

Employing Compensation Strategy in Translation of Idioms: A Case Study of the Translation of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in Persian

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Abstract

How can translators compensate the loss of idiomaticity while translating idiomatic texts? Taking an English novel as the source text and its Persian translations as the target language, we aim to answer this question. For the sake of this study 61 idioms and 32 non-idioms were extracted from the first chapter of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In the next stage, we compared the whole data with their Persian translations by Daryabandari and Golestan. The results show that in most cases the translators had translated the SL idioms into TL non-idioms. This strategy leads to an idiomatic imbalance between the ST and TT. In order to somehow deal with this idiomatic loss in their translations, the Persian translators followed compensation strategy by adding target language idioms elsewhere in the text. This means that, if in any case an SL idiom could not be translated as an idiom in TL, the translator can make up for the lost idiom by adding a TL idiom to places where there originally was a non-idiom.

Keywords: Translation, Translation Strategies, Idiom, Compensation Strategy, Source Text (ST), Target Text (TT), Source Language (SL), Target Language (TL).

1. Introduction

Translation has been typically defined as the process of transferring words or text from one language into another. The aim of translation is to communicate the meaning of a source-language text by means of an equivalent target-language text. But sometimes the difference between an SL and a TL and the variation in their cultures can challenge the process of translation. Among the problematic factors involved in translation such as form, meaning, style, proverbs, idioms, etc., the present paper concentrates on translating idioms in general and on the strategies of translating idioms in particular.

The English language is rich because of the breath of vocabulary available to speakers and because of abundant usage of figurative language. Idioms are only one component of figurative or non-literal language. Idioms, unlike metaphors and similes, usually have fixed or common meanings across a variety of situations. One does not need to be sensitive, creative, or poetic in order to use idioms. Idioms are part of our everyday language and most people have a large repertoire upon which to draw for daily interactions. (Vicker, 2000)

Idiomatic expressions are common in all languages and used widely in both written and spoken interactions, and even formal and informal contexts. Each particular language has its own unique and specific idioms which give color to that language. But this uniqueness can cause some difficulties in translation of idioms. These difficulties can relate to different areas, such as: recognizing idioms and distinguishing them from non-idioms, interpreting idioms correctly and rendering the various aspects of meaning that an idiom conveys in the target language. Therefore, for each type of idiomatic expressions and for each type of meaning we need a particular strategy in translation.

In this study, we only focus on the problems caused by non-idiomatic translations of the target text's idioms. As each language has its own unique culture and its own set of rules, sometimes it is impossible to translate an SL idiom with the exact counterpart idiom in the TL. So the translators have no other choice than translating the SL idiom, non-idiomatically. This causes a stylistic imbalance in the level of idiomaticity between the source text and the target text. So here the translators will encounter with a gap of idiomaticity in their translations, while the original text is more idiomatic than their translated version. But how the translators can deal with this problem is what will be discussed in this paper.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 *Idioms*

Idioms are generally defined as fixed phrases consisting of more than one word, and their meaning cannot be worked out by knowing the meaning of the individual words. They have a non-literal meaning that is different from the literal meaning of the phrase. Even if you know the meanings of all the words in the phrase *paint the town red*, you cannot guess the idiomatic meaning of the whole expression: this you must learn separately. (It means, of course, *having a good time*).

McGraw-Hill's Dictionary of American Idioms and Phrasal Verbs(2005), includes verbal

collocations, idioms, idiomatic expressions, clichés, proverbs, set phrases, fixed phrases, phrasal verbs, common phrases, prepositional verbs and phrasal/prepositional verbs in the category of idiomatic phrases, while “they all offer the same kinds of problems to the speaker and writer of English. They are unclear because the meaning of the phrase is not literal or predictable. Phrasal verbs, also called *two-word verbs*, are idiomatic expressions because the second element of the verb (the adverb or preposition) is not necessarily predictable” (p. v).

In the process of translating idioms there are some steps which seem crucial before choosing the proper strategies for translating idioms. One of these steps is to recognize idioms and spot them in the text. Another step is to understand and interpret the idioms accurately. As Larson (1984, p. 143) puts it, “the translator must first be sure of the meaning of the idiom and then look for the natural equivalent way to express the meaning of the idiom as a whole”. Additionally, a translator must be able to use idioms properly and fluently in the target language and as Larson (1984) puts it a translator needs to, “develop a sensitivity to the use of idioms in the receptor language and use them naturally to make the translation lively and keep the style of the source language” (p. 116).

There are some opinions about the translation of idioms by different scholars. But in general, most of them agree on the following three different translation strategies for idioms: translating an idiom with a non-idiom, translating an idiom with an idiom, and translating an idiom literally. However, we should not ignore the fact that, there is always a danger of unavoidable loss of meaning and style of the source text when translating idioms into the target language. For this reason some scholars such as Ingo (1990, as cited in Mustonen, 2010) suggests strategy of translating a non-idiomatic expression with an idiom as one possible strategy.

In an extensive categorization Baker (1992, pp. 72-78) suggests five strategies in translating idioms.

- 1) *Using an idiom of similar meaning and form:* This strategy involves using an idiom in the target language, which conveys roughly the same meaning as that of the source-language idiom and, in addition, consists of equivalent lexical items. This kind of match can only occasionally be achieved.
- 2) *Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form:* It is often possible to find an idiom or fixed expression in the target language which has a meaning similar to that of the source idiom or expression, but which consists of different lexical items.
- 3) *Translation by paraphrase:* This is by far the most common way of translating idioms when a match cannot be found in the target language or when it seems inappropriate to use idiomatic language in the target text because of differences in stylistic preferences of the source and target languages.
- 4) *Translation by omission:* As with single words, an idiom may sometimes be omitted altogether in the target text. This may be because it has no close match in the target language, its meaning cannot be easily paraphrased, or for stylistic reasons.
- 5) *Translation by compensation:* One strategy, which cannot be adequately illustrated, simply because it would take up a considerable amount of space, is the strategy of compensation. Briefly, this means that one may either omit or play down a feature such as idiomaticity at the point where it occurs in the source text and introduce it elsewhere in the target text. This strategy is not restricted to idiomaticity or fixed

expressions and may be used to make up for any loss or meaning, emotional force, or stylistic effect, which may not be possible to reproduce directly at a given point in the target text.

2.2 Compensation

Compensation is a strategy most definitely worth considering, while it can be used as one possible strategy for dealing with idioms and quite an effective one for compensating the loss caused by translating. Therefore, in order to preserve the idiomaticity of the original text and to avoid the mentioned loss, many translators resort to compensation in translating idioms as their final but workable strategy. That is when an idiom is not possible to be translated into TT, a translator's last effort is to compensate an idiom by omitting that and putting an idiom in another place, thus maintaining the stylistic effect of idiom usage in the ST.

Nida and Taber (1969) mention that, "whereas one inevitably loses many idioms in the process of translation one also stands to gain a number of idioms" (p. 106). Also in order to keep the style of the source language Larson notes that, "there will often be words in the source which are not idioms, but are best translated with an idiom". (1984, p. 116)

Harvey(1989) illustrates that "compensation is a technique which involves making up for the loss of source text effect by recreating a similar effect in the target text through means that are specific to the target language and/or text"(as cited in Baker, 1998, p.37). Baker (1992) indicates that in compensation, a translator may omit or play down a feature such as idiomaticity at the point where it occurs in the ST and introduce it somewhere else in the TT (p. 78).

In support of this idea, Newmark (1991) suggests that all puns, alliterations, rhyme, slang, metaphor and pregnant words can be compensated in translation. Though he further adds that, "compensation is the procedure which in the last resort ensures that translation is possible" (pp. 143-144).

Although the compensation strategy has not received a great deal of attention within the field of translation theory, it certainly deserves to be investigated in greater detail which is exactly what this research aims to do, as the researcher has included this strategy in her analysis. In this study, she has limited her discussions on compensation cases in which original non-idioms are shifted to target language idioms.

3. Method

3.1 Corpus

The study is based on a contrastive comparison between the two Persian translations of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Najaf Daryabandari (1986) and Ebrahim Golestan (1949), to find out which of these translators has followed the compensation strategy in his translation, and whether they have been successful in this approach or not.

3.2 Collecting Data

At this point, it seems necessary to mention the data collection process which is administered in this research.

In the first stage the method by which the data was gathered was by collecting the English American idioms from the aforementioned novel and finding their Persian equivalents from the two Persian translations of the same novel. Since the researcher also wanted to examine cases where an English non-idiom had been translated with a Persian idiom, she read the two Persian translation of the book for a second time and extracted the Persian language idioms in places where there weren't any idioms in the source language context. The main problem here was to decide which phrase could be considered as an idiom and which not. So based on the definitions and classifications of idioms by different scholars and as it became evident for the researcher, that a universal and fix definition and classification of an idiom does not exist, she come up with her own set of rules in recognition of idioms.

So the rules here are that, the idiom should be a multiword expression whose meaning cannot be understood from its individual components and has a figurative meaning. Also, as some theorists like Makkai (1972, as cited in Mustonen, 2010) includes phrasal verbs in their categorizations of idioms, the researcher somehow followed the same idea but just included those phrasal verbs which followed the above mentioned rules and phrasal verbs whose meaning is literal were excluded from the data.

In this study, the novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was chosen as the research object for its highly idiomatic use of language. So because of this large number of idiomatic expressions the researcher focused her study mainly on the first chapter of the novel. The data employed for the sake of the present study consists of 279 phrases extracted from this chapter, in both original English text and its two Persian translations. This number includes 151 idiomatic expressions among which 90 expressions were Persian idioms and 61 of them were English idioms and phrasal verbs. The remaining data is a number of 96 non-idiomatic Persian phrases. Furthermore, the data includes a total of 32 cases where a non-idiomatic expression in English text has been translated with a Persian idiom. The summary of the given data is presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Total Number of Idiomatic and Non-Idiomatic Translations of the Twain's Idioms

Twain's Idioms	Total	Translation	Daryabandari	Golestan
61		Idiomatic	23	24
		Non-Idiomatic	38	37

As it can be inferred from the Table 1, the researcher collected altogether 61 idioms from the original text in which the translators had decided to translate them whether idiomatically or non-idiomatically. In this table the total number of idiomatic and non-idiomatic translations of the English idioms is given. These numbers include the data extracted from both Persian translations. By this the researcher can claim that, with a very slight difference between their translations, both translators have a tendency towards non-idiomatic translation of idioms.

In a table below, Table 2, the total number of idiomatic and non-idiomatic translations of the non-idiomatic English text's phrases is given. The numbers here include the data extracted from both Persian translations.

Table 2. Total Number of Idiomatic and Non-Idiomatic Translations of the Twain's Non-Idioms

Twain's Non-Idioms	Total	Translation	Daryabandari	Golestan
	32	Idiomatic	23	20
		Non-Idiomatic	9	12

According to Table 2, the researcher collected 32 non-idioms from the original text in which the translators had decided to translate them whether idiomatically or non-idiomatically. This means that in 23 cases the English non-idioms have been translated idiomatically by Daryabandari and similarly Golestan has translated 20 of SL non-idiomatic phrases idiomatically. This means that the vast majority of extracted SL non-idioms were translated with idiomatic expressions in Persian. In comparison between the two translators, it can be found out that Daryabandari has more tendencies towards translation of non-idioms with idioms.

And finally Table 3 shows the total number of idioms and non-idioms extracted from the first chapter of Twain's novel and a total number of idioms and non-idioms found for Twain's data in both Persian translations.

Table 3. Total Number of Different Data Extracted from Both Translations and the Original Text

Data	Twain	Daryabandari	Golestan
Idiom	61	46	44
Non-idiom	32	47	49
Total	93	93	93

This table defines that Twain's text is more idiomatic (N=61) than Daryabandari (N=46) and Golestan's (N=44) texts.

3.3 *Classifying Data*

After extracting the data, the researcher divided the data into three groups. Those idioms from the source language (SL) which are translated into idioms in the target language (TL), SL idioms, which are translated into TL non-idioms, and SL non-idioms, which are translated into TL idioms. After classifying idioms, she inserted each groups in a separate tables. Each table contains a list of extracts from the original text and their translations from the two available texts. More descriptions on the data had been discussed in section 3.2.

3.4 *Analyzing Data*

In this stage, the researcher analyzed the idioms according to the strategy used to translate them. Here the translators appeared to have used three different translation strategies for idioms. These strategies were:

- 1) translating an English idiom with a Persian idiom
- 2) translating an English-language idiom with a non-idiomatic Persian phrase, and
- 3) translating an English non-idiom, with a Persian idiom.

In the next stage, the researcher calculated the frequency of occurrence of each strategy in the available Persian translations, and based on these frequencies, she counted the percentage proportion of each strategy in the same translations. The results for translation of the SL idioms are shown in Tables 4 and 5, which are presented below.

Table 4. Frequency and Percentage of Idiom's Translation Strategies Applied by Daryabandari

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Translation of idiom with idiom	23	37.70
Translation of idiom with non-idiom	38	62.29
Total	61	100

Table 5. Frequency and Percentage of Idiom's Translation Strategies Applied by Golestan

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Translation of idiom with idiom	24	39.34
Translation of idiom with non-idiom	37	60.65
Total	61	100

The results of Tables 4 and 5 show that the most frequently used translation strategy applied by translators in translation of idioms, was translating a source language idiom with a non-idiomatic target language phrase. In Daryabandari's translation, out of 61 idioms, 38 idioms were translated idiomatically: it was used in approximately 62.29% of all cases. Also in the case of Golestan's translation, the biggest part of idioms was translated non-idiomatically: it was used in 60.65% of all cases.

Also the following set of tables (Tables 6 and 7) indicate the results for translation of the SL non- idioms.

Table 6. Frequency and Percentage of Non- Idiom's Translation Strategies Applied by Daryabandari

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Translation of non-idiom with idiom	23	71.87
Translation of non-idiom with non-idiom	9	28.10
Total	32	100

Table 7. Frequency and Percentage of Non-Idiom's Translation Strategies Applied by Golestan

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Translation of non-idiom with idiom	20	62.50
Translation of non-idiom with non-idiom	12	37.50
Total	32	100

From these two tables, it became evident that translating non-idiomatic SL phrase with a TL idiom was a popular translation strategy used by both translators. This time, out of 32 SL

non-idiomatic phrases, 71.87% of all cases had been translated idiomatically by Daryabandari. Similarly, Golestan had translated 62.50% of all SL non-idioms with TL idioms.

And finally the study showed that translating idiom with idiom was the last and least strategy applied by Persian translators. The summary of the discussed statistics is demonstrated in Table 8.

Table 8. Percentage of each Applied Strategies in both Translations

Strategy	Daryabandari	Golestan
Translation of idiom with idiom	37.70	39.34
Translation of idiom with non-idiom	62.29	60.65
Translation of non-idiom with idiom	71.87	62.50

By these conclusions, it became apparent that both translators tried to avoid translating idioms with idiom and found other strategies for translating difficult cases. Here the translators have translated the majority of idioms with non-idioms, and on the other hand, they have translated many of SL non-idioms with TL idioms. With this strategy they could somehow compensate the loss of the original text's idiomaticity.

4. Results

The results of this study indicate that, the translators appeared to have used three different strategies for translating idioms: translating an English idiom with a Persian idiom, translating an English-language idiom with a non-idiomatic Persian phrase, and translating an English non-idiom with a Persian idiom. As it became clear from the statistics, the two translators most frequently used translation strategy, was translating an idiom with a non-idiomatic phrase in the TL. Another frequent used strategy in this study was to translate an SL non-idiom with a TL idiom. The last and least strategy used by the translators, was translating an SL idiom with a TL idiom.

5. Discussions and Conclusions

As it has been discussed before, idioms often considered difficult to translate but the translators should do their bests to be faithful to the target text. In the case of this study, out of 61 extracted idioms from Twain's novel, 38 (62.29%) of the expressions have not been translated as idioms by Daryabandari. In the same case, Golestan has translated 24 (39.34%) of the idioms with Persian idioms and the remaining 37(60.65%) idioms have been translated non-idiomatically. This imbalance between the total number of idioms and their non-idiomatic translations causes a loss of idiomaticity in the Persian translated texts. Some of these idiomatic losses have been compensated for elsewhere in the text, since the translators have replaced some English language non-idioms with Persian idioms. By this strategy, Daryabandari has added 23 idioms and Golestan has added 20 idioms to their translations. Therefore, the idiomatic balance between the English text and the Persian translated texts remained slightly uneven, but this is something inevitable in translation of any lengthy book. The translators had nevertheless done a good job by compensating the loss of idiomaticity in their translations and in most cases, the meaning of the original texts idioms

has been conveyed. Also by these discussions, one can claim that compensation strategy is a workable strategy, not only in translation of idiomatic texts, but also in translating other elements of the languages such as figures of speech.

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