


## Understanding the Challenges and Difficulties of English-Arabic Idiom Translation: Insights From Students

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### Abstract

The translation of idiomatic expressions from English into Arabic constitutes one of the most demanding tasks for translation students, primarily because idioms are deeply rooted in linguistic structure, cultural symbolism, and contextual usage. Unlike literal expressions, idioms convey figurative meanings that cannot be understood through word-for-word interpretation. As a result, students often encounter significant obstacles when attempting to render them accurately in Arabic. This study investigates these challenges through a survey administered to 50 translation students, aiming to evaluate their comprehension of idioms, their translation strategies, and their perceived level of confidence in dealing with such expressions. The research explores several dimensions, including students' exposure to idiomatic expressions in academic settings, their familiarity with equivalent Arabic idioms, and the strategies they employ when direct equivalents are unavailable. Findings indicate that although idioms are frequently encountered in literary texts, media discourse, and classroom materials, many students struggle to grasp their figurative meanings and embedded cultural references. The survey results show that 80% of participants experience difficulty in identifying appropriate Arabic equivalents, while 70% report challenges in conveying the cultural context underlying English idioms. These figures demonstrate that the problem extends beyond vocabulary knowledge to include cultural competence and pragmatic awareness. Moreover, performance-based responses reveal varying levels of translation accuracy. Familiar or widely used idioms tend to be translated more successfully, whereas less common or culturally specific expressions often result in literal translations that distort the intended meaning. The findings also confirm the crucial role of context in facilitating comprehension; students perform better when idioms are embedded within clear situational frameworks.

**Keywords;** Cultural Equivalence; English-Arabic Translation; Idiom Translation; Translation Challenges; Translation Students.

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## Introduction

Translating idioms represents a sophisticated challenge in the field of translation studies, particularly for students who are still developing their linguistic and cultural proficiency. Idioms, as fixed expressions with meanings that often diverge significantly from their literal interpretations, encapsulate unique cultural perspectives that can be elusive in translation. The complexity arises not only from the linguistic structure of idioms but also from their deep cultural embeddedness, which requires translators to possess both linguistic dexterity and cultural insight. As students grapple with these challenges, they must navigate the intricacies of finding equivalent expressions, adapting cultural references, and preserving the idiomatic flavor in the target language. This paper delves into the multifaceted difficulties faced by translation students when translating idioms, emphasizing the importance of cultural competence and exploring strategies to enhance the accuracy and authenticity of idiomatic translation. Through a survey conducted with translation students, the study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the different difficulties the students encounter while dealing with these expressions and how these difficulties impact their translation choices and decisions.

### 1. Literature Review

The translation of idioms has been a topic of considerable interest in translation studies, given the complexities involved in accurately conveying figurative language across cultural and linguistic boundaries. Idioms are inherently tied to the cultural context of their origin, making their translation particularly challenging. Unlike ordinary lexical items, idioms often carry meanings that cannot be deduced from the individual words they contain, necessitating a translation approach that accounts for both linguistic and cultural nuances. As a result, scholars have long debated the best strategies for idiom translation, leading to the development of various theoretical frameworks. This literature review explores these approaches, focusing on key studies and methodologies that have shaped our understanding of idiom translation. By examining foundational theories and their practical implications, this review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the current research on idiom translation and its significance in translation practice.

J.C. Catford, in his work *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* (1965), discusses the challenges of translating idiomatic expressions, emphasizing that idioms often resist direct translation due to their cultural specificity and non-literal meanings. He argues that the translator must find equivalent idiomatic expressions in the target language or, when no equivalent exists, opt for non-idiomatic translations that convey the intended meaning. According to Catford **Erreur ! Signet non défini.**, the process of translating idioms requires careful consideration of both linguistic structure and cultural context to ensure that the impact and nuance of the original expression are maintained in the target text.

Catford suggests that translators should prioritize finding functionally equivalent idioms in the target language, which allows for a natural-sounding translation while preserving the original idiomatic force. However, when no direct equivalent exists, he proposes a semantic translation approach, in which the meaning of the idiom is conveyed through a non-idiomatic phrase that aligns with the target language's linguistic norms. To illustrate this, he provides the example of "*It is raining cats and dogs.*" He compares different translation strategies—word-for-word, literal, and free translation—and concludes that free translation is often the most effective approach for idioms, as it adapts to the collocational and idiomatic requirements of the target language **Erreur ! Signet non défini.** His emphasis on functional equivalence has been influential in later research on idiom translation, particularly in discussions on balancing fidelity to meaning and naturalness of expression.

In his book *A Textbook of Translation* (1988), Peter Newmark offers another perspective, linking idioms to metaphor translation. He argues that metaphor translation represents one of the most significant challenges in translation, as metaphors and idioms share the characteristic of using figurative language

that deviates from literal meaning. Newmark expands the definition of metaphors to include idioms, proverbs, personifications, and polysemous words, as they all involve using terms in non-literal ways.

His classification underscores the idea that idioms function as extended metaphors, carrying layers of meaning that must be preserved in translation.

Newmark outlines several strategies for translating idioms and metaphors, ranging from literal translation (when the metaphor or idiom has an equivalent in the target language) to cultural adaptation (when the idiom must be altered to fit the norms of the target culture). He emphasizes that while direct equivalence is preferable, it is not always possible due to cultural and linguistic differences. In such cases, paraphrasing or descriptive translation may be necessary to preserve the intended meaning and rhetorical effect **Erreur ! Signet non défini.** This approach aligns with Catford's argument that meaning takes precedence over form, particularly in cases where a literal translation would result in confusion or loss of meaning.

Beyond linguistic theories, functionalist translation approaches have also contributed to the study of idiom translation. Scholars such as Hans Vermeer and Katharina Reiss emphasize that translation is fundamentally guided by function and purpose (Skopos theory) rather than strict adherence to linguistic equivalence **Erreur ! Signet non défini.** From a functional perspective, the choice of how to translate an idiom depends on the target audience, the purpose of the translation, and the communicative context. This means that translators must evaluate whether an idiomatic or non-idiomatic rendering is more appropriate based on the needs of the reader.

Eugene Nida's dynamic equivalence theory further supports this approach by advocating for translations that reproduce the effect of the source text rather than adhering strictly to its structure **Erreur ! Signet non défini.** In the case of idioms, this often means adapting expressions to culturally familiar equivalents or rephrasing them in a way that maintains the original intent and impact. For example, an English idiom like "break a leg" (used to wish someone good luck) might be translated into Arabic as "في قدمك البركة", which conveys a similar positive wish in a culturally appropriate way.

The translation of idioms remains one of the most intricate challenges in translation studies, requiring a balance between linguistic fidelity and cultural adaptability. As highlighted by Catford (1965), Newmark (1988), and other scholars, the difficulty lies not only in finding lexical equivalents but also in preserving the idiomatic force and intended meaning of the original expression. While linguistic theories emphasize equivalence and structural adaptation, functionalist perspectives highlight the importance of context and purpose-driven translation choices.

By synthesizing these perspectives, translators can develop more effective strategies for handling idioms, whether through direct equivalence, cultural substitution, paraphrase, or functional adaptation. The implications of these approaches extend beyond idioms to broader issues in figurative language translation, shedding light on the interplay between language, culture, and meaning. As research in translation studies continues to evolve, further exploration of idiom translation across different language pairs will be essential for refining translation methodologies and improving cross-linguistic communication.

### *1.1. Definition and Characteristics of Idioms*

Idioms are common figurative expressions in both written and spoken language, characterized by meanings that cannot be easily deduced from their individual words. They are essential components of natural language, often used to express complex ideas concisely and vividly. McCarthy (2004) defines

idioms as fixed expressions with meanings not immediately clear from their components. Similarly, Crystal explains that idioms function as single linguistic units where the meaning of the whole cannot

be inferred from its individual parts. Additionally, idioms are syntactically restricted, meaning they do not allow the usual variability of words seen in other contexts **Erreur ! Signet non défini..**

In a similar vein, Baker describes idioms and fixed expressions as “frozen patterns of language which allow little or no variation in form and, in the case of idioms, often carry meanings which cannot be deduced from their individual components” **Erreur ! Signet non défini..** This fixed nature makes idioms unique and poses significant challenges for language learners and translators alike. Furthermore, Gramley and Pätzold (1992) define idioms as “complex lexical items” that are longer than a single word but shorter than a full sentence, emphasizing that their meaning cannot be derived from their constituent elements **Erreur ! Signet non défini..**

Based on the definitions provided above, an idiom is a fixed expression or phrase that functions as a single unit of meaning. It is typically longer than a word but shorter than a sentence, and its meaning cannot be understood by simply analyzing the individual words it contains. Idioms are semantically unique and often resist direct translation, requiring a nuanced understanding of both language and culture to interpret correctly. This characteristic highlights the necessity of cultural competence in translation, as idioms are often deeply embedded in the cultural and historical contexts of their source language.

Baker (1992) also outlines the rigid structural constraints of idioms, noting that they do not permit modifications in word order, omission of words, or substitution of synonyms. For example:

- Word order cannot be changed (e.g., "the short and the long of it", meaning "to sum up", translated into Arabic as "باختصار" أو "بالمختصر المفيد").
- Words cannot be omitted (e.g., "spill the beans", meaning "to reveal a secret", translated into Arabic as "يفشي السر").
- Extra words cannot be added (e.g., "the very long and short of it" or "bury the old hatchet" instead of "bury the hatchet").
- Synonyms cannot replace idiomatic words (e.g., "the tall and the short of it" instead of "the long and the short of it").
- Grammar cannot be altered (e.g., \*"the music was faced" instead of "face the music", meaning "to accept the consequences", translated as "يتحمل العواقب").

These structural constraints distinguish idioms from regular collocations or metaphors, as idioms function as indivisible lexical units that maintain their form and meaning regardless of context.

Newmark (1988) further elaborates on the role of idioms in communication, arguing that they serve two primary functions. First, their referential function allows them to describe mental processes, states, concepts, people, objects, qualities, or actions in a more effective and succinct manner than literal language. Second, their pragmatic function makes descriptions more engaging, clear, and vivid by appealing to the reader's or listener's senses and emotions **Erreur ! Signet non défini..** In this sense, idioms enhance the expressiveness of a language, making speech and writing more colorful and dynamic.

Newmark's observation underscores the dual nature of idioms: on the one hand, they serve as compact and efficient tools for conveying meaning, while on the other, they contribute to the aesthetic and rhetorical richness of language. This dual role explains why idioms are deeply rooted in culture and why their translation often requires strategies beyond direct word-for-word substitution. Successfully

translating idioms depends on recognizing shared cultural images and universal cognitive patterns that allow for equivalent expressions in the target language. Without this cultural and linguistic awareness, translators risk either distorting the intended meaning of the idiom or rendering a translation that sounds unnatural or unfamiliar to the target audience.

### ***1.2 Challenges in Translating English Idioms into Arabic***

Translating idioms between English and Arabic presents several challenges due to linguistic, cultural, and structural differences between the two languages. Since idioms are deeply rooted in cultural and historical contexts, a direct translation often fails to capture their intended meaning. According to Baker (1992), one of the main difficulties in translating idioms is that languages do not always have equivalent idiomatic expressions. While some English idioms have Arabic counterparts with similar meanings (e.g., "a double-edged sword" - "سلاح ذو حدين"), many idioms are culture-specific, making direct equivalence difficult or impossible. In such cases, translators must choose between paraphrasing the idiom, replacing it with an equivalent Arabic expression, or even omitting it altogether if it does not contribute significantly to the overall message.

A significant challenge in idiom translation arises from differences in metaphorical imagery. English idioms often employ imagery based on animals (e.g., "let the cat out of the bag"), weather ("raining cats and dogs"), or body parts ("get cold feet"). In contrast, Arabic idioms frequently draw from Islamic, historical, or poetic references (e.g., "بلغ السيل الزبي", meaning "the situation has reached a critical point"). As Newmark (1988) points out, when metaphorical images in idioms are unfamiliar to the target audience, they may lose their effect or even create confusion. This issue requires translators to either find an equivalent idiom in Arabic with a similar meaning or to rephrase the idiom while maintaining its figurative impact.

Another challenge is the syntactic rigidity of idioms. Baker (1992) notes that idioms are often "frozen patterns" that do not allow word substitution, reordering, or grammatical modification. This poses a problem when an English idiom does not fit naturally within Arabic syntax. For example, the idiom "bite the bullet" (meaning to endure a difficult situation) cannot be translated literally into Arabic, as it would sound unnatural. Instead, an Arabic translator might use "يتجرع المرارة" to convey a similar meaning while maintaining the idiomatic nature of the expression.

Lastly, idioms carry strong cultural connotations that may not be immediately apparent to non-native speakers. As Crystal (1991) explains, idioms often embody cultural values, humor, or historical events that make them difficult to interpret correctly. For instance, the English idiom "kick the bucket" (meaning "to die") has no logical connection to death for an Arabic-speaking audience, making a literal translation misleading. Instead, an Arabic translator might opt for "لفظ أنفاسه الأخيرة" or "انتقل إلى رحمة الله" to match the cultural and linguistic expectations of Arabic readers. This highlights the importance of cultural awareness in idiom translation, ensuring that the target audience fully grasps the intended meaning without unnecessary confusion.

## ***2. Methodology***

In this study, the methodology was designed to explore the challenges and difficulties faced by students in translating English idioms into Arabic. The researcher used a questionnaire that consists of 5 sections. Section 1 for demographic information, section 2 for idioms understanding, section 3 for the main challenges faced in idioms translation, section 4 for cultural and linguistic differences, section 5 contains a test to assess the students' translations of five English idioms used in contextual sentences and the last section includes 2 open-ended questions.

### 2.1 Participants

The study involved 50 Master 2 students majoring in Arabic-English-Arabic translation at the department of translation of the university of Tlemcen during the academic year 2024-2025. The subjects of the study included 70% female students and 30% male students. Their age ranged between

20-25 years old and most of them have a BA in English except five (5) students, three (3) of whom have a BA in Translation, One (1) in French and one (1) in Arabic. It is worth noting here that the students

need to have a good command of the English language in order to join a master programme in Ar-En-Ar translation.

### 2.2. Data Collection

This study was conducted in the Department of Translation at the University of Tlemcen. Before distributing the questionnaire, students were informed about the study's objectives and encouraged to provide honest responses. The questionnaire was administered during different translation sessions. It was also emphasized that their responses would be treated with confidentiality.

### 2.3. Procedures

Sections 2, 3, and 4 of the questionnaire are designed to explore different dimensions of the challenges faced by students in translating English idioms into Arabic. Together, these sections provide a comprehensive analysis of the various factors that contribute to the challenges of idiom translation, offering insights into both the linguistic and cultural aspects of the process.

#### 2.3.1 Understanding Idioms

This section aims to assess the students' familiarity with English idioms and their confidence in comprehending them. This helps identify whether difficulties in translation stem from a lack of understanding of idiomatic expressions or other factors.

**Table 1:** Idioms understanding

Questions	Answers and percentages	
1. How confident are you in your understanding of English idioms?	Very confident	02%
	Somewhat confident	40%
	Neutral	20%
	Not very confident	30%
	Not confident at all	08%
2. How often do you encounter idioms in your translation classes?	Very frequently	10%
	Frequently	40%
	Occasionally	30%
	Rarely	15%
	Never	05%
3. Do you think idioms in English are easy to understand?	Very easy	02%
	Somewhat easy	30%
	Neutral	15%
	Somewhat difficult	33%
	Very difficult	20%

**Source:** The researcher

The results reveal varying levels of confidence among students regarding their understanding of English idioms. Only 2% of respondents feel very confident, while 40% are somewhat confident, suggesting that a significant portion has a moderate grasp of idiomatic expressions. However, 30% of students reported

being not very confident, and 8% stated they are not confident at all, indicating that nearly 40% of respondents struggle with idioms.

Regarding the frequency of encountering idioms in translation classes, 10% of students reported encountering them very frequently, and 40% stated they come across idioms frequently. Meanwhile, 30% encounter them occasionally, and a combined 20% encounter them rarely or never. These findings suggest that while idioms are a regular part of translation studies for many students, a notable portion still encounters them infrequently.

When asked about the ease of understanding English idioms, only 2% found them very easy, while 30% considered them somewhat easy. In contrast, 33% of students perceived idioms as somewhat difficult, and 20% found them very difficult, reflecting a significant challenge in comprehension. The remaining 15% remained neutral on the matter.

Overall, the findings highlight that while many students encounter idioms regularly, a substantial proportion struggles with understanding them, pointing to a need for improved instructional approaches in translation studies to enhance students' confidence and comprehension.

### 2.3.2. Translation Challenges

This section focuses on the specific difficulties encountered by students when translating idioms from English to Arabic. It seeks to identify common obstacles such as cultural differences, lack of direct equivalents, and the complexity of retaining the original meaning, tone, or style in translation.

**Table 2:** Challenges of Idioms translation

Questions	Answers & Percentages	
1. What is the biggest challenge you face when translating English idioms into Arabic? (Check all that apply)	Understanding the literal meaning of the idiom	50%
	Understanding the figurative meaning of the idiom	70%
	Finding an equivalent idiom in Arabic	80%
	Conveying the cultural context	70%
	Maintaining the original tone or style	50%
2. How often do you find that there is no direct equivalent in Arabic for an English idiom?	Very often	10%
	Often	35%
	Occasionally	35%
	Rarely	20%
	Never	00%
3. How do you usually handle idioms that have no direct equivalent in Arabic?	Translate them literally	40%
	Find a similar Arabic idiom	03%
	Paraphrase the meaning	50%
	Omit the idiom	07%

**Source:** The researcher

The results highlight the major difficulties students face when translating English idioms into Arabic. The most significant challenge reported is finding an equivalent idiom in Arabic (80%), followed by understanding the figurative meaning (70%) and conveying the cultural context (70%). Additionally,

50% of students struggle with understanding the literal meaning of idioms, while another 50% find it difficult to maintain the original tone or style. These findings suggest that both linguistic and cultural factors play a critical role in idiom translation.

When asked about the availability of direct equivalents in Arabic, 10% of students reported encountering this issue very often, while 35% faced it often and another 35% encountered it

occasionally. Only 20% said they rarely struggle with this, and no one indicated that they never face this issue. This suggests that the lack of direct equivalents is a frequent challenge in idiom translation.

Regarding strategies for handling idioms without direct Arabic equivalents, the most common approach is paraphrasing the meaning (50%), which allows for conveying the intended message without relying on a literal translation. 40% of students attempt to translate idioms literally, which may result in loss of meaning. Interestingly, only 3% try to find a similar Arabic idiom, indicating a difficulty in identifying culturally relevant equivalents. Finally, 7% of respondents choose to omit the idiom entirely, which may lead to loss of stylistic and expressive elements in the translation.

Overall, the findings highlight the complexity of idiom translation, emphasizing the need for improved strategies that account for both linguistic meaning and cultural adaptation.

### 2.3.3. Cultural and Linguistic Differences

This section examines how cultural nuances and linguistic variations affect the translation process. It aims to understand which types of idioms—whether universal, culturally specific, or individual—pose the greatest challenges and how these differences influence the translation outcomes.

**Table 03:** Cultural and Linguistic Differences

questions	Answers & percentages	
1. Do you think cultural differences make it harder to translate idioms from English to Arabic?	Strongly agree	30%
	Agree	60%
	Neutral	01%
	Disagree	04%
	Strongly disagree	05%
2. Which type of idioms do you find most challenging to translate?	Idioms with universal themes (e.g., "a piece of cake")	10%
	Idioms with cultural references (e.g., "hit the nail on the head")	70%
	Idioms with individual or less common imagery	20%

**Source:** The researcher

The results of this section indicate that cultural differences play a significant role in the difficulty of translating idioms from English to Arabic. A majority of students (60%) agree that cultural differences make translation harder, while 30% strongly agree with this statement. Only 4% disagree, and 5% strongly disagree, suggesting that nearly all respondents recognize the impact of culture on idiom translation.

When asked which types of idioms are the most challenging to translate, 70% of students identified idioms with cultural references (e.g., "hit the nail on the head") as the most difficult. This suggests that expressions deeply rooted in cultural traditions, customs, or historical references pose the greatest challenge. Meanwhile, 20% of respondents found idioms with individual or less common imagery more difficult, indicating that unfamiliar metaphors or figurative language can also complicate translation. Only 10% reported that idioms with universal themes (e.g., "a piece of cake") were the most challenging, implying that expressions with globally understood meanings are relatively easier to

translate. Overall, these findings emphasize the importance of cultural awareness and contextual adaptation when translating idioms. They also suggest that literal translation alone is insufficient and that translators must develop strategies to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps effectively.

#### 2.3.4. Idioms translation

For the sake of testing students' ability to translate English idioms into Arabic, five idiomatic expressions have been chosen and used in contextual sentences. These idioms vary in complexity and cultural specificity, providing a well-rounded assessment of students' translation skills. The idioms are: "conceited as a barber's cat", "through thick and thin", "stabbed in the back", "hit the books" and "bite the bullet".

The students produced different translations of the first sentence 'After getting married, she became as conceited as a barber's cat'. Hence, only 10% of the participants produced correct translations in terms of meaning (e.g. (بعد زواجها أصبحت مغرورة، انتابها الغرور بعدما تزوجت، .e.g. ( أصبحت حنونة بعد الزواج، أصبحت مغرورة مثل قطة الحلاق، أصبحت كالطفلة، أصبحت عنيفة بعد زواجها). All these translations reflect the students' lack of cultural awareness and their differences in idioms understanding. The remaining 45% of the participants did not produce any translation of the sentence. The researcher thinks that the contextual elements were not accurate enough to help the students guess the meaning of the idiom.

For the second sentence 'A real friend is someone who stands by your side **through thick and thin**', the students have succeeded in getting the right meaning of the idiom which means 'whatever happens' or 'in spite of all difficulties'. Hence, 100% of the answers were correct (e.g. (الصديق الحقيقي هو الصديق الذي يقف بجانبك في السراء والضراء، الصديق الحقيقي هو الصديق الذي يقف معك في جميع الظروف (بجانبتك في السراء والضراء، الصديق الحقيقي هو الصديق الذي يقف معك في جميع الظروف (الصديق وقت الضيق). There are even two students who provided an Arabic equivalent (الصديق وقت الضيق). The researcher believes that the context in which the idiom appears has helped the students grasp its meaning.

The third sentence 'her best friend **stabbed her in the back** and they never spoke to each other again' was translated differently by students. Thus, 68% of them translated it correctly and kept its meaning 'to be unfaithful or disloyal to' providing translations such as: (منذ أن خدعتها صديقتها المقربة، لم تتحدثا إلى بعضهما) ، (البعض، صديقتها المقربة خانها ومنذ ذلك الحين لم تتحدث إليها). There are even translations (30%) that kept the idiomatic effect of the sentence and rendered it as: (صديقتها المقربة طعننها في ظهرها، ومنذ ذلك الحين لم تتحدث إليها).

The fourth sentence, 'With exams approaching, Ahmed decided to cancel his weekend plans and **hit the books** to prepare for his final tests.', seems to be less common resulting in varying translations. Only 30% of the students got the correct meaning (to study hard) paraphrasing it as (مع اقتراب الامتحانات، (قرر أحمد أن يلغي برنامج عطلة نهاية الأسبوع ويجتهد في مراجعة دروسه تحضيرا للاختبارات النهائية). 70% of the students provided unmeaningful renderings of the idiom, hence, (يتخلص من الكتب، يضرب الكتب، يرمي الكتب، يبتعد عن الكتب)، all of which do not make sense. None of them succeeded in providing an Arabic equivalent with a similar meaning like (صهر الليالي) (من أراد العلى، صهر الليالي). This example demonstrates how some idioms require flexible translation strategies to preserve their intended meaning and impact.

The last sentence, 'Despite his fear of public speaking, Ahmed had **to bite the bullet** and present his research at the international conference.', contains another idiom that is not very common among the students as revealed by their translations. 25% of them stuck to the literal meaning of the idiom, rendering it as (كان عليه أن يعض الرصاصة) which is not common in Arabic. However, 70 % of them used paraphrasing and rendered the meaning of the idiom (to endure a painful or difficult situation with

courage) served by the context of the idiom which makes the meaning clear. Thus, translations like ( كان ( عليه أن يواجه الموقف، أن يتحدى بالشجاعة، أن يتحدى مخاوفه ) were very common and repeated. The remaining 05% of the students got an arabic equivalent( كان عليه أن يحاضر على ممرض في المؤتمر الدولي ) using an arabic collocation ( على ممرض ) which means enduring a difficult situation.

The students' ability to translate English idioms into Arabic varied significantly depending on the idiom's complexity, familiarity, and cultural specificity. The results indicate that while students succeeded in translating some idioms with clear contextual clues, they struggled with those that lacked direct Arabic equivalents or were culturally unfamiliar.

The first idiom, "**conceited as a barber's cat**," proved highly challenging, with only 10% of students producing correct translations. Nearly 45% of the responses were incorrect, often reflecting a misinterpretation of the idiom's cultural meaning, while the remaining 45% of students did not attempt a translation. This suggests a lack of cultural awareness and difficulty in inferring idiomatic meanings from context.

Conversely, the second idiom, "**through thick and thin**," was successfully translated by 100% of students, with some even providing an Arabic equivalent ( الصديق وقت الضيق ). This high success rate indicates that clear contextual clues played a crucial role in helping students deduce the idiom's meaning.

For the third idiom, "**stabbed in the back**," 68% of students correctly conveyed the intended meaning, while 30% maintained the idiomatic effect in Arabic ( طعنها في ظهرها ). This suggests that while the metaphor was unfamiliar, its figurative meaning was more accessible due to its conceptual universality.

The fourth idiom, "**hit the books**," posed a greater challenge. Only 30% of students provided a correct paraphrase ( يجتهد في مراجعة دروسه ), while 70% produced incorrect or nonsensical translations ( يضرب الكتب، يتخلص من الكتب ). No student successfully identified an Arabic equivalent, highlighting the difficulty of idioms that do not share cultural or linguistic parallels.

Finally, the idiom "**bite the bullet**" was misinterpreted by 25% of students, who translated it literally ( يعض الرصاصة ). However, 70% successfully conveyed its figurative meaning ( يواجه الموقف، يتحدى بالشجاعة ), demonstrating that context played a crucial role in comprehension. A small percentage (5%) provided an Arabic equivalent ( على ممرض ), showing an ability to recognize idiomatic parallels when available.

Overall, the findings reveal that students struggle most with idioms that lack direct cultural or linguistic equivalents, while contextual clues and universal concepts aid comprehension and accurate translation. This underscores the need for targeted training in idiom translation, focusing on cultural awareness, paraphrasing strategies, and recognizing equivalent expressions in Arabic.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study highlight the significant challenges that students of translation face when translating English idioms into Arabic. The complexity of idioms, their cultural specificity, and the lack of direct equivalents in Arabic often lead to misunderstandings and inaccurate translations. While some idioms with universal themes were easier for students to grasp, others that relied on cultural or metaphorical references proved far more difficult. The results demonstrate that students tend to rely on literal translation when they are unfamiliar with an idiom, often leading to nonsensical or incorrect

renderings. However, when strong contextual clues were present, students were more successful in deducing meaning and providing accurate translations, sometimes even offering equivalent Arabic idioms.

The study also reveals that a significant number of students struggle with interpreting the figurative meaning of idioms, and many find it difficult to maintain both the meaning and stylistic effect of the original expression. While some students were able to paraphrase idioms effectively, very few managed to produce culturally appropriate equivalents. This suggests a gap in students' exposure to idiomatic expressions and their ability to apply translation strategies beyond direct substitution.

To address these challenges, translation training programs should place greater emphasis on idiom comprehension, cultural awareness, and flexible translation techniques. Encouraging students to analyze idioms in different contexts, compare them with Arabic equivalents, and develop paraphrasing skills can enhance their ability to handle idiomatic expressions effectively. Additionally, incorporating more real-world translation practice, exposure to authentic texts, and discussions on cultural nuances can help students build confidence in idiomatic translation.

Ultimately, mastering idiom translation is essential for developing advanced translation skills. By fostering a deeper understanding of idioms and their cultural significance, translation students will be better equipped to handle the complexities of figurative language, ensuring more accurate and culturally appropriate translations.

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