

***The Emotive Meaning in some Arabic Islamic  
Formulaic Expressions with Reference to  
Translation A Critical Study***

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تأريخ القبول: ٢٠٠٩/٩/١٦

تأريخ التقديم: ٢٠٠٩/٧/١٢

**Introduction:**

One of the most common features of a language is that it, in one way or another, contains a large number of expressions which fall in different culture-specific fields. Arabic shares this characteristic with other languages. On many occasions Arabs may use or come into contact with some social expressions that bear some religious impressions. These expressions are peculiar to the Arab Islamic culture and are genuine parts of Arabic. In addition to their social function, such expressions hold to a large extent some type of affective meaning, the effect worked on the addressee by using one particular linguistic expression rather than others that might have been used to express the same literal message on part of both speaker and receptor.

As far as the question of translation is concerned, some arguments may arise:

- 1- To what extent are such expressions translatable from Arabic into English?
- 2- Does the translator succeed in conveying the same effect to the English receptor as that experienced by the Arab receptor?
- 3- Finally, does the translator's TL cultural background facilitate achieving the same effect on the TL receptor as that experienced by the SL receptor?

**Discussion:**

From the very beginning, man has been a social being and has lived in societies (Lado, 1964:24). In doing so, most people spend a considerable part of their life talking, listening, reading and writing. It has been argued that a person doing these activities may come into contact with as many as

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100,000 words a day. This is tantamount to saying that the use of language is an integral part of being human (Aitchison, 1987:1).

Language is a means of communication. It is the best means of communication and interaction between people. A language therefore must have meaning to be conveyed to the addressee. Thus, on most occasions, meaning is regarded as an integral part of language just as language is an integral part of being human.

Since people began to live in groups, they have invented and developed patterned ways of doing things and talking about them that facilitate the communication and interaction necessary for social living. When such patterned ways of acting, talking, thinking, and feeling become sufficiently uniform in one society and sufficiently different from those of others, they constitute a culture (Lado, 1964:24).

A people's culture consists of all the ideas, beliefs, feelings and ways of doing things created by the group (Bohannon, 1979:942). Lado defines culture as a structured system of patterned behavior, (cited in Ilyas, 1989:122).

Since Language is an integral part of being human, one can argue that language is therefore regarded as an integral part of culture, a people's whole way of living. Language reflects the interests, ideas, customs and other cultural aspects of a community. The vocabulary of a language manifests the culturally important areas whether religious, aesthetic, social, ritual, etc... (ibid). A language therefore is a central component of culture through which the other cultural components are expressed.

When a person comes into contact with people of another culture, s/he may notice that they speak a different language, dress differently and have some characteristics of behavior that identify them as members of a different society. This superficial recognition of cultural groups denotes that there are, indeed, very different cultures within the unity of the human race (Lado, 1964:24). But this does not mean that cultures are always dissimilar. Some cultures are strikingly similar, others are partially dissimilar (Ismail, 1988:44; see also Saleem, 2001:33).

Bohannon points out that cultures, whether similar or different, have some common features that result from the basic needs shared by all people (Bohannon, 1979:499; see also Saleem, 2001:33). One of these common features is the existence of the so-called formulaic expressions which have

some different connotations and/or functions. Many of such expressions fall in an aspect of language referred to by Malinoweski (1923) as "Phatic Communion" in which words do not convey meaning but have a purely social function (cited in Palmer, 1981:52). They are purely used to cement the social relationships between people. Many of them fall on a neutral ground. They have acquired a common global destination in that they are used and understood by the public all over the world. The following English examples are a case in point: such as; "good morning", "good day", "good afternoon", "good evening", "good night", "good luck", "good appetite", "congratulations", "nice holiday", "nice journey", "merry Christmas", "happy new year", "welcome", "most welcome", "hello", "goodbye", "oh", "ah", "here are you", "how kind!", "how do you do?", "how are you?", "nice to meet you", "not at all", etc... Some others fall in a rather culture-specific grounds such as the different talks about the weather used by the Europeans and the different talks and questions about health and the family used by the Arabs.

In this paper, the researchers are focusing on another type of formulaic expressions that hold both social function as well as some kind of "affective meaning".

Arabic, indeed, contains a large number of expressions that are used in numerous situations and hold teachings and conventions deeply rooted in the Arab-Islamic culture. In addition, it seems very difficult to convey the emotiveness they hold into other languages; the following are some examples:

"كثر الله خيرك" ، "عظم الله اجرک" ، "حيّك الله" ، "شكر الله سعيكم" ، "سعيكم مشكور" ، "بارك الله فيك" ، "بوركت" ، "جزاك الله خيرا" ، اسكنه الله فسيح جناته" ، "توفاه الله" ، رحمه الله" ، "حفظه الله" ، "كن مع الله" ، "توكل على الله" ، "استعن بالله" ، "اشكر الله" ، "اتقي الله" ، "استغفر الله" ، "معاذ الله" ، "اعوذ بالله" ، "ما شاء الله" ، "ان شاء الله" ، "لا سامح الله" ، "لا قدر الله" ، "الحمد لله" ، "حمدا لله" ، "الشكر لله" ، "تقبل الله" ، "ذرية صالحة".

Emotive meaning or emotiveness which is based on the emotive intention of the speaker is one of the cultural problems which faces the translator in translating such expressions.

Stevenson defines emotiveness as a tendency of a word to produce an effective response by people (Stevenson, 1963:21-22). On many occasions, words or phrases are intended to arouse emotional reactions on the part of the receptors; that is to say, certain words or expressions tend to produce emotive responses showing that there is an emotive meaning. In

this regard, Shunnaq argues that some text producers use neutral/objective vocabulary, whereas others use emotive/subjective vocabulary- that is to say, some types of texts are intended to arouse emotional reactions towards a special topic (Shunnaq, 1993:39).

### **Emotiveness and Equivalence:**

Translatability wobbles between smoothness and complexity. Theorists of translation agree that translation is the rendering of the same ideas from the SL into the TL. They also agree that the translator is both a text receiver and a text producer who should firstly read and understand the SLT then convey it into the TLT. In other words, the translator is expected to produce a TLT which should be equivalent, creative, genuine, and has the SL cultural savor.

On many occasions, complex dilemmas may face the translator in his endeavor to find or select a translation equivalence for an expression. Due to the degree of cultural relatedness and linguistic affiliation between the source and receptor codes used to convey the message, such difficulties alternate in their sharpness and diversity between the least and the smooth to the numerous and the sharp. In this regard, Nida states that the process of translation may take place in one of the following different cases:

- 1- The translation between closely related languages and cultures, e.g., from French into English and vice-versa.
- 2- The translation between diverse linguistic systems and closely related cultures, e.g., from German into Hungarian or from Swedish into Finnish and vice-versa.
- 3- The translation between different linguistic affiliations and highly diverse cultures. (Nida, 1964:160).

Nida's third distinction, in fact, fits the case where the translation from Arabic into English and vice-versa takes place. Which always involves problems arising from the transfer of the message from the SL to the TL. Indeed, producing functional equivalence in translating certain Arabic texts into English constitutes main problems to Arab translators (Shunnaq, 1993:34). Nida adds that in the translation between related languages and cultures, the least number of serious problems are encountered. The major difficulties, on the other hand, occur when both languages and cultures are totally different. Less dilemmas are faced when both cultures are related, but the linguistic systems are divergent (Nida, 1964:160). This is

tantamount to saying that differences between cultures cause more serious problems than do the differences in linguistic affiliation. In this regard, Newmark distinguishes between "neutral" and "culture-specific situation". If the situation being described in the SLT is on neutral ground without having specifically local features, there will be no translation problem. But, by contrast, if the SLT describes a situation which has elements peculiar to the SL culture, then these elements will be problematic since they cannot be rendered into the TL (Newmark, 1982; 7). Newmark's division of cultural problems is helpful in classifying and translating the expressions that represent our focal point in this paper.

Regarding emotiveness, Newmark adds that translators sometimes have to give precedence to emotive and affective elements in the SL over the informative or content elements if the context requires that (Newmark, 1982:133). In line with Newmark, Shunnaq argues that an Arab Translator translating emotive lexical items into English should take this suggestion into heart (Shunnaq, 1999:38). Shunnaq adds that the translator may opt to translate a lexical item with "+emotiveness" as opposed to "- emotiveness".

#### **Data Analysis:**

The following are some selected Arabic Islamic formulaic expressions. They are selected, interpreted and analyzed by the researchers. The analysis of each expression is preceded by an interpretation then followed by a discussion.

#### **1- SL Text: "بارك الله فيك"**

#### **Interpretation:**

This formulaic expression falls on a neutral ground because it takes place in similar social settings in both the SL and the TL. The denotation of this formulaic expression is supplicatory request. The connotation is reciprocal sympathy.

#### **Text Analysis:**

**Situation:** Neutral

**SL Denotation:** Supplicatory Request, greeting, thanking and showing satisfaction

**SL Settings:** 1-Thanking someone who did his best to facilitate something that is beyond the grasp. 2-Thanking someone who is being sympathetic. 3-Greeting someone who did something excellently

**SL Connotation:** Reciprocal sympathy

Subjects Renderings	TL Connotation	TL Affection
1. God Bless you	+	+
2. Bless you	+	+
3. God Bless you	+	+
4. God Bless you	+	+
5. God Bless you	+	+
6. Bless you	+	+
7. Bless you	+	+
8. God Bless you	+	+
9. God Bless you	+	+
10. Bless you	+	+

**Discussion:**

The subjects of the study used semantic translation and gave formal equivalents. They all succeeded as each of them provided the equivalent TL formulaic expression with the compatible connotation and the equivalent emotiveness in the TL. This is the advantage of the items which fall on a neutral ground. They take place in similar contextual settings in both the SL and the TL. Consequently, each of the two languages has its own peculiar expression which, combined with the cultural traits, expresses the same connotation and results in the same affection in the TL.

**2. SL Text "حفظه الله"**

**Interpretation:**

This formulaic expression falls on a neutral ground because it takes place in similar social settings in both the SL and the TL. The denotation of this formulaic expression is request. The connotation is supplication for the protection of someone.

**Text Analysis**

**Situation:** Neutral

**SL Denotation:** Request

**SL Settings:** 1- Wishing good for someone with a benevolent character and ongoing charity and generosity. 2- Requesting for the protection of a person's son/father, etc.

**SL Connotation:** Supplication for the protection of someone

Subjects Renderings	TL Connotation	TL Affection
1. God preserve him	+	+
2. God preserve him	+	+
3. God preserve him	+	+
4. God protect him	+	+
5. God save him	+	+
6. God save him	+	+
7. God protect him	+	+
8. God preserve him	+	+
9. God save him	+	+
10. long live	+	+

### Discussion:

The subjects of the study used semantic translation. They provided various formal equivalents with similar connotations. They all succeeded as each of them provided the equivalent formal equivalence which holds the compatible connotation and results in the equivalent emotive effect, though the expressions God save... and Long live... are most likely used in the TL.

### Other proposed rendering:

In specific situations the TL people use the expression "May s/he live long".

### 3. SL Text "اعوذ بالله"

#### Interpretation:

This formulaic expression falls on a neutral ground because it takes place in similar social settings in both the SL and the TL. The denotation of this formulaic expression is request. The connotation is supplication against evil things or bad deeds.

#### Text Analysis

**Situation:** Neutral

**SL Denotation:** Request

**SL Settings:** 1- Avoiding bad deeds. 2- Denying evil things

**SL Connotation:** Supplication Against evil things or bad deeds

Subjects Renderings	TL Connotation	TL Affection
1. God forbid	+	+
2. God forbid	+	+
3. God forbid	+	+

4. Resort is to God	+	-
5. I seek God's help from that	+	-
6. God protect me from that	+	-
7. God forbid	+	+
8. God forbid	+	+
9. God forbid	+	+
10. God forbid	+	+

#### Discussion:

As this formulaic expression falls on a neutral ground; both the SL and the TL consequently possess their own peculiar expressions that hold the same connotation and result in the compatible affection on the part of the receptors. Subjects 1,2,3, 7,8,9 and 10 used semantic translation and provided the counterpart formulaic expression that represents the formal equivalence which is most likely used by the TL speakers.

The rest of the subjects provided different expressions that bear similar connotations, but they are less likely used. Consequently, they definitely seem to be odd and less affective on the part of the TL receptors. The expression "I seek God's protection against such a thing" which appears repeatedly on TV is more affective as it is used in the TL.

Therefore, providing formal equivalents that result in the same effect depends on the degree of the translator's awareness of the TL cultural background.

#### 4. SL Text "الحمد لله"

##### Interpretation:

There is indeed a partial gap between the SL and the TL regarding the use of this formulaic expression as to its presence in both languages in one setting and its absence from the TL in the other settings. The denotation of this expression is approval and appreciation. The connotation is worship, glorifying and thanking Almighty Allah.

##### Data Analysis:

**Situation:** Neutral and Culture- Specific

**Denotation:** Approval and Appreciation

**SL Settings:** 1- Thanking Allah for his graces on someone. 2- Expressing worship and glory to Allah on an unfavorable occasion or a disaster

**TL Settings:** Thanking Allah for his grace on someone

**SL Connotation:** Worship and Glory to Allah



Subjects Renderings	TL Connotation	TL Affection
1. Praise be to God	+	+
2. Thanks to God	+	+
3. Praise be to God	+	+
4. Praise be to God	+	+
5. Praise be to God	+	+
6. Thanks to God	+	+
7. Thanks to God	+	+
8. Praise be to God	+	+
9. Praise be to God	+	+
10. Thanks to God	+	+

**Discussion:**

The Subjects of the study used semantic translation and provided formal equivalents. They all succeeded as they used the TL counterpart expressions that bear the same connotation and result in the same affection in the TL.

**5- SL Text "جزاك الله خيرا"****Interpretation:**

This formulaic expression falls on a culture-specific ground. The denotation of the expression is supplicatory request. The connotation is thanking and reciprocal sympathy.

**Data Analysis:**

**Situation:** Culture-specific

**SL Denotation:** Supplicatory request

**SL Settings:** 1- Thanking someone who did his best to do or facilitate something that is beyond the grasp. 2- Some other different social settings.

**SL Connotation:** Reciprocal sympathy

Subject Renderings	TL Connotation	TL Affection
1. May God reward you the best	+	-
2. May God reward you the best	+	-
3. May God reward you for it	+	-
4. May God reward you	+	-
5. Many Thanks to you	-	+
6. May God reward you	+	-
7. May God reward you	+	-
8. May God bless you for it	+	-
9. May God reward you for it	+	-
10. Appreciated	+	+

### Discussion:

Subjects 1,2,3,4, 6,7,8, and 9 used semantic translation. They failed in achieving the equivalent affection in the TL, though the SL connotation is preserved; their rendering look incongruous with the TL culture and are seemingly unintelligible on the part of the TL receptor. They inserted into the TL their own cultural traits which are somewhat odd and vague in the TL.

Subject No. 5 used communicative translation. He achieved an equivalent affection, though he neglected the SL connotation. But his rendering is seemingly congruent with the TL and intelligible on the part of the TL receptors.

Subject No. 10 used adaptation. He somewhat succeeded as he conveyed the SL connotation, thus he somewhat achieved the equivalent effect.

**6- SL Text:** "رأس الحكمة مخافة الله"

### Interpretation:

This formulaic expression falls on a culture-specific ground. Its denotation is a religious instruction. The connotation is piosity.

### Data Analysis:

**Situation:** Culture-specific

**SL Denotation:** Religious instruction

**SL Settings:** Religious instructive setting

**SL Connotation:** Piosity and reminding someone of God's furiousness

Subjects Renderings	TL	TL
	Connotation	Affection
1. To fear God is the genuine wisdom	+	-
2. God fearing is the essence of wisdom	+	-
3. Wisdom is the fear of God	+	-
4. The head of wisdom is be afraid of God	+	-
5. The fear of God is the best wisdom	+	-
6. The wisest man is he who fears God	+	-
7. To be wise is to be afraid of God	+	-
8. The chief wisdom is the fear of God	+	-
9. Be God fearing, the wisdom says	+	-
10. To fear God is the best Wisdom	+	-

**Discussion:**

The subjects of the study used semantic translation. They all preserved the SL connotation into the TL, but their renderings are incompatible with the TL cultural traits. In many contextual circumstances, Jesus is being taken as God in the Christian societies. In addition, the SL text holds some kind of aesthetic flavor which has to be conveyed into the TL. The subjects of the study imposed into the TL their own culture-specific traits that are totally odd and unintelligible on the part of the TL receptor. They were not sufficiently aware of or at least they neglected the effect of the cultural differences and the aesthetic value as well. Such renderings make the SL receiver hear English words with Arabic flavor which are consequently unintelligible.

**The proposed rendering:**

"Blessed are they who are being pious" (used in TV shows).

**7- SL Text "أتق الله"****Interpretation:**

This formulaic expression falls on a neutral ground. The denotation of this expression is warning. The connotation is reminding of Allah's punishment.

**Data Analysis:**

**Situation:** Neutral

**SL Denotation:** Warning

**SL Settings:** 1- False claim. 2- False Swearing. 3- False witness. 4- False accusation. 5- Violation of rights.

**SL Connotation:** Reminding of Allah's punishment

Subjects Renderings	TL Connotation	TL Affection
1. Fear God	+	-
2. Be pious	+	+
3. Fear God	+	-
4. Be afraid of God	+	-
5. Fear God	+	-
6. Fear God	+	-
7. Fear God	+	-
8. Fear God	+	-
9. Be pious	+	+
10. Be pious	+	+

**Discussion:**

Subjects 1,3,4,5,6,7 and 8 used semantic translation and provided formal equivalents. They succeeded in preserving the SL connotation in the TL, but their renditions are ineffective in the TL. They imposed into the TL their own culture-specific traits.

Subjects 2,9 and 10 used communicative translation and provided functional equivalents. They succeeded because their renderings hold the SL connotation and result in equivalent affection in the TL.

**8- SL Text "حياءك الله"**

**Interpretation:**

This formulaic expression falls on a culture specific ground. The denotation of this expression is request. The connotation is reciprocal sympathy.

**Data Analysis:**

**Situation:** Culture-specific

**SL Denotation:** Request

**SL Settings:** 1- Congratulations. 2- Ordinary Conversation. 3- Greeting someone who did something excellently. 4- Greeting the public on some particular occasion, e.g. religious, social, political, National, etc.

**SL Connotation:** Reciprocal Sympathy

Subject Renderings	TL Connotation	TL Affection
1. May God greet you in peace	+	-
2. Most welcome	-	+
3. May God preserve you in peace	erroneous connotation	
4. Most Welcome	-	+
5. Most Welcome	-	+
6. Most Welcome	-	+
7. Most Welcome	-	+
8. May God preserve you in peace	erroneous connotation	
9. May God greet you in peace	+	-
10. Most Welcome	-	+

**Discussion:**

Subjects No.1 and 9 used semantic translation. They succeeded in preserving of the SL connotation in the TL, but their renditions are totally incompatible with the TL cultural traits. They imposed on the TL their own culture-specific traits which are totally odd and unintelligible to the TL receptor. They were not sufficiently aware of, or at least, they neglected the

effect of the cultural differences between the SL and the TL. Such renderings make the TL receptor receive English words with Arabic flavor which are consequently unintelligible to the English receptor for they are culturally incompatible with the English cultural circumstances as the counterpart expression in Arabic is.

As for subjects No. 3 and 8, in addition to the same negligence, they provided erroneous connotations in their renderings.

Regarding the rest of the subjects, they used adaptation. They, in fact, neglected conveying the SL connotation into the TL, but they provided functional equivalents as the nature of their renderings, involve the TL contextual circumstances and are thus culturally intelligible to the TL receptor in some of the settings.

Thus, it is possible to say that though the contextual circumstances of the SL and the TL settings are sometimes similar in nature, they are culture-bound in that each language has its own peculiar expressions which express the same connotations and intertwine the cultural traits and the contextual circumstances in each of the SL and the TL.

### **Conclusion:**

Formulaic expressions are regarded as a language universal feature. As a living language, Arabic has acquired a great deal of formulaic expressions which are used in various social settings. Such expressions have, indeed, acquired the approval of Arab speakers, listeners or readers. In addition to the social function, a great number of such expressions hold teachings and conventions deeply rooted in the Arabic-Islamic culture. As far as the question of translation equivalence is concerned, there is sometimes a kind of accidental cultural correspondence between Arabic and English regarding the use of some formulaic expressions. On many occasions, partial or full gaps between Arabic and English may exist where certain changes have to be made so as to produce a TL rendering which may not hold the same propositional meaning as that of the SL, but is likely to produce the same emotive effect on the part of the TL receptors. With regard to this question, the translator's background of the TL culture is very helpful in taking the decision in such cases.

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المعنى العاطفي في بعض التعبيرات التقليدية الإسلامية العربية بالإشارة إلى الترجمة

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المستخلص

البحث دراسة نقدية لطوعية الترجمة في الكثير من العبارات المقولبة من العربية إلى الانكليزية . إذ تعد العبارات المقولبة صفة بارزة موجودة في كل اللغات. وتتأثر كل لغة حية تأثراً ايجابياً بهذه الظاهرة . فهي نتيجة طبيعية لنزعة الإنسان للتواصل وتعزيز الأواصر الاجتماعية . وتعد أيضاً إحدى وسائل الإثراء اللغوي في أية لغة حية . وقد تبين أن اللغة العربية تشتمل على الكثير من التعبيرات المقولبة والتي يتم تبادلها في الكثير من المواقف الاجتماعية . كما تبين أن العبارات المقولبة قد نالت بطريقة أو بأخرى استحسان مستعملي اللغة العربية . وهكذا فقد برهنت اللغة العربية حيويتها فضلاً عن قابليتها على التواصل مع غيرها من اللغات الحية .