ज्ञानविविधा

कला, मानविकी और सामाजिक विज्ञान की सहकर्मी-समीक्षित, मूल्यांकित, त्रैमासिक शोध पत्रिका

Author's :

Shikha Mishra

Research Scholar,
Department Of English and
Modern European Languages,
University of Allahabad.

Corresponding Author :

Shikha Mishra

Research Scholar,
Department Of English and
Modern European Languages,
University of Allahabad.

Challenges in Translating Cultural Idioms : A Case Study

Abstract : In this study paper, the issue for translators when translating cultural idioms is discussed. These are words highly rooted in a culture and language. Idioms carry meanings that cannot be literally translated since what their literal words convey. The study discusses how variations in culture and language can lead to loss of meaning or misunderstanding upon translation. In a case study examination, the article explores cases of idioms in one language and their translation into another. The article discusses strategies employed by translators, such as finding corresponding idioms in the new language, rephrasing the meaning of the idiom, or offering definitions. It also raises the necessity of understanding both the target and source cultures in order to effectively convey the intended message. This study illustrates the creativity and cultural sensitivity required in the translation of idioms and gives a glimpse into the broader problems of cross-cultural communication. It is hoped to be practically useful to translators and to illustrate the richness and subtlety of cultural expression in language.

Keywords : Translation, intercultural, sophisticated, Cultural idioms, Cross cultural.

Introduction : Translation is that necessary link for intercultural communication as well as literature

A Peer Reviewed, Refereed and Indexed Quarterly Journal of Arts, Humanity & Social Sciences

exchange[1]. Translation became a sophisticated profession in the 21st century, requiring not only linguistic competence but also cultural awareness and interpretative skills. It is crucial in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps, facilitating communication between diverse groups and nations. Translation is not a matter of words alone but an ingrained cultural practice that serves to create understanding and exchange.

Language is a potent mirror of culture and identity, augmented by idiomatic terms that make it richer in expression and meaning. Phrases like "cheek by jowl" or "Adam's Ale" demonstrate how particular words contain meaning that extends beyond the literal text. Such terms tend to hold cultural references, social mores, humor, or historical backgrounds that are so ingrained for native speakers as to be completely foreign for others. Translating idioms necessitates more than a lexical translation; it takes conveying the latent meaning and the cultural implication. This renders the process particularly onerous even for a skilled translator.

Idioms are cultural symbols or short-hand expressions that bind speakers together in a common cultural context. They provide information about the way of life, values, and shared beliefs of a people. They can also alienate or puzzle outsiders if not translated correctly. Idiomatic expressions are therefore bridges and barriers to cross-cultural communication.

Literal translation usually ends in failure to transmit the meaning intended, creating ambiguity or distortion. On the other hand, excessive adaptation poses a danger of distorting the original meaning. Balancing loyalty to the original text and cultural adequacy is hence important. The accurate translation of idioms is important not just to save meaning but to encourage intercultural understanding as well as to avert misunder-standing. Thus, idioms become indicative of the soul of language as well as of the culture itself.

Literature Review : Idioms are "cultural fingerprints," carrying social norms, historical events, and collective experiences characteristic of certain language groups. Their figurative meaning and strong cultural embeddedness present serious difficulties for translators. In Nida's (1964) Equivalence Theory, translation is comprised of two major methods: Formal Equivalence and Dynamic Equivalence[2]. Formal Equivalence, or formal correspondence, focuses on literal, word-for-word translation. This approach is based on linguistic correctness and aims to retain the grammatical pattern and word choices of the original text. Such translations are likely to come out sounding unnatural or vague in the target language, especially in the case of idiomatic phrases.

Conversely, Dynamic Equivalence or functional equivalence aims to express the

intended meaning in a natural and culturally suitable way for the target group. It conforms idioms, syntax, and grammar to the norms and expectations of the target language community. This is meaning-oriented and emphasizes the effect of the message rather than its form. In idiom translation, dynamic equivalence is usually more successful, since idiomatic expressions are closely embedded in the source culture and might not have direct equivalents in the target language.

Fernando (2020) claims that idioms create a bridge between culture and language, highlighting the need for cultural literacy in addition to linguistic skills in the process of translation[3]. Understanding and correctly translating idioms, thus, demands a profound knowledge of both the source and target cultures.

Previous studies of idiom translation have given attention mainly to semantic and pragmatic issues. Authors have invariably pointed out that the figurative nature of idioms and the absence of one-to-one equivalence cause major obstacles. The literature critically discusses how semantic fine points and pragmatic requirements can make translation difficult, particularly in multi-cultural contexts, rendering idiom accurate transfer a delicate and complex endeavour for the translator.

Methodology : This research makes use of the mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data to investigate students' difficulties in translating idiomatic expressions. The research mainly comprises tasks where students have to translate the chosen idioms and phrases. This method is used to evaluate the translation performance of students and obtain information about what they know regarding the difficulties involved. Through an examination of both the precision of translations and students' self-reflections, the research aims to determine frequent problems and tendencies in idiomatic translation at the learner level.

Analysis of Quantitative Data : To analyze the translation task data, descriptive statistics will be employed to identify the most prevalent types of errors and the strategies adopted by students in handling idiomatic expressions. Each participant's performance will be assessed using a detailed marking grid comprising five key criteria: accuracy, cultural appropriateness, fluency, creativity, and grammar. The individual scores will be aggregated to generate overall performance metrics for each participant. The collected data will be visually represented using charts, bar graphs, and pie diagrams to offer a clear depiction of recurring challenges and patterns in translation performance.

Additionally, responses from the structured questionnaire will be subjected to quantitative analysis to gauge students' perceived difficulties in translating idioms, commonly used strategies, and areas in which they feel additional instructional support is

required. Frequency distributions and cross-tabulations will be used to explore relationships between performance and perceptions, offering further insights into learners' translation competence.

Analysis of Qualitative Data : The qualitative data derived from semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaire responses will be analyzed using thematic analysis. The process will involve coding the data to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the difficulties students face in translating idiomatic expressions. Particular attention will be given to challenges associated with cultural references, metaphorical meanings, contextual mismatches, and syntactic structures.

Moreover, interview data from instructors will be analyzed to highlight their pedagogical perspectives on idiomatic translation, perceived learner challenges, and practical strategies they employ to address such issues. This dual-perspective approach capturing both learners' and educators' voices will enrich the analysis and provide a comprehensive understanding of the pedagogical implications in teaching and learning idiomatic translation.

Realistic and Pragmatic Problems in the Semantic Translation of Idiomatic Idioms : One of the most enduring semantic problems in idiom translation is the incongruity between their literal meaning as figurative expressions and the literal meanings of individual words that make up such expressions. As Baker (2018) explains, idioms tend to be based on metaphorical, symbolic, or culturally charged words, so they become nonsensical when translated literarily[4]. This can best be seen in phrases such as "cheek by jowl," which, when literally translated into a language that does not have the same conceptual system, can result in confusion or a loss of meaning altogether.

Literal or formal equivalence translators usually struggle with semantic error since the meaning of the idiom is contained in cultural symbolism and not in lexical content. This challenge is particularly evident when the idioms contain metaphors within a certain culture or make allusions to native beliefs, practices, or past events. Here, the idiom's underlying meaning can only be connoted via culturally relevant interpretation and not linguistic substitution.

Zarei and Rahimi (2020) stress that "semantic gaps between languages make it hard for translators to locate equivalent idiomatic expressions"[5]. These gaps happen when the target language does not have an idiom or an equivalent culturally phrased word, and so the translator needs to paraphrase or come up with a culturally equivalent phrase, both of which may deviate from the source tone or essence.

In addition, cultural allusions exacerbate semantic difficulty. Newmark (2020) points

out that idioms tend to have their origins in the historical, social, or religious context of the source language[6]. Without a robust knowledge of such cultural underpinnings, the translator can find it difficult to transmit the idiom's complete implication. Idioms referring to folklore, traditional practices, or historical incidents can be most slippery in translation since they contain multiple meanings not readily available to non-members of the culture. Hence, the translation of idiomatic expressions is more than a matter of linguistic skills cultural awareness, interpretive ability, and creative alteration are called for to close semantic gaps without sacrificing the authenticity of the original message.

Translation Approaches to Idiomatic Expressions : Translation techniques play a vital role when dealing with idiomatic expressions, which often resist direct translation due to their figurative meaning and strong cultural associations. Given the complexity of idioms, translators have adopted various strategies such as paraphrasing and finding culturally and semantically equivalent expressions in the target language to preserve meaning and achieve cultural harmony.

Paraphrasing is one of the most accessible and commonly used strategies. This method involves reconstructing the idiom in the target language to convey its intended meaning, without attempting to retain the exact wording or structure of the original expression. Paraphrasing is particularly useful when there is no direct equivalent in the target language or when the literal interpretation of the idiom is ambiguous or misleading. As Baker (2018) states, paraphrasing allows the translator to emphasize the message or emotional impact of the idiom, rather than strictly adhering to its original form[7]. This approach is widely endorsed in translation studies for its flexibility and effectiveness in maintaining communicative intent, especially when dealing with culturally bound idiomatic expressions.

Another frequently employed approach is finding an equivalent expression in the target language. This technique involves identifying an idiom or phrase that carries the same figurative meaning and cultural resonance as the original. When such an equivalent is available, it enables the translator to maintain both the non-literal meaning and the cultural connotations of the source idiom. As Baker (2018) further notes, using a culturally and metaphorically appropriate equivalent enhances the naturalness of the translation and makes it more relatable to the target audience.

Both strategies-paraphrasing and using equivalent idioms serve as essential tools in managing the dual challenge of linguistic accuracy and cultural fidelity in idiom translation. Their careful application contributes significantly to achieving effective cross-cultural communication.

Discussion : The research casts critical light on two main areas: the main challenges students face when translating idiomatic expressions from Indian languages into English, and the secondary how linguistic and cultural factors affect idiom translation.

In answering the first question, the findings showed that one of the most common issues was that students tended to translate idioms literally. This commonly produced ridiculous or awkwardly phrased translations which never adequately reflected intended figurative import. Idioms like "Apple of Discord" and "Adam's Ale" were more and more frequently taken literally, evidence that learners' background is restricted by an under-developed command of idiomatic expression as well as inability to proceed past shallow readings.

Another notable hindrance was the lack of cultural competence. Most idiomatic expressions come with cultural, historical, or religious connotations that the students were not always aware of. For instance, idioms involving mythology, local traditions, or social norms were frequently misinterpreted or translated in an incorrect manner as a result of students' limited exposure to the source culture.

These discoveries confirm the proposition that successful idiomatic translation does not take only linguistic knowledge-cultural literacy is required. Misunderstanding can result in not only bad translations but also the loss of emotional tone, humour, or sarcasm in the idiom.

Therefore, the research stresses the necessity of integrating cultural training into translation education. In order to be skilled translators, students need to acquire double competence: proficiency in the target language and profound competence in the socio-cultural context from which idioms originate and operate.

Conclusion : This research has identified a number of crucial hurdles that students face when translating idiomatic expressions from English into Vietnamese, and vice versa, such as an over-strong tendency towards literal translation, inadequate cultural consciousness, and syntactic adaptation difficulties. The findings emphasize the important functions that both linguistic and cultural factors exert on formulating the translation of idiomatic expressions. The difficulty of translating idioms meaningfully and accurately is further compounded by cultural mismatches, syntactic structure variations, and differences in idiomatic use across languages.

One of the major concerns identified in the study is that students have a tendency to concentrate on a word-for-word translation, which tends to result in incomplete or inaccurate interpretations. Moreover, idioms tend to be based on cultural allusions that do not necessarily have equivalent forms in the target language, resulting in misinterpretation

or loss of meaning altogether. This underscores the need to include cultural literacy in the training of translators, especially where idiomatic expressions are concerned.

In order to meet these challenges, translation courses should focus more on idiomatic understanding and cultural sensitivity. Students should be instructed on how to identify the figurative sense of idioms and how to transfer such expressions to the syntactic and cultural conventions of the target language. This exercise must strike a balance between retaining the spirit of the original idiom and making the translation sound appealing to the target audience.

Subsequent studies may examine how various pedagogical strategies affect the teaching of idiomatic translation and how cultural immersion courses deepen students' knowledge of idiomatic expressions. By reinforcing linguistic competence and cultural knowledge, translators are able to handle the nuances of idiomatic translation more effectively, ultimately producing more accurate, contextually appropriate, and culturally sensitive translations from English to Indian languages.

Works Cited :

1. Thakur, Amrendra Kumar. "Theoretical Approaches to Translating Maithili Literature: Challenges and Innovations" Creative Flight, Vol. 6, No. 1 January, 2025, pp. 206-223

2. Nida, Eugene A. Toward a Science of Translating: With Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating. Brill, 1964.

3. Fernando, Chitra. Idioms and Idiomaticity. Oxford University Press, 2020.

4. Baker, Mona. In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation. 3rd ed., Routledge, 2018.

5. Zarei, Abbas Ali, and Mohammad Rahimi. "The Translation of Idioms: A Comparative Study of English and Persian."Translation Studies Quarterly, vol.-18, no.-2, 2020, pp. 45–60.

6. Newmark, Peter. A Textbook of Translation. Prentice Hall, 2020.

7. Thakur, Amrendra Kumar. "Regional Literature in the Age of Machine Translation: Opportunities and Limitations." Ars Artium, vol. 13, Jan. 2025, pp. 127-138, https://www.arsartium.org/archive/volume-13-january-2025/amrendra-kumar-thakur/

•