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## Inquiry into the challenges of translating idioms extracted from musical lyrics

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#### Abstract

Translation has always been described as an age-long activity that impacts the communication between speakers of different languages. An aspect of translation that has remained evasive is the translation of idioms, mainly idioms that are tied to contextual peculiarities. Generally, idioms have enabled language users to transmit ideas that mirror how they think and their perspectives on specific scenarios. Translation also represents a time-honored practice of presenting content initially written in one language in another. Idiom translation is a specialized field since it calls for in-depth familiarity with various cultural notions in the target language and the source language. This research considered several factors crucial in translating idiomatic expressions extracted from musical lyrics. The focus was to explicate the challenges faced by translators in reproducing the meanings of idioms in musical contexts in one language into another without distorting or entirely omitting the intended meanings of the idioms when translated into the target language. The study critically examined the challenge of adopting appropriate technique or strategy, the challenge of encapsulating the internal semantic compositions of the idioms, the challenge of



transmitting the social, cultural, stylistic, and contextual projections of the idioms, and the challenge of generating connecting expressions in the target language to match the disintegrated nature of musical lyrics. The result of the study further expounds on the importance of the in-depth knowledge of the translator, both in the two languages and like language use in music. Translators also need to explore diverging methodological approaches and employ diverging techniques when translating idioms in musical lyrics. The study further recommended using self-generated techniques and conceptual alignment to produce suitable equivalents of idioms extracted from musical lyrics in the target language.

**Keywords:** Idioms, contextual and cultural projections, musical lyrics, translation techniques

### Public Interest Statement

The Translation of idioms has an enormous impact on the communication between speakers of different languages. With the encounter of cultures, there is a broader effort in linguistics and Translation Studies to study the challenges of translating idioms, in particular those extracted from musical lyrics. The findings of this article will have significant implications for linguists and translators, suggesting that the Translators need to explore diverging methodological approaches and employ diverging techniques when translating idioms in musical lyrics. It further recommended using self-generated techniques and conceptual alignment to produce suitable equivalents of idioms extracted from musical lyrics in the target language.

### Introduction

Translation has become one of the most important elements that will aid in the era of globalization, and language is an important part of communication. Today, people must master a specific language to effectively communicate with others. Different countries have different languages and cultures. As a result, the forms of information or target language that are transferred can be written or spoken with the equivalent of SL (source language). Translation is the process of converting spoken language into written language to convey messages from one language to another. Effective translators can share information and initiate conversation. The act of expressing thoughts and feelings, or disseminating information, is known as communication in translation. Few people in the world are fluent in speaking and writing in English. Because English is a foreign language in some countries, people require translation to use it in their interactions, including in music and art.

Music is an aspect of human activities that permeates the culture and social values of the people. Music artists use language to communicate thoughts unique to the cultural and social classes and embed style in communication (Nasution et al., 2023). Significantly, one language tool that has provided music artists with rich cultural values is idioms. Idioms enrich the significance of the discourse through the practical terms they have generated, which is one of the roles they play in the process. Using elegant language features such as idioms often develops powerful musical lyrics. As Kovacs (2016) asserted, using idioms in social discourse necessitated action from language specialists, including translators. Several translators have attempted the translation of idioms in musical lyrics, providing further insight into the challenges the translators encounter in providing suitable equivalents of idioms in musical lyrics from the source language to the target language.

When translating the equivalents of idioms from one language into another language, translators face specific obstacles, just as they do with every other aspect of translation (Batubara et al., 2023). When attempting to offer equivalents of idioms from the source language in the target language, these difficulties are regarded as the most significant ones that translators face. According to Munday (2008), translators, in general, are tasked with the difficulty of preventing fidelity degradation. The idea of fidelity erosion in translation is used to define the degree to which the translator retains the meaning of the text in the original language and the intellectual foundations of the text.

Idiom translation presents several unique challenges, the most significant of which is the maintenance of faithfulness (Abdelaal & Alazzawie, 2019). The challenge that faces translators is determining how to convey the sense of certain idioms from the source language into the target language without altering the sense that the text was intended to convey in the first place. This may be the reason Abdelaal and Alazzawie (2019) concluded that when a translator understands the message intended in the use of certain idioms in context, it also becomes difficult to seek another idiom in the target language that can suitably replace the source language idiom without any noticeable impact in the original meaning. As a result, the translator may inevitably need to have a solid grasp of not just the spoken form of the source language and the target language but also an understanding of how culture influences cognition and projects in both languages. Therefore, the translator needs to be able to speak both the language being translated from and the language being translated into.

This study sets out to explicate other specific challenges translators face in providing the perfect equivalents of idioms in musical lyrics without altering the cultural values and social projections embedded in those idioms, and also maintaining the stylistic effects of the idioms exactly in the musical lyrics. The study also sets out to provide methodological and practical solutions to challenges not based on primary language data. The challenges are discussed in light of the nature of language in music lyrics and the connection between cultural values and social attachments in creating and using idioms in musical lyrics.

### Literature Review

Translation has been an essential component of multilingual communication throughout its development, which has progressed to include a variety of new strategies; throughout these many years, the practice has been evolving. Throughout history, translating a text written in one language into another has been at the discipline's core, prompting the development of various approaches, methodologies, and theories (Purba et al., 2023). The use of diverse translation techniques is often predicated on a variety of features of linguistic data since some aspects of language data, such as idioms, call for specific approaches to be utilized throughout the translation process (Chen, 2009; Kovacs, 2016; Davies, 2004).

Idioms are phenomena that have origins in the intricate link between language and culture. Fernando (1994) asserts that idioms are linguistic chunks with definite meaning or a linguistic item that embodies natural life notions and phenomena directly related to a particular culture. An idiom is primarily presented as a linguistic chunk with a set meaning (Shojaei, 2012). Idioms continue to play a vital role in the day-to-day usage of language in both spoken and written forms. Constantino (2015) asserts that an idiom is described as a string of words whose meaning is distinct from the meaning provided by the individual words. Since idioms have their origins in culture and the differences within cultures, the consequence is that the translation of idioms must be approached differently from the translation of other components of natural language usage.

Translation of idioms, in general, has posed a plethora of challenges, considering the impacts of context and cultural features on the meanings of idioms (O'Dell & McCarty, 2010). When translating idioms and other fixed phrases, the translator is technically required to have an extraordinary familiarity with both the source language's cultural phenomena and the target language's culture. In addition, the translator must be able to determine the extent to which each idiom may be linked to a particular cultural connection and must also be able to deal with the rigor involved in identifying equivalents for idiomatic pairings.

Understanding that language users use different expressions to convey the same or similar meaning is an interesting aspect of translating idioms. This is because while an expression might be completely tangible and easy to understand for the interlocutors of a specific language, the same set of words and expressions may seem entirely vague and dim and even, in some cases, lacks the sense to the speakers of the other. In contrast, an expression might be completely tangible and easy to understand for the interlocutors in a language (Kovecses, 2010).

### Methodology

Several methodological approaches have been suggested in analyzing a research issue's characteristics. It may be qualitative, quantitative, or a blended technique. The following discussion of methodologies is intended to help create the fundamental approach for this current research project. The qualitative technique is a research approach that has a long history in the field of sociology and has gained popularity among social scientists since it enables researchers to conduct inquiries that attribute people's behaviors, interactions with one another, and behavior (Creswell, 2014; Prasetya et al., 2023). Quantitative research is a methodology that is utilized most frequently to conduct numerical data analysis (Hulu et al., 2023). The collection of numerical data and its subsequent analysis through numbers, graphs, and tables constitute the core of applying the quantitative research method (Sutrisno et al., 2023). The descriptive approach is taken for

this study, and the qualitative methodology is used for the research. The research is carried out using a descriptive study design, and the primary objectives of the research are tackled descriptively.

## Results and Discussion

### Results

Specific challenges have been discussed by researchers who have conducted practical translations of idioms in different languages, mainly in musical lyrics. These challenges are in addition to the challenges discussed earlier in translating idioms from the source language to the target language. Idioms in musical lyrics create significant difficulty in translating them because there are many different cultural and social interpretations of the ideas represented by the idioms. Arrays of studies that have attempted to study the translation of idioms in music lyrics have provided insight into the challenge translators face in this genre of language use. Top in the list of challenges translators face in providing suitable equivalents of idioms are listed below as the study findings.

- The challenge of encapsulating the internal meaning compositions of the idioms in the source language when rendered into the target language.
- The challenge of transmitting cultural, stylistic, social, and contextual projections embedded into the semantics of the idioms is tied to the musical lyrics.
- The challenge of generating connecting expressions to perfectly contextualize the ideas in the target language, considering the disjointed nature of musical lyrics
- The challenge of suitable methodological and strategic techniques to adopt in translating the idioms in musical lyrics into the target language.

### Discussion

The difficulty of recognizing and correctly interpreting idioms in musical lyrics by encapsulating the many facets of the idioms in question has remained. When translating idioms in musical lyrics, it is typically clear whether or not the translator is aware of idioms as cultural rudiments of ordinary language usage. The phrases and meanings of the idioms are linguistically fixed, which presents the translator with difficulty distinguishing the many conceptual frames that compose idioms. This is a challenge that must be met since idioms are linguistically fixed. The ability to interpret concepts via conceptual metaphor projections is still essential for translators, as claimed by Baker (2018). Abdelalaal and Alazzawie (2019) contend that the recognition of idioms as conceptual units is essential in the process of translation because it enables the translators to search for other linguistic units in the target language that share similar thought units, as opposed to combining linguistic expressions that are similar to those found in the text written in the source language. In other words, the researchers believe that the recognition of idioms as conceptual units is significant in the process of translation.

The inner meanings of idioms in musical lyrics not only represent the cultural and social projections of the source language but also encode the inner meanings and structural systems created by the language user, in this case, the music artist. Music artists have constantly proven the ability of expressions to mean just what they want. They also create new idioms or use the existing ones in specific ways that are not in line with how they are conventionally used. As such, the translator is challenged to understand the internal mechanisms of using the idioms in the lyrics. Significantly, there is a need for the translator first to understand the message of the musical lyrics. As such, the translator is faced with the challenge of understanding the intended meaning of the idiom from the artist's perspective, the conventional interpretation of the idiom, and how to render these concerns into the first language with an appropriate equivalent.

There is also the difficulty that arises when attempting to translate the idiomatic expressions into the target language in a way that does not alter the many conceptions, cultural projections, stylistic effects, and social conceptions that characterize the musical lyrics. As was already discussed, idioms are more

closely related to cultural ideas than language constructions. Other language units may have synonyms, antonyms, or related semantic projections. Idioms are considered relatively unchangeable, both in terms of their meaning and linguistic projection. It is the responsibility of the translator to render the text from the source language into the target language during the translation process. Furthermore, the translator's job is first to create a projection of the conceptual units in both languages and then locate the linguistic units in the first language that are equivalent to the projection.

This has been a considerable challenge considering the stylistic and social projections that characterize language use in music lyrics. Music artists use language mainly to exert non-conventional effects, communicating thoughts targeted at specific social and cultural groups. Furthermore, they deploy idioms to satisfy the communication needs of the targets of the music lyrics. Thus, the translator may need to read beyond the linguistic expressions to decode the cultural projection and social and stylistic effects embedded into the idioms in the musical lyrics. A translator may be compelled to translate the idioms using traditional knowledge without paying attention to the internal cultural, social, and stylistic effects of the idioms as used in the context. No doubt, the meanings of idioms are fixed, but in the musical lyrics, music artists tend to use social and stylistic effects to twist the meaning to add further impact to the lyrics. It is necessary for the translator to strategically capture these salient features when providing the equivalent in the target language.

As such, they were preserving the text's original stylistic and contextual features while translating it into another language remains a considerable challenge. Idioms and other forms of natural language features are dependent, to a large extent, on the context in which they are used. Meaning and use are enormously influenced, to a great extent, by both style and circumstance. Although idioms have a fixed meaning regardless of the context in which they are used, the manner of speech and the contextual projections that led to the development of the meaning are essential factors to consider when translating the equivalent into the source language.

There is also the challenge of generating expressions that can perfectly contextualize the idioms in the musical lyrics when translated into the target language due to the language used in music lyrics. Writers of musical lyrics employ different language features, including incomplete expressions. The writers also create idioms or add different expressions to an already existing idiom. When translating the idioms into the target language, the translator may be faced with the difficulty of providing different expressions, especially when the adopted technique for translation is paraphrasing.

Finally, another huge challenge is selecting an appropriate translation technique or strategy in rendering the equivalents of the idioms in musical lyrics. Translators, in general, have been faced with the challenge of selecting the appropriate technique or method for translating a particular idiom. One may be confused about which method to adopt, considering the nature of some idioms. The translation may be accomplished in the traditional sense via various approaches, including literal translation, transposition, modification, modulation, reduction or expansion, and other methods. Despite this, most research on translating idioms does not adhere to any of the methodologies mentioned above. Considering the recommendations made by some previous studies in the translation of idioms in musical lyrics, the following translation strategies may be used when translating idioms in music into other contexts:

- Provision of semantic and sense equivalents in the target language: this method is sometimes known as total equivalent translation. In this instance, the meaning of the idiomatic expression in the source language is preserved while being expressed using a different linguistic form. The significance of the use of this approach lies in the fact that the meaning of the idioms is not changed in order to conform to the target language. This is because the equivalent in the target language encodes the same meaning or reference as the original. This is one of the most common translation approaches, particularly in situations where the translator demonstrates a high level of expertise in both the language being translated into and the language being translated from.
- Paraphrasing: In this step, the translator may provide a short explanation of the idiom's meaning

in the source language in the language he will be translating into. This strategy is often used when there is neither an exact meaning nor an idiomatic equivalent in the target language. Since there is no direct translation of idioms from the source language into the target language, the method of paraphrasing must be used while translating. To give equivalents in the translation, it has also been suggested that translators who are not proficient in either the languages they are translating into, or the language that is their native language often resort to paraphrasing. In order to adequately explain this strategy, it is essential to point out that it is not the same as the direct supply of language form equivalents when it comes to deriving the idiom form in the target language.

- Omission and substitution: this strategy comprises the direct omission of an idiom or the replacement of another phrase or a literal translation in place of the idiom. Many translators use this method frequently to translate idioms into musical lyrics. Indeed, this method can distort the original meaning and social, cultural, and contextual rudiments of the idioms used in the original texts. However, the method can be used as a last resort in translating idioms in music.

### Conclusion and Implication of Analysis

The translation of idioms in musical lyrics is a unique endeavor that must be taken more seriously to avoid fidelity erosion or absolute diversion from the original text's meaning. This is a result of the artists creating many idioms in musical lyrics or modifying the linguistic features of the original conventional idiom. Considering that the meaning of idioms is fixed and that artist usually distorts the fixed meaning to create style and social aesthetics in the musical lyrics, the translator may be challenged to encode these features when rendering the equivalent into the target language.

This study has outlined four main challenges translators encounter when translating idioms in musical lyrics. The first challenge discussed is maintaining the inner meaning of the idioms. The translator may find it challenging to get equivalent idioms or expressions in the target language that directly encode all the internal meanings of the idiom, mainly as used in the musical lyrics. This challenge can be solved through proper understanding of not just the idiom but other expressions that are created with the idiom. The translator needs to create a conceptual projection of the principal idea behind the music track, wherein the idiom is created from.

The second challenge is the issue of preserving the social, cultural, and stylistic features embedded in the idioms as used in the music context. The translator may be challenged to transmit the idioms' cultural, social, and stylistic features into the target language. It is common to embed style, cultural projections, and social and aesthetic features into language use. This can be mitigated by exploring the nature of the style and the social and cultural targets of the musical lyrics. This will assist the translator in understanding the lyrics' aesthetic effects and deciding how to provide the embedded effects when providing the equivalents in the target language.

Another challenge is the issue of using appropriate expressions to attach to the idiom in translating it into the target language. Naturally, music lyrics are usually disjoined in a way that idiomatic expressions may not be fixed as it is in conventional language. In the translation of musical lyrics, the translator may follow the meanings of the lyrical lines where the idioms occur to provide adequate equivalents. The implication is that the translator may unintentionally alter the intended meaning of the idioms if the accompanied expressions are not adequately encoded concerning the context of usage.

Finally, the issue of the appropriate method or technique to adopt in translating idioms in musical lyrics has posed a challenge to the translator. The translator may find it difficult to select the right method to translate certain idioms in the musical lyrics. Significantly, all idioms cannot be translated using a single method. As such, it may be a case that each idiom requires a specific method to be adopted in the translation. To mitigate this, the translator needs to understand the message of the source language, understand the techniques for idioms translation, and make appropriate choices based on the idioms' cultural, aesthetic, and social effects.

Translators' challenges in translating idioms in musical lyrics are largely surmountable when the appropriate technique and considerations are implemented at each stage. This study has provided insight into translators' challenges when translating musical lyrics. The study also provides ideas and solutions to the challenges. The focus is to direct translators on appropriate actions



**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest

### Biographies

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### Authorship and Level of Contribution

Conceptualization, A. A., and N. A.; methodology, H. H. and J. B.; validation, E. F. and N. S.; Formal analysis, N. A. and H. H.; investigation, N. S. and I. L. S.; resources, N. A.; writing (original draft preparation), N. A. and H. H.; writing (review and editing), A. A., N. A., J. B. and H. H.; visualization, N. A.; supervision N. A. and H. H. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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