Similes in Translating Animal Names from Jordanian Spoken Arabic into English

Mohd Nour Al Salem *, Imran Alrashdan, Essa Salem
Department of English Language and Literature, The University of Jordan, Jordan

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Abstract

Animal names are commonly used in Jordanian Arabic (JA) and other dialects of Arabic to express embedded meanings, intentions and feelings. This study explores how native English speakers (NESs) conceptualise and translate animal names as figuratively used in JA into English. To this end, a questionnaire was distributed to 53 NESs to find the most suitable translation into English, with a focus on the simile type acceptable in the Target Language (TL). The study classified the types of similes based on Abdul-Raof’s (2006) framework. The questionnaire included 10 situations in which animal names are used. The findings revealed that, unlike JA which accepts all three types of simile (see Abdul-Raof 2006) to address people using animal names, the most widely acceptable type of simile to NESs was the detailed one—in which both the simile feature and element are given. The single simile—in which only the simile element is given came second. The effective simile—in which both the simile feature and element are missing—was deemed almost unacceptable to most participating NESs. These findings implicate a difference between the two languages and their respective cultures in terms of translation of animal names, a finding that may be generalizable to the translation of other cultural aspects.

Keywords: Animal Names, Figurative Use, Jordanian Arabic, English, Simile, Translation.

Introduction

Animal names are used denotatively and connotatively in nearly all cultures. Each connotative meaning bears different representations, emotions, images, and projections that characterize the norms of the respective society. Consequently, the connotative meaning of a given animal name in a certain culture may seem weird in another culture. Such a fact not only leaves an impact on the comprehension of the animal words usage, but also presents a real challenge for the translatability of these terms (Wang and Xuena 2015).
Animal names are commonly used in spoken Arabic to express certain meanings figuratively rather than directly (Elaheh 2011). They are utilized to describe people, their behaviours, or personalities by making a comparison between them and certain animals. This likening is usually meant to express a feeling, opinion, praise, dispraise, or hatred (Elaheh 2011). In other words, they can be used positively to commend someone or negatively to offend him/her. Some animals are known for specific features. In English, for example, these names are metaphorically used to communicate the following meanings: the pig is disgusting, the chicken is cowardly, the snake is untrustworthy, and the cat is relaxed. In Arabic, the lion is courageous, the elephant is large, the wolf is bold, the fox is cunning, the donkey is stupid, and the snake is sneaky (Sabariah et al. 2012; Sameer 2016).

In Arabic, this comparison may take the form of an effective simile, single simile, or detailed simile. The effective simile is a type of simile where the feature and element of simile are missing (Abdul-Raof 2006, 202). To make this clearer, consider the example علي آسد (Ali is a lion). The simile feature is typically ‘carriage’ and the simile element is ‘like’, and both are not given (implied). In the single simile, the simile element is given as in علي كالأسد (Ali is like a lion), but the feature (courage) is missing (Abdul-Raof 2006, 200-201). The detailed simile occurs when both the simile feature and element are given (Abdul-Raof 2006, 202) as in علي شجاع كالأسد (Ali is as courageous as a lion).

It is worth mentioning that metaphor in English is “a cognitive figure of speech based on an implicit likeness (without any comparative particle) between two unalike entities, in which the literal meaning is changed” (Al Salem 2014, 69). In this sense, the effective simile and metaphor have something in common, i.e. both of them operate without a comparative particle and without mentioning the feature of similarity between the likened and likened to objects. To make these concepts more clear, in the example ‘Ali is a lion’ above, there is no comparative particle such as ‘like’ or ‘as’; the likened is Ali; the likened to is a lion; the feature of similarity (courage), which shows how these two elements are alike is also missing.

The questions arising from a translation perspective are the following: Shall these types of simile be retained in the target language, i.e., English? Is there a preferable strategy when translating animal names from Arabic into English? Shamsaeefard et al. (2013), for instance, favor literal translation when investigating simile translation strategies in four Persian translations of Hamlet to show maximum faithfulness to the ST. Husni and Newman (2015) argue that the translation of collocations, for example, involves a three-phase process: recognition, comprehension, and reproduction. While comprehension can easily be achieved through the use of good dictionaries that assist in understanding the meanings intended, Husni and Newman (2015) assert that recognition and reproduction might not be as easy, particularly when such collocations have figurative and connotative meanings.
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To the best of the researchers’ knowledge, very few studies have been conducted on this topic. This study, therefore, is hoped to bridge the gap between Arabic and English and be beneficial to English speakers learning Arabic and those interested in translation studies.

Translation is not simply about how various languages contact and relate, but also about how cultures and communities contact and interact. An early conceptualisation of translation was offered by Catford (1965) as a process by which languages contact. In this view, translation was thought of as a purely linguistic endeavour. This study aims to investigate how native English speakers (NESs) conceptualise and translate animal names as figuratively used in Jordanian Arabic (JA) into English. It also seeks to determine the best translation strategy of animal names from JA into English. Specifically, the study tries to answer the following two questions:

1. How do native English speakers perceive and translate animal names from Jordanian Arabic into English?
2. What is the best strategy in translating animal names from Arabic into English?

Literature Review

Translation is not purely linguistic because it involves deeper senses that are communicated in the use of language. The rendering of linguistic forms into another language might not be a challenge to even novice translators. But translating a sense from one language into another requires an encyclopaedic knowledge of not only the involved languages but also the cultures and norms behind these languages. What further contributes to creating this challenge is the fact that language is a complex system that includes constructions, phrases and expressions that may be difficult to decipher by relying on the use of a dictionary.

Previous studies show that different translation strategies have been applied in translating similes. This has been attributed to different parameters such as the availability of an equivalent in the TL, the faithfulness to the ST, and the satisfaction of the TL needs. In other cases (e.g. Zohdi and Saeedi 2011; Rapi and Miconi 2014; and Elaheh 2011), various translation strategies such as literal translation, addition, and omission were employed to render the message meaningful in the TL.

The translation of animal names used in different linguistic structures such as proverbs, metaphors and similes has been an interesting area of research in translation studies. Nakhavali (2011) asserts that the translation of animal words can lead to misunderstanding as they serve sociolinguistic and semantic functions derived from different values, positive or negative, in each society. Wang and Zhang (2017) believe that the two effective translation strategies when it comes to animal names are domestication and foreignization. The former strategy was used to familiarize the TL readers with the foreign text (Nida 1993, 121). In this type, “fidelity is given to transporting the message” (Al Salem 2014, 223). For example, the effective smile ذﻟﻚ اﻟﺘﺎﺟﺮ ﺿﺒﻊ (that merchant is a hyena) may best be translated as ‘that
merchant is as greedy as a hyena’ or ‘that merchant is greedy’, where the animate element is completely deleted. Foreignization was not found to be commonly used for some cultural differences between the two languages. It is worth mentioning that metaphor is

The translation of animal names in different languages has been examined by a few studies (e.g., Hsieh 2006 in Mandarin Chinese and German; Resetar and Radic 2003, and Silaski 2013 in Serbian; Landau 2015 in English; and Nakhavali 2011 in English and Persian, to mention some). Hsieh (2006) studied the translation of animal names in Mandarin Chinese and German; Resetar and Radic (2003) and Silaski (2013) handled the same topic in Serbian; Landau (2015) discussed it in English; and Nakhavali (2011) studied it in English and Persian. However, very few studies examined the translation of animal names from English into Arabic and vice versa (e.g., Sameer 2016). To fill this gap, this study explores how Arabic and English contact in the use of animal names which are culture-specific. This specificity leads to creating a challenge when translating constructions that include animal names from the source language (SL) into the target language (TL).

Sameer (2016) hints at some of the difficulties that face Arabic-English translators when translating animal metaphors from English into Arabic highlighting the fact that the cultural variation does affect the translation. Similarly, Husni and Newman (2015) give the example of the English combination ‘patient owl’ to explicate how cultural specificity affects translation decisions. A literal (i.e., linguistic) translation of this construction will lead to a loss of the cultural and figurative meaning that it conveys (while, in the Western culture, the owl has a positive connotation, in the Arabic culture, it is the opposite).

Of the few studies that examined English-Arabic translation of animal names, Sameer (2016) examined the role of culture in translating animal proverbs and the cognitive, social, and pragmatic functions of animal-based proverbs. In his study, 20 English and Arabic animal-based metaphors were analysed. Following a qualitative approach in analysing the data, he found that the examined metaphors carry social, cultural and cognitive values and that animal proverbs carry figurative meanings that are different from the literal meanings. Sameer (2016) concluded that deep understanding of the figurative meaning and knowledge of the cultures of SL and TL are needed to produce proper translations. It was also found in his study that while some animals (e.g., horses and dogs) are associated with similar meanings in both English and Arabic, other animal metaphors have different functions.

The studies above discussed translation strategies of similes, translation of animal words, and the difficulties that may face the translator when translating these names. A variety of methodologies were used, i.e. qualitative or quantitative. The results reflected on various translation strategies such as literal translation, addition, and omission. It was also found that some animals have the same association in Arabic and English, and some animals are culture-specific. The present study adopts both qualitative and quantitative approach and hopes to reach at very clear findings concerning the best simile type in translating animal names from Arabic to English.
The connotations of animal names are not the same in all languages and cultures, as can be seen in the studies above. Most of these studies tend to be similar in that they examine translation strategies in different linguistic structures as well as the translation of animal names in different languages. However, none of these studies has tackled the strategies used in translating animal names, especially from Arabic into English. The present study seeks to fill up this gap.

**Methodology**

**Hypothesis**

This study examines how animal names are translated by NESs. Our hypothesis is that some names used in JA may not be translated literally into English, using an effective simile- where both the particle of simile (like or as) and the feature of similarity are not given. An example is: Jane is a scorpion. Similarly, the single simile- where the particle of simile is given, but the feature of similarity is ellipted, may not work well in translating animal names. An example of this type is: Mark is like a raven. Such translations may be unacceptable or even misleading. On the other hand, a detailed simile- where the simile particle and feature are given may be a better translation strategy. An example is: David is as cunning and crafty as a fox. To test this hypothesis, NESs from the USA, UK, and Canada were chosen to respond to a questionnaire which included 10 situations in which animal names are used.

**Data and Research Tool**

To achieve the goal of the study, a ten-item questionnaire was developed by the researchers. The corpus of animals included mammals, pets, reptiles, and birds. The 10 questions were designed to obtain the specific data necessary for gauging the acceptability of the translations given in stylistic terms. The questionnaire included multiple-choice-type questions to provide quantitative results, as well as open-questions to provide qualitative results. The questionnaire comprised 10 sections about the top 10 animals most frequently used in everyday spoken JA. To ensure a high degree of reliability, the questionnaire was distributed online to get a reasonable number of respondents. The translations were provided by the researchers themselves.

The translations were judged on a 4-point scale as totally acceptable, fairly acceptable, fairly unacceptable, and totally unacceptable. The three possible translations were divided into three strategies: Effective simile (metaphor), single simile, and detailed simile. A space was provided to help the participants give feedback.

**Participants**

The participants were 53 NESs who do not speak Arabic. Their ages ranged between 18-47 years. Thirty five of them were females and 18 males. Twenty nine respondents had a BA in English Language and Literature, Social Studies, Political Sciences, International Law, Pharmacy, Theology, Engineering or
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Chemistry. Nine respondents had an MA in Social Studies, Humanities, Law, or the English Language, and two respondents had a PhD in English. 13 respondents had no degree.

Analysis Procedures

The translations were judged, as already mentioned, on a 4-point scale as totally acceptable, fairly acceptable, fairly unacceptable, and totally unacceptable. Inspired by Abdul-Raof’s framework of classifying types of similes (2006), the researchers divided the three possible translations into effective simile (metaphor), single simile, and detailed simile (see the abstract above). This framework in particular is exclusively designed for the translation of all simile types from Arabic into English. A space was provided to help the participants give feedback.

Results

This section shows findings related to each of the 10 questions included in the questionnaire. It presents background information about how the animal name is used in JA. It also demonstrates how the situation is perceived and translated by NESs.

The Camel

This animal typically lives in the desert. It is patient and can stand living long without water; it is believed to keep water in its hump. Patient people are therefore likened to camels on the grounds of their patience. The camel also carries heavy goods and is used for riding by Bedouins and desert police (camel brigades). It is therefore called سفينة الصحراء (the desert ship) (Almuwayne’ 2008). A man who shoulders a huge responsibility on behalf of his children or friends is usually called by people around him and out of sympathizing with him جمل المحامل (the burdened camel), and he finds it acceptable. This man, however, has a certain limit and when it is impossible for him to shoulder a burden any longer, he complains through the expression القشة التي قصمت ظهر البعير (the straw that broke the camel’s back). This expression also exists in English in similar contexts. On the other hand, the camel is referred to as a symbol of hatred as it is typically known in the Arab World as bearing grudges against somebody who had hurt it in the past and seeking revenge on him/her even after a long time. So, malicious people can be likened to camels, but this likening is offensive (Almuwayne’ 2008). Useless work is also likened to حراث الجمال (camels’ plough) as the camel’s hoof is large and consequently hardens the ploughed soil again on its way back.

The term جمل (camel) is exclusively used for a male person as the word itself refers to males. The word used for a female camel in Arabic is ناقة (she camel). In English, however, this animal does not belong in any English-speaking country except Australia. It is rarely used in English expressions, sayings or proverbs. Some examples from English include “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a
needle than it is for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven” and “It is the last straw that breaks the camel’s back.”

The analysis revealed that the effective simile ‘He is a camel’ is either totally unacceptable or fairly unacceptable to 42 out of the 53 participants. The single simile ‘He is like a camel’ was acceptable to 31 respondents and rejected by 22. To be more precise, paradoxically 20 subjects found it fairly acceptable and 15 found it fairly unacceptable. Similarly, 11 found it totally acceptable and seven totally unacceptable. The detailed simile ‘He is as patient as a camel’ was totally acceptable to 42 respondents. The animal-free paraphrase ‘He is patient’ was totally acceptable to 35 respondents. Figure 1 below shows these statistics.

Figure 1: (Un)Acceptability of Camel-Related Renditions

The Cat or Kitten

Cats or kittens are harmless pets. A cat is usually used in Arabic to refer to a serene and cute girl on the grounds of flirtation (Isam 2019). This figurative use is also used negatively in Arabic as in ‘Do you see these employees? They are like cats (pussies) before the boss, meaning they are cowardly. In addition, cats are usually used to refer to people who repeatedly escape death and survive for a relatively long time. A common saying in Arabic is: Do not worry about him/her; he/she is a cat with seven souls. In English, however, “a cat with nine souls” is used. This typical image about cats, i.e. they do not die/give up easily is the same in both Arabic and English; due to cultural differences, the number of souls is not the same.

The cat in a similar sense may be strong or harmful. Hence, it is common to say in Arabic ‘Whoever plays with the cat stands its scratches’ to mean that you should expect difficulties dealing with somebody (Isam 2019). A third use of cats in Arabic appears in ‘playing a cat-and-mouse game with somebody’. This applies to a couple like an old
husband and his wife who keep fighting, but at the same time cannot live apart. The Arabic saying ‘When the cat is away, the mouse will play’ is also used when people enjoy themselves more and behave with greater freedom when the person in charge of them is not there. These last two sayings also exist in English and have the same pragmatic use, but in the plural form (mice) in the latter. The two words قط (a male cat) and قطة (a female cat) are used interchangeably in Arabic to refer to males and females. The latter is slightly more common; consequently, the female usage was adopted in the questionnaire.

Analysis showed that 39 respondents thought that the effective simile ‘She is a cat/kitten’ is neither fairly acceptable nor totally acceptable. Again, in the single simile ‘She is like a cat/kitten’, paradoxically 22 subjects found it fairly acceptable and 18 found it fairly unacceptable. 48 found it totally and fairly acceptable. The detailed simile ‘She is as beautiful and kind as a cat’ was found totally acceptable by 35 subjects and fairly acceptable by 13. The animal-free paraphrase ‘She is beautiful and kind’ was accepted by 52 subjects out of 53. Figure 2 shows their responses.

Figure 2: (Un)Acceptability of Cat-Related Renditions

The Raven الغراب

In the Arabic culture, the raven is a bird of ill-omen that is related to pessimism, melancholy, and death although it is believed that ravens are wise animals. This negative image derives from the raven’s dark black colour, harsh cry, and place of living in perished regions. In Arabic, the expression إنه مثل الغراب لا يأتي إلا بالأخبار السيئة (He is like a raven; he brings only bad news) is common (Muwasi 2018). Similarly, أخذوها الغراب وطاف (the raven took it and flew away), where ‘it’ refers to happiness, is used to announce the end of happiness. When people consult an unqualified person, the saying إذا كان الغراب دليل قوم (when the raven guides people) ironically arises. Although it is typically known that ravens hold trials and apply justice in their kingdom, they are never viewed positively in the Arab World (Muwasi 2018). This animal
is used in addressing males and females alike in Arabic although the word غراب per se refers to a male person. In English, the raven does not have a bad connotation.

In the questionnaire, the effective simile ‘He is a raven’ was either fairly unacceptable or totally unacceptable by 39 respondents. The single simile ‘He is like a raven’ was totally acceptable by 12 respondents, fairly acceptable by 20 respondents, and fairly unacceptable by 19. Only 2 respondents found it totally unacceptable. The detailed simile ‘He is as ominous as a raven’ and animal-free paraphrase ‘He is ominous’ were fairly and totally acceptable by 48 and 47 respondents respectively. See Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: (Un)Acceptability of Raven-Related Renditions

The Donkey

To call someone ‘a donkey’ is a big insult in Arabic. Typically, donkeys are known for stupidity and stubbornness in the Arabic culture (Alshibami 2003). In spoken Arabic, some people may describe a very weak pupil as ‘a donkey in his study’; this is too offensive (Alshibami 2003). In addition, donkeys are known for their noisy braying. This appeared in the Holy Quran. It happens to liken people who raise their voices in speech while their voices are too noisy to donkeys, but this is very offensive, too. People who can do hard work or work for a long time are usually described as ‘working donkeys.’ Although this is an example of positive people, it is unacceptable for them to be described as such and they may find it offensive; it means that they are hard-working idiots. In English, however, a donkey is a hard-working animal that people ride and use for pulling a plough and carrying goods. In British English, people sometimes describe a hard, boring job as ‘donkey work.’

The analysis revealed that the effective simile ‘He is a donkey (ass)’ was totally acceptable to 20 respondents and fairly acceptable to 7. 23 found it fairly unacceptable and 10 totally unacceptable. The single simile ‘He is like a donkey’ was accepted by 36 and rejected by 17. The detailed simile ‘He is as stupid as a donkey’ was accepted by 45, and the animal-free paraphrase ‘He is stupid’ by 49. Only 4 participants found the latter totally unacceptable. Figure 4 presents these judgements.
The Falcon

The falcon in the Arab tradition, especially in the Arab Gulf area, symbolizes dignity and bravery as it hunts by itself and eats fresh meat only. A falcon needs to be immediately masked when hunted in order not to die of a heart attack (Tlemat 2002). Similarly, it needs to eat from its prey. If its hunt is seized, the falcon may die out of fury. Falcons are buried and funerary monuments are held after their death. A man who is highly dignified and enjoys pride and strong character may be described as a falcon (Tlemat 2002). Falcons are also known for their sharp sight; it is eight times stronger than that of a male. People, who see well especially far objects, are usually likened to falcons. Likewise, falcons are very fast, particularly when chasing a prey. Fast runners or footballers may be likened to falcons. The figurative use of falcons in Arab tradition, poetry, folk tales, and songs is always positive and to commend someone. The word صقر (falcon) is masculine and typically used with males. In the Western tradition, falcons are known as hunters of birds and animals, but other qualities are not commonly recognized by lay males.

In the analysis, the effective simile ‘He is a falcon’ was not acceptable by participants to a large extent; 38 of them found it either fairly or totally unacceptable. The single simile ‘He is like a falcon’ was totally acceptable by 8 participants and fairly acceptable by 28. The detailed simile ‘He is as brave and dignified as a falcon’ was accepted by 47, and the animal-free paraphrase ‘He is brave and dignified’ by 48.
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Figure 5: (Un)Acceptability of Falcon-Related Renditions

The Fox الثعلب

This animal is typically used in Arabic to describe cunning and crafty people who can get what they want, especially by tricking or deceiving others (Muwasi 2018). In this sense, we disapprove it. Shawqi, a late Egyptian poet, says: He is wrong who believes that the fox has a religion. The use of this animal is exclusive to males. However, a fox in Arabic and other cultures is sometimes used positively to refer to clever people (Muwasi 2018). Examples are: “He is a fox at cards”. The German leader Rommel was known as the desert fox during the World War II on the grounds of his ability to hide and manoeuvre. Similarly, the former football player Rudy Voller was also called ‘a fox’. A clever man or boy can jokingly be addressed directly as a fox as in ‘How did you get the post? You are a fox, man.’ More examples are: ‘the fox preys furthest from his hole’ and ‘the more a fox is cursed, the better he fares’.

Figure 6 below shows that the effective simile ‘He is a fox’ is totally acceptable and fairly acceptable only to 12 and ten respondents respectively. The single simile ‘He is like a fox’ is acceptable to 39. The detailed simile ‘He is as cunning and crafty as a fox’ was accepted by 50, and the animal-free paraphrase ‘He is cunning and crafty’ by 52.

Figure 6: (Un)Acceptability of Fox-Related Renditions
The Sheep/Lamb

In Arabic, this animal is used metaphorically on the basis of behavioural characteristics to describe people who blindly accept whatever they are being told to do (Alhaysheh 2017). An example is ‘My colleagues are (like) lambs; they accept whatever the boss says.’ It is also used to describe people, especially males, who can be easily led or ‘as a symbol of meekness or innocence.’ (See Oxford English Dictionary online). An example is ‘He is a lamb; he never says “no” to his wife.’ On the basis of the shape/size, ‘lamb’ is used to refer to a fat male baby/toddler who keeps sucking milk or eats so much (Alhaysheh 2017). The idiom: ‘(like) a lamb/lambs to the slaughter’ is used to describe people who are going to do something dangerous without realizing it. These examples show that the lamb is used offensively with adults and even with gluttonous children. But it can be used positively in specific contexts.

The questionnaire results show that the effective simile ‘He is a lamb’ is not acceptable in English. The single simile ‘He is like a lamb’ is nearly equally fairly acceptable and fairly unacceptable. The detailed simile ‘He is as meek as a lamb’ was accepted by 50 subjects, and the animal-free paraphrase ‘He is meek’ by 46. See Figure 7 below.

![Figure 7: (Un)Acceptability of Lamb-Related Renditions](image)

The Monkey

Although there are several types of the monkeys’ family, this animal is used in Arabic on two bases: behaviour and look (Alkhazen 2018). First, it refers to a hyperactive child who cannot keep quiet for a short period only. Second, it may be used to refer to an ugly person – a male or female (Alkhazen 2018). In both cases, it is impolite or offensive to call somebody a ‘monkey’. In English, too, active children, especially those who like playing tricks on people, are informally referred to as ‘monkeys’ (Alkhazen 2018).

The analysis revealed that the effective simile ‘He is a monkey’ was acceptable by 15 respondents but rejected by 38. The single simile ‘He is like a monkey’ was acceptable by 28 but rejected by 25. The
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detailed simile ‘He is as hyperactive/ugly as a monkey’ was accepted by 43 subjects, and the animal-free paraphrase ‘He is hyperactive/ugly’ by 44. See Figure 8.

Figure 8: (Un)Acceptability of Monkey-Related Renditions

The Snake

This venomous reptile is used in Arabic to refer to people, especially women, who seem kind-hearted while they are sneaky in reality (Bashir 2018). An example is: ‘Do not trust her. This woman is such a snake.’ The Arabic idiomatic expression ‘He/she is a snake under hay’ is used to stress how sneaky that person is. In English too, the idiom ‘a snake in the grass’ is used to deliver the same message. It is worth mentioning that in Arabic it is acceptable to address a close friend face to face as ‘You are a snake under hay; I cannot trust you.’

Figure 9 below shows that the respondents were nearly equally divided between the acceptability and unacceptability of using the effective simile ‘She is a snake’. To be more precise, 27 found it acceptable and 28 found it unacceptable. The single simile ‘She is like a snake’ was totally acceptable by 18 and fairly acceptable by 19. The detailed simile ‘She is as sneaky as a snake’ was accepted by 51 participants.

Figure 9: (Un)Acceptability of Snake-Related Renditions
The Wolf

A wolf in Arabic culture is used to describe a bold and fearless man who depends on himself. An example is إن لم تكون نذبًا أكلتك الذئاب (If you are not a wolf, wolves will eat you) (Abdul-rahman 2020). It also refers to an honourable and trustable man who persists in doing what he wants and at the same time shows a high level of dignity. When someone asks help from a fellow, he/she says in spoken Arabic إن لم تكون ذئباً أكلتك الذئاب meaning ‘shall I ask a favour/help from you or from the wolf?’ Similarly, it is common to say ‘Do not worry about him; he is a wolf,’ meaning that he will never give up before the mission assigned to him is done. Catching a wolf alive is nearly impossible in practice. The expression جاب الذئب من ذيله (He grabbed the wolf by its tail) is used sarcastically to make fun of he who thinks that he did something great while it is silly. Wolves, on the other hand, are believed to be dishonest and distrusted. The Arabic expression إنه ذئب في ثوب حمل إله ولا لذئب and its English equivalent ‘He is a wolf in sheep’s clothing’ are used to describe deceptive people. Men who kidnap and rape children or women are referred to as ذئاب بشريه (human wolves) on the grounds of brutality (Abdul-rahman 2020).

Figure 10 below shows that the effective simile ‘He is a wolf’ is totally acceptable by 10 participants and fairly acceptable by 11. Similarly, 11 found it fairly unacceptable and 21 totally unacceptable. The single simile ‘He is like a wolf’ was fairly acceptable by 12 and totally acceptable by 27. 10 found it fairly unacceptable and 4 totally unacceptable. Both the detailed simile ‘He is as fearless as a wolf’ and the animal-free paraphrase ‘He is fearless and self-reliant’ were accepted by 50 and 51 subjects respectively.

Discussion

This section presents a discussion of the findings of the study. Table 1 below shows the most acceptable types of simile by NESs when translating animal names from Arabic into English. Clearly, the most acceptable to NESs was the detailed simile followed by the single simile and the effective simile.
The detailed simile (e.g., ‘He is as meek as a lamb’ and ‘He is as cunning and crafty as a fox’) was highly acceptable by NESs in the translation of all animal names. For example, one of the highest percentages was that relating to the use of the lamb by NESs. This result can be explicated in light of this animal’s distinctive feature, i.e., meekness, which is very common in both Arabic and English. Another high percentage was that relating to the use of the fox in English which is contributed to this animal having the same connotation in both languages, i.e., cunningness and craftiness. On the other hand, the table shows that the lowest percentage was that relating to the use of monkeys as likening people to monkeys on the grounds of ugliness may be rude in English, especially because this has a negative connotation in the American history. Hyperactivity as another distinctive feature of monkeys in the Arab culture was found strange to some respondents. The second lowest percentage was that relating to how NESs use the donkey; this animal has a good connotation in the western culture and does not represent stupidity as it does in Arabic. The detailed simile strategy was to a high extent acceptable to the questionnaire respondents. This acceptability is due to fact that this kind of simile explicitly states the topic (likened), vehicle (likened to), simile element (as), and simile feature (patience, beauty, craftiness, etc).

### Table 1: Percentages of the acceptability of the translation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simile Type</th>
<th>The Effective Simile</th>
<th>The Single Simile</th>
<th>The Detailed Simile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fairly acceptable</td>
<td>Totally acceptable</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camel</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cat</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raven</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donkey</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>37.7%</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falcon</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamb</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monkey</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snake</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolf</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>41.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>17.64</td>
<td>17.67</td>
<td>35.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The single simile (e.g., ‘He is like a lamb’ and ‘He is like a falcon’) was the second most acceptable rendering of a situation where an animal name is used to describe people by NESs. While the variation in the percentages representing the use of the detailed simile is low, there is greater variation in these representing the use of the single simile as shown in Table 1 above. For example, the use of the single simile when referring to people as cats was acceptable to 90.5% of the respondents which is the same for the detailed simile. This finding can best be explicated in light of the fact that not all NESs believe that cats are cute and kind. One respondent wrote that “in America, people do not think cats are kind.” In addition, the use of the camel to describe people was not acceptable using the single simile to over 40% of the respondents. This is attributed to the fact that, as some participants say, “most native English
speakers know little about the characteristics of camels”; using the camel in a simile without explaining the grounds of similarity between camels and people seems awkward. Similarly, some respondents wrote that it is not quite clear to a North American to understand the simile ‘He is like a donkey’ if he has not been exposed to Arabic. Some respondents believe that likening people to monkeys is rude. A few participants believe that ‘wolf’ in English means a womanizing.

The similes ‘He is a fox’ and ‘She is a snake’ were totally acceptable to 28% and 34% of the respondents, representing the highest percentages totally acceptable in regard to the single simile strategy of translation. These two animals are used in English in contexts similar to those in Arabic. The proverb ‘A fox is not taken twice in the same snare’ is just an example on the craftiness of this animal. Some respondents find that likening someone to a snake is rude although such likening is used in English. Others, however, say that this is common in English. Here, the choice ‘fairly acceptable’ noticeably gained higher percentages than those pertaining to the choice ‘totally acceptable’.

Respondents’ feedback indicates that as the grounds of similarity (simile feature) are missing, the whole simile is not clear to them and the meaning is not understandable. Some respondents also asked ‘how is he like a lamb?’ for example, believing that the word ‘like’ implies resemblance in appearance. In Arabic, however, it mostly means similarity in behaviour rather than physical appearance. Respondents who accept this type of simile say that stylistically it is more acceptable and more polite to use a particle of simile (simile element) than to directly refer to people as animals (with no simile element). The results show that the single simile is fairly unacceptable to around 27% of the respondents and totally unacceptable to 9.6 of them, with regard to all animals taken together. The highest percentages revolve around the lamb (52.7%), monkey (47%), camel (41%), cat (40%), and raven (40%). A lamb in English is informally used to describe or address somebody, especially a young child, with affection or pity as in ‘You poor lamb.’ A monkey is historically related to racism. A camel is nearly unknown in terms of its characters. A cat is not viewed as kind. A raven is not ominous in English.

In relation to the effective simile, results showed that in the examples ‘He is a lamb’, ‘He is a falcon’, ‘She is a cat/kitten’, ‘He is a raven’, and ‘He is a camel’, the effective simile strategy was totally acceptable only by 4%, 7.5%, 7.5%, 9%, and 9% of the respondents respectively. Similarly, the same similes were fairly acceptable by only 15%, 20.7%, 19%, 17%, and 11% of the respondents respectively. Although the percentages pertaining to the latter category are relatively higher than those pertaining to the former, they are still low. The highest is 20.7%. What follows is a discussion of these results.

The effective simile ‘He is a lamb’ was found to be generally unacceptable as ‘lamb’ “represents innocence in English,” as some respondents said. Consequently, 79% find it either fairly unacceptable or totally unacceptable (60% find it fairly unacceptable and 19% find it totally unacceptable). ‘He is a falcon’ too was found unacceptable; some respondents asked ‘why?’ In figures, 71.6% find it either fairly unacceptable or totally unacceptable (22.6% find it fairly unacceptable and 49% find it totally unacceptable). ‘She is a cat/kitten’ was found to be awkward to some respondents as no specific
Similes in Translating Animal Names from Jordanian Spoken Arabic into English

description is given. Some asked ‘why?’ and ‘on what basis?’ 71.6% of the respondents find this simile either fairly or totally unacceptable (22.6% find it fairly unacceptable and 49% find it totally unacceptable). ‘He is a raven’ was also awkward to a number of respondents as a raven “is not ominous in English”. No more comments were given about the raven. Some 83% of the respondents find this simile either fairly or totally unacceptable (30% find it fairly unacceptable and 53% find it totally unacceptable). In regard to ‘He is a camel’, respondents say that camels are very rare where they live, and consequently find it “odd to liken people to camels directly”. Others believe that English speakers may not understand the connotative meaning of the camel as “it is not very common to compare someone to a camel”. Some respondents say that “in an American English context, ‘camel’ is used to describe someone who can work for a long time with little breaks and minimal food and water”. As a result, only 9% of the respondents find this simile totally acceptable and 11% of them find it fairly acceptable. More than 79% of the respondents find this simile either fairly or totally unacceptable (26% find it fairly unacceptable and 53% find it totally unacceptable).

Only 15% of the participants find ‘He is a monkey’ totally acceptable and 13.5% find it fairly acceptable. Some respondents say that “even if we do refer to people as monkeys, but this is unnatural”. A number of participants say that monkeys should not be used as this is a racial epithet for black people, and others find it derogatory and has a negative connotation in the US, especially with regard to African Americans and slavery. As a result, 71.5% of the respondents find this simile either fairly or totally unacceptable (28% find it fairly unacceptable and 43.5% find it totally unacceptable). Similarly, only 18.9% of the participants find ‘He is a wolf’ totally acceptable and 20.7% find it fairly acceptable. Many of them rather prefer the phrase ‘lone wolf’, which “refers to an independent person”. To some respondents, ‘wolf’ “never means self-reliant in English. It always signifies to a pack of group”. The results indicate that 61% of the respondents find this simile either fairly or totally unacceptable (21% find it fairly unacceptable and 40% find it totally unacceptable). The simile ‘He is a fox’ was totally acceptable to 22.6% of the respondents and fairly acceptable to 19% of them. Those who find it unacceptable say that it is a stereotype, especially among young people, to call an attractive woman ‘a fox’. Around 59% of the respondents find this simile either fairly or totally unacceptable (19% find it fairly unacceptable and 40% find it totally unacceptable).

The donkey was totally acceptable in ‘He is a donkey’ by 24.5% of the respondents and fairly acceptable to 13% of them. Some respondents say that although ‘donkey’ is used in such a context, the word ‘ass’ is more common in spoken English to mean ‘a stupid person’. Examples are ‘Don’t be such an ass!’ and ‘I made an ass of myself at the meeting – standing up and then forgetting the question’. Other respondents find it meaningfully acceptable to refer to someone as a donkey, but it is rude. Others say that “donkey does mean stupid in English, but more often it means stubborn”. Other respondents ask ‘why is he a donkey or like a donkey?’ This simile was found to be unacceptable to 62.5% of the respondents.
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(43% find it fairly unacceptable and 19.5% find it totally unacceptable). The effective simile ‘She is a snake’ came first among the ten effective similes used in the questionnaire with 37% of the respondents find it totally acceptable. But only 13% find it fairly acceptable. Some say that ‘snake’ means ‘two-faced’, and this is different from its basic figurative use, i.e., sneaky. A number of respondents say that this type of simile is the most widely used phrase in American English; it is more common than the single simile and detailed simile. One respondent said that “comparing someone to a snake is a common term”. In other words, any simile that directly includes the snake in reference to untrustworthy people will be totally or fairly acceptable. This simile was found to be unacceptable to around 50% of the respondents (13.5% find it fairly unacceptable and 36.5% find it totally unacceptable).

Conclusion

This study contributes to the role of cultural variation and culture-bound usages in translation studies, specifically the translation of animal words used to address people. The study confirms that the challenge in translating these words from Arabic stems from the fact that their usage is encapsulated in their culture-based figurative meaning and the absence of figurative equivalents in English.

While in Arabic the three types of simile are acceptable, in English, only the detailed simile was highly acceptable. The findings reveal that reproduction of the figurative meaning in animal words requires some addition in translation to bridge the gap in the cultural differences between Arabic and English. The translation using a detailed simile, where a simile particle and simile element are added, was therefore most acceptable as it fulfills the needs of the TL reader/hearer. The study has also shown that using an effective simile as a translation strategy does not generally work successfully as most of animals are not used figuratively in English, or are used differently. The single simile strategy was relatively acceptable as the simile particle is given explicitly in this type. Future research is needed to explore appropriate translation strategies in other areas so that a clear understanding of cultural differences is achieved to help translators in the two languages.
Similes in Translating Animal Names from Jordanian Spoken Arabic into English

التشبيهات في ترجمة أسماء الحيوان من اللهجه الأردنية المحكية إلى اللغة الإنجليزية

محمد نور السالم، عمران الرشدان، عيسى سالم
قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وأدابها، الجامعة الأردنية، الأردن

الملخص

تستخدم أسماء الحيوانات في اللغة العربية/اللهجة الأردنية للتعبير عن معانٍ، ومقاصد، ومشاعر محددة. تسعى هذه الدراسة لاستكشاف كيف يفهم الناطقون بالإنجليزية أسماء الحيوانات المستخدمة مجازاً في اللهجة الأردنية. وكيف يترجمونها إلى الإنجليزية. وتحقيق ذلك، فقد تمّ توزيع استبانة عشوائيّة مكونةً من أسماء الحيوانات على ثلاثة وخمسين متحدثاً باللغة الإنجليزية للتوصيل إلى أفضل ترجمة ممكنة. مع التركيز على نوع التشبيه الأكثر قبولاً في اللغة المستهدفة (الإنجليزية).

تثبت النتائج أنه، خلافاً للغة العربية التي تقبل أنواع التشبيهات الثلاثة عند محاكاة الناس باستخدام أسماء الحيوانات، فإن الإنجليزية تفضل التشبيه المرسل (الملسّل) الذي يتضمن وجه الشيء وآداء التشبيه. يليه التشبيه المفرد الذي يتضمن وجه الشيء فقط، بينما اعتبر معظم المشاركون التشبيه البالغ (الفقال) الذي لا يتضمن أيًا من وجه الشيء أو آداء التشبيه غير مقبولًا تقريبًا. يدل النتائج على وجود فرق بين اللغتين والثقافتين العربية والإنجليزية فيما يخص ترجمة أسماء الحيوانات. وهي نتيجة يمكن تعليمها على ترجمة جوانب ثقافية أخرى. الكلمات المفتاحية: أسماء الحيوانات، الاستخدام المجازي، اللهجة الأردنية، اللغة الإنجليزية، التشبيه، الترجمة.
References


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Appendix 1: Questionnaire

This questionnaire will be used for research on the translation of animal names from Arabic to English. Please give information about the following:

1. Your educational level (Please circle the highest qualification which you have):
   - No degree
   - Bachelor's Degree
   - Master's Degree
   - Doctorate

2. Your major:

3. Your age:

4. Your sex:

5. Any experience you have of doing translation:

Q1. Read the following English translations. Here man is likened to a camel on the grounds of patience. How acceptable is each of the translations below in stylistic terms?
   1. He is a camel.
      a. totally acceptable
      b. fairly acceptable
      c. fairly unacceptable
      d. totally unacceptable
   2. He is like a camel.
      a. totally acceptable
      b. fairly acceptable
      c. fairly unacceptable
      d. totally unacceptable
   3. He is as patient as a camel
      a. totally acceptable
      b. fairly acceptable
      c. fairly unacceptable
      d. totally unacceptable

Q2. Read the following English translations. Here a serene and cute girl is likened to a cat or kitten on the grounds of beauty and kindness. How acceptable is each of the translations below in stylistic terms?
   1. She is a cat/kitten.
      a. totally acceptable
      b. fairly acceptable
      c. fairly unacceptable
      d. totally unacceptable
   2. She is like a cat/kitten.
      a. totally acceptable
      b. fairly acceptable
      c. fairly unacceptable
      d. totally unacceptable
   3. She is as beautiful and kind as a cat/kitten.
      a. totally acceptable
      b. fairly acceptable
      c. fairly unacceptable
      d. totally unacceptable

   Please add any comments you have regarding the acceptability of this translation:

Q3. Read the following English translations. Here a man is likened to a raven when he is related to ill-omen. How acceptable is each of the translations below in stylistic terms?
   1. He is a raven.
      a. totally acceptable
      b. fairly acceptable
      c. fairly unacceptable
      d. totally unacceptable
2. He is like a raven.
   a. totally acceptable  b. fairly acceptable  c. fairly unacceptable  d. totally unacceptable
3. He is as ominous as a raven.
   a. totally acceptable  b. fairly acceptable  c. fairly unacceptable  d. totally unacceptable
Please add any comments you have regarding the acceptability of this translation:

Q4. Read the following English translations. Here man is likened to a donkey on the grounds of stupidity. How acceptable is each of the translations below in stylistic terms?
   1. He is a donkey.
      a. totally acceptable  b. fairly acceptable  c. fairly unacceptable  d. totally unacceptable
   2. He is like a donkey.
      a. totally acceptable  b. fairly acceptable  c. fairly unacceptable  d. totally unacceptable
   3. He is as stupid as a donkey.
      a. totally acceptable  b. fairly acceptable  c. fairly unacceptable  d. totally unacceptable
Please add any comments you have regarding the acceptability of this translation:

Q5. Read the following English translations. Here man is likened to a falcon on the grounds of dignity and bravery. How acceptable is each of the translations below in stylistic terms?
   1. He is a falcon.
      a. totally acceptable  b. fairly acceptable  c. fairly unacceptable  d. totally unacceptable
   2. He is like a falcon.
      a. totally acceptable  b. fairly acceptable  c. fairly unacceptable  d. totally unacceptable
   3. He is as brave and worth dignity as a falcon.
      a. totally acceptable  b. fairly acceptable  c. fairly unacceptable  d. totally unacceptable
Please add any comments you have regarding the acceptability of this translation:

Q6. Read the following English translations. Here man is likened to a fox on the grounds of cunning and craft. How acceptable is each of the translations below in stylistic terms?
   1. He is a fox.
      a. totally acceptable  b. fairly acceptable  c. fairly unacceptable  d. totally unacceptable
   2. He is like a fox.
      a. totally acceptable  b. fairly acceptable  c. fairly unacceptable  d. totally unacceptable
   3. He is cunning and crafty.
      a. totally acceptable  b. fairly acceptable  c. fairly unacceptable  d. totally unacceptable
Please add any comments you have regarding the acceptability of this translation:
Q7. Read the following English translations. Here man is likened to a **lamb** on the grounds of meekness. How acceptable is each of the translations below in stylistic terms?

1. He is a lamb.
   a. totally acceptable  b. fairly acceptable  c. fairly unacceptable  d. totally unacceptable
2. He is like a lamb.
   a. totally acceptable  b. fairly acceptable  c. fairly unacceptable  d. totally unacceptable
3. He is meek.
   a. totally acceptable  b. fairly acceptable  c. fairly unacceptable  d. totally unacceptable

Please add any comments you have regarding the acceptability of this translation:

Q8. Read the following English translations. Here man/child is likened to a **monkey** on the grounds of hyperactivity or ugliness. How acceptable is each of the translations below in stylistic terms?

1. He is a monkey.
   a. totally acceptable  b. fairly acceptable  c. fairly unacceptable  d. totally unacceptable
2. He is like a monkey.
   a. totally acceptable  b. fairly acceptable  c. fairly unacceptable  d. totally unacceptable
3. He is hyperactive/ugly.
   a. totally acceptable  b. fairly acceptable  c. fairly unacceptable  d. totally unacceptable

Please add any comments you have regarding the acceptability of this translation:

Q9. Read the following English translations. Here a woman is likened to a **snake** on the grounds that both may be sneaky. How acceptable is each of the translations below in stylistic terms?

1. She is a snake.
   a. totally acceptable  b. fairly acceptable  c. fairly unacceptable  d. totally unacceptable
2. She is like a snake.
   a. totally acceptable  b. fairly acceptable  c. fairly unacceptable  d. totally unacceptable
3. She is sneaky.
   a. totally acceptable  b. fairly acceptable  c. fairly unacceptable  d. totally unacceptable

Please add any comments you have regarding the acceptability of this translation:

Q10. Read the following English translations. Here man is likened to a **wolf** on the grounds of fearlessness or self-reliance. How acceptable is each of the translations below in stylistic terms?

1. He is a wolf.
   a. totally acceptable  b. fairly acceptable  c. fairly unacceptable  d. totally unacceptable
2. He is like a wolf.
   a. totally acceptable  b. fairly acceptable  c. fairly unacceptable  d. totally unacceptable
3. He is fearless and self-reliant.
a. totally acceptable  b. fairly acceptable  c. fairly unacceptable  d. totally unacceptable
Please add any comments you have regarding the acceptability of this translation: