

Translating Idioms: A Study on English Translation of *The Date Palm*

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Abstract

The present study sought to investigate the idiomatic expressions in a literary Text based on Baker's (1992) model. More specifically, this study is conducted to find strategies for translating idioms into the English language. It also highlighted if Baker's strategies were distributed equally through English translation. More importantly, the shortcomings of the idiom translations were presented. The corpus is composed of Moradi Kermani's *The Date Palm* as Source Text (ST), with the English translation as Target Text (TT) by Croskery (2017). Based on the received data, "translation by paraphrase" strategies have been used in many cases and frequently by the translator. This strategy is most commonly used in translating idioms when the translator cannot find any equivalents for the source idiom. The least frequent strategies related to "using an idiom of similar meaning and form" that translator attempts to find an expression in the target language which is equivalent to the source language both in terms of meaning as well as lexical items.

Keywords: Literary Translation, Translation Strategy, Idiom, Literary Text

1. Introduction

Translation, in general, is a phenomenon that has a remarkable influence on people's everyday life (Hatim & Munday, 2004). According

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to Bell (2001, p. 6), "translation is changing the place of a text in one language by a representation of an equivalent text in a second language". Thus, equivalence is one of the most challenging issues in the translation process; achieving the equivalence between units of the SL and TL is the translation's foremost goal. It is challenging to get terminological equivalence in Persian/English translation.

Idioms are lexical items or linguistic expressions identifying concepts, objects, or phenomena of material life, especially to a given culture. They are essential for any language to preserve the local and cultural color of that language.

Each language has numerous idiomatic expressions that can cause some problems for translators or learners of that language. Understanding this aspect of language is necessary for each native speaker of the language to communicate effectively. Some research on Persian translation of idioms or idiomatic expressions was provided. It should be noted that there is a wide range of subjects that could be examined in terms of translational aspects. The present study focuses on translating idioms as one of the most innovative and exciting aspects of language. That is to say, this study aimed at investigating the idioms in the English translation of *The Date Palm* by Moradi Kermani through Baker's (1992) strategies in translation studies.

2. Statement of the Problem

In Baker's (1992) view, "the main problems that fixed and idiomatic expressions pose in translation relate to two main areas which are the ability to identify and interpret an idiom correctly and the difficulties in rendering different aspects of meaning that an idiom or a fixed expression represents into the target language" (p. 65). Also, as Straksiene (2009) mentioned, lack of equivalence on the idiom level is one of the problems a translator faces in translating idioms. All languages have idiomatic expressions, but finding an equivalent in the TL that corresponds to the idiom in the ST is not easy.

Idioms and fixed expressions are an inseparable part of every language. There are some problems in understanding and translating them because the meaning of these fixed expressions cannot be understood from the superficial meanings of the single words constituting them. Translating fixed expressions or idioms from one language into another is a good task that forces a translator to know both languages and cultures and recognize and deal with the problems in finding an appropriate equivalent for idiomatic pairs.

On the other hand, idioms are always language- and culture-specific material translates idioms into an essential and exciting issue. Since every language shows certain things, corresponding expressions may not be found in another language. This language-fixity sometimes makes the translation of idioms tricky, and idioms are regarded as one of the most complicated elements in their translatability. Translating idioms is problematic if the translator is not aware of the ST and TT cultural differences. Also, recognizing idioms and distinguishing idiomatic from non-idiomatic expressions would be the main problem for him/her.

3. Research Questions

According to the objectives of the study, the following research questions were addressed:

- What strategies have been used by the translator in rendering idiomatic expressions?
- What are the shortcomings of English idiom translations regarding Baker's (1992) model?
- Do Baker's strategies distribute equally through the English translation of *The Date Palm*?

4. Literature Review

The purpose of this article is to reflect the relevant literature about the translation of idiomatic expressions and the topics and subjects around it. As the first step, we introduce translation and presents approaches to translation. Also, the concept of meaning and equivalence are detailed in this part. After that, we discuss general strategies for a good translation. Then, this section presents definitions of idioms and types of idioms. Further, the problems, as well as the strategies of translating idioms, are elaborated.

Karimi (2014) studied the translatability of Persian idiomatic expressions to English in political discourse. The study investigated how Persian idiomatic expressions would influence the western translators' strategies to provide the ultimate English product. It also attempted to uncover the underlying assumptions in the target text, then suggest some weighty strategies to overcome difficulties with translation. For this purpose, the data were analyzed within the mentioned framework proposed by Baker (1992).

Khosravi and Khatib (2012) examined strategies used to translate English idioms into Persian in novels *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee and *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck and their translations. They

did their study based on Baker's (1992) model that proposed four strategies for translating idioms: "using an idiom of similar meaning and form," "using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form," "translation by paraphrase," and "translation by omission." Based on their findings, "paraphrase" was the most common strategy, and "using an idiom of similar meaning and form" was the least common strategy applied in the translation of the two novels above.

Shojaei (2012) tried to identify the difficulties in translating interlingual idiomatic pairs and later on aimed to suggest some strategies to deal with those difficulties. Following Baker's (1992) classification of challenges and strategies in translation studies, Shojaei applied them primarily for some English and their equivalent Turkish (Azeri) and Persian pairs. The findings revealed no clear-cut distinction to cope with idiomatic expressions; however, the situation decides which strategy to take.

Tousi (2011) investigated which strategies translators apply to compensate for the loss of idiomaticity while translating idiomatic expressions. The data were gathered from the English novel Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as the SL and its Persian translation as the TL. The results indicated that the topmost used translation strategy by the translator was "translating SL idioms into TL non-idiomatic expressions." This fact leads to an imbalance between the SL and TL idioms. Coping with this problem, the translator used the compensation strategy by adding idioms instead of non-idioms in the TL.

Belfaqeeh (2009) carried out a study regarding the more acceptable translation strategies to Arab readers. His study was conducted based on domesticated or foreignized strategies. Collecting the relevant data from different books, his study was conducted. The analysis of the data indicated that the domestication strategy was more popular to Arab readers. In other words, for the Arab readers, the content of the message and translated equivalent idiom were of significant importance. Literal translation and deletion, furthermore, attained minor preferences for the Arab readers.

Marashi and Poursoltani (2009) used Gottlieb's classification of interlingual subtitling strategies to analyze Farsi into English subtitling strategies employed in Iranian feature films. The materials used were two corpora of the Farsi audio scripts of 12 Iranian films and their translations in English in subtitles. Based on their findings, Gottlieb's model applied to Farsi-to-English subtitling of Iranian feature films. In addition, their

study revealed “transfer” as the most frequently used strategy and “deletion” as the least often one in translating the subtitles.

5. Method

The purpose of this article is to describe the design and methodology used in conducting the study. This chapter describes the research method employed to answer the research questions. Therefore, the current chapter introduces the study's design and a description of the corpus; it also includes procedures to collect and analyze the data.

5.1. Design of the Study

Burns and Grove (2003, p. 195) define a research design as "a blueprint for conducting a study with maximum control over factors that may interfere with the validity of the findings". The current project is descriptive and qualitative. Qualitative research is to describe the quality of something in some enlightening way. More strictly, qualitative research can lead to conclusions about what is possible, what can happen, or what can happen at least sometimes; it does not allow decisions about what is probable, general, or universal (Williams & Chesterman 2002). However, Descriptive research is a subset of empirical research that “seeks new data, new information derived from data observation and from experimental work.

As mentioned above, this study is a qualitative and descriptive corpus-based research, and the objectives were to analyze the English translation and discover the idiomatic strategies.

After categorizing the items based on Baker's model, the frequencies of each strategy were shown via SPSS software. Moreover, related figures and tables were provided.

5.2. Procedures

Data collection is the process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest in an established systematic fashion that enables one to answer stated research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes (Kabir, 2016). The process of collecting data of the study, their classification, and analysis was done manually. The unit of analysis was the idiomatic expressions. Data were collected from the Persian literary text, *The Date Palm*, and its English translation. The theoretical framework of the study was based on Baker's model. According to the objectives of the study, the researcher gathered the data in the following steps.

First, the researcher carefully read the Persian text line by line with its English translation to find the idiomatic expressions.

Second, the researcher extracted and underlined the idioms in translation and separated them based on the proposed model.

Third, the researcher wrote the related strategies in translating idioms. Also, the frequency of them and their shortcomings were presented by her.

Fourth, the data reliability was checked by the two raters in the research, the supervisor and the thesis researcher.

Finally, the researcher classified and wrote the strategies of idiom translation. That is to say, she made the collected data ready for the next stage of the study, i.e., data analysis.

6. Results

This article provides the results of data analysis based on the proposed research questions. The tables and diagrams demonstrate the subjects' responses in detail regarding the frequencies and the percentage.

Table 1. *Analysis of Idioms based on Baker's Theory*

N	Source text	Translated text	Selected strategy
1	دلم روشن شد	I felt hopeful	Paraphrase
2	خدا عمرت بده	God bless you	Using an idiom of similar meaning and form
3	لب یه گوشت نمی زد	He never ate meat	paraphrase
4	چوبدستی را حواله بچها کرد	He took his stick and yelled at the children	paraphrase
5	اگر به انها رو بدهی سوارت می شوند	If you give them an inch, they'll take a mile	Using an idiom of similar meaning and dissimilar form
6	گرم خوردن بود	Untranslated	Translation by omission
7	قصه های قدیمی که توی آبادی دهان به دهان می گشت	The old spoken tales in the village that had passed from ear to ear	Using an idiom of similar meaning and form

8	درویش از نی زدن دست کشید	Darvish stopped playing the reed flute	paraphrase
9	گوشت شان و شیرشان برکت دارد	Their meat and their milk carrying blessing	paraphrase
10	خضر مرادش را بدهد	To bring an answer to his prayers	paraphrase
11	گوساله تو چنگ درخت توت بود	The calf was hanging on the mulberry tree	paraphrase
12	پستانش درد می کرد	The vein in the udders would swell	paraphrase
13	تا از چشم زخم گرگها و سگها در امان بماند	To keep the hunger-eye from wolves and dogs at bay	Using an idiom of similar meaning and dissimilar form
14	رضا پسر همسایه شان یک درخت البالو داشت که هیچ کس جرئت نداشت چپ به اش نگاه کند	Reza had a sour cherry tree that no one dared to look twice at it	Using an idiom of similar meaning and dissimilar form
15	به شاخ و برگش پوست تخم مرغ و دعا آویزان میکرد که چشم نخورد	He hangs eggshells and players from branches and leaves to protect them from the evil eye.	Paraphrase
16	زبان بسته از گشنگی مرد	The poor thing is dying of hunger	Paraphrase

17	آخر آدم حسابی می اید اینجا درخت نخل بکار د؟	Would anyone in their right mind plant a date palm here?	Paraphrase
18	مراد اخم هایش را درهم کشید	Morad got upset and furled his brows.	Paraphrase
19	تو چقدر دل نازکی	Don't be so sensitive	Paraphrase
20	حیف آن نانی که میخوری	A waste of the bread we feed you	Paraphrase
21	فکر کرد که نباید دست و پایش را گم کند	He thought it better not to lose his composure	Paraphrase
22	رفته بود پی کارش	It has gone its own way	Paraphrase
23	لکه نازک سفید کنار آسمان داشت از هم و او می رفت	A tiny wisp of cloud was dissipating in the corner of the sky	Paraphrase
24	آب خنک بود و روی تنش دوید	The water was cool as it ran over his body and skin.	Paraphrase
25	از هیكلت خجالت بگش	you should be ashamed of yourself	Paraphrase
26	از حرف گلرخ دلش گرفت	The Golrokh's words hurt his feelings	Paraphrase
27	مراد غصه اش شد. می خواست کله بز را بکند	Morad was so mad. He could have killed the goat	Paraphrase

28	الان توی آبادی ما آدم گر می گیرد از گرما	Right now in our village, people burn up from the heat	paraphrase
29	ناز شستنت باغبون	The pride of your thumb, gardener	Paraphrase
30	مراد هرچه از نخل شنیده بود با آب و تاب تعریف می کرد	Morad told them interesting stories about everything he had heard	Paraphrase
31	هرکدام را به یکی از اهالی ده چشم روشنی می دهند	They cut off the trees as gifts to each member of the village	Paraphrase
32	سر به هوا شده	Untranslated	Translation by omission
33	مراد دست به دامن پیرمرد شد	Morad started begging the old man	Paraphrase
34	الان زبانت را کوتاه می کنم	I'm going to talk a switch to you if you don't stop talking	Paraphrase
35	وای به حالت آگه خونه بیای	Wait and see what I do to you when you get home	Paraphrase
36	دل توی دل مراد نبود	Morad was so worried	Paraphrase
37	دل مراد بنا کرد به زدن	Untranslated	Translation by omission
38	دلش سوخت به حال نخل ، به حال من؟	Did he feel sorry for the date palm or for me?	Paraphrase

39	شوهرخاله را زیر چشمی می پایید	He watched his uncle out of the corner of his eye.	Paraphrase
40	که بکهو سرو کله گلرخ پیدا شد	When suddenly Golrokh appear	Paraphrase
41	خدا عمرت بدهد	May you live long	Paraphrase
42	الهی که خیر ببینی	Be happy	Paraphrase
43	آنقدر به قد و بالایش نگاه کنی و از شان بالا بروی که دلت را بزند	you can inspect them and climb them as much as you like until you go tired of them	Paraphrase
44	نفوس بد نزن	Don't jinx it	Using an idiom of similar meaning and form
45	دود توی هوا و می رفت	The smoke in the air dissipated	Paraphrase
46	سوز سرد ، لوله های دود را نخ نخ می کرد	The freezing wind chill breaking up the smoke funnels	Paraphrase
47	کاش به رضا گفته بودم به اش سر بزند	I wish I had told Reza to check on it.	Paraphrase
48	برف خوش خوشک آب می شد	Untranslated	Translation by omission
49	مراد بیشتر از همه جوش و جلا می زد	Morad got more excited than anyone else	Paraphrase
50	کلمه ها جان می کردند و از دهانش در می آمدند	He would struggle to get the words out of his mouth	Paraphrase

51	بوش آدم را حالی به حالی می کند	Untranslated	Translation by omission
52	پولها رو کل رمضان می گرفت ، ده شاهی این ور ، اون ور نمی کرد	Kal Ramazan took care of the money. He never missed a penny.	Paraphrase
53	قلب هایمان پاک نیست	Our hearts are not pure	Paraphrase
54	خد از ما رو برگردانده	God has turned away from us	Paraphrase
55	مراد داشت از غصه دق می کرد	Morad felt like he was dying from broken heart.	Paraphrase
56	پروانه ها ملخ ها و سنجاقک ها بال بال نمی زدند	The butterflies, grasshoppers, and dragonflies were left wandering about.	Paraphrase
57	سر راه به درخت نخل سر می زد	On his way home, he would stop by and visit his date palm	Paraphrase
58	درخت ها و درخچه ها دست از جان شسته بودند	The trees had practically given up on life	Paraphrase
59	باد افسوس میخورد و برای درختچه ها و یونجه ها دل می سوزاند	The wind shook its head softly in regret as if immersed in heartbreak	Paraphrase
60	بزغاله ها و گوساله های کوچولو تاب بی شیری نداشتند	The little goats and calves were dying from lack of mother's milk	Paraphrase
61	پدرها و مادرها اوقاتشان تلخ بود	Fathers and mothers were so bitter	Paraphrase

62	شوهر خاله مراد پاک خودش را باخته بود	Auntie's husband had completely lost it	Paraphrase
63	برو پی کارت	Go find something to do	Paraphrase
64	دل خاله شور افتاده بود	Anntie started worrying	Paraphrase
65	آب کم بود و به جان مردم بسته بود	People lives depended on water	Paraphrase
66	اگر کسی سنگی به پای می خزانند که از کنارش کاسه آبی پای درختی برود ، حسابش پاک بود	If anyone tried to slide a rock to the side with his foot foe even a bowl full of water to reach the foot of his tree, he would be made to answer for it.	Paraphrase
67	تا تو باشی دیگر آب مردم را نزدی	that'll teach you not to steal people 's water.	Paraphrase
68	خدا جای حق نشسته	God's watching	Paraphrase
69	اگه تو هم بودی ، خونت به جوش می آمد	If it were you, your blood would boil too.	Paraphrase
70	قابل شما را ندارد	It's no trouble at all	Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form
71	توی دل و روده اش مالش انداخت	It warmed his stomach	Paraphrase
72	نسیم پاک و خنک صبح به صورتش	He could feel a pure, cool	Paraphrase

	خورد ، چرتش را پراند	morning breeze on his face	
73	پلک های مراد سنگین شد	His eyelids burned even more	Paraphrase
74	نباید کاری کنیم که فردا نتوانیم توی صورت هم نگاه کنیم	.we shouldn't do things that would later cause us to be too ashamed to look at each other faces	Paraphrase
75	صلوات بفرسین تا دین تان کامل شود	Recite a Salavat to renew your faith	Paraphrase
76	تو دیگه خودتو قاتی نکن	Don't you interfere	Paraphrase
77	بهتر است آستین ها را بالا بزنیم	We should roll up our sleeves	Using an idiom of similar meaning and form
78	آبادی دور بود و چشم به راه	The village was far away and anxious for the water to arrive.	paraphrase
79	میخواست پسرش را بفرستد شهر درس بخواند ، آدم شود	He wants to send his son to school in a city to get a proper education and become a respectable person	Paraphrase
80	دلش برای زیارت پر می زد	Her heart fluttered at the thought of a pilgrimage	Paraphrase

81	میخواهم دست به دامن امام شوم و چشمم رو ازش بگیرم	I want to beg Imam to restore my eyes	Paraphrase
82	سالهاست که آرزوی زیارت به دلم مانده	I have had this wish in my heart for many years	Paraphrase
83	قرض هایم را که دادم سر راحت زمین می گذارم	When I pay my debts, I'll be able to put my head down and sleep	Paraphrase
84	برای این یکی دندان تیز نکن	don't get your heart set on this one	Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form
85	جان میداد برای میز، مبل، کدو جعبه	It would be great for making furniture	Paraphrase
86	پبله کرده بود که درخت را بفروشد	he was pushing to sell the tree	Paraphrase
87	گردوهایش توی این آبادی لنگه ندارد	The walnuts it produces are beyond compare in the village	Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form
88	موتور که نون و آب نمی شود	A motorcycle can't give us bread and water	Paraphrase
89	آقای رضایی از خیر خریدن آن درخت گذشت	Mr. Rezaei decided to pass on buying that tree.	Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form
90	از ما بهتران توی خونه دارند	Our superiors live in that tree	Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form

91	جماعت با ترس و لرزش شاخه ها را نگاه می کردند ، ته دلشان خالی شده بود.	The crowded watched in suspense	Paraphrase
92	میخواهی کار دستمان بدهی	Do you want to get yourself killed?	Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form
93	می دانی که زندگی ما لنگ است	You know that we are short of money	Paraphrase
94	چشم به هم بزنی آنقدر وضعت خوب می شود که اصلا ما را هم نمیشناسی	Before you know it, your financial situation will be so good that you won't recognize us.	Paraphrase
95	عارت می شود بگویی که مال این آبادی هستی	You dread telling anybody that you come from this village	Paraphrase
96	خاله اش بزرگش کرده و حالا می خواهد از سر بازش کند.	His aunt raised him, and now she wants to get him off her back	Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form

Table 2. Frequency of the strategies based on Baker's Model

Selected strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Using an idiom of similar meaning and form	4	4.16%

Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form	10	10.42%
Translation by paraphrase	77	80.21%
Translation by omission	5	5.21%
Total	96	100%

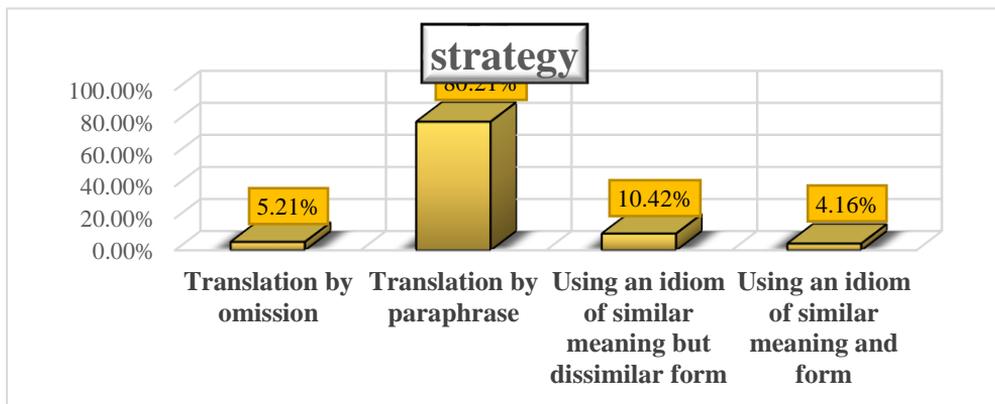


Figure 1. Frequency of the strategies based on Baker's Model

7. Discussion

In her book, *A Corpus-Based Approach*, Moon (1998, p. 3), defines an idiom as "an ambiguous term, used in conflicting ways". Inlay or general use, the idiom has two primary meanings. First, the idiom is a particular means of expressing something in the language, music, art, and so on, which characterizes a person or group; secondly, an idiom is a particular lexical collocation or phrasal lexeme, peculiar to a language (Moon, 1998). It is evident that the people of different countries have diverse ideologies and every society perceives the world differently from the other one. Consequently, the ideologies influence the languages and the ways of expressing meanings.

The translator tries to find the corresponding idioms in English of 96 idioms based on Baker's theory. According to the above table and figure, the translator tried to use "paraphrase strategy" in the most selected idioms to transfer the meaning of the sentences to be faithful as the principle for the translator to render the text directly to produce a similar text in the

target language. Therefore, most of the cases belonged to the "translation by paraphrase".

8. Conclusion

The research was carried out to explore the idioms found in *The Date Palm* story and analyze the strategies used in translating the idioms by applying Baker's translation strategy. Appropriate strategies to translate idioms determine the quality of the idiom translation because the meaning of idioms cannot be extracted from each component word. Also, the shortcomings of the translation of the idiom were indicated in this work.

After analyzing and interpreting data, some significant shortcomings have been observed in the English version: meaningless translation, untranslated idioms, and adding and removing some words from TL. Moreover, the translator applied all the idiomatic strategies, but none of them were equally distributed in the English translation of *The Date Palm*. Based on the received data, "translation by paraphrase" strategies have been used in many cases and frequently by the translator. This strategy is most commonly used in translating idioms when the translator cannot find any equivalents for the source idiom. In Baker's (1992) view, when no equivalents exist, it is not wise to omit the whole idiom but present more clarifications. Because of the lexical or stylistic differences between the two languages, it is not always existed correspondence. Thus, the source idiom should be elaborated more to transfer its meaning to the target language. It should be noted that the given meaning would not be an exact equivalent or semantic equivalent of the source idiom.

Earlier in the study, it was mentioned that the least frequent strategies related to "omission" and "using an idiom of similar meaning and form". *Omission strategy is applied by the translator when there is no close match between the languages' items or when the translator cannot find any equivalents. When the idiom is very difficult to even for the translator, he/she tries to remove the whole or part of the idiom.* So, the translator has omitted some parts of the idioms and has changed an idiomatic expression into a non-idiomatic sentence. Employing the other least frequent strategy, "using an idiom of similar meaning and form", the translator attempts to find an idiom in the target language which is equivalent to the source language both in terms of meaning as well as lexical items. As Baker (1992) stated, this strategy is hardly achieved since languages differ in identifying a single concept.

As elaborated, the translator applied four translation strategies, ranging from the "paraphrase strategy" used at the highest frequency to the

strategy of "using an idiom of similar meaning and form" being used at the lowest frequency. Considering the results, it is recommended that the translator be aware of the translation strategies and theoretical translation issues suggested by different scholars. More importantly, he/ she, as a translator, should have a good command of the target language idiomatic expressions. Also, in translating the literary text like a novel or story, the translator should benefit from creativity to overcome the challenging task of transferring the idiom from the source into the target language.

The study outcomes may be helpful for novice translators who can adopt more suitable approaches for translating idioms. Strategies used by experienced translators can guide them through their work of rendering Persian texts into English.

Eventually, this study hopes that English and Persian idioms receive more attention in the future, especially from translators, since competence with idioms improves and strengthens the translator's language competence in general. Translators are not only required to handle ST idioms well and render them correctly in the TT, but they also must integrate more acceptable and suitable TL idioms into their translations to make expressive and appealing writings rather than mere translations that transform ST words into the TL ones. The researcher expects this study can fulfill the reference required for translation students who want to improve their knowledge on translating idioms. It is worth mentioning that this research will be beneficial as the source of information and reference related to the translation of idioms.

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