

Using Baker's Strategies in Translating Persian Idioms into English in Sadegh Hedayat's Dash Akol Story

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Abstract

Idioms are the building blocks of a language and civilization that provide interesting insights into the use of words and languages. In addition, idioms are an essential feature of a language, as they are applied to communicate ideas concisely and effectively. In literary genres, novels and short stories, considered a part of fiction, are full of culture-specific expressions that require careful translation from the source language into the target language. For this, the use of appropriate strategies to translate idioms determines the quality of idiom translation because the meaning of idiomatic expressions cannot be extracted from their individual components. This qualitative study aimed to investigate Baker's strategies used in translating Persian idiomatic expressions in Sadegh Hedayat's Dash Akol story into English. Accordingly, Baker's five translation strategies of idioms of similar meaning and form, idioms of similar meaning but dissimilar form, translation by paraphrase, translation by omission and literal translation were examined to analyze the translated story. It was found that translation by paraphrase (45%) was the most frequent strategy used to translate idioms, followed by the strategy of similar meaning but dissimilar form (27.5%), the strategy of similar meaning and form (12.5%), translation by omission (10%), and literal translation (5%), respectively. This study offers a new insight into translating idiomatic expressions from Persian into English and may have beneficial implications for students, teachers and researchers, as well.

Keywords: Idioms, Translation Strategies, Dash Akol, Sadegh Hedayat

Introduction

One of the tasks that a translator should do is to deal with translating idioms in the text. As defined by Merriam-Webster, an idiom is an expression in the usage of a language that is peculiar to itself either in having a meaning that cannot be derived from the conjoined meanings of its elements. Idioms include cultural, religious, and socially-specific items, and are abundant in ordinary conversations among people in a society. Idioms can be distinguished easily by native language speakers, but to those who are not of, they will find it difficult to comprehend. Idioms reflects the characteristic of language, the community's way of life and culture. So, translating idioms requires understanding the mechanisms of translating texts. As Newmark (1988) puts it, "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. 190). Translation, as to Pym's (2010) words, can be seen as a "general activity of communication between cultural groups" (p. 143). Considering the concept of translation, one can recognize that the fundamental purpose of translation is to reproduce various kinds of texts in another language, and consequently, converting the text into another understandable text to a wider range of readers.

Idioms are parts of the figurative language that cannot be separated from novels and short stories. In translating Persian idioms into English in "Dash Akol," a short story from Sadegh Hedayat, there are many Persian idioms that require a number of strategies to be translated into another language such as English. This is indicative of the fact that both languages are distinctively different in both linguistics and cultures. So, the translator needs to be aware of such idioms. Besides, the translator should employ the strategies that best match equivalent idioms. In the meantime, when the strategies are correctly applied, the product of the translation will convey the message as intended, thus avoiding lost translation and misunderstanding in the TL text.

Larson (1984) states that "the translator also needs to develop sensitivity to the use of idioms in the receptor language and use them naturally to make the translation lively and keep the style of the source language. There will often be words in the source language which are not idioms but are best translated with an idiom (Larson, 1984, p.1). Meanwhile, when translating an idiom into the target language the translator should be cautious of the original effects the writer intends to present. He must be very careful not to lose the sense for his target readers. In the case of giving a literal translation, the translator should choose those equivalents which carry the same cultural effects as that of the original.

Baker (1992) suggests five strategies of translating idioms and fixed expressions (as cited in Sadeghi and Farjad, 2014, p. 249). They are using an idiom of similar meaning and form, using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form, translation by paraphrase, translation by omission and compensation (literal) strategy. As stated, this study aimed to investigate Baker's strategies used in translating Persian idiomatic expressions in Sadegh Hedayat's Dash Akol story into English.

Literature Review

Idioms are not a common phenomenon. There are several definitions of idioms. Joelene and Maureen (2003) define idioms as "non-literal phrases whose figurative interpretations cannot be derived from their literal meanings" (p.188). However, Marlies (1995) defines an idiom as "an expression whose overall figurative meaning cannot be derived from the meaning of its parts" (p. 283). Cain et al. (2005) define idiom as a figurative expression that may be interpreted literally, but it takes a nonliteral meaning when used in a specific context (p. 66). Overall, idioms are such a complicated phenomenon to characterize or describe in precision, as there is no universal definition of an idiom and its characteristics. Some scholars (e.g., Cooper: 1998) consider idioms as such a broad term, which includes metaphors, similes, proverbs, and even individual words (e.g., Hockett: 1964; Katz & Postal: 1963), whereas other scholars strictly view idioms. Whatever the case, idioms are an essential phenomenon in vocabulary acquisition (Adelnia & Dastjerdi: 2011).

Baker (2018) postulates that the problems in translating idioms are prompted by two causes, viz., the ability to recognize and interpret an idiom correctly, and how to render the various aspects of the meaning of the ST idiom into the TL. Recognizing an expression as an idiom may not be an easy task as it might seem to. Translators sometimes fall in the trap of perceiving an idiom literally, and thus the inability to recognize it as an idiom. Baker believes that the more complicated an expression to understand in specific contexts, the more likely it will be recognized as an idiom by a translator. For example, the expression "Put your money where your mouth is" surely must mystify target-language readers, and the translator would realize that this saying is not meant to be taken literally. However, Baker mentioned that there are some instances where idioms can be misleading for a translator. Some idioms can be interpreted, and they render some vague, poorly understood meaning, the meaning that is obvious resulting from the most straightforward word to direct word translation. However, the problem is that these idioms may have a different meaning from the literal meaning that they mean.

There are several studies related to strategies used in translating English idioms into Indonesian. Saputro (2012) investigated the strategy used in translating idioms in Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows. In his study, he concluded that the most strategy used in idiom translation is translation by paraphrase. In line with Saputro, Khosravi and Khatib (2012) also conducted study to analyze the application of strategies in translating English idioms into Persian in Novels. Khosravi and Khatib reached the conclusion that translation by paraphrase is the most

frequent strategy used. Lafta (2015) also gives the same conclusion that the translation by paraphrase the most common used strategy in idiom translation. Besides that, Sugiarti and Andini (2015), Rahmaganti and Himmawati (2015), and Ili (2016) have come to conclusion that among Baker's idiom translation strategies, translation by paraphrase appears to be the most employed by translators to translate idioms. Belfaqeeh (2009), moreover, carried out a study regarding the more acceptable translation strategies to the Arab readers. His study was conducted based on domesticated or foreignized strategies. Collecting the relevant data from different books, his analysis of the data indicated that domestication strategy was more popular to the Arab readers. In other words, for the Arab readers, the content of the message and translated equivalent idiom were of significant importance. Literal translation and deletion, furthermore, attained the least preferences for the Arab readers. Also, Shojaei (2012) tried to determine the difficulties in translating interlingual idiomatic pairs, for which he suggested some strategies to deal with those difficulties.

Describing the Strategies

According to Baker's (1992, as cited in Bujić, 2014) classification, the following strategies can be used when translating idioms:

(a) Using an idiom of similar meaning and form: Using this strategy means using a target idiom, which expresses a similar meaning to that of the source-text idiom, using similar lexical components; as in *انسان جایز الخطاست*, which is translated into *Error is human*.

(b) Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form: By this strategy, the source-text idiom is translated into a target-text idiom, which conveys approximately the same meaning, but with different lexical components. Those seeking this strategy should have an excellent command of the target language and a good bilingual dictionary of idioms; as in *موهامو تو آسیاب سفید نکردم*, which is translated into *I wasn't born yesterday*.

(c) Translation by paraphrase: This is suitable for situations in which there is no equivalent target idiom. Those translators seeking to use this strategy save their time by checking the meaning of an idiom in a monolingual dictionary and using the explanation as to the idiom translation; *چشم دیدنش را ندارم*, which is translated as *I hate to see him*.

(d) Translation by omission: Baker (1992, as cited in Bujić, 2014) suggested that this strategy is useful when there is no close match in the target text, if it is difficult to paraphrase or if there are certain stylistic reasons for omitting the idiom altogether.

(e) Literal translation: It is attempting a word-for-word translation that is as close as possible to the original, especially regarding the text's structure and grammar, as in *خدا پرده ناموس بندگان ندرد*, which is a Persian idiomatic expression (extracted from Sa'di's Garden of Rose or Gulistan) and the translator Edward Rehatsek has applied the literal translation: *God shall not tear apart the veil of honor of His servants*.

Sadegh Hedayat

Sadegh Hedayat (17 February 1903 – 9 April 1951) was an Iranian writer, translator and intellectual. He is considered one of the founders of modern Iranian fiction along with Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh, Bozorg Alavi and Sadegh Chubak. Hedayat was one of the pioneers of modern Iranian fiction writing and also a prominent writer. Many researchers have considered his novel *Blind Owl* to be the most famous and brilliant work of contemporary Iranian fiction. Although Hedayat is famous in fiction writing, he has also translated works from ancient Iranian texts such as Zand and Homan Yasan and also from writers such as Anton Chekhov, Franz Kafka, Arthur Schnitzler and Jean-Paul Sartre. He is also the first Iranian person who translated texts from Middle Persian (Pahlavi) into modern Persian. One of his greatest works is *Dash Akol* a subset of *Three Drops of Blood*. *Dash Akol* is a short story that was analyzed by the present study. This story by Sadegh Hedayat is the story of a valiant in Shiraz called *Dash Akol* who falls in love with a girl Marjan but has to sacrifice his love in respect to the honor and chivalry of valiantly

Methods

This study followed a descriptive design. Data in this study were collected from the short story of *Dash Akol* by Sadegh Hedayat. Here, forty idiomatic expressions were extracted from the short Persian version and their English equivalents were examined. The collected data were qualitatively analyzed. The researcher examined the ST idioms and compared them to the translations in the TT. Using Baker's (2018) classification of idioms' translation strategies, the researcher identified the translation strategies employed in the TT, and described the strategies used for their translation.

Results

The following table presents forty Persian idiomatic expressions extracted from the short story of *Dash Akol* and their corresponding translations in English. The table also reveals the strategies used by the translator.

Table 1: Persian idiomatic expressions and their corresponding equivalents in English, as well as the strategies used



No.	ST	TT	Selected strategies
1	سایه یکدیگر را با تیر زدن	Shoot at the other's shadow	Idiom of similar meaning and form
2	ماستها را کیسه کردن	----	Omission
3	رستم صولت و افندی پیزی	To see if one can put your money where one's mouth is	Idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form
4	ضرب شست نخوردن	Escape one's fist	Idiom of similar meaning and form
5	لنگ انداختن	Dare challenge	Paraphrase
6	گرد و خاک کردن	Throw one's weight around	Idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form
7	مرد خانه نیست؟	Where is the man of the house?	Literal
8	سبیل را دود دادن	Teach one a lesson	Idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form
9	دم خود را روی کول گذاشتن	Put one's tail between one's legs	Idiom of similar meaning and form
10	کینه به دل گرفتن	To be licked	Paraphrase
11	جان سالم به در بردن	Make one pay for it through the nose	Idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form
12	بامبول زدن	Cause trouble	Paraphrase
13	مثل برج زهر مار	----	Omission
14	کارد زدن و خون نیامدن	Smart with anger	Paraphrase
15	دست روی دل گذاشتن	----	Omission
16	رستم بود یکدست اسلحه و ما بودیم و همین سماور	To ever disarm Rostam; One old Samovar's all we have and now it is done	Paraphrase
17	مرده خوربودن	Grave robber	Idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form
18	زیر دین مرده رفتن	Carry out dead man's last wish	Idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form
19	غال گذاشتن	To have a fine way to keep a deal	Idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form
20	خط و نشان کشیدن	Take on sb	Paraphrase
21	پشت گوش فراخ و گشاد باز بودن	Carefree and spender	Paraphrase
22	زیر پا نشستن	Set one up	Paraphrase
23	توی مال خود نوپ بستن	Squander away one's property	Paraphrase
24	دو به دست افتادن	Find a breathing space	Idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form
25	لغز خواندن	To be a tough one from now one	Paraphrase
26	توی کوک کسی رفتن	Ridicule	Paraphrase
27	دک شدن	Turn tail and run	Idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form
28	موس موس کردن	----	Omission
29	سر پیری معرکه گیری	Have one foot in the grave and now fallen in love	Idiom of similar Meaning and form
30	حنا رنگ نداشتن	Lose one's clout	Paraphrase
31	تره خورد نکردن	Not respect anymore	Paraphrase
32	بر روی خود نیاوردن	Ignore	Paraphrase
33	تمک به حرامی	Betray one's trust	Paraphrase
34	از آب و گل درآمدن	Be ready to leave the nest	Idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form
35	کله گنده	Important person	Paraphrase

36	توی هیچل انداختن	Keep one in no end of trouble	Idiom of similar meaning and form
37	سی خودمان و سی خودشان	Time for each party to go one's way	Paraphrase
38	بغض تو گلو گیر کردن	A sob chocking one	Literal
39	روی زمین سفت شاشیدن	Meet one's match now	Idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form
40	خرده حساب ها را پاک کردن	Settle one's account	Paraphrase

The findings showed that that translation by paraphrase (18 cases) was the most frequent strategy used to translate idioms, followed by the strategy of similar meaning but dissimilar form (11 cases), the strategy of similar meaning and form (5 cases), translation by omission (4 cases), and literal translation (2 cases), respectively.

The table below also shows the percentage of the strategies used in translating the Persian idiomatic expressions.

Table 2: The percentage of the strategies used in translating the Persian idiomatic expressions

Translation by paraphrase	Similar meaning but dissimilar form	Similar meaning and form	Translation by omission	Literal translation
45% (18 cases)	27.5% (11 cases)	12.5% (5 cases)	10% (4 cases)	5% (2 cases)

It was found that translation by paraphrase (45%) was the most frequent strategy used to translate idioms, followed by the strategy of similar meaning but dissimilar form (27.5%), the strategy of similar meaning and form (12.5%), translation by omission (10%), and literal translation (5%), respectively.

Discussion and Conclusion

Translating idioms are arguably the most complex and problematic task for translators. There is sometimes no one-to-one equivalent for the idioms of the source language (SL) in the target language (TL), and for this, translators face a hard task. As defined by dictionaries, an idiom is a phrase or expression that usually presents a figurative, non-literal meaning attached to the phrase. We know that languages across the world enjoy an abundant collection of figurative and non-literal expressions that require different and pertinent translation strategies. The translator should choose a proper strategy according to the purpose of the translation based on relevant strategies. Every concept in one particular language has its own correspondent in another language, though this may involve applying a series of translation strategies that may not always correspond to each other stylistically. So, omitting a word or an idiom from a text is not a wise action to take. Languages use a number of culture and social-specific expressions to better convey their purposes and to aid the reader realize the mechanisms of the language better. Persian, like English, is rich in idiomatic expressions, which can be found in Persian novels, literature, short stories, etc. For example, there are thousands of idiomatic expressions and sayings in Persian poetry, as well as novels and short stories, as Iranian people use idioms and sayings most often in their ordinary conversations. Using Mona Baker's idiom translation strategies, this study collected as many as 40 Persian idiomatic expressions in the short story of Dash Akol by Sadegh Hedayat to discover their corresponding English equivalents and the relevant strategies used. Findings showed that the English translator has used the paraphrase strategy most in translating Persian idioms, while the strategies of idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form, similar meaning and form, translation by omission and literal taking the next ranks. It is thus concluded that translators should pay attention to idioms in the source language and clearly convey them to the target language by adopting translation styles and strategies. Using these strategies will aid the readership better understand the text and explore the meanings, in addition to conveying the message of the text more properly.

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