

# The Translation of the Arabic Descriptive Words That are Derived From the Names of Animals Used to Give Adjectives for Human Beings or Describe Their Behaviors - Case Study: Students at The University of Jordan / Amman

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## Abstract

Arabic language is a rich language; it is full of different expressions and idioms. Some parts of speech like nouns could be used for many other purposes (e.g. adjectives). Many descriptive words in Arabic are derived from the names of animals to give adjectives for human beings or to describe their behaviors. This study aims to translate these words by transforming the correct meaning in the Arabic culture. A case study is made with students of translation class at The University of Jordan/ Amman. They were asked to translate ten sentences; each of which contains a name of an animal that is used to give an adjective for humans or describe their behaviors. Some of these words (expressions or idioms) have equivalences in English so that, they are easy to be translated. Others have no equivalences in English, so the students need to look for the correct meanings these words indicate in the Arabic culture. Literal translations for these words are not accepted at all because no message could be delivered in this case.

**Keywords:** Translation, Translators, Descriptive words, Equivalences

## 1. Introduction and Literature Review

Translation has been defined as the activity in which a meaning of a given linguistic item is rendered from one language to another, Longman Dictionary (2006). The language to be

translated is called the source language (SL), whereas the language to be translated into or arrived at is called the target language (TL). It is ‘‘the comprehension of the meaning of a text and the subsequent production of an equivalent text’’, Warwal (2014).

This activity happens by transforming the entities from (SL) into their equivalence in (TL) depending on either the literal meaning of the words; this way guarantees no perfect results for translators specially if the statement includes cultural-based expressions or idioms, or the general meaning based on the cultural or social background that the translator has about the SL; this way is always accepted. Alnuzaili E.S in "Arabic and English Adjectival Systems in Translation: Agreement Intricacies" argues that a translator should always think outside the box and remember that TL audience is not the same as ST audience".

A translator needs to have a number of skills. First, he needs to have a good knowledge regarding the social and cultural environment of the words in both the SL and the TL to cover all justifications regarding the reason the words are translated in and because translation cannot achieve its goals in isolation of culture and society; accordingly, translation involves at least two languages and two cultures (Toury1978). Culture in this context includes the knowledge of community, religion, traditions, habits, family and social structure, educational system, political and governmental hierarchies, and use of advanced technology (Geertz, 1975, Lado, 1968). Halliday (1989) adopted a semantic definition when he says that culture is ‘‘a set of semiotic systems, a set of systems of meaning, all of which interrelate’’. In later sections in this study, there will be discussed how culture can change the meaning.

Second, a translator has to have a good knowledge about the process of derivation. It is the process of forming words from bases or roots by the addition of affixes, by internal phonetic change often with a change in the form class of a word. In English, it involves Prefixation and Suffixation; it is made by adding derivational affixes to roots or to stems of two or more morphemes. In Arabic, derivation has always been considered the most natural way to create a new vocabulary. In the discussion section of this study, it will be discussed how the names of animals (nouns) are used as adjectives to describe humans and their behaviors.

Third, a translator needs to have a good background about idioms (a group of words, whose meaning is different from the meanings of the individual words, Oxford online dictionaries). Translating idioms is arguably the most complex and problematic task for translators. Pederson (cited in Trosborg 1997:109, in Howwar 2013) argues that the process of translating idioms is not an easy task and that ‘‘the translation of idioms is as difficult as it is central’’. Gottlieb suggests that ‘‘an idiom is difficult to decode correctly for someone who only knows the normal meanings of its constituent elements’’ (1997, p.260). In another statement proposed by Beekman and Callow, idioms are defined as ‘‘the combination of at least two words which cannot be understood literally and which function as a unit semantically’’ (1974, p.49). Translators cannot find the proper equivalent of some of the SL items. According to Culler (1976), languages contain concepts which differ radically from those of another, since each language organizes the world differently. This study includes a number of idioms that need to be translated based on the meaning they carry not the literal meaning of the individual

words. Besides, index (1) and (2) of this study include a number of Arabic and English idioms that contain names of animals or planets used to describe humans or their behaviors.

Forth, a translator needs to get a good knowledge about the equivalences in TL. For a formal definition, Dubois et al (1973) says “translation is the expression in another language (or target language) of what has been expressed in another source, language, preserving semantic and stylistic equivalences”. But it has already been suggested by many translation scholars such as Baker (1992) and New mark (1988:91) that the notion of equivalence is problematic in the study of translation, and to overcome this problem, various translation strategies have been suggested by various authors within the field of translation. Equivalence in the translation of some adjectives is sometimes a mysterious spot since even the dictionary or lexical meanings of some often thought of as equivalent adjectives remain relative and even far from being similar (Mansour2010).

However, this paper will study how to translate the Arabic descriptive words that are derived from the names of animals to describe human beings and their behaviors. Some of these words are idioms, some has equivalence in English and some others have to do with the Arabian culture.

However, this study will focus on answering two questions:

1. What are the best translations for the Arabic descriptive words that include names of animals used to describe human beings and their behaviors?
2. Will the translation be accepted if the translator presents the literal meaning? Or the general meaning is only accepted?

## **2. Study Data**

The data of the present study involves ten Arabic sentences, each of which includes one descriptive word derived from the names of animals to describe human beings or their behaviors. The sentences were collected from internet and people to be translated into English. The study population includes 47 third-year students (in translation class) who study Applied English at The University of Jordan, and had at least taken three courses in translation. The students were not asked to write their names on the papers that include the sentences to be translated, and they were not allowed to use dictionaries. They were given one hour to finish the translation. The correct translation of each descriptive word in the ten sentences is provided beside the different translations of the students. The following are the findings and the results of these translations.

## **3. Results and Analysis**

This section displays the findings of the study followed by an analysis of the data. The students come up with different translations for the ten sentences which include one example of animals' names that are used in Arabic for different purposes. Some students present the translation of the meaning (the right meaning), some others translate the words literally by mentioning the names of the animals shown in the sentences, and others come up with the equivalences of the animals' names in English language. The ten sentences in Arabic and

their correct translations in English will be presented in table 1. The different translations of the students with justifications will be presented next.

Table 1. The ten sentences in Arabic and their correct translations in English language

Ss. No	The sentence in Arabic	Correct translation
1.	كان الرجل <u>متنمرًا</u> في تعامله مع زملائه. ka:na ?arraju lu mutanam miran fi: ta <sup>c</sup> a:mulih i ma <sup>c</sup> zumala: ?ih	The man <u>was bullied</u> in his dealings with his colleagues.
2.	استأ <u>سد</u> الرجل في بداية علاقته مع صديقه. ta <sup>c</sup> a:mulih i ma <sup>c</sup> Sadi:qih	The man <u>was dominating</u> at the beginning of his relationship with his friend.
3.	تحدثت معي بلسان أفعى. taHadathat ma <sup>c</sup> i: bilisa:ni ?af <sup>c</sup> a:	She spoke to me <u>cunningly</u> .
4.	كان الرجل <u>جميلًا</u> في صبره على فراق ابنه. ka:na ?arraju lu jamalan fi: Sabrihi <sup>c</sup> ala: fira:qi ?ibnih	The man was very <u>patient</u> in tolerating his son's parting.
5.	كان الرجل <u>حصانًا</u> في أداء المهام الموكلة اليه. ka:na ?arraju lu HiSa:nan fi: ?a:da: ?almaha:m ?almu:kalati ?ilaih	The man was <u>as strong as a horse</u> in performing his missions.
6.	هو في تصرفاته <u>بهييم</u> . huwa fi: taSarrufatihi bahi:m	He behaves <u>stupidly</u> .
7.	لديها عيني <u>ظبي</u> . ladaiha: <sup>c</sup> ainai THabii	Her eyes are <u>very beautiful</u> .
8.	هي <u>فأرة كتب</u> ؛ مولعة بالقراءة. hiya fa?ratu kutubin mu:la <sup>c</sup> atun bilqira?ah	She is <u>bookworm</u> . She is fond of reading.
9.	وكأنني ابن البطة السوداء. waka?anani ?ibnu ?albaTati ?assawda:?	It seems like I am the <u>black sheep</u> .
10.	طوله <u>كطول النحلة</u> وعقله كعقل السخلة. Tu:luhu kaTu:l ?annakhlah wa <sup>c</sup> aqluhu ka <sup>c</sup> aql ?assakhlah	Although physically he <u>looks adults</u> , his <u>behaviors are still stupid</u> .

The first sentence includes the word (tanamara=تنمر). This word in Arabic is derived from the animal name (tiger) which is used to indicate the harsh behavior of someone toward others both physically or mentally. (Tiger) is chosen to indicate this meaning in Arabic because of the harsh and predator way tigers behave other animals. This word has been translated in English language as (bully) so that the students find no difficulties in translating it.

The translations of the students are as the following:

1. كان الرجل متتمراً في تعامله مع زملائه.
  - a. The man was a bully in his behaviors with his colleagues.
  - b. The man was treating his colleagues like a bully.
  - c. The man was bullied in his dealings with his colleagues
  - d. The man was bullying his colleagues.
  - e. The man is bullying in his dealings with his colleagues.

The all translations of the students were using the word (bully) with its different parts of speech and none of them translate the word literally by using the word (tiger). In translations 1.a, b, students translate the word as a noun *bully*. In 1.c, the word is shown as an adjective *bullied*. In 1.d,e translations, the students translate the word as a verb with its present or past continuous tense *is bullying, was bullying*. All translations were accepted.

The second sentence includes the word (ista?sada=استأسد) which is derived from the animal name (الاسد=lion). This word is used positively in Arabic to refer to one's strength and wisdom in his behavior and has the ability to lead a group of people. Arabians depend on the idea that lion is the king of forest and kings are known by their strength and wisdom.

The translations of the students were as the following:

2. استأسد الرجل في بداية علاقته مع صديقه.
  - f. The man was a bully at the beginning of his relationship with his friends.
  - g. The man was dominating and controlling at the beginning of his relationship with his friends.
  - h. The man was bold at the beginning of his relationship with his friends.
  - i. The man was courageous at the beginning of his relationship with his friends.
  - j. The man was intense at the beginning of his relationship with his friends.
  - k. The man was in charge and controlling at the beginning of his relationship with his friends.

In 2.a translation, the students give the sentence a negative meaning and make tigers and lions with the same level; they translate ((استأسد=ista?sada) as (bully). This translation is wrong and not accepted since (bullying) indicates negative meaning whereas (استأسد=ista?sada)

indicates positive meaning. The rest translations indicate positive meanings by using words such as *dominating, bold, courageous, intense and controlling*, and all of them are accepted ones. None of the students translate the word (استأسد=?ista?sada) literally by using the word (lion).

In the third sentence, the word (?af<sup>c</sup>a:=أفعى) which means (snake) in English is used. Snakes are symbols for cunning and wiliness. This word indicates that a ruse is made by someone without using or following literal words and activities (the meaning is hidden beyond the literal words in talks). In the statement, the (tongue of the snake) is used to indicate that the girl's words were cunning.

The translations of the students were as the following:

3. تحدثت معي بلسان أفعى.

- a. She talked to me with a snake tongue.
- b. She talked to me with a viper's tongue.
- c. She talked to me like a snake.
- d. She talked to me toxically.
- e. She talked to me harshly.
- f. She talked to me cunningly.
- g. She talked to me malignantly.
- h. She talked to me dishonestly.
- i. She talked to me in a malice way.

In 3.a, b. translations, the students translate the statement literally by using words like *snake tongue, viper's tongue*. This statement has no equivalence in English language so that the speakers of English will understand nothing from these translations. As a result, these translations are not accepted. In 3.c. translations, the students make a similarity between the way the girl talks in and the way of snakes communicate with, this actually is not accurate enough and so the translation is not accepted. The rest of the translations focus on the meaning by using words such as *toxically, harshly, cunningly, malignantly, dishonestly*, all these translations are accepted and to the point.

The fourth statement includes the word (جمال=jamal) which means (camel) in English. Camels in Arabian cultures are a symbol for patience since they live in deserts with harsh and difficult circumstances. The word (camel) is positively used in Arabic to indicate the ability to be patient for long time. In the above sentence (sentence 4, table 1), the meaning indicates that the man was very patient in tolerating his son's parting.

The translations of the students were as the following:

4. كان الرجل جملاً في صبره على فراق ابنه.

- a. The man was so patient in his son's loss.
- b. The man was long-suffering after the death of his son.
- c. The man shows beautiful patience in his separation of his son.
- d. The man behaves as a camel in his patience for his son's loss.

In 4.a, b, c translations, the meaning is translated correctly by using words such as *patience*, *patient*, *long-suffering*. Many people in Arab countries are familiar with the relation between camels and patience, and this meaning is not difficult to be reached by the students. In 4.d translation, the students mention the word (camel) in their translations with the combination of patience, this translation may not be understood by some people who are not familiar with the physical features of camels as Arabians, so the this translation will not be accepted.

In the fifth sentence, another name of animals is used; the horse (alHiSa:n=الحصان). In the Arab world, horses indicate the meaning of strength and uniqueness. When referring to someone as a horse, this means a positive indication about his behavior.

The translations of the students were as the following:

5. كان الرجل حصاناً في أداء المهام الموكلة اليه.

- a. The man was so active in doing the tasks assigned to him.
- b. The man did his job perfectly.
- c. The man was furious in doing his job.
- d. The man worked hard.
- e. The man did his work really fast.
- f. The man was as fortress in doing his job.
- g. The man was as strong as a horse in doing his job.

In translations 5.a-e, the students use different adjectives to translate the word (horse=حصان=HiSa:n) such as *active*, *perfect*, *furious*, *work hard*, *fast* to refer to the strength and originality of the man in doing his job; they translate the meaning and so their translations are accepted. In 5.f translation, the students use the word *fortress* which means (castle) to refer again to the strength of the man's body in doing his job; this translation includes another idiom which may not be understood by all people, so I will consider this translation as inaccurate. Some students mention the word *horse* in combination with *strong* in their translation; their translations are still accepted since they keep the meaning.

The sixth sentence includes the word (bahi:m=بهيمة) which means (animal) in English. This word in Arabic is used to refer to any animal with four legs used to carry people such as donkeys, oxen, cows, horses and others. It is used negatively in Arabic to refer to the stupidity of someone's behaviors.

The translations of the students were as the following:

6. هو في تصرفاته بهيم.

- a. His behaviors are stupid.
- b. He behaves stupidly.
- c. He goes into things blindly.
- d. He is like animals in his behaviors.
- e. He is an animal in acting this way.

In 6.a, b, c translations, the meaning is translated by using words such as *stupid*, *stupidly*, *blindly*; so the translation is accepted. In 6.d,f translations, the students translate the word literally by using the word *animal(s)* to refer to the meaning; this translation could be accepted by many cultures but not all specially by those who believe in the behaviors of animals and believe that not all animals are stupid.

The seventh sentence is a flirtation one that includes the name of an animal which has very beautiful eyes; deer. The word in Arabic is ( ظبي=THabii ), it is used a lot by the ancient Arabian poets to refer to the beautiful eyes of girls. The word is still used nowadays with the same meaning.

The translations of the students were as the following:

7. لديها عيني ظبي.

- a. She has very beautiful eyes.
- b. She has sharp eyes.
- c. She got doe-eyes.
- d. She has deer eyes.
- e. She has fawn eyes.
- f. Her eyes are as beautiful as deer's ones.

In 7.a, b translations, the students translate the meaning by using words such as *beautiful*, *sharp* to refer to the beauty of the eyes. In 7.c,d,e, the students use the name of the animal with different words like *doe*, *deer*, *fawn*. These translations could be accepted by those people who find deer's eyes beautiful and so they will understand the meaning, but on the other hand, some people will not accept this translation if they find that deer do not necessary have the most beautiful eyes of animals. In 7.f translation, the students combine the name of the animal with the word *beautiful* through the structure as+adj+as+N; this translation is not accurate for the reason mentioned with translations b, c, d, e.

The next two sentences (S 8, 9, Table 1) contain the name of two animals whose translation has equivalence in English language. The animals are ( فأرة=mouse), its equivalence in English



is *bookworm*, and (black duck=البطة السوداء), its equivalence in English is *black sheep*. In sentence 8, the word (mouse=فأرة) is used when referring to someone who is fond of reading.

The translations of the students were as the following:

8. هي فأرة كتّيب؛ مولعة بالقراءة
- She likes reading books a lot.
  - She is fond of reading books.
  - She is fancy with reading books.
  - She is crazy about reading books.
  - She is a bookish girl.
  - She is a bookworm.
  - She is like a mouse, fond of reading books.

The students in 8.a,b,c,d,e, translate the meaning by using words such as *like, fond, fancy, crazy, bookish*. Other students translate the sentence with its equivalence in English language *bookworm*. Some students translate literally and use the word *mouse* but actually this translation is not accepted since mice naturally has no relations with reading books. In sentence 9, (black sheep=البطة السوداء) is used to refer to someone who is ignored by others or who has no importance in his community. The translations of the students were as the following:

9. وكأني ابن البطة السوداء.
- I am always ignored.
  - I am not into account.
  - I feel like I am marginal.
  - They behave as I am not here.
  - They behave me as black sheep.
  - They behave me as if I am the son of the black duck.
  - They behave me as if I am the son of the odd duck.
  - They behave me as if I am the son of the ugly duck.
  - They behave me as if I am the son of the duck egg.

The students in 9.a, b, c, d translate the meaning by using words such as *ignored, account, marginal, not here*. Other students come up with the equivalence in English *black sheep* (e.g. 9.e translation). Some students come up with the literal meaning of (البطة= السوداء?albatati ?assawda:?) by using words such as *the son of black duck, odd duck, ugly duck, the duck egg*. The first two translations are accepted but the lasting one is not.

The last sentence in table 1 includes two words to describe a human both physically and mentally; ( النخلة=?annakhlah ) which means (palm) and ( سخله=?assakhlah ) which means (goat). This statement is said when someone is very tall and his physical appearance is gentle but he behaves stupidly. The translations of the students were as the following;

10. طوله كطول النخلة وعقله كعقل السخله
- Although he is an adult, his behaviors are still stupid.
  - Although he is enough matured, he behaves stupidly.
  - His appearance does not hold an attractive mentality.
  - His length is same as a palm but his mind is like a goat.
  - He is very tall but his brain is very small.
  - He is very tall but very stupid.
  - He is tall but na ĩve.
  - He is cute but stupid.

In 10.a, b, c translations, the students translate the meaning by using words such as *adult*, *matured*, *stupid*, *attractive mentality*, this translation is surely accepted because the idea of the statement is that once a human reaches a specific age, he has to behave in a good way not in a stupid way. In 10.d translation, the students translate the words literally by mentioning *palm* and *goat*. In 10.e,f,g translations, the students make a relation between the length of humans and the percentage of their intelligence, that as, the taller a human is, the smarter he must be. This meaning actually is not accepted and not used; there is no relation between the physical features of human beings and their intelligence. Similar meaning is shown in 10.h translation where a relation between cuteness and intelligence is made.

#### 4. Conclusion

Translation is the process of transforming words, expressions, idioms or the meaning from one language (SL) into another (TL). When translating single words or expressions, translators can provide more than one equivalence in the TL. Translating statements that include specific words derived from names of animals, planets or other objects will put the translator in front of three choices; he either needs to have a good knowledge about the culture and sometimes the environment of the SL, so that he can transform the correct meaning, he may provide a literal translating for the statements; in most cases this will not be accepted because it delivers no logical meaning, or he will look for the equivalence in TL if available; in this case, translators must have a good background about the synonyms and equivalences in the TL. To sum up, transforming the general meaning or providing the equivalences (in the TL) in translation are much better than coming up with the literal meaning. This paper could be the first one for researchers to encourage them looking for the names of other animals and plants that are used in giving humans adjectives. Arabic language

is full of adjectives that are derived from names of animated objects and so this is a rich material for researching.

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1

Here are some other statements where names of animals and planets are used (as idioms) to describe human beings or their behaviors.

1. كان حديثها معي معسولاً kan Hadi:thuha ma<sup>c</sup>i: ma<sup>c</sup>su:lan
2. هي في نشاطها نحلة hiya fi: nashaTiha naHlah
3. هو في تصرفاته نمس huwa fi: taSarrufatihi nams
4. ثور لاهي في برسيمه dhu:r ?allah fi: barsi:muh
5. الك ولا للذيب؟ !ilak walla lathi:b
6. هو ذيب فعل huwa thi:b faHl
7. اخفض لي جناحك ikhfiD li: janaHak
8. انا ذيبك ?ana thi:bak
9. هذه الفتاة جمل hathihi ?alfatatu jamal
10. بدى خديها متوردين خجلاً bada: khaddayha mutawaridayn khajalan
11. ارتدى الرجل قميصاً مشجراً irtada: ?arrajulu qami:San mushajjaran
12. هذه الفتاة دبة hathihi ?alfatatu dubbah

13. هو يريدني بقرة حلوب huwa yuri:duni: baqarah Halu:b
14. هو مع زوجته خروف huwa ma<sup>c</sup> zawjatihi kharu:f
15. كم هو بغل! kam huwa baghl
16. هي طويلة كالزرافة hiya Tawi:la kazzara:fah
17. هي زنانة كالنحلة hiya zannanah kannahlah
18. وجهها كالخنفساء wajhuha: kalkhunfusa:?
19. هي في بيته أرنب huwa fi: baytihi ?arnab
20. حيتان السوق Hi:tan ?assu:q

## Appendix 2

Here are a number of statements in English where names of animals are used as idioms to describe humans or situations.

1. At snail's pace.
2. Busy as a bee.
3. Open a can of worms.
4. Wild goose chase.
5. The world is your oyster.
6. Watching like a hawk.
7. Mad as a hornet.
8. Eagle eyes.
9. Dog eat a dog.
10. Get your ducks in a row.
11. Guinea pig.
12. Hold your horses.
13. I will be a monkey's uncle.
14. Let sleeping dogs lie.
15. Pet peeve.
16. A little bird told me.

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