, rather than the significance of "*camels*" as being symbolic representatives in reflecting certain aspects of the traditional heritage of Arabs.

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Every culture has its system of beliefs. This system varies from place to place. In view of that, the cultural of such system will also vary from religion to religion, such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism and so on. However, while most Arabs are following Islam, the vast majority of west cultures follow Christianity. In translation, the difference of beliefs between the source language and the target language may pose serious challenges mainly when dealing with proverbs. Such concerns will be current in translating Arabic proverbs with religious beliefs into English by using formal and dynamic translation equivalents.

A religiously oriented expression like "ليس بعد الشدة إلا الفرج" is an example of the issue just viewed. The formal translation this religious culture-bound expression is *after hardship, there is nothing except repose*, whereas the dynamic translation is *after a storm comes a calm*. The verbatim meaning of the formal translation is fully conveyed into English, but the religious belief of this expression is lost because the formal equivalent does not tell that Muslims' faith in Allah shall put an end to this "*hardship*". As a result, the English receptor cannot specify the presence of the source language religious beliefs in formal translation. However, the dynamic translation of this expression relatively represents an air of a fresh start after being exposed to "*a storm*". Though dynamic translation succeeds in conveying the intended meaning, it fails in reflecting the religious side of the Islamic expression, since neither Allah nor faith in Allah are not transmitted into the target language receptors' religious beliefs. It follows from the above that neither formal equivalence nor dynamic equivalence managed to convey the religious belief of this Arabic expression. A fact which one can never ever deny is that cultural translation does not always succeed in transmit the beliefs of a particular community into other communities throughout translation (cf. Bassnett, 1980: 31). In such case, the translator has to explain the expression presented giving more details of the aspects which such expressions come across.

3. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study has focused on cultural gaps in translating certain Arabic proverbs and expressions into English. These gaps or losses occur due to the cultural differences on the deep symbolic level of the source text. However, they occur frequently even when the linguistic equivalence is achieved. Having discussed the importance the cultural factors contribute to translation, the following remarks might be the main conclusions and recommendations arrived at throughout this study:

1. Equivalently, English and Arabic proverbs and expressions are not related, because either meanings or cultural aspects are given only, but not both of them simultaneously.

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2. The cultural differences between the target language and the source language necessitate additional information in the target language in order to explain the divergent ideas and facts to the receptors.
3. Cultural differences can be rendered between the source language and the target language by selecting the cultural optimal, but not identical, equivalent in the target language.
4. While closing the cultural distance between proverbs of languages, Nida's (1964) formal as well as dynamic equivalence do not entirely dissipate cultural gaps between languages.
5. Since there is no exact translation, the compensation for the lack of the receptors' background knowledge may serve as a proper solution in translating some cultural-bound expressions.
6. Lacking the cultural equivalent can sometimes block the process of translating certain culture-bound terms or religious expression.
7. If not possible to find the dynamic equivalent in the target language, a translator can resort to the linguistic theory in explaining the cultural intended meaning to the source language receptors.
8. To "*hit the nail on the head*", a translator should not only be bilingual, but he should necessarily be bicultural.

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