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Exploring the translation equivalences in translating ironic expressions in Arabic newspaper editorials

Kholud Mahmoud Al-Shehabat

Department of English, College of Science and Arts, Qassim University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Abstract---The current study explores the translation equivalences in translating ironic expressions in Arabic newspaper editorials and to what extent Jordanian respondents can capture the ironic message(s) in the original text. Several sarcastic and ironic expressions are randomly selected from Al-Zoubi's corner in Al-Rai daily. They have been given to 20 M.A. students at Jadara University; to translate from Arabic into English. The findings indicate that the students employed various translation techniques, namely, word-for-word, literal translation, functional equivalence, and ideational equivalence methods, to render the meaning of various ironic expressions in Arabic newspaper editorials.

Keywords---translation equivalences, ironic expressions, Arabic newspaper editorials.

Introduction

The translation is defined as the "process of rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the translator intended the text by finding the exact equivalents" (New Mark (1981, p.5). The concept of "equivalence" is fundamental in translation science, significantly when the major translation problem depends on finding proper translation equivalents. Competent translators should always capture denotational and connotational components when dealing with such expressions (Shunnag & Farghal, 1999).

Previous studies (Al-Sayaheen, 2009; Al-Shishani, 1994; Muhaidat, 1996) investigate the translation of ironic expressions. For example, al-Shishani (1994) investigated translating Culture-bound Expressions in Naji Al-Ali's Ironic Caricatures; Muhaidat (1996) conducted a study on the translation of some ironic Quranic Verses, including ironic expressions into English".

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Corresponding author: Al-Shehabat, K. M.; Email: K.alshehabat@qu.edu.sa

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Translating sarcastic and ironic expressions takes much work to capture and translate accurately. This is why professional and competent translators always need help dealing with such expressions. In this context, difficulty arises in understanding the shades of the meaning for these expressions and also in finding the appropriate equivalence that will make it understandable to readers in both cultures, the original cultures (S.L.) and the target culture (T.L.). The significant reasons for the difficulty of translating these expressions arise from the lack of familiarity with these expressions in both languages.

Therefore, motivated by the importance of equivalence and the gap in previous research, the current study aims to explore the translation equivalences in translating ironic expressions in Arabic newspaper editorials and, in addition to what extent Jordanian respondents can capture the ironic message(s) in the original text. Furthermore, it seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What kind of equivalence are respondents employed when they respond to a translating task?

RQ2. To what extent can Jordanian respondents capture the original text's ironic message(s)?

Literature review

Language and culture are closely interrelated. Translating culture-bound terms can be demanding since they have specific meanings in the culture and language they arise but not necessarily in others. According to Newmark (1988, p.32), "culture-specific items can be recognized quickly since they have a long distance from target language culture, they are peculiar to the source language and cannot be translated easily". He asserts that "cultural differences are more problematic than linguistic differences in the process of translation.

As Mateo (1995) defining irony is a problematic issue. Because the concept of irony is more comprehensive than "saying one thing and meaning another."

Hatim and Mason (1990:99) deal with irony from a translational perspective; they discuss difficulties in translating irony. Winokur (2007) says irony has an uncanny ability to mirror itself: people misunderstand the meaning of the word irony, one of the meanings of the words. The irony is a question that answers itself ("I need this?") Or an answer that question itself. Al-Sayheen (2009), cited from Holman (1972-279), defines irony as: "A broad term referring to the recognition of a reality from the masking appearance verbal irony is a figure of speech in which the actual intent is expressed in words which carry the opposite." Bill Bryson (1984:83) defines irony as "... the use of words to convey a contradiction between the literal and intended meaning".

Wahsheh (2010) investigates the translatability of colloquial expressions in Jordanian daily newspapers. Translating colloquial expressions is a challenge in translation studies compared to other kinds of texts; the translator's task is made more complicated when linguistic and cultural peculiarities characterize colloquial expressions.

Al-Rawabdeh (2009) investigates the translatability of Arabic jokes, touching on the significant problems and obstacles that make their translation challenging.

Translating jokes is a challenge in translation studies. Compared to other kinds of texts, jokes pose a severe problem in translation owing to their unique linguistic and cultural structure. Al-Sayaheen (2009) investigates the translatability of culture-specific ironic expressions from Arabic into English. It also aims at identifying the source of the difficulties student translators face while attempting to render such expressions.

Abu Ismail (2009) examines the cultural problems in translating Palestine folktales into English; the study concludes that the Arabic cultural expressions and idioms are difficult to translate into English because of the cultural gap between the two different environments. The study also concludes that some of the expressions were problematic because they are based upon social or religious standards that are not shared between the Arab culture and the English cultures. Harahsheh (2008) studies the challenges that may face translators as they try to convey the semantic meaning and pragmatic effect of the cultural expressions that appear in tribal jurisdiction terms. The study shows referential gaps facing translating tribal expressions, such as footnoting and paraphrasing. Al-Qassas (2008) conducted a study on translating newspaper opinion articles. This study evaluates the English/ Arabic translation of a sample of journalistic opinion articles published in Jordanian newspapers regarding translation accuracy and faithfulness to the original text. Finally, O'moush (2003) sheds light on Jordanian colloquial idiomatic expressions from two perspectives, linguistic and cultural. The study aims to explain many colloquial idiomatic expressions commonly used by Jordanians, help non-native speakers of Arabic understand and use such expressions, and explain and analyze the lexicon and cultural backgrounds.

Method

Data Collection

This study employed a qualitative method to analyze how translators translate several sarcastic and ironic expressions that are randomly selected from Al-Zoubi's corner in Al-Rai daily. They have been given to 20 M.A. students at Jadara University; to translate from Arabic into English. (See appendix 1). Students' translations have been qualitatively analyzed and discussed regarding acceptability and the level of understandability of ironic expressions in the original text. Furthermore, the translation has been referred to and assessed by three native speakers of English who judged the comprehensibility of the translated items.

Findings & Discussion

The present section presents the study's findings and the evaluation of translation equivalences in translating ironic expressions in Arabic newspaper editorials and to what extent Jordanian respondents captured the ironic message(s) in the original text. Along with the discussion on translating ironic expressions.

Table 1: Translation of the first Arabic ironic expressions

Source Arabic ironic expressions	الشَّادِينَ عَلَى آبَاطِهِم
Transliteration	alshaddyn ealaa abatihim
Students' English Translation	A: Too nervous.
	B: Those who are stressed.
	C: Very angry but determined men.

The first example in this discussion is the Arabic term الشَّادِينَ عَلَى آبَاطِهِم which has been translated differently into these translations: A: Too nervous, B: Those who are stressed, and C: Very angry but determined men.

These translations have depended on the literal meaning of the original text. None of the translations above have dealt accurately with the original message intended by the original S.L. text. In Jordanian daily conversations and discourse, this expression is always said when the speaker describes some people, generally in high positions in the country and most of whom are decision-makers. He describes these people as always screaming and saying very enthusiastic speeches as if they are the only people in the country. However, they would not keep the same enthusiasm once vigorously tested. So, translating this irony literally or using an ideational equivalence, such as in C, would lead to great damage and distortion in the original meaning of the item.

The first translation, A, describes a manner that is not explicitly stated in the utterance and, therefore, may not be accurate enough to render the message. This translation depended on the item's general context but ignored the original's sense. Doing so will lead to losing the original's beauty and aesthetic value. Similarly, translation B resorted to defining the text rather than coming up with a precise equivalence that renders the function of the original. Here, the translation may only be successful if we sacrifice the content and structure. The translator's resort to defining the original text will make the T.L. text lengthier and might have some redundancies that will negatively affect the discourse.

At this place, it is good to think of a translation that ensures translating a mixture of form and content. The suggested translation might be people who create fuss because it indicates that these people typically value words, not deeds; they never did something that might reflect upon their good intentions to work and achieve. All they care about is a fuss. This translation matches Schleiermacher's notion that it supports sense-for-sense translation rather than Dryden's word-for word-translation. Here, translating the sense will first help maintain the naturalness of the original text and then render the exact message of the Arabic text so that the sense of irony is not lost. However, because the present researcher is not bicultural and the English language and culture are not that familiar, there might be a better equivalence that captures the same message as the original.

Table 2: Translation of the second Arabic ironic expressions

Source Arabic ironic expressions	الطَّبْطَبَةُ عَلَى الْمُخْطِئِينَ
Transliteration	altabtabat ealaa almukhtiiyn
Students' English Translation	A: rubbing the sinners' shoulders.

	B: turning a blind eye toward wrongdoers.
	C: to forget and forgive the errant.

The following example in this study is *الطبطبة على المخطئين* which has been translated into: A: rubbing the sinners' shoulders, B: turning a blind eye toward wrongdoers and C: to forget and forgive the errant.

At the beginning, it is notable that translation B makes a good sense in this regard. The translation looks very accurate and to the point. This expression typically describes people who try to intentionally forgive those who commit big mistakes and different names such as mercy, forgiveness, and sympathy when they do not deserve to be forgiven. People in high positions keep patting the shoulders of their bosses or even the ones who have less rank than them. They would not even worry about their mistakes; when they are detected, they would be forgiven.

Similarly, translation A captures a similar message in the original, but the choice of the expression sinners gives the translation a sense of a religious point of view. However, these people did not commit religious mistakes, but they committed social and political ones. So, although the translation renders the content, it does not render the real essence of the original text. Translation C in contrast fails pragmatically to render the original message, but it ideationally succeeds in capturing the idea itself. In this regard, translation B succeeds in rendering the message of the original ironic expression in both form and content, so no meaning or, to be more accurate, no distortion took place.

Table 3: Translation of the third Arabic ironic expressions

Source Arabic ironic expressions	كما ان الشمس لا تغطي بغربال
Transliteration	kama an alshams la tughataa bighirbal
Students' English Translation	A: as the sun cannot be hidden by a sieve.
	B: right is might.
	C: Just as the sun will out, the truth will always prevail.

Another example that really looks perplexing and confusing for translators and readers as well as *كما ان الشمس لا تغطي بغربال* which has been translated differently as A: as the sun cannot be hidden by a sieve, B: right is might and C: Just as the sun will out, the truth will always prevail.

Clearly, these translations render the exactness of the message. The originality of this proverb is that although people might try to hide the truth, they cannot succeed forever. Truth sooner or later will come out and prevail. This might be because of the nature of the creator, who always creates justice between all creatures and human beings. It is noted that all translators employ different successful equivalences that translate the message of the item under consideration. All translations focus on the eventual prevailing of truth at the end of everything even though it might be late sometimes. Now because the nature of this ironic expression is common knowledge to everyone and to every culture, it is reasonable to notice that it is understandable. So, the translations did the job.

Translation A, as a sieve cannot hide the sun, is translated literally. In other words, the translator employed word-for-word equivalence, which successfully rendered the message. Of course, this translation has succeeded because it is common knowledge and shared experience within all cultures, a notion that might be generalized. We can conclude here that all data and information of this kind could be translated formally. In other words, the translation succeeds by translating the form and the content regardless of the idea or the function of the original. Still, Translation B, which functionally translated the item succeeded in giving a similar function for the same item. It suggested a translation in the target language culture with the exact meaning. In this regard, the present researcher values this translation just to avoid attempting to lose the original text's sense. That is, to avoid ambiguity in the T.L., translators should in such cases, render the function of the expression, although both render the message.

Translation C, Just as the sun will out; the truth will always prevail, is meant to be translated ideationally. In other words, it is meant to translate the idea away from the structure of the original. Although the translation makes sense and explains the message, it violates the text's rules. The text is meant to be sarcastic and ironic, and a translation that defines rather than translates negatively affects the text. So, ideational equivalence, like formal equivalence, successfully renders the idea but sacrifices the structure. Contrary to what I argued at the beginning about the reliability of formal or word-for-word equivalence, I still argue that functional equivalence might be the best resort with such expressions, expressions that show commonalities among cultures and that are very familiar in all cultural traditions.

Table 4: Translation of the fourth Arabic ironic expressions

Source Arabic ironic expressions	حطّ ابطنك بطيخة صيفي
Transliteration	ht abtanuk batikhah sayfi
Students' English Translation	A: Place a watermelon in your belly.
	B: be cool.
	C: There's nothing to worry about.

The next example that sheds light on the fact that translators should avoid translating literally is the ironic expression حطّ ابطنك بطيخة صيفي. Translators have dealt with this item differently by using different kinds of equivalence and different translation strategies, once by translating it literally, once ideationally, and another functionally. These translations are: A: Place a watermelon in your belly, B: be cool and C: There's nothing to worry about.

Translated have depended entirely on the text to capture these meanings. However, some of their translations could have made more sense, although it might be understandable in the target language. For example, translation A literally translates the item as "place a watermelon in your belly." This statement is usually uttered when one feels worried about a particular situation. That is, someone is trying to comfort someone by telling him that his or her matter is like a piece of cake and that all he or she has to do is relax and be calm because there are no terrible consequences. People who know very little about the significance of the summer watermelon will not be able to understand the message, especially

those who belong to a different culture. However, adding the literal lexicon of watermelon in the original text will complicate the understanding of the original text. For readers who belong to another culture translation, A will give a different message than the original. They will need clarification, and the existence of this kind of fruit will be perplexing, too. So, literal translation or formal equivalence in this regard will fail to render the message of the original item because it will sound vague to people who belong to a different culture.

Translation B is a good one here. The translator tried to create a functional equivalence by appropriately finding equivalence to the intended message. Be cool is a good translation because it gives the impression that the speaker is trying to relieve the addressee by telling him or her that her issue is not that complicated and that he or she should not expect harmful consequences in return. Translation C, there is nothing to worry about, does render the idea, but it caused significant distortion to the original structure of the item. It also affected the naturalness of the item when the translators changed it from a culture-specific item into an explanation, negatively affecting the original message's beauty. So, here only functional equivalence works better than all other equivalence because it appropriately sends the message Al Zoubi wants to deliver. However, both ideational equivalence and formal equivalence might capture some parts of the message, but they will not be good options.

Table 5: Translation of the fifth Arabic ironic expressions

Source Arabic ironic expressions	خط لرق
Transliteration	khabt lizaq
Students' English Translation	A: suddenly.
	B: as a sudden.
	C: intruding/uninvited.

The following example that I will comment on is خط لرق which is a very culture-specific expression that also expresses sudden activity or an act that is not well arranged. Of course, its tone is critical and touches of sarcasm. Nevertheless, most translations successfully translated the idea in the original text by showing a surprising act. These translations are: A: suddenly, B: as a sudden and C: intruding/uninvited.

Translations A and B render the neutral message existent in the sarcastic expression. However, they do not render the unwelcome that is implicit in the message. This item indicates that the doer of the action did not make any preparations for his or her act, which was a complete surprise for the hearers or the audience. Translation C, in contrast, partially succeeds in translating some parts of the meaning and fails in a different part. It denotes that the doer of the action did not make suitable arrangements for his act and acted very intrudingly to the extent that the receivers of the action did not welcome his or her way of behavior. Translating this item requires a mixture of sudden and unwelcome acts, such as thoughtless and inconsiderate attempts.

Table 6: Translation of the sixth Arabic ironic expressions

Source Arabic ironic expressions	تفققنا مفاجأة أخت أختها
Transliteration	tafaqaena mufaja'at 'ukht 'ukhtiha
Students' English Translation	A: surprise us.
	B: a real shock.
	C: Casting startling revelations on us.

The next item is culture-specific and could hardly be understood by any nation or people except for Jordanians. This item is تفققنا مفاجأة أخت أختها which definitely should not be translated literally or word for word translation because it will come up with very confusing translations such as, will blow us up with a surprise a sister of its sister. This translation is awkward and unclear. It is also funny and pointless. Our translators who belong to this culture and live it are familiar with such expressions and use them daily. They translated these items as follows: A: surprise us, B: a real shock and C: Casting startling revelations on us.

The translators were misled by the context, which explicitly talks about a surprise, but they needed to comprehend that the item under question functions as an adjective for a surprise. The expression تفققنا مفاجأة أخت أختها is intended to show empathy for the activity or for the situation that is going on. This expression is also used for emphasis and certainty because it implies that the speaker is trying to exaggerate the size of the surprise. A good translation might be an adjective that corresponds well with the TLT. Ideational equivalence at this point could be a perfect option. The best ideational translation could be remarkable or stunning. Translation C, in contrast, shows no correspondence with the original because it has nothing to do with revelations. So, it fails pragmatically to render the exact message of the item. In other words, it has nothing that has to do with revelations. Here, I have to point to Dryden's idea that focuses on the necessity of paraphrasing once translators are stuck or fail to capture the whole intended meaning with the equivalences available for them, so resorting to ideas such as paraphrase or free translation could solve the problem. Similarly, it is also necessary to point to the notion of emotiveness; it is vital to render the emotional and emotive sense, although it looks ironic here.

Here, this expression can only be translated heavily depending on the contextual debate that clarifies the message because the word-for-word translation strategy can never render the sense of the ironic expression. So, competent translators and professional translators should exert extra effort in translating the cultural element in the text and not only depend on the lexicon and phraseology of the item.

Table 7: Translation of the seventh Arabic ironic expressions

Source Arabic ironic expressions	حك لي تا أحك لك
Transliteration	hikk li ta ahk lak
Students' English Translation	A: Rub to me, I will rub for you.
	B: scratch my back; I will scratch your back.

	C: Your scratch my back and I will scratch yours.
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The next item which belongs to ironic expressions is *حك لي تا أحك لك*. This expression, by and large, describes the status of most people in Jordanian society. It denotes that people will not do any service or favor for others unless they receive something in return for that service or favor. So, they keep uttering this to remind the addressee that he has to do something good if he or she expects something good. Translations for this item were: A: Rub to me, I will rub for you, B: scratch my back; I will scratch your back and C: Your scratch my back, and I will scratch yours.

Noticeably, all translations depend entirely on literal translation in rendering the expression. However, they all needed to grasp the appropriate idea that should have been reported in the original text. Blindly depending on the literal equivalence will lead to inevitable confusion and misunderstanding. For example, hearers from other cultures might think of the situation as sexual behavior. So, it is good to translate these expressions based on culturally and internationally recognized paradigms to avoid confusion and perplexity.

The three translations should not have resorted to literal translations but should have resorted to functional ones. For example, a tit-for-tat is an expression that also exists in western culture and accurately renders the exact message intended by the author. So, translators did not research properly before they started translating these expressions because, once again, it should be reminded that translators should be bicultural and bilingual. In this regard, the translations focused on the idea and ignored other considerations, such as form and structure.

Table 8: Translation of the eighth Arabic ironic expressions

Source Arabic ironic expressions	تشوطينا
Transliteration	tashawtahuna
Students' English Translation	A: Tampering with us.
	B: victimize.
	C: Brutally attack us.

One of the most difficult ironic expressions, which also sounds and read very hard for even people of the same culture is *تشوطينا* which means that the speaker has lived or underwent harsh conditions that led him to suffer hard times. The speaker utters this expression to express his dissatisfaction about the current status, here politically and economically, that lead them to terrible consequences in these two areas. Surprisingly, the translations did an excellent job of rendering the appropriateness of the message, but they lacked emotiveness. That is, the expression *تشوطينا* is very Jordanian specific and could be rarely used anywhere else but in Jordan, so it has an exceptional function in our culture. The competent translator, in turn, should be able to translate the emotiveness attached to this ironic expression because not doing so will negatively affect the specificity of the text and create some distortion. Still, it is worth looking at the

translations in hand. These translations are: A: Tampering with us, B: victimize and C: Brutally attack us.

Most translations move around the idea of the original message, but none accurately renders the psychological effect of this message. For example, translation A, meant to be ideationally translated, roughly renders the lexical item but does not render its spirit of it. Therefore, it might not be considered a good resort here. Similarly, translation B needs to fit within the lexical context and suit the contextual debate that originated in the original. However, the translation partially renders the idea that the targeted people have become like victims because of experiencing particular circumstances that gave them hard times. However, translation C succeeds in comprehending the true sense of the message of the origin by combining an explanation that shows the current harsh situation. So, this again proves that the choice of sense-from-sense translation or domesticized translation will help the reader get more involved in the text and keep the translation much more faithful to that of the original. At this point, it is necessary to focus on the notion that in dealing with translations that deal with texts of unique features such as Ironical expressions, translators must not only render words but also, as so many scholars previously argued, he or she should render the sense of the expression.

Table 9: Translation of the ninth Arabic ironic expressions

Source Arabic ironic expressions	الخص
Transliteration	Ekhs
Students' English Translation	A: I point.
	B: shame on you
	C: damn you

Now, let me move from direct, ironic expressions to some ones that are dysphemistic. The next category of ironic items lies under expressions that are not euphemistic. The first expression is *الخص* which is a kind of a curse, and it is said in our culture to depreciate and belittle certain people who act in mean and impolite, illegal, and disrespectful manners. Translators have come up with different translations, however. These translations include A: I point, B: shame on you, and C: damn you.

Translation A needs to include the idea of the item. The translator has opted for his pattern of understanding the item and therefore, he came up with a completely different understanding. Further, it might mean that the translator may not be familiar to this item and therefore, he falls victim to mistaken thoughts and ideas. Resorting to translating the function of the item resulted in producing good translation is was the case with translations B and C. So, it is axiomatic to conclude that such expressions could be translated both ideationally and functionally because at any case, they will render the intended message which will also highlighted by the tone and intonation of the utterance.

Once we want to make sure that our translations make sense and are understandable, we could back-translate these expressions from English into Arabic and judge them because, at this level, we make sure that our translations

are valid and reliable. It is also significant to point out that because the translators belong to different regions in Jordan, results may vary, and it is, unsurprisingly, to score different rates and scales of comprehensibility.

Conclusion

The current study explores the translation equivalences in translating ironic expressions in Arabic newspaper editorials and to what extent Jordanian respondents can capture the ironic message(s) in the original text. The findings indicate that the students employed various translation techniques, namely; word-for-word, literal translation, functional equivalence, and ideational equivalence methods, to render the meaning of various ironic expressions in Arabic newspaper editorials.

It is tough to translate some culture-specific and culture-dependent expressions that we call or refer to as ironic expressions, so translators should be fully aware of the two cultures, the source language and the target one. We cannot say that translators must always use the same translation strategy for translating ironic expressions such as the ones said by Al Zoubi. In other words, each case might be different depending on the quality of the text.

However, some items always require functional equivalence as the best translation strategy because it could be the safest and best in the T.L. After all, we want to maintain the meaning and the content. Translators should sometimes use intelligent techniques to avoid offending people's habits, cultures, and norms. Translators should always put in mind the reader before they translate. The reader we found is an essential part of the translation process because he is the one who will assess our translations, and he or she is the one who will be the target audience, so he should be distinct from the process of translation.

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Appendix 1: The test

No.	The Expression	Translate A	Translate B	Translate C
1.	الشاذين على أباظهم	Too nervous	Those who were so stressed	Very angry but determined men
2.	الطبطبة على المخطئين	Rubbing on the sinner shoulders	Turning a blind eye to wrongdoers	To forgive and forget the errant
3.	كما أن الشمس لا تغطي بغربال	as the sun cannot be hidden by a sieve	right is might	Just as the sun will out, the truth will always prevail.
4.	"حط ابطنك بطيخة صيفي	Place a watermelon in your belly	be cool	There's nothing to worry about
5.	خبط لرق	suddenly	as a sudden	Uninvited/ intruding
6.	تفققنا" مفاجأة أخت أختها	Surprise us	a real chock	Casting startling revelations on us
7.	حك لي تا أحك لك	Rub to me I'll rub to you	scratch my back , I will scratch your back	Your scratch my back and I will scratch yours
8.	تشوطينا	Tampering with us	Victimize	Brutally attack us
9.	اخص	I point	shame on you	Damn you