

Abdulmenem Hamdache
Lebanese International University
Tripoli, Lebanon
raycosta77@yahoo.com

Contrastive study of Arabic and English idioms and pragmatic accuracy of online translation applications

Abstract

When Lebanese English language learners send emails to their instructor, they translate Arabic idioms into English using online applications. This often results in incoherent and inconsistent translation that hampers communication between student and instructor. Wrong semantic and pragmatic use of English as L2 in case of idioms leads to difficulty in verbalizing the necessary meaning. Therefore, this research is aimed at contrasting and comparing idioms between Arabic and English, particularly, two Arabic idioms *مربط الفرس* ‘the bottom line’ and *بنت الحلال* ‘a bride’ widely used in writing and speaking, to find out whether the concordances and collocations of these idioms concur and differ in meaning when translated into English using online applications. When the idioms are literally translated, the meaning totally changes. This study adopts corpus linguistics approach making use of 2 corpora – International Corpus of Arabic Website of Bibliotheca Alexandrina and The Corpus of Contemporary American English – to find and analyze instances quantitatively and qualitatively of how the two idioms collocated and concurred in Arabic and English. Continuous sampling of the tokens and contextual analysis enabled to list all the meanings found for the idioms. The results indicate that it is possible for both Arabic idioms to find English units (a multiword unit and a word correspondingly) with meaning equivalency, however, oftentimes their translated versions (especially of the second idiom) lacked accuracy to provide the literal and pragmatic meanings of the idioms.

Keywords: phraseology, prefabs, idiom, meaning equivalency, collocation, concordance, corpus linguistics

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