TRANSLATING IDIOMS OF COLOUR
(an Examination of the Relationship of Idioms of Colour Between English, Arabic and Spanish Languages)

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Abstract. Nowadays, human communication is considered to be one of the most important topics occupying the minds of linguists, anthropologists, psychologists, and philosophers. Since it is the most important means for communication among human beings, the relation between language, history, culture, worldview and their mutual interactions have high significance. The inextricable connection highlights different indications of conventionalized language including the idiomatic expressions as one of the important and pervasive language uses reflecting culture in real life. Like different sorts of figurative language, idioms give off an impression of being the common decoders of traditions, social convictions, social traditions, and standards. Idioms, as a major component of native-like correspondence, empower a language learner to comprehend the thoughts, feelings and perspectives of the speakers of target language. Therefore, learning idioms provides learners a good opportunity to get data about the basic parameters of a language.

Key words: language, idioms, culture, translation, English, Arabic, Spanish

INTRODUCTION

Language, as conceived by Kramsch [Kramsch 1998, as cited in Yağiz, O. & Izadpanah, S. 2013: http://www.academypublication.com/issues/past/jltr/vol04/05/07.pdf], is a system of signs that has cultural value of its own. Speakers identify themselves and others through language as the symbol of their social identity. Therefore, when a restriction in language use is perceived, speakers tend to feel that their social group or culture is being ambushed. Culture and language travel together as one, we use one to understand the other, to construct our social lives and improve our world. We can see this declared in several studies [Alptekin 2002; Brown 1994; Bygate 2005; Jiang 2000; MacKenzie 2012; Risager 2007, as cited in Yağiz, O. & Izadpanah, S. 2013: http://www.academypublication.com/issues/past/jltr/vol04/05/07.pdf]. Even if we have a wide understanding of a certain language's linguistic features, this has been proven not to be enough for successful intercultural communication [Scarino 2010, as cited in Yağiz, O. & Izadpanah, S. 2013: http://www.academypublication.com/issues/past/jltr/vol04/05/07.pdf]. This knowledge must be supported by notions of cultures, tendencies, conventions and norms [Baker 2012]. Culture not only helps people understand each other's verbal languages, but also plays a crucial role in non-verbal communication such as beliefs, norms, behaviours and values.

Speaking a language is not only about memorizing the linguistic aspects of a given etymology, but also contextualizing and processing the information acquired through

either visual or aural inputs [Scarino 2010, as cited in Yağiz, O. & Izadpanah, S. 2013: http://www.academypublication.com/issues/past/jltr/vol04/05/07.pdf]. Translation also plays a crucial role in understanding culture, according to House [House 2009], who stated that translation is as much a linguistic act as it is cultural; it is a way of communicating between cultures. We cannot separate language and culture when translating, because one cannot exist without the other; they are embedded.

Language has proven to be one of the best ways for humans to express feelings, needs, knowledge and traditions. The problem sojourns in that not everyone shares the same language and culture. That is why translation and interpreting play a crucial role in human understanding. Written and spoken texts are the manifestations of sociocultural norms and traditions. Texts are culturally specific, which means that they cannot be translated word-by-word from an SL (source language) to a TL (target language), for the cultural elements implicit on them will not be understood by the target readers. The translation should have the same effect on its readers as the source text has on the original target readers (Nida, as cited in Munday, 2001).

The linguistic worldview or the linguistic picture of the world is one of the fundamental concepts of modern linguistics and has widely been debated by philosophers, linguists and social scientists. Although this notion started to be important in the early 20th century with the suggestion of Benjamin Lee Whorf that language affects our perception of the world, the relationship between language and culture has been debated since Ancient Greek by those who consider that the relationship is natural and those who think that it is subjective and conventional.

The representation given to idioms determines how they are processed and understood in a particular context. Consequently, two important questions have to be asked: Are idioms of colour related interculturally or interlinguistically? And, are there untranslatable idiomatic expressions? This paper attempts to answer those questions, starting from the hypothesis that people from different cultures and languages still have the same experiences, and that that leads to a mutual understanding of idioms of colour.

THEORETICAL PART

On idioms:

Every idiom has its own semantic, syntactic and pragmatic structure based on the culture and the history they are reflected on. In other words, their configuration justifies their meaning. Idiomatic expressions are based on the non-literal meaning of the words that compose them; therefore, it becomes quite clear that an awareness of the source and context of the idiom are needed to understand them.

On culture:

Throughout the decades many definitions of culture have emerged, but the most quoted and one of the oldest, would be that from the anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor in 1871, who stated that "culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" [as quoted from Katan 1999: 16]. Through the years, the definition

has been slightly modified and extended. In this last claim, Hester and Eglin made a point in 1997, declaring that culture is in action, "this means that the orderliness of cultural resources (categories, devices and the rest) is constituted in their use rather than pre-existing" [Hester, Eglin 1997: 20]. A more recent view of culture can be provided by Katan [Katan 2009], who claims that with the passing of time, the concept of culture will change. Originally, culture referred exclusively to what was civilized in a certain society (education, art, architecture). Later, how people lived (sociology and then ideology) was introduced in the concept of culture.

On culture and language:

Lambert [Lambert 2000] says that language is a rather common aspect to consider when talking about cultural identity. He adds importance to the changes on the answers to two basic questions: "Has culture anything to do with language? [And,] is language a distinctive feature in matters of cultural identity?" [Lambert 2000: 166]. According to Katan [Katan 1999], Malinowski was one of the first to support that language could not be understood without culture. While Boas [Boas 1986] believed that language and thought had no barriers in between, that language, culture and thought were dynamically related and that "the form of language will be moulded by the state of that culture". To which Bennet added in 1998 that intercultural communication is based on the differences between cultures' behaviour patterns, values and languages. Hongwei [Hongwei 1999] thought that language is a portrait of culture, that it "mirrors other parts of culture, supports them, spreads them and helps to develop others" [Hongwei 1999: 121]. This makes language one of the most important features of culture. Since all aspects of culture are closely related, language evolves and changes with them [Hongwei 1999: 123].

On language against culture:

Once stated that culture and language are closely related, one must stop and look at the criticism on the area too. Newmark [Newmark 1988], for example, does not think of language as a component of culture, for he says that "if it were so, translation would be impossible". He claims that language is not the determining factor influencing our understanding of reality; those determining factors would be beliefs and thoughts, as Reddick [Reddick 1992] suggests [*as cited in* Katan 1999].

According to Lambert [Lambert 2000], it is not that language and culture are not related, but that cultural studies have paid little attention to linguistics and language. One of the most striking observations Lambert makes is that one of the disciplines devoted to language, linguistics, has not paid much attention to culture and identity. Lambert [Lambert 2000: 166], as an added criticism, also states that although in any area of the humanities the link between culture and language may be approached, there is no accepted ground for it, and those who do study this connection, rarely combine it with other disciplines.

On translation:

Up until now we have tried to define idioms and their relation to culture and what is understood as culture. This is important because the way in which we perceive it will delimit which elements we consider cultural and how do we translate them. For the same

reasons, we should define translation too. As Venuti stated in 1995, the act of translation consists on replacing the chains of signifiers that conform the source-text for equivalent signifiers on the target language, providing an adequate and understandable interpretation. He views translation as something indispensible for cultural consideration, which aims to domesticate a foreign culture maintaining its origins [Venuti 1995: 18].

When translating a text, knowledge of the languages alone does not guarantee a successful interpretation. Bell [Bell 1991], supported by Paluszliewicz-Misiaczek [Paluszliewicz-Misiaczek 2005], states that a translator not only has to possess a perfect knowledge of the languages involved, but also a wide socio-linguistic competence to be able to understand the text, the context, its function and the target readers. Translation studies do not see the source text and the target text just as linguistic material; they approach them from afar, "seeing first the cultural context, then the situational context, and finally the texts itself" [Leppihalme 1997: 3].

When translating idioms, some words might be conceptually equivalent, but not schematically equivalent. Meaning that, although the words themselves are translatable from the source language or culture to the target language or culture as they are, they might not get the same meaning as a hole. This reflects each culture's characteristics and backgrounds, and the difference in understanding abstract equivalents, which might or might not be the same.

On colours:

Since time immemorial, Colour Psychology has had an effect on the human mind, although the true meaning of it has never been described. Theories and investigations on the matter have been proposed since the XVIII century, but the wide intertwined aspects of psychology and culture make it difficult to box colour in zip lock categories. In Ancient China and in the Mayan civilization, cardinal points were represented with colours; Egyptians believed them to have healing powers; Aristotle related the basic colours to the elements, and Leonardo Da Vinci offered the world a classification. With the pass of the years, many techniques have been developed using colours, like chromatherapy, for example, but their direct (immediate, physical, tangible) and indirect (secondary, related to affections) effects have not been yet proven definitive. Taking this into consideration, colour can be weighed to be an explored subject, and it is, but as we have already stated, there is much more to it than meets the eye.

One of the major exponents of Colour Psychology would be Johann Wolfgang Goethe, whose discourse on Colour Theory proposes that colour is up to our perception, and that involves both the brain and the sight. According to him, each colour influences an individual in three ways: impression, expression and construction. First, colours are perceived; then, we associate them with a feeling; finally, we link them to a symbol that communicates an idea. Colours can also harmonize between them, as well as with their environment, and make us feel emotions in a way that we start automatically associating them to certain things and using them to express ourselves.

PRACTICAL PART:

Metaphoric signification of colours can be problematic, especially in translation, as we have already stated. The perception of colour idioms rests on the culture we are referring to, and in particular, to the context behind the use of the idiom. The same idiom,

in different societies, can awake a variety of emotions. Xing [Xing 2008: 88] argues that each colour use has three meanings: original or etymological, extended or metaphoric (extended through cognitive means), and abstract.

It has to be understood that finding two colours in three different languages that match in meaning and are used in an idiom with the same essence is rare, but it happens. Some other times, they are translatable interculturally, but not literally. And there is a third option we are going to explore; the non equivalency that results from different cultural backgrounds. The cultures and languages we are going to focus on are English from the United Kingdom, Arabic from Jordan and Spanish from Spain; and we are going to centre our attention in green, black and white, with some particular additions.

When literal translation is acceptable:

According to our research, these three cultures we are working with have some cultural aspects in common due to what happened in the eighteenth century between Arabs and Spain and between England and Arabs in the twentieth century so we can say that they do share some history and aspects. Therefore, in various cases, literal translation of the idioms is possible. We are going to illustrate some examples hereunder

In these cultures coal has been a very used and important mineral, and this made the expression "black as coal" literally translatable as "أسود مثل الفحم" in Arabic and "negro como el carbón" in Spanish. The same occurs with "black as night", "أسود مثل الليل" and "negro como la noche". To follow with black, in English, to be in someone's "blacklist" is not to be appreciated by them, but you can also do so in Arabic ("القائمة السوداء") and Spanish as well "lista negra". We can print something "black on white" "أسود على أبيض" "negro sobre blanco" in the three cultures too. It is curious how the language of Shakespeare can be translated literally into Arabic and Spanish, because his expression "green eyed monster" has the literal translation "الوحش ذو العيون الخضراء" and "monstruo de los ojos verdes". Maybe traffic lights have had a bigger effect on our daily life than we imagine, because "give/get the green light", "خذ/أعطي الضوء الأخضر" and "dar/tener luz verde" are used to approve something, just as stoplights let the cars through. And as a last example on this section, we will "roll out the red carpet" to the exact equivalent of this idiom in Arabic "فرش السجادة الحمراء" and Spanish "poner la alfombra roja" that also means to receive with respect and commodity.

When a non literal equivalent exists:

Occasionally, some cultural aspects are slightly or very changed from one society to the other. For example, we can see a bad or "black future" in English and "futuro negro" in Spanish but in Arabic it is "مستقبل فارغ" (empty future), or have dirty or "black money" "dinero negro" which means in Arabic "forbidden money" "مال حرام". "once in a blue moon" that in Arabic loses the colour and changes it to "century": "مرة بالقرن" (once in a century) and changes to "wind" in Spanish "de ciento en viento" (from a hundred wind). Another exemplification can be the idiom "out of the blue" that in Arabic is "فجأة" (suddenly); in Spanish is "de la nada" (out of nothingness); which actually has a literal translation, but lacking colour, "out of thin air".

When there is no equivalent:

In many cases there is no close equivalent, literal or otherwise, due to the differences on the cultural background the three languages have. There is an idiom in Arabic that is commonly used "العفاريت الزرق تقفز أمامي" (the blue afreets are jumping in front of me), afreet is a powerful jinn or a demon according to Muslim mythology, which is to describe how a person is angry that he cannot see anything else and in English and Spanish there is no such description. When a joke is vulgar and has sexual connotations, Spaniards speak of a green joke or "chiste verde", which in English and Arabic are not as such. To finish the third section, when something is very odd, they say it is "weirder than a green dog" ("más raro que un perro verde", but English and Arabic speakers do not regard green dogs as a spreaded synonym of oddness.

CONCLUSION:

To sum it up, idioms are very helpful in learning other languages and understanding different cultures, we may say that they are not only expressions to learn but a path to diversity. But we should keep in mind that one must know how to translate them right not to lose their cultural and lexical diversities because through the previous examples we managed to prove that some expressions have different meaning or translations. And finally, this study showed us that people from different origins whether it is history, culture, worldview or language, still we do have a mutual life experiences and understanding of idioms and in this case, idioms of colour.

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ПЕРЕВОД ИДИОМ
С КОМПОНЕНТОМ-НАЗВАНИЕМ ЦВЕТА
(на материале английского, арабского и испанского языков)

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Человеческое общение является сферой актуальных научных исследований лингвистов, антропологов, психологов и философов. История, культура, мировоззрение народа взаимосвязаны и находят свое отражение во фразеологии, единицы которой являются своеобразными декодерами традиций, социальных убеждений, традиций и стандартов общества. Идиомы, как составной элемент общения с носителями языка, передают основные идеи, принципы и ценности отдельно взятой культуры и народа. Изучение идиом является хорошим ресурсом для умножения знаний любого языка.

Ключевые слова: фразеологизмы, идиомы, перевод, арабский язык, русский язык, испанский язык

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