

CHALLENGES OF TRANSLATING IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS

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Abstract: *This study investigates the challenges students face when translating idiomatic expressions English and explores how linguistic and cultural factors influence the translation process. Utilizing a combination of translation task analysis and focus group discussions, the research reveals that students frequently rely on literal translations, resulting in inaccurate or nonsensical outcomes due to their inability to grasp the figurative meanings of idioms. The findings emphasize the critical role of cultural knowledge and syntactic flexibility in effective idiomatic translation. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on idiomatic translation by highlighting the interplay of linguistic and cultural factors and suggesting strategies to enhance translation accuracy.*

Key words: *English idiom, language community, complex ideas, sensitive topics, pragmatic function, cultural immersion, linguistic.*

Idiomatic expressions hold significant importance in communication as they are deeply embedded in the linguistic and cultural fabric of a language. These expressions often carry figurative meanings that cannot be deduced from the literal meanings of the individual words, making them a rich source of cultural identity and linguistic creativity. For instance, idioms often encapsulate historical, social, and cultural values unique to the speakers of a particular language. Idiomatic expressions serve as "cultural markers" that can both enhance in-group solidarity and present barriers to out-group understanding. In this way, idioms provide a window into the shared experiences and worldviews of the language community.

Moreover, idioms contribute to the efficiency and expressiveness of language. Idiomatic expressions can communicate complex ideas or emotions succinctly, often adding colour and nuance to everyday conversation. These expressions are not merely ornamental but serve practical communicative functions, such as softening criticism or injecting humour. For example, the English idiom "kick the bucket" conveys the concept of death in a less direct manner, illustrating how idiomatic language can be used to approach sensitive topics with tact. The cultural

significance of idioms is also reflected in their resistance to direct translation. Idioms are often culture-bound, meaning their meanings are closely tied to the specific cultural and historical context in which they arise. Baker [1] highlights that idioms "pose unique challenges for translation" due to their reliance on metaphorical language and cultural references. Thus, translating idioms across languages requires not only linguistic knowledge but also cultural sensitivity, as translators must find ways to convey both the literal and figurative meanings within a different cultural framework. One of the core complexities is that idioms often rely on metaphorical language, which can be culturally specific. Many idiomatic expressions derive from historical, social, or cultural experiences unique to the language community. For instance, the English idiom "spill the beans" means to reveal a secret, but a direct translation into another language, might not carry the same metaphorical weight or meaning. This is because the expression draws from a cultural context where beans, once spilled, are irretrievable an idea that may not be immediately recognizable in other linguistic contexts.

Moreover, the non-literal nature of idioms often leads to misinterpretation when translators apply word-for-word translation methods. Literal translations of idioms can result in awkward, nonsensical, or even misleading phrases in the target language. Idioms also vary in their frequency and use across different languages, adding another layer of complexity. As Wray [2] points out, languages may not always have an exact idiomatic equivalent for a particular phrase, which forces translators to choose between paraphrasing, finding a comparable idiom, or explaining the meaning through non-idiomatic language. This decision making process is influenced by the need to maintain the stylistic and pragmatic function of the idiom in its original context. For example, humorous idioms used in casual conversation may lose their humour if translated too literally, while formal idioms used in professional contexts require precise cultural adaptation to maintain their intended meaning. The complexity of idiom translation, therefore, lies in the multifaceted nature of idioms ranging from their figurative meanings to their cultural underpinnings. Translators must be skilled not only in the linguistic structure of both the source and target languages but also in understanding the cultural significance behind the idioms to effectively convey the intended message.

One of the primary challenges in translating idiomatic expressions is their reliance on figurative or symbolic meanings, which are often not aligned with the literal meaning of the words used. Translators must decipher the intended meaning behind the idiom rather than focusing on the surface-level meaning of individual words. For example, translating the English idiom "kick the bucket" literally into another language would not convey the intended meaning of "to die". Understanding the context and figurative meaning behind idioms is essential, but this can vary widely between languages, making translation difficult.

Idiomatic expressions are often deeply rooted in the culture of the source language, drawing upon historical, social, or regional references that may not exist in the target language. Idioms frequently evoke imagery or experiences unique to the source culture. For instance, the idiom “bite the bullet” has a historical reference to soldiers biting on bullets during surgery without anaesthesia. Translating this idiom into a language that lacks this cultural reference might lead to misunderstanding or the need for explanation, which diminishes the idiom’s impact. Not all idiomatic expressions have direct equivalents in the target language, meaning that translators must either find similar idiomatic expressions that convey the same meaning or resort to paraphrasing. According to Zarei and Rahimi [3], this is a common issue when translating idioms, as finding an idiom that captures both the meaning and tone of the original in another language is challenging. For example, the English idiom “break the ice” does not have an equivalent idiom in many languages and may need to be paraphrased, resulting in a loss of brevity and metaphorical richness. Idiomatic expressions are often highly context-dependent, and their meaning can change based on the situation in which they are used. An idiom in English may carry one connotation in a formal context and another in an informal setting, which complicates the task of choosing an appropriate translation. Translators need to fully grasp the context and register of the original language to choose an equivalent expression that fits the context in the target language. For instance, the English idiom “takes the plunge” can carry different nuances based on the speaker's tone and situation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has identified the major challenges that students face when translating idiomatic expressions English, including the prevalence of literal translation, a lack of cultural knowledge, and difficulties with syntactic adaptation. Additionally, the findings underscore the critical role of linguistic and cultural factors in influencing the translation of idiomatic expressions. Linguistic factors, such as differences in syntax and idiomatic structure, coupled with cultural mismatches, contribute to the complexity of translating idioms accurately and meaningfully. To address these challenges, translation training programs should emphasize the importance of idiomatic understanding and cultural awareness. Students must be taught strategies for recognizing and interpreting the figurative meanings of idiomatic expressions while adapting them to the syntactic and cultural context of the target language. Moreover, future research could explore the effectiveness of various pedagogical approaches to teaching idiomatic translation and the role of cultural immersion in improving idiomatic comprehension.

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