

Translating English Color Idioms into Arabic

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Abstract

Color idioms, a special category of idioms, cannot be translationally approached without deep and ‘voracious’ cultural insight that goes beyond the transmittal of linguistic structure and a very parochial sense of meaning. This paper argues that color idioms pose a Herculean translation task when rendering them from English into Arabic. By examining data from literary and political domains and employing Nida’s (1964) *formal/functional equivalence*, Baker’s (1992) *idiom translation model*, and Farghal and Shunnaq’s (1999) *ideational equivalence*, our analysis identifies two primary, exceedingly intractable, translation difficulties: the intricate idiomatic-symbolic meanings of color idioms, and the stark cultural disparities between these two languages. The findings also indicate that Baker’s (1992) *borrowing the source language idiom*, which prompted an insidiously *exoticizing* literalist-formal translation, has turned out to be the most heavily used method, followed by *translation-by-paraphrasing*, which stimulated the weaving of noxious ‘colorless’ equivalents, whose ‘selvedges’ are arguably so frayed to ensure ‘colorful’ frayages, or full restitution of meaning. These ‘misfiring’ loss-ridden equivalents have been addressed by proposing, where necessary, more valorizing redressive translation solutions.

Keywords: Color Idioms; ‘Colorless’ Idiomatic Translation; Formal/Functional Equivalence; Ideational Equivalence; Translation Loss

1. Introduction

Deeply embedded in a language’s cultural tapestry, idioms typically imbue languages with cultural and linguistic paradigms. Defining an idiom as “a group of words which have a different meaning when used together from the one it would have if the meaning of each word were taken individually” (*Collins Cobuild Dictionary of Idioms* 2002, 6) implies that idioms are often non-compositional and thus semantically opaque since their meanings happen to swerve from their individual constituents that cannot be directly inferred from them (Al-Shaikhli 2012; Berlin and Kay 1969; Liu 2012; Stunžaitė 2015; Subanova and Nurmuradova 2020). This study is primarily concerned with the translation of one special category of idioms, i.e., *color idioms*, which are characterized by having “a meaning that is not apparent

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from the color and the color itself is not directly implied” (Alotaibi 2020, 98). In fact, color is seen here as a central engine in the construction of idiomatic meaning.

Likewise, idioms, with color references, are structures that go beyond their primary meanings, and the interpretations of these idioms and the colors they employ can vary greatly from one culture to another. Color idioms, in particular, can actually be considered a *terra incognita* for probing commonalities, diversities, and peculiarities across languages and cultures; color idioms may not always resonate as a universal phenomenon. Thus, it is argued here that the translation of color idioms is likely to present formidable challenges for translators, owing to the fact that they are not only deeply culture-specific (Strakšienė 2009; Mohammedain 2021; Baker 1992; Al-Shaikhli 2012; Rakhieh et al. 2014), but they also serve as catalysts for notoriously intricate symbolic color-related meanings, which further complicates the idiomatic meaning, and which is inextricably bound up to present potentially hidden complexities and problems of translation. Therefore, translators should have enough knowledge of the languages and cultures they are dealing with and know how to adapt the source idioms with their target equivalents to produce effective translations (Abdalla 2018; Al-Huraibi 2018; Al-Khanchi 2019; Marais & Meylaerts 2018). Besides, they should not only concentrate on finding a linguistic match but also on negotiating meaning across different cultures (Venuti 2013). This is specifically with color idioms, as they are expected to be far harder and far more precarious to translate than default non-color ones.

Indeed, color idioms are still an under-explored area of concentration in translation in both directionalities: English-into-Arabic, and Arabic-into-English. In light of all of this, the objective of this study is three-fold: (1) to address this gap by examining English color idioms and their Arabic translations through amassing overwhelming evidence for highlighting the sort of serious problems associated with their translation, (2) to assess the accuracy and adequacy of the translation strategies employed in this context, and (3) to propose alternative, hopefully more optimal translations, whenever the need arises.

2. Review of Related Literature

The study of color idioms encompasses various scholarly approaches, with some researchers delving into their linguistic properties and others into their translational challenges. This section is divided into three subsections: linguistic studies on color idioms, translation studies on color idioms, and the theoretical framework: translation strategies and models on color idioms. These subsections will now be taken up in a piecemeal fashion:

2.1 Linguistics Studies on Color Idioms

As far as linguistics is concerned, different linguistic aspects of color idioms have been studied. Some have looked into the semantics behind these expressions (Al-Adaileh 2012; Ayesa 2021; Btoosh 2014; Evgenia and Yuliya 2020; Rabab'ah and Al-Saidat 2014; Sahan and Abdulkadhim 2021; Steinvall 2002; Stunžaitė 2015; Tomićić 2022; Xing 2009); some have delved into the structural (both morphological and syntactic) characteristics of them (Mehawesh, Jaradat, and Sadeq 2015; Steinvall

2002; Vaclavíková 2010; Yusifova 2021); some have approached such structures from a cognitive perspective (Hasan, Al-Sammerai, and Kadir 2011; Meng 2022); and, some have explored their etymological and lingua-cultural implications (Moreno 2011; Guryanov, Rakhimova, and Rudnick 2017; Kigel 2021b, 2021a, 2022e, 2022d, 2022c, 2022a, 2022b, 2022f). Given that this paper is not the proper ‘springboard’ for a deep-dive into the linguistics of color idioms, the focus will now pivot towards its axis, the translational perspective.

2.2 Translation Studies on Color Idioms

The translation of idiomatic expressions, particularly those involving color, has not received extensive scholarly attention in English-to-Arabic and Arabic-to-English translations. These idioms have gained more global momentum with other language pairs, reflecting their linguistic and cultural relevance. Therefore, a research gap can be observed in the field of translation: a few studies have been conducted on the translation of color idiomatic expressions, specifically from English into Arabic. Besides, most of the data used in the previous studies have been collected from dictionaries, which will not give reliable results for the analysis. Further, researchers have focused on the difference in the symbolic meanings of color idioms between cultures, and they have overlooked the major issue of translation loss.

To start with English-into-Arabic directionality, a few studies have been found to focus on color idioms. Al-Shaikhli (2012), contending that color idioms represent a thorny area for translation theorists and practitioners alike, investigates the translation of such phrases, particularly the methods that have been employed for translating them, such as using an idiom of similar meaning and form, using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form, translation by omission, translation by paraphrase, loan translation, and translation couplet. Yet, the study concludes that paraphrasing is the most commonly used strategy.

Similarly, Rakhieh et al. (2014) examine the difficulties faced by Jordanian English language students when translating culture-bound color idioms, with a special focus on the strategies followed by the trainee-translators to overcome these difficulties. The study shows that the deletion strategy was used due to a lack of knowledge of the idiom’s meaning, whereas the literal translation method was heavily relied upon, resulting in vague and awkward translations. However, paraphrasing provided more acceptable translations, aligning with Al-Shaikhli’s (2012) findings on its prevalence as a preferred strategy. Reema and Maite (2017) scrutinize the translatability of color idioms across English, Arabic, and Spanish, contending that shared cultural references can facilitate literal translations, whereas cultural disparities can sometimes preclude direct equivalents. Metwally (2022) assesses the effectiveness of Venuti’s (2017) translation strategies, specifically domestication and foreignization, in translating color idioms, advocating for a flexible translation approach.

In the Arabic-to-English directionality, color idioms have also been the subject of scholarly translational investigation. Salim and Mehawesh (2013) look into the translation of color idioms in Naguib Mahfouz’s *The Thief and the Dogs*, and identify four translation strategies: using idioms of similar meaning, cultural substitution, paraphrasing, and omission. Although their findings are insightful,

they are case-specific and may not be generalizable. Similarly, Al-Mhanawi (2021) examines the translation of color idioms in three novels by Mahfouz. The results reveal poor performance on the part of the translator, attributed to a lack of cultural knowledge or equivalence and the use of inadequate techniques. Altohami (2022) handles the translation of color terms, specifically *black* and *white*, from Arabic into English and sheds light on their potential for literal or figurative interpretation. However, this study is limited to only two colors and a single text, which may not guarantee a comprehensive and reliable understanding of color expressions.

Abushunar (2021) studies the translation of color idioms in both directionalities with a view to investigating the competence of Jordanian EFL learners in rendering color idioms. The findings of the study demonstrate that the students have poor competence in color idioms, as they provided non-equivalent translations as a result of using reduction strategies, such as avoidance and literal translation, whereas paraphrasing is the most dominant strategy in this context. It can be observed that Abushunar's (2021) findings are similar to those of Rakhieh et al. (2014) and Al-Mhanawi (2021) due to depending on the same methodology, i.e., the evaluative tests, which give unreliable results.

In a global context, the translation of color idioms has been considered not only in English and Arabic but also in other language pairs. Harutyunyan (2010) assesses color idioms' translation into Armenian and Russian in British and American novels. Ahmadi and Ketabi (2011) examine the translatability of color idioms between English and Persian, Gudkova and Burlakova (2017) between Russian and German, Ebralidze (2019) between English and Georgian, Uusküla (2019) from English into Estonian, Subanova and Nurmuradova (2020) from English into Uzbek, Li (2021) from English into Chinese, Fakhretdinov and Latypov (2022) between Tatar and French, Saidvaliyevna (2022) from English into Uzbek, Oguz and Uusküla (2023) between Estonian and Swedish, Usmonova and Yuldashova (2023) between Russian and English, and Selyem (2023) from English into Romanian, among others. In general, these studies have all focused on the challenge of finding direct equivalents for color idioms in the target language due to cultural and linguistic discrepancies among languages. Some of them have underscored the importance of context in coping with this challenge and comprehending the meanings of the idioms. This emphasizes that cultural awareness and contextual analysis are essential to bridge the gap between languages and improve the translation of such expressions.

2.3 Theoretical Framework: Translation Strategies and Models on Color Idioms

In Translation Studies, color idioms epitomize the intricate interplay between language and culture, posing distinct challenges for achieving equivalence in translation. Nida (1964) introduces two types of equivalence approaches in translation: formal and dynamic or functional. The formal equivalence approach advocates for closely adhering to the source text's form and content. Conversely, the dynamic equivalence approach prioritizes the natural and effective conveyance of the message in the target language. In idiom analysis, *formal equivalence* may involve translating idioms literally, which can be challenging if the target language does not have a direct equivalent. On the contrary, *functional equivalence* aims to find an equivalent that captures the cultural meaning rather than sticking to a literal translation.

Despite their utility, these models often grapple with the unique cultural and linguistic nuances that can render formal equivalence impracticable and functional equivalence potentially imprecise in maintaining the cultural essence of the source text. To reconcile these two approaches that may be seen as representing the two extremes on a cline, Farghal and Shunnaq (1999) propose the ideational equivalence approach, which advocates for the workable transmission of the source text's core concept or basic idea, regardless of linguistic or cultural congruence. This strategy proves invaluable when translators are stuck, especially when they encounter idiomatic expressions that lack direct counterparts in the target language, which eventually would enable them to circumvent the constraints of structural or affective fidelity.

Nida (1964) also proposes a triad of techniques for idiom translation: rendering idioms with non-idiomatic language, translating idioms with equivalent idioms, and substituting non-idioms with idiomatic expressions. Newmark (1988) contends that the most efficacious approach to translating idioms involves employing a natural target language idiom that effectively conveys the same meaning and impact as the source language idiom. Baker (1992) further develops and broadens these strategies by offering a nuanced model tailored for leveraging incomparably more perspicuous translations of such idiomatic expressions. Such a model encompasses six strategies: (1) using an idiom of similar meaning and form, (2) using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form, (3) borrowing the source language idiom, (4) translation by paraphrase, (5) translation by omission of a play on idiom, and (6) translation by omission of the entire idiom (Baker 1992, 71-78).

Baker's framework offers translators a versatile toolkit, enabling them to navigate the complexities of context and communicative intent while striving to preserve the integrity of the source message, especially in English-Arabic idiom translation. This framework does seem to be instrumental in mitigating misinterpretations and ensuring that translations resonate authentically within the target culture. The first strategy helps in finding a direct equivalent when an idiom is shared between the two languages. If direct translation does not work out due to linguistic differences in the concerned languages, the second strategy will be helpful in maintaining at least the idiomatic meaning. When a suitable equivalent is absent in the target language, the translator can either borrow the source idiom if it has an understandable cultural concept, is accompanied by an explanation, or describe the idiomatic meaning using the paraphrasing strategy. Finally, the deletion strategies will be crucial when an idiom or a part of it adds no significant value in the target language, and omitting them would help maintain the flow of the text.

Indeed, all the discussed frameworks of equivalence proposed by Nida (1964), Farghal and Shunnaq (1999), and Baker (1992) do appear to provide foundational approaches to address the translation challenges of cultural-specific expressions like color idioms. However, the ongoing evolvement of language and culture requires these frameworks to be adapted to better handle such challenges. For example, integrating cognitive linguistics can potentially help understand the mental processes through which color idioms are processed and conceptualized. Having an awareness of the mental processes may enable translators to navigate the different symbolic meanings across languages and cultures. Thus, the linguistic cognitive approach has the potential to enhance translation accuracy and cultural nuance, thereby bridging the gap between languages and fostering deeper intercultural understanding.

3. Methodology

3.1 Corpus

The corpus of this study includes the English versions of multiple and diversified sources, along with their Arabic translations. These sources, mainly translated books, are essentially restricted to literary and political domains, given their rich and vivid language and high use of color-related idioms that challenge translators to preserve nuanced meanings across languages. Analyzing these idioms in such genres can assist in understanding the impact of translation on their interpretation, as well as the intricacies involved in cross-cultural communication. Table (1) summarizes these sources and the input for the corpus built for this study.

Table 1: Corpus-related Data Sources

English Reference's Title	Author	English Reference's Publisher	Year of Publication	Translated Version's Arabic Title	Translated Version's Publisher	Year of Publication	Translator's Name	Genre
The World is Flat	Thomas Friedman	Farrar, Straus and Giroux	(2005)	العالم مستو	Dar Al-Rai	(2006)	Hossam Eldeen Khodour	Political history
Twilight	Stephenie Meyer	Little, Brown, and Company	(2005)	الشفق	Sama Publishing	(2009)	Alharith Al-Nabhan	Literary novel
Dreams from my Father	Barack Obama	Canongate Books	(2007)	أحلام من أبي	Kalimat Arabia	(2009)	Heba Maghrabi and Eman Najem	Political memoir
To Kill a Mockingbird	Harper Lee	Random House	(2010)	لا تقتل عصفورا ساخرا	Dar Attakwin	(2015)	Tawfiq Alasadi	Literary novel
Go Set a Watchman	Harper Lee	Random House	(2016a)	ازهب أقم حارسا	Arab Scientific Publishers, Inc.	(2016b)	Zeinah Idrees	Literary novel
Trump Revealed	Michael Kranish and Marc Fisher	Simon and Schuster	(2016)	ترامب بلا قناع	Dar Al Saqi	(2017)	Ebtisam Bin Khadra'a	Political biography
Who Rules the World?	Noam Chomsky	Penguin Books	(2017a)	من يحكم العالم؟	Dar El Kitaab Alarabi	(2017b)	Fawaz Za'aror	Political criticism
Lords of the Desert	James Barr	Simon and Schuster	(2018)	سادة الصحراء	Dar Al Saqi	(2020)	Raed Alhakeem	Political history

3.2 Procedure

Two steps have been taken to gather the required data: the first involved a careful reading of the source language reference alongside its relevant translation to extract, using the randomization technique, color idioms, and their corresponding equivalents. The second included classifying idioms by color. Sixty-nine color idioms have been obtained and classified into the following main categories: *black-color* idioms, *white-color* idioms, *red-color* idioms, *green-color* idioms, and *blue-color* idioms. It should be mentioned that during the collection of data, special attention has been paid to black, white, red, green, and blue idioms because these colors frequently carry strong, culturally specific connotations that can vary widely across languages, presenting unique challenges in translation. Analyzing these idioms allows

for a comprehensive examination of how translators navigate the intricate task of preserving the original meaning and emotional impact in different cultural contexts.

The data analysis will start by unlocking the idiomatic-symbolic semantics of every color idiom and then evaluating the appropriacy of the translation strategy employed and the accuracy of the resultant translation. The latter implies comparing and contrasting each *source language text* (henceforth, SLT), or the English color idiom with its *target language text* (henceforth, TLT), or its Arabic version, and Baker's (1992) *idiom translation model*, Nida's (1964) *formal equivalence* and *functional equivalence*, and Farghal and Shunnaq's (1999) *ideational equivalence* will be heavily relied upon for such purposes.

3.3 Research Design

This is a contrastive-evaluative analytical study, mainly driven by a qualitative model, and which involves comparing and contrasting the English color idioms (SLTs) with their Arabic translations (TLTs).

4. Discussion

4.1 Black-color Idioms

Example (1):

SLT: "You thought that would be a **black-tie occasion**, did you?" he teased, touching the label of his tuxedo jacket. I scowled to hide my embarrassment. 'I don't know how these things work'" (Meyer 2005, 535).

TLT: "ظننت أنها ستكون مناسبة جديرة بربطة العنق السوداء... أليس كذلك؟" قال يناكفني لامسا ياقة ستريته. عبست

(Meyer 2009, 485). لأخفي حرجي: "لا اعرف كيف تجري هذه الأمور"

The English color idiom *black-tie* in Example (1) is a pre-modifying compound within a larger one (black-tie occasion). Morphologically, *black-tie* describes the head noun, occasion, indicating an event "at which people wear special formal clothes, such as tuxedos for men" (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* 2009, 159). Semantically, *black tie* symbolizes formal dress, particularly for businesspeople. Translationally, the translator has adhered to the SL form, rendering it as مناسبة جديرة بربطة العنق السوداء. In other words, the translator has employed Baker's (1992) *borrowing the source language idiom* strategy, except introducing a slight modification, i.e., جديرة (lit. worthy), which now back-translates as *an occasion worthy of a black tie*.

Wearing a *black tie* (lit. (ربطة عنق سوداء) usually by businesspeople on formal occasions is typical of English culture, but atypical of Arabic one, as businesspeople in the Arab world don't need to wear black ties in formal events. With this literal-formal translation approach, the translator has transferred a foreign cultural element to the Arab target readers, which they are not familiar with, and which is quite impactful on adequacy rather than accuracy. This is because black color does not carry the same symbolism in Arabic culture in this context. Thus, the unawareness of the cultural associations of this particular color, especially with formal occasions, can be remedied by applying Baker's (1992) fourth strategy, *translation*

by *paraphrase* that can pragmatically produce مناسبة رسمية لرجال وسيدات الأعمال (lit. a formal occasion for businessmen and businesswomen). Yet, by resorting to paraphrasing, the idiomaticity of a *black-tie occasion* and the SL color constituent black are sacrificed. In other words, although the suggested option مناسبة رسمية لرجال وسيدات الأعمال is a quite *functional equivalent*, it incurs a double loss: an idiomatic loss, as its equivalent is no longer an idiom in Arabic, and a color loss, including, of course, the loss of its relevant indication and/or symbolism. Lastly, it should be pointed out here that Arabic lacks specific tie-related or dress-related color idioms for such occasions, making color-for-color equivalence unfeasible.

Example (2):

SLT: “Nuclear war is **the black swan** we can never see, except in that brief moment when it is killing us. We delay eliminating the risk at our own peril. Now is the time to address the threat, because now we are still alive” (Chomsky 2017a, 222).

TLT: “الحرب النووية هي البجعة السوداء التي لا يمكن لنا أبداً أن نراها، إلا في تلك اللحظة العابرة التي تقتلنا فيها. نحن نؤجل القضاء على خطر يعرضنا للخطر. الآن هو الوقت المناسب للتصدي للتهديد، لأننا الآن ما نزال على قيد الحياة” (Chomsky 2017b, 245).

In Example (2), the idiom *black swan* was introduced by Nassim Nicholas Taleb in his book “The Black Swan” (Kigel 2022d, 44). This expression figuratively refers to an “unpredictable, unexpected, rare event” with “severe consequences” (Kigel 2022b, 8) rather than a literal black-colored swan. The rarity of black swans, as swans are typically white, underpins its use in English to denote unexpected events. Indeed, Arabs do not share this knowledge with English speakers, which would inevitably cause comprehension issues for the TL audience in translation. As far as translation is concerned, the color idiom has been rendered in its exact formal SL structure and literal semantic sense into the TT as البجعة السوداء by applying Baker’s (1992) third translation strategy, *borrowing the source language idiom*.

Begrimed and beslimed by the literal-formal approach and being conscious of this problem, the translator supplemented the formal equivalence with a descriptive material right after it, i.e., التي لا يمكن لنا (i.e., which we may never see) that can help non-native speakers of English to grasp its idiomatic-symbolic message fairly; yet, a much more functional equivalence at the translator’s disposal could have been opted for hereby recouring to Baker’s (1992) second strategy, *using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form*, that is طائر العنقاء (lit. the phoenix). In fact, in the Arab culture, طائر العنقاء does seem to establish an idiomatic isomorphism in translation, but not in color. *Al-Munjid Dictionary* (Maalouf 1986, 534) defines طائر العنقاء as “an illusionary and non-existent bird,” which can explain why Arabic speakers make a connection between it and any *unpredictable or impossible event*. In fact, the color of the Arabic equivalent طائر العنقاء is unknown, and it would be so weird in the Arab culture to label it color-wise as black, i.e., as طائر العنقاء الأسود (lit. the black phoenix). Though the expression طائر العنقاء can be considered an extremely functional equivalent to the idiom *black swan*, it ‘kills in cold blood’ the

color *black*, i.e., it loses the color black and its inherent semantics and symbolism. However, using this expression can evoke the underlying idea of rarity conveyed by *black swan* while considering the cultural symbols familiar to the target audience.

4.2 White-color Idioms

Example (3):

SLT: “Mott-Radclyffe visited the base that spring and reported that, in the absence of a friendly local population, it was a ‘useless **white elephant**.’ The 80,000 troops who lived on it were guarding neither the base nor the canal: ‘they were merely guarding each other’” (Barr 2018, 215).

TLT: "في ذلك الربيع، زار القاعدة وذكر أنها في غياب السكان المحليين الودودين كانت مجرد "فيل أبيض عديم الفائدة".
 إذ لم يكن الجنود البالغ عددهم ثمانين ألفاً، المقيمون فيها، يحرسون القاعدة، ولا القناة؛ كانوا "تقريباً يحرسون بعضهم بعضاً" (Barr 2020, 196).

The color idiom *white elephant* in Example (3) designates “a possession that is useless or troublesome, especially one that is expensive to maintain or difficult to dispose of” (*Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* 2020, 311). Semantically, *white elephant* does not signify an elephant that is white. Translationally, this color idiom has been rendered literally as فيل أبيض in the TLT by employing Baker’s (1992) *borrowing the source language idiom* translation strategy. This rendition corresponds with the source color idiom formally, but not idiomatically, functionally, or even ideationally because the literal rendition فيل أبيض does not reflect the idiomatic-symbolic message of *white elephant* and introduces an ‘assailable’ incomprehensible foreignness that would negatively impinge upon the coherence of the entire structure since such an idiom is unshared between English and Arabic.

However, following Baker’s (1992) second strategy, *using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form* may yield much better results. The religious expression لا يسمن ولا يغني من جوع (the seventh verse in Surah Al-Ghashiyah; lit. “neither nourishing nor satisfying hunger”) (*Holy Quran* 2011, 441) captures the functional meaning of *white elephant* but loses the color element. This expression is often used in Arabic to describe something that is of little or no value. Another possible option to ponder over in this context is the Arabic idiom كانت شوكة في الحلق (lit. it was a fork in the throat), which corresponds to the English idioms ‘a pain in the neck,’ or ‘a thorn in the neck,’ indicating something troublesome and hard to dispose of. Both can be applied in a similar context to the English idiom *white elephant*, as they indicate the ineffectiveness or burden of an object, in this instance, *the base*. The two options are functionally workable equivalents as they are as idiomatic as the source one. Nevertheless, Both of them result in a color-related translation loss, as *white* is neither used in Arabic contexts, nor are there any other color equivalents.

Example (4):

SLT: “‘So I called my general counsel,’ said Whitman, ‘who came over from his cubicle, and he was **white like a sheet**. We called Levitt back together and we put him on the speakerphone’” (Friedman 2005, 551).

TLT: وقالت ويتمان: "وهكذا طلبت مستشاري العام، الذي جاء من حجرته، وكان شاحباً مثل ملءة. وكالمنا لفيت معاً" (Friedman 2006, 498) ووضعناه على مكبر الصوت"

The color idiom *white like a sheet* in Example (4) involves a simile that designates, semantically and idiomatically, a person who is “very pale” (*Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* 2020, 311) due to fear or illness. The translator employed a literal-formal translation strategy, aligning with Baker’s (1992) *borrowing the source language idiom* strategy, rendering it as شاحباً مثل ملءة (lit. pale as a sheet). However, this translation communicates a slightly different figurative meaning and color-related symbolism.

In Arabic, شاحب (lit. pale) is primarily associated with sadness, sorrow, exhaustion, and poverty rather than fear or illness. Additionally, the term ملءة, meaning any *mattress cover* of any color, does not evoke the common English association of white sheets. This results in a loss of the specific cultural and symbolic connotations of the color white, which in English is traditionally linked to fear and illness. Inspired by Baker’s (1992) second strategy, *using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form*, a more valorized equivalent involving the color أصفر (lit. yellow) can be given here, simply as in the Arabic culture, *yellow* is typically associated with the state of *being ill* or *afraid*, and thus, it can enact the same cultural, idiomatic, and symbolic associations of *white* in English, as in the following manner: وكان وجهه مصفراً (lit. his face was yellowish). This cannibalistic-idiomatic color option is very well-known to the TL audience and sounds more thuddingly naturalized and appealing than شاحباً مثل ملءة, yet with very minimal translation loss.

4.3 Red-color Idioms

Example (5):

SLT: “He got an urgent call from a Taj manager, asking if he could get to Atlantic City to host the birthday rally. Cox took a **red-eye** to Philadelphia, where a driver whisked him to the rally” (Kranish and Fisher 2016, 175).

TLT: "تلقي مكالمة عاجلة من مدير تاج محل يطلب منه العودة إلى أتلانتيك سيتي لتنظيم مهرجان عيد ميلاد ترامب. جاء" (Kranish and Fisher 2017, 272) . كوكس الى فيلادلفيا في رحلة ليلية بالطائرة، ومن هناك أوصله السائق الى مكان المهرجان"

In Example (5), the color idiom *red-eye* is an informal expression that literally means an eye that is red; yet, it is an idiom that indicates “a flight that leaves late at night and arrives early the next morning” (*Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms* 2002, 322). By utilizing Baker’s (1992) *translation by*

paraphrase strategy, the color idiom has been translated as رحلة ليلية بالطائرة (lit. night flight by plane), which triggers a considerable color-related idiomatic-symbolic loss. Given that Arabic neither has such a color idiom nor has any other counterpart with a different color but which may sustain the same idiomaticity and symbolism, Baker's (1992) *paraphrasing translation strategy* can help break such a translational impasse.

In light of this, a *red-eye* is a late flight that nearly takes off around midnight. This element of time of the flight has not been properly paraphrased by the translator in the provided translation رحلة ليلية بالطائرة, which generally indicates a night flight without specifying whether it is an early-night or late-night one. A more precise *translation by paraphrase* can be طائرة آخر الليل (lit. late-night plane) or even طيران آخر الليل (lit. late-night flight). The Arabic description of the flight, i.e., آخر الليل (lit. late-night), can serve as an ideational equivalent to the SL color idiom. Although these two options are 'colorless' and not idiomatic, they seize the element of time, i.e., *the late time of the plane* that is symbolically meant by the *red* color in the idiom *red-eye* very naturally and very coherently.

Example (6):

SLT: "When, en route for Egypt, Landis paused in London, he told British officials that his prime objective was **to cut out the red tape** that impeded American exporters selling in the Middle East" (Barr 2018, 79).

TLT: "في طريقه إلى مصر، توقف لانديس في لندن، وأخبر المسؤولين البريطانيين أن هدفه الرئيسي كان قطع الشريط الأحمر الذي يمنع المصدرين الأمريكيين من البيع في الشرق الأوسط" (Barr 2020, 69).

The color idiom *cutting the red tape*, Example (6), is a political color idiom that means to "eliminate or neutralize something complicated, such as bureaucratic rules and procedures," and when someone wishes to "cut out" something, this means he/she wants to "stop it" (Spears 2007, 106, 107). Employing Baker's (1992) third strategy, *borrowing the source language idiom*, the translator has rendered the color idiom literally into the TL as قطع الشريط الأحمر, which matches the SL idiom in terms of form only, but not in its genuine idiomatic-symbolic meaning and function.

Indeed, this literal translation (قطع الشريط الأحمر) reflects a totally different idiomatic sense that is *cutting the red ribbon*, symbolizing the inauguration of new projects or facilities. This can be envisaged as a staggeringly unimpressive translation loss, as the color component red and its symbolic color associations with tape have been sacrificed. However, Baker's (1992) strategy, *using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form*, is most suitable for relaying ideationally the basic idiomatic-symbolic sense of *cutting the red tape*, as التخلص من الترهل الحكومي (lit. disposing of governmental sagginess). In Arabic, the word الترهل (sagginess) commonly collocates with الجلد (the skin) to indicate that the skin has started to "hang down or bend" (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2009, 1540). In the governmental field, it is used to refer idiomatically to poor governmental performance and inefficient

bureaucratic rules, making the translation natural, comprehensible, and true to the essence of the original idiom. Accordingly, although the revised translation *هدفه الرئيسي كان التخلص من الترهل الحكومي* is devoid of color symbolism, it accurately captures the idiomatic sense of "cutting the red tape" and ensures clarity and relevance for the TL audience.

4.4 Green-color Idioms

Example (7):

SLT: "He had such a **green thumb**, he could make anything grow. He had studied these techniques from the British, you see. When he worked for them as a cook" (Obama 2007, 199).

TLT: "كان شديد المهارة في الزراعة، وبإمكانه زراعة أي شيء، وقد تعلم هذه التقنيات من البريطانيين عندما عمل لديهم" (Obama 2009, 428) *ظاهياً*.

In Example (7), the color idiom *to have a green thumb (finger)* describes those people who are skilled at gardening and growing plants (Oxford Dictionary of Idioms 2020). A literal rendition, such as *أخضر ابهام* may seem unintelligible to Arabic readers. The translator has used Baker's (1992) *translation by paraphrase* strategy, rendering the idiom as *شديد المهارة في الزراعة* (lit. highly skilled in agriculture). While this captures the basic idea, it loses the idiomatic and color symbolism of the original expression.

However, the employment of this strategy has resulted in an inevitable translation loss, as the idiomaticity and symbolic significance of the color *green* have been 'flattened' since Arabic does not share English this particular idiom. However, following Baker's (1992) strategy, *using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form*, Arabic has a very functional equivalent color idiom, with almost the same meaning, which is *يده خضراء* (lit. he has a green hand), as *green* is normally associated with plants and gardening in Arabic too. Moreover, the idiom's meaning *يده خضراء* can further be comprehended by its self-explanatory co-text, which is *وبإمكانه زراعة أي شيء* (lit. he could make anything grow). Thus, the revised translation effectively captures the essence of the SL color idiom.

Example (8):

SLT: "With **green envy**, she watched Henry's effortless mastery of the automobile. Cars are his servants, she thought. "Power steering? Automatic transmission?" she said" (Lee 2016a, 14).

TLT: راقبت بحسد كبير مهارة هنري في التحكم بالسيارة من دون جهد يذكر. وفكرت أن السيارة كالخادم بين يديه. قالت: "مقود؟! تبديل آلي؟!" (Lee 2016b, 17)

The color idiom *with green envy* in Example (8) signifies extreme jealousy or envy (Oxford Dictionary of Idioms 2020, 129). The translator has utilized Baker's (1992) *translation by paraphrase* strategy, transferring it into *بحسد كبير* (lit. with great envy) in the TL. Although the source language (SL) idiom and its translation do not match formally, they align ideationally. This is because the core meaning of the idiom is preserved in the TL, and a literal translation like *أخضر بحسد* would seem highly unusual to

Arab readers. While English links *green* with *jealousy* or *envy*, Arabic associates it with *life*, *young age*, and *Islam*. The differing connotations necessitate omitting the color in translation. Arabic even lacks any other color-based idiomatic equivalent in this context. Although the translator has maintained a reasonable veneer of functionality via the already provided ideational option, a more functional but ‘colorless’ equivalent that can make up for the loss of the SL color in the TL by adhering to Baker’s (1992) strategy, *using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form*. A suitable alternative can be the metaphorical expression أكل الحسد قلبها (lit. envy has eaten up her heart), which idiomatically matches with *green envy*.

4.5 Blue-color Idioms

Example (9):

SLT: “In Palm Beach, a tiny village of cloistered estates and private beaches where **blue bloods** and billionaires relished their privacy” (Kranish and Fisher 2016, 151).

TLT: "في بالم بيتش، وهي قرية صغيرة تضم بيوتاً منعزلة وشواطئ خاصة كان أفراد العائلات الملكية وأصحاب المليارات يستمتعون فيها بخصوصيتهم" (Kranish & Fisher 2017, 231)

In Example (9), the ST features the color idiom *blue bloods*, which refers to “a family of the highest social class” (*Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms* 2002, 41). Given that such an idiom is not shared with Arabic, and so it cannot be translated literally as دماء زرقاء, the translator using Baker’s (1992) explanatory strategy, *translation by paraphrase*, has provided a non-literal yet erroneous translation: أفراد الملكية (lit. members of the royal families). However, the literal option دماء زرقاء can be contextually appropriate in scenarios involving bruises or injuries, but not in the idiomatic sense.

Indeed, the offered translation أفراد العائلات الملكية appears not only to have declined in unpacking the idiomatic meaning of *blue bloods* but also to have doomed the symbolic aspect of the color *blue* in the entire makeup of this idiom restricting it to royalty and excluding other high social classes. To address the color loss while maintaining functional equivalence, alternative translations, such as النبلاء (lit. noble people), نخبة البلدة (lit. the elites of the town), or عليّة القوم (lit. the cream of the crop, or the cream of the cream) can be considered. Other viable options include أولاد الأكابر (lit. children of great masters) and أولاد الحسب والنسب (lit. children of dynastic honor and fine lineage). Although these alternatives lack the color component *blue*, they are culturally appropriate and convey the intended meaning of high social status. In conclusion, while the idiom *blue bloods* cannot be directly translated into Arabic with its color intact, these suggested options provide a culturally relevant and functional equivalent, albeit with some translation loss regarding the color symbolism.

Example (10):

SLT: "We can educate 'em till we're **blue in the face**, we can try till we drop to make Christians out of 'em, but there's no lady safe in her bed these nights" (Lee 2010, 168).

TLT: "يمكننا تثقيفهم حتى تزرق وجوهنا، ويمكننا أن نحاول أن نجعلهم مسيحيين حتى نسقط أرضاً من التعب، ولكن لا (Lee 2015, 411). توجد سيدة آمنة في فراشها هذه الأيام"

The color idiom *blue in the face* in Example (10) is associated with extreme effort or emotion, often to the point of physical fatigue or breathlessness, symbolized by the idea of turning blue in the face from exertion or frustration. The whole phrase *till we're blue in the face* has been rendered into the TL literally and formally as *حتى تزرق وجوهنا* by taking advantage of Baker's (1992) *borrowing the source language idiom*. Undoubtedly, the act of educating others requires a remarkable degree of *physical* and *mental effort*, and this is usually a long process that takes place over a long time, which can account for why English express such an action or practice with the color idiom *blue in the face*.

Likewise, Arabic does associate the blueness of the skin of the face with such sorts of activities in addition to conditions such as *choking*, *death*, and *feeling cold*, and so the provided translation *حتى تزرق وجوهنا* not only maintains the color *blue* but also spews out, to a large extent, the same idiomaticity and color symbolism of the idiom in question. Following Baker's (1992) second strategy (*using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form*), other idiomatic yet color-wise 'bleached' options can include *حتى* (lit. *till our strength is failing*), *حتى الرmq الأخير* (lit. *until the last moment*), *حتى النفس الأخير* (lit. *until the last breath*), or even *حتى تنقطع أنفاسنا* (lit. *until we are short of breath*). All these options can be looked upon as fundamentally qualified and copious equivalents. Yet, an unavoidable semantic loss and, consequently, a comparable translation loss is inherently characteristic of every one of them.

5. Conclusion

This study has been primarily concerned with investigating the problems and challenges associated with translating a specific group of idioms, namely, *color idioms*. The study has shown that color idioms are indefeasibly thorny in translation from English into Arabic. This can be mainly ascribed to the fact that many of these idioms are not shared by these two languages, which, in turn, is essentially attributable to the sharp cultural differences between them. Colors, which are hand in glove with idioms' semantic makeup, have been found to expand and deepen our familiarity with the mentality of two speaking communities, English and Arabic, to dispense subtle idiomatic-symbolic meanings and associations, and to carry distinct cultural imprints, which have complicated their translation.

As far as translation is involved and by drawing upon Baker's (1992) *idiom translation strategies*, Nida's (1964) *formal equivalence* and *functional equivalence*, and Farghal and Shunnaq's (1999) *ideational equivalence*, the assessed translations have exhibited varying degrees of accuracy and adequacy, as they differed and oscillated in the density of their idiomaticity, depending on the translation

technique used by the translator in this context. Perhaps, in an earnest attempt to maximally and astutely offer a faithful imitation of the original, the translator has rampantly used the *literalist-formal equivalence*, but the *ideational* and *functional* ones, to a lesser extent. Indeed, analysis has revealed that the translator has preferred Baker's (1992) *borrowing the source language idiom* as the most heavily used strategy, which 'fuels' their insidiously *exoticizing* literalist-formal translation approach noticed here. Though this approach has been expedient in very limited cases (e.g., Example 10), it has been quite sterile in many others (see Examples 1, 2, 3, & 6).

Analysis has also shown that the second most common translation strategy used by the translator is Baker's (1992) *translation by paraphrase*. At best, such a strategy has assisted the translator only in providing a 'colorless' functional equivalence or a 'colorless' ideational one. The latter is seen here as an attempt to offer a plausible veneer of functionality (e.g., Examples 7 & 8). It has been equally demonstrated that in all cases, the paraphrasing strategy has been obfuscated by the *killing* of the color. This *noxious deletion of color* has given rise to a great deal of translation loss. The effacement of color is thus a very 'serious injury' to the idiom in hand, thereby sapping the strength of its idiomaticity and 'dampening' its inherent color symbolism when it should have been fought for bitterly. In a nutshell, these have been weaved as meretricious *non-color*, or 'colorless' equivalents, whose 'selvedges' are so frayed and so jagged that, in many cases, have unquestioningly got off home ground. Finally, motivated by the very same theoretical framework drawn upon for assessing the accuracy and adequacy of the provided translations, more appropriate corrective translation options have been suggested where needed.

ترجمة عبارات الألوان الاصطلاحية من الإنجليزية إلى العربية

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الملخص

تعدّ التعبيرات الاصطلاحية المتعلقة بالألوان فئة فريدة من التعبيرات الاصطلاحية، لا يمكن التعامل معها ترجمياً دون فهم ثقافي عميق و'أنهما معرفياً' يتجاوز النقل الحرفي للبنية اللغوية والمعنى السطحي الضيق. وتناقش هذه الورقة البحثية أن التعبيرات الاصطلاحية المتعلقة بالألوان تشكل مهمة ترجمة شاقة عند نقلها من اللغة الإنجليزية إلى اللغة العربية. ومن خلال دراسة بيانات مستقاة من مجالات الأدب والسياسة، وبالاستناد إلى مبدئي "التكافؤ الشكلي" و"التكافؤ الوظيفي" لنايدا Nida (1964)، واستراتيجيات بيكر Baker لترجمة التعبيرات الاصطلاحية (1992)، ومبدأ "التكافؤ الفكري" لفرغل وشناق Farghal and Shunnaq (1999)، يكشف التحليل عن صعوبتين أساسيتين بالغتي التعقيد في الترجمة، هما: المعاني الاصطلاحية الرمزية للتعبيرات المتعلقة بالألوان، والفوارق الثقافية الشاسعة بين هاتين اللغتين". وتشير النتائج أيضاً إلى أن نهج بايكر (1992) في اقتراض التعبير الاصطلاحي من اللغة المصدر، الذي أدى إلى ترجمة حرفية - شكلية تتسم بنوع من التغريب الخفي، قد تبين أنه الأكثر استخداماً، وتليه الترجمة بالتفسير، التي دفعت إلى حياكة نسيج لغوي ضار 'عديم اللون'، ذي 'حواف' يمكن القول جداً إنها مهترنة أو متآكلة للغاية، لدرجة أنه غير قادرة على استعادة المعنى الاصطلاحي اللوني الكامل بصورة كافية للغاية، وقد غولجت هذه الأنسجة (المكافئات اللغوية) المثقلة بالفقد المعنوي والترجمي والتي أخطأت في إصابة أهدافها من خلال اقتراح حلول ترجمة تصحيحية أكثر دقة، كلما اقتضت الضرورة، تعزز من قيمة النص وتعيد صياغته بما يضمن دقة المعنى.

الكلمات المفتاحية: عبارات الألوان الاصطلاحية؛ الترجمة 'اللونية' الاصطلاحية؛ التكافؤ الشكلي/الوظيفي؛ التكافؤ الفكري؛

خسارة في الترجمة

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