An Analysis Of Familiarity Of Undergraduate Students Towards Translation Of Idioms From English Into Urdu

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Abstract

Idioms are very difficult to translate especially from a language that is culturally and linguistically quite different from another. As it is obvious that most idioms do not have any direct equivalence into the target language (TL) therefore, the present study aims at investigating the level of familiarity of students towards the translation of idioms from English into Urdu. To achieve this goal, the researcher has used a translation test based on idioms as a research tool and conducted it on 100 students enrolled in the last 4 semesters of an undergraduate program majoring in English. The translation test consists of the translation of de-contextual idioms (purely idioms) and contextual idioms (used within context). The idioms were chosen according to the types of idioms presented by Fernando (1996) as literal idioms, semi-idioms and pure idioms. The findings of the study reveal that the level of students' familiarity regarding the translation of idioms is lower in the translation of de-contextual idioms than in the contextual translation of idioms. De-contextual idioms were quite difficult for them to translate. It has shown the difficulties like inability to find equivalents in the target language, the cultural gap between

source language (SL) and target language (TL), few understanding due to figurative meaning of idioms, lack of knowledge about idioms and no suggestiveness while translating de-contextual idioms. Moreover, the literal idioms were quite easily translated however, semi-idioms and pure idioms became more difficult to translate due to the increasing level of opacity.

Keywords: translation, English, Urdu, de-contextual idioms, contextual idioms.

Introduction

Translation Studies is a fast-growing field of study that deals with the theory, description and application of translation. In this modern era, it has got more progress in meeting the needs of a rapidly growing world due to expansion in cultural exchanges, increasing knowledge and international communication. The developments made in the modern world play an important role in the field of translation because translation studies deal with multiple areas of study like scientific, medical, technological, commercial, legal, cultural and literary (Manfredi, 2008). Therefore, if there were no translations, people would have never been able to understand the content of the other languages. This is why the translation field is growing fast as it is very much important to impart to readers the actual meaning or sense from a source language (SL) into a target language (TL). However, there are a few challenges faced by those who try to translate the information containing idioms, scientific and literary expressions. The real challenge which is faced by translators is transferring the actual meaning or sense from one language into another. This challenge arises due to the cultural gap and inability to find equivalence in the target language (SajidJuma'a, 2014). Similarly, Nida (1964) has also elaborated the idea that a translator aims to understand the content or sense of a text during translation. He should consider the cultures of both SL and TL and also try to reproduce an equivalent effect on the readers. According to Langlotz (2006, p.2), idioms are complex in nature and require understanding and careful consideration.

Literature Review

Studies related to the de-contextual and contextual translation of idioms are also important because the current research is based upon the de-contextual and contextual translation of idioms therefore, in this section, such research are observed in the research conducted by Nippold and Martin (1989) explored the translation of idioms in isolation and context on 475 adolescents ranging from 14 to 17 years old. The result indicated that idioms were translated with more accuracy in context than in isolation. The qualitative analysis concluded that more no responses, literal, related and unrelated errors were done in isolation than in context but more restatement errors were made for idioms translated in context. Asl (2013) tried to find out the role of context during the translation of idioms. For this purpose, 60 upper-intermediate Iranian EFL students were chosen for experimenting on them. The result of the study showed that students of the first experimental group given greater context for translating idioms had achieved higher scores than limited-context and de-contextual groups of students. It was concluded that context helped in learning idioms. Another researcher, Meryem (2010) investigated the difficulties faced by first-year master students studying at Mentouri University Constantine during the translation of idioms from English into Arabic and vice versa. For this purpose, a translation test was given to students. The results of the study had shown that there were some basic problems faced by them during the translation of idioms. However, the contextual use of idioms helped the students to guess the suitable meaning of idioms. In the same way, Dweik and Suleiman (2013) made a research study to find out the problems faced by Jordanian Graduate students majoring in English Language in translating culture-bound expressions. The researchers selected 60 Graduate students enrolled in M.A English language program in three Jordanian universities by simple random sampling. The researchers made up a translation test that was given to graduate students to translate cultural expressions from Arabic into English. The results of the research revealed that the various problems faced by students while translating cultural expressions were mostly: unfamiliarity with cultural expressions, the problem of finding equivalence in TL and a lack of knowledge about translation strategies. Similarly, SajidJuma'a (2014) made a study to investigate the difficulties

faced by M.A. English language students while translating idioms from English into Arabic. The students were from two Jordanian Universities (Middle East University and Petra University). For this purpose, the researcher designed a translation test that was given to students to translate from English into Arabic. After the translation test, a semi-structured interview was taken place with students and experts to gather more data. The results of the study revealed that the challenges faced by them included: non-equivalence in the target language, lack of knowledge about context, formal and semantic features of idioms, the cultural gap between English and Arabic language and less knowledge about using appropriate translation strategy.

By keeping in view, the above literature study, it is revealed that most of the works dealt with finding out difficulties and contextual and de-contextual translation of idioms. Moreover, the majority of works used translation tests as research tools for data collection. In light of previous works, the researcher has also used translation tests and interviews as research instruments to find out difficulties faced during the translation of idioms from English into Urdu. The study of literature has shown that the translation of idioms from English (SL) into Urdu (TL) has not been practiced in Pakistan as done in other countries. Fewer researches have been conducted in Pakistan so far. Therefore, the researcher has decided to attempt in this area by adopting a proper methodology.

Research Methodology

Research Design
The study employs a descriptive research design as it enables flexibility to researchers in capturing the opinions of respondents regarding the identified problem. The researchers adopt translation tests as the primary data collection method, allowing the researchers to delve into the quantitative aspect of the research, assessing the respondents' familiarity levels with idioms. The utilization of numerical analysis in scrutinizing the data obtained through research instruments, along with the generalization of outcomes through representative samples, further reinforces the quantitative nature of the research. A convenience sampling method is used for the present study, as

it is considered most suitable for selecting samples from students who are convenient to reach. This approach affords the researchers a heightened level of easily accessible in approaching and data collection. Notably, all selected samples in this method volunteered to partake in the study, demonstrating their eagerness to contribute and provide responses. This combination of descriptive and quantitative research methods offers valuable insights into the familiarity of respondents with idiomatic expressions, providing a comprehensive and methodologically robust investigation into the subject matter. Approximately 100 students (boys and girls) were selected out of which 31 were boys and 69 were girls belonging to 4 different educational institutions (refer to Table 1). Their ages ranged from 18-23 years of age. Table (1) gives details of the participants as per their institutions.

Table1 Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

S. No.	Name of Institutes	No of Participants
1	University of Malakand (UOM)	26
2	Abbottabad University of Science & Technology (AUST) Havelian	26
3	Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan (AWKUM)	17
4	Govt. Post Graduate College (GPGC) Haripur	31

The researchers designed a test based on the translation of idioms for respondents, focusing on the translation of idioms from English to Urdu. The test consisted of two parts: In the first part, students were directed to translate de-contextual English idioms into Urdu to find out their competency regarding their familiarity with the translation of idioms. In the second part of the translation test, the contextual idioms were handed over to translate into Urdu. The aim of examining contextual idioms was to assess whether context helped in identifying the equivalent idioms in the target language. The sole objective of the translation test was to find out the problems faced by respondents while translating idioms. The translation test included 9 idioms, selected from 3 categories of idioms: literal idioms, semi-idioms, and pure idioms, as classified by Fernando (1996) according to their degree of opacity. Each idiom represented its own category. To ensure the validity of the test, the researcher sought input from two research experts who

verified its accuracy. The idioms used in the translation test were sourced from reputable references, including "Dictionary of American Idioms," "Chambers Idioms," and "The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms."

To collect data, the initial phase involved providing de-contextualized idioms for translation. Subsequently, contextual idioms were presented for translation to assess the students' familiarity with idioms and determine if context aided them in comprehending the meaning of idioms in Urdu. The data obtained from the translation tests were organized into tables, displaying the percentages of familiarity and unfamiliarity with idioms in both de-contextual and contextual translation aspects.

Results and Discussion

Translation of De-contextual English Idioms into Urdu

De-contextual idioms were given first to respondents for translation. Table (2), shows the degree of familiarity of students regarding de-contextual translation of English idioms into Urdu.

Table 2 Students' Familiarity with de-Contextual Idioms

S. No	Idioms	Correct Answers	Incorrect Answers	No Answer	Classification of Idioms
1	From A to Z	95	5	00	
4	All ears	51	38	11	**Literal Idioms**
5	As wise as an owl	38	62	00	
Total		**184**	**105**	**11**	
Percentage		**61%**	**35%**	**3%**	
6	Know the ropes	21	66	13	
7	Break the ice	30	44	26	
8	Foot the bill	28	32	40	**Semi Idioms**
Total		**79**	**142**	**79**	
Percentage		**26%**	**47%**	**26%**	
12	Wet behind the ears	00	79	21	
13	Bite the dust	10	55	35	
14	Pain in neck	9	55	36	**Pure**

Total	19	189	92	Idioms
Percentage	6%	63%	30%	
Total of all answers	282	436	182	
Percentage of all answers	18%	29%	12%	

The results of the translation of de-contextual idioms in table (2) show that the increasing level of figurativeness has a great influence on students' familiarity with idioms and their translation. It has been noticed that the literal idioms have recorded the highest score with 61% correct answers. However, the other two categories such as semi-idioms and pure idioms represent low scores as compared to literal idioms. Semi-idioms get 26% for correctly translated idioms whereas pure idioms have got the least score with 6% for correct answers that show the familiarity of students. The overall result has shown that only 18% of students are familiar with idioms and their translation while 29% of incorrect answers and 12% of no answers reveal unfamiliarity of students. This has revealed the fact that the degree of familiarity decreases with an increase in the degree of opacity such as 61%, 26% and 6% for literal idioms, semi-idioms, and pure idioms respectively. While the percentage of unfamiliarity increases as the translation of idioms moves from one category to the other such as 35% for literal idioms, 47% for semi-idioms and 63% for pure idioms.

The analysis of de-contextual translation of idioms makes clear that literal idioms are usually easy to be translated because the meanings of these idioms can clearly be understood from the meaning of their constituents. Students have interpreted them easily due to the high degree of relatedness to meaning. The simple composition of a group of words in idioms resulted in a simple translation into Urdu. The idiom, "from A to Z" is translated by 95 students as,ا سے ے تک (alif se ye tak- to complete fully). Another idiom, "a child's play" was translated by 88% of respondents as,بچوں کا کھیل (bachon ka kheil- easy task). Therefore, almost 38 students have translated "all ears" as, کان سارے ے (sare kaan- all ears) while 11 students have given no answers. The idiom "as wise as an owl" is translated by 38 students as, الوجیسا عقلمند (ullu jesa aqalmand- as wise as an owl) which led these idioms to mistranslation both semantically and culturally. Semi-idioms, in

comparison to literal idioms, are difficult to translate such as sixth idiom, "know the ropes" is translated by 21 respondents as, طریقہ جاننا (tareeqa janna- to know way), whereas, this idiom is translated incorrectly by 66 respondents because of using literal translation as,رسیوں کو جاننا (rasiyon ko janna- to know the ropes), حد میں رہو (had me raho- be in limits). However, 13 respondents have given no answers. A pure idiom, "be wet behind the ears" has not been answered correctly by 79 students. They have translated it wrong as,کانوں کا کچا (kaano ka kacha hona, imperfect by ear),باخبر رہنا (bakhaber rehna- to get aware) whereas 21 respondents have given no answers.

Therefore, the result of Table (02) revealed the fact that de-contextual translation of idioms is a very difficult task. The difficulty in translation increases as it comes to semi-idioms and pure idioms. However, it has also been observed that the overall familiarity percentage was more in literal idioms such as 61%, while in semi-idioms the percentage of familiarity decreases i.e. 26%, whereas the percentage of familiarity decreases to 6% during pure idioms translation. This has shown that the level of familiarity decreases with the increase in figurativeness.

Translation of Contextual English Idioms into Urdu
The researcher has analysed the students' performance to check their extent of familiarity with the context. The results are shown in Table (3)

Table: 3 Students' familiarity with Contextual Translation of Idioms

Literal Idioms	CA	ICA	NA
1-He has studied the subject from A to Z	95	00	5
4- The children were all ears when their father was describing a car crash	87	13	00
5- This is a difficult problem, you need to be as wise as an owl to be able to solve it	58	42	00
Total Literal Idioms	**240**	**55**	**5**
Percentage of Literal Idioms	**80%**	**18%**	**1%**
Semi Idioms			
6-He will be very good once he knows the ropes a bit better	56	26	18
7-Let's break the ice by inviting our new neighbors for a meal	47	38	15
8-My boss took me out for lunch and the company footed the bill	81	10	9

Total Semi Idioms	**184**	**74**	**42**
Percentage of Semi Idioms	**61%**	**24%**	**14%**
Pure Idioms			
12-In those days I was wet behind the ears and I didn't realize he was dishonest	18	61	21
13-The soldier was too young to bite the dust	31	41	28
14-People who are always complaining are a pain in the neck	44	38	18
Total Pure Idioms	**93**	**140**	**67**
Percentage of Pure Idioms	**31%**	**46%**	**22%**
Total of all answers	**517**	**269**	**114**
Percentage of all answers	**34%**	**17%**	**7%**

It has been observed in Table (3) that during the translation of contextual literal idioms, the percentage of correct answers increases to 80% whereas in de-contextual translation the percentage was 61%. Similarly, the greater difference in contextual translation is seen in the translation of semi-idioms. The percentage of correct answers to semi-idioms is 26% during de-contextual translation. However, in the contextual translation of semi-idioms, the percentage of correct answers increases to 61%. Likewise, the contextual translation of pure idioms shows the greatest difference in comparison to the de-contextual translation of idioms. The percentage of correct answers during translation of de-contextual pure idioms is 6% which has increased to 31% during contextual translation. The analysis of the contextual translation of idioms has shown that the use of idioms in context has helped a lot in understanding their meaning of them such as,

Statement (1) He has studied the subject from A to Z.

In translating this statement, table (3) shows that about 95 students corrected this statement. The students have translated it like,

۔ اس ﻧﮯ مضمون ساراکا سارا پڑھ لیا۔

(us ne sara ka sara mazmoon parh liya- he studied the subject all in all)

However, 5 students left this statement unanswered.

Statement (2) the children were all ears when their father was describing a car crash.

This statement is translated correctly by 87 students.

ـ بچے ہمہ تن گوش تھے جب ان کا باپ گاڑی کا حادثہ بیان کر رہا تھا

(bachy hama tan ghosh thy jb unka walid unko garhi ka hadsa bayan kr rha tha- the children were all ears when their father was describing car accident)

ـ بچے بہت غور سے باپ سے گاڑی کے حادثے کے بارے میں سن رہے تھے

(bachy bhot ghor se bap se garhi k hadsy k bare me sun rhy thy- Children were listening very carefully from father about car accident)

However, 13 students have translated it literally and irrelevantly as,

ـ بچوں کے تمام کان تھے جب ان کا والد انھیں گاڑی
کے حادثے کے بارے میں بتا رہا تھا۔

(bachon k tamam kan thy jb unka walid unhyein garhi k hadsy k bare me bata rha tha- childrenwerehaving all ears when their father was telling them about car accident)

Statement (03) this is a difficult problem, you need to be as wise as an owl to be able to solve it.

This statement is translated correctly by 58 students.

ـ یہ ایک سنگین مسئلہ ہے، تمھیں عقلمندی سے اسے حل کرنے کی
ضرورت ہے۔

(ye ek sangeen masla hai, tumhein aqalmandi se ise hal krny ki zarorat hai- this is a difficult problem, you need to solve it wisely)

Whereas, this statement is translated incorrectly by 42 students as,

ـ یہ مشکل کام ہے، آپکو الو کی طرح عقلمندہہونا پڑے گا۔

(yeh mushkil kam hai, apko ullu ki trha aqalmand hona parhyga-
it's a difficult job, you have to be as wise as an owl)

۔ یہ مشکل مسئلہ ہے تمھیں بیوقوف بننا پڑے گا

(ye mushkil masla hai tmhein bewaqoof banna parhyga- this is
a difficult problem, you have to be a fool)

Statement (04) he will be very good once he knows the ropes a
bit better.

Table (3) shows that this statement is translated
correctly by 56 respondents as,

۔ وہ بہت اچھا ہوگا اگر وہ ایک دفعہ سب کچھ اچھے طریقے سے جان لے

(woh bhot acha hoga ager who ek dafa sb kuch achy tareeqy se
jan ly- he will be very good if once he knew the ways better)

۔ وہ زیادہ بہترہوجائے گا جب اسکو اپنے کام کی سمجھ آجائے گی۔

(who ziada behter ho jai ga jab usko apny kam ki samjh ajaigi-
he will get better when he understood his work)

However, 18 respondents have given no answers while 26 of
them have given incorrect answers such as,

۔ وہ بہتر ہو جائے گا جیسے ہی وہ رسی سیکھ جائے گا۔

(who behter ho jaiga jese hi who rassi seekh jai ga- he will be
good as he learned the rope)

۔ جب اسے مشکلات کا اندازہ ہوگا تو وہ بہتر ہوجائے گا

(jb usy mushkilat ka andaza hoga tau woh behter ho jaiga- when
he will assess the difficulties, he will be good)

Statement (05) let's break the ice by inviting our new neighbors
for a meal.

The context of this statement gives way to correct
translations and is answered by 47 students as,

۔ چلو اپنے پڑوسیوں کو کھانے پر بلا کر جھجھک ختم کرتے ہیں۔

(chalo apny parhosiyon ko khany pr bula kr jijak khatam krty hain- let's resolve the hesitation by inviting our neighbors on a meal)

۔ چلو ہم پہل کرتے ہیں اپنے نئے پڑوسیوں کو کھانے پر بلا کر

(chalo hum pehel krty hain apny naye parhosiyon ko khany per bula kr- let's take an initiative by inviting our new neighbors on a meal)

However, 15 students have given no answers while 47 of them have translated incorrectly as,

۔ چلو نئے پڑوسیوں کو کھانے پر بلا کر برف توڑ دیں۔

(chalo naye parhosiyon ko khany per bula kr baraf torh den- let's break the ice by inviting new neighbors on a meal)

Statement (6) my boss took me for lunch and the company footed the bill.

This statement is translated by 81 students correctly as the context has helped them in understanding the meaning of this idiom. They have translated it as,

میرے باس مجھے کھانے پر لے گئے اور کمپنی نے بل ادا کیا۔

(mere boss mjhy khany per ly gye aur company ne bill ada kiya- my boss took me on lunch and company paid the bill)

Whereas, 9 respondents have left this idiom unanswered while 10 of them translated it quite incorrectly as,

میرے باس مجھے کھانے پر لے گئے اور باقی سب جل گئے۔

(mere boss mjhy khany per ly gye aur baqi sab jal gye- my boss took me on lunch aur rest of all got jealoused)

Statement (7) in those days I was wet behind ears and I didn't realize he was dishonest.

This statement is translated correctly by 18 students as,

۔ ان دنوں مجھے اتنی عقل نہیں ہوتی تھی اور میں نہیں جان سکا کہ وہ بے ایمان تھا

(un dino mjhy itni aqal nhi hti thi aur me nhi jan ska k woh be eman tha- In those days I was not wise and I didn't realize that he was dishonest)

ـ ان دنوں مجھے سمجھ نہیں تھی اور مجھے نہیں پتہ چلا کہ وہ بد دیانت تھا

(un dino mjhy samjh nhi thi aur mjhy nhi pta chala k woh bad dianat hai- In those days I didn't have sense and I didn't realize that he was dishonest)

This statement is left unanswered by 21 students while 61 of them have translated it incorrectly as

ـ ان دنوں میں کانوں کا کچا تھا اور مجھے احساس نہیں ہوا کہ وہ بے ایمان تھا۔

(un dino me kano ka kacha tha aur mjhy ehsasn nhi hua k wh be eman tha- In those days I was imperfect by ears and I didn't realize that he was dishonest)

Statement (8) the soldier was too young to bite the dust.

This statement is answered rightly by 31 respondents as,

ـ فوجی دھول چٹانے کے لیے بہت چھوٹا تھا

(fauji dhul chatany k lye bht chota tha- the soldier was too young to bite the dust)

ـ سپاہی بہت ہی جوانی میں مرا۔

(sapahi bhot jawani me mara- the soldier died too young)

However, 28 students have given no answers while 41 of them have translated it as incorrect due to irrelevant translation such as,

ـ سپاہی اتنی مشکلات کا سامنا کرنے کے لیے بہت چھوٹا تھا

(sapahi itni mushkilat ka samna krny k liye bht chota tha- the soldier was too young to face the difficulties)

Statement (9) People who are always complaining are a pain in the neck.

44 students have translated this statement correctly by using an idiom having a similar meaning but dissimilar form such as,

ـ وہ لوگ جو ہر وقت شکایت کرتے ہیں وہ درد سریہوتے ہیں۔

(woh log jo hr waqt shikayat krty hain who dard-e-sir hty hain- those who complain all the time are irritating)

ـ جو لوگ ہمیشہ گلے شکوے کرتے ہیں وہ ناک میں دم کر دیتے ہیں۔

(jo log hamesha gily shikwy krty hain who naak me dum krty hain- those people who always complain, tease a lot)

ـ جولوگ شکایات کرتے ہیں ان سے بندہ تنگ رہتا ہے۔

(jo log shikayaat krty hain un se banda tang rehta hai- one gets fed up from complaining people)

However, 18 of them have provided no answers while 38 respondents have translated this statement incorrectly by using literal translation or irrelevant translation.

ـ جو لوگ شکایت کرتے ہیں وہ گلے کادرد ہوتے ہیں۔

(jo log shikayat krty hain who galy ka dard hty hain- the people who complain are throat aches)

The findings of Table (3) reveal that contextual idioms are quite easy to translate than de-contextual translation of idioms. Context has helped students in understanding the meaning of idioms according to their use in context.

Conclusion

The results of the study reveal that their familiarity with English idioms and finding equivalent into Urdu is quite low and their ability to interpret idioms is limited especially in de-contextual translation of idioms. This is mainly due to the fact that idioms are artistic and specific to culture where meaning is quite different from meaning of constituent words. It has been revealed that students have faced a lot of difficulties while making the translation from English into Urdu. The major difficulties that they have faced are: unable to guess appropriate meaning of idioms, inability to find equivalents in the target language, the cultural gap between SL and TL, figurative meaning of idioms, lack of knowledge about idioms. The social context has an important role in facilitating the

figurative meaning of idioms, and hence, providing correct answers. However, students' translations of de-contextualized idioms usually ended up with unsatisfactory results because an idiom is largely related to situation and culture that gives it a meaning. Moreover, while making a translation from English into Urdu, the students stuck to the literal translation that makes the translation of most of the idioms incorrect. As a result, they usually succeed in translating literal idioms but when it comes to semi-idioms and pure idioms they are totally confused because such idioms are to be taken as a single unit in order to provide acceptable translation.

Consequently, better understanding, using and translating idioms, using accurate strategies to solve problem of non-equivalence and familiarity with differences between source and target languages need mastering. Students should also be exposed, more and more, to use of idioms in scools and universities in order to extend their knowledge.

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