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Translating Northeastern Neo-Aramaic Idioms into English

Varteen Hanna Shaba

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Available from:

Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID),

Institute of Development Studies (IDS),

Brighton BN1 9RE, UK

Tel: +44(0) 1273 915704

E-mail: creid@ids.ac.uk

Website: www.ids.ac.uk/creid

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Summary

Northeastern Neo-Aramaic (also known as NENA) languages and literature are a prosperous and encouraging field of research. They abound with oral traditions and expressions that incorporate various spoken forms including everyday language, tales, songs, chants, prayers, proverbs, and more. These are used to transfer culture, knowledge, and community values.

Some types of oral forms are idioms and fixed expressions.

Idioms are extremely problematic to translate for a number of reasons, including: cultural and linguistic differences between languages; their specific connection to cultural practices and interpretations, and the difficulty of transferring the same meanings and connotations into another language with accuracy. This paper explores how to define and classify idioms, and suggests specific strategies and procedures to translate idioms from the NENA dialect Bartella (a local Aramaic dialect in Nineveh Plain) into English – as proposed by Baker (1992: 63–78). Data collection is based on 15 idioms in Bartella dialect taken from the heritage play *Khloia d baretle teqta* (Wedding in the old Bartella). The findings revealed that only three strategies are helpful to transfer particular cultural conceptualisations: using an idiom of similar meaning and form; using an idiom of similar meaning but different form, and translation by paraphrasing.

Based on the findings, the author provides individuals and institutions with suggestions on how to save endangered languages and dialects, particularly with regard to the religious minorities' heritage. Key among these recommendations is encouraging researchers and scholars to direct translation projects and activities towards preserving minority languages with their oral heritage and cultural expressions, which are susceptible to extinction.

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1 Introduction

Neo-Aramaic dialects are modern forms of Aramaic language. Their history goes back to more than 3,000 years ago. Until recently they have been spoken by Christian and Jewish communities and minorities in the Middle East. In the mid-twentieth century, Jewish communities were forced to leave Iraq. The 2003 Iraqi war and the 2014 ISIS invasion of Christian villages in Nineveh Plain led to a large displacement of Christian communities. As a result, Christian dialects are at risk of becoming extinct.

Scholars and academics have been working on both written and spoken language forms, with the intent of envisaging how to keep a language alive. Among several options for language preservation is translation – one of the most reliable and secure ways to regenerate and re-form a language. For many years, it was assumed that translation served primarily to preserve literature, but with the rise of global perspectives on translation and a socio-cultural turn in translation studies, the function of translation has widened its scope, and the concept of language preservation through translation is gaining currency.

According to a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) study, increasing the number of speakers of endangered languages is extremely difficult, but such languages can be documented, interpreted, and translated to ensure their survival. The notable literature of an endangered language can be translated into other languages or vice versa. As a result, translation is an endeavour that gives voice to the voiceless languages in the world. By translating specific NENA oral expressions (and idioms in particular) into a global language such as English, in this paper, I am allowing the authors' works to be read beyond their linguistic borders, thus supporting the preservation of religious heritage, which is at risk of being lost due to direct targeting, displacement, and migration. Additionally, with the emergence of translation as a unique area of study, minor and native literatures of any language in the globe have significantly increased their chance of survival.

Neo-Aramaic dialects are classified into four surviving subgroups as mentioned by Khan and Noorlander (2021: preface): 'Western Neo-Aramaic of south-western Syria, Central Neo-Aramaic of south-eastern Turkey, Northeastern Neo-Aramaic of northern Iraq, south-eastern Turkey and western Iran (generally known as NENA) and Neo-Mandaic of south-western Iran'. NENA dialects are very diverse and highly influenced not only by their standard and vernacular neighbouring languages such as Arabic, Kurdish, Turkish, and

Persian, but also by foreign diasporic languages like English, Swedish, Modern Hebrew, German, and French (Coghill 2020).

This paper is focusing on the Northeastern Neo-Aramaic dialect of Bartella. It is spoken by Christians who are devotees of the Syriac (Orthodox and Catholic) church. This dialect is referred to by the term *Sureth*, which is derived from Syriac language and is a partial form of *Suriaeth* (according to Syriac). Bartella is a town located in Nineveh Plain in the north of Iraq, to the east of the city of Mosul. The texts of this local dialect, which include folk and oral traditions, are written in Arabic script. This is due to the speakers' social situation and the fact that they live in close proximity with Arabs. Liturgical hymns are, however, composed and written in Classical Syriac language.

The present paper focuses on finding the appropriate strategies for translating idioms from NENA-Bartella dialect into English. In this study, Baker's approach to translating idioms is adopted as a theoretical framework, particularly in relation to its application to different cultures. The play adopted as a sample in this study is *Khloia d baretle teqta* (Wedding in the old Bartella), written in 1997 by Dr Bahjat Behnam and Ibrahim Shaba, who are famous Bartella authors. The play has been performed in Bartella dialect. It spans a specific period, between the 1950s and 1960s, and reflects the lifestyle of the town, including cultural traditions and costumes, heritage practices, events, and experiences associated with their unique cultural idioms, and in particular it depicts wedding ceremonies in this Syriac village. This play has been chosen particularly because it includes a large number of idioms used by the people of Bartella from that time onwards. One of the most prominent linguistic characteristics of this dialect is indeed the idioms, which reflect the long-standing aspects of life in this region.

2 The relationship between culture, language, and translation

Scholars, theorists, etymologists, and anthropologists agree that there is a close relationship between society and its own language. The notion of a language community is defined as a group of people who are using the same language and share the same values, attitudes, and behaviours transmitted through learning (Halliday 2007: 6; İşi 2017: 23). It seems obvious that there is an interconnection between language and culture. Anthropologists have insisted on that, and particularly on the entwined relationship

between language and culture and how they substantially define our experiences of the world (Sturge 2009: 67; Nida 1993: 105).

Many theorists have given different definitions of culture. Edward Tylor (1871: 1) suggests that culture includes thoughts, actions, and habits, and that it is also learned, shared, and exists within groups – i.e. it is integrated, united, and dialectal. Building on this, Ward H Goodenough (1957) argues that culture goes beyond things, people, behaviours, and emotions, and that ‘it consists of how people think, their models for perceiving, relating to, and otherwise interpreting them’. For instance, what people say and do, their social arrangements and events that are products and by-products of their culture as they apply it when they perceive and deal with different circumstances (*ibid.*: 167). As a consequence, the English etymologist Lyons and colleagues (1988) argue that a specific cultural language is considered an integral piece of its lifestyle.

Based on these views, culture is constructed on the past and present of society and consists of intangible elements, such as habits, traditions, different religious rituals and values, various works of literature and the arts, etc. It is therefore rooted in its own society. However, as today we live in a world where internet technologies give access to a large number of resources, it is difficult to restrict the concept of culture to a standardised definition. In particular, the relationship between culture and language is complicated as culture is the sum of practices and convictions of the general public, and language is the most important means by which the community tenets can be communicated and transmitted (Nida 1993: 105).

This study focuses on the translation of idioms. Idioms play a vital role in defining the identity of any language and its speakers since they constitute a special lexical category of language repertoire that presents a specific behaviour in the use of language. So it is important to shed light on the relationship between culture and translation because one of the main purposes of translation is to disseminate the intangible cultural linguistic heritage of ethnolinguistic communities in an effort to preserve their endangered languages. Bassnett and Lefevere (1990) put forward a cultural turn in translation studies by focusing on the connection between translation and culture, and explaining how culture constitutes a major change of emphasis in translation studies. They aim to include more ‘general issues of context, history and convention’ within translation. This interrelationship is regarded as a means of interlingual communication and a method of social interchange, and because of that, translators have the responsibility to be both bilingual and culturally skilled

(Bassnett 2005). Many theorists and scholars such as Taft (1981, cited in Katan 2009: 91), Malinowski (1964: 306), Toury (1995: 200), and Vermeer (1992: 40), who also see translators as cultural mediators, have similar arguments on their ability to facilitate the communication process, and point out that translation is an activity that includes no less than two languages and two cultural norms. Thus, translators confront two sets of norm systems – i.e. they investigate the social elements of the source language and explore the most effective strategy to transfer these elements into the target language. It is accordingly obvious that translation and culture are incidentally and functionally linked because translation is not only a process that replaces elements in the source texts with equivalents in the target text, but also seeks the best way to convey the context and cultural variations (İşi 2017: 10). It is noteworthy that the translation process produces a new text that is read in accordance with the readers' different perceptions of the world (Katan 2009: 91).

Cultural specificity imposes a barrier to translation as one word may have many connotations in different cultures (İşi 2017: 12). For example, in the case of the Bartella dialect's idiom *ethih* (his hand)/ *ethah* (her hand) *yarikhta* (long), its literal translation is 'his/her hand is long'. This expression has several idiomatic meanings depending on the context. It may refer to a thief, a person who impulsively attacks people, or somebody who is influential and powerful in society. Conversely, its literal translation in English as 'longhand' conveys the meaning of handwriting with a pen or a pencil, as opposed to typing. This demonstrates how the value and function of the two expressions build on their distinct cultural contexts.

3 Idioms are cultural references

Cultural references have interested many theorists and scholars in the field of translation studies. They are known by different terms; Newmark (1987) uses the term 'cultural words', Nedergaard-Larsen (1993) calls them 'cultural-bound elements', and Aixelá (1996) uses the term 'cultural specification'. Scholars have different methods to deal with cultural references: some argue that they are related to a specific culture, hence it is difficult to transfer them exactly into other languages because of the cultural difference between the two languages (Bekouche 2019: 465). However, Baker (1992: 68) considers it possible to convey cultural references as she states that: 'idioms and fixed expressions which contain culture-specific items are not necessarily understandable. It is not the specific items contained in an expression that are difficult to understand or to translate but rather its

meaning and its association with the culture-specific context'. Thus, the translation of cultural references is not impossible but is a complicated process for the translators who should bear in mind the importance of transferring the intended meaning and not the form. As Nida (1964: 164) says, 'correspondence in meaning must have priority over correspondence in style'.

Additionally, cultural references are classified in different ways. Florin (1993: 123) divided them into thematical, geographical, and historical categories. The thematical category covers the everyday language of work, the arts, religion, legends, and cultural folklore. The geographical category deals with the geography associated with one language as the local, national, international cultural references, and the historical category relates to the history of past or present events. Alternatively, Molina (2001, cited in Bekouche 2019: 471) categorises the cultural reference into four groups: natural environment, cultural heritage, social culture, and linguistic culture. Natural environment includes geography and land, biology, meteorological phenomena, and landscapes. Cultural heritage involves a large group of historical truths, personalities, religious beliefs, social events, arts, music, dance, games, and tales. The social culture category refers to social customs, conventions, and social organisations. Within a linguistic culture group, the most useful approach is Molina's since it gives a necessary consideration to phonological and lexical subgroups. This group consists of idiomatic expressions, metaphors and so on.

Idioms are linguistic expressions representing concepts and objects that are specific to a given culture or language. They help to preserve the local and cultural colour of any language (Adelnia and Dastjerdi 2011: 874). But what is an idiom exactly?

3.1 Definition of idioms

In the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, idioms are defined as expressions that 'cannot be derived from the meaning of the words alone, but that have a separate meaning of their own, particular to a certain region or group of people'. Here, language is both a carrier of culture and a tool for disseminating it. Consequently, idiomatic expressions are a crucial component of language. Linguists and translation researchers who have studied these linguistic features have proposed a variety of definitions. According to Catford (1965), idioms are a free combination of words, the meaning of which is constructed in disassociation with the meaning of its separate components. For instance, the idiomatic expression 'fed up' is a combination of two words that means someone is upset, but if the

two words are translated separately, the meaning is very different. By the same token, for Larson (1998: 20), idioms are 'a string of words whose meaning is different from the meaning conveyed by the individual words'. In her book (*In Other Words...*), Baker (1992: 63) describes idioms as 'frozen patterns of language which allow little or no variation in form and [...] often carry meanings which cannot be deduced from their individual components'. Based on the above definitions, an example of a Northeastern Neo-Aramaic Bartella dialect idiom would be: *twele brishe daqlatheh* (extracted from the play in question and still commonly used among people in Bartella), which means 'he is late'. This idiom cannot be understood from the meaning of its separate words as its literal translation is 'he slept over the head of his feet'. Using idioms produces a socially acceptable, precise, lively, and interesting discourse, and enables a coherent and cohesive communication (Fernando 1996, cited in Aldanani 2019: 1775).

3.2 Types of idioms

The translation of idioms is a big challenge for the translator. In order to recognise idioms better, the experts have identified different types of idioms. Baker (1992: 65) states that there are some idioms that are more recognisable than others and they include expressions that are not in line with reality, such as the NENA-Bartella dialect idiom *atwa ara ellibokh*, which literally means 'may earth sit down on someone's heart', where the idiomatic meaning conveys a bad wish addressed to somebody who forcefully sits or settles in somewhere. Moreover, Fernando (1996, cited in Daydan 2015: 177) groups idioms into three sub-classes: pure idioms, semi-idioms, and literal idioms. A pure idiom sub-class is a 'conventionalized, non-literal expression', whose meaning cannot be predicted from the meaning of its elements – for example, 'spill the beans'.

A semi-idiom has 'at least one literal and one non-literal meaning. "Foot the bill" (i.e. "pay") is one example of a semi-idiom, in which foot is the nonliteral element, and the word bill is used literally' (*ibid.*). A literal idiom is less complex than the other two even if the source idiom is unfamiliar, such as 'to go on foot', which means 'to walk'.

Furthermore, in order to understand idioms better, Adelnia and Dastjerdi (2011: 880) divide them into the following five categories.

3.2.1 Colloquialism

Colloquialism is a feature of informal speech, writing or daily conversation different from formal speech or writing (Adelnia and Dastjerdi, *ibid.*). For example, *methle men gekhkih* (she/he died of laughter) is an informal idiomatic expression used to describe someone who laughs a lot.

Colloquial language is used mainly within a specific geographical area. For instance, the following words are used almost exclusively by the people of Bartella.

- *Hai hoe* is an expression that conveys a sense of discontent, impatience, and dissatisfaction. It is still frequently used by elderly people, whereas younger generations are more influenced by surrounding languages such as Arabic and Kurdish.
- *Haier* means 'hurry up'. It is rare to find such expression in other languages, even within the NENA dialects. It has traditionally been used by elderly people.
- *Japal* is used to describe someone who is 'dirty and careless'. The surrounding languages and dialects lack such an expression.
- *Dady* is the colloquial and common name of 'the aunt' or any woman who is a relative of the family. It is also used by other neighbouring NENA dialects with the same connotations, like the Bakhdida dialect (Bakhdida is one of the regions adjacent to Bartella and most of its people are Christians speaking an Aramaic dialect that is very similar to Bartella's). In Bakhdida, the speakers use *atti* to refer to the aunt. Despite having the same pronunciation as the English word 'daddy', it does not have the same meaning.

3.2.2 Proverbs

A proverb makes the speech simpler, more actual, and more understandable. It is used to express facts based on logical sense. A proverb is defined by Mieder (2004: 3) as 'a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorisable form and which is handed down from generation to generation'.

Most proverbs can be considered idioms because as Holme (2004: 65) suggests, proverbs are figurative and metaphoric expressions used to depict an accepted meaning. An example is the NENA proverb that is used by the people of Bartella: *khmara gjahi wa saqa*

gnahi, which means that 'the donkey works hard to carry water but it's the person riding the donkey who gets tired'. This proverb is used to show how some people work very hard in a specific event or situation, while others who make no effort and pretend to be fatigued are being praised. If we look closely, we can see that translation scholars and researchers use proverbs in the study of idioms translation. Baker (2011: 81) makes no distinction between idioms and proverbs as she uses proverbs to translate idioms through paraphrasing.

3.2.3 Slang

Slang is an informal language or register which is used exclusively by a particular group of people to add fun and humour to the speech. An example of slang is *shtikha b shimsha*, which is translated literally into 'she/he is laying under the sun', but metaphorically it is used to describe a person who does not know what is happening around him/her.

3.2.4 Allusions

Allusions are a metaphoric form of speech defined by Abrams (1999: 9) as 'a passing reference, without explicit identification, to a literary or historical person, place, or event, or to another literary work or passage'. An example is mini *pishle reshia d matha khapara d qurawatha*. It means literally 'the one who became the head of the town is the gravedigger'. It is used to refer to a circumstance or an event when a person of no worth or importance comes to be in charge of a place or situation.

It is worth considering another example, *emabtli el arkhil*. On the one hand, it is an expression used to describe when someone places many things on a clay terrace called *arkhil*. On the other hand, it indicates the stacking of household goods that are useless.

3.2.5 Phrasal verbs

Phrasal verbs are usually the association of a verb with a preposition or a verb with an adverb. They carry an idiomatic meaning that is sometimes completely different from the original verb and they are informal expressions of everyday language – for instance, the NENA phrasal verb *hakokh elli*, which is translated literally as 'your right is on me' (i.e. my bad). It is used to express when a person accepts that they are wrong or that something is their fault.

3.3 Features of idioms

Based on the reviewed studies, translation scholars confirm that idioms are characterised by three features (Aldanani 2019: 1775):

1. Compositeness: It means that idioms are realised as multiword expressions.
2. Institutionalisation: Idioms are traditional expressions.
3. Semantic opacity: The meaning of idioms cannot be understood by their separate elements.

According to Ghazala (2003: 204), idioms have other main features: namely all idioms are metaphorical, hence they cannot be taken literally. In addition, it is difficult to describe idioms as non-grammatical patterns because their syntax is always fixed. It is also really hard to add or omit any word, their meaning is consistent, and they are cultural and informal. Consequently, the success in translating idioms depends on whether idiomaticity is maintained or distorted (*ibid.*).

4 Difficulties in translating idioms and idiomatic expressions

Translators encounter many stylistic, cultural or religious problems when translating idioms from one language to another. Newmark (1987) identifies some major problems in rendering idioms in idiomatic language in particular for the difficulty of finding an identical or equivalent idiom in the target language. He also states that syntactic issues are not the principal problem confronted by translators, but rather lexical problems such as collocation, words, settled phrases, and idioms. Strictly speaking, Baker (2011: 71–75) claims that the most important step after recognising and interpreting an idiom is to decide how to translate it into another language, because the difficulties of translating idioms are different from those of interpretation. She summarises the main challenges as follows:

- The problem of no equivalence in the target language. Idioms are expressed differently in different languages because they are culturally specific and are often untranslatable because their meaning is frequently associated with culture-specific contexts. For example, the NENA-Bartella idiom *ssalmeh koma*, which means literally ‘his/her face is black’, cannot be understood by English speakers as the colour black is not associated with failure or defeat as it is in NENA and Arabic

cultures. So this idiom is used metaphorically in both Arabic and NENA dialects to indicate that someone failed to perform an action or to accomplish a task.

- Another difficulty is that the context in which it is used may be different among languages: although some idiomatic expressions may have similar associations in the target language, their connotations are different (Baker 2011: 71).
- The idiom may be used with both its literal and idiomatic meanings in the source language, therefore the translator may have difficulty finding an idiom in the target language that is similar both in form and meaning, such as the NENA-Bartella idiom *bkesin ethi* (I will cut my hand), meaning that something is impossible to happen. As NENA and Arabic are Semitic languages and share many social and cultural beliefs, this idiom is translated into Arabic in an identical manner. However, translating this idiom into English can be challenging, because as Baker (1992: 72) recalls, it is hard to find a corresponding idiom in English conveying both literal and idiomatic meanings in this context.
- There is another obstacle postulated by Baker (2011: 75), which may impede the process of translation of idioms: the distinction between languages with regard to 'the use of idiom in the written language, the contexts in which they are used and their frequency of use'. This is not encountered in NENA dialects as they are not written.

On the basis on what has been mentioned, the process of translating idioms is not easy; it requires the translator to be not only a linguist but also a good cultural mediator.

5 Strategies in the translation of idioms

Throughout the history of translation studies, many scholars have written about various strategies used to translate a text from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL). Newmark (1981: 125) states that idioms should never be translated word-for-word, a view which is shared by Larson (1984, cited in Assaf Al-assaf 2019: 13). This is because word-for-word translation would not make sense, as the form cannot be maintained. However, the word or phrase in the target language can be used in translation, if it has a corresponding meaning. On the other hand, UI Hassan and Tabassum (2014: 20) refer to the possibility of using literal translation when the two languages belong to the same family.

Baker (2011: 75–76) sheds light on additional factors to consider when translating idioms such as ‘the significance of the specific lexical items which constitute the idiom’ and ‘the appropriateness or inappropriateness of using idiomatic language in a given register in the target language’. Also, Mollanazar (2004, cited in Akhbari 2013: 36) suggests two ways of translating idioms: using an appropriate idiom that identifies as its equivalent in the target language, and using its meaning if there is no corresponding idiom in the target language.

Baker (1992) postulates some hopefully helpful strategies for translating idioms, as follows.

5.1 Using an idiom of similar meaning and form

This strategy involves the replacement of the source language idiom with a target language idiom that has equivalent meaning and form. As indicated by Baker (2011: 76), ‘this match can occasionally be achieved’ – for example, the NENA-Bartella idiom *qlibq risheh eqlatheh* (he turned upside down), which corresponds in form and meaning to the English idiom ‘to turn something on its head’. On the other hand, there is an English idiom equivalent only in form, that is ‘head over heels’, which is defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary to mean ‘very much or deeply’.

5.2 Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form

Aside from the strategy described above, another method for translating idioms is to use an idiom with a similar meaning but a different form. This method is employed when the translator finds an idiom that has no lexical items in the target language but has a similar meaning in the target language. For instance, *ethih ellibeh* literally means ‘his hand is over his heart’, and corresponds closely to the English expression ‘someone’s heart is in his/her mouth’. This idiom is used by all Iraqi people with numerous dialects. It conveys the meaning of ‘expecting an unpleasant situation’.

5.3 Borrowing the source language idiom

Baker (2011: 79) presumes that ‘just as the use of loanwords is a common strategy to deal with culture-specific items, it is not unusual for idioms to be borrowed in their original form in some contexts’. The borrowing strategy is largely adopted by Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) as a direct translation procedure in order to avoid gaps between the source and target languages: the source language message is incorporated element by element into the target language. This strategy is referred to by Vinay and Darbelnet as the simplest of all

translation procedures and includes using foreign words in the target language. An example is the Italian word 'pizza', used in all languages over the world. However, borrowing of idioms or fixed expressions is very difficult. It is self-evident that idioms in Bartella dialect cannot be borrowed by English due to the great diversity in the linguistic, phonological, and cultural systems of the two languages.

5.4 Translation by paraphrasing

Baker (2011: 80) claims that this is the most common procedure employed when it is challenging to use the idiomatic language in the target text 'because of differences in stylistic preferences between the two languages'. For example, the most common and unique idiom of the Bartella dialect, the single word *khlapeh*, lacks equivalent counterparts in other languages. It is used basically to praise the Lord and the saints, so it might be paraphrased into English as 'Hallelujah'. Paradoxically, it is pronounced when the speaker is dissatisfied with the addressee. Many researchers and scholars see both advantages and disadvantages in this strategy. Chesterman (1997: 104), for example, states that paraphrasing 'results in a TT [target text] version that can be described as loose, free, in some contexts even under translated'. In a similar way, Delisle *et al.* (1999: 167) consider paraphrasing dangerous, as it consists of introducing elements in the target text that are not contained in the source text. Conversely, Baker (2011: 80) views paraphrasing as an essential strategy in translating idioms and fixed expressions.

So based on the views of the scholars, Baker's suggestion of paraphrasing is the most appropriate procedure to resolve the problem of idiomatic inadequacy in the target language, specifically when translating from Aramaic into English.

5.5 Translation by omission of a play on words in an idiom

Sometimes, translators have to translate literally when it is impossible to find a proper target language equivalent for the source message, so a translator can communicate the message without distortion (Vazifekkhah 2017: 36). This strategy is strongly remarked by Baker (2011: 84) to include only translating 'the literal meaning of an idiom in a context that allows for a concrete reading of an otherwise playful use of language'. This strategy is problematic since some idioms include a play on words, and as languages differ in the way they form idioms, it is hard to produce a play on words in a particular target language (Rasul 2018: 132).

5.6 Translation by omission of an entire idiom

In general, omission is viewed as an unfavourable translation strategy (*ibid.*). Nonetheless, some translation scholars have viewed omission as a useful strategy (cf. Baker 1992; 2011; Toury 1995: 82; Dickins, Hervey and Higgins 2002: 23). Baker (2011: 85) remarks that ‘as with single words, an idiom may sometimes be omitted altogether in the target text’. In other words, it can be omitted when ‘it has no close match in the TL [target language], their meaning cannot be easily paraphrased, or for stylistic reasons’ (*ibid.*). However, this can be criticised – as argued by Rasul (2016: 110) – because the meaning of the source message may be penetrated so the result is ‘a translation loss in semantic, stylistic and cohesive aspects of the text’. He also sees that the strategy of omission can be valid if there is a compelling reason such as avoiding a lengthy explanation, and in case there is the possibility of inferring the meaning of the idiom from the co-text or context.

Considering all the strategies reviewed by Baker (1992/2011), this paper suggests that the most appropriate ones for translating idioms from the NENA-Bartella dialect into English are as follows:

1. Using an idiom of similar meaning and form.
2. Using an idiom of similar meaning but different form.
3. Translation by paraphrasing.

6 Methodology, data analysis, and discussion of results

Data collection in this study focuses on identifying NENA-Bartella dialect idioms included in the play *Khloa d baretle teqta*, and investigating the proper strategies which can be used to translate these idioms into English in the most appropriate way, endorsed by the researcher of this paper both as a native speaker of Bartella dialect and a bilingual speaker.

When adopting Baker's strategies to translate idioms, it is important to mention certain cases where she thinks that avoiding translating an idiom may lead to a loss of meaning, notably:

1. The translator's inability to change the word order in an idiom.
2. The translator's inability to delete or add a word or even to replace an idiom with another one.
3. The translator's inability to change the grammatical structure of an idiom (Baker 1992: 63).

This confirmed the translator's responsibility to transfer the heritage and cultural aspects in specific and unique contexts.

6.1 Strategies used when translating NENA-Bartella dialect idioms into English

6.1.1 Using an idiom of similar meaning and form

According to this strategy, the translator tries to find an idiom in the target language which corresponds to the source one in meaning and form. This strategy can be achieved effortlessly when the source and target languages belong to the same family of languages. Conversely, it is fairly difficult to identify an adequate equivalent if the two languages differ substantially in the way they identify certain concepts.

Here are two examples of using this strategy:

Example 1. Source language: *ari lishanukh*

Target language: 'hold your tongue', which means to stop yourself from saying something.

Example 2. Source language: *la giela bmokhi*

Target language: 'it is not going into my brain' or 'it never enters my mind', which means I cannot understand anything or I cannot believe what is being said or done.

6.1.2 Using an idiom of similar meaning but different form

When it is impossible to translate an idiom or a fixed expression through direct equivalents with similar meaning and form, the translator resorts to looking for an idiom with similar meaning but different lexical items. This is the most common, interesting, and challenging strategy for translating idioms (Rasul 2018: 126). In this strategy, the translator relies on their cultural background in order to find the equivalent idiom with the same function in the target language (Assaf Al-assaf 2016: 23).

Here are some examples of using this strategy:

Example 1. Source language: *filis khwara da yoma koma*

Target language: 'a penny saved is a penny earned'

The source idiom means literally 'the white penny is good for the black day'.

Example 2. Source language: *kasih la ktina*

Target language: 'to spill the beans'

The source idiom's literal translation is 'their belly cannot bear...'

Example 3. Source language: *empele dithwa bkhalwa*

Target language: 'a fly in the ointment'

The source idiom means literally 'the fly dropped in yogurt'.

Example 4. Source language: *bkila dkilet pishit kila wo muzida*

Target language: 'with the measure you use, it will be measured to you and even more' (Mark 4: 24)

Example 5. Source language: *dirokh el qataeniathokh wal meshteniathokh*

Target language: 'he fell into the old track'

This Bartella idiom literally means that she/he returned to their sticks and canals, which refers to the sticks and water canals used in farming as hand tools and methods. Obviously, farming has been and still is an integral part of the lives of the people of Bartella and Nineveh Plain.

Example 6. Source language: *tmisha bkitma*

Target language: 'down in the dumps'

In the examples above, the translator is able to use idioms which have similar propositional meanings but different form in both the source and target languages. To render the idiomatic expression *empele dithwa bkhalwa*, the idiom 'a fly in the ointment' can be used to express the same connotation as both languages share that concept in a similar way to represent a single thing or a person who spoils a situation that could have been very positive or enjoyable.

The fourth example is a verse from the Bible about judging each other. The Bible is a crucial part of Christian life; most of the language of people in Christian areas such as Bartella includes quotations from the Bible. Religion generally plays an important role in shaping the beliefs of a community and this is reflected in the way they speak and behave daily.

In the fifth example, the source idiomatic expression is still used to express when someone falls into their old routine with the expectation that something wrong will happen. In order to keep the same impact on the target language readers, this idiom is replaced with a TL idiomatic expression which has similar connotative and denotative meaning but different lexical items. *Tmisha bkitma* is normally used as an interjection expression in the source language to express the misfortune of someone's life.

6.1.3 Translation by paraphrasing

When it is not possible to use the previous two strategies in idiom translation, translators may attempt to use paraphrasing (Rasul 2018: 129). This strategy helps to avoid literal translation that would result in abnormal or loss of translation. Larson, 1998, cited in Rasul, 2018, states that 'the real danger comes when translating an idiom literally since the result will usually be nonsense in the receptor language'.

The following examples apply to this strategy:

Example 1. Source language: *muktile aqli*

Target language: 'she/he convinced me'

Here, if it is translated literally to the English reader as 'he cut my mind', it would be something illogical and not in line with reality.

Example 2. Source language: *ethi wa akli*

Target language: 'she/he is someone's right hand'

Again, the literal translation as 'she/he is my hand and leg' is awkward.

Example 3. Source language: *kemhaki palga*

Target language: 'someone's talk makes no sense'

Translated literally, this means that the speaker 'beats around the bush' or says things that are not reasonable or have no meaning.

Example 4. Source language: *hak bithokh*

Target language: 'you are right'

To some extent, the English receptor may be aware of the literal rendering as 'the right is in your hands', but paraphrasing is the most appropriate choice in this situation so that the translation sounds more genuine and accurate.

Example 5. Source language: *gdari liba el liba*

Target language: 'to reconcile between people's conflicting hearts'

The nature of societies in Nineveh Plain in general and in Bartella in particular reflects the way people living in the community can bring their hearts together and guide one another to find peaceful ways, which is highly represented in the idiom *gdari liba el liba*. The strongest evidence comes from their expressions of greeting, which start with an idiom mentioned repeatedly throughout the play (see Example 6).

Example 6. Source language: *shlama elkhon*

Target language: 'Hello', although the original idiom could be translated literally as 'peace be upon you' (*shlama* means 'peace')

The translator prefers paraphrasing with a more idiomatic expression in the target language in order to make the translation sound genuine and more familiar for the reader or the listener. Moreover, the response to this expression of greeting is *pshina wa bishlama*, which is paraphrased by 'welcome with love and peace'. This idiom has equivalents in other languages: in Arabic, it is *alسلام alyakum*; in Hebrew, it is *shalom elaykhom*.

Additionally, there is a very common idiom widely used by Bartella's people:

Example 7. Source language: *alkistanokh*

Target language: 'a response to somebody's intransigence'

This is a culture-specific and colloquial idiom. The translator may opt to paraphrase rather than to translate literally as it is a difficult expression to use in such contexts. This idiom is used to refer to a situation when the speaker is upset and reacts against the listener.

7 Conclusion

Northeastern Neo-Aramaic (NENA) is a grouping of related dialects. They have been consistently spoken by most Christian minorities in Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran. They constitute the intangible cultural heritage of their minorities and communities; therefore their protection and preservation have recently received worldwide attention. This paper focused mainly on one of the Nineveh Plain dialects in the north of Iraq, the Bartella dialect (spoken by a social group living in a town called Bartella) and in particular on culture-specific expressions such as idioms and fixed expressions.

The main aim of reviewing the definitions and types of idioms was to investigate and identify the appropriate strategies for translating Bartella dialect idioms into English by adopting Baker's approach as described in her book, *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*. Fifteen idioms constituted the basis of this study's analysis to identify the most appropriate translation strategies to deal with Bartella idioms as cultural references. As a result, and due to the significant cultural and linguistic differences between NENA dialects and the English language, only three strategies were selected.

The analysis and discussion demonstrate that idioms have characteristics that are specific to the culture and language in which they have formed. They have an interesting purpose in language since they mean more than the words they represent. Once grasped, idioms – whether metaphorical or figurative – function as a palpable and unique element of any language. They allow the speaker to express specific feelings in speech without stating them openly. They also provide cultural perspectives on society norms, ideals, and beliefs. Idioms provide insight into the speaker's ideas, feelings, and perspectives. Culture and language are intricately linked. The results show that literal translations do not transmit the connotative and denotative meaning, and that it is better to choose expressions in the

target language that may differ in form but offer a more genuine and familiar rendition of the expression itself.

The results also show that the discipline of translation studies can contribute to gathering, documenting, and preserving the oral and linguistic heritage of ethnic groups and communities before it disappears, in particular for idioms, which are the most valuable component of cultural history as they not only convey the information they aim to convey, but also have an impact because of their unique language. An excellent idiom encourages readers to think deeply about the spirit it carries by allowing them to form unlimited associations.

8 Recommendations

The following suggestions could be good solutions for individuals and institutions to use translation as a means to protect and preserve endangered minority languages:

1. Enhance the awareness of scholars, researchers, and academics about these languages.
2. Implement translation projects based on saving or regenerating disappearing languages or dialects.
3. Encourage the publishing sector to document language translation materials in an effort to protect the rich cultural and history of these languages.

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CREID is an international consortium led and convened by the Institute of Development Studies, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK

T +44 (0) 1273 606261

F +44 (0) 1273 621202

E creid@ids.ac.uk

W www.ids.ac.uk/creid

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