

Whorfian Hypothesis Theoretic Approach to Translating Iraqi Colloquial Expressions into English

Dr. Nathume Younis Salih

Nazim.younis@alnoor.edu.iq

Al-Noor University College

ABSTRACT

This research focuses on translating Iraqi colloquial expressions into English within the framework of Sapir & Whorf hypothesis.

This hypothesis provides a linguistic, thought and cultural framework to study the impact of language and the culture in which it is spoken on the ways in which speakers of that language views and perceives the world around them.

The idea that language, culture and thought are intertwined has attracted the attention of many scholars. Among these were Edward Sapir and Lee Whorf who had developed a linguistic theory which emphasizes the fact that a language people speak affects the way they envisage the world around them.

The Sapir and Whorf hypothesis asserts categorically that a language's structure determines or substantially impacts the forms of thought and conduct appropriate to the culture in which it is spoken.

In other words we can assert that the theory provides a cognitive and cultural framework to study language through making the assumption that language can impact and even control the way we view and perceive the world around us.

The significance of this research stems from the fact that translating cultural related texts poses substantial difficulties for translators due to the cultural differences between Arabic and English languages, especially when taking into consideration that the task of the translator will be twofold in the sense that he must first translate the Iraqi colloquial expressions into standard Arabic and then translating the

resulting text into English. This in turn requires full competency in Arabic language colloquial and standard varieties in addition to the English language as well.

The study aims at exploring difficulties and hindrances encountered by translators when attempting to translate Iraqi colloquial expressions into English.

The main hypothesis of this research is that translating Iraqi colloquial expressions might hinder the translator task due to their cultural peculiarity. It also assumes that translating such colloquial expressions requires competent and skillful translators in both Arabic and English languages.

As for the procedures adopted, a number of Iraqi colloquial expressions will be handed over to a number of translators to implement the task of translation. Their translation versions will be assessed to pinpoint misinterpretations and translation errors.

The model adopted in this research will be that of Vinay & Darbelnet (1958), since it provides an appropriate framework to analyze different types of translation strategies and procedures.

The study arrives at the conclusion that rendering Iraqi colloquial expressions into English represents a difficult task for translators since it is performed between colloquial and standard Iraqi Arabic language on the one hand and English language on the other. It also concludes that implementing this translation task requires a competent and skillful translator who will render Iraqi colloquial language into standard Arabic and then into English.

م.د. ناظم يونس صالح

كلية النور الجامعة

الملخص

يركز البحث على ترجمة العبارات العامية العراقية الى اللغة الانكليزية ضمن اطار فرضية وورف وسابير. هذه الفرضية توفر اطارا لغويا وثقافيا لدراسة تأثير اللغة والثقافة على الطريقة التي ينظر من خلالها مستخدمي تلك اللغة للعالم من حولهم.

ان الفكرة القائلة بان اللغة والثقافة والافكار تكون مترابطة مع بعضها قد اثارت انتباه العديد من الباحثين ومن ضمنهم وورف وسابير الذين قاموا بتطوير نظرية لغوية تؤكد على ان اللغة التي يستخدمها الناس تؤثر على الطريقة التي ينظرون من خلالها الى العالم من حولهم. هذه النظرية عرفت فيما بعد بفرضية وورف وسابير وهي تبين بوضوح ان هيكلية اللغة تحدد انماط التفكير والسلوك المرتبطة بالثقافة الخاصة بتلك اللغة.

عبارة اخرى نستطيع القول ان النظرية توفر اطارا ذهنيا وثقافيا لدراسة اللغة من خلال افتراض ان بإمكان اللغة ان تؤثر او تسيطر على الطريقة التي نفهم من خلالها العالم من حولنا.

يكتسب هذا البحث اهميته من الحقيقة القائلة بان ترجمة النصوص الثقافية تشكل تحديا حقيقيا للمترجمين بسبب الاختلافات الثقافية بين اللغتين العربية والانكليزية خصوصا عندما نأخذ بالاعتبار بان مهمة المترجم ستكون مزدوجة حيث يتعين عليه ان يقوم بترجمة العبارات العامية العراقية الى اللغة العربية القياسية وبعد ذلك يقوم بترجمة النص الناتج الى الانكليزية وهذا يتطلب معرفة تامة باللغة العربية القياسية واللهجة العامية العراقية اضافة الى اللغة الانكليزية.

يهدف البحث الى استكشاف الصعوبات والمعوقات التي يواجهها المترجم عند قيامه بترجمة النصوص العامية العراقية الى اللغة الانكليزية.

يفترض البحث ان ترجمة العبارات العامية العراقية قد تعيق عمل المترجم بسبب خصوصيتها الثقافية كما انها ايضا تفترض ان ترجمة هذه العبارات تتطلب مهارة وخبرة باللغة العربية والانكليزية.

وبالنسبة للإجراءات المتبعة في هذا البحث, فسوف يقوم عدد من المترجمين بترجمة عدد من النصوص العامية العراقية وسيتم تقييم هذه التراجم من اجل تحديد الاخطاء والمشاكل الترجمة.

سيتم اعتماد الموديل الخاص بفيناي وداريلنت ١٩٥٨ لهذه الدراسة لأنه يوفر الاطار الملائم لتحليل الانواع المختلفة من طرق و استراتيجيات الترجمة.

تخلص الدراسة الى ان ترجمة اللغة العامية العراقية الى الانكليزية تمثل مهمة صعبة للمترجم لأنه يقوم بالترجمة بين اللغة العامية العراقية والعربية القياسية من جانب وبين اللغة الانكليزية من جانب اخر كما انها تخلص الى ان هذه المهمة تتطلب وجود مترجم كفوء يقوم بترجمة اللغة العامية العراقية الى اللغة العربية القياسية وبعدها الى اللغة الانكليزية.

The theoretical part

Definition of translation

In order to explain the relationship between colloquialism and translation; we should first give an illustrative definition of translation. Many translation scholars define the term (translation) differently.

Catford (1965: 20) illustrates that translation is “The replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)”. He also refers to equivalence’s importance as he says “A central task of translation theory is that of defining the nature and conditions of translation equivalence” (ibid.: 21).

As for Nida and Taber (1974: 12), they agree with Catford’s definition and assert that “translation consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source–language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style”.

However, Bassnett (1980: 2) clarifies that “equivalence’ should operate on the surface features of the translated text”. According to Catford's and Bassnett's definitions, equivalence is absolutely essential in the translation process.

Whereas Newmark (1982: 7) states that translation is “A craft attempting to replace a written message and/or statement in another language”.

Venuti (2004: 343) states that “translation is a dual act of communication. It presupposes the existence, not only of a single code, but of two distinct codes, the “source language” and the “target language”.

Another definition by Isadore Pinchuck (cited in Ma“mur, 2005: 117) is that translation is “a process of finding a TL equivalent for an SL utterance”.

Nord (1997: 44) defines translation as “a kind of target–culture representation or substitute for a source–culture text. As such, it may carry out quite different functions with regard to the source culture”.

Definition of Colloquialism

The word colloquialism primarily comes from the Latin word colloquium, which when translated into English means "conference" or "conversation." thus, we can readily say that colloquialism is a rhetorical device that refers to the use of everyday or casual language. McCrimmon (1972: 130).

In addition to being associated with a "regional" or "local" dialect, colloquialism frequently includes geographical qualities. Syntactically speaking, colloquialism might be "a word or group of words, phrases, or aphorisms." moreover, colloquial expressions may be employed unintentionally in language, and non-native speakers may have trouble interpreting them because they are considered idiomatic or metaphorical sayings rather than literal units (ibid).

According to McCrimmon (1972: 136), the definition of "colloquial" is "a characteristic which is appropriate to the spoken language or to writings that seek certain effects". When two people converse together rather casually, a variety of terms and expressions are utilized. The same goes for educated individuals who might also use the same terms and expressions.

If the authors want to give the readers the idea that they are speaking directly and intimately to them, they can utilize this style or technique in their writings. The writer will typically steer clear of all formal language in such circumstances and instead frequently employ shortened and clipped words. As a result, the writer strives to be as informal as possible in his writings(ibid).

Popowich, et al. (1997: 35) perceives Colloquial language as "the one that includes a remarkable amount of idioms and slang expressions which are frequently ungrammatical".

Concerning words and phrases that regularly break language rules, it is evident that they are shorter, and tend to be less sophisticated (ibid:31).

Therefore, rather of using lengthy and complex sentences, colloquial statements are typically composed of a series of unstructured, brief phrases (ibid: 32).

According to Trask (1999: 28), colloquial speech is "ordinary, relaxed, or informal". The majority of people have some control over their use of colloquial language when speaking in formal contexts like writing essays, giving lectures, participating in job interviews, etc. However, when those individuals feel completely at ease and pressure-free, they switch back to a more casual variant of their language.

Colloquialism, according to Crystal (1999: 61), is a "pronunciation, word, or grammatical construction that is heard in the most informal levels of speech, and which tends to be avoided in formal spoken and written language". Therefore, it is appropriate to notice the usage of contractions like (I'm and can't) in informal conversations.

According to Chaer and Agustina (2004: 65), "language variations can be categorized into a few different categories, the one that is based on the speaker's point is colloquial language".

According to Hossein (2008: 4), colloquial language is "a higher style than slang and which is different from the formal standard language in some distinctive features like pronunciation, choice of words, and sentence structure".

Characteristics of Colloquialism

McCrimmon (1972: 167) describes colloquial language as follows:

1. Somewhat short, simple, and often incomplete clauses, with small number of rhetorical devices.
2. A copious use of 'contractions' (e.g. "I'll, we've, didn't, can't, ...etc."), 'clipped words' (e.g. "cab, exam, phone, ...etc."), and omitting the relative pronouns (e.g. "who, which, that") that would be kept in the formal style.

3. A vocabulary that generally avoids using higher-level words and substitutes less objectionable slang terminology.
4. A grammatically straightforward framework that heavily relies on colloquial expressions and occasionally ignores the aesthetically distinctive aspects of formal grammar.
5. The addressee uses a familiar or personal tone to try to make an impression in his speech .

Bussmann (1996: 201) refers to colloquialism, as an everyday language, he asserts that the term "colloquial speech" refers to the full collection of terms used in a casual and familiar setting, such as at home or at the place of employment. According to him idioms are widely used informally in everyday language and they represent a form of informal language. They share the following characteristics with colloquial expressions as follows:

- a) The meaning of the phrase as a whole cannot be inferred from the meaning of its constituent parts, for example, "to have a crush on someone" may also imply "to be in love with someone".
- b) When certain components are changed, the meaning is systematically altered, like when "crush" is changed to "smash" in the example above (ibid).

Standard (formal)Language vs. Colloquial (informal) Language

The variety that is exclusive to a given nation or region is known as standard language. It therefore has the highest level of prestige and status among all members of society, and writing is the finest means to confirm its significance. Standard variety is frequently used in literature and the news, it is documented in dictionaries and grammar, taught in schools, and regarded by non-native learners as a foreign second language (Richards & Schmidt, 2010:554; Holmes, 2013:78).

Richards & Schmidt use the word "standard English" to refer to all of the standard national variants of English, such as American English, British English, Australian English, etc.

The evolution of the language's standard form is illustrated by Trudgill (2000: 67). He claims that it was originated historically from the several London-based English dialects that were modified throughout time by court speakers, academics, and other writers.

By that time, the English used by the upper classes in the capital city had evolved significantly from that used by other socio-economic groups and had come to be considered the norm for anyone who wished to communicate "well" in both speech and writing. Since printing became so common, it has been the most widely used version of English in books. It has consistently held the title of being the most well-known form of the English language despite several alterations (ibid).

Both Holmes (2013) and Leech and Svartvik (2013) have made a distinction between formal and informal language. According to them, formal language "is the type of language used publicly for some serious purpose, i.e., in official reports, business letters, regulations, academic writing, and formal public speeches or lectures" Holmes (2013: 65).

On the contrary, colloquial language, also known as informal language, is "the language of everyday conversation, private letters, and private interaction in general" (ibid).

Trudgill (2000) presents an alternative perspective on the distinction between formal and informal language. He asserts that "it's crucial to keep in mind that the difference between standard and non-standard speech has nothing to do with the contrast between formal and informal language or concepts like "bad language", speaking Standard English is possible in both informal and formal contexts, and Standard English speakers curse just as frequently as non-native English speakers" (2000: 55).

Translation of colloquial expressions

When translating colloquial expressions that represent a significant part of a community's culture, translators may run into a lot of difficulties, the most prominent of these is how can the author's intended meaning be transmitted through the translation. In some translated texts, the colloquial expressions may be reproduced more effectively to make them more accessible for the intended audience and to more accurately express the author's meaning. Dickins et al. (2002: 220)

In translation studies, it's crucial to convey the writer's or speaker's intended meaning. Depending on the subject matter or even the writing style of the text, a range of colloquial terminology may be used to make the translation distinct from other translations (ibid).

Unfortunately, incorrect translations of diverse sorts of texts that include colloquial terminology might frequently produce inappropriate translations that fall short of the expectations of the readers in the target language (ibid).

Dickins et al. (2002: 225) claim that there are at least two challenges a translator faces when translating colloquial expressions that are used or written in the native language. The first problem is committing a mistake called a register error, it occurs when the translator translate into a language that is more formal than the original language.

If the translator either fails to detect the original's level of formality or delivers it with the same level of formality, the same register cannot be entirely preserved. The second problem is that the target audience are not experiencing the same impact (ibid).

Newmark (1988: 46) points out that the difference in formality between the target language and the source one could be one of the reasons why the translation might not have the same impact as the original.

He adds that colloquial vocabulary and style are becoming more acceptable in writing and speaking English. The translator must take into

account the cultural context and linguistic peculiarities while translating a text in which colloquial language is the primary language utilized in order to reflect the message and mood of the source text (ibid).

According to Almaghary (2002: 10), there might be a number of problems while translating colloquial language, thus the translator must analyze the meaning and keep in mind that standard language differs from language used by regular people. The ideal translator is seen to be the one who is familiar with the audience needs and expectations.

The translator will encounter more difficulties and will make more mistakes unless he asks a native speaker's assistant to produce the best translation version through the use of colloquial, informal, and street language (ibid).

Sapir and Whorf hypothesis (linguistic relativity)

The Sapir–Whorf hypothesis states that language significantly affects how people see the world, languages people speak have an impact on everything from personal cognition and perception to a more general social patterns of action. As a result, members of any particular speech community can eventually come to have a common view of social environment and the world around them. Lyons (1981: 50).

The Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, which bears the names of the American linguists Edward Sapir and his pupil Benjamin Lee Whorf, is composed of two related ideas. The first, known as *linguistic determinism*, which holds that language determines how we think, and the second, known as *linguistic relativity*, it asserts that speakers of different languages have significantly varied perspectives on how the world is because there is no upper limit to the structural diversity of languages. Lyons (1981: 55).

According to the Whorfian hypothesis, language actually shapes ideas rather than just serving as a vehicle for them. Thus, different world

views among speakers of different languages might be detected (Romanine, 1994).

The Sapir & Whorf hypothesis, which was first proposed in the 1920s and 1930s, has generated a lot of debates and researches in a number of fields including, linguistics, psychology, philosophy, anthropology, and education. It hasn't been fully refuted or supported, yet it has persisted in attracting the interest of researchers around the world (ibid).

The moderate version of the hypothesis, which takes linguistic relativity into account, explains how availability of suitable words and expressions affects perception. According to Sapir and Whorf, items that the culture deems to be trivial are typically allocated one or two words, while culturally essential objects, situations, and processes are typically defined by a multitude of words (ibid).

As Whorf (1956) once described his theory in strong and memorable terms:

"We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native language. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscope flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds—and this means largely by the linguistic systems of our minds"(ibid).

Language, linguistic relativity and culture

Culture is often defined as a socially acquired knowledge that a person possesses as a result of being a member of a specific community. Language and culture are studied together because specific languages have historically been tied to certain civilizations; these languages act as the key to the cultures they are associated with. The languages themselves can only be completely understood in the context of the cultures in which they are profoundly ingrained. Whorf (1956: 33)

Since each area or nation has its own unique culture, it can occasionally lead to miscommunication when someone from another country speaks that country's language. We must be familiar with the culture of a country in order to comprehend the specific phrases, culture specific terms, and occasionally even the simple words (ibid).

According to Guirdham, M. (2005: 46), culture is about "shared meanings". Language is the means by which we make sense of the world, and it is also the means through which meanings are created and shared. Only language allows for the exchange of meanings.

Accordingly, "to say two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same way and that they can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings about the world, in ways that will be understood by each other" (ibid).

The practical part:

in this part of the research a number of Iraqi colloquial expressions will be handed over to a number of translators to carry out the task of translation. Their translation versions will be thoroughly analyzed to verify the accuracy of the translation and to pinpoint misinterpretation and translation errors.

SL Text (1):

مثل شكة الابرة

Translators' renderings

Translator (1) : Causes no pain

Translator (2) : Like a needle prick

TL text	Sense of TL text	Strategy used	Compatibility of sense
Causes no pain	Painless	Adaptation	+
Like a needle	Similar to a needle	Literal translation	-

prick	prick		
Similar to a needle prick	Like a needle prick	Literal translation	–
Like a pinprick	Similar to a needle prick	Literal translation	–

Translator (3) : Similar to a needle

Translator (4) :like a pinprick

SL text	مثل شكة الابرة
Sense of the SL text	Causing no pain

Discussion

The meaning of this Iraqi colloquial expression is related to the situation when someone especially a paramedic or a therapist is trying to persuade his patient especially young children that the injection or the treatment will be painless and easy to take.

This meaning was conveyed properly by translator 1 rendering. His translation is consistent with the intended meaning and hence regarded appropriate translation of the SL text.

On the other hand, translators' 2, 3 and 4 renderings fall short of responding to the targeted meaning, therefore deemed inappropriate translations of the SL text.

SL Text (2) :

أني لساني متبري مني

Translators' renderings

Translator (1) : I don't like my tongue

Translator (2) : I don't like my tongue

Translator (3) : I don't want my tongue

Translator (4) : I can't control my tongue

SL text	أني لساني متبري مني
Sense of the SL text	My tongue is uncontrollable

TL text	Sense of TL text	Strategy used	Compatibility of sense
I don't like my tongue	I dislike my tongue	adaptation	-
I don't like my tongue	I dislike my tongue	adaptation	-
I don't want my tongue	I dislike my tongue	adaptation	-
I can't control my tongue	My speech is out of control	adaptation	+

Discussion

This Iraqi colloquial expression denotes the meaning of a situation in which some speakers may find it difficult to restrain or control their speech in a way that might cause harm or inconvenience for the people they are speaking to or having discussion with.

Translators' 1,2 and 3 renderings are incompatible with the intended meaning, thus they are deemed inappropriate rendering of the SL text. Conversely, translator 4 rendering is in line with the targeted meaning and thus regarded appropriate rendering of the SL text

SL Text (3):

تجيك التهائم وانت نايم

Translators' renderings

Translator (1) : you have problems when you sleep

Translator (2) : problems happen while you are a sleep

Translator (3) : problems happen while you are a sleep

Translator (4) : your problems are caused by others

SL text	تجيك التهائم وانت نايم
Sense of the SL text	Your problems are caused by others

TL text	Sense of TL text	Strategy used	Compatibility of sense
you have problems when you sleep	When you sleep you face difficulties	Adaptation	-
problems happen while you are a sleep	When you sleep you face difficulties	Adaptation	-
problems happen while you are a sleep	You face problems when you sleep	Adaptation	-
your problems are caused by others	Others cause you problems	Adaptation	+

Discussion

This colloquial expression is used in situations when some people might experience certain difficulties or problems caused by others, especially friends, relatives or even family members.

This meaning was conveyed accurately by translator 4. His translation version corresponds to the intended meaning and thus, deemed appropriate rendering of the SL text. Contrarily, renderings provided by translators 1, 2, and 3 were inconsistent with the intended meaning, hence regarded inappropriate renderings of the SL text.

SL Text (4):

نايم ورجليه بالشمس

Translators' renderings

Translator (1) : sleeping late until sunrise

Translator (2) : sleeping with his legs under the sun

Translator (3) : sleeping with his legs under the sun

Translator (4) : sleeping in the sun

SL text	نايم ورجليه بالشمس
Sense of the SL text	Paying no attention to his own affairs

TL text	Sense of TL text	Strategy used	Compatibility of sense
Sleeping in the sun	Sleeping under the sun	Adaptation	-
Sleeping with his legs under the sun	Sleeping late in the morning	Literal translation	+
Sleeping with his legs under the sun	Sleeping late in the morning	Literal translation	+
Sleeping in the sun	Sleeping under the sun	Adaptation	-

Discussion

This colloquial expression is used to denote the meaning of a situation in which some people might be extremely careless and show no interest in their daily life issues and interests and thus, negatively impact their living and social standards.

This meaning has been portrayed in a situation of someone sleeping late in the morning and thus, missing the chance to get up early to work and to provide for himself and his family.

Translators 1 and 4 renderings have fallen short of achieving the targeted meaning and consequently, regarded inappropriate renderings of the SL text.

On the other hand, translators 2 and 3 renderings comply with the intended meaning and ultimately, considered appropriate rendering of the SL text.

SL Text (5):

يعيد نفس الاسطوانة

Translators' renderings

Translator (1) : replaying the same disc

Translator (2) : repeating the same thing

Translator (3) : repeating the same thing

Translator (4) : replaying the same song

SL text	يعيد نفس الاسطوانة
Sense of the SL text	Repeating the same action

TL text	Sense of TL text	Strategy used	Compatibility of sense
Replaying the same song	Playing the same song repeatedly	Literal translation	-
Saying the same thing	Repeating saying the same words	Adaptation	+
Saying the same thing	Repeating saying the same words	Adaptation	+
Replaying the same song	Playing the same song repeatedly	Literal translation	-

Discussion

This colloquial expression denotes the meaning of a situation in which some people might tend to repeat themselves when they speak in order to put more emphasis on certain issues or attitudes they deem important to be emphasized or taken into consideration.

This meaning has been properly conveyed through the renderings of translators 2 and 3. Their translations comply with the targeted meaning and thus regarded appropriate rendering of the SL text.

On the other hand, translators 1 and 4 renderings contradict the intended meaning, ultimately deemed inappropriate translations of the SL text.

SL Text (6):

لا تخليني بوجه المدفع

Translators' renderings

Translator (1) : don't fire on me

Translator (2) : don't put me under fire

Translator (3) : don't let me face the fire

Translator (4) : don't get me into troubles

SL text	
Sense of the SL text	

TL text	Sense of TL text	Strategy used	Compatibility of sense
don't fire on me		Adaptation	—
don't put me under fire		Adaptation	—
don't let me face the fire		Adaptation	—

don't get me into troubles		Adaptation	+

Discussion

The meaning of this Iraqi colloquial expression is closely related to the conception that problems and difficulties are collateral and concomitant to everyday life situations and that people are very keen to avoid such difficulties and hardships.

Translators 1, 2 and 3 translation versions are inconsistent with the intended meaning and hence deemed inappropriate renderings of the original text.

Conversely, translator 4 rendering goes in line with the targeted meaning, consequently regarded appropriate rendering of the SL text.

Conclusions

The analysis arrives at the following conclusions:

1–Translation of Iraqi colloquial expressions into English poses certain difficulties for translators, these difficulties are mainly caused by cultural gaps between the two related languages.

2–The aforementioned difficulties require competent and skillful translators who should be fully acquainted with both languages.

3–The task of the translator is mainly twofold, firstly, he has to translate the Arabic colloquial text into standard Arabic and secondly, rendering the resulting text into English.

4–Iraqi translators will be more acquainted with the Iraqi colloquial expressions and consequently more capable of achieving the targeted meaning compared with non–Iraqi translators speaking other Arabic language varieties.

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