

**Translating idiomatic expressions in literary texts:  
Saving the pragmatic meaning**

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## Translating idiomatic expressions in literary texts: Saving the pragmatic meaning

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**Abstract:** This paper investigates a problematic issue in many texts, particularly literary, that is of rendering hidden pragmatic meanings of idiomatic expressions into the TL. In order to arrive at the best strategy to do so from the perspective of the TL audience, in this case native speakers of English, the researcher provided the targeted audience with multiple translations of a single idiomatic expression, in context, and asked them to choose the best suiting translation from their point of view. Baker's strategies for translating idioms was the framework adopted for this study (Baker, 2018). The findings emphasized the importance of conveying the pragmatic meaning of idiomatic expressions with reservation of the aesthetic elements of the text. They also suggested that pragmatic and cultural highlights, in addition to translation strategies curricula, should be part of translation training programs.

**Keywords:** Literary translation; Baker's framework; pragmatic function; translation of idioms.

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## ترجمة العبارات الاصطلاحية في النصوص الأدبية: الحفاظ علي المحتوى الدلالي

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**المستخلص:** تبحث هذه الورقة في إشكالية ترجمة المعاني الدلالية للعبارات الاصطلاحية في العديد من النصوص ، لا سيما الأدبية منها. من أجل الوصول إلى أفضل الاستراتيجيات لترجمة هذا النوع من العبارات من وجهة نظر قارئ النص المترجم، وهم في هذه الحالة الناطقين باللغة الإنجليزية ، قدمت الباحثة للجمهور المستهدف عدداً من الترجمات المختلفة لعبارة اصطلاحية واحدة في سياقات متعددة وطلبت منهم اختبار أنسب ترجمة من وجهة نظرهم. كانت استراتيجيات بيكر لترجمة المصطلحات هي الإطار المعتمد لهذه الدراسة (Baker, 2018). وقد أكدت النتائج على أهمية نقل المعنى الدلالي للتعبيرات الاصطلاحية مع الحفاظ على العناصر الجمالية للنص، كما تبين من الدراسة أهمية توعية طلاب مناهج الترجمة بالاستراتيجيات المتاحة لهم في حال مواجهتهم صعوبات في ترجمة العبارات الاصطلاحية وأهمية مراعاة العناصر الثقافية والدلالية للنص المترجم.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الترجمة الأدبية، إطار عمل بيكر، المحتوى الدلالي، ترجمة العبارات الاصطلاحية.

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## Introduction

Although translation as a process of conveying propositions from one language to another proved to be possible (Hurford, Heasley and Smith, 2007), some aspects of language seem to be highly connected to a specific culture that they become harder to translate. Such items include culture-related expressions, like idioms, whose function seem to be affected by the context where they are used. Thus, even most professional translators sometimes fail to come up with one-to-one equivalents for them. This failure, if we may call it so, may actually be the successful way to approach the translation of such problematic cultural expressions (Tawfiq, 2008).

O'Dell and McCarthy (2010) define idioms as "fixed combinations of words whose meaning is often difficult to guess from the meaning of each individual word" (p.6). According to Olbasa, Raga, and Adola (2017) an idiom is an expression which consists of one word or more with a meaning different from that of its constituent parts. Shojaei (2012) believes that idioms may include some cultural aspects like religious beliefs, superstitions, and certain ideologies pertaining to the people originally from the culture where the idioms come from. According to Martirosyan (2013, p.219) "Idioms share cultural and historical information and broaden people's understanding and manipulation of a language".

Having to translate such expressions in a literary text adds to the problem, because in literary texts it is not just the content that the translator needs to convey, s/he also must attend to the aesthetic elements of the SL text. Kahrizangi and Haddadi (2017) assert that in addition to L1 and L2 sufficient knowledge and competence, translators of literary texts need to be equipped with cultural competence in order to deliver the text properly. Hence comes the importance of this study in arriving at the perfect balance between content and style when translating literary texts. We assume that it is even more important to retain the pragmatic function of the original idiomatic expression over conveying its lexical and structural features into the target language. To verify this

assumption, the researcher consulted native speakers of English in what they believe to be the best and most acceptable technique for translating idioms among the techniques developed by Baker (2018).

## **Literature review**

### **Previous studies**

Aguado-giménez and Pérez-paredes (2005) explored the kind of translation strategies used by undergraduate university students when translating English texts into Spanish. The framework used by the researchers was that developed by Baker in 1992. They found out that when students faced difficulty in translating certain words they relied on the translation strategies that they have learned, which points out to the importance of teaching translation strategies in colleges. Moreover, they emphasized that the teaching of translation courses needs to be based on theoretical grounds as well as classroom experiences which may eventually add to such theories. Such findings support the recommendations of this research which is to incorporate examples from novels and poems written in local dialects in the learning experiences of translation students. By knowing the translation preferences of native speakers of different languages, we can create translation textbooks and syllabi that are more beneficial.

Jaber (2008) investigated the translatability of English metaphors into Iraqi Arabic.

Her underlying assumption was that matching experiences produced by the SL and the TL cultures should make the process of translating metaphors and finding near equivalents possible. To verify her assumption, she analysed a number of English metaphors into the meaning they represent, then borrowed metaphoric equivalents from the local Iraqi dialect. The researcher concluded that cultural experiences are not actually shared, yet speech communities live corresponding cultural experiences, which makes translating metaphors based on their functional equivalence possible. This supports the recommendation made by the present research that in translating idioms

it is more important to retain the pragmatic functional meaning of the original over keeping its literal and structural features.

Al-Masri (2009) explored the factors leading to cultural losses in the translation of Arabic literary texts, and the role of the translator as a vehicle to convey cultural meanings. So, the researcher analysed metaphors, idiomatic expressions, and proverbs in a number of Arabic short stories written by the novelist Youssef Idris alongside their English translations, adopting Pike's etic-emic approach to translation. She concluded that the translation was successful in analysing the communicative meaning but it failed to convey cultural and emotional meanings of the SL text. One of the recommendations put forward by the researcher, and supported by the findings of this study, was for translators to assume the role of the cultural insider to both texts, SL and TL, in order to render a successful translation.

Guerra (2012) examined some of the problems rising in literary translation. She analysed the translations of 96 university students translating cultural terms from English into Spanish and visa versa. One of the major problems that she identified was having many words in the literary text that are deeply rooted in the source culture to the extent that they might not have a proper equivalent in the target language. Therefore, she believes that the act of translating literary texts is merely a way of providing a subversion -not an equivalent- of the source text. The researcher, moreover, described the best translation strategies that a translator can utilize when attempting to translate a literary text, and showed a preference to the use of three translation strategies; namely: borrowing, description, and adaptation, when translating from their mother tongue and into it. Guerra interpreted this preference as an attempt to subversion, and at the same time, preserving the source language.

Shojaei (2012) investigated the obstacles facing translators when dealing with interlingual idiomatic pairs. He adopted Baker's (1992) framework for classification of difficulties and translation strategies in his analysis of English-Turkish and English-Persian equivalent pairs.

Findings of the study suggested that there are a number of factors which need to be considered when translating idiomatic expressions, among which are the socio and meta-linguistic elements, linguistic and stylistic considerations, and cultural aspects.

Prace (2013) investigated cultural specificity in translating Czech cultural-specific expressions in promotional texts into English. He also examined the strategies that need to be used to translate such expressions. He specified the levels translators need to pay attention to such as: the lexical level, collocations and idioms, the textual level, and the pragmatic level. He, then, identified the possible translation strategies to deal with cultural-specific expressions as being: functional equivalent, transposition, synonymy, retention, through translation, translation by less expressive word, adding guidance, translation by omission, and compensation. He concluded that the most frequently used strategies were loan words and generalization, which were not accurate strategies in conveying the meaning. The second most frequently used strategies were cultural substitution, functional equivalent, and particularization. He also found that translators sometimes resort to the use of two strategies at a time in translating cultural-specific expressions.

Samardali, Al Momani, and Kitishat (2013) examined the effect of failure to understanding the pragmatic and cultural meanings of Arabic idioms on rendering inappropriate English translations. The researchers distributed a questionnaire among 20 M.A translation students at Yarmouk University which included some Arabic cultural expressions involving pragmatic or cultural implied meanings. The expressions were selected from a Jordanian short story called "Habilat Bishra". The students were asked to provide suitable equivalents to these expressions. The findings supported the assumption that lack of adequate pragma-linguistic knowledge leads to rendering of inappropriate translations. The participants provided literal translations of the SL expressions ignoring the cultural meanings associated with these expressions. This point is further investigated in this study, taking

into consideration native speakers' perspectives on the strategies they believe to be suitable for translating idiomatic expressions.

Ardeshiri and Zarafshan (2014) conducted a study on the work of 30 English-Persian Iranian translation students. Their errors were counted and analyzed in order to find out the source of the most prevalent errors. It was observed that most of the mistakes were caused by misunderstanding of the SL pragmatic meanings, which refers to the cultural and contextual meanings that go beyond the literal meaning of the expression, and hence occurs incomprehensive rendering of the message. To compensate for lack of pragmatic knowledge, the students resorted to different translation techniques, such as; omission, addition, and paraphrasing. The researchers interviewed lecturers of translation who claimed that this lack of knowledge is caused by various reasons among which are: problems in the reading comprehension skills, grammatical incompetence, and lack of interest in the SL author's main message.

Farghal and Almanna (2014) investigated the importance of incorporating pragmatic concepts like presuppositions, speech acts, and politeness in the translation field. To do so, they examined a number of Arabic translated texts, comparing the SL text with the TL text in order to prove that hidden pragmatic meanings affect the essence of the message that needs to be translated, and the quality of the translated texts. They concluded that pragmatic aspects of any text are very essential to the meaning and therefore provide a challenge to the translator. They also advised a more pragmatic approach to translation where translators' attention is drawn to the importance of rendering the implicit meanings of the text as well as the explicit meanings, a recommendation that goes in line with the results of the present study.

Alwafai (2015) analyzed two Arabic translations of the novella *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway. The purpose of her study was to investigate the problems of translating English literary texts into Arabic and the strategies adopted by Arab translators to carry out the

translation task, in addition to suggesting some guidelines for better practices in the field of Arabic literary translation. In her analysis, the researcher adopted Baker's theory of equivalence, focusing mainly on two levels of equivalence; word and collocation. The findings showed that translations of literary texts should consider both contextual and cultural factors in the SL and TL. Moreover, the researcher recommended that untranslatable problematic culture-specific items could be tackled in various ways such as paraphrasing, rewording, lexicalizing new concepts, and adapting them culturally.

Daghoughi and Hashemian (2016) analysed the English translation of Jalal Al-Ahmad "by the pen" by Ghanoonparvar (1988) in the light of Newmark's proposed taxonomy for translating culture-specific items (1988). They recognized that the translator used all of Newmark's strategies in dealing with the cultural specific items found in the novel with modulation and paraphrase being the least frequently used strategies, and functional equivalent as the most frequently used one. They claimed that the functional equivalent strategy is the most effective one in translating literary texts with many culture-specific items because it makes the translated text comprehensive to the target language reader.

Hussein and Mhammad (2016) investigated the effect of context on translating the pragmatic meaning in three different translations of the famous Shakespearean tragedy 'Macbeth'. Their investigation focused on three main points; the extent to which translators restricted the context of the original text, how well did the translators resolve pragmatic ambiguity of the text, and whether translators were able to provide appropriate equivalents for items in the original text. They dealt with four types of context in their study; situational, cultural, sentimental, and linguistic. They tried to arrive at the impact of each on the translation process. Results showed that pragmatic ambiguity arises from translators' misunderstanding of SL contextual factors. They also found that semantic and communicative approaches can both be successfully adopted in literary translations. Finally, they concluded

that the type of context most translators relied on was situational context with some reference to the other three types.

Kahrizsangi and Haddadi (2017) examined the challenges facing literary translators and attempts to find solutions to them in order to improve literary translation competence through enabling students to "translate into the target language the content, expressive power, language style, and an equal function of the literary text" (p.350). To carry out this task, the researchers applied the function-focused theory developed by Nord (2008) to a translation of an anecdote by Heinrich von Kleist. They believed that the challenges facing the translator stem from the style of the target text, the aim of translation, cultural differences between source language and target language, and/or their pragmatic competence. Therefore, the authors suggested that a translator needs to identify the text type, its syntactic and stylistic structures, and the aim of the translation in order to decide which translation method will best suit the specific text case. They also believe in the importance of understanding the function and the style of the source text in addition to the stylistic, syntactic and expressive tools of the source text's author in order to achieve a competent equivalent in the target language.

Horvathova and Tabackova (2018) examined the translatability of multiword idiomatic expressions in the German novel *Wer einmal aus dem Blechnapf frißt* by Hans Fallada's into Slovak. They believed that in literary work, idioms are used to add local, time, and social meanings to the text. Thus, they attempted to define the criteria that were applied and to outline the strategies that were used in the translated version of the novel to arrive at a comprehensive translation. They concluded that the translator managed to preserve the artistic style of the SL by using idiomatic TL expressions whenever possible, with resorting to compensation as a balancing strategy when needed. Finally, the researchers suggested further investigation of the English translation of the novel in order to find out the effect of cultural closeness or lack thereof on the translation of literary texts.

Aldanani (2019) investigated the translation strategies used in the translation of the Arabic novel 'Scattered Crumbs' into English with special attention given to idioms. The researcher believes that in most translated idioms, the translator was successful in rendering the cultural meaning of the SL idiom, either by use of loan words or paraphrasing. However, he believes that the translator has failed in cases of absence of equivalent where the translator opted for literal translation of SL idioms, because such translations do not comprehensively convey the meaning of the original idiom and therefore may cause miscommunication.

### Framework

The framework used in this study at approaching the translatability of idioms is that developed by Baker (Baker, 2018), whose framework and book are considered among the most influential in the field of translation training and translation studies (Munday, 2008). Baker's framework was also chosen for its focus on the relationship between translation and pragmatics. It looks at text equivalence at multiple levels; one of which is the pragmatic level (Baker, 2018). The other levels are the word, above-word, grammar, thematic structure, cohesion, semiotic and pragmatic levels. In this paper, we deal with the 'Above-word' and 'Pragmatic' levels of equivalence since the realm of cultural expressions falls mainly between these two.

Baker (ibid.) proposed a taxonomy for translating idioms and fixed expressions which includes the following strategies:

- 1- Using an idiom of similar meaning and form: in such a case the translator looks for an idiom in the TL that conveys roughly the same meaning of the idiom in the SL and consists of equivalent lexical items.
- 2- Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form: here the translator focuses on finding an idiom in the TL that conveys the same meaning as the original idiom regardless of the composing words.
- 3- Borrowing the SL idiom: this is a case similar to that of a loan

word, where the translator keeps the idiom in its SL form in the translated version.

- 4- Translation by paraphrase: this strategy is used when it is hard to find a suitable idiomatic expression in the TL or if the targeted stylistic classification does not suit the equivalent TL idiom. In this strategy, the translator resorts to analyzing a paraphrased version of the SL idiom or fixed expression.
- 5- Translation by omission of a play on an idiom: this strategy focuses on the literal meaning of an idiom, ignoring a side playful meaning the original idiom has.
- 6- Translation by omission of an entire idiom: a translator might be compelled to resort to this strategy when none of the strategies above proves effective or for stylistic reasons (Baker, 2018, p.77-87).

### Methodology

In this paper, a single idiomatic expression from the Najdi Arabic novel *Donia Ghareebah* (Strange world), by the cyber writer who goes by the name Najdiah Asliah, is investigated. This expression (Allah yakhaleek), literally translated as may God preserve/keep you, has a non-fixed pragmatic meaning that changes based on the intentions of the speaker in each given context. Arriving at the intended meaning is dependent on the hearer's understanding of not only the co-text of the expression, but of all the elements of the situation; the identity of the speaker, the identity of the hearer, their relation to each other, and the topic being discussed. This cooperation of contextual and cultural elements in arriving at the intended meaning highlights the importance of pragmatic competence in translating literary texts.

Occurrences of the expression and its use in context were analyzed to determine its intended meaning in each instance. Afterwards, three translation strategies, adopted from (Baker, 2018) were applied to translate the expression, creating three or four translations for the same expression in each given context. Then, these translations, placed in context, were presented to and judged by native speakers of English to decide which translation strategy was more successful in conveying the

pragmatic meaning in the TL (English). The questionnaire consisted of six texts, at the end of each text, there was an allocated space for the participants' comments and/or suggested translations.

The participants were asked to provide some information about themselves in the first page of the questionnaire. Such information included their nationality, education, gender, and age. Only participants who were native speakers of English were included in the study. No restrictions regarding education, age or gender were applied. However, all participants were minimally BA holders and the youngest were in their mid-twenties.

The questionnaire was distributed manually and electronically to ensure receiving as many contributions as possible. Three manual copies were handed back, and 18 digital copies were received, out of which only 14 met the criteria described above. So, the total number of replies analysed was 17. The participants belonged to four countries all of which speak English as the first language; three Canadians, seven Americans, five British, and two Irish. Twelve of the participants were females and five were males. All of them were between the age of 25 and 50, and all of them have a college degree.

### **Data analysis**

In this section, the items of the questionnaire are analyzed one by one. First, the item itself, is presented as it is in the questionnaire paper (see Appendix A for the original Arabic script), then a brief statistic of the number of votes each translation received is provided, followed by a comprehensive discussion of the participants' choices and added contributions, if any.

### **Text A**

Reema goes to visit her friend Kholood after several days of the death of Kholood's father. She meets Kholood's mother, and the following conversation takes place:

Reema: my mother sends her greetings to you and apologizes for any unintentional negligence.

Kholood's mother: my greetings to you and your mother. How sweet of her. She's done more than enough.

- 1- Reema: God bless you.
- 2- Reema: Don't mention it.
- 3- Reema: May God preserve you.

The three numbered responses above are all translations of the expression under investigation. In each translation, the researcher adopted a translation strategy from those suggested by (Baker, 2018). Translation number 1 adopts strategy (a) "using an idiom of similar meaning and form" (p.77). Translation 2 adopts strategy (b) "using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form" (p.79). Translation 3 adopts strategy (e) "translation by omission of a play on idiom" (p.85), which is the nearest in definition to literal translation.

It is necessary to point out that while translation (a) comes with similar meaning and form, it does not convey the pragmatic meaning of the original utterance. It only reserves part of the literal meaning related to praying for the sake of the hearer. The pragmatic meaning of the expression, as explained before, is not constant. Instead it acquires its meaning from the context where it is used. Therefore, translation (b) is actually the closest in meaning to that of the original. This classification applies to all the items discussed in this paper.

The following table shows the number of times each translation was chosen by the participants.

**Table 1: Participants' choices of strategies in text A.**

Translation	Corresponding strategy	Number of times chosen
1	a	5
2	b	7
3	e	3

Two participants did not choose any of the given translations; instead, they provided their own suggested versions. One of them suggested the following response: "we wish we could do more", while the other suggested that the response should be: "I am sorry for your loss, and I am sorry if you have needed anything I haven't provided". In these two suggestions, the participants preferred using fixed expressions in the TL that suit the context of the situation in which the utterance was used.

Table 1 above shows that the majority of the participants opted for the translation that contributed to the pragmatic meaning. Though they were not informed of the strategy applied in each translation, their choices show that they believed the translation that was based on the pragmatic function of the original is the best fit to the context. Even in the case of the two participants who provided their own translations, their contributions were based on what they believed to be a good response in light of the context and co-text provided for them. Not surprisingly, their suggestions were in line with translation (b) which can be characterized as being pragmatic-oriented.

### **Text B**

Mshari: honey, I have been talking to you over the phone for 5 months and I don't even know how you look. This is unbelievable.

Njood (trying to change the subject): Mshari

- 1- God bless you.
- 2- Come on /please.
- 3- May God preserve you.

don't pressure me. I've just arrived at my friend's place.. I'll call you later.

Just as in the previous text, the first translation corresponds to strategy (a). The second translation provided conforms with strategy (b). The third translation corresponds to strategy (e). The first translation focuses on conveying the literal meaning by using similar form. The second

focuses more on conveying the pragmatic meaning, and the last one is merely a literal translation of the original. The following table shows the number of times each translation was chosen by the participants.

**Table 2: Participants' choices of strategies in text B.**

Translation	Corresponding strategy	The number of times it was chosen
1	a	0
2	b	15
3	e	1

One participant provided her own suggested translation. She suggested that the translation should be 'I am not ready to meet you and I am making an excuse'. Although the gist of this suggested translation goes in line with the original, its bluntness is not in conformity with the context. The context of the conversation shows that the two conversationalists; Mshari and Njood, are in a romantic relationship, yet they have never met face to face. Njood's response indeed shows that she is trying to delay their face-to-face meeting. However, the utterance she produced after the investigated idiomatic expression implies that she is doing that gently not aggressively.

Interestingly, the vast majority of the participants opted for the pragmatic-based translations. They believed that this translation is best used in this situation. No one chose the first translation which was an attempt to convey the literal meaning of the original with a similar idiomatic effect. Only one chose the literal translation of the original.

### Text C

Sara: Thank you. Don't forget my present as you promised. SIM with special number and the latest Nokia cell phone.

Her father: hhhh I've never seen someone who asks for a present and puts down conditions.

Sara: yes dad

- 1- God bless you.
- 2- May God be with you.
- 3- May God preserve you for me

Just like the two previous texts, translation number 1 corresponds to strategy (a), translation number 2 corresponds to strategy (b), and translation number 3 corresponds to strategy (e). The following table shows the number of times each translation was chosen by the participants.

**Table 3: Participants' choices of strategies in text C.**

Translation	Corresponding strategy	The number of times it was chosen
1	a	5
2	b	1
3	e	4

In this item, many of the responses were novel suggestions by the participants. Six participants provided their own translations, which implies that they believed that none of the given translations was adequate. Their suggested translations were: "thank you", "God help you", "I am one of a kind", "please", "pretty please", "I don't know where I went wrong raising you". Obviously, the participant who provided the last response misunderstood the utterance as belonging to the father not to the daughter. One participant did not understand the situation and wrote "I am confused by the above three as I feel I need more contextual information". However, most of the participants suggested translations that seem to acknowledge the pragmatic function of the speech act of asking a favour, or even begging as can be understood from their translations. They gave responses they believed suit the elements of the situation, i.e. the speaker, the hearer, the occasion, and the topic.

In translation number 3, 'for me' was added at the end. This is due to the use of a specific pronoun by the speaker attached to the fixed expression. Usually when pronouns are used in this way with this particular expression the intended meaning of the expression is actually its literal meaning. So, in this particular item the literal meaning goes in line with the pragmatic one.

Five participants chose translation 1, one chose translation 2, and four chose translation 3. As explained before, in this particular item, the

literal meaning is very similar to the pragmatic meaning. Therefore, all three translations have similar form (prayer) and meaning. So, we can assume that participants' choices were based on personal preference of one form over another rather than on deeper differences among the three translations.

### Text D

Thamir: by the way, have you heard about the future husband of Haifa Wahbi (a famous singer)?

Nawaf: don't say a word

- 1- God bless you.
- 2- Please.
- 3- May God preserve you.

since I've heard the news (about the future husband), I've had a headache.

Table 4 below displays the translations, their corresponding strategies and the number of times each one was chosen.

**Table 4: Participants' choices of strategies in text D.**

Translation	Corresponding strategy	The number of times it was chosen
1	a	0
2	b	12
3	e	0

In this item, none of the participants chose translation 1 nor 3. Twelve participants chose translation 2, and four suggested different translations. One participant opted for the deletion of the item as a whole, which is one of the strategies proposed by Baker "translation by omission of entire idiom" (2018: 86). Two of the suggested translations dealt with the idiom as part of the previous utterance, thus instead of providing a separate utterance they added word(s) to the previous one. One suggested adding the word 'ever', and the other suggested the phrase 'about it'. The two alternative translations for the idiom provided by the other two participants were 'Jesus Christ' and 'I beg you'.

The majority of the participants have chosen the second translation which corresponds to strategy b. According to this strategy, it is more important to convey the pragmatic function of an idiomatic expression than to render the literal meaning into the target language.

### Text E

(Abeer refuses to meet her husband who has come to meet her in her parents' house to make amends)

Nawaf (Abeer's brother): Abeer shame on you. The man begged me, he told me to tell you he wants to talk to you about something.

Abeer: Nawaf

- 1- God bless you.
- 2- Please.
- 3- Stop it.
- 4- May God preserve you.

Today is Eid (Islamic festival) and fun. I don't want to ruin my day.

Table 5 below displays the translations, their corresponding strategies and the number of times each one was chosen in text E.

**Table 5: Participants' choices of strategies in text E.**

Translation	Corresponding strategy	The number of times it was chosen
1	a	1
2	b	10
3	b	5
4	e	0

In this text two translations corresponding to strategy b, which is to translate an idiom by using an idiom in the target language with the same meaning but dissimilar form, were provided. The two translations 2 and 3 combined received 15 responses. One participant chose translation 1 which is to translate using an idiom in the target language with similar form and meaning, and none chose translation 4 which is to use the literal translation of the original idiom. One participant provided their own translation which was a combination of translations

2 and 3 'please stop it', so we could say that this participant chose strategy b as well.

### Text F

(Abeer staying at her parents' house with her kids after having a fight with her husband) Abeer: Reema (her younger sister)

- 1- God bless you.
- 2- If it is not much trouble.
- 3- Please.
- 4- May God preserve you.

See if my kids are awake or not.

Table 6 below displays the translations, their corresponding strategies and the number of times each one was chosen in text F.

**Table 6: Participants' choices of strategies in text F.**

Translation	Corresponding strategy	The number of times it was chosen
1	a	0
2	b	12
3	b	4
4	e	0

Again in this text, two translations were provided corresponding to strategy b. and once again the majority of the participants chose the two translations corresponding to this strategy, 12 choosing translation 2 and 4 choosing translation 3. None of the participants chose the first nor the last translations which correspond to strategies a and e respectively. One participant provided her own suggested translation which was not actually a translation, rather it was a conversation softener. She preferred adding the expression 'sweetly' to the beginning of the following utterance, and treated what was originally two utterances in the SL text as one utterance in the TL translation.

### Results and discussion

In this section, the common findings out of the six analyzed extracts will be highlighted. Unique cases and idiosyncratic responses will be

discussed as well.

- 1- In all extracts except one, C, the majority of the participants chose the translation(s) corresponding to strategy b 'using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form'. The TL idiom varied from text to text based on the pragmatic function of the idiomatic expression in each specific conversation (table 7).
- 2- In text C, most of the participants felt that none of the provided translations suits the conversation so they provided their own. This may be due to cultural differences, i.e. the situation described in the conversation does not relate to the participants' cultures, or it may be due to the insufficiency of the extracted text to provide a comprehensive picture of the situation. One participant explicitly expressed her lack of understanding and refrained from neither choosing from the provided translations nor coming up with her own. In fact, facing translation problems caused by existing cultural gaps between SL and TL was one of the findings agreed upon among many researchers in the field of literary translation (Almasri, 2009; Alwafai, 2015; Horvathova and Tabackova, 2018)
- 3- Most of the translations suggested by the participants were idioms as well. For example, one suggestion for text A was 'I am sorry for your loss'. For text C, many fixed expressions were suggested by the participants. To mention a few, one suggested 'God help you', another 'I don't know where I went wrong with raising you', and one wrote 'I am one of a kind'.
- 4- The least picked strategy was strategy e 'translation by omission of a play on an idiom'. This finding indicates that readers of literary texts actually value the aesthetic elements of the texts they are reading and feel that these elements are as important as keeping the content of the text.
- 5- One of the interesting findings was that the factors identified in the background questions section; i.e. age, education, nationality and gender, had no influence on the participants choices of strategies. There was no specific strategy that one nationality, age group, or gender, preferred over the other.
- 6- In three of the four texts where 'please' was provided as a

translation option (Texts B, D, E, and F), it was the preferred one compared to the other translation options. Thus, if we want to come up with a near equivalent for the idiom الله يخليك (Allah ykhaleek), literally translated as 'may God preserve/keep you', it would be the expression 'please'. Although 'please' does not fit the traditional definition of (idioms) since it consists of one word only, it is similar to idioms in that it carries figurative meaning that is not derived from the expression's original lexical meaning. What the investigated Arabic expression and 'please' have in common is that they are both expressions with inconsistent pragmatic function, which changes according to the contexts where they are used.

**Table 7: The number of times each strategy was chosen in all texts.**

Strategy	The number of times it was chosen
a	11
b	67
e	8

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

In this study, six conversations containing the idiomatic expression under investigation were extracted from a local novel written in the local Najdi dialect. Despite having a constant form, this idiomatic expression changes its pragmatic function based on the context. The calculation of the pragmatic function is totally derivable from the context based on the relationship between the participants and mainly the topic of the conversation. Based on its literal meaning, which is sometimes the one intended, the closest equivalent for it in English is 'God bless you', while a literal translation of the idiom would be 'may God preserve/keep you'. Choosing the former equivalent as the best translation shows preference for conformity of form and meaning in translation of idiomatic expressions, which corresponds to translation strategy (a) in Baker's framework for translating idiomatic expressions (2018). Using the literal translation of the idiomatic expression's constituting words corresponds to Baker's strategy (e). Using a variable expression in the target language based on the pragmatic meaning conveyed by the expression in a specific context corresponds to Baker's strategy (b).

These three strategies were the ones employed in this study by providing three, sometimes four, translations for the same idiomatic expression in each extract, and asking the participants to choose the one they felt best to suit the conversation. The majority of the participants' responses showed preference to strategy (b), which recommends that a translator uses an idiom of the same meaning of that of the original paying less attention to conformity in form. This choice emphasizes the importance of understanding and conveying the pragmatic meaning of the SL idiom, while keeping in mind the aesthetic elements of the literary text since the participants still chose an idiom in place of the original, focusing more on the meaning the idiom is playing in a particular context rather than its literal meaning. This finding comes in agreement with the results of other previous studies which highlighted the importance of conveying not only the content meaning of words but also the pragmatic role they play in the text (Jaber, 2008; Shojaei, 2012; Prace, 2013; Daghighi and Hashemian, 2016). Based on the results of the present study, the following recommendations are made:

- 1- Since many researchers have agreed that many of the translation mistakes in the field of literary texts arise from some level of incompetency in understanding the pragmatic meaning of idioms in SL (Samardali, et al., 2013; Ardeshiri and Zarafshan, 2014; Hussein and Mhammad, 2016), I recommend that translation programs should pay more attention to the pragmatic element that idioms, and many other language expressions, may carry. These programs should emphasize the importance of pragmatic function and train their students on how to arrive at that hidden meaning intended in the original text and ways to render it successfully into the TL. This was seen by many researchers as a way to improve the level of future literary translations (Farghal and Almana, 2014; Kahrizangi and Haddadi, 2017).
- 2- It is also important to teach future translators and train them on how to deal with problematic expressions in literary texts. In addition to being equipped with adequate linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic knowledge in both languages, source and target, translators need to know the available techniques provided for them by various tested

frameworks, which all proved to be successful when applied appropriately (Aguadogiménez and Pérez-paredes, 2005; Guerra, 2012). They also need to know how to choose from them and how to decide which technique or strategy will best serve the needs of their expected audience.

- 3- It is very important to weigh the significance of the aesthetic elements of the language in the text being translated. That is; stylistic and aesthetic features do not carry the same level of importance in scientific and literary texts. Aesthetic elements and figurative features of literary texts need to be attended to and addressed when translating to other languages, especially since they seem to be of high value to the audience of the TL text as suggested by the data of the present study.
- 4- It would be beneficial to translation students to include texts written in different regional varieties in their training programs. Being exposed to various varieties allow them to be acquainted with different cultures, and train them on ways for translating problematic cultural expressions.

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عبير: نواف الله يخليك اليوم عيد ووناسه ما أبي أضييق صدري.

**Text F**

(عبير مقيمة مع أطفالها في بيت والديها بعد مشاجرة حدثت بينها وبين زوجها).

عبير (مخاطبة أختها الأصغر): ريمما الله يخليك شوفي عيالي صحوا ولا لا؟؟

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