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## Diglossia in Translating Proverbs between Arabic and English: A Linguistic Perspective<sup>(\*)</sup>

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### Abstract

Diglossia is a common linguistic phenomenon in Arabic in all aspects of communication including proverbs. This paper examines how diglossia affects the translation of Arabic diglossic proverbs into English, taking Saudi vernacular as an example. The study adopts a descriptive analytical approach. Five (5) professional translators from five (5) Arab countries (Saudi, Yemeni, Egyptian, Syrian and Sudanese) were hired to respond and comment on thirty-six (36) carefully selected Saudi proverbs into English. The proverbs were categorised into six groups: lexical diglossia, morphological / phonological variation, code-mixing (code-switching), semantic / pragmatic contrast, frequency and cultural relevance, and formality-informality tension. The analysis is based on the views of Nida (formal and dynamic equivalence), Baker (pragmatic strategies) and Toury (translation norms). The findings show several facets of diglossia in translation. Translators closer to the Saudi context tended to prioritise adequacy and cultural specificity whereas others favoured target text acceptability and communicative clarity. Dynamic equivalence predominated for secular pragmatic proverbs while formal correspondence was preferred for religious and morally solemn items. Baker's pragmatic model proved to be useful in the analysis of translators' choices regarding implied meanings and translation shifts. Toury's framework explained how initial, preliminary and operational norms guided translators' choices. The study findings are valuable to translators, linguists, educationists, and cultural studies scholars.

**Keywords:** diglossia, formal/dynamic equivalence, pragmatic strategies, proverbs, Saudi vernacular, translation norms, untranslatability.

## Introduction:

The translation of proverbs is one of the highly interesting and intriguing areas due to the intersection of linguistic, cultural, semiotic and historical dimensions that weave a web of meanings which force themselves upon the translator's mission of transfer of meaning across languages. Simply defined, proverbs are concise, metaphorical expressions encapsulating cultural wisdom, moral lessons, social norms and values, and shared experiences. With translators as mediators, always seeking fidelity and equivalence, the translation of proverbs poses huge challenges in the normal translation circumstances<sup>(1)</sup> due to the desire to have the target text (TT) reader share a similar experience to that of the source text (ST) reader (Nida, 1964; Nida and Taber; 1969/82). For example, the proverb *اللي ما يعرف الصقر يشويه* (Literal: He who knows not falcon roasts it) is often used in colloquial Najdi speech but draws on a formal cultural frame. In English, a dynamic equivalent such as 'casting pearls before swine' can capture the pragmatic effect and the dialectal voice in a way better than the literal rendering does.

The case becomes even more challenging if diglossia comes in the line. Diglossia, a term formalized and made famous with reference to Arabic by Ferguson (1959), refers to the sociolinguistic coexistence of two functionally distinct varieties within a single language community. It is postulated that Arabic has a High Variety (HV), typically referred to as Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) or Classical Arabic (CA), which is used in formal, literary and religious contexts, as well as a Low Variety (LV), which comprises numerous, spoken colloquial dialects used for everyday communication (e.g. Gulf, Egyptian, Levantine, Maghrebi, etc.). This dichotomy creates unique challenges for the translation of proverbs since most of these crystallized units of folk wisdom exist mainly in colloquial registers and often require MSA representation in their translation. Therefore, unlike any prior research hitherto, this study foregrounds diglossia as an independent variable by systematically interfacing equivalence, pragmatic strategies and translation norms across data derived from dialectal Arabic.

(1) This situation is more pressing in case of interpreting conditions, where interpreters struggle to convey culturally loaded expressions, such as proverbs, between languages on the spot.

The translation of proverbs has been the subject matter of many studies, as observed in the literature review below, but little mention has been made to the role of diglossia in this dynamic field. Therefore, this paper comes as a response to this research lacuna, investigating the linguistic, cultural and pragmatic tensions from three theoretical perspectives – i.e. Nida's dynamic equivalence, Baker's pragmatic strategies, and Toury's translation norms. Proverbs are fixed expressions; hence, they are good parameters to measure the phenomenon of diglossia in translation. The study analyses how Arabic diglossia influences equivalence determination (Nida) and necessitates strategic compromises (Baker) and implicates power dynamics in translator's choices (Toury), all on the translator's way to achieve the paradoxical task of rendering HV/LV cultural expressions into TT accessible messages.

### **Statement of the Problem:**

The study examines how diglossia influences the translation of Arabic proverbs into English. A highly diglossic language, Arabic exhibits a functional division between MSA and its diverse regional dialects (represented in this study by Saudi dialect), both of which serve as a source of proverbial expressions. This linguistic duality poses challenges for translators because proverbs can carry sociocultural, stylistic and pragmatic meanings that are not easily transferable into English. The central problem addressed here is how diglossic variation (e.g. MSA vs. Saudi vernacular) affects translators' choices between adequacy and acceptability, and how this variation interacts with pragmatic effects and norm-governed decisions in rendering Arabic proverbs into English.

The study draws on three theoretical frameworks: Eugene Nida's (1964) concept of equivalence (formal and dynamic), Mona Baker's (2018) pragmatic strategies for addressing translation challenges, and Gideon Toury's (1995) translation norms (initial, preliminary and operational). Through these frameworks the study sheds light on how translators negotiate the tensions between literal accuracy and cultural resonance and how diglossic variation shapes the decision-making process in rendering Arabic (Saudi) proverbs into English.

The value of this research stems from its endeavour to intersect diglossia (a linguistic phenomenon) and translation theory with an aim to reveal strategies to preserve both meaning and cultural context while also

highlighting the constraints imposed by this linguistic hierarchy in Arabic. Thus, this research contributes to linguistics by engaging with the effects of diglossia on transferring meaning across languages, while at the same time engaging with translation studies by offering insights into how diglossia complicates equivalence and manipulates pragmatic adaptation as well as adherence to or deviation from the established translation norms.

**Research Questions:**

The study seeks to answer these four questions:

1. How does linguistic diglossia in Arabic influence the selection and rendering of proverbs in English translation?
2. What pragmatic strategies do translators utilize to overcome linguistic and cultural challenges while translating Arabic proverbs into English?
3. How do translation norms operate in the decision-making processes while translating Arabic proverbs into English?
4. What patterns emerge in balancing linguistic accuracy and cultural resonance while maintaining TT readability when translating Arabic proverbs into English?

**Research Objectives:**

In alignment with the research questions, this study aims to:

1. analyse the impact of diglossia on the equivalent translatability of Arabic proverbs into English based on Nida's conceptualization of equivalence.
2. examine how Baker's pragmatic strategies can be effectively used to preserve cultural and contextual meanings when translating proverbs.
3. highlight the mechanisms of Toury's translation norms as manifested in the translation of Arabic proverbs into English in diglossic circumstances.
4. identify translation patterns and propose insights into effective practices that translators can use to grapple with the translation of Arabic proverbs into English in diglossic conditions.

**Literature Review:****Diglossia:**

Since the seminal article on diglossia by Ferguson (1959), citing Arabic as a prototype of this linguistic phenomenon, several studies have pursued the subject. It has been indicated that the roots of Arabic diglossia can be historically traced to the pre-Islamic era shaped by sociopolitical shifts that

deepened the divide between formal and vernacular Arabic (Blau, 1977). Fishman (1967) has broadened the concept and, focussing on Gulf contexts, showed how Arabic in both its formal and informal registers coexists with English. According to Bassiouney (2020), the two diglossic levels of Arabic serve functional purposes, where LV is a marker of identity and reflects intimacy and HV is the communication tool used to maintain formality, education and religious purposes.

Generally, prior works differ in whether they treat diglossia as primarily a sociolinguistic constraint or an index of identity. Meanwhile, studies on proverb translation converge on the usefulness of pragmatic strategies but diverge on the extent of domestication vs. foreignization. Recent contributions (e.g. Alharbi, 2024; Hmaidan, 2024; Tegui, 2024; Alharbi, 2023; Jibreel, 2023) highlight persistent challenges in idiom equivalence and cultural pragmatics. No study so far, however, has directly dealt with diglossia within a multi-framework analysis (Nida-Baker-Toury) on dialectal proverbs. This study addressed that gap by using data collected from an Arabic dialect and encoded against these frameworks.

### **Proverbs:**

Proverbs, by nature, are carriers of cultural knowledge. The difficulty of their translation stems from four inherent features – which are, their metaphoricity, fixed form, pragmatic versatility and sociolinguistic anchoring (Mieder, 2004; Ghazala, 2008). Being a marker of regional identity in most cases, encapsulating cultural norms and social behaviours, proverbs tend to be found mostly in the vernacular form (Alharbi, 2024; Alharbi, 2023); their ‘standardization’ into MSA can, according to Albirini (2015, 118), amount to regional cultural erasure. However, many Arabic proverbs do exist in MSA side by side with vernacular forms, the former conveying formality while the latter intimacy and humour, and as such their translation requires distinct strategies (Farghal & Al-Hamly, 2015). Given the elements embedded in proverbs, such as humour, religion, poetry, cultural implications, etc., the lack of direct equivalents in English complicates the translation process even more (Hmaidan, 2024; Tergui, 2024; Jibreel, 2023). On the other end of the seesaw, literal translation may not be the answer, and the resonance of the ST proverb may be lost in its way to TT.

## Translation-Related Theoretical Foundations:

This study adopts three theoretical frameworks to understanding the translation of proverbs from a diglossic context. These are as follows.

### 1. Nida's Equivalence

Nida (1964) proposes two translation strategies: formal correspondence and dynamic equivalence<sup>(1)</sup>. Formal correspondence prioritizes text structure, focusing on the preservation of ST. dynamic equivalence, by contrast, seeks natural communicative equivalents in TT. Obviously, at least in most cases, the translation of Arabic proverbs using formal correspondence may preserve HV or LV registers but will result in unnatural English. That is why it is a corollary to adopt dynamic equivalence – despite the relativity inherent in the term and its products – to translate proverbs in order to maintain accessibility and preserve the cultural weight even at the expense of sacrificing the ST form.

### 2. Baker's Pragmatic Strategies

According to Baker (2018), proverbs are fixed expressions. She (2018, 77-87) proposes six strategies to deal with fixed expressions, including proverbs: using an idiom of similar meaning and form, using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form, borrowing the source language idiom, translation by paraphrase, translation by omission of a play on idiom, and translation by omission of entire idiom. The sociocultural context is of paramount importance to Baker, indicating that the use of MSA or dialect can influence register and reception, which is a key bone of contest in diglossic Arabic.

### 3. Toury's Translation Norms

Toury's (1995) framework is rooted in Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS). It introduces the concept of norms that shape translator's choices. These are categorised into (1) initial norms (source vs. target culture orientation); (2) preliminary norms (text selection); and (3) operational norms (textual decisions). In diglossic contexts, translators may tend to standardise colloquial proverbs into MSA (to ensure adequacy) or adapt or even paraphrase them into English equivalents (to ensure accessibility).

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(1) Later scholars adopted different nomenclatures for almost the same categorization – e.g. Newmark's (1988) semantic and communicative translations. Also, the core of Venuti's (1995) domestication and foreignization imply, in a way, Nida's premises.

While Toury's theory is focused on the cultural domain of translation theory, it is the linguistic (conscious or subconscious) choices made by translators that reflect this impact on the translation product.

### Research Methodology:

For the purposes of this study, a qualitative, descriptive-analytical research design is adopted. It focuses on the identification, categorising and analysis of the translation of 36 daily-life Saudi Arabic proverbs into English (Appendix 1). Special attention is paid to how diglossia influences equivalence (Nida), pragmatic strategies (Baker), and translation norms (Toury). The selected proverbs were then given to five (5) paid professional translators (1 Saudi, 1 Yemeni, 1 Egyptian, 1 Syrian and 1 Sudanese) to translate and provide paratextual feedback on the translation process. Upon completion, the respondents were asked to answer 15 questions related to their translation experience (Appendix 2). The various translators' nationalities, despite not being exhaustive of all Arab communities, can be regarded as representative, and the outcomes are not expected to vary much, had more translators from other dialects been included.

The choice of five (5) translators is appropriate for qualitative depth and cross-dialectal contrast while also keeping the analysis traceable. Their paratextual commentary was also valuable in the thematic analysis, against the backdrop of the trio-framework (Nida-Baker-Toury). Moreover, the categorisation of proverbs was validated through expert review of two Saudi native linguists, who provided consultation on and assessment of the clarity and relevance of the content; disagreements were resolved and recommendations incorporated, to ensure content validity.

The Saudi-dialect proverbs were extracted from Aljehaiman (1982); supporting materials in both Arabic and English included Naisabouri (d. 1124; 1988), Kassis (1999), Saini et al. (1992), Doyle et al. (2012), Mieder (2021, 2019, 2012, 2004, 1993), Burckhardt (2002); and Al-Sudais (1976).

The selection of proverbs was made on basis of a set of six (6) criteria (Appendix 1) – i.e. lexical diglossia, morphological/phonological variation, code-mixing (code-switching), semantic/pragmatic contrast, frequency and cultural relevance, and formality-informality tension. Lexical diglossia relates to proverbs that contain terms unique to the Najdi dialect compared to MSA equivalents. Morphological/phonological variation covers proverbs

which reflect features typical of the Najdi vernacular, such as turning the /k/ into /ts/ or (ق) /q/ into /g/, or showing morphological changes from MSA. The code-mixing criterion is related to proverbs which combine both MSA and the vernacular in a single utterance. In the semantic/pragmatic contrast, proverbs containing words used in Najdi with meanings different from MSA are chosen. In the 5<sup>th</sup> criterion, the selected proverbs are used widely in daily speech in Saudi Arabia but are easily traceable to classical origins (i.e. Quranic, literary or old Arabic traditions). Finally, the proverbs reflecting the formality-informality tension are those vernacular proverbs which have an MSA 'touch' inherent in their pragmatic usage in Saudi colloquial Arabic.

An assessment template has been designed specifically for the analysis of the translations of the proverbs in which the translation of each proverb was evaluated on basis of the concepts of Nida, Baker and Toury (Appendix 3). Each translator's response is analysed through this template in order to draw conclusions on points of convergence and divergence.

The responses to the post-translation questions functioned like a guided interview to garner insights on the translator's preferences, strategies, techniques and awareness of the role of diglossia in translating proverbs.

## Results:

Bringing five translators from five Arabic contexts (Saudi, Yemeni, Egyptian, Sudanese, and Syrian) carries great significance to show how far diglossia works among speakers of Arabic from the various Arabic geographical contexts, thereby affecting translator's performance. Not all Arab countries are included because the research focus is not on similarities and differences between translators – despite being an integral part of a typical diglossia research. However, the data collected from the five translators portrayed a nuanced picture of how diglossia influences translation behaviour and decision-making, thereby the strategies translators adopt to deal with vernacular proverbs. The analysis came up with some recurring themes, each of which corresponds to one or more of the theoretical frameworks (i.e. Toury's norms, Baker's pragmatic model, and Nida's equivalence). These themes reflect a spectrum of oriented translator's approaches ranging between adequacy (remaining faithful to the source) and acceptability (adapting to the target culture) while grappling with various factors such as dialectal variations, register and pragmatic meaning.

With reference to lexical diglossia, the selected Saudi proverbs often integrate words from both MSA and regional dialects, which in turn led to contrasting responses and approaches by translators in dealing with this lexical hybridity. The Saudi and Yemeni translators appeared to favour adequacy-oriented strategies, as reflected in their translations of dialectal proverbs. This tendency may relate to their familiarity with the source culture rather than any generalisable cultural trait. Nida's formal correspondence was dominant in their translations, preserving dialectal items even when the resulting English expressions sounded a little unconventional. Their comments implicate their alignment with Baker's concept of pragmatic strengthening whereby dialectal lexis carries social and emotional resonance. Their attempts to retain it show their desire to preserve speaker's identity and tone. For example, terms like الأقسر (*alagshar*, the rough or unlucky day) or أزعب (*az'ab*, scoop) were translated as "the rough day" and "ladle/scoop", respectively, keeping the regional colour intact – words that other translators needed more clarification on. By contrast, the other (Egyptian, Sudanese and Syrian) translators aimed to achieve acceptability (Toury's TT-oriented norm), domesticating dialectal words by replacing them with neutral or standardised equivalents. In their argument, intelligibility for English readers outweighed adherence to lexical authenticity. Therefore, their approach followed dynamic equivalence, trying to reproduce the communicative effect rather than the linguistic form. From the above, it becomes clear that, in terms of lexical diglossia, the Yemeni and Saudi translators emphasized adequacy and form while others adopted acceptability and effect.

The second category of proverbs was intended to highlight morphological and phonological variation. It is worth mentioning that spoken Saudi Arabic, like many other vernaculars, has many key markers of dialectal morphology and phonology, such as shortened verbs, elided endings or distinct vowels. Translators generally indicated that these features are untranslatable at the formal level, and if an English colloquial variety is used to reflect them, unintended associations may be implicated in the resulting TT, and would appear artificial or stereotyped. Their adopting of regularization as the preferred translation strategy depended heavily on Toury's operational norms, despite some attempts by the Saudi translator to

experiment with subtle compensation by using contracted forms (e.g. *ain't*) to echo the colloquial tone, thus invoking Baker's pragmatic principle of audience accommodation; he acknowledged the risks of such experimentation. Other translators preferred to render the meaning using a standard written register, adopting neutralisation as their professional strategy.

The third group of proverbs aimed to deal with diglossic code-mixing and register layering, using proverbs that shift fluidly between colloquial and Quranic registers. Here, translators' strategies diverged sharply based on their initial orientation. The Saudi and Yemeni translators adopted an adequacy based approach. It was easy for both translators to grasp the register shifts and layers as well as the implicated connotations embedded in the proverbs, and in their translation, they attempted to reflect the ST intricacies, as much as possible, thus adopting formal correspondence. By contrast, the other translators chose acceptability and dynamic equivalence, opting for a consistent neutral English at the cost of disregarding register variations. Overall, the translators' decisions largely reflect Toury's metrical norms, i.e. choices based on inclusion, exclusion and normalisation.

The fourth cluster of proverbs were meant to reflect semantic and pragmatic contrast in the rendering of diglossic proverbs. Translators came up with an array of responses reflecting the tension between maintaining TT acceptability and ST adequacy. For example, the following proverb:

*Table (1): Example*

<b>Proverb</b>	مع أخوتك مخطي ولا وحدك مصيب
<b>Transliteration</b>	<i>Ma' akhwātak mkhṭi wa-lā waḥdak muṣīb</i>
<b>Literal rendering</b>	<b>With your brothers (on the) wrong (side), and not alone (on the) right (side)</b>

The Saudi translator translated it as "To err with kin is better than to succeed alone", and the Yemeni translator produced it as "To err collectively rather than succeed alone". Obviously, both translators upheld Toury's initial norms of adequacy, with an aim to preserve dialectal communal ethos through parallelism, but at the same time they didn't abandon Baker's pragmatic implicature nor Nida's formal correspondence. On the other hand, the translation by the Syrian participant ("Misery loves company") prioritised dynamic equivalence and Toury's acceptability to embed familial irony despite cultural opacity. In some other proverbs, like the following.

Table (2): Example

Proverb	إبرة في تبن
Transliteration	<i>Ibrah fi tibin</i>
Literal rendering	A needle in hey(stack)

The concept seems to be universal despite slight variations in rendering, such as the Saudi translator's "needle lost in a straw stack". Given the easy inferability of meaning, the borders separating the polarities of formal-vs-dynamic, adequacy-vs-acceptability and contextual pragmatics become rather blurred. Moreover, while semantic factors can be easily grasped across various diglossic Arabic communities, one way or the other, the pragmatic factors are largely shaped by the translator's understanding of communal ethos, which may not be easily accessible to everyone. Deeper understanding and familiarity with the local sub-culture is often required. Overall, it is observed that the Saudi translator gives more weight to the preservation of connotative elements (tending more toward adequacy and formal correspondence) whereas others prefer the dynamic, acceptability-oriented translation.

The fifth category of diglossic proverbs focuses on frequency and cultural relevance, concerned mainly with local Saudi (more of Bedouin) characteristics and environment, although it is a fact that most of the other Arab communities bear almost all the same features. In this study, the translators' familiarity with Saudi proverbs influenced their interpretive confidence and the selection of the preferred strategy, reflecting Toury's negotiation of preliminary norms depending on translator's socio-cultural position and perception of the target audience. The Saudi and Yemeni translators appear here like cultural insiders, easily recognising the social weight of certain proverbs and, thus, pursued adequacy to preserve authenticity. In some cases, all translators feel obliged to divert from formal adherence and go for dynamic equivalence, or what Newmark (1988) terms as communicative translation because meaning is highly embedded in cultural codes that a semantic translation would lead the reader nowhere to the intended meaning. The following proverbs in particular demonstrate this point:

Table (3): Example

<b>Proverb</b>	اللي ما يعرف الصقر يشويه	كل شاة معلقة بعرقوبها
<b>Transliteration</b>	<i>Alli ma ye'rif alsaqer yashwih</i>	<i>Kil shatin me'allagah be'irgobha</i>
<b>Literal rendering</b>	He who knows not falcon roasts it.	Each ewe [shall be] hung by its heel
<b>Meaning</b>	Ignorance desecrates value.	There is no escape from destiny.

Finally, the sixth category has to do with proverbs that, despite their formal nature, are frequently used in vernacular speech, mainly due to their religious or traditional wisdom and values. In proverbs like the following:

Table (4): Example

<b>Proverb</b>	ومن يتق الله يجعل له مخرجا	ليس الفتى من قال كان أبي
<b>Transliteration</b>	<i>Wa man yattaqi Allaha yaj'alahu makhrajan</i>	<i>Laysa al-fata man qala kana abi</i>
<b>Literal rendering</b>	He who avoids angering Allah, Allah will provide him with exit (from hardships).	Not-him the boy who says, "My father was (so-and-so)"
<b>Meaning</b>	Whoso wards off Allah, He crafts an outlet	True manhood is beyond paternal legacy.

translators stated they were able to easily find translated versions online, despite the variations in rendition. It was observed that translators aimed to retain the religious, literary or cultural solemnity (with most preferring formal correspondence) and the illocutionary force inherent in the pragmatic dimensions these proverbs occupy in the Arabic collective repertoire. Despite the register shifts, these proverbs are integral to Arabs' communicative culture, regardless of vernacular, as these proverbs once cited enhance moral authority.

Ultimately, a general view of the responses reveals that, in most cases, the Saudi and Yemeni translators tended to exhibit adequacy-driven behaviour, showing loyalty to ST norms while the other translators demonstrated acceptability-driven strategies that are aimed at TT fluency. As far as Nida's equivalence theory is concerned, it has been observed that dynamic equivalence dominated especially when the communicative effect outweighed the form. In other words, formal correspondence is adopted

only when cultural fidelity is prioritised. Baker's pragmatic model was of great importance in clarifying how translators interpret implied meanings and negotiate register shifts to cope with the various contextual implications.

### Discussion:

The responses of the five professional translators were analysed on basis of the specifically designed model (adopting Toury's norms, Baker's levels of equivalence, and Nida's theory of equivalence), offering rich insights into how diglossia, cultural identity and translation norms converge in the negotiation of meaning during the translation of vernacular proverbs – here from Saudi Arabic into English. Apart from choices stemming from individual preferences, factors such as translator's proximity to and knowledge of ST all play a significant role in the choice of translation strategy and, consequently, the translation product. Interpretations are limited to the five-participant sample and should not be generalised to national cultures, as observations reflect individual tendencies within the dataset.

Respondent translators oscillated between the dichotomy of Toury's initial norms where the translator's primary orientation is determined to go towards adequacy (i.e. faithful representation of ST) or acceptability (i.e. assimilation of TT norms and dynamics). The Saudi translator, for example, was more tenacious about his culture, thereby attached himself more to the strategy of adequacy, even replicating the ST metaphors into English, creating a foreignized English translation. He operated mostly within the ST system (in the polysystem), perhaps guided by an internalised sense of textual legitimacy rather than external readability. On the other hand, the Egyptian, Syrian and Sudanese translators displayed more tendency towards acceptability. They tended towards the message rather than the form. Perhaps, they were not very occupied with the nuanced and semiotic intricacies inherent in the proverbs as much as the Saudi translator was. That is why their translations in the majority of examples reflect an adaptive attitude, preferring TT intelligibility over ST form and literal content. The Yemeni translator, interestingly, fluctuated between adequacy and acceptability, depending on how culturally bound the proverb was. Her responses are likely to have been modified by the geographical and linguistic proximity between Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Thus, as far as diglossia and translation are concerned, the translators' socio-cultural

positioning and cultural stance (i.e. Toury's principle of "insider vs. outsider") informs their choices and adoption of translation norms.

Nida's dynamic equivalence was preferred by most translators than formal correspondence. The factors behind that include the nature of proverbs themselves as communicative building blocks whose real meaning stems from the message they deliver rather than their forms, and the familiarity (or degree of lack thereof) with the intricate web of meaning ingrained in the proverbs themselves and the desire of the translator to show ST fidelity. In some instances, formal correspondence proved even useless. Translating, for example, *ما يعرف الصقر يشويه* ("He who doesn't know the falcon, roasts it") as such ends up in what it may seem to others as a merely descriptive statement, ignorant of the real social criticism, thus failing to deliver the intended message (e.g. casting pearls before swine). However, formal equivalence still has resonance in selective texts, especially those with religious connotations, whether because they bear stylistic solemnity deemed essential, or because they were easy to locate on the internet. Therefore, dynamic equivalence dominated the translation of secular and pragmatic sayings, and formal correspondence prevailed for religious and morally weighted expressions, indicating translators' ethical awareness of context, tone, message, and implied audience expectations.

Viewed with Toury's operational norms in mind (i.e. the governing textual decisions during translation), the produced translations of the five translators, in their majority, showed significant adoption of a substitutive strategy whereby an Arabic proverb is replaced with an English counterpart that carried similar meaning or pragmatic function. Indeed, this reflects an acceptability-driven norm, perhaps stemming from a common belief among translators that proverbs in one language should ideally be replaced by idiomatic expressions to facilitate reception by TT readers. The Saudi translator, however, explicitly resisted this method, as far as possible, arguing that it erases cultural specificity. To him, it appears, proverbs are not just carriers of functional wisdom but also cultural signifiers of Saudi worldview and should therefore be treated within the ST ideological identifiers to preserve ST identity and avoid a dominating, eroding impact of TT culture. These mixed views demonstrate the impact of the plurality of operational norms, emphasizing the notion that translators' search for

meaning and consequent rendition are a process of negotiation of norms and communicative goals.

The views of Baker have been immensely valuable in the analysis of diglossia and register normalisation in the translation of diglossic proverbs. Most of the currently used proverbs in Arabic colloquial language show a mixture of both the vernacular and MSA, evidencing the continuum inherent in diglossia as far as Arabic language is concerned. Most translators resorted to normalisation and neutralisation of register into one English variety (the standard English), and attempts to replicate the diglossic nature of some Arabic proverbs resulted in artificial expressions that have no real bonds with ST – i.e. using "*ain* ʔ" to reflect Arabic vernacular expressions. Most translators, not all, adopted a pragmatic adaptation strategy, tailoring their linguistic choices to target audience expectations. The Saudi translator attempted to retain traces of orality through informal English tone and slight colloquialism, demonstrating that diglossia can be seen as a marker of authenticity rather than an obstacle – e.g. *أحِينَ الْيَوْمِ وَمَوْتِنَ بَكْرَةَ* (“Literal: Let me live today, and kill me tomorrow” i.e. Enjoy today, death may come tomorrow”). This experimentation could risk cultural distortion and violate Baker’s pragmatic norms of audience expectations. In most cases, translators’ responses generally showed that dialectal morphology and phonology do not have cross-linguistic equivalents, and even if morphological aspects can in rare cases be assimilated and echoed, the phonological elements tend to dissolve in the translation process. While other translators saw diglossia as a linguistic irregularity, the Saudi and Yemeni translators saw it as a cultural identity feature worth preserving in the TT, a view consistent with Ferguson’s sociolinguistic conceptualisation of the functional co-existence of high and low varieties and demonstrating that translators' choices are also ideological in nature.

The translators generally revealed a fundamental divide on the value of preserving the diglossic flavour in translation. The Saudi and Yemeni translators saw it as an index of Saudi cultural realism and collective wisdom and should, therefore, be retained as a local voice through informal English tones and rhythmic phrasing – reflecting Toury’s adequacy orientation and Nida’s formal equivalence. By contrast, the other translators favoured acceptability to avoid distracting or confusing TT readers.

However, even those in favour of cultural authenticity resorted to pragmatic compensation, in consistence with Baker's views, to make up for possible translation loss as a result of stylistic effect preservation.

It is important to make it clear that most proverbs are inherently pragmatic and rely on metaphor, irony and contextual inference. This is obvious in the translators' strategies, which clearly mirrored Baker's model of pragmatic equivalence in their attempt to strike balance between literal meaning and implied communicative intent. The Egyptian and Syrian translators tended to favour functional idioms to reproduce implicature, hence favouring communicative impact over imagery. The Sudanese, in many cases, paraphrased implicit meaning for clarity. The Saudi and Yemeni tended more to retain metaphorical structure, and trusted TT reader's instincts to connect the dots and make meaning. Therefore, pragmatic interpretation depended heavily on translator's cultural cognition, and emerged as a culturally contingent act where geographical belonging and cultural awareness determine which parts of meaning the translator prioritises and deems important to convey.

### Conclusion:

This study has examined the impact of Arabic diglossia – i.e. the co-existence of two varieties of Arabic, High Variety (known as Modern Standard Arabic, or MSA) and Low Variety (vernacular), with Saudi regional dialect as an example – on the translation of Arabic proverbs into English. The study drew on Nida's (1964) theory of equivalence, Baker's (2018) pragmatic model, and Toury's (1995) norms of translation. The research revealed that diglossia exerts a profound impact on the translator's decision-making processes as well as orientation towards either adequacy (fidelity to ST) or acceptability (TT fluency).

Based on the study findings, translators' linguistic background and cultural proximity have a significant role to play in the shaping of the translation strategies adopted. For example, the Saudi and Yemeni translators functioned as cultural insiders and, therefore, tended to prioritize adequacy and formal correspondence, demonstrating cultural tenacity and viewing the preservation of dialectal and cultural markers as essential to their stance of maintaining authenticity. On the other hand, the Egyptian, Sudanese and Syrian translators preferred acceptability and dynamic

equivalence. They, thus, emphasized the importance of communicative clarity and natural TT over the preservation of embedded cultural elements.

Broadly speaking, dynamic equivalence turned out to be the dominant translation approach, particularly for proverbs that are more of a secular or pragmatic nature, i.e. where communicative intent outweighed form. But, formal correspondence remained pervasive in the translation of religious and moral proverbs, mainly due to their stylistic solemnity and shared collective Arab identity. Moreover, Baker's pragmatic strategies demonstrated immense functionality in explaining how translators handled implied meanings, register shifts, contextual implications, and stylistic facets. Toury's framework, too, provided grounds for understanding how translators fared through operational and preliminary norms to shape their negotiations between cultural loyalty and linguistic acceptability.

Diglossia is, indeed, not merely a linguistic obstacle but a marker of identity that can be strategically handled to enrich translation. Since translation can be seen as norm-negotiated mediation, diglossia's seeming untranslatability fosters innovative equivalence, enriching intercultural wisdom transfer yet challenging cultural essence. When translators perceive diglossia as an asset, they can succeed in projecting the socio-cultural texture of the source language society. But when they view it as a complication, they will most likely tend to neutralise the dialectal nuances and produce translations that are communicatively smoother but culturally slimmer. As such, it can be perceived that the translation of Arabic proverbs in diglossic contexts is an act of negotiation between fidelity to the indigenous cultural voice and accommodation of TT audience's expectations. And here it is the translator's choice that determines not only where the translator stands but the quality of the product. Therefore, the study of diglossia in the translation of proverbs is a pursuit of balance and an attempt to bridge sociocultural gaps in translation and linguistic theories. Awareness of these gaps can ultimately bring about clearer communication and more international understanding.

### **Limitations:**

This study has been limited to 5 translators only from 5 different Arab countries; more insights may be garnered if the circle is expanded to other Arab countries or even non-Arab speaking translators of Arabic. In addition, the Saudi vernacular has been taken as an example despite the fact that there

may even be triglossic vernaculars within Saudi Arabia itself – so, the study can be said to be limited to Najdi Saudi proverbs. Moreover, the study can be expanded to other Arabic vernaculars to see if more results and views can be obtained. The study's qualitative approach (despite its richness of interpretive analysis) falls short to quantify perceptions and attitudes. A mixed-methods approach would, therefore, be of immense value to explore this domain, perhaps accounting also for translator's qualifications and experience as well as the role of digital tools in assisting translators. Finally, interdialectal studies can also add richness and diversification of views on Arabic diglossia and translation.

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## Appendix I Selection and Categorisation of Proverbs

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <sup>(1)</sup> أحم التنور ينجس القرص</li> <li>2. <sup>(2)</sup> أزعب والبلابل مفجرة</li> <li>3. <sup>(3)</sup> كل جويبة ما تأخذ إلا مالاها</li> <li>4. <sup>(4)</sup> أبكي بكا ورع عن الديد مفطوم</li> <li>5. <sup>(5)</sup> أبيك لليوم الأقرشر</li> <li>6. <sup>(6)</sup> ما جا به إلا قرادته</li> <li>7. <sup>(7)</sup> لو أخمل الحاكي ما أخمل المستحكي</li> </ol>	<b>Lexical diglossia</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. اللي ما يعرفك يجهلك</li> <li>2. اللي في الجدر يطلعه الملاس</li> <li>3. <sup>(8)</sup> إخذ حق وعط حق</li> <li>4. <sup>(9)</sup> أحين اليوم وموتن بكرة</li> <li>5. <sup>(10)</sup> اسمع يا جر</li> <li>6. من طول الغيبات جاب الغنaim</li> </ol>	<b>Morphological / phonological variation</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. قالوا يا زين السرج على البقر</li> <li>2. <sup>(11)</sup> ابذر الحب وارج الرب</li> <li>3. كل يغني على ليلاه</li> <li>4. إذا كثر ابنك خاويه</li> <li>5. اصبر على مجنونك لا يجيبك أجن منه</li> <li>6. <sup>(12)</sup> اشتر بدرهم وفصل باثنين</li> </ol>	<b>Code-mixing (code-switching)</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <sup>(13)</sup> مع أخوتك مخطي ولا وحدك مصيب</li> </ol>	<b>Semantic / pragmatic contrast</b>

(1) أعط الأمور حقوقها من العناية لتعطي الثمار المطلوبة

(2) نتائج جهد تذهب سدى بسبب خلل في العملية ذاتها... أزعب أخرج الماء من البئر إلى الحوض؛ البلابل هي فتحات خروج الماء من الحوض

(3) الجويبة حوض الماء، للصر حدود

(4) مكره أخاك لا بطل

(5) للشدائد

(6) القرادة سوء الطالع أو سوء الحظ

(7) إذا كان المتحدث مجنون فليستمع عاقل

(8) كن منصفا

(9) حل لي مشكلة اليوم وغدا يعلم الله ماذا يحصل

(10) إياك أعني واسمعي يا جارة

(11) اعمل بالأسباب

(12) اعط الخبز لخبازه

(13) قارن: يد الله مع الجماعة

<p>2. رأسه يابس<sup>(1)</sup> 3. إبرة في تبن<sup>(2)</sup> 4. أبعد ما يشوف خشمه<sup>(3)</sup> 5. الحى يحبيك والميت يزيدك غبن<sup>(4)</sup> 6. لا صار زادك ماكول فرحب<sup>(5)</sup></p>	
<p>1. يد واحدة ما تصفق<sup>(6)</sup> 2. اعمل خير وارمه البحر<sup>(7)</sup> 3. كل شاه معلقة بعرقوبها<sup>(8)</sup> 4. اللي ما يعرف الصقر يشويه 5. حطب عمك لا يهمك 6. إذا طاح الجمل كثرت سكاكينه</p>	<p><b>Frequency and cultural relevance</b></p>
<p>1. ومن يتق الله يجعل له مخرجًا 2. ليس الفقى من قال كان أبي 3. لكل مقام مقال 4. الصبر مفتاح الفرج 5. الكلمة الطيبة صدقة 6. آخر الطب الكي</p>	<p><b>Formality-informality tension</b></p>

- في الفصحى عنيد ولا يلين؛ في العامية شجاع ولا يخاف(1)  
إبرة في كومة قش(2)  
لا يرى أبعد من أنفه؛ لقصر النظر(3)  
لا قسمة له(4)  
طالما وليس من الممكن لك تغيير الوضع فاقبله بترحاب حتى لا تخسر أغراضك ومروءتك(5)  
لا تصفق(6)  
افعل الخير وألقه في البحر(7)  
كل نفس بما كسبت رهينة(8)



## Appendix II

### Test and Questionnaire

Dear translator,

Thank you for your participation. This test and survey are a data collection tool for a research paper on the role of diglossia in the translation of Arabic proverbs into English. Below are 36 Saudi vernacular proverbs followed by 15 questions. You are kindly requested to start with the translation process and, upon completion, respond to the questions. Your answers will remain confidential and will be used exclusively for the purposes of this research

Warm regards,

Researchers

Name:

.....

Nationality:

.....

Years of Experience:

.....

No.	Source Proverb (Arabic)	Translation	Published / Self Translation	Observations on Diglossia (impact of MSA vs. Dialect)
1.	أحم التنور ينحض القرص			
2.	أزعب والبلابل مفجرة			
3.	كل جوية ما تأخذ إلا ملاها			
4.	أبكي بكا ورع عن الديد مفطوم			
5.	أيك لليوم الأقرش			
6.	ما جا به إلا قرادته			
7.	اللي ما يعرفك يجهلك			
8.	أبعد عليك من السما			
9.	إخذ حق وعط حق			

10.	أحين اليوم وموتن بكرة			
11.	اسمع يا جر			
12.	من طول الغيبات جاب الغنایم			
13.	قالوا يا زين السرج على البقر			
14.	ابذر الحب وارج الرب			
15.	كل يغني على ليلاه			
16.	إذا كبر ابنك خاويه			
17.	اصبر على مجنونك لا يجيك أجن منه			
18.	اشتر بدرهم وفصل باثنين			
19.	مع أخوتك مخطي ولا وحدك مصيب			
20.	رأسه يابس			
21.	إبرة في تن			
22.	أبعد ما يشوف خشمه			
23.	الحي يجيبك والميت يزيدك غبن			
24.	لا صار زادك ماكول فرحب			
25.	يد واحدة ما تصفق			
26.	اعمل خير وارمه البحر			
27.	كل شاه معلقة بعرقوبها			
28.	اللي ما يعرف الصقر يشويه			
29.	حطب عمك لا يهملك			
30.	إذا طاح الجمل كثرت سكاكينه			
31.	ومن يتق الله يجعل له مخرجاً			
32.	ليس الفتي من قال كان أبي			
33.	لكل مقام مقال			
34.	الصبر مفتاح الفرج			
35.	الكلمة الطيبة صدقة			
36.	آخر الطب الكي			









you prioritize a smoother target version?

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8. Many proverbs carry implied meanings beyond their literal form. How did you capture these pragmatic effects (e.g., irony, sarcasm, cultural advice) in your translation?

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