

The Competence of Translation Major Students' at Al-Zaytoonah University in Translating Cultural Idiomatic Expressions

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the level of translation competence among students of Al Zaytoonah University, it also investigates the effect of their academic level and gender on their translation competence. The sample consisted of (44) male and female students in Al Zaytoonah University. The researcher developed a translation competence scale which consisted in the initial form of (34) paragraphs. In order to answer the questions of the study, the means, standard deviations, two way ANOVA (2×4), and correlation coefficients were computed. The results of the study revealed that the level of translation competence of university students was moderate. Also, the results revealed that there is a statistically significant difference in translation competence due to academic level. In addition, the results of the study revealed that translation competence was significantly positively related to the use translation strategies.

Keywords: Translation competence, Translation Strategies, University Students

Introduction

Language is a human system of communication that uses arbitrary signals, such as voice sounds, gestures, and/or written symbols. Linguists (that is, specialists in the study of language) have defined *language* in many different ways. Here, chronologically arranged, are a few of those definitions:

1. "Language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols." (Edward Sapir, *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech*. Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1921)
2. "A language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates." (B. Bloch and G. Trager, *Outline of Linguistic Analysis*. Waverly Press, 1942)
3. From now on I will consider a language to be a set (finite or infinite) of sentences, each finite in length and constructed out of a finite set of elements." (Noam Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures*, 1957)
4. "Language is behaviour which utilizes body parts: the vocal apparatus and the auditory system for oral language; the brachial apparatus and the visual system for sign language. . . . Such body parts are controlled by none other than the brain for their functions." (Fred C.C. Peng, *Language in the Brain: Critical Assessments*. Continuum, 2005)
5. "A language consists of symbols that convey meaning, plus rules for combining those symbols, that can be used to generate an infinite variety of messages." (Wayne Weiten, *Psychology: Themes And Variations*, 7th ed. Thomson Wadsworth, 2007)
6. "We can define language as a system of communication using sounds or symbols that enables us to express our feelings, thoughts, ideas, and experiences." (E. Bruce Goldstein, *Cognitive Psychology: Connecting Mind, Research, and Everyday Experience*, 2nd ed. Thomson, 2008)

Language as mentioned above is a tool of communication and a means of creating relationships between humans. It builds a bridge between nations' ideologies and cultures. Since translation is regarded a bilingual communication as it deals with two different languages; it plays a great and essential role in founding such a bridge and filling the gap between peoples all over the world. Peter Newmark (12 April 1916 – 9 July 2011) was an English professor of translation at the university of Surrey, defines translation as the art of transferring meaning of the text from one language to another, taking care of the functional relevant meaning. While Birslin (1976, P 1) defines translation as "the general term referring to the transfer of thoughts and ideas from one language (source) to another (target), whether the languages have established orthographies or don't have such standardization or whether one or both languages based on signs."

Language is used to construct our social lives and using this understanding to improve our world. Language and culture are inextricably intermingled. This togetherness has been widely highlighted in several linguistic, social and cultural studies (e.g. Alptekin, 2002; Brown, 1994; Bygate, 2005; Jiang, 2000; MacKenzie, 2012; Risager, 2007 ;). Peterson and Coltrane (2003) emphasize that to achieve desired communication, culturally appropriate language use appear to be a must. In other words, knowledge of linguistic features is not adequate for successful intercultural communication (Scarino, 2010).

Accurate translation should involve the conceptual identity of languages, the source (the language; the translator translates from) and the target language (the language the translator translates into) as well. Thus; being a translator or an interpreter is one of the most challenging tasks; he / she should have good background knowledge, topic knowledge, and social and cultural competence. One of the interesting definitions of the term "translator" is the one giving by Lotfipour, 1997, "the translator's task is to create conditions under which the source language author and the target language reader can interact with one another." Wierzbick argues that we "are different people" not only because we speak different languages, but we think differently, feel differently and relate to each other differently (A. Wierzbick).

Translating idioms raises a number of challenges as the mastery of idioms is often equated with native speaker fluency (Frendo, 1996; Schmitt, 2000; Wray, 2000). A number of studies consider idioms a subcategory of the more general lexical phenomenon of formulaic language (Nattinger & Decarrico, 1992; Moon, 1999, 2000, 2002; Wray & Perkins, 2000). Being able to understand and translate idioms is a key to nativelike fluency)

Typically, an idiom is characterized as a string of words whose semantic interpretation cannot be derived compositionally from the interpretation of its parts. "Shoot the breeze," for instance, cannot be understood by putting together shoot, the, and breeze in the same way in which "eat the soup" can be understood. Thus, idiomatic expressions defy the standard view of language comprehension according to which understanding a sentence entails at least recognizing the individual words in the sentence, retrieving their meanings from the mental lexicon, and combining them according to their grammatical relations.

People use idioms to make their language richer, more colorful, and to convey subtle shades of meaning or intentions. Idioms are used to often replace a literal word or expression. Many times the idiom when used describes the nuance of meaning in a better way than a single word.

However, insofar as this view does not allow for the comprehension of idioms, these expressions are problematic for any theory of language processing. They are even more challenging if one considers how frequently they appear in the language. Boatner, Gates, and Makkai's (1975) Dictionary of American Idioms, for example, includes 4000 expressions, a list which is far from exhaustive. It is clear, therefore, that the comprehension system cannot deal with them simply as exceptions that must be learned but do not affect the normal functioning of the system. In line with the lexical representation hypothesis, idioms are stored in the mental lexicon as individual items and are retrieved in the same way as any other word. This retrieval process is initiated as soon as the first word of an idiomatic expression is encountered and runs in parallel with the computation of the literal meaning of the expression (Swinney & Cutler, 1979). An alternative view has been proposed. An alternative view has been proposed 668 0749-5%x/88 \$3.00 Copyri&t 0 1988 by Academic Press, Inc. All rights of reproduction in any form reserved. Comprehension of idioms by Gibbs (1980, 1986), who claims that the identification of an idiom does not occur in parallel with the computation of its literal meaning. Rather, it precedes the derivation of the literal meaning, which is accomplished only if the idiomatic interpretation of the string fails to integrate with the context.

Learning idiomatic expressions will enhance the students' communicative ability and will result in understanding cultural norms. (Samani and Hashemian, 2012, p. 249) As the meaning of idiomatic expressions are not formed within conventional rules and often seen non-compositional in nature (Fernando and Flavell, 1981), lack of reliable clues to understand and interpret has led to the assumption that the only way to learn idiomatic expressions is rote-learning (Boers et al., 2007)

In addition to the studies with the native speakers, non-native speakers have become the centre of studies in the literature with regard to idiom processing. For instance, Van Lancker-Sidtis (2003) investigated the impact of prosodic cues on helping the native and non native speakers in making a difference between two idiom interpretations. The results of study indicated that prosodic cues help native speakers to distinguish between figurative and literal use of idioms compared to the non-native participants though they were proficient language users, and non-native speakers had significantly more difficulties. Awareness of figurative language particularly idioms will improve teaching and assist learners to have better communication strategies. Otherwise, accurate and appropriate target language use and understanding will be at risk and the learners will tend to transfer their native language conceptual structure which will most probably be inappropriate.

Translation of idioms is considered one of the challenging areas in the field of translation as an idiom isn't always predictable and a translator can't depend on the meaning of its separate constituents. Researchers classify idioms depending on the degree of idiomaticity, the idiom carries, to three classifications:

Transparent idioms:

Are those idiomatic string which are easy to comprehend and translate and their meaning can be inferred from the significance of their constituents "one to one semantic relations between the idiom constituents and components of the idioms meaning. For example: "to read between the line" means to see what is behind the words

Semi-transparent idioms:

Semi-transparent idioms are idiomatic expressions which usually carry a metaphorical sense and their constituents have a small role in comprehending the overall meaning of the expression. For example: "to break the ice: means to ease the tension

Semi-opaque idioms:

This group of idioms refers to those idiomatic expressions in which the figurative sense is not related to that of the constituent words of the expression. For example: "to pass the buck" means to pass responsibility

Opaque idioms:

This type of idioms are the most difficult type of the idiomatic expressions because the relation between idioms constituents and its meaning may be opaque and the senses of individual words can be nevertheless constrain both interpretation and use. For example: "to burn one's boat" means to make retreat impossible.

The purpose of this study

The teaching of idioms sheds light on a number of challenges. This study is to explore how qualified the students of translation are at the English Department at Al-Zaytoonah University, to deal with the cultural idiomatic expressions. According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2003, p.741), idiom is defined as “a phrase which means something different from the meanings of the separate words; the way of statement typical of a person or a people in their use of language.” The use of idioms enriches the meaning and crystallizes the language. They reflect the characteristics of the language and show the cultural flavor of the society.

Every language has its own proverbs, phrasal verbs, and idiomatic expressions. These combinations of words have figurative meaning which would be a bit difficult to be understood because the formal equivalence doesn't always work, and here appears the translator's command of the target language. This is why the teaching of idioms raises a number of challenges. A great deal of research has been conducted on the translation of idioms because being qualified to translate idioms is a means to measure the proficiency of the translator's command of the second language. Many researchers such as (Palmer 1925, Warner 2005, Gibbs 1989, Skehan 1998, Libben and Titone 2011, Irujo 1986) have tackled this topic in their researches.

Jackendoff (1997) points out that idioms are pervasive in the communication and that the English language has as many idioms as adjectives.

Cristina Cacciari; Patrizia Tabossi in the foreword of their book “Idioms: Processing, Structure, and interpretation say that “If natural language had been designed by a logician, idioms would not exist. They are a feature of discourse that frustrates any simple logical account of how the meanings of utterances depend on the meanings of their parts and on the syntactic relation among those parts. Idioms are transparent to native speakers, but a course of perplexity to those who are acquiring a second language.

The office of English language Programs in its Reference Guide to American Idioms defines idioms as “a group of words that means something different than the individual words it contains. As with any language, American English is full of idioms, especially when spoken. Idioms add color and texture to language by creating images that convey meanings beyond those of the individual words that make them up. Idioms are culturally bound, providing insight into the history, culture, and outlook of their users. This is because most idioms have developed over time from practices, beliefs, and other aspects of different cultures. As the culture changes, the words used to describe it also change: some idioms fall out of use and others develop to replace them. With idioms in particular, the beliefs or practices leading to their use may disappear while the idiom itself continues to be used.

I went through the conclusions of some researchers who have pursuit in this field; (Labben and Titone 2011, Gibbs and Nayak 1985) especially the use of idioms by the non-native speaker and idiom difficulty. It is generally agreed that the nature of idioms makes them difficult to understand and to translate.

The Problem of the Study

The idea of this study stems from the importance of the cultural idioms and their existence in every single domain in life. However, non-native students lack the competence and proficiency in dealing with this kind of idioms. Idioms are related to the culture of the society and thus reflect the traditions, customs, and the way of thinking of the people of that community. Translation is an interlingual communication that deals with two different languages and two different cultures. The teacher of translation faces a great challenge when teaching idioms to non-native students because they might not be familiar with the target culture and its idioms. Moreover, the non-native student might be unable to find the functional equivalence of the source language idiom as he might not be aware of the cultural idiomatic expressions of his mother language. The study would be helpful for the teachers to recognize the points of weaknesses in the students' ability in interpreting cultural idioms and of course that would facilitate their job in teaching the non-native students how to deal with cultural idioms they might encounter.

Objectives of the Study

In this paper, the researcher tries to figure out the ability of the non-native students at Al-Zaytoonah University to comprehend and translate the idiomatic expressions and whether the gender of the student as well as his / her academic year play a role in his / her proficiency to translate the idiomatic expressions or not. The study also aims to measure the degree of development if there is. The researcher conducts a test that includes a group of sentences with idiomatic expressions. The test is to be corrected by the teachers of translation at the English Department. Each teacher is to answer a questionnaire that defines the criteria of grading.

The researcher thinks that some students might encounter a problem in translating the idioms due to the lack of cultural knowledge or to the unfamiliarity with the concept of the idiomatic expression in both languages. Others might face a problem because they overlook the context and they don't deal with the idiomatic expression as a part of the big picture. Some students might misunderstand the expression and, hence, they mistranslate it. So the researcher aims at answering the following questions

Questions of the study

1. What is the level of translation competence among students of Al Zaytoonah University?

2. Are there differences of statistical significance at the level of significance ($\alpha = 0.05$) in the translation competence among the university students attributed to their academic level and gender?

Importance of the Study

According to Newmark (1988): "in translating idiomatic expressions into idiomatic language, it is particularly difficult to match equivalence of meaning with equivalence of frequency" (p. 28). He believes that the main problems, a translator faces, are not grammatical but lexical, i.e. words, collocations, and fixed phrases or idioms (Newmark, 1988). Davies mentions a number of problems students might face in translating idioms and fixed expressions:

- Recognition
- No equivalent in the target language
- A similar counterpart in the target language with a different context of use
- An idiom used in the source text both in its literal and idiomatic sense at the same time
- Difference between the convention, context and frequency of use in the source and target languages (2004, p. 193).

Baker (1992) believes that " the main problems that idiomatic and fixed expressions pose in translation relate to two main areas: the ability to recognize and interpret an idiom correctly and the difficulties in rendering various aspects of meaning that an idiom or a fixed expression conveys into the target language (p. 65).

This study will shed the light on Al-Zaytoonah University non- native students at the English Department/ Translation competence in recognizing the functional counterpart equivalence of the cultural idiomatic expressions.

The researcher tries to investigate the reasons behind the problems that the non-native students might face. The researcher suggests that the gender, the academic year, the cultural background of the non-native students, as well as the familiarity of the expression, play a basic role in his / her ability to translate the cultural idiomatic expressions. When the teacher of translation knows the points of weaknesses of the students specialized in translation, he / she would help the student to solve these points and boost the student's ability to overcome any problem relating to these specific factors.

Literature Review

Since idioms are related to cultures, this is why non- native speakers find it difficult to comprehend and figure out the real meaning of the cultural idiomatic expressions. If the non-native speaker has good background knowledge of the target culture, he / she would render the idiomatic expression correctly. A great deal of research has been done on idioms in a wide variety of fields. However, research into idioms as a measure of proficiency for second language learners is very sparse. Several researchers have tangentially approached the topic (Palmer 1925, Warren 2005, Gibbes et al 1989, Skehan 1998), and research on both idioms and second language proficiency abounds, but investigation into a possible relationship between the two concepts remains a field in need of exploring. It is generally agreed that the nature of idioms makes them difficult to understand and to translate.

One of the recent researches done on idioms is a study by Kyle Hugh Vanderniet at the Department of Linguistics and English language, BYU. The study explores the relation between idiomatic knowledge and second language proficiency; this has to do with the study in hand, in which the researcher tries to investigate the ability of the translation major's students at Al-Zaytoonah University to comprehend and render the cultural idiomatic expressions they might encounter. Kyle Hugh in his study concluded that idiomatic knowledge is more strongly related with speaking skills than with writing or reading skills. Another result of his study indicates that the two constructs are strongly correlated, but that the observable relationship between them is only modest.

Another study on idioms, is the one conducted by Aziz Abdolshahnejad & Zahra Beheshtirooi, Azad University, on translation of the cultural idiomatic expressions and Cultural Concepts in Literary Translation of Simin Daneshvar's 'Savushun'. This study shows the problems the Persian translator encountered when translating a Persian novel written by an Iranian academic into English. She used many strategies such as deletions, substitutions, and definitions to save herself in some situations of cultural idiomatic expressions.

Rita Simpson & Dushyanthy Mendis from University of Michigan, United States tackled the area of teaching idioms and how difficult it is to the teachers to decide what idioms should be taught. Their study also addressed the advantages and limitations of a corpus-based approach to researching and teaching idioms in a specific genre by drawing on a specialized corpus of 1.7 million words of academic discourse. The results show that such a corpus would be informative for language teachers when the primary target language domain matches that of the corpus.

Qink Zhang Department of English at Hexi University, Zhangye conducted a study on the Chinese idioms and their translation into English. The researchers sum up that, by using literal translation, equivalence can be established of the four aspects: forms, meaning, styles, and images functions, thus achieving the highest degrees of functional equivalence.

Research Methodology

This study is a survey research type. It is empirical with some theoretical insights regarding comprehending and translating cultural idiomatic expressions. A test was adopted to test translation major students' competence at Al-Zaytoonah University.

The participants were all second and fourth year BA translation major to test their perception and knowledge of some cultural idiomatic expressions. The test was basically used to find out the student's idiomaticity competence. The test also tests the competence of the female and male students to find out which gender is better in comprehending and translating the expressions. This would be helpful to the teachers of English to figure out the points of weaknesses where the students need help and what idioms should teachers teach. A questionnaire containing certain criteria was provided to the translation teachers to grade the answers of the students. The questionnaire was of likert type scale. The students' competence of translating the cultural idiomatic expressions was elicited on a 5-point likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree. The total number of the students who participated in the study was 40; divided into two groups. The first group consists of ten second year females and ten males. The second group consists of ten fourth year females and ten males. The study was conducted in the second semester of the academic year 2016-2017. The test was distributed during class time in courses (i.e. general translation from English into Arabic, general translation from Arabic into English, translation criticism, and technical translation).

Design and Methodology

Population of the study

The population of the study consisted of all English language students at Al Zaytoonah University in 2016/2017

Sample of the study

The study sample consisted of (44) male and female students from Bachelor degree of specialization in translation major at Al Zaytoonah University during the second semester of the academic year 2016/2017

Study Tool

Translation competence scale: the translation competence scale was developed, which consisted in the initial form of (34) paragraphs.

Validity of the scale

In order to verify the validity of the scale it was introduced to a jury of 4 faculty members of translation in Al Zaytoonah university and Al Isra university, the arbitrators omit four paragraphs and it became (30) items in its final shape.

Reliability of the scale

The reliability of the scale was verified by applying it to the total study sample (n = 44) male and female students, by calculation The coefficient of internal consistency, using the equation Kronbach Alfa reached (0.88), which is considered appropriate for the purpose of this studying.

Statistical analysis

To answer the first and third questions of the study Arithmetical averages and standard deviations were calculated, and to answer the second question of the study TWO-WAY analysis of variance was used where gender variable (male, female) and academic level (First, Second, Third, and Fourth Year) were treated as independent variables, translation competence as a dependent variable.

Results of the study and its discussion

First, the results related to the first question: What is the level of translation competence among students of Al Zaytoonah University?

To answer this question, the mathematical means and standard deviations on the translation competence scale were extracted; Table (1) shows this.

Table (1): The means and standard deviations of the responses of the study subjects on the translation competence scale

N	Item	Mean	Standard deviation
1	I think I am a good translator	2.95	0.87
2	I feel comfortable while translating	3.46	1.31
3	I translate faster than my colleagues	2.98	0.85
4	I need some assistance during translation	3.41	1.29
5	I enjoy translation	3.43	1.30
6	I get to know a lot of new words during translation	3.00	0.94
7	I love during the translation to read the text aloud	3.01	0.95
8	I translate faster than my colleagues	2.93	0.86
9	I feel relax during translation	3.01	0.95
10	I can translate newsletters	3.39	1.27
11	I can translate poetic poems and novels	3.05	0.01
12	My colleagues believe I am translating beautifully	2.91	0.93
13	I think translation is easy for me	3.38	0.23
14	My family members believe I am translating beautifully	2.90	0.92

15	I feel a marked improvement in my translation ability	3.36	1.22
16	I feel that my colleagues like to read my translation	2.86	0.87
17	I understand the subjects I am translating in the course material well	3.35	1.22
18	I can distinguish between main and secondary ideas during translation	3.33	1.20
19	I can identify concepts and ideas that I understand during translation	3.27	1.13
20	I can assess my translation ability	3.30	1.14
21	I can translate a text even if it is boring	3.24	1.12
22	I ask meaningful questions to myself during translation	3.21	1.10
23	I can explain the ideas I've translated to my colleagues	3.79	0.90
24	I think the computer lab is a great place to translate	2.71	0.86
25	Knowing how to translate well is important to me	2.75	0.85
26	I think translation is a way to spend time	3.17	1.02
27	I spend a lot of my time translating	2.61	0.83
28	I feel happy when my translation is praised	3.13	1.01
29	I understand almost everything when I translate myself	3.09	0.98
30	I would like to participate in the study groups that motivate me to translate	2.65	0.81
Total		3.01	0.95

Table (1) shows that the level of translation competence in general is moderate among the study members (3.01) on the scale as a whole. The means of the responses of the study subjects ranged from (2.61-3.46), indicating that students tend to view their translation competence as moderate.

Second: Results related to the second question: Are there differences of statistical significance at the level of significance ($\alpha=0.05$) in the translation competence among the university students attributed to their academic level gender?

To answer this question, the arithmetic means and the standard deviations of the responses of the study subjects on the level of translation competence were extracted according to the variables of the academic level and gender, table (2) shows this.

Table (2): means and standard deviations for the responses of the study members on the translation competence scale according to the variables of the academic level and gender

Year	Male		Female		Total	
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation
First year	2.32	0.84	2.35	0.86	2.34	0.85
Second year	2.85	0.89	2.92	0.92	2.89	0.90
Third year	3.18	1.01	3.20	1.10	3.19	1.09
Fourth year	3.66	1.13	3.68	1.14	3.67	1.13
Total	3.00	1.01	3.02	1.03	3.01	0.95

Table (2) shows that there are apparent differences between averages the grades of the students on the translation competence scale according to year level and gender variables. And to know the statistical significance variance of these differences TWO-WAY ANOVA analysis of variance was used, and table (3) shows that.

Table 3: Results of the analysis of the binary variance of the impact of academic level and gender and their interaction on the translation competence

Source of variance	Sum of squares	Df	Mean of squares	F value	Sig
Academic level	19.79	3	6.6	6.667	*0.000
Gender	0.75	1	0.75	0.757	0.681
Academic level	1.34	3	0.44	0.44	0.593
Gender					
Error	389	390	0.99		
Total	410.89	397			

Table (3) shows statistically significant differences ($\alpha=0.05$) attributed to the academic level in in translation competence and the value of F (6.667). To determine the difference positions, (Tuckey) test was used for the post comparisons. The results were as shown in the table 4.

Table (4): Tuckey test results for post comparisons for the averages of Self-efficacy in translation according to academic level variable

Levels of academic level variable		Differences in means	Sig
1 st year	2 nd year	-0.55	0.560
1 st year	3 rd year	*-0.85	0.000
1 st year	4 th year	*-1.33	0.000
2 nd year	3 rd year	-0.30	0.580
2 nd year	4 th year	*-0.78	0.000
3 rd year	4 th year	-0.48	0.621

* Statistically significant at α ($\alpha = 0.05$)

It is clear from Table (4) that the level of translation competence third year students was higher and statistically significant than the level of first Year students. The level of translation competence is also for fourth year students was higher and statistically significant than the level of translation competence in first and second year students; the level of translation competence is improving and evolving with progress according to Students' academic level.

Conclusion

This result can be explained in light of the impact of efficiency in translation of the experiences experienced by students, so it is noted that translation competence improves with the progress of the student's academic level; that is, students of the first year, for example, suffers from a lack of academic skills, these skills are available and acquired through university years. The result also was interpreted in light of the impact of expertise on translation competence of the students; as the level of study progresses proficient students have some translation skills, university success experience, which is reflected in their appreciation of their abilities in translation. Also the translation competence is affected by students' emotional state; as students' progress in university study let them feel comfortable and enjoy studying at university level, which reflected positively on their proficiency in translation; the average of translation competence of study subjects is increasing by the level of study, and the results of the study promoted what Brinter pointed out that the emotional and psychological state, is one of the sources of self-efficacy. (Brinter and Pajares, 2006)

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations can be proposed:

1. The need for awareness of the level of translation competence among students, as it relates to translation strategies.
2. Building training programs to improve the translation competence.
3. Studying the concept of competence in translation and revealing its relationship with other variables, such as academic achievement.
4. Conducting studies examining the factors affecting translation competence.

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