

THE DIFFICULTIES JORDANIAN GRADUATE LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE FACE WHEN TRANSLATING ENGLISH IDIOMS INTO ARABIC

by

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This study is an investigation of the problems facing graduate students of translation at two Jordanian state universities, namely Yarmouk University (Irbid) and the University of Jordan (Amman), in translating English idiomatic expressions into Arabic. It analyzes translations produced by forty-five subjects of a forty-five-item test that consists of sentences each of which contains an idiom.

The problems arising from those translations are: losing some shades of meaning, misunderstanding the meaning of the sentences, disrupting coherence and unintelligibility due to the culture-bound idiomatic expressions, the presence of counterparts similar in form but different in meaning, the failure to determine whether the expression at hand is an idiom, the lack of competence required to translate such expressions, the lack of familiarity with the presence of idioms and the factors of carelessness and time pressure. The idiomatic types are arranged from the most to the least idiomatic, i.e. from idioms with adverbs to phrasal verbs.

The subjects used the following strategies proposed by Baker (1992):

1. using a target language idiom of the same form and meaning,
2. using a target language idiom of the same meaning but different form,
3. paraphrasing the idiom, and
4. omitting the idiom.

The present researchers conclude with some recommendations for the improvement of the students' command of English idiomatic expressions and their ability to translate them into Arabic, pedagogical implications, and recommendations for further research.

1. Introduction

The present study is an investigation of the problems graduate students of translation at two Jordanian state universities face in their comprehension and translation of English idioms into Arabic. The present research is built on the premise that a thorough investigation of the errors made by the subjects of the study

constitutes an invaluable vehicle for understanding and, hopefully, minimizing the source(s), areas, and amount of difficulty facing this particular group of advanced learners of English as a second/foreign language. The present researchers further hope to draw generalizable conclusions about both the source and remedy of the problem at hand.

There is relatively little information available about the focus of this research. To the best of the present researchers' knowledge, the translation of English idioms into Arabic has not been adequately investigated, which has resulted in a gap in the field of translation that needs further study. Through this humble scholarly effort, the present researchers hope to contribute to the bridging of this gap.

The problem of this study centers around the lack of research on how Arab students in the Master's programs of translation at both Yarmouk University and the University of Jordan translate English idioms into Arabic. Due to the fact that idioms constitute an important part of day-to-day English, language learners need to pay special attention to them. Students about to get a Master's degree in translation should concentrate on improving their knowledge of idiomatic expressions because they are bound to come across idioms while translating English texts into Arabic even if they choose not to use them in translating Arabic texts into English.

The present researchers hope that the findings of this study will provide indispensable insights not only for researchers studying the point in question, i.e. the translation of idioms and idiomatic expressions, but also for learners of English and students of translation in particular who may be interested in the remedial aspect of this research. Furthermore, the present researchers hope that the findings of this study will be helpful to teachers as well as material developers in the field of translation.

1.1. Background Information

The present researchers believe that a brief introduction of the two universities, the two programs from which the sample of this study is drawn, and the kind of courses they offer may prove most helpful in gaining further insight into the problem at hand. It is worth noting that the vast majority, if not all, of the graduate students enrolled at the two programs hold undergraduate degrees in the English

language, literature, or both, most often from one or the other of these two universities.

The University of Jordan was founded in 1962 in Amman, the capital of Jordan and, thus, was the first university in the country. It started with only one faculty, the Faculty of Arts, and one-hundred and forty-nine male and eighteen female students. It now contains thirteen more faculties: the Faculty of Sciences, the Faculty of Medicine, the Faculty of Nursing, the Faculty of Pharmacology, the Faculty of Agriculture, the Faculty of Engineering, the Faculty of Technology, the Faculty of Dentistry, the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, the Faculty of Educational Sciences, the Faculty of Shari'a, the Faculty of Law, and the Faculty of Physical Education. It is now home for over twenty-two thousand students. The University of Jordan offers graduate as well as undergraduate and diploma degrees. It has an educational hospital where its graduate physicians, nurses and pharmacists practise for their future careers.

Yarmouk University was established in 1976 in the city of Irbid in the northern part of Jordan. Despite the fact that it started with only one faculty, the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, it now contains six more faculties: the Faculty of Science, the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, The Faculty of Education and Fine Arts, the Faculty of Islamic Studies (Shari'a), the Faculty of Physical Education, and the Hijawi College. Yarmouk University is now home for about fifteen thousand students in both undergraduate and graduate programs. Despite its humble beginnings, Yarmouk University has developed into a thriving institution with an international reputation for its wide programs of training and research.

It is worth noting that Jordan today has six state universities and a good number of private universities and middle university colleges that have been founded to cater for the growing demand for higher education in the kingdom.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

This study is concerned with the problems facing Arab students in the Master's programs of translation in the English Departments of Yarmouk University (Irbid) and the University of Jordan (Amman)

in translating English idioms into Arabic. The present researchers attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What problems, if any, result from these Arab students' translation of English idioms into Arabic?
2. What possible reasons are behind these problems?
3. Which type of idioms is more problematic for these students?
4. Which strategies of Baker's (1992) are used by these students in translating idioms?

Accordingly, the following two hypotheses are tested:

1. There are no problems facing Arab students in translating English idioms into the Arabic language.
2. There are no strategies utilized by Arab students in their attempt to render those idioms into the Arabic language.

1.3. Significance of the Study

This study is significant for the following three reasons:

1. It explores an area of cross-linguistic translation that, to the best of the present researchers' knowledge, has not yet been adequately explored, i.e. problems of translating English idiomatic expressions into Arabic. The researchers hope to suggest possible solutions to these problems as a means to improve students' performance in translation.
2. The findings of this work are hoped to lend verification to the validity of the strategies of translating idioms proposed by Baker (1992), a verification which would enable the present researchers to determine whether or not these strategies are practised by Arab students.

3. Finally, the findings of this study could lay the grounds for testing the theoretical principles of translation.

2. Earlier Studies

The following review of research focuses on areas related to the definition, character, and categories of idioms in addition to the translation of idioms, the difficulty of learning idioms, and of learning idioms in Arabic.

2.1. Idioms

An idiom is 'a phrase which you cannot understand by putting together the meanings of the words in it' (McCaig and Manser 1986:iii). The idiomatic expression *to blow a fuse* means 'to become enraged or to cause a fuss'. However, the meaning of 'blow' is 'move along, flow, cause to move, be moved or carried by the wind or other air current, breath hard and quickly and produce sound from' (Hornby et al. 1974:89), and the meaning of 'fuse' is 'tube, cord, etc., for carrying a spark to explode powder, bomb or blasting shell' (Hornby et al. 1974:351)*. The meaning of these two words has nothing to do with the meaning of them put together to form the idiom.

The words 'idiom' and 'idiomatic' come from Greek and mean 'peculiar or individual'. 'Idiomatic expressions conform to no basic principles in their formation and are indeed laws unto themselves' (Shaw 1975:xxiv). Clark (1988:i) states that

when literal meanings are applied to individual words in a combination of words and the intended meaning of the combination does not emerge, we are dealing with an idiom. Put another way, an English idiom cannot generally be translated literally into another language and preserve its meaning. Idioms are illogical and few follow the rules of English grammar, let alone that of another language... Slight differences in phrasing can make a great difference to meaning. For instance, there is a lot of difference between a *dark horse* and a *horse of another color*.

2.2. Characteristics of Idioms

Idiomatic expressions share the following characteristics:

1. Idioms are metaphorical rather than literal, i.e. 'several words combined often lose their literal (exact) meaning and express something only remotely suggested by any one word' (Shaw 1975:xxiv).
Examples: *birds of a feather* 'people of the same sort'
black list 'list of persons who are disapproved of or are to be punished'
'Birds' and 'feathers' have nothing to do with people of any sort, and the black color does not indicate danger or punishment.
2. They are invariable or fixed in form. They cannot be changed or varied in the way literal expressions are normally varied, whether in speech or writing. This results in the following rules:
 - a. One often cannot substitute words that are close in meaning.
Example: *The man gave up the ghost.*
**The man gave up the apparition.*¹
**The man released the ghost.*
 - b. One cannot replace a noun by a pronoun without losing the idiomatic meaning. 'The reason that pronouns often cannot be substituted for nouns in idiomatic phrases is that the meaning of the phrase as a whole has become idiomatic' (Urdang 1979:viii).
Example: *He spilt the beans over my plans to find a new job.*
**He spilt them over my plans to find a new job.*
Pronouns do occur in idiomatic expressions, especially with the pronoun 'it'. Phrases with pronouns are idioms in their own right.
Example: *snuff it* 'to die'

- c. The formation of the passive is impossible in most cases.
Example: *At three o'clock, the man gave up the ghost.*
**At three o'clock, the ghost was given up by the man.*
 - d. One cannot add a word to the idiom (Baker 1992:63).
Example: One can never say **the very long and the short of it.*
 - e. One cannot change the order of words in an idiom (Baker 1992:63).
Example: The idiom *the long and the short of it* is changed into a non-idiom if we switch its words to be **the short and the long of it.*
 - f. One cannot delete a word from the idiom (Baker 1992:63).
Example: The idiom *to spill the beans* cannot be written **to spill beans.*
 - g. The only changeable part of all the idioms containing a verb is the tense, but students should pay attention to the fact that although an idiom is considered one semantic unit, the tense morpheme should be attached to the verb (Baker 1992:63).
Example: *kicked the bucket* but not **kick the bucketed*
3. Most, but not all, of these expressions are phrases of two or more words.
 4. Most, but not all, of these expressions belong to informal spoken English rather than to formal written English. It is impossible to see idiomatic expressions like *pissed at* written in a newspaper article.
 5. Idiomaticity is a matter of degree or scale. Some have a literal, as well as an idiomatic, meaning while others have no literal meaning at all.
Examples: *to spill the beans* (both literal and idiomatic)
until kingdom come (idiomatic)
Thus, the following sentences are possible in English:

He spilt the beans on the carpet (literal).
He spilt the beans over my plans to go to Europe (idiomatic).
 (Urdang 1979:viii)

6. When idioms containing prepositions are joined in a compound construction, all the appropriate prepositions must be included, unless they are the same (Strunk and White 1979:27).
 Example: **His speech was marked by disagreement and scorn for his opponent's position.* (disagreement with and scorn for)
7. The internal modification of the idiom is only possible if the figure is maintained, heightened, or made more pertinent to the case in hand (Urdang 1986:238).

2.3. Categories of Idioms

Numerous researchers have written about the categorization of idioms. In addition to the work of Seidl and McMordie (1978), which is central for the premise of the present study, there has been the research done by Lattey (1986:217-218), who classified idioms according to their grammatical type, concept or emotion they portrayed, and image/picture they draw. Jackson (1988:107) defines what he terms 'pure idioms', which allow both literal and non-literal interpretation. Boatner and Gates (1984:iv-vi) distinguish among three types of idiomatic expressions: lexemic (verbal, nominal, adverbial, and adjectival) idioms, phraseological idioms, and sayings and proverbs. Spears (1987:vii) lists clichés, slang phrases, phrasal verbs, and common sayings as types of idiomatic expressions. Manser (1983:ix) distinguishes among colorful, picturesque phrases, literary expressions, well-worn proverbs, and grammatical oddities.

Alexander (1984:129) divides idioms into phrasal verbs, tournures, and irreversible binomials. Urdang (1979:ix-x) lists fourteen types of idioms in his dictionary: traditional idioms, idioms in which actions stand for emotions or feelings, pairs of words joined by *and* or *or*, idioms with *it*, allusions, sayings, typical conversational phrases, similes, archaisms, jargon, Americanisms, foreign phrases, phrasal verbs, and common phrases and terms.

Idioms can be both regular and grammatical. Idioms like *to blow a fuse* and *to be out of one's mind* do not violate any English grammatical rules. The fact that others can be odd or ungrammatical creates confusion and makes it a must for the learner of English to deal with the idiom as if it were one word. Seidl and McMordie (1978:4) distinguish the following three types of idioms:

1. idioms with an irregular form and a clear meaning
 Example: *I am good friends with him.*
 Although this example is clear in meaning, it has serious grammatical problems. The first person singular pronoun 'I' cannot substitute 'friends' which is plural. Besides, 'friend' collocates with 'of' followed by a possessive pronoun. This idiom, grammatically put, can be rendered as 'I am a good friend of his.'
2. idioms with a regular form and an unclear meaning
 Example: *to have a bee in one's bonnet*
 This is an expression which, on the one hand, does not violate any grammatical rules, but, on the other hand, has an obscure meaning. *To have an insect in one's hat* does not imply the meaning of the idiomatic expression, *to be obsessed with an idea.*
3. idioms with an irregular form and an unclear meaning
 Example: *to be at large*
 Here, the preposition is followed by an adjective instead of a noun; this idiom means 'to be free', something which is not indicated by its components.

Seidl and McMordie (1978) discuss other types of idioms:

1. idiomatic words which may come as adjectives or nouns.
 Examples: *We had a thin time yesterday.*
Bill is a hard worker; he studies for hours on end (ibid.:30).
2. idioms consisting of nouns and adjectives in combination; under this category they list seven subtypes:

- a. pairs of adjectives
Example: *high and low* (ibid.:42)
 - b. pairs of nouns
Example: *beer and skittles* (ibid.:43)
 - c. collective noun phrases
Example: *bunch of grapes* (ibid.:45)
 - d. compound adjectives
Example: a *run-of-the-mill* job (ibid.:45)
 - e. adjective + noun phrases
Example: *an able-bodied seaman* (ibid.:46)
 - f. noun phrases
Example: *a cast in the eye* (ibid.:62)
 - g. proper names
Example: *Uncle Sam* (ibid.:67)
3. idioms consisting of verbs and nouns; these have three types:
- a. verb + noun collocations
Example: *to acquire knowledge* (ibid.:69)
 - b. noun + verb collocations
Example: *a crisis arises* (ibid.:78)
 - c. animals' cries
Example: *apes gibber* (ibid.:79)
4. idioms with prepositions and adverbs
Examples: *to appear before* a magistrate (ibid.:83)
far and near (ibid.:99)
5. adjectives + prepositions
Example: *accompanied by* (ibid.:101)

6. idioms with the verb 'to be'; these have two subcategories:
- a. to be + noun/adjective phrases
Examples: *to be full of oneself* (ibid.:168)
to be a slave to something (ibid.:169)
 - b. to be + prepositional phrases
Example: *to be at cross purposes* (ibid.:169)
7. idioms with verbs
Example: *to bring someone to book* (ibid.:179)
8. idioms from special situations, e.g. banking, health, etc., and special categories, e.g. animals, colors, etc.
Examples: *to dishonor a check* (ibid.:203)
someone's pigeon 'his responsibility' (ibid.:218)
9. idioms of comparison
- a. comparisons with adjectives
Example: *as black as the Ace of Spades* (ibid.:233)
 - b. comparisons with verbs
Example: *to be like a fish out of water* (ibid.:239)
10. proverbs
Example: *Clothes do not make the man.* (ibid.:243)
11. special uses of words with grammatical functions
- a. modals, 'it' and 'there'
Examples: *May* we smoke during the break? (ibid.:16)
It's been either raining or snowing all the week. (ibid.:17)
There he comes. (ibid.:18)
 - b. possessive adjectives
Example: I must run, or I'll miss *my* train! (ibid.:20)
 - c. verbs active in form passive in meaning
Example: The butter *spreads* easily. (ibid.:20)

Cruse (1986:37) stresses the fact that idioms are considered one semantic unit; 'an idiom may be briefly characterized as a lexical complex which is semantically simplex'. He later mentions that idioms show the internal cohesion of a word and resist interruption. Since one cannot add words to an idiom or treat it as something far from a unit, one cannot say *Arthur has a chip, apparently, on his shoulder.

Palmer (1976:80) poses other restrictions on the changes an idiom may incur. He says that although the tense of the idiom can be changed, the number of the noun in it is fixed. We cannot even change the adjective in an idiom and put it in, say, the comparative form.

Examples: *to spill the beans* but not *to spill the bean
to fly off the handle but not *to fly off the handles
red herring but not *redder herring

He then mentions that some idioms are more flexible than others; thus, we may come across the passive form of some idioms.

Examples: The law was laid down.
 The beans were spilled.

2.4. Difficulty Of Learning Idioms

Kharma and Hajjaj (1989:72-74) claim that there are three reasons why idiomatic expressions constitute a special difficulty:

1. The nature of idioms makes it really difficult for a foreign learner of English to understand them. It is no use to try and analyze them into their constituent elements. They have to be learned as one unit, taking into consideration their meanings and syntactic restrictions.
2. The learner usually singles himself out as a foreigner when he tries to avoid idioms, as they are frequent items in the native speakers' daily use of language.

3. Although a number of English idioms may have Arabic equivalents, as shown in examples i and ii below, the great majority of idioms are not only language- but also culture-specific, especially when they are parts of proverbs, as shown in examples iii and iv below.

Examples: i. to move heaven and earth
 ii. neither here nor there
 iii. to eat one's hat
 iv. as drunk as a lord

Iruju (1986b:236-238) offers several explanations for the difficulty of learning idioms. These are:

1. non-literality. Idioms are not literal in that they do not mean what they say;
2. lack of exposure to idioms. This is due to native speakers' tendency to use simple, everyday vocabulary when addressing second language learners;
3. problems of correct use. It is really difficult to master the meaning of idiomatic expressions and to use them correctly as they vary in formality. Iruju illustrates this point with examples like you got it (slang); he kicked the bucket (colloquial); and he ran the risk (formal).
4. Further reasons for the difficulty of using idioms correctly are found in the grammatical constraints mentioned above, and in
5. the teaching materials. Many second language teaching materials either ignore idioms or only mention them in passing. There are no suitable materials for teaching them.

Iruju then lists the criteria needed to choose which idioms to teach to help learners to comprehend and produce idioms. These criteria are:

1. frequency of use, as students need to learn the most frequent idioms in everyday conversations.

Example: *In charge* is more frequent than *to darken one's doors*.

2. transparency, which means that the meaning of an idiom can be figured out.
Example: *The coast is clear* is easier to understand than *he has a green thumb*.
3. appropriateness, as it is probably not worthwhile trying to teach idioms restricted to colloquial use or slang.
Examples: *You bet your boots to bump off*.
4. simplicity of form and vocabulary, as some idioms are more difficult than others because: a. they contain very low-frequency vocabulary (*a needle in a haystack*); b. they only occur in the passive (*taken in by*); c. they occur only in the negative (*can't make head or tail of*); and d. they are unusual in form (*I am good friends with him*).
5. similarity to first-language idioms, as similar idioms are easier to learn.
Example: *to hold one's breath*.
6. student-generated idiom lists: The students can keep notebooks for all the idioms they encounter and have these as the basis for teaching activities (Iruju 1986:238-239).

2.5. Idioms in Arabic

Abu Sa'ad (1987:5-16) distinguishes two types of expressions in Arabic:

1. Contextual expressions are those which acquire new meanings through their context or structure.
Example: The verb *daraba* 'to hit or to throw something at' acquires new meanings through its structure and use as in:
'He blew the horn.'
He set the tent up.

It drew us apart.
'He mixed them.'

2. Idiomatic expressions are those which acquire their meanings through the image they portray.
Examples: 'to pull the fire towards his loaf' (selfishness)
'The war showed its legs.' (It became more fierce and bloody.)

Abu Sa'ad (1987:7-8) states the following two reasons why people use idiomatic expressions in Arabic:

1. To beautify their language and distinguish it through this stylistic phenomenon.
Example: 'He agrees to everything this person says'.
2. To avoid mentioning a word that may cause embarrassment or annoyance.
Examples: 'He went to the bathroom'.
'He died'.

Besides their figurative nature, Arabic idioms have the following structural and semantic characteristics (Abu Sa'ad 1987:10-13):

1. Idioms come in the following structural patterns:
 - a. The sentence which consists of two or more words;
Example: to put the cart before the horse
 - b. Genitive constructions whose individual meanings are familiar, while the result of their combination is unfamiliar;
Example: Noah's ark 'something that gathers many objects or species'
the patience of Job 'real patience and tolerance'
 - c. Individual idiomatic words;
Example: He is an ear 'He tells of what he hears without thinking'.
2. They are influenced by certain linguistic phenomena such as:
 - a. synonymy, where different structures express the same meaning;

- b. homonymy, where one structure express different meanings; and
 - c. antonymy, where one structure expresses opposite meanings.
3. Idioms are related to proverbs and, thus, the more common the proverb the greater its chance of being an idiom.
 4. Idioms derive their figures from the environment. Arabic, like English, is full of idiomatic expressions. Yet, there are more of them in Arabic dialects than in Modern Standard Arabic. Thus, we find idioms like Moroccan, Jordanian and Syrian, and Saudi expressions of condolence which all signify someone's death. Many of the Arabic idioms are easy to understand because their meanings are not that far from the sum total of their respective components. But others, just as in English, are difficult to understand, especially for non-native speakers of Arabic, simply because their meanings are far from the sum of their components.

Some idioms are really difficult because they are very culture-specific (Kharma and Hajjaj 1989:74).

Examples: 'It was her own fault (that she hurt herself)'.
'The married couple is very suited to each other'.

Although there are phrasal verbs in Arabic, the problems Arab students face are twofold:

1. Sometimes, the whole phrase in English is equivalent to only a verb in Arabic.
Examples: to be off
to be out of one's mind
2. Sometimes, the preposition used with the English verb is different from the one used with its Arabic equivalent (Kharma and Hajjaj, 1989:70).
Examples: to be after
to get rid of

2.6. Translation of Idioms

Nida and Taber (1982:208) define translation as the 'reproduction in a target language of the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning, and second in terms of style' and claim that it comprises three stages:

1. analysis or 'the set of procedures including back transformation and componential analysis which aim at discovering the kernels underlying the source text and the clearest understanding of the meaning' (ibid.:197);
2. transfer or 'reproducing the message in the target language' (ibid.:208); and
3. restructuring or 'changing the form of a discourse without changing the contents of the message, specifically transforming the raw results of the transfer process into a stylistic form appropriate to the target language and to the intended receptors' (ibid.:206).

The translator faces many problems when dealing with a text. Hatim and Mason (1990:21-22) list the following problems:

1. comprehension of the source text, including phrasing of the text (grammar and lexis), access to specialized knowledge, and access to the intended meaning;
2. transfer of meaning, including relaying lexical meaning, relaying grammatical meaning, and relaying rhetorical meaning, be it implied or inferable, for potential readers;
3. assessment of the target text, including readability, conforming to generic and discursal target language conventions, and judging the adequacy of translation for a specified purpose.

Newmark (1988:94-103) defines culture as the way of life and its manifestations peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression. Universal words like 'breakfast'

and 'pile' often cover the universal function, but not the cultural description of the referent. He claims that although one language may have several cultures and sub-cultures, dialect words are not cultural if they designate universal reference. The translation problem arises when a cultural gap or distance exists between the source and target languages.

One thing which remains to be said is the fact that the unit of translation is not the word, contrary to what most people think. Mason (1982:22) states that 'the relevant language unit for translating is not the individual word or the single sentence, but rather the text.' Words and sentences may have more than one meaning when taken separately; what determines their meaning is their position within the text and what they add to it.

Duff (1981:90-91) states that one needs to distinguish between idiomatic expressions that are common to both the source and the target languages (pave the way for, cast fresh light on) and those which are peculiar to one of the languages. In translating expressions of the second kind, the translator should not feel constrained to render idiom for idiom; it is primarily the context of the passage – and of course the idiomatic potential of the target language – that should determine his or her choice.

While reviewing the literature on translating English idiomatic expressions into Arabic, the present researchers ran into a study done by Iruju (1986a). She studied the comprehension of twelve Venezuelan advanced learners of English of forty-five English idioms, of which fifteen have identical counterparts in both form and meaning in Spanish, fifteen have similar counterparts, and fifteen are totally different from their Spanish counterparts. Using two multiple-choice and definition tests, she found out that it was easier for the subjects to translate idioms found in the two languages. Most errors occurred in the third category, where the idioms had no counterparts in the native language. The present researchers believe that further research may prove Iruju's conclusions generalizable to learners from other language backgrounds.

Baker (1992:66-78) approaches the subject of translating idioms and its problems as well as the reasons behind them. She says that the learner of the language cannot match the competence of a native speaker when it comes to idioms. She claims that idioms are difficult to translate because of the difficulty of recognizing them and

rendering all their aspects of meaning. Baker lists the following two cases in which idioms are misleading:

1. Some idioms may seem transparent with nothing in the surrounding text to signal them.
Example: to take someone for a ride 'to deceive or cheat somebody'.
2. An idiom may have a close counterpart in the target language which is not as similar to the original as it appears to be.
Example: 'to pull someone's leg' in English is 'to tell someone something untrue as a joke to shock him temporarily and amuse him when he finds out later it was a joke'; but in Arabic, it means 'to trick somebody into talking about something he would have rather kept secret.'

Baker summarizes the main difficulties of translating idioms as follows:

1. The way the source language chooses to express the meaning by means of an idiomatic expression does not imply that the target language does the same thing. Languages differ in expressing the same meaning through a single word, a transparent fixed expression, an idiom, etc. Also, idioms are sometimes culture-specific and have no equivalents in the target language.
Examples:
(1) to carry coal to Newcastle (English)
Eulen nach Athen tragen 'to carry owls to Athens' (German)
Both mean 'to supply something to someone who already has plenty of it'.
(2) It rains cats and dogs. (English)
It rains old women and sticks. (Welsh)
Both mean 'raining heavily'.
2. An idiom may have a similar counterpart which is used differently, i.e. their shades of meaning are different.
Example: to go to the dogs 'to lose one's good qualities'

This idiom has a counterpart in German, but the two idioms are different in that the English idiom can describe a person or a place, while the German is only used in connection with a person to mean 'to perish/to die'.

3. The source language idiom can be used to express both its literal and idiomatic meaning; this may not be possible in the target language and thus reduces the play on the idiom.
Example: ...He had sufficient influence to be able to poke his nose into the private affairs of others where less aristocratic noses might have been speedily bloodied... (This play on 'nose' can be reproduced only in languages which have the idiom with 'nose' in it, like Arabic).
4. Sometimes languages differ as to the contexts where idioms can be used or in the frequency of their idioms. In English, the use of idioms in news reports is limited, while it is quite common in advertisements, promotional material, and in the tabloid press. Arabic, which makes a sharp distinction between written and spoken discourse, and where the written mode is associated with a high level of formality tends, on the whole, to avoid using idioms in written texts.

As an introduction to the strategies of translating an idiom, Baker (1992:71-72) says that the way in which an idiom or a fixed expression can be translated into another language depends on many factors. It is not only a question of whether an idiom with a similar meaning is available in the target language. Other factors include, for example, the significance of the specific lexical items which constitute the idiom, i.e. whether they are manipulated elsewhere in the source text, as well as the appropriateness of using idiomatic language in a given register in the target language.

She then lists five translation strategies which can be used in translating idioms, as follows:

1. using a target language idiom of the same form and meaning
Example: turn something on its head
2. using a target language idiom of the same meaning, but with a different form

Example: One good turn deserves another. (English)
A beau jeu, beau retour 'A handsome action deserves a handsome return'. (French)

3. paraphrasing the idiom
Example: to take it in its stride
4. omitting the whole idiom
Example: ... and added a predated bonus for good measure
5. compensation which is clarified as 'one may either omit or play down a feature such as idiomaticity at the point where it occurs in the source text and introduce it elsewhere in the target text' (ibid.:78).

In their book, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, Nida and Taber (1982:106) claim that idioms are the most obvious candidates for semantic adjustment, as the very fact that they are idioms means it is unlikely that the same type of distinctive form will have the same meaning in another language. The adjustments are quite understandably of three types: (a) from idioms to nonidioms, (b) from idioms to idioms, and (c) from nonidioms to idioms. In other words, idioms may be translated into idiomatic or nonidiomatic expressions.

Bassnett-McGuire (1980:23-24) states that 'idioms, like puns, are culture-bound'. She gives the Italian example, *Giovanni sta menando il can per l'aia*, which literally means 'John is leading his dog around the threshing floor'. This does not make sense in English, and this idiomatic expression is best translated as 'John is beating about the bush'. She clarifies this by saying that 'the substitution of idioms is made not on the basis of a corresponding or similar image contained in the phrase, but on the function of the idiom'.

3. The Study

This study will examine the translatability of the following types of idiomatic expressions (cf. Bassnett-McGuire, 1980):

- I. Phrasal verbs.
Example: to give up

- II. Idiomatic words. These may come as adjectives or nouns
Examples: We had a thin time yesterday.
Bill is a hard worker; he studies for hours on end. (Bassnett-McGuire, 1980:30)
- III. Nouns and adjectives in combination.
- a. pairs of adjectives
Example: high and low (ibid.:42)
 - b. pairs of nouns
Example: beer and skittles (ibid.:43)
 - c. compound adjectives
Example: a run-of-the-mill job (ibid.:45)
 - d. adjective + noun phrases
Example: an able-bodied seaman (ibid.:46)
 - e. noun phrases
Example: a cast in the eye (ibid.:62)
 - f. proper names
Example: Uncle Sam (ibid.:67)
- IV. Idioms with prepositions and adverbs.
Examples: appear before a magistrate (ibid.:83)
far and near (ibid.:99)
- V. Idioms with the verb 'to be'.
- a. 'to be' + noun/adjective phrases
Examples: to be full of oneself (ibid.:168)
to be a slave to something (ibid.:169)
 - b. 'to be' + prepositional phrases
Example: to be at cross purposes (ibid.:169)
- VI. Idioms with verbs.
Example: to bring someone to book (ibid.:179)

3.1. Methodology and Data Collection

The population of this study consists of Jordanian students all enrolled in the Graduate Programs of Translation in the Department of English Language and Literature at Yarmouk University and the University of Jordan. The present researchers' attempt to

select a sizeable sample is based on their belief that the larger the sample is, the more generalizable the findings are. The sample consists of forty-five students, twenty of whom are from the University of Jordan. The only important variable in the choice of the sample is the fact that all the subjects have earned at least fifteen credit hours of courses. The translations done by forty of these students are discussed, due to the present researchers' suspicion that the remaining five were not taken seriously by the subjects.

The present researchers have designed a test of forty-five items, each of which is a sentence containing an idiom. These idioms are presented in a variety of sentence structures so as to ascertain the suitability of the context and the reliability and seriousness of the participants' responses, to ensure the subjects' translation of the idiom and not the context, and to control the probability of correctly guessing the meaning of the idiom. To avoid putting the students down, there is a variety of idiomatic expressions ranging from fairly easy to quite difficult. (The forty-five items are listed in the Appendix at the end of this article).

This test has been piloted. Two specialists in the fields of linguistics, translation, and second language acquisition and teaching methodology have checked the test for content validity and maintained that the test adequately covers the content of the study.

3.2. Data Analysis

The present researchers attempt to identify errors marking the problem areas Jordanian students encounter when translating idioms into their native language. They attempt to classify the strategies students employ in translating a given idiom. Further, they use the computation of the number of correct and incorrect translations converted into percentages and mathematical means to determine the degree of ease or difficulty posed by different types of idioms.

Two experts worked on this study as raters to judge whether or not the translations proposed by the present researchers for the subjects' responses were valid, and agreed on excluding the five translations which were not done seriously. They further checked the inter-codal reliability coefficient to ensure the present researchers' objectivity. Allowing for slight individual differences, any other researcher would most likely get the same results.

4. Findings of the Study

The present researchers discuss the strategies used for each of the six types of idioms identified in Section 3, their percentages, and the overall percentage of each strategy.

Four of the six types of idioms have subtypes, while the remaining two do not. These four types are each followed by a summary of the kinds of strategies used by the subjects. All six types are also followed by a general summary.

I. Idiomatic Words

1. Adjectives

In the three sentences exemplifying this subtype, namely 1, 15 and 29, the subjects used the following strategies:

1. *Paraphrase*. 68.3% of the subjects gave what they thought to be a paraphrase of the idiomatic expression. 27.5% succeeded in supplying the correct paraphrase while 40.8% failed to do so. Instances of the correct and incorrect paraphrases of the idiomatic expressions in the three sentences are:

Idiom: a good drink
Correct: He drank much.
Incorrect: a delicious drink...

Idiom: a thin time
Correct: an unpleasant time...
Incorrect: free time...

Idiom: hard put
Correct: He had difficulty...
Incorrect: He couldn't...

2. *Giving the idiomatic counterpart*. This was possible only for sentence 1, as the idiomatic expression in it, unlike those in

the other two sentences, has an Arabic counterpart. Only 1.7% of the subjects supplied a correct idiom for this sentence.

3. *Literal translation*. 12.5% of the subjects translated the idiom literally coming up with incorrect translations, as none of the idioms here has a literal Arabic counterpart. Instances of incorrect literal translations like *a good drink* are found for the first sentence.
4. *Omission*. 5.8% of the subjects omitted the idiomatic expressions altogether. They did not translate them into Arabic as they did the rest of the sentence.
5. *Not translating the sentence*. 11.7% of the subjects did not translate the given sentences.

2. Nouns

In the four sentences pertaining to idiomatic nouns, i.e. sentences 2, 16, 30 and 42, the subjects used the following strategies:

1. *Paraphrase*. 60% of the subjects gave what they thought to be a paraphrase of the idiom. 35% succeeded in supplying the correct paraphrase and 25% did not. Instances of these correct and incorrect paraphrases are:

Idiom: on end
Correct: non-stop...
Incorrect: after work...

Idiom: My word!
Correct: My God!
Incorrect: believe me!

Idiom: a long way out
Correct: far from the right answer...
Incorrect: unrelated to the question...

Idiom: a point

Correct: He would stand by me.

Incorrect: The boss would praise me.

2. *Literal translation.* 6.3% of the subjects literally translated the idiomatic expression in the first three sentences, yielding incorrect translations, as none of the idioms here has a literal Arabic counterpart. Instances of these incorrect literal translations are:

Incorrect: in the end...

Incorrect: My word!

Incorrect: with long ways...

3. *Omission.* 13.7% of the subjects omitted the idiomatic expressions altogether and translated the sentences as if they were free of idioms.
4. *Not translating the sentence.* 20% of the subjects did not translate the given sentences.

II. Adjectives and Nouns in Combination

1. Adjective + Adjective

In sentences 3, 17 and 31, which represent this subtype, the subjects made use of the following strategies:

1. *Paraphrase.* 40.8% of the subjects gave what they thought to be a paraphrase of the idiomatic expression. 37.5% succeeded in finding the correct paraphrase while 3.3% incorrectly paraphrased the idiomatic expressions. Instances of these correct and incorrect paraphrases are:

Idiom: high and low

Correct: everywhere...

Incorrect: much and little...

Idiom: rough and ready

Correct: approximate and inaccurate...

Incorrect: simple...

2. *Giving the idiomatic counterpart.* 0.8% of the subjects supplied the correct Arabic proverb, *words are few with full indication* as the translation for the idiomatic expression 'short and sweet' in sentence 31.
3. *Literal translation.* 45% of the subjects translated the idiom literally, coming up with incorrect translations. Instances of these incorrect translations resulting from the lack of Arabic idiomatic counterparts are:
high and low...
rough and ready...
short and sweet...
4. *Omission.* 5% of the subjects omitted the idiomatic expressions altogether. They did not translate them into Arabic as they did the rest of the sentence.
5. *Not translating the sentence.* 8.4% of the subjects did not translate the given sentences.

2. Noun + Noun

While translating sentences 4, 18 and 32, exemplifying this subtype of idiomatic expressions, the subjects used the following strategies:

1. *Paraphrase.* 40.8% of the subjects wrote what they thought to be a paraphrase of the idioms. 22.5% succeeded in choosing the correct idiom while another 18.3% failed to do so. Instances of correct and incorrect paraphrases are:

Idiom: head over heels

Correct: completely...

Incorrect: He had a headache.

Idiom: heart and soul

Correct: I'm all yours.

Incorrect: I'm all ears.

Idiom: might and main

Correct: with all his strength...

Incorrect: easily...

2. *Giving the idiomatic counterpart.* As the idiomatic expressions in sentences 4 and 18 have Arabic counterparts, 21.7% of the subjects correctly translated these expressions idiomatically.
3. *Literal translation.* 15% of the subjects literally translated the idiomatic expression in sentence 18, yielding the incorrect translation heart and soul...
4. *Omission.* 0.8% of the subjects omitted the idiomatic expression altogether and translated the sentence as if it contained none.
5. *Not translating the sentence.* 21.7% of the subjects did not translate the given sentences.

3. Compound Adjectives

The subjects used the following strategies to translate the idiomatic expressions in sentences 5 and 19:

1. *Paraphrase.* 42.5% of the subjects wrote what they believed to be a paraphrase of the idiom. 6.25% gave the correct paraphrase of the idiom while the other 36.25% yielded incorrect ones. Instances of these paraphrases are:

Idiom: happy-go-lucky

Correct: carefree...

Incorrect: lives as matters choose...

Idiom: hole and corner

Correct: hidden...

Incorrect: empty...

2. *Literal translation:* 37.5% of the subjects supplied incorrect literal translations of the idiomatic expressions like optimism, happiness and being lucky...
3. *Not translating the sentence.* 20% of the subjects did not translate the given sentences.

4. Adjective + Noun Phrases

In sentences 6, 20, 33 and 43, which represent this subtype, the subjects used the following strategies:

1. *Paraphrase:* 63.15% of the subjects gave what they thought to be a paraphrase of the idiomatic expression. 33.75% succeeded in capturing the correct meaning of the idiom and 29.4% failed to do so. Instances of these correct and incorrect paraphrases are:

Idiom: close-fisted

Correct: stingy...

Idiom: double-Dutch

Correct: meaningless talk...

Incorrect: Sanskrit...

Idiom: flying colors

Correct: with great success...

Incorrect: easily...

Idiom: blind date

Correct: their first date...

Incorrect: by chance...

2. *Giving the idiomatic counterpart.* As only the idiomatic expression in sentence 6 has an Arabic counterpart, only 2.5% of the subjects supplied the correct idiomatic translation.
3. *Literal translation.* As none of the idiomatic expressions in this subtype has a literal Arabic counterpart, 20.6% of the subjects supplied incorrect literal translations, instances of which are:
closed...
Dutch...
with flying colors...
4. *Omission.* 7.5% of the subjects omitted the idiomatic expressions altogether.
5. *Not translating the sentence.* 6.25% of the subjects did not translate the given sentences.

5. Noun Phrases

In translating sentences 8, 21, 34 and 44, which represent this subtype, the subjects used the following strategies:

1. *Paraphrase.* 50.6% of the subjects wrote what they thought to be a paraphrase of the idioms in these sentences. 27.5% came up with the correct paraphrase and the remaining 23.1% failed to do so. Instances of these correct and incorrect paraphrases are:

Idiom: by the skin of his teeth
Correct: He barely escaped.
Incorrect: at the last moment...

Idiom: a stone's throw
Correct: could be hit...
Incorrect: He has nothing to do with it...

Idiom: spoke in his wheel
Correct: They put a spoke in his wheel.
Incorrect: They spoke while he talked.

Idiom: money for jam
Correct: as if his money were for a little effort...
Incorrect: It came suddenly.

2. *Giving the idiomatic counterpart.* Sentence 21 contains the only idiomatic expression with an Arabic counterpart; 3.1% of the subjects supplied the correct Arabic idiom.
3. *Literal translation.* 6.9% of the subjects incorrectly supplied incorrect literal translations, instances of which are:
He escaped with the skin of his teeth.
His money came from a plate of jam.
They put a stick in his wheel.
4. *Omission.* 7.5% of the subjects omitted the idiomatic expressions altogether.
5. *Not translating the sentence.* 28.8% of the subjects did not translate the given sentences.

6. Proper Names

Before discussing the strategies the subjects used here, it is worth noting that of the three idioms representing this subtype, namely those in sentences 7, 22, and 35, the idiomatic expression *Boxing Day* is culture-bound, as many people do not have the ritual of giving presents to postmen and other workers on the day following Christmas.

The subjects used the following strategies to translate these idioms:

1. *Paraphrase.* 46.7% of the subjects supplied correct and incorrect paraphrases of the idiomatic expressions in question. 29.2% managed to come up with the correct paraphrase while

17.5% failed to do so. Instances of these correct and incorrect paraphrases are:

Idiom: The Black Death
Correct: the plague...
Incorrect: obligatory death...

Idiom: the Star-Spangled Banner
Correct: the U.S flag...
Incorrect: a patched banner...

Idiom: Boxing Day
Incorrect: in times of war...

2. *Literal translation.* 25.8% of the subjects supplied the incorrect literal translation as none of these idiomatic expressions could be translated literally into Arabic. Instances of these incorrect literal translations are:
 the dark death...
 Star-Spangled Banner...
 Boxing Day...
3. *Omission.* 1.7% of the subjects omitted the idiomatic expressions altogether.
4. *Not translating the sentence.* 25.8% of the subjects did not translate the given sentences.

III. Idioms with the Verb To Be

1. To Be + Noun/Adjective Phrases

In translating sentences 12, 26, and 39, which represent this subtype, the subjects used the following strategies to deal with the idioms:

1. *Paraphrase.* 51.7% of the subjects wrote what they thought to be a paraphrase of the idioms in these sentences. The paraphrases used by 30% of the subjects were correct, while

21.7% of the subjects gave incorrect paraphrases. Instances of these paraphrases are:

Idiom: was the making of
Correct: a result of...
Incorrect: participated...

Idiom: to be the order of the day
Correct: the order of the day...
Incorrect: suitable...

Idiom: is set on
Correct: to be determined to...
Incorrect: ready...

2. *Giving the idiomatic counterpart.* 0.8% of the subjects tried to translate the idiomatic expression through giving an Arabic counterpart, but failed as they chose incorrect idiomatic expressions, like the proverb 'Many a shot is without a marksman' for the idiomatic expression in sentence 12.
3. *Literal translation.* 7.5% of the subjects translated the idioms in sentences 12 and 39 literally; 5% correctly translated the idiom in sentence 29, while another 2.5% supplied the incorrect literal translation of the idiom in sentence 39, i.e. 'sitting'.
4. *Omission.* 15% of the subjects omitted the idiomatic expressions altogether.
5. *Not translating the sentence.* 25% of the subjects did not translate the given sentences.

2. To Be + Prepositional Phrases

In the three sentences exemplifying this subtype, namely 13, 27, and 40, the subjects used the following strategies:

1. *Paraphrase.* 76.7% of the subjects wrote what they thought to be a paraphrase of the idiomatic expressions. 49.2% succeeded in supplying the correct paraphrase while 27.5% of the subjects failed to do so. Instances of the correct and incorrect paraphrases of the three idiomatic expressions in the three sentences are:

Idiom: is at his best
Correct: is at his best...
Incorrect: He works only if forced.

Idiom: is out of depth with
Correct: He does not understand.
Incorrect: extremely happy with..

Idiom: are up in arms
Correct: angry...
Incorrect: the main source...

2. *Literal translation.* 4.2% of the subjects translated the idioms in the three sentences literally, coming up with incorrect translations. Instances of these literal translations are:
 He is not into...
 They rose in arms.
3. *Omission.* 0.8% of the subjects omitted the idiomatic expressions altogether. They did not translate them into Arabic as they did the rest of the sentence.
4. *Not translating the sentence.* 18.3% of the subjects did not translate the given sentences.

IV. Phrasal Verbs

1. verb + preposition/adverb

In sentences 10, 24, 37 and 45, which represent this subtype, the subjects made use of the following strategies:

1. *Paraphrase.* 80% of the subjects wrote what they thought to be a paraphrase of the idioms in these sentences. The paraphrases used by 60.6% of the subjects were correct while 19.4% of the subjects gave incorrect paraphrases. Instances of these correct and incorrect paraphrases are:

Idiom: to act up
Correct: it broke down.
Incorrect: traffic jam...

Idiom to let out
Correct: needs to be let out...
Incorrect: be put aside...

Idiom to do without
Correct: I could do without...
Incorrect: with no education...

to lay up
Correct: caused me to stay in bed...

2. *Literal translation.* 2.5% of the subjects translated the idiom in sentence 37 literally, coming up with incorrect translations like *do without*.
3. *Omission.* 0.6% of the subjects omitted the idiomatic expressions altogether.
4. *Not translating the sentence.* 16.9% of the subjects did not translate the given sentences.

2. Verb + Particle + Preposition

In sentences 11, 38, and 25, which represent this subtype, the subjects made use of the following strategies:

1. *Paraphrase.* 89.2% of the subjects wrote what they thought to be a paraphrase of the idiom. The paraphrases used by 56.7% of the subjects were correct, while 32.5% of the subjects

gave incorrect paraphrases. Instances of these correct and incorrect paraphrases are:

Idiom: to be in for

Correct: to be in for trouble...

Incorrect: in real danger...

Idiom: to add up to

Correct: give much information...

Incorrect: It is real.

Idiom: to get up to

Correct: what he will do...

Incorrect: how he will live...

2. *Literal translation.* 0.8% of the subjects literally translated the idiomatic expression in sentence 25, coming up with incorrect translations like *he will stand up*.
3. *Not translating the sentence.* 10% of the subjects did not translate the given sentences.

VI. Idioms with Adverbs

In the three sentences exemplifying this type, i.e. 9, 23, and 36, the subjects used the following strategies to deal with the idiomatic expressions:

1. Paraphrase: 70% of the subjects paraphrased the idioms as they saw fit. 25.8% of the subjects succeeded in giving the correct paraphrases while the other 44.2% failed to do so. Instances of these correct and incorrect paraphrases are:

Idiom: by and by

Correct: after a short time...

Incorrect: at the end...

Idiom: by the by

Correct: by the way...

Incorrect: after a short time...

Idiom: on and on

Correct: endlessly...

Incorrect: again and again...

2. *Omission.* 13.3% of the subjects omitted the idiomatic expressions altogether.
3. *Not translating the sentence.* 16.7% of the subjects did not translate the given sentences.

Table 1 summarizes the percentages of the strategies used in the translation of the idiomatic expressions discussed above.

STRATEGY TYPE	PARAPHRASE CORRECT INCORRECT	IDIOM CORRECT INCORRECT	LITERAL CORRECT INCORRECT	OMISSION	BLANK
Idiomatic Words	31.25 32.90	0.85 0.00	0.00 9.40	9.75	15.85
Adjectives and Nouns in Combination	26.70 20.70	4.70 0.00	0.00 25.10	4.30	18.50
Idioms with Verbs	55.80 20.80	0.00 0.00	0.00 2.50	6.70	14.20
Idioms with Adverbs	26.70 43.30	0.00 0.00	0.00 0.00	13.00	16.70
Idioms with the Verb To Be	39.60 24.60	0.00 0.40	2.50 3.35	7.90	21.65
Phrasal Verbs	59.05 25.55	0.00 0.00	0.00 1.65	0.30	13.45
Total	239.10 167.85	5.55 0.40	2.50 42.00	42.25	100.35
Percentage	39.90% 28.00%	0.90% 0.10%	0.40% 7.00%	7.00%	16.70%

Table 1. Percentages of Strategies Used for Translating Idiomatic Expressions

Table 2 shows the percentages of correct translations, incorrect translations, omission, and non-translation of the idiomatic types and subtypes.

TYPE/SUBTYPE	CORRECT	INCORRECT	OMISSION	BLANK
Idiomatic Words	32.10	42.30	9.75	15.85
Adjectives	29.20	53.30	5.80	11.70
Nouns	35.00	31.30	13.70	20.00
Adjectives and Nouns in Combination	31.40	45.80	4.30	18.50
Adjective + Adjective	38.30	48.30	5.00	8.40
Noun + Noun	44.20	33.30	0.80	21.70
Compound Adjectives	6.25	73.75	0.00	20.00
Adjective + Noun Phrases	38.75	47.50	7.50	6.25
Noun Phrases	31.20	29.40	10.60	28.80
Proper Names	29.20	43.30	1.70	25.80
Idioms with Verbs	55.80	32.30	6.70	14.20
Idioms with Adverbs	26.70	43.30	13.30	16.70
Idioms with the Verb To Be	42.10	28.35	7.90	21.65
To Be + Noun/Adjective Phrases	35.00	25.00	15.00	25.00
To Be + Prepositional Phrases	49.20	27.50	0.80	18.30
Phrasal Verbs	59.05	27.20	0.30	13.45
Verb + Preposition/Adverb	60.60	21.90	0.60	16.90
Verb + Particle + Preposition	57.50	32.50	0.00	10.00

Table 2. The Percentages of Correct translations, Incorrect translations, Omissions, and Not Translating Sentences for the Idiomatic Types and Subtypes

5. Discussion

The discussion below is divided into four major sections, each of which pertains to one of the four questions of the study.

5.1. Students' Problems with the Translation of English Idioms into Arabic

Numerous problems result from the students' translation of English idioms into Arabic. The 35.7% of the subjects who incorrectly translated the idiomatic expressions as well as the 7% who omitted them altogether changed the meaning of the given sentences in one way or another. The idiomatic expression was not added to the sentence for aesthetic purposes but rather to add shades of meaning to that sentence, which would disappear if the idiom were to be omitted. For instance, to translate a sentence like sentence 8, *he escaped by the skin of his teeth*, as *he escaped*, does not draw the whole picture the sentence is meant to present. It only shows that the person was able to escape, but ignores the fact that he barely made it. The sentence lost some of its meaning when translated as such into Arabic.

Pertaining to the incorrect translations of the idiomatic expressions, these result in misunderstanding the given sentence. Changing the meaning of the idiomatic expression is always followed by modifying the whole sentence to suit the incorrect rendition of the idiom, which is best illustrated in sentence 1, *Bill had a good drink at the pub last night. His wife was not at home*. Instead of conveying the meaning of Bill's drinking himself into a stupor, he is said to have *betrayed his wife*, which is a totally different message from the one intended in the sentence.

A little more than 16% of the subjects did not translate the whole sentence, which resulted in the loss of its meaning. Had the sentence been in a passage, ignoring it would have caused the translator to lose a good portion of the intended meaning. He/she could also disrupt the coherence of the passage and lose an important part of it.

The concept of translating the idiomatic expression literally may cause misunderstanding and confusion. The absence of a literal counterpart for 95.6% of the idiomatic expressions in the sentences led to the students' production of incorrect literal translations which

rendered sentences like 1 above ambiguous or difficult to understand. It obscured its meaning altogether because the literal translation was meaningless in Arabic. This is further illustrated in sentence 16, *My word! You look pale today*. *My word* is not an expression of surprise in Arabic and, therefore, is unintelligible for those who read the sentence alone and apart from the English original sentence.

From the discussion above, the major problems that arise from the students' translation of idiomatic expression are:

1. The loss of some shades of the meaning of the given sentence through omitting the idiomatic expression;
2. Misunderstanding the meaning of the whole sentence through the incorrect rendition of the meaning of the idiomatic expression;
3. Disrupting the coherence of the passage when omitting or incorrectly translating an idiomatic expression within it; and
4. Unintelligibility which results from the literal translation of the idiom into a meaningless Arabic phrase.

5.2. Potential Reasons for these Problems

There are several reasons for the difficulty students find when translating English idiomatic expressions into Arabic, of which the most important are:

1. *The cultural background*. Some idioms are culture-specific. They are alien to the translator's native culture, which may result in misunderstanding. If this translator is denied access to a dictionary, he/she will be forced to rely on his/her own understanding of the idiom, which may render a faulty translation. In this study, this is illustrated in idioms like *Boxing Day*, which are alien to the Arabic culture.
2. *The existence of a similar Arabic idiomatic expression which is different in meaning*. Students may look for an idiom which is similar to the one they are translating without

concerning themselves with comparing the two idioms to see if they have the same shades of meaning.

3. *The students' inability to determine whether or not the expression they are translating is an idiom*, thus missing its point altogether.
4. *The lack of competence to find the corresponding Arabic idiom or translate the idiom correctly*. Students may not have the ability to render the idiom in Arabic.
5. *The lack of familiarity with the presence of idiomatic expressions in Arabic and that their meaning goes beyond the meaning of their constituent words*. This is obvious in the students' reliance on literal translation of given idiomatic expressions such as *Boxing Day*.
6. *Carelessness*. Subjects may have been careless at times since this test was not part of their curriculum or course requirements.
7. *Time pressure*. Some students were not satisfied with the allotted time as they were what could be called slow translators.

5.3. The Most Problematic Type(s) of Idioms for the Subjects of this Study

Before attempting to categorize the types and subtypes of idioms according to their degree of difficulty, it is worth mentioning that sentence 35, *there were no people on the street on Boxing Day*, was not translated correctly by any of the subjects. This may be due to the fact that it is culture-bound, as *Boxing Day* is not as significant in the Arabic culture as it is in the British one. 55% of the subjects translated the idiom literally or almost literally, 5% omitted it, while 12.5% did not translate the sentence altogether.

5.3.1. Degrees of Problematicity of Idiom Subtypes

As shown in Table 2, which presents the percentages of the correct translation of idiomatic subtypes (*incorrect translation, omission of idioms and not translating the sentence altogether*), these subtypes may be arranged (in descending order of problematicity) as follows:

1. *Compound adjectives (nouns and adjectives in combination)*. Only 6.25% of the subjects were able to correctly translate the idiomatic expressions in this subtype.
2. *Idioms with adverbs*. 25.8% of the subjects were able to correctly translate the idiomatic expressions in this subtype.
3. *Adjectives (idiomatic words)*. 29.2% of the subjects were able to correctly translate the idiomatic expressions in this subtype.
4. *Proper names (nouns and adjectives in combination)*. 29.2% of the subjects were able correctly translate the idiomatic expressions in this subtype.
5. *Noun phrases (nouns and adjectives in combination)*. 30.6% of the subjects were able to correctly translate the idiomatic expressions in this subtype.
6. *Nouns (idiomatic words)*. 35% of the subjects were able to correctly translate the idiomatic expressions in this subtype.
7. *To be + noun/adjective phrases (idioms with the verb to be)*. 35% of the subjects were able to correctly translate the idiomatic expressions in this subtype.
8. *Adjective + noun phrases (nouns and adjectives in combination)*. 36.25% of the subjects were able to correctly translate the idiomatic expressions in this subtype.
9. *Adjective + adjective (nouns and adjectives in combination)*. 38.3% of the subjects were able to correctly translate the idiomatic expressions in this subtype.

10. *Noun + noun (nouns and adjectives in combination)*. 38.3% of the subjects were able to correctly translate the idiomatic expressions in this subtype.
11. *To be + prepositional phrases (idioms with the verb to be)*. 49.2% of the subjects were able to correctly translate the idiomatic expressions in this subtype.
12. *Idioms with verbs*. 54.2% of the subjects were able to correctly translate the idiomatic expressions in this subtype.
13. *Verb + particle + preposition (phrasal verbs)*. 56.7% of the subjects were able to correctly translate the idiomatic expressions in this subtype.
14. *Verb + preposition/adverb (phrasal verbs)*. 60.6% of the subjects were able to correctly translate the idiomatic expressions in this subtype.

5.3.2. Degrees of Problematicity of Idiom Types

Idiomatic types could be arranged from the most to the least problematic in the following manner:

1. *Idioms with adverbs* were correctly translated by 25.8% of the subjects.
2. *Adjectives and nouns in combination* were correctly translated by 30.8% of the subjects.
3. *Idiomatic words* were correctly translated by 32.1% of the subjects.
4. *Idioms with the verb to be* were correctly translated by 42.1% of the subjects.
5. *Idioms with verbs* were correctly translated by 54.2% of the subjects.

6. *Phrasal verbs* were correctly translated by 58.65% of the subjects.

5.3.3. Baker's (1992) Idiom Translation Strategies Used by the Subjects

The subjects of this study used the following four of the five strategies discussed in Baker (1992):

1. Using a target language idiom of the same form and meaning;
2. Using a target language idiom of the same meaning but a different form;
3. Paraphrasing the idiom; and
4. Omitting the idiom altogether, which was done by 7% of the sample.

6. Summary

The present study has the following four major purposes:

1. to determine the strategies the subjects of this study use in translating idiomatic expressions;
2. to find the problems which may arise in the process of translating these expressions;
3. to discover the causes of these problems; and
4. to find the most problematic type of idioms for these particular subjects.

The problems arising from the students' translations of English idiomatic expressions into Arabic are:

1. the loss of some shades of meaning when omitting an idiom from the sentence;
2. misunderstanding the meaning of the sentence through the incorrect rendition of the idiom;
3. disrupting the coherence of a text when omitting or incorrectly translating the idiom; and
4. unintelligibility through the use of literal translation.

These problems arise as a result of the following:

1. some idioms are culture-bound;
2. some idioms may have counterparts similar in form but different in meaning;
3. students may not be able to determine whether or not the expression at hand is an idiom;
4. students lack the competence to translate the idiom into Arabic;
5. students lack the familiarity with the presence of idiomatic expressions; and
6. students may be hindered by factors of carelessness and time pressure.

The idiomatic types arranged from the most to the least problematic for the students are:

1. idioms with adverbs;
2. adjectives and nouns in combination;
3. idiomatic words;
4. idioms with the verb to be;

5. idioms with verbs; and
6. phrasal verbs.

The students used four of the strategies discussed by Baker (1992) for translating the idioms presented in the study. These are:

1. using a target language idiom of the same form and meaning;
2. using a target language idiom of the same meaning but a different form;
3. paraphrasing the idiom; and
4. omitting the idiom.

7. Some Pedagogical Implications

This study has shown that translating English idiomatic expressions into Arabic is likely to pose problems for Master's students of translation in Jordan. The present researchers would like to make the following recommendations:

1. Students should be encouraged to take special care of idiomatic expressions and their meanings. The idiomatic expressions within translated texts should be emphasized to ensure that the students will understand them if they come across them again.
2. A course or at least a major part of a course should be devoted to idiomatic expressions. In this course, students should be given the definition and types of idiomatic expressions, in addition to a substantial number of illustrative examples in and out of context. Students should be encouraged to gather some idiomatic expressions for each session to introduce them to the class, which will go a long way towards enriching their repertoire of this important aspect of the language.

3. Students should be encouraged to keep an active file or make lists of the idioms they come across and look them up in bilingual dictionaries of idiomatic expressions.
4. Students should be encouraged to use idioms whenever possible and to refrain from paraphrasing them for fear of making errors.

8. Suggestions For Further Research

In spite of the present researchers' belief that the present study has thoroughly examined the question at hand, they still think that idiomatic expressions constitute an important aspect of language that needs further investigation. The translation of idiomatic expressions often poses problems and causes major deficiencies for students of translation in graduate programs and elsewhere, which makes it imperative that further research be done in closely related matters such as:

1. Comparing and contrasting the strategies used by students at different proficiency levels;
2. Conducting a study or a series of studies on the translation of idiomatic expressions from Arabic into English;
3. Examining whether or not the student's competence in a certain language is necessarily an indicator of his/her ability to understand, use and translate its idiomatic expressions; and
4. Preparing bilingual dictionaries which make clear the existing differences between Arabic idiomatic expressions and their English counterparts.

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Notes

- *. [Editor's Note, inserted in proof] A further, derived meaning of *fuse* is 'a device used to control overload in an electronic or electrical circuit'.
To blow a fuse, in this sense, means 'to cause the device to trip or melt', thus shutting off the current to prevent damage to the circuit and its components.
1. The asterisk (*) indicates that the utterance it marks is unacceptable in English.
 2. Items 1, 2, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 23, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 36, 38, 39, 40, 42 and 45 are taken from Seidl and McMordie (1978:24, 30, 99, 118, 119, 168, 169, 6, 37, 43, 99, 139, 169, 175, 26, 35, 43, 100, 118, 169, 176, 34 and 146 respectively)
 3. Items 5, 19 and 24 are taken from Hornby et. al (1974:390, 408 and 484 respectively).
 4. Item 18 is taken from Hornby (1980:288)
 5. Item 28 is taken from Wood (1964:21).

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Appendix²*The Test*

Translate the following sentences into Arabic:

1. Bill had a good drink at the pub last night. His wife wasn't at home.
2. Bill is a hard worker; he studies for hours on end.
3. I felt tired looking for my sister high and low.
4. He fell head over heels in debt.
5. She goes through life in a happy-go-lucky manner³.
6. The rich man did not like to spend money. He was a close-fisted man.
7. The Black Death killed many thousands of people in the past.
8. He could not fire the gun but escaped by the skin of his teeth.
9. By and by, the son began to realize the wisdom of his father's advice.
10. The car's been acting up again this week; I've been late to work every day.
11. He'll be in for trouble if he doesn't work harder.
12. His unexpected success in the election was the making of Herbert's political career.
13. Graham's at his best when he's working under pressure.
14. Jane had had enough of Mike's stupid and critical remarks, so she finally told him where to get off.
15. We had a thin time yesterday. The party ended with a fight.
16. My word! You look pale today.
17. I can't tell you how to use prepositions correctly. I can give a few rough and ready rules.
18. I'm yours heart and soul⁴.
19. We don't like these hole-and-corner methods.
20. I could not understand anything. It looked as if he spoke double Dutch.
21. He shouldn't have interfered as he was within a stone's throw of the gun.
22. When I was in the USA, I bought the Star-Spangled Banner.
23. By the by, did Mary tell you about her latest adventure?
24. He's getting so fat that his trousers need to be let out round the waist.
25. I wonder what he'll get up to next!
26. Rises in prices but not wages seem to be the order of the day.
27. Derek is out of his depth with the new computer.
28. He spent almost half an hour telling us about himself and what he had done. He's pretty good at blowing his own trumpet⁵.
29. He was hard put to give a convincing excuse for his behavior.
30. My arithmetic's terrible; my answers are always a long way out.

31. I won't go into a long explanation of the reasons for my leaving. I'll just make it short and sweet.
32. He lifted the tree with might and main.
33. I passed the exam with flying colors.
34. They put a spoke in his wheel and ruined all his preparations.
35. There were no people on the street on Boxing Day.
36. Mary's inclined to chatter on and on for hours and hours.
37. I can do without the book if you need it.
38. The new information adds up to very little, I'm afraid.
39. Danny is set on starting his own pop group.
40. The students are up in arms about the government's plan to close their college.
41. The manager wanted us to believe that he is the best person for the chair, but we nailed all his lies.
42. When it came to the salary rises, I hoped that the boss would stretch a point in my favor – but he didn't.
43. They met on a blind date and fell in love.
44. He got rich without effort as if his was money for jam.
45. I've been laid up with rheumatism for a week.