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Using the Words HEAD, HEART and HAND in Arabic Idioms and How to Render their Meanings into English

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Abstract:

Translation is the process of rendering a unit from one language (Source Language) into another (Target Language). When it comes to idioms (fixed expressions consisting of two words or more giving a meaning different from the meaning of the individual words), the translators are going to face a number of troubles. This study focuses on translating the Arabic idioms that contain the words HEAD, HEART or HHAND. The methodology of this study is based on a number of statements collected verbally or through written texts and expressing the meaning by paraphrasing them. The results show that none of the Arabic idioms used in this study have equivalences in English language and so, what is shown are the paraphrased meaning for each.

Keywords:

translation, idiom, paraphrasing

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Introduction and Literature Review

Translation is the process of transforming the meaning from a source language (SL) into a target language (TL). This process needs the translator to be aware of some aspects regarding both languages such as culture, religion, society and sometimes the environment; it puts the translator in front of some troubles when it comes to translate cultural or social aspects especially when translating proverbs, idioms or phrasal verbs. This study will focus on the translation of the Arabic idioms that contain the words *head, heart and hand*. Before going deeply in discussion, definitions for idioms and the strategies of translating them will be viewed.

When we present the difficulties when translating our source, we must consider several aspects:

- The knowledge of the two languages;
- The meaning of the words;
- Perceptions;
- The time and the context in which the text was written;
- Interpretation according to the writer's personality and experience.

For this work, we deal directly with difficulties in translation relative to the aspect of understanding and re-expression.

Culturally translation problems are due to the differences between two different cultures.

Understanding the message implies, by the receiver, identification and decoding of the socio-cultural type of information in all sorts of allusions. These differences are encountered in texts called through cultural elements, "cultural references" ("Culture-specific items"). According to T. Cristea (1998: 179), language systems in which evolve the language communities face specific diversification of areas highlighted in the translation:

"The confrontation of two natural languages in the transfer of messages reveals firstly a common general structure which allows the translation and the existence of weakly idiomatic areas and also the differences that attract disturbances in the transmission of data experience."

In what follows we will present and analyses some problems of our target text.

Definition of idioms

Simply, idioms are defined as two words or more put together to come up with a meaning that is almost different from the meanings of the individual words. For example, if someone says in English *It rains dogs and cats*, this means that it

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rains heavily. Idioms are treated as figures of speech, which are defined in the Collins English Dictionary (2006) as “an expression such as a simile, in which words do not have their literal meaning, but are categorized as multi-word expressions that act in the text as units”. Longman Idioms Dictionary (1998) defines them as “a sequence of words which has a different meaning as a group from the meaning it would have if you understand each word separately”. Accordingly, idioms should not be broken up into their elements because they are sometimes referred to as a fixed expression (Cowie and Mackin, 1975, viii cited in Balfaqeh, 2009).

Larson defines idiom as “a string of words whose meaning is different from the meaning conveyed by the individual words” (Larson, 1984, p.20). In another place, he argues that idioms “carries certain emotive connotations not expressed in the other lexical items” (Larson, 1984, p.142). Idioms are found in all languages, they give speciality to a language and keeps its identity.

According to McMordiew “we can say that an idiom is a number of words which [when they are] taken together, mean something different from the individual words of the idiom when they stand alone”. (McMordiew, 1983, p. 4). On the other hand, Moon (1998) in her book, *A Corpus-Based Approach*, defines idiom as “an ambiguous term, used in conflicting ways”. In lay or general use, idiom has two main meanings. Idioms are created by the native speakers of languages with fixed structures and meanings (based on a specific social or cultural occasion) and used both formally (in writing) and informally (friendly speaking).

How to translate idioms?

One of the most important difficulties in learning a language is to master the idioms of that language because their meanings cannot be worked out from literally translating the words themselves. Idioms are different from all forms of the language, because their meanings cannot be predicted from their individual words, Baker (1992). There are some challenges that face the translators when they need to translate idiomatic expressions. The problem happens because of some factors regarding the culture and the environment of the target language. According to Larson, idioms must be translated with great care. He argued that: “the real danger comes in translating an idiom literally, since the result will usually be nonsense in the receptor language”. In order to reach the best results, translation must have a sense and easy forms to express the meaning. Translators have to follow one of these strategies; they have to look for equivalence in the TL if the same idea of an idiom exists, or they have to look for the exact meaning and search in the situations and the occasions where these idioms appear to be able to paraphrase the meaning. So the translation of idioms needs the translator to have a good knowledge about the society and the culture

of both languages in order to paraphrase the idea or to get equivalence. Literal translations are not accepted with idioms in any case.

In this study, none of the Arabic idioms used have equivalences in English, so what is translated is the meanings they express. We paraphrase the meanings.

The question that this study tries to answer is that:

How to translate idioms that have no equivalences in the TL?

Data collection

There are no ready-made sources available for collecting the Arabic idioms in this study. Two sources are followed; the first is live sources such as TV programs, radio, and movies. The second is written sources such as social media posts, newspapers, magazines, novels, books and dictionaries. The idioms examined in this study are divided into three parts; the first includes those idioms with the word HEAD, the second are with the word HEART, and the third is with the word HAND. Many others that includes other organs of humans are mentioned in the appendix.

Analysis and Description

The idioms to be discussed are divided into three parts; the ones with the word HEAD, then the ones with the word HEART, and finally the ones with the word HAND.

HEAD idioms

This section displays the meanings and the usages of the Arabic idioms which include the word (head= رأس). All the Arabic idioms used in this study have no equivalences in English, so that the paraphrased meanings will be displayed and discussed.

Table (1) displays the idioms that include the word HEAD and their meanings in English.

S. No.	The Arabic idiom	The meaning in English
1.1	حط رأسي بالطين	He brought me shame.
1.2	كبر رأس معي	He is very stubborn.
1.3	كبرت رأسه بكلامي	I complimented him.
1.4	ما تحط رأسك برأسي	Do not challenge me.
1.5	جمع رأسيين بالحلال	He was the mediator in their marriage.
1.6	ارفع رأسك	Be proud of yourself.
1.7	وقع على رأسه غز	He was engaged in a big trouble.
1.8	الولدين على رؤوس بعض	The two kids were born with a relatively short break between them.
1.9	هو من رؤوس العرب	He is an Arab notable.
1.10	كلامه عبي رأسي	What he says is convincing.

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Here are an analysis and a discussion for each.

1. حط راسي بالطين.

This statement literally includes three words; put, head and mud. It is literally translated as *He puts my head in the mud*. This idiom appears in many Arabian cultures especially those in The Middle East like the Jordanian and Egyptian. It is used to express the feeling someone gets because of a fault or a mistake his son makes, the feeling of shame. The meaning indicates the inability of a man to meet or face others because of shame so he starts to hide his face from others, similar to an ostrich when it puts its head in the sand to look for food or safety.

2. كبر راس معي.

This statement literally includes three words; make large, head and with me. There are two other used idioms similar in meaning; *راسه و ألف سيف* which is literally translated as *his head is with thousand swords*, and *ركب راسه* which is literally translated as *he rides his head*. These idioms are used in Arabian countries to talk about someone who is very stubborn, he insists on his opinion and has no flexibility in dealing with others.

3. كبرت راسه بكلامي.

Literally, this idiom includes three words; make large, head, talk. This idiom is used by Arabians when talking about the overrated praise of someone for the aim of fawn. The exaggerating in saying the decorated words to someone leads his head to be enlarged. This idiom expresses a huge amount of used lying and not real words.

4. ما تحط راسك براسي.

Literally, this idiom is translated as *Do not put your head inside mine*. The meaning expressed by this idiom is that someone is asking another one not to challenge him. It is used in situations controlled by tension and stress or sometimes full of fighting and anger. When an Arabian person uses this idiom, it means that he finds no one equal to him or to his efforts, and so he asks the other one not to try to challenge him either physically or even by words.

5. جمع راسيين بالحلال.

In this idiom, the word *head* is not used as a singular but to indicate two; bride and groom. It is used in Arabian countries since many ages to say that someone was a mediator in a couple marriage; that is, the couple has no relations before and he tries to let them know each other and get married. When this idiom is used, people envy this person for being the link between the two families (the couples' families); he will be blessed by God for this job.

6. ارفع راسك.

This idiom includes two words; make high and head. It is used by people in the Arabian countries to ask someone to feel proud. Sometimes, parents say this idiom to their sons to push them a head especially if the sons are not enough confident of themselves. This idiom can be used by anyone and in any situation needs high honor.

7. وقع على راسه غز.

When Arabian people use this idiom, a sense of gloating appears in their words. This idiom indicates that someone is engaged in a very big trouble because he does not accept the advice of others. Sometimes, it is used when someone is aware of mistakes but then unconsciously he makes a fault and is engaged in a problem.

8. الولدين على رؤوس بعض.

In this idiom, the word *head* is used in a plural form. It is used by the families to say that the two babies were born with a relatively short break (a year in most cases). This idiom is used when we notice that two little brothers are fighting all the time for even silly things, may be because none of them get the enough amount of care. And so the reason people come up with is that they were born directly after each other.

9. هو من رؤوس العرب.

The word *head* here is also used in its plural form. This idiom is used by Arabian Bedouins many years ago to indicate that someone is the leader of hi tribe. Sometimes, it is used to praise someone (who is not a leader) because of his achievements, his braveness and his generosity. so that, this man is one of the most important leaders Arabs know.

10. كلامه عبي راسي.

Literally, this idiom is translated as *His talk fills my head*. People use this idiom to say that someone is persuaded by the words or the talk of someone else. Mostly, it is used in public occasions like elections periods or in parliaments. When it is used by individuals, it means that a man who is talking has an excellent ability to convince others by his words.

HEART idioms

This section displays the meanings and the usages of the Arabic idioms which include the word (heart= قلب). All the Arabic idioms used in this study have no equivalences in English, so that the paraphrased meanings will be displayed and discussed.

Table (2) displays the idioms that include the word HEART and their meanings in English.

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S. No.	The Arabic idiom	The meaning in English
2.1	قلبه ابيض/اسود	He is with a kind personality or with a strict personality.
2.2	قلبه من حديد	He is very brave.
2.3	قلبه كالحجر	He is very tough and harsh.
2.4	ايدى على قلبي	I am afraid of something to happen.
2.5	قلبي صار بين رجلي	He is very scared.
2.6	خطفت قلبي	I deeply fall in love with her.

1 قلبه ابيض/أسود

Literally, this idiom has two words; heart, the color (either white or black). This idiom is literally translated as *He has a white/ black heart*. It is used almost in all Arabian societies to describe the personality of someone; if he has a white heart, it means that his personality is kind like angels, but if he has a black heart, so his personality is strict and sly like devils. None of both colors refer to the natural color of the heart (which is red), since white and black are always on the opposite sides.

2 قلبه من حديد

This idiom is literally translated as *He has a heart made of iron*. It is positively used in the Arabian societies to describe someone that he is strong and brave to face any trouble or enemy and feel scary of nothing. This description comes from the hardness of iron.

3 قلبه كالحجر

Literally, this idiom is translated as *His heart is like a stone*. When describing someone by using this idiom, the description appears negatively sine it indicates that his personality is very tough and has no mercy in dealing and behaving with humans or animals as if he does not feel the others.

4 ايدى على قلبي

The literal meaning for this idiom is that *I put my hand on my heart*. It is used to describe predicting a situation with a lot of scary feelings. The meaning comes from the idea that when a human feels danger, his heart start beating fast and so he tries to calm it down by putting his hand over it.

5 قلبي صار بين رجلي

Literally, this idiom is translated as *My heart becomes between my legs*. This idiom is used to describe oneself being very afraid of something. The meaning

comes from the idea that the heart leaves the body and reaches the last point of the legs so there will be no life.

6 خطفت قلبي

Here, the literal meaning is that *She kidnapped my heart*. People in the Arabian countries used to use this idiom since ancient ages to describe the romantic situation of falling in love with a girl. As if this girl steal his heart, and so he is not able to live any more unless he meets her.

HAND idioms

This section displays the meanings and the usages of the Arabic idioms which include the word (hand=يد). All the Arabic idioms used in this study have no equivalences in English, so that the paraphrased meanings will be displayed and discussed.

Table (3) displays the idioms that include the word HAND and their meanings in English.

S. No.	The Arabic idiom	The meaning in English
3.1	له قبضة من حديد	He is very strong.
3.2	يده للخير ممدودة	He is very generous.
3.3	ايديه فاطة	He spends money on unnecessary stuff.
3.4	ايدي في حلقه	I spent a lot of money on him.
3.5	بقص ايدي اذا الكلام صحيح	I am sure that the talk is not true.
3.6	حط ايدك على راسك وانت تحكي معي	You must respect me.

1 له قبضة من حديد

Literally, this idiom is translated as *His hand is made by iron*. The idiom is positively used to describe how strong someone is. The meaning comes from the idea of the hardness of iron, so physically, this man is very strong.

2 يده للخير ممدودة

This idiom is literally translated as *His hand is stretched out for goodness*. It is always used in the Arabian countries with positive meaning to describe the generosity of someone; he spends money for charity and for any person needs.

3 ايديه فارطة

His hand is disassembled; this is how literally the idiom is translated. This idiom is used to negatively describe someone who always spends money on unnecessary stuff. This person has no plans to think financially about the future.

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4 ايدي في حلقة

The literal meaning for this idiom is that *My hand is inside his larynx*. People use this idiom when someone wants to remind another that he did a lot of financial or spiritual things for his credit. So, this person does not have to deny that.

5 بقص ايدي اذا الكلام صحيح

I will cut my hand by a scissor if this talk is right, this is the literal translation of the idiom. It is used when someone is very sure about something that it will not happen or it is not right.

6 حط ايديك على راسك وانت تحكي معي

Literally, this idiom is translated as *Put your hand on your head while you are dealing or talking with me*. It is used in some Arabian countries like Jordan when asking someone to respect someone. This happens when a man is not aware of the authority someone has, and so he has to respect him, otherwise he will lose a lot.

Appendix 1

Many other idioms in Arabic include the word *head*. Here are they:

1. راسه في النوم خفيف
2. راسه ثقيل
3. حط راسك بين الرووس وقول يا قطاع الرووس
4. انت اخذت من راس الكوم
5. راس الحكمة مخافة الله
6. راسه يابيس
7. فلانة رأس أفعى
8. رح اكسر راسك
9. انت على راسي
10. حط عيونك بوسط راسك
11. انفجر راسي من كثر التفكير
12. انت عقال الراس
13. هو رأس الفتنة
14. راسه اكبر من رأس المحافظ
15. راسه مقفل

Appendix 2

Many other idioms in Arabic include other organs of human body. Here are they:

1. نزلت من عيني
2. هو معيني عيني
3. دق خشوم
4. انت على خشمي
5. بكسر رجلك
6. حكيت معه واعطاني الطرشة
7. اكسر عينك

8. لسانه بده قص
9. وسع صدرك
10. اثار الي بالبنان
11. ايده وسخة
12. و راس ابوي ما عملت شي
13. يأكل على كل ضررس لون
14. دايرة على حل شعرها
15. انت رمش عيني
16. الظفر ما بطلع من اللحم
17. الدم ما بصير مي
18. الدم صار للركب
19. اذن من طين واذن من عجين
20. وقف شعر راسي

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