

## The Strategies Employed in Translation of Idioms from English into Persian: the case of Dickens' *Great Expectations*

Ebrahim Samani <sup>1</sup>  Gohar Golampour<sup>2</sup>

1. Assistant Professor, Higher Education Complex of Bam, Bam, Iran.  
*samani@bam.ac.ir (corresponding author)*

2. Master of English Translation, Higher Education Complex of Bam, Bam, Iran  
*gohar.gholampour@gmail.com*

### Abstract

The present study aimed at examining the repertoire of strategies employed by Iranian translators in translating English idioms into Persian. To achieve this aim, the study focused on Charles Dickens' novel *Great Expectations*. The strategies proposed by Mona Baker (1992) were the selected framework for the analysis. The results of descriptive statistics helped the researchers answer two research questions with regards to the types and frequencies of the strategies used. The findings showed that the least frequently employed strategy was paraphrasing (4.28%) and the most frequently used one was “using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form” (67.14 %). The findings of the study can be of help to educators in providing a comprehensive map of strategies used by Iranian translators in their translation tasks.

**Keywords:** Idioms, Translation strategy, Persian translators, *Great Expectations*

**Citation:** Samani, E. & Gholampour, G. (2024). *Applications of Language Studies*, 2(1), 171-184.

Received: 2023-06-01

Revised: 2023-09-14

Accepted: 2023-10-20

Article type: Research paper

P-ISSN: 2588-6975

E-ISSN: 2588-6983

Publisher: Hazrat-e Masoumeh University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22034/jals.2024.713346>

## **1. Introduction**

The mastery of any language includes being familiar with words, phrases, proverbs, metaphors, and idioms. Idioms are usually referred to as the set of words whose meaning cannot be understood simply by knowing each word. Idioms are considered as one of the beauties of every language which spiritualize and colorize that language. They are closely connected to the culture of every society. The great works of art are produced on a daily basis throughout the world and attract the attention of interested people. Translators are at the forefront of addressing this interest. They adopt different strategies in their task of translation. It is of utmost importance to get a clear picture of the repertoire of strategies used by Iranian English literature translators in their task of translation. This will benefit the prospective translators at the beginning of their career as they encounter the complicity of language for the first time especially related to idioms.

As a matter of fact, the studies of this kind will help not only the beginner translators but also the translators of all levels of proficiency. Examining the distribution of strategies in the translation of literary works of art will help young translators in getting familiar with the range of strategies as well as the most frequently and the least frequently used ones. This study aimed at finding out the most and the least frequent strategies employed by Iranian English literature translators in translating the idioms. The two research questions of the current study are the following:

1. What strategies are used in the translation of idioms by Iranian translators according to Mona Baker's framework?
2. What are the most and the least frequent strategies used strategies in the translation of idioms by Iranian translators according to Mona Baker's framework?

## **2. Review of Literature**

According to Oxford dictionary, translation is the rendering of the meaning of a word or text in another language. Larson (1984) also defines an idiom as the strings of words, whose meaning is not inferred by the meaning of the individual words. As one of the strategies delved into types of strategies used in the translation of English idioms, Khosravi and Khatib (2012) focused on the novels "To kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee and "From Mice and

Men" by John Steinbeck. They analyzed the book according to the strategies proposed by Mona Baker (1992). The findings of their study indicated that the "translation by paraphrase" was the most frequently used strategy with a percentage of 71.25% and the least frequently used strategy was "using an idiom of similar meaning and form" with a percentage of 2.21%. They concluded that the sufficient mastery of idioms in the target language accompanied by the element of creativity is essential for translators.

In another study by Mohsen and Mozafar (2013), the strategies employed in the translation of English subtitles of two Persian television series "Zero Point Orbit," and "The Tenth Night" were analyzed. Like in the previous study, the most frequently used strategy was "translation by paraphrase" with a percentage of 72 %. The translation of about 5 % of idioms was not correct as the translators translated them incorrectly. The strategy of "using an idiom of similar meaning and form" was absent. According to the authors, translators paraphrase or delete source language idioms instead of using equivalents for them in the target language.

Farahani and Ghasemi (2012) also examined the use of different strategies in the translation of *the Adventures of Pinocchio* according to Mona Baker's framework. In accordance with previous studies, "paraphrase" was the most favorable strategy of translators with 43 percentage. The next frequently used strategy was "using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form" with a percentage of 40. "Translation by omission", and "using an idiom of similar meaning and form" were in the next places in terms of frequencies. It seems that strategies like "using an idiom of similar meaning and form" and even "using an idiom of similar meaning and dissimilar form" are the least favorable strategies among translators as using them requires the allocation of an enormous amount of time and energy not to mention a complete mastery of target language and especially demotivates young translators from the use of these strategies and they may choose them as a last resort. All the evidence confirms the fact that proficiency affects the choice of strategy. Smadi and Alrishan (2015) also highlight this fact by stating that diversity in the strategies of translators is the direct result of their linguistic and pragmatic competence.

In contrast with previous findings, in Hashemian and Arezi's study (2015), the subtitles of two movies "Bring It On," and "Mean Girls" were examined according to Mona Baker's theoretical framework. Unlike the already mentioned studies, "omission" was the most frequently used strategy. "Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form," "using an idiom of similar meaning and form," and "translating by paraphrase" were the next strategies in terms of frequencies. Further examinations may yield useful insights regarding why their findings did not follow the pattern. Maybe studies like Ali and Rushaidi (2017) can be considered as good examples of the studies in answering these kinds of questions. In their study, the researchers presented 60 undergraduate students of a university in Oman with some idioms. Then, the students were asked to select the strategies from a list of strategies and think aloud while doing this. According to their findings, inability in finding a suitable equivalent, misinterpretation of the meaning, and using literal translation which did not convey the same meaning were the main difficulties that the students faced. The findings indicated that they used paraphrasing, literal translation, and omission to address their problems in translating.

In another study, Ahmadi (2017) also analyzed the translation of three novels of "lord of the flies", "the old man and the sea", and "animal farm" into Persian. As it was expected, "translation by paraphrase" was the most frequently used strategy with a percentage of 42.3%. The others from the most frequently used to the least frequently used were "using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form," and "using an idiom of similar meaning and form". It appears that these two strategies always lose the first place to paraphrasing in a competition to achieve the first place.

In two studies that were conducted in Indonesian culture, there was a focus on the strategies employed in translation from Indonesian into English. In previous studies the most frequently used strategy was paraphrasing (Fitri, Faidi, & Hartono, 2019; Habizar, 2016). According to the authors, the frequent use of paraphrase in Indonesian context indicates that English and Indonesian cultures do not share so many commonalities. ILI (2016) also highlights that when the extent of mismatch between the source and target language increases, the task of translation will encounter serious problems. He also indicated that lack

of proficiency contributes to a translator's reluctance to find an idiom and choose an appropriate strategy in its translation. The evidence for the fact is present in the findings of Kovacs (2016) who focused on the strategy use of a group of translator trainees without any previous experience in translation. According to the findings, of many available strategies, they favored the strategy of paraphrase.

In contrast with previous studies which found paraphrasing as the most frequent strategy, Miandoab (2018) analyzed the strategies used in adding English subtitles into Iranian movies. According to his findings, "using the idiom of similar meaning and form" was the most frequently used strategy in preparing English subtitles of Iranian movies. However, in a study by Neshkovska (2018), using the strategy of "similar meaning and form" was absent due to the huge cultural and linguistic differences between source and target language in the study. According to Strakšienė (2009), one of factors that are indicative of the uniqueness of a culture and language is the existence of idioms. As a result, their translation required a complete understanding of the source and target languages. According to Shojaei (2012), challenges that a translator faces in translating idioms and fixed idiomatic expressions are: 1) idioms that have no equivalent in TL; 2) idioms that matches in both source and target language but differs in meaning; 3) idioms that are used in both literal and idiomatic meanings simultaneously; 4) idioms that are used in different contexts.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Materials**

In this study, the novel *Great expectations* by Charles Dickens was chosen using convenience sampling as the focus of the research study. As there are many translations of this book in Iran, the oldest and the latest translations were selected for the analysis. The first one (T1) was translated by Ebrahim Younesi (Sirvan Azad) and the second one (T2) was translated by Hamid Reza Balouch. In order to achieve inter-rater agreement, the researchers analyzed some introductory pages of the novel and then discussed the cases of inconsistencies with each other. Then, about 70 idiomatic expressions were extracted from the first twelve chapters of the novel. They were analyzed according to Mona Baker's suggested strategies to answer the research questions of the study.

### 3.2. Data Analysis

The selected data were analyzed using the strategies suggested by Mona Baker. Table 1 represents the list of these strategies accompanied by their definition and their examples. Then, descriptive statistics were used to represent the result of the analysis through tables, figures, and percentages.

**Table 1**

*Mona Baker's Strategies, their Definitions, and their Examples*

Strategy	Meaning	Example
Using an idiom of similar meaning and form	This strategy conveys roughly the same meaning as that of the source language idiom and, in addition, consists of equivalent lexical items.	Drove me out of my mind. هوش از سرم به در کرده بود.
Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form	Through this strategy, an idiom or fixed expression in the target language which similar in meaning to that in the source language, but consists of different lexical items is selected as an equivalent in the translation task.	Keep still, you little devil, or I'll cut your throat. صدات را در نیار.
Translation by paraphrase	Through this strategy, idiomatic expressions are translated in the target language because using idiomatic expressions in target language seems inappropriate due to differences in stylistic preferences of source and target language.	. . . as if he were mentally casting me and himself up. انگار داشت توی ذهنش ما دو نفر را می دید.
Translation by omission	through this strategy, a translator may decide to omit an idiom in the target text; because it has no close match in the target language, its meaning cannot be easily paraphrased, or for stylistic reasons.	no cases of this strategy in the analysis.
Compensation	Through this strategy, 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. This strategy is not restricted to idiomaticity or fixed expressions and may be used to make up for any loss of meaning, emotional force, or stylistic effect which may not be possible to reproduce directly at a given point in the target text.	no cases of this strategy in the analysis.

#### 4. Results

The study aimed at answering two research questions which were related to the type and frequencies of strategies used in the translation of two Iranian translators of the selected novel *Great Expectations*. Table 2 represents the result of the analysis of the first selected translation by Ebrahim Younesi (T1).

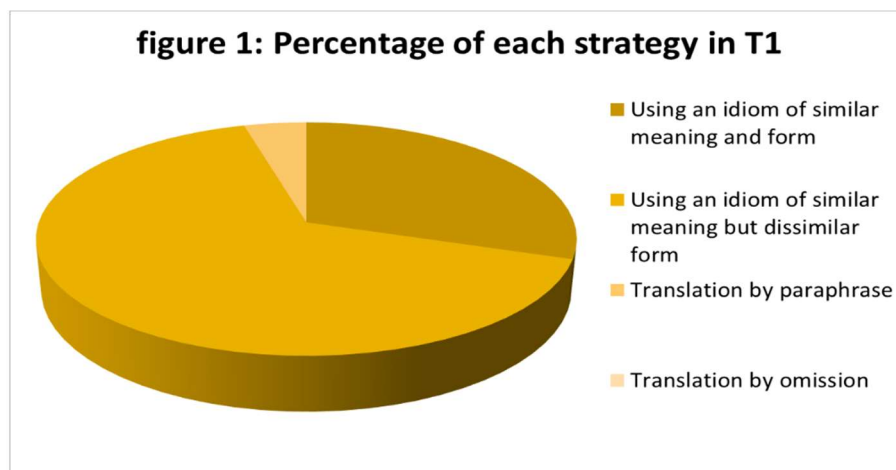
**Table 2**

*The Distribution of Strategies Used by the First Translator (T1)*

Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
Using an idiom of similar meaning and form	21	30%
Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form	46	65.71%
Translation by paraphrase	3	4.28%
Translation by omission	0	0
Total	70	100%

According to Table 2, the most frequently used strategy by T1 was "using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form" with a percentage of 65.71% and the least frequently used strategy was "translation by paraphrase" with the percentage of 4.28%. The strategy of "translation by omission" was absent in the translation of T1 of the idioms of this novel. The same information has been presented in Figure 1:

Figure 1 shows that the strategy of "using an idiom of similar meaning and form" was the most salient strategy in the collection of strategies (T1). The results of the analysis of the second Translation by T2 of the selected novel is presented in the Table 3:



**Figure 1**

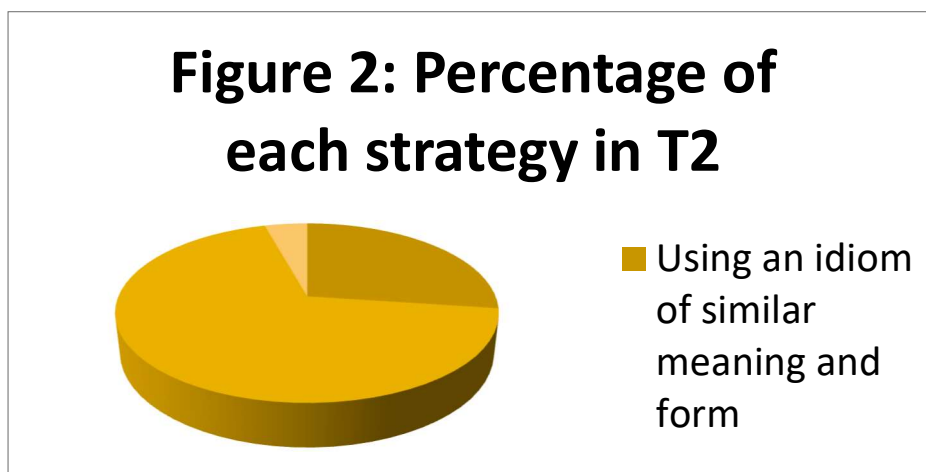
*Percentage of each Strategy Used by T1*

**Table 3**

*The Distribution of Strategies Used by the Second Translator (T2)*

Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
Using an idiom of similar meaning and form	19	27.14%
Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form	48	68.57%
Translation by paraphrase	3	4.28%
Translation by omission	0	0
Total	70	100%

According to Table 3, the most frequently used strategy for T2 was also "using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form" with the percentage of 68.57%. The least frequently used strategy was also "translation by paraphrase" with the percentage of 4.28%. Like the first Translation (T1), in the second Translation (T2), there was no case of "translation by omission". Figure 2 shows the same findings in a graphical format.



**Figure 2**

*Percentage of each Strategy Used by T2*

As Figure 2 indicates, using an idiom of similar meaning and form accounts for a major part of the repertoire of strategies used by T2. In order to obtain a total percentage of the strategies used in both translations, the statistics of both translators were added to each other and the result is presented in Table 4:

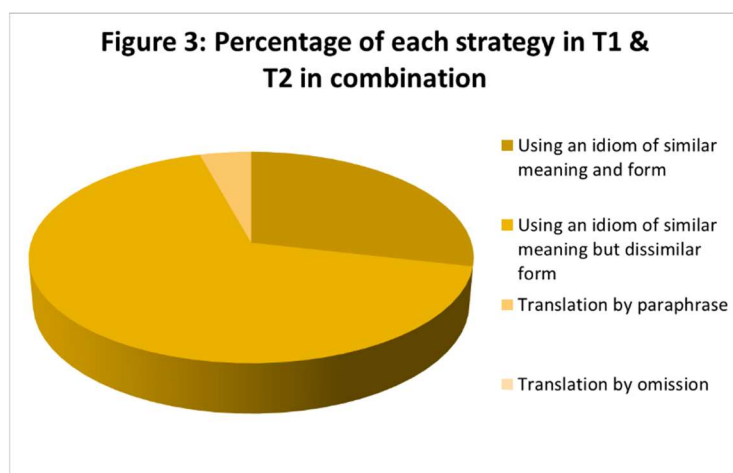
**Table 4**

*The Distribution of Strategies Used by both Translators*

Strategies	Percentage
Using an idiom of similar meaning and form	28.57%
Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form	67.14%
Translation by paraphrase	4.28%
Translation by omission	0
Total	100%

According to Table 4 and Figure 3, the strategy of “using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form” was rated as the first strategy among other used strategies with a

percentage of 67.14%. The other strategies from the most frequently used to the least frequently used were “using an idiom of similar meaning and form,” and “translation by paraphrase”, respectively. The “translation by omission” was not used at all in both translations.



**Figure 3**

*Distribution of Strategies Used by both Translators*

## **5. Discussion**

The current study was conducted to examine the type and frequencies of strategies that the translators use in the task of translation. The focus of the study was on the novel “Great Expectations” by Charles Dickens. According to the results, the strategy favored by the two selected translators was "using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form", and the least frequently used strategy by them was "translation by paraphrase". The findings of this study contradict the findings of previous studies (e.g., Farahani & Ghasemi, 2012; Khosravi & Khatib, 2012; Kovacs, 2016; Mohsen & Mozafar, 2013) in that paraphrasing was used as a last resort by translators. On the other hand, this finding is to some extent in accordance with Hashemian and Arezi (2015) and Miandoab’s findings (2018) in that “using similar meaning and form”, and “using similar meaning and dissimilar form” were reported as the most frequently used strategies.

According to the results, it can be said that these translators had an acceptable performance in finding equivalents for the selected idioms. In other words, as the proficiency and experience of translators increase, they tend to keep using strategies like omission and paraphrase at a minimum. In accordance with previous studies, “the translation by omission” was absent which is another evidence of the quality of the translation of the selected translators. The selected translators are well-established and they translate profusely in an Iranian context.

According to Strakšienė (2009), for a task as delicate as translation, a complete understanding of both source and target languages is necessary. As it was mentioned, the least frequently used strategy was “paraphrasing”. Lack of using the strategy of paraphrasing implies that both of the translators dedicated their time and energy to convey their message completely. It can be said that there is a connection between proficiency in translation and the type of strategies used by translators (ILI, 2016; Smadi & Alrishan, 2015). Unfortunately, nowadays, a significant number of the translations are economically oriented and they are conducted in a shorter period of time. That is why translators, especially the young ones, mostly employ “translation by paraphrase” in their translations. They simply benefit from the fact that the Persian language is afforded with many equivalents that can replace almost every English idiom. Unfortunately, this fact, most of the time is overlooked by the community of book readers as they do not have access to the original text and the required time for evaluation.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study investigated the most and the least strategies used in the translation of idioms of the novel “Great Expectations”. The translated idioms were analyzed through the lens of the strategies suggested by Mona Baker. The findings indicated that the most and the least frequently used strategies were respectfully “using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form” with a percentage of 67.14% and “translation by paraphrase” with a percentage of 4.28%. The findings of this study can help differentiate the high-quality translations from those which have been done haphazardly considering the strategies that have been used. It

also indicates that knowledge of the target language is of utmost importance which guarantees the quality of translation.

As the novel selected for the study is one of the famous works of Charles Dickens and, as a result, many publishers have published its translation, reviewing all these translations and selecting the most appropriately translated books for the study were impossible. Thus, the researchers of the current study, focused on the two translations based on convenience sampling. Future studies can expand the scope of this study by including a large number of novels or different translations of the same novel. Researchers can also study the type and frequencies of the used strategies across gender, proficiency or age.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) certify/certifies that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in the present research paper.

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