

## Problems Encountered Translating English Clichés into Arabic

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### Abstract:

This study presented here has been designed to shed some light on problems of rendering English clichés and examine the ability of the students in translating English expressions into Arabic. The quality of translation depends on the translator's knowledge, competence, cultural background and awareness of a number of factors relevant to the source text (ST) such as context, culture influence among others. This certainly influence lexical choices that serve the purpose of the language text (SL). For achieving this purpose, the study is made up of two parts, the first is theoretical and concerns translation, its definition and problems confronted students when translation clichés. The second part is a practical, and concerned with the analysis of results of the test given to the students who were studying in the Department of English Language in Faculty and Arts and Science in Qeminis. The test consists of seventh questions English Clichés, where the students were required to translate and choose the closest equivalent of the Arabic. Their translation will be investigated and analyzed, the resulted that found will be showed at the end of this work.

**Keywords:** Cliché, rendering, expression

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## المشاكل التي تواجه الطلبة في ترجمة العبارات المتداولة الى اللغة العربية

### الملخص:

تم تصميم هذه الدراسة المقدمة هنا لتبسيط بعض الضوء على مشاكل ترجمة الكليشيات الإنجليزية، واختبار قدرة الطلاب على ترجمة التعبيرات الإنجليزية إلى اللغة العربية، حيث تعتمد جودة الترجمة على معرفة المترجم وكفاءته وخلفيته الثقافية ووعيه بعدد من العوامل ذات الصلة بالنص المصدر مثل السياق وتأثير الثقافة وغيرها، ويؤثر هذا بالتأكيد على الاختيارات المعجمية التي تخدم غرض النص اللغوي، ولتحقيق هذا الهدف تتكون الدراسة من: قسمين، الأول نظري، ويتعلق بالترجمة وتعريفها والمشكلات التي تواجه الطلاب عند ترجمة الكليشيات، أما الجزء الثاني فهو عملي، ويهتم بتحليل نتائج الاختبار المقدم للطلاب الذين كانوا يدرسون في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية الآداب والعلوم قمينيس، ويتكون الاختبار من سبعة أسئلة من الكليشيات الإنجليزية، حيث يطلب من الطلاب ترجمة واختيار أقرب مرادف لها من اللغة العربية، وسيتم التحقيق في ترجمتهم وتحليلها، وعرض النتائج في نهاية هذا العمل

**الكلمات الدالة:** المتداولة- ثقافة- نمطية- دلالات- تلميحات

### 1.Introduction.

Translation is not only about transferring each word to its equivalent in the target language, but rather about transferring the rules of the language that communicates the information, and of the transmission of the same information and thought, of the culture and the style of the author. However, translation theories differ on how to transfer this information from source to destination. Students must have

bilingual competence in the source language and the target language, as well as knowledge of both cultures to eliminate ambiguities in some texts that must be translated .

Most students face problems in translating clichés when translating from English into Arabic because they could not give the right, or the appropriate or even a closer equivalent cliché. Since clichés are difficult to be understood from the context unlike simple words,

students tend to translate them inappropriately. One possible explanation to this is that students are unaware of the meaning of clichés in the source language, in other words, the majority of them do not know the meaning of clichés because of their insufficient practice.

In this very issue, Baker (1992, p.68) states that this task might prove to be challenging. The challenge may emerge due to linguistic and cultural gaps as well as lack of TL equivalence.

Nevertheless, even if TL proverb exists, it would not accomplish complete equivalence since the meaning and usage of proverbs differ among languages. In this introduction, the paper will examine proverbs definition, culture, functions, and translation methods.

Translation is a creation in which the translator tries to recreate the source text with fidelity, regularity and equivalence in mind when conveying the author's message (Catford, 1965). Several theorists, Newmark (1985),

Bakella (1984) and others, have discussed the close relationship between translation and culture; the translation process must be in a cultural framework to make a natural translation from the source text.

Meanwhile, Neubert and Shreve (1992) mention that translation plays a vital role in cultural differences, which means that cultural connection produces many benefits and advantages. Translators must recognize three elements during the translation process: the source language from which the text is translated, the target language into which the text is translated, and the source text.

With this in mind, the study aims to examine the problems of translation from English to Arabic with a focus on clichés. A cliché cannot be translated simply by looking up the literal meaning of its words in a dictionary. The literal translation of the clichés cannot give the exact and true meaning. Translating

clichés has always been a difficult problem due to various cultural aspects.

### 1.The significance of the study

The importance of the study lies in the difficulty that encounter the 20 students of English when rendering clichés from Arabic into English, may be accounted for their lack of knowledge of the strategies that professional translators use to overcome such problems and try to suggest solutions and identify strategies that may help limit or avoid this difficulty

### 2. Objectives of the study

This study aims to explore the obstacles that English students of Qminis Faculty encounter when translating clichés. In addition, it aims to find out the strategies to overcome translation difficulties they face when translating clichés from English into Arabic

### 3. Questions of the Study

This study raises the following questions:

1-What are some of the obstacles which EFL university students face while translating clichés?

2-How do they translate clichés and what type of equivalence do they opt for when rendering such terms/ expressions

3-What translation strategies are suitable for the rendering of clichés into Arabic?

### Literature Review:

#### 2.Culture and Translation:

The purpose of translation is communication. Basically human beings use language as the most important means of communication, and language is influenced by people's culture and beliefs whether consciously or unconsciously. Therefore, translation involves both language and culture; yet most translation definitions do not directly imply cultural expressions. For instance, Catford (1965) stated that "translation is the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another language." (p. 20). Similarly, Savory (1968) maintained

that translation is made possible by an equivalence of thought that lies behind its different verbal expressions. Even Newmark (1981) who gave a great importance to cultural elements in his suggestions of methods and procedures still did not indicate culture in his definition. He stated that "translation is a craft consisting in the attempt to replace a written message and/or statement in one language by the same message and/or statement in another language." (p. 7)

For every translated sentence, the translator must be able to decide on the importance of its cultural context, what the phrase really means, not necessarily what it literally means, and convey that meaning in a way which makes sense not only in the target language but also in the context of the target culture. The term culture refers to a set of beliefs that control a particular country or group behaviors. It is defined by Taylor (cited in Hymes, 1964: 455) as "a complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs,

customs and any capacities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society". Among these beliefs, language is considered as an essential part that constitutes one's culture, Longman dictionary describes it "the heart within the body of culture" cited in Bassnett, 1980:22) this is involved in the process of translation through the influence of the source and target cultures. Culture has a great impact on the process of translation in the sense that the degree of integration of the source text (ST) in the target culture may vary, and may cause serious problems for the translator. In this respect, culture may lead to different types of translation. Translation may, sometimes, result in a shift towards the target culture, and the translation text may or may not merge completely in the target culture "(Yowelly and Lataiwish 2000 :1070)

### Definitions of clichés:

A cliché is a phrase that may have been original or funny once, but is now need used so often that it has lost it meaning

. One might be : It's got get worse before it gets better .T hat was originally about illnesses , but now it's applied to all kind of situations, also it is easy to understand like It's got to get worse before it gets better ' but they get overused.in addition it's an expression, idea., or element of an artistic work which has become overused to the point of losing its original meaning, or effect, and even to the point of being trite or irritating, especially when at some earlier time it was considered meaningful or novel (Blake & Robert W. 1993:85). In phraseology, the term has taken on a more technical meaning, referring to an expression imposed by conventionalized linguistic usage. The term is frequently used in modern culture for an action or idea that is expected or predictable, based on a prior event. The word cliché is drawn from the French language. In printing, a cliché was a printing plate cast from movable type. This is also called a stereotype. When letters were set one at a time, it made sense to cast a phrase

used repeatedly, as a single slug of metal cliché came to mean such a ready made phrase. (the Museum of Printing Retrieved 2009).

According to Oxford Advance Learners Dictionary of Current English (1974) , the meaning of clichés indicates that it is a phrase , idea , and a belief fixed in from used and repeated without change , for example good morning and how do you do , are sorts of unchangeable expressions as fixed cultural idiomatic phrases . Clichés give accurate definition origins and uses of metaphors that will be easily understood and applied. Many clichés are proverbs which represents sort of advice or wisdom such as: at daggers drawn, behind the scenes, bolt from the blue, darken the door od, lead a dog`s life , leave the sinking ship , know the ropes , stick to one`s last.

Cook and Hirst (2013) state that "a cliché is a kind of ersatz novelty or creativity that is, ' ipso facto, unwelcome or deprecated by the reader." The term 'overused' might suggest that there is

some range of acceptable frequency for expressions, but this limit seems hard to determine; the cliché-hood of an expression rests on a tacit, cultural judgment. The cliché expressions we focus on are semantically compositional and syntactically regular, without non-literal meaning.

However, since they are conventionalized, their use provides evidence that the author did not construct the expression word for word, but took a shortcut by employing a ready-made stock phrase. The occurrence of such expressions may therefore be taken as a negative marker for creativity and originality.

### Clichés and Idioms:

Idioms are not the only kind of prefabricated speech ; there are many other sorts of formulaic fixed phrases like clichés .Clichés are similar to idioms in that ,they include patterns which are relatively frozen , but they are different from them , in the sense that these patterns are usually made up of

extended stretches of language .Clichés like there is no doubt about it , a good *time was had by all* and *have a nice day* differ also from idioms in the way that they are easily understandable from the meaning of their individual constituents . In contrast to idioms which are often learnt as a single unit without taking into account the meaning of their parts' (Nattinger and De Carrico, 1992:32), Clichés are often idioms which are figurative phrases with an implied meaning; the phrase is not to be taken literally. This causes difficulty when translating to another language, because the meaning may not be understood by people within that culture.

Clichés and idioms are both phrases used in our everyday language. A cliché is a common phrase or an expression which has been used so many times since it first originated that with the changing times and its overuse, it has lost its true meaning. Overuse makes it boring too; for example, "easy as pie" or "a piece of cake." It means very easy, not difficult at



all. Anybody who has knowledge of the English language can understand the meaning.

Some clichés are literal and some figurative. Some clichés are a thought which are very true; some are thoughts or phrases which are stereotypes; some clichés are facts, and some may not be true. Whatever type they might be, had they been used sparingly, they would still be interesting as they were inspired by experiences of everyday life.

### Figurative Clichés:

The clichés which do not have literal meaning, if translated in any other language, they will not make any sense at all. For example, “it’s raining cats and dogs.” We know it means raining heavily. Imagine a person who doesn’t speak English and tries to translate it literally; he wouldn’t ever venture out in the rain again.

### Literal Clichés:

Clichés which can be translated literally, for example: “All’s well that ends well.” It means when the end is well, it does not

matter if something went wrong in between. It means exactly what is written.

### Idioms:

Idioms are phrases which are always figurative; they cannot be literally understood and are unique to every culture and language. For example, “getting cold feet,” it means to feel scared of something. “He got cold feet on his wedding day.” If you try to translate it literally, it will hardly mean what is supposed to be expressed. Some idioms are considered figurative clichés by many. The differentiating factor is their use or overuse.

Idioms are considered to be transparent and opaque. Idioms need to be learned, and people learning English need to build a vocabulary of idioms.

### Opaque idioms:

Opaque idioms are idioms whose literal meaning is not at all related to the real expression. They cannot be translated to mean what a person wants to express. For example, “to smell a rat,” means



something is wrong and one is convinced about it. This idiom cannot be taken literally by any means.

### Transparent Idiom:

These idioms can be translated a little bit and do make some connection to the expression. For example, "laying the cards on the table," means to disclose something. The expression does connect to the action. When cards are played, you lay the cards on the table to show them thus disclosing what you have.

According to above we can say clichés are phrases which have been overused and have become very common and boring. Idioms are phrases which are not so overused, and a vocabulary needs to be built to learn to use them, clichés are figurative as well as literal; idioms are transparent and opaque also some idioms can be figurative clichés, in addition using idioms is considered a sign of good writing; using clichés in writing is considered poor writing.

### Classification of Clichés:

There are thousands clichés in the world. Many of them have meaning that you can obviously see, but some have meanings that are only clear if you know the context. For example, the clichés, *any port in a storm* has a hidden meaning is that, in a bad situation, anything will do. However, this cliché can also be used to say that a man has many friends or lovers. Some clichés can be interpreted differently based on the context. For example:

'what goes around comes around'. Commonly used in British English, this expression means that a person's actions, whether good or bad, will often have consequences for them.

Another example is: 'to avoid like the plague'. The 'plague' is a disease that can become a deadly epidemic. Therefore, if we say that you should 'avoid something like the plague', it means to stay far away from it.

"And the list goes on" is an interesting cliché. People tend to use it in speech when they are giving a number of

examples. For instance, one is talking about the benefits of studying abroad, like making new friends, learning a new language, getting to know another culture and 'the list goes on.' It's another way to say 'etcetera'.

There are many types of clichés which are collected from different websites, these clichés can be classified as following: (i) literary clichés; (ii) political clichés and (iii) animal clichés

### Literary Clichés:

Clichés are frequently employed in everyday language. These expressions have become so widely used in popular culture and media that their meanings have become associated with them due to their sheer repetition. These platitudes are frequently also aphorisms, which are memorable sayings that convey a universally acknowledged truth. In literature, a cliché is technically an expression or idea that has become widely used due to its overuse. The concept may also be transposed, potted and regarded as epitome of cliché for

instance, in some styles of writing such as paraphrasing and repetition a certain word is clichéd because it is overused in genres such as literature and science. (sited in [www.woosh](http://www.woosh) 2001) The problem of literary clichés is not with the words they contain, but in the concept behind the words. one may say the same thing in many way, but the understanding does not alter.

Many clichés originated in classic works such as Shakespeare, or certain fables, and were repeated to convey that same classic concept that the original author so expertly captured.

An example of literary clichés Shakespeare's saying in Julius Caesar: *My salad days when I was green in judgement.*

أيام شبابي عندما كنت ساذجا

And his saying in Richard III:

*A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse*

ضاعت مملكتي بسبب حصان

### Political clichés:

Political clichés can be divided into two categories: (i) clichés for speech and (ii) debate clichés.

### (i) Clichés for Speeches:

There are lots of clichés in political speeches, the choice of which depends on whether the speaker is an incumbent, a challenger, or just trying to impress his constituency. (cited in politicalcliche.com). The majority of people who watch political speeches have little interest in what is being said. They are evaluating speaker's delivering style and mesmerisms while paying scant attention to the content of the speech which can be filled with clichés interspersed with facts and figures that may or may not have some connection with reality but the speaker must look convincing. clichés are used while delivering a speech even in the rare case that something significant is being said. Here some examples of these clichés adapted from ([www.politicalcliche.com](http://www.politicalcliche.com))

*We are the defenders of freedom around the world*

**نحن حماة الحرية في العالم**

*We're the leaders of the free world*

**نحن قادة العالم الحر**

*This country had a proud heritage*

**لدى هذه الدولة تاريخ عريق**

### Debate Clichés:

Clichés can be found if people are going to agree with their opponents during debates they are prefacing their comments with, for example

**مع كل الاحترام** *with all due respect*

Even if they have no intention of showing any semblance of respect in their rebuttal remark in the cliché

**في الواقع / في حقيقة الأمر** *as a matter of fact*

Conveys the impression that the speaker does not have his facts straight ([www.politicalcliches.com](http://www.politicalcliches.com))

### Animal Clichés:

There are various animal clichés, here are some which are related to domestic cats, dogs, monkeys and horses.

**To rain cats and dogs**

**تمطر قططا وكلابا**

*Which refers to heavy rain*

### **Crocodile tears**

دموع التماسيح

Referring to fake tears, if somebody is pretending to cry or has forced himself to cry to gain something

### **Cat got your tongue**

القطعة اكلت لسانك

This cliché is said to a person, normally children who give no replay to a question or comment. It refers to cats that like to be near face in order to feel breath being exhaled.

### **Monkey see, monkey do**

القرود تحب التقليد / التقليد الأعمى

This cliché refers to the learning of a process without an understanding of why it works. Another definition implies the act of imitation, usually with limited knowledge and/or concern for the consequences.

### **As brave as a lion**

كالأسد في الشجاعة

To say that someone is "as brave as a lion" means they have the same qualities. They are not afraid to face any danger or

difficulty. They are confident and bold in their actions and decisions. They are willing to stand up for themselves and others. They are respected and admired for their bravery. (cited in [www.bussinessball.com](http://www.bussinessball.com))

### **Color-Term Cliché**

Words used for colors are slippery and changeable expression throughout history, they have different cultural meaning, for example the white color can be used in many phrases such as

**White lie** كذبة بيضاء

Whereas the red color can be used in expressions like

**Have given him the red eye** يريه الوجه الآخر / ينقلب عليه

**Caught red handed** قبض عليه بالجرم المشهود

**Green with envy** أسود قلبه حسدا

### **Data collection:**

Ten students from University of Benghazi, Faculty of science and Arts, Geminis Department of English. were chosen from different levels to be tested in rendering cliches to achieve our

research objective. Most of these English expressions are well known and translatable because of their repetition in everyday conversation. they are also clear and their meaning could be deducted from the context.

### Data Analysis:

The test aims at investigating the student's knowledge of English cliches

and the degree of their comprehensibility. In other words, it attempts to examine the students' degree of familiarity and non-familiarity these cliches and their usage. The following table shows the students answers.

NO.	Cliches	Correct answer	Incorrect answer	<i>accepted</i>	<i>Total</i>
1-	You cannot judge a book by its cover	16	2	2	20
		80	10	10	100%
2-	Worth her weight in gold	12	6	2	20
		60%	35%	5%	100%
3-	Works her finger to the bone	14	3	3	20
		70%	15%	15%	100%
4-	Hand in hand	8	6	6	20
		40%	30%	30%	100%
5-	I was walking in air	12	7	1	20
		60%	35%	5%	100%
6-	Like a bolt from the blue	9	4	7	20
		45%	20%	35%	100%

7-	Rotten to the core	9	2	9	20
		45%	10%	45%	100%

## The Analysis of the Students` Translation

As I mentioned previously the purpose of this study was to investigate the performance of students when they translate the English clichés into their mother tongue Arabic, from overall the above table shows that the highest percentage of correct rendering of sentences is (80%)

### sentence 1

#### In this day and age:

Whereas two students committed errors their at rendering, it is revealed that students. Although students which is 10% percentage gave the suitable equivalent to this clichés day and age

In this sentence, it seems that the majority students were successful rendering this cliché

Expression except students translated into

في هذا اليوم والعمر

but of some translated it word for word which consider improper on the matter two students 10%.

As a first step towards giving the appropriate equivalent to this cliché students have to look at the structure, which is made up of simple and clear words that help students to draw a clear metaphorical image leading to the comprehensive od idiomatic meaning which is

في الوقت الراهن/ هذه الأيام

### Sentence 2

#### Worth her weight in gold

60% students who could successfully giving the acceptable translation while sime students find it difficult to interpret in an appropriate way therefore, the students35% failed to give the acceptable equivalents. They translated it

as وزنها ذهب

But 5% of them fail to translate this sentence and have problems translating cliché. Additionally

مفيد أو مساعد

### Sentence 3

**Works her finger to the bone:**

In this sentence, 70 % of students succeed in giving the acceptable translation on this cliché which is

تعمل بكل جهد واجتهاد

Students 15% tried to give an accurate meaning but another students about 15% give a expectable translation

تعمل بلا كلل ولا and تكدح جاهدة في العمل ملل

Except 6 (15%) who was unfamiliar with this cliché and failed to give the intended meaning and used literal translation instead as

تعمل إصبعها إلى العظم

### Sentence4

**Hand in hand**

In this sentence, 40%of students succeed in translating this cliché despite the variety of the translation strategies

they followed, for example some of them translation

يدا بيد it literally

here as other's by مشاركة / بالتعاون translated this cliché communicatively

It seems that 30%translation are acceptable because the intended meaning is understood in both translation While the rest of them rendering the sentence wrong

### Sentence 5

**I was walking on air**

In this sentence, 60% commitment to give correct translation it seems that students are familiar with this cliché most of them translated it successfully mainly because the literal translation

على الجو / يمشي على الهواء

translation. on the تشعير الابتهاج والفرح the other hand 35%gave the suitable equivalent which is Its not acceptable although students 5% did not give the right

### Sentence 6

**Like a blot from the blue**



In this sentence, the accurate meaning from the context 45% given which is

كأنه صاعقة من السماء

While 35% of the answers have been given such as;

بقعة من السماء أو مفاجأة مذهلة

Whereas few students have found the acceptable answer and presented

This indicates the students' reliance on the context, but some of them still unable to give contextual meaning 20%

### Sentence 7

#### Rotten to the core

In this sentence, students about 45% understood it correctly and therefore, they successfully the intended meaning which is

فاسد أخلاقيا للنخاع

students 45% showed the back of translation competence, they have been misled by the context that made them distort the

meaning, so they gave unacceptable Arabic equivalents

مثل الثمرة الفاسد

Also some

#### متعفن للجذور

Whereas the rest of them 10% who could not provided a correct rendering this indicates the students' awareness of the meaning of cliché in advance it different to be guessed from the context

في الصميم, عفن اللب

### Conclusion and Recommendation

The study revealed that the obstacles which students face in translating proverbs from English into Arabic inability to translate culturally bound words/ expressions properly; giving wrong TL equivalent, irrelevant meaning and wrong paraphrasing. This happens because some translators don't understand the proverb correctly which lead them to grasp the wrong meaning of the proverb due to the lack of reading and translation practice. For instance, the proverb "

### Recommendations

The study sheds the light on the challenges that student of English department encounter when translating clichés as well as the strategies they use

when translating clichés to overcome those challenges. Based on the findings of this study, the following are recommended:

Students should be familiar with SL culture and TL culture, practice translation and **not restrict themselves only to the theoretical side also they should be careful in bringing the target equivalent in addition, use** the most suitable dictionaries to understand the meaning of clichés and pay attention to linguistic mistakes and check their translations before handing them out. Students who wish to be professional should be familiar with the distinguished structure of clichés and their style in addition of the translation strategies and technique and should practice translation by using these strategies and avoid the literal translation that makes meaningless translation and translate clichés as one unit not to translate the words separately.

Students should interact with English native speakers, read more books and per

iodicals, and watch more English language television shows and movies.

Students need to be aware of the grammatical errors and practical

applications of both languages. They ought to refrain from rendering nonsensical translation by translating literally.

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