A Pragmatic Analysis of Arabic Proverbs with Reference to their Equivalence and Non-equivalence in English

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Abstract

Proverbs can be defined as culture-laden expressions used for transferring wisdom, recommendations, warning, giving a piece of advice…etc. Theoretically, they are treated as something that should always be replaced by equivalent in the target language. They are also required to be clarified and justified in the source before the target culture since many of them cannot be easily understood. Thus, the translator seeks to find an equivalent of the proverb in the target language. If he does not find a translation of the meaning behind these words, he would delete the proverb altogether or conducting a word-for-word translation. This may be the best way to translate instead of confusing the reader with words that he can't understand its cultural connotations.   In this paper, the researcher tackled some Iraqi Arabic famous proverbs to be pragmatically analyzed to show their meaning with reference to their equivalent in the target language. It has been shown that the Iraqi proverbs mostly involve a speech act of warning, advice and irony.

Keywords: Proverbs, Pragmatics, Cultural Equivalence, Metaphor, Source Meaning.

1. Introduction

This paper is a kind of qualitative research approach that aims at exploring and revealing the pragmatic meaning of selected Iraqi Arabic proverbs with referring to their equivalence in English. The data in this paper were selected on the basis of their daily use in the Iraqi Arabic everyday banal language. The motivation to do such analysis stems from the fact that an Iraqi Arabic native speaker may need to use them in English as a target language whether in an academic or social context.
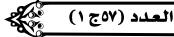
The research questions posed in this study are:

1- What is the nature of Iraqi Arabic proverbs?
2- What pragmatic function they involve?
3- What are their English equivalences?

2.1 Proverbs: Types and Functions

Proverbs, as a folklore discourse, have been the concern of researchers in different areas of research. Thus, they have been defined and categorized differently according to the domain they prevail in. There is, in any case, some broad arrangement with regards to what comprises a proverb. Proverb is "a saying in more or less fixed form, marked by 'shortness, sense, and salt' and distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth tersely expressed in it". Proverbs are illocutionary acts that imply hidden meaning, wishes and goals of the speaker. They can fill in as tools to cover individual views in open interactive situations (Kassis, 1999). In various societies there are different underlying social portrayals about the essential idea of world proverbial discourse, despite the fact that there is a few circumstances common to the greater part of the way of life. For instance, the utilization of proverbs in Arabic societies contrasts from European societies according to their classification from informal to formal style of communication. In this manner, from the perspective of their own way of life researchers once in a while will generally disregard very fundamental elements of world of proverbial speech, similar to ritual use of these expressions (Brosh, 2013). Public proverbial discourse of ceremonies is a huge component of communication. But in regular use, proverbial expressions, similar to greetings, openings and leave-takings, appear to have practically inverse capacity in friendly connection than in others relationships. They fill in as repetitive easing up component in discourse. General rhetoric (in traditional meaning) apply to use of proverbs, when it is heard as an indirect speech. Proverbs are devices that deal with the data that are not directly or indirectly existing. The socially dominated normal equipment makes it conceivable to allude to imperceptible knowledge. Individuals can talk without giving continually clarifications to the expressions or perspectives. Yet, the need to involve hidden messages in proverbial speech should be deciphered comparable to social situations with the speaker and listener. The more a person is reliant of the feelings and acknowledgment of the one with whom the conversation is conducted, the more he needs indirect tools of conversation. Various classifications of proverbs have been proposed by various researchers. To meet the aims of this paper, we present one main classification presented by Norrick (1994), who conducted an analysis of a number of proverbs from the oxford dictionary of English Proverbs. He crafted a more observationally arranged and a less affected schematization that sorts proverbs out in line with the kind of figuration they use. He recognized five types of figurative proverbs: metaphoric, metonymic, synecdoche, hyperbolic and paradoxical proverbs. It should be referenced that as would be natural for Norrick (1994), metaphorical proverbs have non-literal implications that contrast from their literal meaning.

In light of the scope of this research, three types are put forward thereto:

2.2.1 Metaphoric Proverbs

A nominal becomes metaphoric because of its collaboration with another proverb constituent, or the nominal represent some feature attribute. An illustration of the first example is, "favor will as surely perish as life and of the second, fair play is a jewel (Penfield and Duru, 1988).

2.2.2 Metonymic Proverbs

This kind of proverb relies on relationship between something in a real sense named and the thing intended. An example of a metonymic proverb is "who has a fair wife needs more than two eyes" where the eye metonymically symbolizes the "sight" (Muxtorova, 2022).

2.2.3 Hyperbolic Proverbs

Norrick (1994) remarks that "hyperbole is generally viewed as a logical figure alongside, while perhaps not exactly of a similar significance of synecdoche, metaphor and metonymy". As a matter of fact, hyperbole is a linguistic intensifier, where Intensification says more than needed. For instance, the proverb "a faint heart never won fair woman" is an exaggerated saying because of the presence of "never" in it. This proverb is related to the logical orientation whose meaning and interpretation involves an intelligent inconsistency which is considered as contradictory proverb. This type of proverb has a second meaning on the behalf of the hearer. For example, the proverb "fair is not fair everywhere". Indeed, the condition of such proverb is that it declares unmistakable legitimate inconsistency (Mieder, 2004).

All communities and societies have a set of proverbs used predominantly as effective method for communicating cultural and social norms and values. Proverbs can be used in different parts of conversations. We can find and hear proverbs in a form of a verse, poetic line, social saying or wisdom as well as day-to-day routines in all cultures, to address circumstances or simply raise laughter. Proverbs have different kinds of functions. Literary function, for example can be relevant to the literary works such as poetry, prose and songs. They often involve wisdom including advising, ordering, warning and other pragmatic values. Another function of proverb is a practical function so that they can be valuable and impactful in the everyday life purposes. They are also used for teaching, apologizing, complaining and fulfilling other pragmatic functions.

2.4 Proverbs and Translation

Some researchers have been interested in translating proverbs out of admiration and fascination with them and to make them heard to different peoples of different cultures and languages. It is acknowledged that proverbs include metaphors that are intended to have another meaning. The translator expects obstacles to achieve the intent and convey the meaning, and the reason for this is the difference in cultural patterns between societies and peoples that reflect a range of cultural contexts, historical, political, social, economic, moral, and cultural values. For example, the wisdom that says, "Someone knows where the shoulder is eaten from." If a translator translates a verbal translation into a foreign language, it loses its significance and value and may not mean anything to the recipient. Therefore, the translator must be keen on translating the meaning, bearing in mind that the cultural pattern is different. It must be a prelude through which he explains the environmental and cultural conditions in which the proverbs arise (Nida, 1964).

Newmark (1988), remarks that translators face linguistic problems during the process of translating like mistakes in usage resulting from the translator's lack of competence in writing properly, using literal translation or the lack of translator's common sense. Moreover, these linguistic problems may stem from the weak grammatical competence, ill-equippedness with style, lexical words, collocations or idioms. Proverbs are typical expressions that are symbolically significant in any language. They denote meanings that can cover all aspects of life. This in turn, makes them important elements in peoples' talk. Litovikina (2014) points out that proverbs could carry themes related to professions, money, love, marriage, divorce, friendship, education, drugs, children and parents, God and religion, cars and computers.
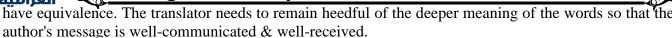
According to Owji (2013), a major crux that faces translation is the lexical problems. Owji shows that although words are entities that refer to things or concepts, translators may not be able to replace a word in one language with a word in another language when referring to the same concepts or things.

As such, Owji also divided lexical problems into two subcategories:

Semantic Meaning: which points out to words in the source text that have their match words in the target text such as (tree, father, son etc.). The lexical meaning however refers to words or phrases that

have equivalence. The translator needs to remain heedful of the deeper meaning of the words so that the author's message is well-communicated & well-received.

Figurative expressions: this subcategory refers to the thorny issues when translating idiomatic expressions. Ginting (2022) crafts the following suggestions for translating idiomatic expressions:
(a) There must be awareness to distinguish between regular expressions and metaphors.
(b) The translator needs to be well-resourced when processing metaphor translating.
(c) The translator must be abreast of the variety of contexts and their limitations in the use of metaphors.
(d) Knowledge about the limits imposed on translation as well as on the message transfer.

In such a process, the translator should be keen to steer clear from literal translation and recover the connotation closest or parallel to the target proverb in a fashion that simulates the cultural meaning in the target language. Originally, proverbs are the by-products of real situations. Each proverb retains a written history known to its milieu. To secure a well-transmitted and a well-received message, it is necessary to be abreast of origin of the proverb, and discard the literal translation (Talbi & Haifaa, 2019).

3. Data Analysis and Discussion

In this research, the research has chosen selected Iraqi Arabic proverbs to examine their realization in English in terms of their equivalence and pragmatic meaning. These proverbs are often used in everyday life.

Accordingly, this Arabic proverb (إن مع العسر يسرا) is religiously and socially rooted in the Arabic culture. It involves the meaning of "With hardship there is ease, a great glad tiding comes with hardship and difficulty, for relief comes with distress, and in defining hardship by definition - and it indicates generality - an indication that no matter how severe and difficult this hardship is. This proverb has a cultural equivalent in English which is *After clouds sun shine*.

The proverb اللي ما يلوح العنب ، يگُول حامض literally means that "He who doesn't catch the grapes, says it is sour. This proverb is of a Najdi origin, which is made as an argument and justification as a result of one's failure to achieve a life goal. While it's a lack of will and lack of enough efforts, the attriutee may attribute his failure to the factors surrounding him. It is said by a person who does not wish others good. We may usually see such happen in our daily life where people treat each other with respect amicability, but when these people become more successful and pursue a different path from them they start to hate them and speak ill of them.

A popular proverb اجا يكحلها عماها that Iraqis repeat according to their local dialects to express that so-and-so wanted to fix a situation and solve the issue or problem, but instead he spoiled what came for and even made it worse. In the old days, the dog always noticed the beauty of the cat's eyes and asked her about the secret of their beauty. Her response was that this beauty stems from the black frame that surrounds her eyes, which is completely similar to eyeliner. The dog liked the idea of eyeliner around the eye, and wanted his eyes to be beautiful, as is the case with the cat, so he only put eyeliner on his finger and tried to put it on his eye. But unfortunately, his claw entered his eye and pierced it, hence the saying, "He came to eyeliner, but made her a blind.

This proverb العرق دساس literally means that "the human belongs to a race". It is a kind of folk proverbs that we hear from our parents and our local community from ancient times and the proverb has many meanings that indicate an event, situation or something related to any problem. It reflects on the beliefs and customs of the parents. It indicates the culture of peoples and among these proverbs is (race is belonging). It carries the meaning that every child resembles his family, for example, the worker is the son of a worker and he innately holds his parental nature.

In English, there is a cultural equivalent to this proverb which is "the apple does not fall far from the tree. This saying is also a metaphorical expression about the parents and their children. An apple is the product of the tree as a child is the product of his parent. If a child does something that reminds you of the parent you refer to, "The apple (child) does not fall far from the tree (parent)." Meaning that the child's behavior stems from the parent raising the child or even genetically passing on their traits.

Another social and cultural proverb is اللي تلدغه الحية بيده يخاف من جرة الحبل whose literal meaning of text is that "He who is bitten by a snake is afraid of stripping the rope. Pragmatically, it refers to a person who has been betrayed by someone, is afraid of everything around him. The cultural equivalent for this proverb

in English is that "A burnt child dreads the fire". Both of these proverbs involve the meaning of taking care of repeating certain actions or behaviors.

One of the old folklore proverbs الباب اللي تجيك منه ريح سده وأستريح "If the door lets in the breeze, close it off and rest at ease). This proverb urges a person to be careful of things that open the door to trouble, confrontation and problems. And other similar proverbs such as: Keep an arm away from evil and sleep. Or stay away from evil and sing to it. Some repeat this proverb on many occasions or mention it and comment on it on some events. It could be considered for an individual as a principle upon which many of his actions are based, but there are those who have another opinion, as opening the door to the wind might prevent some bigger problems. However, there is a cultural equivalent for this proverb which is "solve a problem at hand".

The proverb المال السايب يعلم السرقة literally means that "Unattended money teaches theft". It is famous popular proverb calls for the imposition of censorship and auditing of funds, and implicitly blames the owners of money in many cases of theft, as they facilitated the tasks of the thief by leaving the money without protection or oversight. It is common to say in English "gear adrift is a gear gift". This basically means that leaving stuff unsecured is an open invitation to theft. In other words, it prompts those to secure their equipment and belongings or it could be lost or stolen.

The social proverb الصديق وقت الضيق refers to a cultural fact that "The ideal friend is the one you find in times of adversity. It reflects the correct image of true friendship. There are friends who take the place of a brother by standing by their friends through ease and need. The cultural equivalent for such a proverb in English is "A friend in need is a friend indeed".

The Arabic proverb سبع صنايع والبخت ضايع literally means that "Seven jobs and fortune telling is lost". This proverb pragmatically is said to someone who does not benefit from any work and does not benefit from any craft he masters. Perhaps luck has a big role in that, and it may be attributed to the neglect on the part of the person, lack of awareness of things, lack of mastery of his work or inability to carry out things properly, which makes his share of failure in all matters. The English equivalent for this proverb is "Jack of all trades, master of none".

3.1 Overall Discussion

Knowledge of the target culture is crucial to the success of translation between two languages, since the degree of ignorance of the culture is directly proportional to the degree of resistance to translation. In other words, translation is difficult for a translator who is ignorant of the foreign culture of the target language. The greater this ignorance, the greater the difficulty of translation, a difficulty that reflects the situation in which there is cultural convergence between the two languages, the subject of translation.

The problem of transferring cultural elements between English and Arabic is one of the most important things that stand in the way of the translator, and this is due to the lack of harmony between Arab societies and English society at the religious, political level, and at the level of customs, traditions and beliefs in their cultural and social dimensions. Each language has its own uniqueness which makes it special to the people who speak it. The translator must be more familiar with the target civilization and culture and therefore more familiar with it.

That is to say, the cultural untranslatability emerges when one of the functionally important positive characteristics of the source language text is completely absent from the culture of which the target language is a part. The difficulty of translation lies in the fact that the language is not a list of words; it is enough to replace one word with another to obtain the required equivalent in the second language.

Therefore, the untranslatability is manifested in the fact that it combines two different linguistic systems, and between two different cultures of the universe and reality. The significance of the concepts is linked in the mind of the individual to a set of special experiences and social events that he is going through, and its implications may differ from one individual to another from the same environment.

4. Conclusion

Proverb is a by-product of real situations. Proverb has a written history, familiar to its local source culture. To secure a well-tranlated proverb process in the target culture, it is necessary to figure out the proverb message the proverb is made for in the source culture. There's a unanimous agreement among scholars of translation that translators often fail to convey the exact meaning in the source text they want to transfer to the target language. This problem might stem from several factors, the most common of which is the

fact that every language possesses multiple synonyms whose meanings vary slightly from each other. Also each language belongs to a particular culture. Though a word-for-word translation is made, translator may fall short to transfer the word culturally. It appears common that many translators transfer the perception of the owner of the original word to the target language. The linguistic differences may lead to misconceptions and misunderstandings. Structurally, every language is marked by a distinct character in the sentence formation and word order. This indicates that difference in language structural rules generates translational problems given that there are no preset rules to structural transfer. In light of this, the translator needs to be abreast of the culture of the target language in order to arrive at the true meaning in the target culture in the translation process.

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