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Idioms as Daunting Cultural Elements for Translators to Translate: The Case of Collins's *The Hunger Games*

Hamidreza Abdi[1]

* Correspondence:
hamidreza57abdi@gmail.com
1. MD Freelance Researcher, Iran

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Abstract

The present study aimed at investigating the translation strategies the Persian translator adopted for idioms from English into Persian. To do so, qualitative descriptive research, with special attention to idiom translation and to the way such problematic items were translated from English into Persian, was applied. Then, a comparison was made between idioms, which were extracted from Collins's (2008) *The Hunger Games*, and their translation made by Akhtar (n.d.) according to Baker's (1992) taxonomy of translation strategies, namely *using an idiom of similar meaning and form*, *using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form*, *translation by paraphrase*, and *translation by omission*. Moreover, the chi-square test (X^2) was used to see whether there is a significant relationship between the type of translation strategies and the number of them used by the Persian translator. The results revealed that Akhtar employed all four of Baker's strategies to overcome idioms, of which the last two strategies were the most/least used strategies by him respectively. In addition, he preferred to apply the TT-oriented strategies rather than the ST-oriented ones. Misusing the TT-oriented strategies, in this case *translation by paraphrase*, did not allow him to create a good sense of some idioms in the TT and communicate effectively with the target audience. Thus, the translations he produced were not mainly acceptable and the target readers did not enjoy them to a great extent. The findings of the current study should be beneficial to translation students, newly researchers, and translation teachers. This study also suggested some pedagogical implications that could be helpful for those who benefit from the results of the study.

Keywords: translation, idioms, Baker's taxonomy of translation strategies

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1. Introduction

Translation is a means of transport used to transfer culture from one nation to another. In approval, it has an essential role to play in "increasing awareness and understanding among diverse cultures and nations" (Hassan, 2011, p. 2). According to Abdi (2022a), translation is "a unique opportunity given to the target readers to become familiar with the foreign culture" (p. 26). Sofianou (2007) points to the communicative mission of translation and considers it "cross-cultural communication" (p. 10). This is because translation is used to communicate in "translated messages within a certain cultural linguistic system" as Toury (1980, p. 17) implies. Thus, translation contains various types of culture-specific items, such as idioms and allusions that pose serious challenges to the translator.

Idioms are artistic expressions of the language whose real meanings are not the same as their literal meanings as Al-Shawi and Mahadi (2012) state. In this relation, Ahmadi (2017) argues that it is mainly impossible to grasp an idiom's sense through the meanings of the words that constitute it due to its origin in a certain culture. This creates a complex problem for the translator who does not have an in-depth knowledge of both cultures. Thus, s/he should be bicultural rather than bilingual and be familiar with the cultural interaction made between languages via translation as Sun and Li (2018) discuss. The translator's unfamiliarity with two cultures propels him/her towards another problem: finding an adequate equivalent for an idiom.

Lvovskaya (2000) believes that the communicative equivalence of two texts is the main problem of any translation. This problem becomes severe in the translation of idioms due to conveying the culture-sensitive notions of the idiom from the source language (SL) into the target language (TL) through a target equivalent as Teilanyo (2007) implies. In addition, the context in which an idiom is used needs to be taken into consideration because, as Balfaqeeh (2009) describes, a TL equivalence may be found for an idiom but there is a difference between the context of the SL and the TL. Such a difference may lead the translator to find no equivalent for an idiom. According to Adelnia and Dastjerdi (2011), it does not imply that the translator should ignore the idiom and not translate it.

To deal with idioms, the translator requires a powerful tool: appropriate translation strategies. In other words, s/he should make the right choice among translation strategies proposed by different scholars in this regard. To have good use of such tools, the translator needs to possess strategic competence which is defined by PACTE (2000) as "all the individual procedures, conscious and unconscious, verbal and non-verbal, used to solve the problems found during the translation process" (p. 102). This led him/her to find the suitable equivalent for an idiom and communicate with the target readers in the best possible way and enhance their understanding of that idiom. The translator's inability to choose an adequate translation strategy and his/her limited knowledge of making good use of that strategy is considered a shortage and causes a knotty problem for him/her as Abdi (2019) argues.

From classifications of translation strategies, Baker (1992) presents relevant taxonomy for translators to cope with idioms. Under her model, the present study investigated the translation strategies the Persian translator adapted for idioms from English into Persian through a comparison between Collins's (2008) *The Hunger Games* and its Persian translation. This led to determining the translator's achievement in translating idioms and communicating with the target audience. The results of the present study should be beneficial to translation students, newly researchers, and translation teachers. To reach the aims of the present study, the researcher searched for the answers to the following questions:

1. Which Baker's translation strategies did the translator employ to deal with idioms?

2. Did the translator successfully translate idioms and enhance the target readers' understanding of such cultural items?

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1 Baker's Taxonomy of Translation Strategies for Idioms

For Baker (1992, p. 63), Idioms are "frozen patterns of language" with the possibility of little or no change in form and also with meanings apart from the words that constitute it. As she states, this makes translation difficult for most translators because they are mostly unattainable to achieve the same sensitivity native speakers may have for manipulating an idiom. In other words, the problem arises if a) there is no equivalent for an idiom in the TL, leading to the loss of various meanings; b) an idiom has a close correspondence in the TL with a different context of use; c) both literal and idiomatic meanings of an idiom used in the source text (ST) at the same time; and/or d) the frequency

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of the use of idioms is different in the SL and the TL, for example, infrequent/frequent use of idioms in news reports and advertisements respectively.

To overcome the thorny problem an idiom creates for the translator, Baker suggests two solutions: recognizing and interpreting an idiom to the best possible ability and conveying various aspects of the meaning of an idiom into the TL. She considers many factors affecting the translation of an idiom. This includes the availability of an idiom with the same meaning in the TL, the importance of special components that constitute an idiom, and the application or non-application of translation strategies employed for idioms. Accordingly, Baker proposes a wide range of translation strategies on the basis of the context an idiom is translated. Her classification is as follows:

1. *Using an idiom of similar meaning and form:* It is used for an idiom in the TL that its meaning roughly corresponds to an idiom in the SL with the same equivalent lexical items.
2. *Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form:* It is appropriate for an idiom in the TL whose meaning is approximately the same as that of the idiom in the SL with a different lexical item.
3. *Translation by paraphrase:* It is considered a common way to translate an idiom if no correspondence is found in the TL or no possibility is for the use of idiomatic language due to differences between the stylistic preferences of the two languages.
4. *Translation by omission:* It is used to omit an idiom due to finding no close correspondence in the TL.

2.2 Recent Studies in the Field

Considering the importance of idioms and the challenge they pose for translators, the number of recent studies in the field is not notable. It is rather to say, the main focus of researchers in the field has not been mainly on idioms but other types of cultural items have been taken into their consideration. For example, Abdi (2022b) examined the way humorous items were translated from English into Persian. The results indicated the success of the translator in dealing with humor and creating a high-quality sense of humor through the TT-oriented strategies. Alimardani and Behtash (2021) investigated translation strategies the translator adapted for the translation of allusions from English into Persian. Based on the results, the translator had more use of the TT-oriented strategies, such as *modifying* strategy, than the ST-oriented ones, for instance, *retentive* strategy, making his translation unpleasant and distracting.

Regarding idiom translation, Abdelaal and Alazzawie (2019) identified Baker's (1992) translation strategies the translator applied for translating idioms to see whether the meaning of idioms was correctly conveyed to the TT. As the results illustrated, the translator was able to make a good sense of most idioms in the TT. In the same study, Wicaksono and Wahyuni (2018) made an attempt to find translation strategies used in translating idioms in Indonesia into English. The findings revealed that *translation by paraphrase, translation by omission,* and *using an idiom of similar meaning and form* were the most used strategies. The most recent study on idioms was conducted by Ediwarman et al. (2022). Their study aimed at finding out the strategies the students used to cope with idioms. As the results showed, the students preferred to employ the TT-oriented strategies rather than the ST-oriented ones, leading them to produce less accurate translations.

In the case of domestic studies, Seifi et al. (2022) devoted their attention to idioms in dubbing and analyzed the translator's performance in rendering English idioms. The results illustrated the frequent and infrequent use of TT and ST-oriented strategies respectively. In another study, Moghaddam and Rad (2021) probe translation strategies the translator employed to translate idioms from Persian into English. According to the results, the translator liked to be faithful to the TT structure via the TT-oriented strategy. In the same context, Miandoab (2018) attempted to determine the translation strategies the translators applied for idioms in dubbing. The results indicated the most use of the ST-oriented strategies and the orientation of the translators towards the ST structure.

3. Methodology

3.1 Corpus

The first part of the book *The Hunger Games: Trilogy* written by Collins (2008) alongside its Persian translation was considered the corpus of the present study. At the first print, the book had 50,000 copies, which increased twice and reached 200000 copies. This led it to include in the New York Times Best Seller list in November 2008 and made it one of the most popular book series in the world. It also encompasses a wide range of idioms that may cause serious

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challenges for the translator. Moreover, Collins is best known as the author of a series of dystopian books for young adults. That is why her book was deemed suitable for the current study. At the time of analysis, the Persian electronic version of Collins's *The Hunger Games: Trilogy* was only available to the researcher, which was translated by Mani Akhtar (n.d.).

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The present study is qualitative descriptive research that was focused on idiom translation and on the way such challenging items were translated from English into Persian. For data collection, the novel *The Hunger Games: Trilogy* was carefully examined to extract idioms. The same procedure was applied to take out the Persian translation of each idiom. Then a comparison was made between each idiom and its relative translation to find out the translation strategies the translator employed for idioms based on Baker's (1992) taxonomy of translation strategies. This led to determining the translator's success in making sense of each idiom and communicating with the target audience. The frequencies and percentages of idioms were calculated and illustrated in tabulation form. In addition, the chi-square test (X^2) was used to see whether there is a significant relationship between the type of translation strategies and the number of them used by the Persian translator.

4. Results

Table 1 indicates the types of Baker's (1992) translation strategies Akhtar (n.d.) employed to translate each idiom from English into Persian. The number of Idioms extracted from the novel *The Hunger Games: Trilogy* was 17.

Table 1. Baker's translation strategies employed by Akhtar for idioms

N	ST	TT	Type of Strategy
1	turn a blind eye	کور می کنند	Translation by paraphrase
2	get the ball rolling	کنار گوی چرخان نام ها برساند	Translation by paraphrase
3	leaving the weight of the world on my sister's fragile shoulders	وزن تمام دنیا را روي شانه هاي نحیف خواهر کوچکم گذاشته بود	Using an idiom of similar meaning and form
4	I have kept my side of the bargain with Haymitch	قبلا چک و چونه ها را با هایمچ زده بودم	Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form
5	to be flying high	بلند پرواز باشد	Using an idiom of similar meaning and form
6	this rubs me the wrong way	مرا به سمت اشتباهی سوق می دهد	Translation by paraphrase
7	I am a stone's throw from the biggest idiot	----------	Translation by omission
8	Has Peeta revealed his true colors?	آیا پیتاِ خود واقعیش را رو کرده بود ؟	Using an idiom of similar meaning and form

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9	it's an injury in a whole different class	جراحتی از نوعی کاملا متفاوت باشد	Translation by paraphrase
10	gives me a sense of security	به من اعتماد به نفس می دهد	Translation by paraphrase
11	tomorrow the tables will turn	فردا نوبت من خواهد رسید	Translation by paraphrase
12	knocks the wind out of me	نفسم را بند آورد	Using an idiom of similar meaning and form
13	may the odds be ever in your favor	موفق باشید و شانس همراه تان باشد	Translation by paraphrase
14	I stand a chance of doing it now	واقعا فکر می کردم شانسش را دارم	Translation by paraphrase
15	they love at stake	هیچ یک از نزدیکانشان در خطر نبودند.	Translation by paraphrase
16	to keep tabs on the population	از آمار جمعیت کشور مطلع شود	Translation by paraphrase
17	a pin drop in the City Circle now	حالا شهر میخکوب شده بود	Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form

Table 2 shows the frequencies and percentages of translation strategies Akhtar (n.d.) applied to deal with idioms. According to Table 2, *translation by paraphrase* ($n = 10$) and *translation by omission* ($n = 1$) were the most/least used strategies by the translator respectively.

Table 2. Frequencies and percentages of translation strategies Akhtar employed for idioms

N	Translation Strategy	*f*	*%*
1	Translation by paraphrase	۱۰	۵۹.0
2	Using an idiom of similar meaning and form	۴	۲۴.0
3	Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form	۲	۱۲.0
4	Translation by omission	1	6.0
Total		17	100.0

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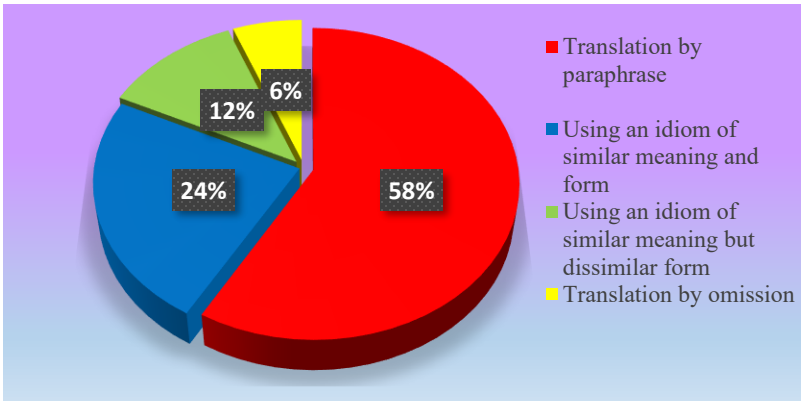


Figure 1. Percentages of translation strategies Akhtar employed for idioms

4.1 Chi-Square (X^2) Test

Chi-square (X^2) test is used to see whether there is a significant relationship between categorical variables. Thus, the X^2 was run to find out whether the association between the type of translation strategies and the number of them employed by the translator is significant. As Table 3 reveals, there was no significant relationship between the type of translation strategies and the number of them used by Akhtar at .05 level of significance ($p = .99$, $p > .05$).

Table 3. Summary of the Chi-square test for the translation strategies and the total number of them used by Akhtar

Types of Translation Strategies	*N*	X^2	*df*	*p*
n				
4	17	.002	3	.99

5. Discussion

As the results indicate, Akhtar (n.d.) employed all of Baker's (1992) translation strategies, including *using an idiom of similar meaning and form*, *using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form*, *translation by paraphrase*, and *translation by omission*. From the translation strategies proposed by Baker, he showed a strong interest in *translation by paraphrase* strategy and took less of an interest in *translation by omission* strategy. The overuse of *translation by paraphrase* strategy made him unable to deal with idioms successfully and make a clear sense of each idiom because such a strategy leads the translator to produce an inaccurate translation of the individual idiom.

For example, the idiom *turn a blind eye* was incorrectly translated into کور می کند via the same strategy which neither conveys the exact meaning of the idiom nor enhances the readers' understanding of the text in which that idiom is used. This is because the idiom *turn a blind eye* means pretending not to notice which has nothing to do with the TT equivalent کور می کند proposed by the translator. Such an equivalent clarifies the meaning of *someone who is unable to see and has become blind*. When the meaning of the idiom *get the ball rolling* is looked for, it becomes clear that the translation provided by Akhtar (n.d.) کنار گوی چرخان نام ها برساند is largely unrelated to this idiom. The reason is that the proper meaning of the idiom *get the ball rolling* is *to make a start* or *to start an activity in order to do something*; whereas the TT equivalent کنار گوی چرخان نام ها برساند implies something like *get to the rotating ball of names* that is different with what the idiom means even in the context in which it is used.

The use of *translation by paraphrase* may be suitable for idioms where there is a possibility to achieve their meanings literally. In other words, the literal translation of the idiom is somehow close to its real meaning. For instance, the idiom *in a different class* in the following statement *it's an injury in a whole different class* refers to a thing that is much better than the other or differs/varies with another thing. Such an idiom was somewhat translated literally into

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کاملا متفاوت, which greatly conveyed its meaning. The same happened in the translation of the idiom *gives me a sense of security*. That is, it was mainly translated literally into به من اعتماد به نفس می دهد Moreover, the translator applies *paraphrase* strategy where s/he not only finds no equivalent for the ST item but also, as Duenas (2003) argues, intends to make the item readable to the target audience and not miss the communicative purpose of the original author.

Overall, Akhtar (n.d.) employed the ST-oriented strategies, namely *translation by paraphrase*, *using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form*, and *translation by omission*, in preference to the TT-oriented ones, such as *using an idiom of similar meaning and form*. It is rather to say, his overall strategy for idioms was TT-oriented, leading him to be oriented toward the structure of the TT and be faithful to the target norms. The results of the present study were in line with the study conducted by Ediwarman et al. (2022) in that the TT-oriented strategies were frequently employed by the students for idioms. Moreover, there was a great deal of similarity between the results of the current study and the one done by Wicaksono and Wahyuni (2018). In their study, *translation by paraphrase* was the most used translation strategy. By contrast, the findings of this study were different from the results derived from Miandoab's (2018) study as the ST-oriented strategies were mostly used by the translators.

The present study presents some pedagogical implications that could be helpful for translation students, newly researchers, and translation students. The recommendation goes for translation students and newly researchers is that they first increase their familiarity with both cultures, allowing them to decode the source idiom well and encode it in the TL in the same way. In doing so, they also need to have an in-depth knowledge of a wide range of translation strategies to use them appropriately. To achieve this, translation students and newly researchers can attend seminars and workshops held by experts in the field. Self-taught/training is the other option that helps them improve their skill of translation strategies and knowledge about both cultures.

It is kindly suggested that translation teachers devote special attention to cultural competence and transfer competence teaching, as two of the sub-competences of translation competence. The former competence, as Albir and Soler (2016) imply, enables students to acquire bicultural knowledge, encyclopedia knowledge, and subject knowledge; whereas the latter makes them able to "complete the transfer process from the ST to the TT" (PACTE, 2000, p. 102). To implement this, different types of translation assignments, which include cultural items of any kind, should be given to students and asked them to recognize and translate such elements through translation strategies they have been taught.

Future studies can be done on the accuracy of the translation of idioms from Persian into English. In this way, it is possible to determine the types of translation strategies applied to deal with idioms and understand the degree of accuracy and acceptance of such strategies. More comprehensive studies can also be conducted by increasing the number of idioms and using a larger sample size. Moreover, the way Iranian translators tend to translate idioms, and the reason for employing one strategy in preference to another will be investigated through further studies. Finally, some inquiries can be carried out to discover the acceptability of the translation of idioms according to the reader's feedback.

6. Conclusion

Idioms are interesting parts of any language including hidden meanings that can only be grasped by the people of that language. This makes the task of translation more challenging for translators when they face such cultural elements. Thus, the current study made an attempt to investigate the translation strategies the translator adopted to cope with idioms from English into Persian. This led to determining the translator's success in producing a good sense of such items in the TT. Based on the results, Akhtar (n.d.) applied all of Baker's (1992) translation strategies for idioms. This includes *using an idiom of similar meaning and form*, *using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form*, *translation by paraphrase*, and *translation by omission*, of which *translation by paraphrase*, and *translation by omission* were the most/least employed strategies by him respectively. As the results indicate, Akhtar had a preference for *translation by paraphrase* rather than other strategies included in Baker's taxonomy. He also professed more interest in such a TT strategy than other TT-oriented types, such as *using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form*, and *translation by omission*, leading to his failure in some cases. Hence, it is concluded that Akhtar was able to achieve success in the translation of idioms and in enhancing the readers' understanding of idioms to some degree. He had the possibility to enhance his performance in translating idioms by using another strategy that aimed at the target text rather than the translation by paraphrase strategy, which allowed him to use Persian idioms in his translation and also convey the same meaning for the target readers. For example, he could translate the idiom *tomorrow the*

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tables will turn into *گردونه به نوبت* via *using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form* strategy rather than into *فردا نوبت من خواهد رسید* through *translation by paraphrase*. In a sense, the translations he produced were of average quality and he could serve the communicative intention of the source author to a certain extent.

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