Some Linguistic and Cultural Problems in Translating
Idiomatic Expressions From Arabic into
English and Vice Versa

by

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B.A. English Literature, Yarmouk University, 1983

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Degree of Master of Arts (Translation), Yarmouk University

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February, 1994
Abstract

The present study is designed to shed light on idiomatic expressions (IEs) as a problematic area when translating from Arabic into English and vice versa. It aims at fulfilling three main objectives:

(1) Classifying the problems that idiomatic expressions present to the process of Arabic - English and English - Arabic translation.

(2) Discussing and analyzing these problems and attributing them to their possible causes.

(3) Proposing some effective methods and strategies to be used in handling these problems.

Problems of translating Arabic and English idiomatic expressions from and into both languages are classified into linguistic problems and cultural problems. The linguistic and cultural backgrounds of Arabic and English idiomatic expressions are brought into focus. The data in this study come from written and Spoken Arabic and English. Spoken Arabic idiomatic expressions discussed in this study come from Levantine Arabic (i.e., Jordanian, Syrian, Palestinian, and Lebanese).

The present study comprises five chapters. The first chapter is a general introduction to the entire study including brief discussions related to translation in general and idiomatic expressions in particular. It also specifies the nature and scope of the problems addressed and outlines the research approach.

Chapter two deals with linguistic problems in translating idiomatic expressions. These problems are divided into semantic and pragmatic problems. Semantic problems are discussed under the following headings:

- Deficiency in lexical items.
- Figurative use of idiomatic expressions.
- Ambiguous idiomatic expressions.
- Emotiveness and connotative meaning.
Pragmatic problems are discussed under the following headings:
- The function of the idiomatic expression.
- Register, formality, politeness, and intimacy.

Chapter three deals with cultural problems in translating idiomatic expressions. Cultural problems are discussed under the following headings:
- Ecology (environment, climate, weather, geographical features, etc)
- Social culture.
- Religious culture.
- Material culture.
- Political culture.

Chapter four deals with the notions of translation equivalence and pragmatic functions in Arabic and English idiomatic expressions. The chapter presents a comparison between Arabic and English idiomatic expressions based on translation equivalence and pragmatic functions. Based on translation equivalence, Arabic and English idiomatic expressions are classified into four groups: semi-identical, identical, semi-different, and different idiomatic expressions. In this chapter, Arabic and English idiomatic expressions are classified into various categories according to their pragmatic functions.

Chapter five brings the study to an end. It provides the conclusions and recommendations, including some suggestions as to how to overcome the linguistic and cultural problems in translating idiomatic expressions from Arabic into English and vice versa.