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Translating Cultural -Specific Terms from ah dini Kurdish into English: A Case of Compliments in Bahdini Spoken Language

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Abstract

Translating culture-specific terms is not an easy task as it comprises a number of problems and challenges. One of the biggest challenges that may the translators face when translating culture -specific terms is the process of achieving the cultural equivalence. The present paper tries to investigate the problems and difficulties that students face when translating culture-specific compliments from Kurdish Bahdini into English in various cultural situations. The paper precisely examines six Kurdish compliments and scrutinize their rendering into English language. In order to realize this aim the researchers designed a test to scrutinize and analyze the translation of six compliments which are used in daily conversation by Bahdini Kurdish speakers and these translations were reviewed. The findings of the study revealed that different techniques such as addition, paraphrase, omission and literal translation are adopted by the participants when translating compliments.

Introduction

One way to practice our social activities is talking to each other in different social occasions. Being members of community, we learn all skills needed for our interaction in the society we live in. In the structure of conversation many automatic patterns can be found. These instinctive sequences are named

routines. They are produced by different speakers and always consist of two parts; the first part and the second part. (Yousefvand, 2010:91)

One of the most important skills that maintain harmony and intimacy between members of any community is compliment. One of the important speech acts that show harmony, intimacy and solidarity between the

participants and keep and retain social intimacy among society members is the speech act of compliment. Compliments can be defined as intricate combination of positive evaluation that display mutual respect, good feelings and implied friendliness. Accordingly, it appears reasonable to consider compliments as interactive and interpersonal speech acts (Holmes, 1988:454).

To sum up, one can say that compliments are positive evaluations or expressions which attributes credit to someone either explicitly or implicitly for an action or event appreciated in a good and positive way by the the members of the speech community.

1. What is Meant by Compliment?

Cambridge advanced learner's dictionary defines compliment as "remark that expresses approval, admiration or respect". Compliment expressions have been studied by different linguists. One of them is Manes who defined it as "an organized speech act which its aims is to replicate social values and morals in any culture". (Manes,1983:96)

For Herbert (1989) in order to fulfill function of any compliment appropriately, two prerequisites must be met: First, the compliment must have expressions of approbation and appreciation on the part of the speaker. Second it must involve topics like an accomplishment possession, achievement, and personal quality of the speaker". (Cited in Tayib 2011: 5)

Holmes (1988:177) defines a compliment as "one of those speech acts that directly or indirectly attributes recognition to any person other than the speaker." The person is frequently praised for having a positive character, a personal accomplishment, a possession, learning a new talent, etc., and both the hearer and the speaker highly respect this. Thus, compliment can be regarded as spur-of-

the-moment expressions of approval, appreciation and admiration. Wolfson (1983:85-87) demonstrates that since compliment is seen as a spontaneous expression, it is generally believed that it is somehow associated with original expression.

Holmes (1988: 445) states that one of the commonly used speech acts in every day conversation is compliment and its most basic function is as "positively affective speech acts" that "normally attribute 'good' to the addressee". Newton and, Burgoon (1990:509) state that expressions of compliment can be defined as "those types of expressions that are used intentionally by the speaker to make the hearer feel good about an action or the event he or she has done earlier.

Hatch (1992: 67) claims that, compliments, as speech acts, are defined as expressives which are expressions of like and dislike, and therefore a compliment is one form of speech act defined as an utterance holding an appreciation and positive evaluation by the speaker to the hearer. Matsuoka (2003:1) claims that compliments are an "intricate combination of positive evaluation, displayed good feelings, implicit friendliness, and half-admitted desire to please."

As a positive speech act, Wolfson (1983: 89) states that compliment has many functions and the most important one is to maintain, build and foster harmony, solidarity and intimacy between speakers and hearers through showing approval or admiration. For Bach and Harnish compliment can be seen a subclass of speech acts of congratulations, along with felicitations and condolences (1979: 52). Accordingly, they come under their class of acknowledgements, which express some positive, or negative attitude towards others.

To sum up, one can conclude that the main idea behinds compliments is to make others

feel good and its main function is to increase solidarity, intimacy and harmony between the speaker and hearer .

2. Compliment Topics

According to Wolfson (1983:90), there are two basic categories into which the compliments subjects can be divided. They are topics related to appearance and ability.

A. Topic of Appearance

For Wolfson (1983:90), there are two types of compliments topics concerning appearance: personal appearance and possessions.

1. Personal Appearance

Apparel is the only thing that the topic of personal appearance usually deals with.

e.g., I love your blouse.

2. Possession

Material possession is the issue in this case.

e.g., My friend, that is a very nice bike.

B. Ability Topic

Ability topic is the second type of compliments. This topic is classified into two wide-ranging types, specific-act and general ability.

1. General Ability

This type of compliment refers to talent, categorical reference to skill, taste, and personal abilities.

e.g., You are so smart and you clarify things so attractively.

2. Specific-Act Ability

All types of compliments that are specific act belong to this type.

e.g., You are being so kind about this. (Cited in Kuncoro, 2010: xxxix)

3. Culture and Translation.

Translation is one of the tools that can help people communicate across cultures. People can be introduced to different languages and ways of thought through translation. Therefore, in order to train interpreters or translators, it is important to understand the relation between

language and culture. Delisle (1988:74) states that "What actually makes translation a very interesting skill, is that it occurs in the situation of the relations between two different and unrelated cultures, namely two worlds of thought and perception"

For successful English-Kurdish translation, knowledge of the target culture is very important and vital. Needless to say, that lack of clear insight into the target culture may lead to poor comprehension and understanding. The cultural norms, traditions, and beliefs between the English and Kurdish civilizations are incompatible. Hence, what distinguishes each language from others is its own uniqueness and individuality that make it typical and peculiar to the members of speech community who speak it.

It is evident that words serve as symbols for objects, and words are assigned to a wide range of mental categories. For this reason, the linguistic systems are not only the main reason behind having differences between languages, but comprise the different interpretation and understanding of the world by the speakers who live in that world. For the purposes of speech, knowledge in all languages is organized in a variety of ways. Delisle (Delisle, 1988: 2)

To describe culture is to explain how people believe, feel, behave, and act in a society. Larson (1984:431) states that culture is a complex set of "beliefs, attitudes, values and rules which a group of people share". Thus, to transfer culture means implantation of a new set of values, beliefs, behaviors, and folk temperament into another people's realm of cognition.

For Newmark (1988:95), culture can be defined as "the system of life and its manifestations that are specific to a community which uses a specific language as its ways of expression, thereby acknowledging that each

language has its own culturally precise structures". Newmark classifies cultural terms as follows:

- Ecology: winds, flora, fauna etc.
- Material culture: houses, clothes, food and towns.
- Social culture: work and leisure.
- Organizations: activities, customs, concepts: political and administrative, religious
- Habits and Gestures.

A word from the source language may frequently refer to an idea that is foreign and unheard of in the target culture. The concept can be concrete or abstract, a religious belief, a social norm or custom or even a type of food (Baker 1992:21).

When translating from one language into another, the translator's role is to simplify the transmission of the message, meaning and cultural elements from the source language into target language and produce an equivalent response from the receivers (Nida, 1964:13). Nida claims that both cultural and linguistic differences between the target language and the source language are of equal importance and he concluded that difference between cultures are the main reason behind the rise of complications for the translators rather than differences in the structures of source and target languages. What provides or gives translation techniques, strategies and solutions to overcome this problem is the literature of translation.

Two opposing methods were suggested by Newmark (1988). The first method is transference. It is a strategy when a source language word is transferred into a target language text in its original form which gives color to the text, for example keeping cultural names and concepts. The second one is

componential analysis which eliminates the culture and highlights the message.

4. Strategies for Translating Culture - Specific Terms.

It is a fact that different cultures have different manifestations. That is to say, some notions and items are limited to a specific - culture and country and do not exist in any other cultures. Therefore, in order to render or even write about them, it is important to comprehend these items. Culture -specific items are 1) geographical (geographic formations, man-made geographical objects, flora and fauna that is special to a certain place); 2) ethnographic (food and drink, clothing, places of living, furniture, pots, vehicles, names of occupations and tools); 3) art and culture (music and dance, musical instruments, feasts, games, rituals and their characters); 4) ethnic (names of people, nicknames); and 5) socio-political (administrative-territorial units, offices and representatives, ranks, military realia). The notion of culture is vital to recognize the implications of culture -specific items.

Translation is mainly defined as an activity of transferring meaning and it requires cross-linguistic skills. There is a close relationship between translation and culture. One field that the theorists of translation and translators have focused on is the translatability of the so-called culture-specific, culturally bound expressions.

According to Baker (1992:21) being a good translator, means having good information about semantics and lexical sets and the meaning and value of the words in the source language. Thus, the translator will be able to develop techniques in order to handle the problem of not having equivalence. These techniques are set from general to specific in a hierarchical way.

It is commonly held that it is impossible to have an ideal translation of texts that are full of cultural items. However, the translation concentrating on the objective of writing the source language text is always probable. Whether we translate the culture -specific items or not, the chosen procedure rests on their importance and function in the text under discussion.

According to Munday (2001:104), different strategies can be adopted in translating culture-specific items like literal translation and equivalence

When translating compliments, the strategy of literal translation does not inevitably carry the real message intended in the source language. The second strategy, equivalence, comes in many forms, and it is a difficult task for the translator to achieve equivalence in the target language complement. Baker (1988:21) offered a number of strategies for translating culture-specific items and the commonest one is the translation by "cultural substitution"; this strategy includes using a loan word or a loan word plus an explanation, paraphrase, using unrelated words, and omission. For translating culture-specific items, Vinay and Darbelnet (1989:62-6) present similar strategies such as; paraphrase, addition, and deletion.

5. The Model of The Study

The study provides the types of compliments, the procedures followed in translating them, and the findings of the translation test. The sample of the study were 40 students of 3rd stage at English Dept./ College of Basic Education at Dohuk University. The translation tests were given to them in the middle of the first semester 2019-2020.

The test consisted of a sample of the 6 most communal compliments used daily in the spoken Bahdini Kurdish, and translated by (40) students into English. The data of compliments

was taken from research about compliment conducted by Dr. Sherzad Sabri Ali and it was published in Zakho Journal of Humanities. Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 15–29, March. -2019.

Every compliment was analyzed according to its context /occasion and the meaning of the source text compliment was clarified and explained. The types of translation were considered as paraphrase, literal, addition, and omission.

The rendering was judged as correct, acceptable, unacceptable or failed to translate. If the compliment was rendered by using cultural equivalence, the rendering was considered to be correct the i.e., the source language cultural word is rendered by a target language dynamic equivalence or cultural word i.e., the message in the target language is the same in the source language.

When the meaning of the compliment is paraphrased, the rendering was considered to be acceptable. At the same time, if the compliment was rendered literally, resulting in a weak and uncertain and confused meaning in English, the rendering was regarded unacceptable.

6. Data Analysis

When translating culture -specific terms like compliment, translators encounter a number of problems because of cultural and linguistic gaps that exist between Kurdish and English. The main task of the translator is to find an appropriate equivalent in the target text. If the equivalent does not exist, the translator's task is to render or paraphrase the compliment into English. The inquiry of translation strategies comes to the surface, i.e., paraphrase, literal translation, omission and addition.

The findings of the study revealed that a number of students did not manage to render culture-bound compliments. Some of them also used literal translation strategy which led to

have awkward English and uncertain and confused meanings. Due to the misuse of some lexical words, some students also gave meaningless expressions and collocations. Students used different strategies in translating the compliment and like literal translation, paraphrase, addition, and omission.

6.1 Compliment 1: تومەلایەکی دوازده علمی

This compliment is a very famous one in Bahdini Kurdish and is said to a person, who is very smart, intelligent, knowledgeable and full of knowledge. It is also said to any artful person. It literally means, "You are Mullah of twelve sciences".

Subjecting the translations in table (1) to close scrutiny, one could indeed say that 27.5% of the respondents managed to translate the first compliment and provided correct translations such as "You are an expert" and "You are a talented person" as they were deemed equivalent to "تومەلایەکی دوازده علمی". Correspondingly, sentences such "you know everything" and "you are full of information" were also found to be equivalent to "تومەلایەکی دوازده علمی".

Similarly, 27.5% of the translations were found as an acceptable translation like "You are smart" and "You are a scientist". because their meanings were close enough to "تومەلایەکی دوازده علمی". It is clear that these renderings signify the paraphrase strategy of the source text compliment though they are not often used in daily life. The percentage for unacceptable (literally) translations was 42.5%. Translations like "You are imam with twelve sciences" and "You are very educated mullah" deemed to be not equivalent. These two suggested translations were completely unacceptable as the students misused some lexical words and translated them literally. It is noteworthy that only one student failed to render the above

phrase" تومەلایەکی دوازده علمی "and that compromises 2.5% from overall.

Table (1). Frequency & Percentage of the First Compliment Translation

The Compliment	Correct translation		Acceptable translation		Unacceptable translation		Filed to Translate	
	Fr	Pe	Fr	Pe	Fr	Pe	Fr	P
تومەلایەکی دوازده علمی	1	27.5%	1	27.5%	1	42.5%	1	2.5%

6.2 Compliment 2 نووکی عەمی طوزیی

"Amme Guze" was a popular Kurdish courageous person who stood against abuses and gangsters over a wide area of the place he was living in. This phrase is used now to compliment a person who has similar characteristics of this well-known personality.

Judging from the respondents' renderings in table (2), one can say that 22.5% of the translations were considered to be correct translations as the strategy of paraphrase is adopted; such as "You are so brave" and "You are like the rock". As shown in the table 17.5% of the translations were found to be acceptable as students used expressions such as, "you are famous" and you are the most well-known person. On the other hand, the great majority of translations (60%) were found to be unacceptable since the students translated this compliment literally. "You are like Ame Guze" and "You are Ame Guze".

In the researchers' opinion, the great majority of translators misjudged the meaning of source text compliment and accordingly translated it literally and were deemed wrong.

Table (2). Frequency & Percentage of the Second Compliment Translation

The Compliment	Correct translation		Acceptable translation		Unacceptable translation		Filed to Translate	
	Fr	Per	Fr	Per	Fr	Per	Fr	Per
تووي عتي طووي	9	22.5%	7	17.5%	24	60%	0	0%

7.3 Compliment 3 ضاڤين تة جوانن

This phrase is a very famous one in all dialects of the Kurdish language and is used frequently by all people in different occasions. This compliment is used to respond to a compliment like “you are nice, beautiful, stylish, your jacket is beautiful, that color fits you, what a beautiful address, shoes, hair ,etc.”. The literal translation of it is “your eyes are beautiful”.

Looking closely at the translations supplied by the students in table (3), one soon realizes that 75 % of translations were deemed unacceptable as the translators translated it literally “your eyes are beautiful”. On the other hand, only few students were able to translate in a correct way. Expressions like “thanks for seeing me in this way” and “the way you look is beautiful” were found to be acceptable. These compliments form 7.5%. Similarly, correct translations were 7.5%. Translations like “That is nice from you” and “you are beautiful” were correct as the students have added additional words in an attempt to explain the real meaning of the compliment.

Table (3). Frequency & Percentage of the Third Compliment Translation

The Compl	Correct	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Filed to

The Compliment	Correct translation		Acceptable translation		Unacceptable translation		Filed to Translate	
	Fr	Per	Fr	Per	Fr	Per	Fr	Per
ضاڤين تة جوانن	3	7.5%	7	17.5%	30	75%	0	0%

7.4 Compliment 4 ذ جاميريا خو ديبدي

A phrase that is used in Kurdish language when someone wants to compliment another person about his goodness and respect.

A close examination of the table (4) reveals that three of the translations deemed correct as equivalents such as “Thank you, that means a lot to me” constituted 7.5 percent of the total translations. On the other hand, acceptable translations such as the paraphrase “That is nice of you, May God please you “form 40%”. Translations such as “it is your job” and “it does not matter” were found unacceptable as they show a kind of disrespect and they form 40% as well. While 12.5% of participants didn’t succeed in translating the phrase mentioned.

Table (4). Frequency & Percentage of the Fourth Compliment Translation

The Compliment	Correct translation		Acceptable translation		Unacceptable translation		Filed to Translate	
	Fr	Per	Fr	Per	Fr	Per	Fr	Per
ذ جاميريا خو ديبدي	3	7.5%	16	40%	5	12.5%		

7.5 Compliment 5 توذي بووية ناغا

This expression is also a popular one in Kurdish language and it refers to people who are very snobbish and proud of themselves.

Working through the translations carefully, one soon notices that 12.5% of the participants provided adequate renderings such as “you are so proud of yourself” and “you become a famous person”. Similarly, acceptable translations form 7.5% such as “You look like a chairman”. Unacceptable translations were provided by most of the students and it forms 62.5%. Translations like “you have been a king” was rejected as it does not match the idea of the source text compliment. Finally, failed translations were 17.5%.

Table (5). Frequency & Percentage of the Fifth Compliment Translation

The Compliment	Correct translation		Acceptable translation		Unacceptable translation		Filed to Translate	
	Fr	Per	Fr	Per	Fr	Per	Fr	Per
تو ذ بي بووية ناغا	5	12.5%	3	7.5%	25	62.5%	7	17.5%

7.6 Compliment 6 تووة كي عة ليكا بة تا

“Alike Bate “was living in the beginning of the 20th century in a Kurdish city named Nusebin in Turkey. This person was unjust and famous for his extortion over poor people.

Without having to dig deep, one can say that most of participants failed to supply correct translation because they had no information about that person. Also “Alike Bate” was not from the same area that respondents live in.

That’s why it was found that only 7.5 of translations were correct particularly “you are so adventurous” and “you are a great man”. Similarly, the phrase like “You are such a bossy” was found to be acceptable 5%. Unacceptable translations were 67.5% as students provided literal translations such as “you are like Alike Bate” , “you are like duck Ali” and “you are like a chicken” were completely unacceptable because they are deemed awkward and uncommon. Finally, 20% of students failed to translate this compliment.

Table (6). Frequency & Percentage of the Sixth Compliment Translation

The Compliment	Correct translation		Acceptable translation		Unacceptable translation		Filed to Translate	
	Fr	Per	Fr	Per	Fr	Per	Fr	Per
تووة كي عة ليكا بة تا	3	7.5%	2	5%	27	67.5%	8	20%

7. Conclusion

The present research has come up with the following findings:

1. Translating culture-specific terms from Kurdish to English poses challenges and difficulties for translators firstly because of the different meaning of individual elements of culture -specific terms in both languages, and because of the great differences between the two cultures.
2. Finding the most appropriate strategy in the process of translating the source culture -specific terms into the target language is translator's task. A source language culture-specific term may have no equivalent in the target language.

3. Students have adopted different strategies when translating compliments from Kurdish into English ranging from literal, translation, paraphrase, addition, and omission. The paraphrase technique is the best strategy in the translation of culture-bound compliments
4. It is noteworthy that some students failed to translate compliments 1,3,5, and 6 due to their poor knowledge about compliment in English culture and having difficulty in finding appropriate equivalence .
5. English-Kurdish translators have to be aware of the differences between the two linguistic systems, since these differences may cause problems in translation.
6. In translating the data translators encountered many obstacles and difficulties are due to differences in cultural, lexical, and grammatical levels between Kurdish and English.

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