

REVIEW

Translating Idiomatic Expressions: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

Idiomatic expressions represent a profound challenge in translation due to their non-literal meanings, cultural embeddedness, and fixed linguistic forms. Drawing on information from significant theoretical frameworks and empirical research, this study systematically reviewed the most commonly used models and the primary translation strategies employed to translate idioms across various language pairs. The study aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge in this complex field. The review highlighted the complex nature of idioms and the primary difficulties they present, including semantic opacity and cultural specificity. The review revealed that while perfect equivalence is rare, paraphrasing (28.26%) is the core strategy used across different language pairs, followed by omission (19.56%) and translating an idiom of similar meaning but different form (17.39%). In addition, Mona Baker's (1992) framework is the most commonly used model for analyzing idiom translation. The review also discussed factors that affect strategy selection across various language pairs, including linguistic and cultural distance, context, text type, target audience, and translation purpose. It also proposed avenues for future research, particularly concerning less-resourced languages and the impact of evolving translation technologies. Finally, it highlighted areas that require further investigation, including the need for studies in languages with limited resources and the evaluation of Neural Machine Translation's (NMT) idiomatic performance.

Keywords: Idiomatic Expressions; Translation Strategies; Systematic Review; Cultural Equivalence

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1. Introduction

Language, beyond its literal elements, encompasses layers of meaning embedded in figurative expressions. Among these, idiomatic expressions are the most potent yet obscure linguistic phenomena. Idiom is a phrase or expression whose meaning cannot be deduced from the literal meaning of its units and carries a figurative or non-literal meaning. Examples such as “to bite the bullet” (English), “prendre la mouche” (French, lit. “to take the fly,” meaning to take offense), or “ضرب عصفورين بحجر واحد” (Arabic, lit. “to hit two birds with one stone,” meaning to achieve two goals with one action) demonstrate their inherent non-literal meaning. This semantic opacity, coupled with their fixed syntactic structure and deep cultural roots, renders idioms one of the most formidable obstacles in the translation process^[1-3].

The effective translation of idioms is crucial for maintaining both semantic fidelity and stylistic naturalness in the target text. A mistranslated idiom can lead to misunderstanding, loss of rhetorical effect, or even culturally inappropriate rendering. Hence, both the source language (SL) and the target language (TL), as well as their respective cultural contexts, must be thoroughly understood in order to produce an accurate and culturally appropriate translation for the intended audience^[4]. As a result, translation researchers have focused on recognizing, classifying, and evaluating strategies for handling these complex linguistic units in different language pairs.

The literature on translation strategies for idiomatic expressions was systematically reviewed in the current study. Its main goal was to synthesize the results of previous theoretical models and empirical studies with the intent of pinpointing commonly used models and the primary translation strategies employed to translate idioms across different languages and various language pairs in the translation of idioms. This review aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge in this important field of translation studies by examining these factors.

2. Literature Review: Unpacking Idiom Translation Strategies

Idiom translation requires a shift away from word-for-word equivalence and toward conveying the pragmatic func-

tion and underlying meaning. Since the meaning of an idiom is not the product or result of its components or constituents^[5], idioms pose several challenges for the translator. Even bilinguals exhibit complex interactions between languages^[6], implying that higher-level linguistic features like idioms would naturally present even greater challenges in cross-linguistic transfer. Li et al.^[3] suggest that translating idioms presents difficulties due to their non-literal nature, necessitating careful contextual analysis to accurately interpret and convey their intended meaning. The theoretical foundations of idiom translation strategies are explored in this section, which also classifies the most widely identified approaches used in different languages.

2.1. Theoretical Foundations of Idiom Translation

Mona Baker^[2,7] presented one of the most important theoretical frameworks in idiomatic translation in her groundbreaking book, *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*. Baker’s model provided a comprehensive typology of strategies employed by translators when encountering idiomatic expressions that lack a direct equivalent in the target language (TL). Her model is commonly used as a baseline for analyzing and examining translational decisions in empirical research, including many language pairs^[8-10].

Although scholars occasionally provide different classifications, other scholars generally agree on the same fundamental principles. For instance, Fernando and Flavell^[11] differentiate between pure idioms, semi-idioms, and literal idioms, each necessitating different strategies. Newmark^[12] classifies idioms into several types, offering different translation strategies based on their character. Collectively, these theories emphasize that the idiom’s opacity, fixedness, cultural specificity, communication context, and intended impact on the target audience all influence the chosen translation strategy.

2.2. Common Translation Strategies Across Languages

The systematic reviews of translated texts and the theoretical framework revealed that the following strategies are the most predominant ones for translating idiomatic expressions:

2.2.1. Equivalence-Based Strategies

These strategies seek to achieve a high degree of equivalence by preserving the target text's meaning and, ideally, its idiomaticity. Equivalence is used when there is no formal semantic correspondence to translate a word or phrase from the original language with a group of words or phrases in the other language that reflect the same message; the TL phrase is replaced with another reflecting the same situation^[13]. Translators prefer to use equivalence in order to have a completely unique structure with meanings that differ from the SL text. At the same time, it fits and is still communicatively equal to that of the SL text situation.

- Using an Idiom of Similar Meaning and Form (Equivalence): This is the most popular strategy, which involves replacing an idiom from the source language (SL) with one from the target language (TL) that expresses the same meaning and comparable lexical or imagery content. For example, phrases like “to go from bad to worse” and its French equivalent, “aller de mal en pis,” often fall into this category. However, such perfect matches are rare due to the inherent linguistic and cultural divergences between languages^[2]. Cross-linguistic studies, such as those between English and Persian^[14] or English and Arabic^[15], highlighted its rarity.
- Using an Idiom of Similar Meaning but Dissimilar Form: Finding an idiom in the TL that expresses the same idea as the source idiom but uses different lexical or imagery content is the aim of this strategy. For example, using a culturally appropriate Arabic phrase like “أسلم الروح” (to surrender the soul) or the German phrase “den Löffel abgeben” (to hand in the spoon) to translate the English phrase “to kick the bucket.” Even if the literal imagery changes, this strategy effectively maintains the expression's idiomaticity in the TL^[2]. When idioms resist literal translation and paraphrasing them would weaken the emotional and generic impact of the message, empirical studies often identify this strategy as a practical and widely used strategy^[15].

2.2.2. Non-Equivalence-Based Strategies

Translators use strategies that prioritize meaning transfer ahead of idiomatic form preservation when idiomatic equivalence is impossible or unsuitable.

- Translation by Paraphrase: This strategy is the most common and practical strategy for translating idioms between different language pairs^[16]. It involves explaining the meaning of the idiom in a non-idiomatic, literal way in the target language. For example, “to be on cloud nine” might be paraphrased as “to be extremely happy.” While this method effectively conveys the semantic content, it often results in a loss of conciseness, metaphorical richness, and the stylistic impact or naturalness of the original idiom. Baker^[2] comments that this strategy has both advantages and disadvantages. She states that the primary advantage of employing paraphrasing is that it accurately determines the prepositional meaning. As for its disadvantages, she^[2] advocates that paraphrasing lacks the value of a lexical item, which is why it is unable to represent expressive, evoked, or any associated meaning, and the other disadvantage is that it is time-consuming and awkward to utilize as it requires expressing a segment with quite a few items. Despite these shortcomings, it is the preferred choice when other solutions are ineffective or inappropriate due to its reliability in guaranteeing clear communication. This reliance on paraphrasing aligns with the complexity of the Arabic language, characterized by its morphological richness and diglossia^[17]. Systematic reviews of English-Thai^[18] and English-Arabic^[15-19] translations consistently highlight paraphrasing as the most frequently applied strategy.
- Translation by Omission: This strategy, which is considered a last resort, involves omitting the idiom altogether from the target text (TT). It is typically employed when an idiom has no close equivalent, cannot be effectively paraphrased without significantly disrupting the text, or if its cultural connotations are too obscure or potentially offensive for the target audience. While it avoids miscommunication, it inherently leads to a loss of textual meaning and stylistic nuance, making it a strategy of last resort^[2,20]. In some situations, omitting a term during the translation process has no adverse effect on the final output.
- Translation by Compensation: This strategy entails adding a new idiomatic expression, rhetorical device, or stylistic flourish elsewhere in the target text to compensate for the loss of an idiomatic expression or its stylistic

effect in one part of the text. Even if the specific idiom is not directly replicated, the aim is to maintain the general tone, texture, or communicative impact of the original text^[2]. It is important to note that compensation is not based on adding to the TT any elegant-sounding word to outweigh any flaws that may have appeared in it; instead, it is the weighing of a precise, clearly defined, significant loss with a precise, clearly defined, less significant one^[21].

- **Literal Translation (with caution):** This strategy can be used in some instances, but it is generally discouraged for “opaque” idioms. For “transparent” or “semi-transparent” idioms where the literal meaning offers a strong clue to the figurative meaning (e.g., “to break the ice”), a literal translation might be partially understandable or even acceptable. Moreover, it could be deliberately employed to draw attention to the source text’s (ST) foreignness or when speaking to a highly specialized audience that is familiar with the source culture^[22]. However, a common mistake-causing pitfall is the indiscriminate use of literal translation. Newmark^[23] suggests that literal translation cannot be followed when the literal translation is clearly vague, when a vocative or informative text is poorly expressed, or when there is no “satisfactory” one-to-one TL equivalence for SL general words despite over-translation.
- **Cultural Substitution/Adaptation:** This strategy involves replacing an idiom specific to the source culture with one that is specific to the target culture, having a similar communicative purpose or evoking a similar reaction, even if the literal meaning and imagery are entirely different. This strategy is widely employed to enhance naturalness and resonance with the target culture^[24], particularly in contexts such as advertising or localization.
- **Borrowing/Transliteration:** In rare cases, an idiom might be directly borrowed from the source language into the target text, often accompanied by an explanation, particularly if the idiom is related to a specific cultural concept that is being introduced or if the target audience is expected to have some familiarity with the source language. Borrowing is “a technique of taking a word or expression from the source language”^[25]. It is a technique that is used consciously by the translator, who utilizes the exact word in the TT as it occurs in the ST^[26].

2.3. Factors Influencing Strategy Selection

The choice of an optimal translation strategy for idioms is not arbitrary but is influenced by a confluence of factors:

- **Linguistic and Cultural Distance:** The greater the linguistic and cultural gap between the source and target languages, the less likely it is to find direct idiomatic equivalents, increasing the reliance on paraphrasing or omission
- **Context and Co-text:** The surrounding text provides crucial clues to the idiom’s meaning and appropriate register. The context where the idiom is used can clarify its meaning, which helps determine a strategy that best fits the discourse’s overall tone and flow^[27].
- **Text Type:** The type of text (e.g., literary fiction, technical manual, news report, advertisement) significantly impacts strategy selection. Literary texts might prioritize preserving metaphorical imagery (even if requiring more explanation), while technical texts might favor clarity and direct paraphrase. However, texts do not constantly occur in their pure form. Some texts are multipurpose, as they exhibit the characteristics of multiple types.
- **Target Audience:** The translator must consider the expectations, cultural competency, and prior knowledge of the target audience. A general audience would require a clearer, more natural-sounding equivalent or paraphrase. In contrast, a highly educated audience would likely accept a more nuanced or literal translation, accompanied by illustrative footnotes.
- **Purpose of Translation:** The translator’s choices depend on the translation’s primary purpose (e.g., informative, evocative, persuasive). Clarity and accuracy take precedence over stylistic flair in legal documents, which often favors a paraphrased approach.

The findings from previous systematic reviews highlighted the importance of paraphrasing as the most commonly used strategy in different language pairs, including English-

Arabic^[8,15], English-Persian^[14], and English-Thai^[18]. This prevalence reflected the inherent difficulty in finding precise idiomatic equivalents and the translator’s primary responsibility to convey meaning clearly and accurately.

Reviews also frequently highlighted the low frequency of formal equivalence, as strategies involving idioms of similar meaning and form are consistently found to be the most frequent, thereby validating the theoretical premise that such a finding of equivalence is rare^[28]. In addition, Many studies point to the lack of shared cultural schemas as the primary obstacle to idiom translation^[29,30], often leading to reliance on non-idiomatic solutions or cultural adaptation. Finally, empirical data often suggested a significant impact of translator competence, with experienced translators proving more adept at identifying idioms and creatively employing a wider range of strategies beyond simple paraphrasing, demonstrating a higher level of “idiomatic competence”^[22]. Conversely, difficulties in idiom recognition and the lack of readily available equivalents were common challenges for less experienced translators.

Together, these reviews suggested that although theoretical models provide a strong framework, the practical implementation of strategies is often pragmatic, driven by the immediate need to deliver meaning and naturalness in the target language.

3. Methodology

This section outlines the methodology of the systematic literature review, adhering to the PRISMA 2020 guidelines.

3.1. The Objective of the Study

This study analyzed existing literature to identify the translation strategies employed for translating idiomatic ex-

pressions. It specifically summarized the translation strategies applied across various language pairs. Additionally, it aimed to determine the most commonly used model for identifying idiomatic translation strategies.

3.2. Strategy Search

For literature retrieval, Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) were initially chosen to achieve the research goals. Scopus was chosen due to its reputation as the largest abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature^[31], thereby ensuring a comprehensive search. It facilitates data extraction and documentation by integrating seamlessly with reference managers and systematic review software, offering advanced tools for filtering and refining search results, and assisting researchers in conducting comprehensive and repeatable systematic searches. Meanwhile, WoS has a limited range of journals and inadequate coverage, leading to an incomplete review. Scopus and WoS showed a high level of overlap, requiring extra effort for de-duplication without significantly expanding the body of the relevant articles. Accordingly, WoS was excluded in the final stage based on the aforementioned considerations. The keywords used to search for articles in Scopus were ‘translating idioms’, ‘idioms translation’, ‘idiomatic expressions’, ‘translation’, and ‘figurative language’.

3.3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

We adapted Zhang et al.’s^[32] inclusion and exclusion criteria, tailoring them to align with the research aims. This step is crucial for defining the studies related to the review’s research questions, thereby enhancing its scientific merit and reliability. **Table 1** below details the inclusion and exclusion criteria for this study.

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the articles under study.

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
1. Publications considered for this study must be scholarly journal papers, conference papers, or conference proceedings.	1. Exclude publications from unrelated fields like medicine and biology.
2. The publication must contain ‘translation’ and ‘idioms’ or ‘idiomatic expression’ in its title, abstract, and keywords.	2. The study excludes certain publication types, including theses, book chapters, and editorials.
3. Publications must have a publication date between 2010 and 2025.	3. Exclude any publications if their full text is not available online.
4. Only publications written in English were considered.	4. Exclude studies published in languages other than English.

3.4. Risk-of-Bias Checklist

Translation studies often involve a range of methods, including qualitative interviews, corpus analysis, experimental design, and surveys. To make our judgments more explicit regarding the selected articles, we designed a critical appraisal checklist to assess the strength and trustworthiness of the evidence in our systematic review, making the findings more transparent and rigorous. Moreover, it helps manage inconsistencies in design (see **Appendix A**). Among the 211 articles, 18 articles passed the checklist and were included in the review.

3.5. Data Extraction

We conducted the literature review using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) workflow. This approach is selected because it is a widely adopted system that provides standardized methods and guidelines for systematic literature reviews^[33]. Furthermore, it facilitates critical appraisal, transparency, and minimizes reporting bias. The PRISMA framework involves four main stages: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and the final inclusion of selected articles. The following **Figure 1** outlines the systematic review selection process of studies.

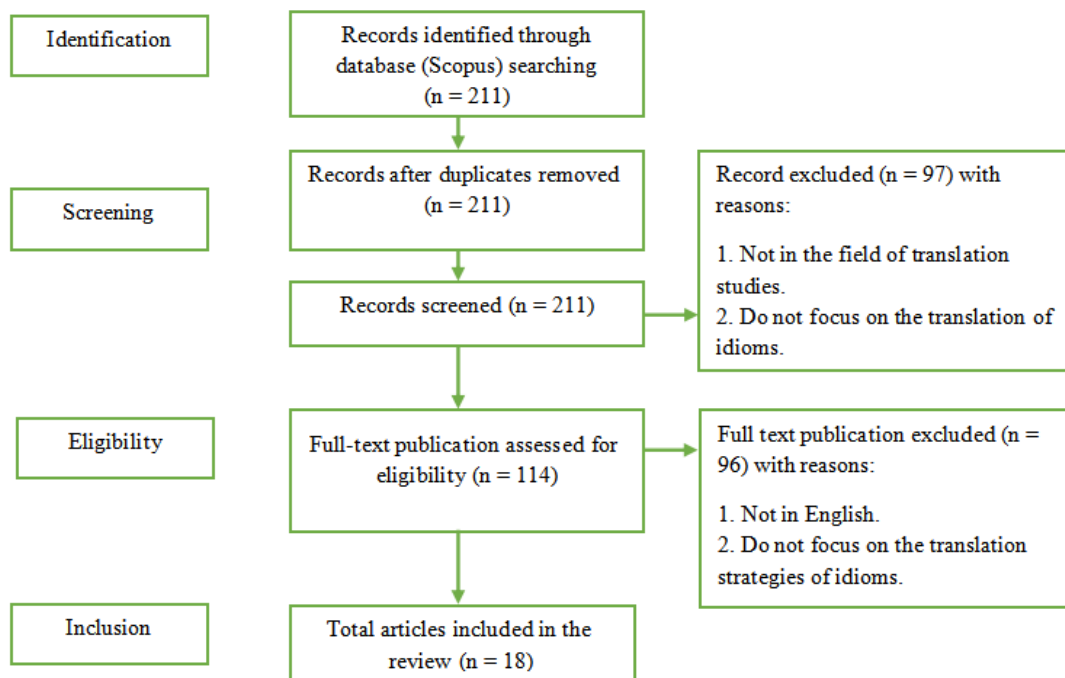


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram Adapted From Pang, Abdul Halim, and Mohd Jalis, 2023.

As shown in **Figure 1**, the review began by identifying 211 articles through a search of the Scopus database. Although Scopus did not generate duplicates, records were checked before screening. After screening, which involved reviewing the titles and abstracts of all identified records to determine if they met the initial inclusion criteria, 97 articles were excluded because they were not in the field of translation studies or did not focus on the translation of idioms. Next, 114 full-text publications were assessed for eligibility. Of these, 96 full-text publications were excluded because they were not written in English and did not focus on idioms translation strategies. Ultimately, 18 articles met the inclusion criteria

and were included in the final systematic review.

4. Findings

The following **Table 2** lists 18 studies published between 2011 and 2025 that investigated strategies for translating idioms in various language pairs. In addition, the table presents the models used and the key findings from each article. The review synthesizes information from a variety of sources, including political discourse, medical publications, children’s literature, audiovisual translation, and other relevant fields.

Table 2. The articles included in the review.

No.	Authors & Publication Date	Language	Models	Study Findings (The Strategies Are Sorted in Descending Order)
1	Alsharif, B., & Khasawneh, R. [1] (2025). Beyond the Literal: Machine Translation Performance and Strategies in Rendering Audiovisual Political Idioms.	English-Arabic	- Helleklev [34] (2006) translation strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - With an explanatory everyday expression (58.62%). - Translating an idiom by an equivalent idiom (44.73%). - Word-for-word (12.06%). - An everyday expression is translated by using an idiom (0%).
2	Almrayat, O., Farghal, M., & Haider, A. S. [15] (2024). Translating idioms in political discourse: Translation strategies and semantic categories.	English-Arabic	- Baker's translation strategies [2] (2018).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Paraphrasing (56.36%) - Similar meaning but different form strategy (23.63%). - Similar meaning and form strategy (15.15%) - Omission strategy (4.84%).
3	Mubaraki [35] (2025). Subtitling Idiomatic Expressions from English into Arabic: Enola Holmes as a Case Study.	English-Arabic	- Pedersen's [36] (2011) taxonomy for rendering extra-linguistic cultural references in subtitling.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Substitution strategy was the most frequently used translation strategy. - Official equivalent strategy is the second most dominant strategy. - Direct translation strategy is the least adopted strategy.
4	Alazzam, T. S., Alzghoul, M. A., & Alzghoul, R. [37] (2024). The Translation of Medical and Health-Related Idioms by University Students from English into Arabic: Challenges and Strategies.	English-Arabic	- Baker's [7] (1992) model.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partial equivalence strategy was the most frequently used translation strategy. - Paraphrase. - Total equivalence translation. - Omission was the least adopted strategy.
5	Obeidat, M. M., Haider, A. S., Tair, S. A., & Sahari, Y. [8] (2024). Analyzing the Performance of Gemini, ChatGPT, and Google Translate in Rendering English Idioms into Arabic.	English-Arabic	- The taxonomy of Baker [7] (1992)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Literal translation. - Sense-based translation. - Idiom-to-idiom translation.
6	Mahadi & Sahari [38] (2024). A Corpus-Based Study of Translating Idioms from English into Arabic Using Audio-Visual Translation.	English-Arabic	- Baker's [7] (1992) classification of translation strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Retaining both similar meaning and similar form was the most frequently used translation strategy. - Maintaining a similar meaning while altering the form. - Paraphrasing. - Compensation-based translation was the least adopted strategy.
7	Obeidat & Abbadi [19] (2024). Subtitling cultural expressions in "Barbie" movie into Arabic.	English-Arabic	- Gottlieb's [39] (1992) subtitling strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Paraphrase (30%). - Transfer (19%). - Deletion (15%). - Expansion (11%).
8	Chanthong & Kaowiwattanaku [18] (2024). A Study of Strategies for Translating English Idioms in Subtitles from Riverdale Series into Thai.	English-Thai	- Baker's Taxonomy [7] (1992).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Paraphrase using unrelated words (43.73%). - Translation by cultural substitution (26.86%). - Paraphrase using a related word (19.80%). - Translation by a more neutral/less expressive word (5.49%). - Translation by omission (2.16%). - Translation using a loan word or a loan word plus explanation (1.96%)
9	Faraj [40] (2024). Mona Baker's Strategies Used for Translating the Arabic HAND Idioms.	Arabic-English	- Baker's [7] (1992) classification.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Paraphrasing. - Translation using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form. - The strategy of 'same meaning, same form.' - Omission strategy.
10	Saideen, B., Thalji, A., Lababaneh, A., Tartory, R., Haider, A. S., & Obeidat, M. [41] (2024). Netflix English subtitling of the Jordanian movie 'The Alleys': Challenges and strategies.	Arabic-English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Baker's [42] (2001). - Gottlieb [39] (1992). - Mughazy [43] (2016). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Metaphorical approximation (idiom to idiom). - Metaphorization. - Literalization (paraphrase).

Table 2. Cont.

No.	Authors & Publication Date	Language	Models	Study Findings (The Strategies Are Sorted in Descending Order)
11	Al-Abbas & Al-Abbas ^[27] (2024). Translating idiomatic expressions in children's literature: A case study of rendering Diary of a Wimpy Kid into Arabic.	English-Arabic	- Baker's ^[7] (1992) taxonomy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - paraphrasing. - Using an idiom of similar meaning and form. - Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form. - Literal translation. - Omission.
12	Abdelaal & Alazzawie ^[44] (2019). Translation Strategies In The Translation Of Idioms In Shakespeare's Romeo And Juliet.	English-Arabic	- Baker's ^[2] (2018) classification of idioms' translation strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Paraphrase. - Compensation. - Omission of the entire idiom. - Omission of a play on the idiom. - Borrowing the source language idiom. - Using an idiom of similar meaning but different form. - Using an idiom of similar meaning and form.
13	Nasir, C., & Ufairah, A. ^[45] (2023). Idiomatic expressions used by the Acehese novelist Arafat Nur in the novel Tanah Surga Merah.	English-Indonesian	- Baker's ^[2] (2018) translation strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Paraphrasing suitable for equal meaning in English. - Compound idioms were used to describe the characters in the novel.
14	Postigo ^[46] (2021). Multilingual Translation of English Idioms in Internet-based TV series: A Contrastive Approach.	English into German, Norwegian, Spanish, and Portuguese	- Labarta Postigo's ^[47] (2020) translation strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Total Equivalence (TE), Partial Equivalence (PE), and Explicit Meaning (EM). - No omissions. - One strategy with no idiomatic expression in the translation (EM).
15	Abidin, E. Z. Z., Mustapha, N. F., Rahim, N. A., & Abdullah, S. N. S. ^[48] (2020). Translation of idioms from Arabic into Malay via Google Translate: What needs to be done.	Arabic-Malay	- Newmark ^[12] (1988) Metaphorical Translation method.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Changing idioms into meanings is the most commonly used strategy. - The flexi method.
16	Pirnajmuddin & Ramezani ^[9] (2011). Idioms in Translation of Children's Literature: The Big Clay Jar by Moradi Kermani.	Persian-English	- Baker's ^[7] (1992) translation strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Paraphrase (61.43%). - Using an idiom of similar meaning but different form (29.81%). - Omission (9.21%). - Literal translation (5.8%). - Idiomatic translation 2.38%.
17	Shojaei ^[10] (2012). Translation of Idioms and Fixed Expressions: Strategies and Difficulties.	English-persian; English-Turkish	- Baker's ^[7] (1992) classification.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Using an idiom of similar meaning and form. - Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form. - Translation by paraphrase. - Translation by omission.
18	Khosravi ^[14] (2012). Strategies Used in Translation of English Idioms into Persian in Novels.	English-persian	- Baker's ^[7] (1992) model.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Paraphrase (71.25%). - Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form (18.18%). - Translation by omission (8.35%). - Using an idiom of similar meaning and form (2.21%).

The following **Figure 2** presents the language pairs studied in the articles under study. It shows that the articles focus more on English-Arabic (41%) when it comes to translating idioms. The second most frequent language pairs, with 9% portion, are Arabic-English and English-Persian. The remaining language pairs are making a smaller percentage (5%, 4%) of the articles, such as English-Thai, English-Turkish, and English-Norwegian.

In **Figure 3**, one notable finding is that Mona Baker's translation strategies^[2,7,42] (1992, 2001, 2018) were fre-

quently used as the main theoretical framework for her comprehensive strategies in translating idioms (48%, 5%, 16%; respectively). Specialized models such as Gottlieb's^[39] (1992) subtitling strategies were adopted in audiovisual contexts, while Pedersen's^[36] (2011) taxonomy was employed for translating cultural references in subtitling. Meanwhile, Newmark's^[12] (1988) method and Labarta Postigo's^[47] (2020) translation strategies were used for specific linguistic and media contexts. Helleklev's^[34] (2006) model was used in a political context.

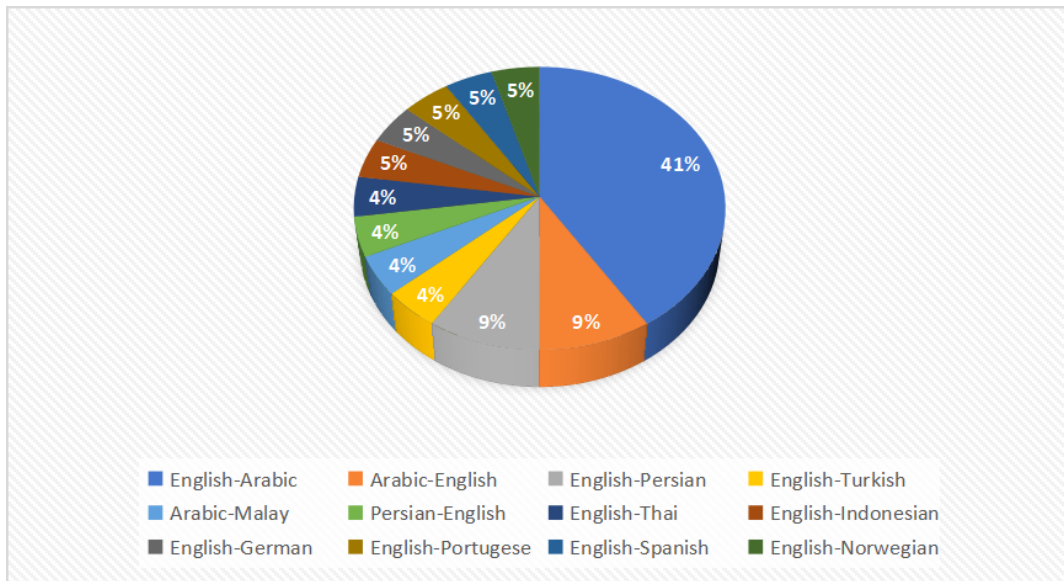


Figure 2. Language-pair comparisons examined in the selected articles.

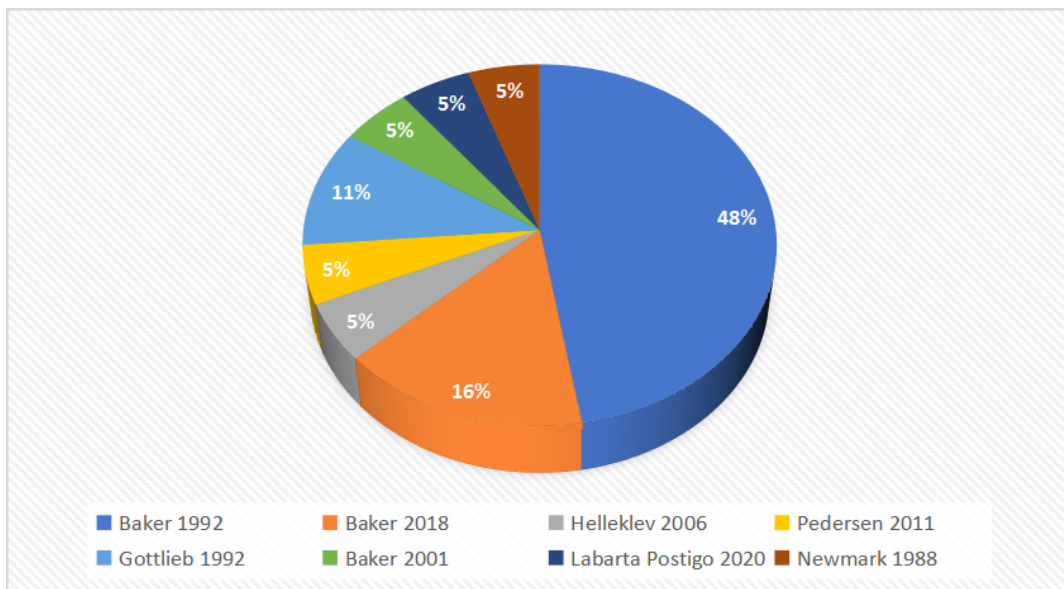


Figure 3. Models employed in the selected articles.

Figure 4 presents the frequency of the most prominent translation strategies employed for translating idioms in the articles under study. The findings demonstrate that paraphrasing (28.26%) was the dominant strategy, commonly cited as the most popular method for translating idioms, as seen in studies by Obeidat and Abbadi^[19] (2024) and Chanthong and Kaowiwattanakul^[18] (2024) and followed by omission (19.56%), translating an idiom with an idiom of similar meaning but different form (17.39%), and translating an idiom

with an idiom of similar meaning and form (15.21%). Literal translation (6.52%) appeared less frequently, while substitution, partial equivalence, and total equivalence were the least used, each representing 4.34%. The difficulties of preserving both semantic accuracy and cultural appropriateness in idiom translation are reflected in this distribution, which shows a definite preference for meaning-based adaptation strategies (paraphrasing, meaning-focused approaches) over form-preserving techniques (literal translation, equivalency-based strategies).

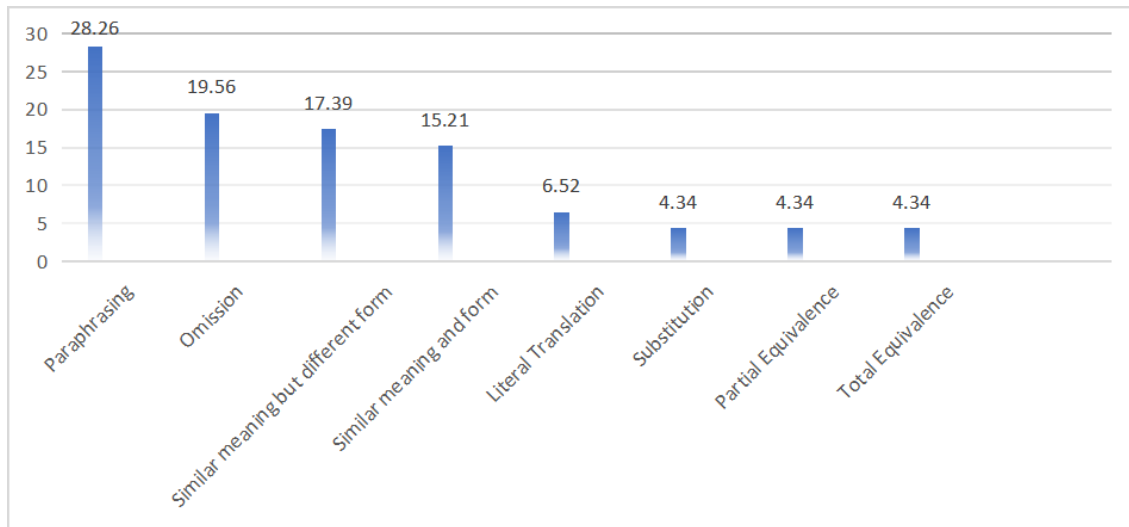


Figure 4. Commonly used translation strategies in the selected articles (x-axis) and the number of occurrences in the scholarly articles under study (y-axis).

5. Discussion: Cross-Linguistic Patterns and Future Directions

The systematic review of literature revealed clear cross-linguistic patterns in idiom translation. Regardless of the language pair, paraphrasing was a common strategy that suggested a universal problem stemming from the peculiarities of idioms. Idioms are also culturally bound; they possess significant regional and cultural value^[15,49], which presents a challenge for the translator. The underlying set of strategies remains consistent, mainly in line with Baker’s framework, even though linguistic and cultural distance can affect the frequency of some strategies (e.g., a higher reliance on paraphrasing for distant language pairs, such as English-Arabic, compared to more closely related ones, like English-German).

Even with conventional strategies, idiom translation still presents several difficulties, which lead to potential directions for future research. Major worldwide languages, such as English, Arabic, Persian, and European languages, are the focus of the majority of the existing research. This highlights the significant need for systematic reviews and empirical studies on idiom translation in less-resourced languages to understand specific challenges and effective strategies in these contexts. In addition, the rise of Neural Machine Translation (NMT) introduces a new dimension. While NMT models have shown impressive gains in general text translation, their ability to handle nuanced idiomatic expressions,

especially those with deep cultural roots, remains a subject of ongoing research. Future systematic reviews could analyze how NMT systems translate idioms compared to human translators and identify specific areas for improvement. Beyond analyzing translation outputs, the cognitive processes that translators employ when encountering idioms could be the subject of future studies. Finally, to improve best practices for idiom translation pedagogy, further research can examine the interaction between normative approaches (what translators *should* do) and descriptive studies (what translators actually do).

6. Conclusions

Idiomatic expressions pose a constant challenge for translators and serve as enduring evidence of the creative and culturally specific nature of human language. This systematic review highlighted the complex nature of their translation, driven by factors such as fixedness, cultural embeddedness, and semantic opacity. The research confirmed that while perfect equivalence is uncommon, tried-and-true strategies—such as paraphrasing—provide pragmatic solutions to overcome linguistic and cultural differences.

The similar results across different language pairs suggested common problems and common strategies. Translating idioms effectively goes beyond simple linguistic conversion; it necessitates a deep understanding of both the source and target cultures, the ability to adapt meaning effectively while minimizing loss, and a great contextual awareness. Id-

iom translation is an art and science that will undoubtedly continue to be a significant and dynamic field of study as languages and translation technology develop.

While this research provides valuable insights, it is important to highlight its limitations. A primary limitation of this study is its reliance solely on the Scopus database. Despite their growing importance, the review does not critically evaluate previous research on AI or Machine Translation tools (such as Google Translate and ChatGPT), in idiom translation, even if neural machine translation (NMT) is considered for further study.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, R.R.K., and B.I.A.; methodology, R.R.K., and B.I.A.; data collection, R.R.K., and B.I.A.; validation, R.R.K., and B.I.A.; writing—original draft preparation, R.R.K., and B.I.A.; writing—review and editing, R.R.K., and B.I.A.; data analysis, B.I.A.. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Appendix A

Table A1. Appraisal Checklist.

A Validity and Methodology				
	Question	Yes	No	Unclear
1	Does the study address a clearly defined research questions related to translation strategies?			
2	Do the studies include appropriate language pairs?			
3	Are the studies included appropriate to answer the review questions (translation strategies and translation models)?			
4	Are conflicts of interest disclosed?			
B Results and Synthesis				
	Question	Yes	No	Unclear
1	Are the characteristics of the included studies clearly described (translation strategies and translation models)?			
2	Are the implications for translation strategies and models clearly discussed?			
3	Is heterogeneity (language pairs, genres, translation models) considered and discussed?			
4	Do the results justify the conclusions?			

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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