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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **(Un)translatability of Yemeni (Ibbi) Zawaamil and Ballads into English: Ibb University Students as a Case Study**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper aims to study (un)translatability in the Yemeni (Ibbi) context, utilizing culture-based texts, specifically zawaamil and ballads, and examining whether they can be translated into English. The study involves 19 Ibb University MA English students. It aims at investigating the extent to which the discourse of these texts is translatable into English. The study thus identifies the difficulties encountered by these students while translating such texts, and hence, suggesting possible strategies and solutions to overcome such difficulties. It employs a mixed-method approach utilizing descriptive and empirical methods, using the questionnaire as an instrument. The findings indicate that linguistic and conceptual difficulties are highly encountered in translating zawaamil and ballads followed by cultural and discourse difficulties and the lowest difficulties are those related to psychological problems. The study concludes that while translatability exists, untranslatability does not, and that this study contributes to the ongoing trend in this regard.

**KEYWORDS**

(Un)translatability, Zawaamil, Ballads, Folk literature art, Colloquialism, Culture, Discourse, Macro-level

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### **1. Introduction**

Untranslatability seems to be one of the most intrinsic, tested, and revolving issues that have been tackled by many researchers in different areas of study (see e.g. Aldahesh, 2014; Alhumaid, 2015; Amine & Eddine, 2022; Cui, 2012; Gharbi, 2021; Gunthilaka & Ariyarathe, 2019; Hlushchenko, 2022; Li, 2021; Mohammedi & Keshavarzi, 2016; Ping, 1999; Ptaszynski, 2004; Qarabesh et al., 2023; Taylor, 2022). This phenomenon has arisen due perhaps to the difficulty of translating texts embedded within the culture such as poetry, and proverbs, among others (see e.g. Dabaghi et al., 2010; Qarabesh et al., 2023; Shormani, 2020). Yemen is known as the cradle of civilization, and Yemeni folk and colloquial literature are full of several genres and forms (see also Caton, 1990). Two very important types of these genres are zamils and ballads. These types of texts are embedded within Yemeni culture and colloquialism. The term *colloquialism* refers to an informal language mostly used in everyday speech and conversations. It is any informal word or expression used aptly in conversation among ordinary or educated people (Nofalli, 2012). Such a variety, however, is common in texts of stylistic, social and cultural nature. Put differently, it can be employed in literary texts which, in return, demand translation strategies like free strategy, modulation, romanization and equivalence.

As for culture, it is the historical and humanistic store of the ins and outs that shape the language, values, beliefs, and norms of a certain nation (see also Katan, 1999). It is an authentic documentation of characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, encompassing language, religion, social habits, rituals, music, arts and the overall lifestyle. It is the shared patterns of behaviors, cognitive constructs and understanding that are learned by socialization (Pappas & Mckelvie, 2022). Culture also

emphasizes communication and peculiarity among communities as it allows individuals of certain communities to express themselves and be easily recognized as distinguished by their own intellectual and behavioral aspects. Thus, culture shapes language and language shapes culture to share essential linguistic processes like translation among languages (Katan, 1999; Newmark, 1988; Baker, 2018, among others).

Furthermore, starting from the fact that culture moved beyond word and text level, some theorists argue that culture is a crucial foundation upon which one can analyze what translation is. They also advocated it as "the larger issues of context, history and convention" (Bassnett & Lefevere 1998, p. 11). Bassnett and Lefevere refer to what is called 'cultural turn' in which they moved towards translation as a cultural act than being absolutely linguistic. In this view, a translator is said to be a 'mediator' between cultures. Translation bridges the cultural gaps among nations (Shormani, 2024) Furthermore, Lefevere (1992) viewed translation as "the most obviously recognizable type of rewriting...because it is able to project the image of an author and/or those works beyond the boundaries of their culture of origin" (Lefevere, 1992, p. 9); i.e., to manifest translation integrated in general literary criticism.

Zawaamil and ballads are thus embedded within the culture (see also Caton, 1990). Zamil, for instance, is a tribal poetic form of Yemeni folklore. We take the term "zawaamil" to refer to the plural form of "zamil", denoting the discursive collective noun used by Yemenis when referring to this folklore genre. Therefore, we will use both terms zawaamil and zamils interchangeably. In fact, the term "zamil" is sometime referred to as "Rijz"/ "Rajz", used by Yemenis in several sociocultural situations including the time of war (see also Al Mannaries, 2021; Al Massri, 2021; Al Shami, 2007; Al Kuhally, 2023; Ibrahim, 2023). Other scholars see that zamils acquired their name from their features and uses including conflict and/or resolution of conflict contexts (see also Caton, 1990; Shormani et al., 2025). They evolved and got their broader discourse from social and cultural spheres. Furthermore, this poetic form has been transferred through generation after generation as a cultural heritage distinguishing historical and social events Yemenis have experienced since centuries. They are further conditioned by and necessitated to respond to certain occasions such as reconciling opposing parties; praising the act of bravery, showing loyalty and celebrating Eid and weddings performed in a close rhythm; high tone and moving while chanting. Ballads, on the other hand, are pastoral songs performed in a chorus form. They are generally set as moving songs at fields or even longer distances. These ballads, however, originated as a kind of enthusiasm in works like plowing and harvesting (see also Al Baradouni, 1998).

In this study, we investigate (un)translatability in the Yemeni (Ibbi) context, focusing on culturally specific texts, namely zamils and ballads. To the best of our knowledge, no previous study has tackled this issue, and therefore, the current study serves to fill this gap. To examine this phenomenon, we have recruited 19 Yemeni MA English students, Ibb University, as the participants of the study. Due to being embedded within culture, these types of texts are deemed difficult to translate; they involve cultural aspects more than simply wording like proverbs and idioms, for example (cf. Shormani, 2020). However, there are several translation strategies that have been employed in successfully translating these types of texts such as romanization, free, literary translations, among others. Thus, the rest of the article is organized as follows. In section 2, we sketch the theoretical background and review the related studies. We also present an overview of zawaamil and ballads. In section 3, we spell out the study methodology. In section 4, we present the study results and in section 5, we discuss these results. Section 6 concludes the article.

## **2. Theoretical background**

### **2.1. Literature review**

It is worthy stating that it has been a long since much focus has been shifted to translation methodologies and principles so as not to limit the translation process to merely "transferring code units". However, with the emergence of linguistic science in the nineteenth century as well as Stenner's postulation under the influence of Leibniz philosophical approach that "language is not the vehicle of thought but its determining medium" (de Pedro Ricoy, 1999, p. 546). New approaches and theories on the (un)translatability have emerged. One of these approaches is the Monadist approach (see e.g. Furth, 1967).

#### **2.1.2. Strategies of translation**

With the advancement of research and studies on translation and the need for more systematic foundations to establish translation process, many translation theorists and scholars tried their best to put forth models and strategies for translation, each in his own perspectives. Newmark, Vinay and Darblent's model of translation strategies is an example (see e.g. Heshmatifar & Biria, 2015). In what follows, we will sketch a number of translation strategies, focusing on those employed by the participants of this study.

#### **Word-for-word strategy**

It is the strategy wherein the translator sticks closely to the original structure and meaning via the direct transmission of such features into the target language (TL). Most translators employ this strategy as a preliminary step in the translation process to recognize anonymous words. Generally, word-for-word strategy is not valid or a reliable translation as it is fundamentally source-

oriented. It does not respect the acceptance of the TL audience as it results in a linguistically odd translation (see e.g. Newmark, 1988; Farghal, 2013).

### **Literal strategy**

This strategy is used to ensure that the source text (ST) is directly transferred into the TL, preserving both form and meaning. Such a strategy does not consider cultural differences as it focuses only on the denotative meaning of each word separately (see e.g. Newmark, 1988). Furthermore, it is commonly used in legal and medical translation as such text types do not encompass figurative features. However, this strategy can be successfully used in the case of similar syntactic structures in both languages.

### **Free strategy**

As its name suggests, the free strategy allows translators more freedom in both source and target languages as it maintains the source language (SL) content but with an orientation towards TL form as well as towards creating natural "acceptance" for the target language audience. Applying this strategy for communicating a specific culture and audience is an essential reason for which adopting the culture of the source text is necessitated. Loss and gain between both languages are potential in structure even if deviating a little in meaning. Moreover, this strategy can be recognized in translating literary and creative text types like poetry and prose which, in return, entail more in depth understanding of both cultures and discourses (see e.g. Bassnett, 2007, 2013).

### **Transference/ transcription / transference**

Transference is a strategy in which a word from the SL is conveyed into the TL as it is without any change. It is usually utilized in the case of the absence of any equivalence in the source languages like Arabic due to a new concept or a specific technical term specific to English (see e.g. Quinney, 2004). It is to some extent, nearest to what is called domestication.

### **Romanization**

Romanization is a translation strategy that has been considered to facilitate the task of reading the source text to the English audience. More obviously, it is the phonemic transference of non-English sounds into the English language. Translators tend to use such a strategy when other translation strategies fail to convey the desired equivalence (see e.g. Liu, 2024).

### **Modulation**

It is a target-oriented strategy in which the translator endeavors to reproduce the source text in a way that coincides with the target language's acceptable linguistic standards. It is necessitated when communicating with the target audience with commonly used expressions in their culture (see e.g. Putranti, 2018). Mass media translation is perhaps one such type of text that requires this type of strategy.

### **Functional and Descriptive equivalence**

These strategies deal with texts containing cultural differences between both source and target languages. Functional equivalence, for instance, is to utilize cultural words or expressions that serve the function the text was written for. Descriptive equivalence, on the other hand, is to describe a source language word with more culturally known terms instead of a direct translation into English.

### **Shift /Transposition**

This strategy involves the substitution of the source text structure which, consequently, results in two levels of shift, namely micro and macro. Micro shift occurs when change does not affect the sociocultural level, and hence may affect the meaning of the intended message of the source text (see e.g. Anggraeni et al., 2018).

### **Compensation and paraphrasing**

Compensation is a strategy in which translators extract a certain word or expression in a sentence of the source language that may cause an odd translation. This loss is then compensated in some other part of the sentence. Furthermore, this strategy is commonly used in interpreting. However, paraphrasing provides more explanation of the source language words rather than describing them (Chesterman, 2016).

## 2.2. An overview of Yemeni YIZBs

As has been discussed so far, zawaamil and ballads are Yemeni folklore genres, manifesting both Yemeni colloquialism and culture. Thus, in this section we address and exemplify these types in more details.

### 3.2.1. Zawaamil

As a Yemeni folklore genre, zamil has been transferred from generation after generation. The emergence of Yemeni zamil or as some called 'Rijz' dates back to the third century during the Roman invasion. The story says that Gin tribes passed through a massive war in which they chanted their famous zamil which provokes horror at hearts. Yemenis used to chant as a sign of conflict or resolution of conflict from then so far (see also Al Eryani, 1996; Al Mannaries, 2021; Al Massri, 2021; Al Shami, 2007; Ibrahim, 2023).

Damn you, cowered! Evading to fight, Whatever darkness is, prevails light,	قبح الله وجهك يا لذليل إن بعد الحرايب عافية
When wars embrace, we never slender, Firm we stand in to make it right.	عند شب الحرايب مانمیل باتجيك العلوم الشافية

### Zamil of Welcome

### زامل ترحيب

Welcome our guest in this visit,  
In such a special day,  
Honored we all gather celebrating his stay,

يا مرحبا بالضيف ذي قرر زيارتنا في اليوم  
الأعر.  
في مقدمه نفخر ونفخر له الدنيا نفير.

And those seeking our subversion futilely,  
A drink of fire they will gulp remorsefully.

ومن يحاول بيننا يصطاد في الماء العكر  
لابد يتقهقر ويتجرع شراب الزمهير.

This poem is a zamil in which the poet, who belongs to Alkuhalies in Assadah district welcomes Alwads in Al sha'ir district, in their Eid visit. The poet starts with greeting the guests and celebrating their stay. He illustrates the mutual unity and fraternization. It ends up with showing the punishment one would get if trying to "subvert" such a relationship.

### On 2011 Events *Bid'*

### في أحداث 2011

It is getting harder and harder,  
Our situation will not go for better,

تأزمت الاوضاع من كل اتجاه  
والحال لن يرجع إلى ما هو عليه.

Who can rescue our nation, I wonder? And take  
us to what we want.

من يخرج الأمة إلى بر الأمان  
والواقع المأمول يوصلنا إليه.

### Jawab

I ask the Merciful God,  
To gratify our people He creates,

أطلب من الرحمن واترجمي رجاه  
يستر على الشعب الذي مته واليه.

Some die at seeking power and authority,  
And everybody wastes in their ways.

الناس تتهافت على سلطة وجاه  
وكل واحد ذي يضحي من صليه.

These poems are zawaamil of *Bid'* 'start' by Walid Al Masry and '*Jawab/Radd* 'response' by Mohammed Al Nussairy in commentary of 2011 events, particularly, political events. In his '*Bid*', Al Masry starts by expressing his depression due to the impossibility of regaining the " old way" of peace and welfare. The poet then wonders who would " pass the nation through" the " save side". In his '*Jawab*', Al Nussairy stresses God mercy as the only way out of such bad circumstances for all people think only of gaining "power and honor" that all lost in the middle of sacrificing for such gain " their way".

## 2.2.2. Ballads

Like other genres of Yemeni oral folklore, ballads 'mahajil' or 'tahyeed' in nomads; 'maghraad' in Maghrib 'Ans or 'mujaabah' in other areas, are still one of the most distinguished evidence of the Yemeni Man. Yemeni people take root and merge with nature; ballads are considered an oral documentation of the ins and outs of Yemenis, in general, and of the rural Man, in particular, through thick and thin they share with land and cattle.

Furthermore, ballads are lyric, rhymed, short songs delivered individually or in chorus form by rural people. Moreover, rural people used to start their morning with ballads as divine supplications; enthusiastic stanzas to motivate workers and farmers as well as travelers chanting to mitigate the awe of the wilderness hardship of traveling as they are moving songs in nature. Nevertheless, historians claim that ballads are the starting point of poetry. Scholars likely attribute ballads to originate in nomad under what is called 'Al Bauh Al Hada'ai'. The story says that a travelling nomad fell down from his camel, hurting his hand, so he began crying 'Wa Idaah, oh my hand'. In the meantime, he notices that the camel is getting faster. Consequently, travelers used to chant such 'Bauh' to fasten their camels. Ballads are of six types namely; travelling and construction ballads; return and "allaan" ballads and green season and harvest ballads (see also Bin Abdo, 2021).

Hurry up! It is late!  
Water in mug is still cold to gain,  
Duped I was by April rain,  
Hurry up! It is late!  
Latent April where is thy daisies,  
Said dying cheeks of ladies,  
Hurry up! It is late!  
Pick a pretty, poor lover,  
A pony lass skinned in amber,  
And if veer away other side,  
Back and forth still but me.  
the black-eyed.

والليل الماء والليلاني  
والماء البارد بالكيز اني  
ما ضحكني ما بكاني , غير رعدك ونيماني  
والليل الماء والليلاني  
أين وردك يا نيماني  
وردي بخدود الشبانني  
والليل الماء والليلاني  
انتقى لك يا هيماني جورته من الحصاني  
انتقى لك كهرماني  
ولنت تشتي لون ثاني  
أدخل وأخرج منه إلا اني.  
عابه إلا ساجي الأعياني.

This ballad embodies a context of workers, say, builders in which they motivate each other to work faster as day is to end. The poet turns to be indulged in an imaginative conversation with April that he is duped by the sudden change of climate into the rains of April. He then wonders about the late growing of April flowers "daisies" as the other replays him in a simile that its daisies are alike beautiful ladies' cheeks color. A third person inter the dialogue "the blacked-eyed".

Beg your grace, oh God  
King of kings, oh Generous God,  
The One Who all calls, replies,  
Never forgets me, never,  
My tongue always murmurs Him,  
Creator of Sky and Earth,  
Knowing everything in the Universe.

جودك يا الله لا جودك  
يا ملك يا جيد يا كريماني  
يا كريماني  
إصداق الميعاد. صادق الميعاد. ما يخلاني ذي خلاني  
ولا ينساني ولا ينساني  
ولا نسيته ولا نسيته. لا من لساني  
ياذا المثاني ياذا المثاني.  
يا كنهه عالم عالماً داري بالبشر والطير لا والأوكار.

The ballad above is attributed to trimming time "qillaam" in which farmers exert huge efforts to get rid of weeds surrounding the growing corn and wheat. Trimming process takes place to prevent grass from hindering corn and wheat from growing properly. The poet of the ballad, who belongs to "Bani Awaadh", Hazm Al Audain district in Ibb, starts with his supplication, in chorus, for God to send them rain generously. He expresses his faith in God who will answer his calls and surround him with mercy. He, in return, did not forget praising Him all the time.

Oh, awaken star over 'Al Massalah',  
 All had lovers, but me still asking Allah,  
 A brownish man in 'Al Audain' raised in dawn,  
 In a white turban and a fresh basil upon,  
 Glad I am as fruits in spring,  
 Like trees when rain's falling.

يا نجم يا سامر، سامر فوق المصلة  
 كلأ معه محبوب وأنا لي الله  
 الأخضرى من الغدين بكر  
 مشدته بيضاء والمنشقر اخضر  
 فرحى أنا فرح الدر بمبكر  
 فرح الشجر ساعة نزول الامطار

The present ballad was written by ' Said Al Shaibani' and sung by ' Mohammed Murshid Najji' in 1948, a very popular Yemeni singer, at the period of monarchy 'Imams' in Yemen. At the beginning, the poet, who was in Cairo then, started to recall the picture he kept in mind of 'AlMasalah, a place in Taiz, the birthplace of the poet'. Furthermore, his nostalgia led him to recall the beauty of other places in Yemen such as 'Al Audain' district in Ibb. He describes the charm and greenish of the place via words like " fresh basil, an aromatic plant or flower", " fruit", "spring" and "rain falling". Farmers used to sing it in their fields; it turned to be part of their usual ballads in the green season.

#### 2.4. Previous studies

To the best of our knowledge, no previous study has tackled this topic, addressing (un)translatability of YIZBs into English. However, a number of studies have been conducted tackling (un)translatability in general, addressing several and various topics. In the Yemeni context, for example, Qarabesh et al. (2023) have studied the (un)translatability of (Yemeni) Arabic oath expressions into English. They collected a corpus of 1,169 oath expressions through an online questionnaire to analyze both linguistic structures and cultural contexts of oaths. They found that there is a close linguistic equivalence between (Yemeni) Arabic and English in terms of oath-making particles and expressions. This suggests that, structurally, many Yemeni Arabic oaths can be directly translated into English without significant loss of meaning. However, at the cultural level, the study indicates that there is some kind of equivalence, as the original impact of Yemeni Arabic oaths is often preserved in their English translations. This implies that the cultural significance and emotional weight of the oaths can be effectively conveyed into English. They conclude that this possibility of translatability is due to the fact that despite the typological difference among languages, including English and Arabic, concepts could be looked at as universal phenomena.

Shormani et al. (2025) have studied Yemeni folklore literature including *Humayni* poetry, *Qassidah*, focusing on Yemeni Ibbi zamils as a tool of conflict resolution. They collected poems and zamils from different districts in Ibb province such as AlQafr, Yareem, AlSahoul, highlighting the tribal situations in which these zawaamil are said, and pinpointing their effects on both the individual and society. Given the value and status a zamil enjoys in the Yemeni society, Yemenis perform zawaamil to ask for forgiveness in tribal conflicts resulted from, for example, killing, land problems and even car accidents. They have also collected some poems from Hadramawt, and studied their poetic characteristics.

Al Baradouni (1998) conducted a study whose aim was to illustrate ballads. It points out that ballads are discontinuous speech in which the voices of a group are responded to by another alternately in the form of verses. This study suggests that a ballad is a manifestation of the pastoral life; it likely expresses their daily struggle, the hardship of traveling as well as a motivation to work. Moreover, it reviewed the various types of ballads such as travel ballads; building ballads; journey ballads; (allan) winter ballads; harvesting ballads and green season ballads.

de Pedro Pedro's (1999) study was devoted to stressing the absence of fundamental untranslatability of any types. This view, however, is critically supported via surveying stances and approaches to translatability, the most focused of which are the universalist and the monadist stances. Linguists and theorists who advocated the former perspective suggest that linguistic universals are a base to guarantee translatability. Those who adhere to the latter, on the other hand, turn the focus to "linguistic community" as the criterion that determines meaning reception and decoding in certain speech community. Back to untranslatability, this concept seems to be considered and involved in correlation with the essence of translation and linguistics as an independent science in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nevertheless, with the advancement of theories and strategies of linguistics and translation, untranslatability gets peripheral.

Ping's (1999) study aims at studying the issue of translatability and untranslatability from sociosemiotic approach. It introduced "untranslatable" in a close linkage to the improper equivalent of the SL in the TL in relation to three types of meaning; referential meaning; pragmatic meaning and intralingual meaning. It asserted that, in reference to those three types of meaning, the focus is on the object of the message rather than on its carrier, and the exclusion of the idea that cultural-bounds terms are untranslatable. Moreover, the fact that translation is a communicative event that enables utilizing verbal signs eased the burden of translators in practical tasks of translation.

Comrie's (1989) study aims to validate McCawley's lists of propositions on the correlative relationship between language universals and translation potential. Comrie refers to such universals as Translatability-Universals, and connects them to various consequence

remarks and hypotheses that have been generated in linguistics. Ramat (1987, p. 10, as cited in Comrie, 1989, p. 53) was an instance of those who voiced such hypotheses claiming that "only in this way [ i.e., through universal semantic content] is it, in fact, possible to understand why languages can, in principle, be translated into other languages". One can comprehend Ramat's claim in terms of translatability and, prior to MacCawley's, Comrie was viewed to be opposing the correlative line to Translatability-Universal's connection. He stresses that despite the potential of other universals of language, there is still non-acceptance of its close linkage to translatability. Besides, his opposing stance was based on certain charges such as that of metalinguistic and situational factors.

### **Research questions**

Based on the above review, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent are YIZBs translatable into English by Ibb University MA students?
2. What are the difficulties encountered by these students while translating YIZBs into English?
3. What are the possible strategies and solutions that would enable them to overcome such difficulties?

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1. Research design**

Given the nature of this study, we have adopted pragmatism as the research philosophy (see e.g. Chih-Pei & Chang, 2017; Gillespie et al., 2024). We have also adopted a mixed-method approach, amalgamated with descriptive and analytical methods as the study design. The macro-level method has also been adopted (see e.g. Palumbo, 2009). In addition, our philosophy of (un)translatability is that every text is translatable into another language (contra to Jacobson, 1959), but there is no 100% correct translation and no 0% translation. Translation varies depending on the nature of the text, the translator, the strategy used, etc. (see Shormani, 2020).

### **3.2. Participants**

This study involves a sample of 19 MA students from the three batches of the MA program, representing 26% students out of a total research population of 73 students at the English Department, Ibb University. They have studied English for about 11 years (6 years in school, 4 years in BA, and a year in MA). They have studied several translation courses including Translation I, II and III in BA course addition to MA courses including Translation Studies, Theories of Translation, Specialized Translation. They have also studied several language and literature courses such as Syntax, Semantics, General Linguistics, Novel, Drama, Poetry, and skill courses such as Writing, Reading and Spoken.

### **3.3. Instruments and data collection**

A questionnaire was utilized to collect the data. The questionnaire consists of two parts: an open-ended questionnaire and a closed-ended questionnaire. It was constructed on Google.sheets for both administering it to the participants and collecting the responses. The open-ended questionnaire begins with a general background information followed by two subparts. The first subpart is a translation task consisting of two main sections. In the first section, participants were asked to translate 14 zawaamil into English. In the second section, they were asked to translate 22 ballads into English. These zamil and ballad items involve single lines, hemistichs, couplets, and/or stanzas. The closed-ended questionnaire consists of Likert five scale model responses, namely *Strongly Agree*, *Agree*, *Neutral*, *Disagree*, and *Strongly Disagree*. This questionnaire includes 19 items (see Appendix A).

### **3.4. Methods of analysis**

As stated above, we have adopted a mixed-method approach, entailing qualitative and quantitative analysis. For the first type, we employed the macro-level analysis, and statistical analysis for the second type. Unlike the micro-level, the macro-level analysis focuses on cultural and social phenomena affecting translation more than linguistic factors (cf. Palumbo, 2009). A macro-level analysis also involves the translation strategies employed in the translation process, tackling certain cultural differences and the peculiar discourse distinguishing each language community (Karimzadeh, et al., 2015). Thus, translators' awareness of those factors at the decision-making level allows them more opportunities to enhance their practice at the production level. Inevitably, this sustains them to carry out communication and acceptance of the message to be translated amongst the target audience. Regrading statistical analysis, we used the Excel tool (available in Google.sheets) and SPSS in calculating the mean scores, standard deviation percentage and frequency.

#### 4. Results

In this section, we tabulate the results and analyze them. Table 1 presents the total results of the study in terms of (in)appropriateness, Freq and percentage.

**Table 1: Appropriate and inappropriate translations (Freq and Percentage)**

Total Freq	Appropriate translation		inappropriate translation	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
684	360	52, 63%	324	47, 37%

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of zamil and ballad items being translated by the study participants. It indicates that the total number of items is 684 encompassing both appropriate and inappropriate translations, each in frequency and percentage. Furthermore, it reveals that appropriate translations are 360, i.e. (52, 63%) rated higher than inappropriate ones, i.e. 324 (47, 37%).

Table 2 presents the results of the study in terms of the translation strategies adopted by the study participants, item, example, and (in)appropriate translations. (We have used (+/-) to indicate whether a translation is appropriate or not).

**Table 2: Adopted strategies (item, strategy, example, and (in)appropriate translations)**

Item	Strategy	Example	Appropriateness
يملأ بني الحارث ومن تحزّم فيها بالعسيب يا قوم من يوصل حماها لا يُرد	Free strategy	Oh sons of Al_ harth who wear al-a'aseeb. Oh people who save the land with undiscussed case	-
		He fills Bani Al-Harith and whoever takes refuge in it with palm branches. O people, whoever reaches its protection in a matter that will not be rejected.	+
		In so far as the space on Bani Alhaarth tribes and its brave tribesmen, whoever approaches its tribes with a matter, his/her matter will be surely met	+
	Equivalence	He fills Bani Al-Harith and whoever is girdled in it with palm branches. O people, whoever reaches its protection in a case will not be rejected.	-
		Those who fill the ranks of Al-Harith, And those who are steadfast with them in the face of adversity, Are a people who will uphold their protection in a matter that cannot be denied	+
		You've never failed whoever knocks your door seeking your help. Our warmest greetings to all men in Bani Alharith as they - the men of Bani Alharith - have never failed anyone asking for your help.	+
		Bani Al Harith stand by us, by you, by any one ask them to.	-
	Word-for-word	The People Bani Al-Harith and whoever The people, who will protect her in an irrevocable case	-

الوادي ياقلمة	Romanization	kalamah Al-Wadi yakalamah	+
		Qalamat alwady ya qalama	+
		The harvester of alwadi	+
	Free strategy	Field harvesting act, harvesting trimmer	+
		Today is the cutter of the valley, oh cutter	+
		You, farmer, harvesting the whole land.	+
	Literal strategy	The valley's trimmer, O prune	+
		In this valley	-
	Modulation	Where is harvester of Alwadi	+

As Table 2 shows, the first item is an example of zamil. This zamil praises Bani Al Harith tribes sending greeting to all its men of high rank and decision makers symbolized by "Al Aseeb". The second item is an example of ballad, sung by Yemeni farmers said in harvesting time. We have given examples of the strategy used in translating these two items, and the translation resulted from applying the strategy. We have also marked the appropriate translation with the sign '+' and the inappropriate one with '-'.

**Table 3: Difficulties encountered while translating Yemeni (Ibbi) zawaamil and ballads into English**

Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Difficulty Level
1	19	4.1579	1.01451	High
2	19	3.3684	1.21154	Moderate
3	19	2.7895	.97633	Moderate
4	19	4.0526	.77986	High
5	19	4.1579	.76472	High
6	19	4.0526	1.17727	High
7	19	4.2632	.80568	High
8	19	3.7368	1.14708	High
9	19	3.2632	1.19453	Moderate
10	19	3.1053	1.32894	Moderate
11	19	4.0000	.88192	High
12	19	4.5263	.61178	High
13	19	4.1579	.95819	High
14	19	3.6842	1.00292	High
15	19	3.3158	1.41628	Moderate
16	19	3.9474	1.43270	High
17	19	4.3684	1.06513	High

18	19	4.0526	.84811	High
19	19	69	52,25463	High

Table 3 displays the statistical findings of the Likert scale adopted for the open-ended questionnaire. We have 19 items (see Appendix B). the Mean is between 2 and 5. The Std. Deviation is between 2 and 0.5. The difficulty encountered is high or moderate. High scores are 14 and Moderate 5, i.e. 73.7% and 26.3%, respectively. The most difficult item is 12 with a mean of 4.5263 and SD of .61178. The lowest difficulty was encountered while translating item 3 with Mean of 2.7895, and SD of .97633.

## 5. Discussion

In this section, we discuss the results presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3. As shown in Table 1, it seems that translating Yemeni Ibbi zamils and ballads into English is possible and that "translatability" exists while "untranslatability" may not. This is illustrated in the number of appropriate translations, viz., 360, i.e. (52, 63%) compared to the inappropriate ones. The latter score 324 translations, i.e. (47, 37%) of the total number of translations in our study.

However, as Table 2 shows there are several translation strategies used by the participants of the study. These are Free strategy, Equivalence, Word-for-word, Romanization, Literal strategy, and Modulation. These strategies were used 5 times or more in our corpus. In fact, there were several other strategies such as paraphrasing, transference, transposition, etc. but these were excluded from our corpus because they were used less than 5 times. There were also strategies used in translating zawaamil more than ballads. For ease of exposition and space, we will focus more and exemplify the Free strategy. We will also touch on other translation strategies for comparison. For example, the zamil *يَمْلَأُ بَنِي الْحَارِثِ وَمَنْ تَحَزَمَ فِيهَا بِالْعَسِيبِ يَا قَوْمَ مَنْ يُوْصِلُ حَمَاهَا لَا يُرَدُّ* was translated in Free translation with several renderings. As an example, consider 'He fills Bani Al-Harith and whoever takes refuge in them with palm branches. O people, whoever reaches its protection in a matter that will not be rejected'. We favor this translation over the others because it is sincere to both the SL and TL.

The two hemistichs constituting the lines of zamil describe Bani Al Harith tribe's bravery and courage, their wearing the belt containing the cover of the Jambia. Jambia is a dagger Yemeni man used to wear as a sign of bravery, strong personality, manhood and belonging (to Yemeni tradition and customs) and that whoever appeals to them in whatever matters will not be down. However, the participants seem to encounter a difficulty in translating the two expressions (*تحزّم فيها بالعسيب*) and (*يواصل حماها*). The first points to not only wearing the Jambia, but also a symbol of manhood, bravery and pride. The second expression indicates that Bani Al Harith tribe has a tradition/habit of protecting anybody who resorts to them and seeks or needs protection.

In Free translation, we also find that some terms such as (*عسيب*) were rendered by transliteration/romanization to translate the direct meaning of "Aseeb" regardless of its connotative meaning essentially meant in the ST. Other participants could comprehend and hence suitably compensate for its loss in expressions like (fill the rank in; carry the stakes; take refuge with palm branches and brave tribesmen). Other participants have tended to omit it without compensating for it. It was noted that some participants have other errors like having no agreement among words and opposite meaning as well as incoherent ideas. So, they found it easier to omit such an expression instead of looking for a suitable equivalence.

As for the ballad *يا قلمة الوادي قلامة الوادي*, let us consider the situation in which it is said. This ballad is said by Yemeni farmers at the time of harvest. It is like their chorus at harvesting and trimming time and that is what exactly and literally "قلمة" means. It is also what the derived participle "يا قلمة" (from *قَلَمَ*) hints for, precisely a harvester, trimmer or cutter. As can be seen in utilizing Free strategy, most participants were capable of successful rendering (*اليوم قلامة*) into (harvesting, harvest, pruning and qalama and qallamah) as evidenced these translations. Nonetheless, the Arabic term (*يا قلمة*) seems to be problematic; they were confused to determine whether it has the same meaning of (*قلامة*) or not. Accordingly, some of them have translated it in a similar way to (*قلامة*). In contrast, some translations provided were totally out of context. Others have managed to bring off a suitable translation such as (pruner, qallmah, harvester, cutter and farmer). However, those who ignored the right meaning have omitted it.

Table 3 shows the difficulties encountered by the participants while translating YIZBs into English. Data obtained reveal that three out of nineteen items were considered the highest difficulties participants encountered. For instance, item 12 *I know the words but not their discourse* ranked as the highest problem for them with a mean of 4.5263 due to the fact that unfamiliarity with the original discourse may lead to transmitting an abstract meaning out of its context. Thus, this would cause them to produce a new message into the target language than the one meant in the source text. This item was followed by item 17, namely *I feel stressed to be exposed to a text containing cultural elements* with a mean of 4.3684. Here, the participants may have found it problematic for it would require ultimate knowledge of both discourses and both cultures. This would add a huge amount of effort to communicate with the target readers looking for the closest equivalence which, in some cases, is very difficult to find.

The third highest difficulty is encountered in rendering item 7 denoting differences in figurative language *Figurative meaning is different in both languages* with an average of 4.2632. This is due to the fact that the linguistic factors as well as the collective mind of each language are different, which entails meaning differences, particularly, those concerning referential elements or how people are framed within each language.

To clarify, the internal structure of all languages is built up with the same universal linguistic conceptualization, covering syntax, semantics, morphology and so on. What differs is only the lexicalization of the concepts, i.e. words, expressions used to denote the concepts (cf. also Regier & Xu, 2017). Every language has terminology different from other languages, and every society has its own ways to name things, and even concepts. To this end, the existence of such universality among languages confirms translatability, and this is what many scholars such as Nida (1964) Oliver and Sacristàn (2001) have agreed to. These authors have evidenced that dealing with culturally-bound terms make it easier for them at the decision-making level. Being familiar with the cultural aspects of a text gives translators rich opportunities of a considerable and sound translation. In this aspect, our study supports other related studies such as Shormani (2020), who has pointed out that culture does translate.

## **6. Conclusion**

To conclude, this study provides a new contribution to the existing knowledge on both the study of folklore and popular literature and (un)translatability. It also provides valuable insights into two typical genres of Yemeni (Ibbi) folklore: zamils and ballads. A number of conclusions can be drawn from our study. The first conclusion concerns the fact that translatability and not untranslatability is a possibility in the context of YIZBs. Although both genres zamils and ballads are difficult to translate due to their being cultural and societal in nature, the fact that 360 translations, i.e. (52, 63%), were acceptable confirms this fact. This indicates that the discourse of zawaamil and ballads is translatable into English, and that conceptualization is universal. The idea that languages diverge typologically, linguistically, culturally and socially, belonging to different language families does not refute the fact that languages are of similar patterns (Joseph, 2004)

The second conclusion is that there is, however, considerable difficulty encountered while translating YIZBs into English. The fact that 324, i.e. (47.37%), translations were unacceptable supports this conclusion. The third conclusion addresses the type of difficulties encountered by the participants of this study. These include linguistic, conceptual, cultural, discourse and psychological aspects. Furthermore, linguistic and conceptual challenges scored the highest ranks, and the lowest ones were related to psychological difficulties. The fourth conclusion that can be stated here tackles the translation strategies used while translating YIZBs into English. The study findings indicate that there were several strategies employed the most important of which are Free strategy, Equivalence, Word-for-word, Romanization, Literal strategy, and Modulation strategy. These strategies resulted in several types of translations for both zawaamil and ballads, some were appropriate and some were not. It was also found that target-oriented strategies such as cultural equivalence in both sub types of functional and descriptive equivalence as well as modulation, free translation and compensation were the best strategies that lead to acceptable translations.

YIZBs are pure Yemeni poetic genres, and their investigation undoubtedly enhances the study of Yemeni Ibbi Arabic, as a very under-investigated language variety (Shormani, 2019). It opens new doors to investigating other linguistic and sociocultural phenomena for linguists, translationalists, (graduate) researchers, among others. YIZBs are rooted within the Yemeni sociocultural characteristics. However, the fact that they are translatable into English contradicts some translation theorists such as Jacobson (1959). Jacobson's notion of absolute untranslatability of poetic forms that "poetry by definition is untranslatable" (Jacobson, 1959, p.238), seems to be not on the right track. The current view sees that absolute untranslatability does not exist, but there is still no firm theory to completely fit in. Our study thus could be added to this view, supporting the hypothesis that translatability does exist, while untranslatability does not.

Our study, however, has some limitations: i) the type of data involved. Our study involved YIZBs, but a broader study could also include zawaamil and ballads from other Yemeni governorates and districts, ii) the participants recruited. We have recruited Ibb University students, another study could involve participants from other Yemeni Governorates to address (un)translatability of zawaamil and ballads in a wider context. We recommend conducting further research addressing these topics. We also recommend teaching culture vis-à-vis language in second language classroom (see e.g. Shormani et al., 2024).

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## Appendix B: (Un)translatability of Yemeni (Ibbi)Zawaamil and Ballads in to English: Ibb University Students as a Case Study

Dear participant,

The researcher, Huda Al Shawsh, is conducting a study to examine whether Yemeni (Ibbi) zawaamil and ballads can be translated into English. You are kindly requested to do twofold task: Part I: Translation test, and Part II: Closed questionnaire. Please be informed that your participation and all your responses will be used only for scientific purposes. Your participation is much appreciated, and will be acknowledged in the study.

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

### Your name (optional)

Your answer

.....

Please choose your gender (optional)

Male:

Female:

### Open-ended test

#### a. Zawaamil

Please, translate the following Yemeni (Ibbi) Zawaamil into English:

.....قَبِّحَ اللهُ وجهك بالذليل

.....إن بعد الحرايب عافية

.....عند شَبِّب الحرايب ما نميل

.....باتجيك العلوم الشافية

.....يا مرحبا بالضيف ذي قرر

.....زيارتنا في اليوم الأغر

.....في مقدمه نفخر

.....وننفر له الدنيا نغير

.....ومن يحاول بيننا يصطاد في الماء العذّر

لايد يتقهقر ويتجرع شراب الزمهير.....

يا كل شامخ بلغ الغالي.....

سَ مَع الدنيا بمواله .....

تأزمت الاوضاع من كل اتجاه.....

والحال لن يرجع إلى ماهو عليه.....

من يخرج الأمه إلى بر الأمان.....

والواقع المأمول يوصلنا إليه.....

أطلب من الرحمن واترجى رجاه.....

يستتر على الشعب الذي منته واليه.....

الناس تتهافت على سلطة وجاه.....

وكل واحد ذي يضحي من صليه.....

سلام من يَحْصُبْ يَصل حيد الفلج.....

والعرش الاعظم ذي ذ كر رب العباد.....

ضاقت على الجاني ومفتاح الفرج.....

من بعد رب العرش فيكم يا مُراد.....

من شافهم يسعد و حُسن الظن فيهم ما يخيب.....

سلام يتردد ملان الكون يوصل كل حد.....

يملا بني الحارث ومن يخزم فيها بالعسيب.....

يا قوم من يوصل جماها في قضية لا يُرد.....

**b. Ballads**

Please, translate the following Yemeni (Ibbi) Ballads into English:

- اليوم قلامة يا قلمه.....
- قلمتها وحدي يا قلمه.....
- ألا وأخي بعدي يا قلمه.....
- يا ناس كم جهدي يا قلمه.....
- قلامة الوادي يا قلمه.....
- والقالمي يقلم يا قلمه.....
- ما عاداناش جمال شد الجمال ما عاداناش جمال.....
- ألا عضتين جنوبي من شدود الاحمال.....
- مسافرين الله يبسر سفر كم.....
- بالعافية يردكم بلدكم.....
- مسافرين ألا يا ليتنا معاكم.....
- ألا نؤكل لنا من زادكم وماكم.....
- قولوا لأمي وابي لمه نسوني.....
- خلف الجبال السود ضيعوني.....
- علي وبالك من علي.....
- يا راوس القامة ألا وهيامه.....
- كل العبير عندك ذلي.....
- حجر وسيري سايره ولا تكوني حايره.....
- دوري عليها دايره.....
- قطعه وسجامه.....
- هيمت أنا وحدي.....
- أنا واخي جمبي.....

**Appendix B: Closed Questionnaire**

**Instructions:** Please read the following three parts, and tick a tick (✓) in the column (Agree, Strongly Agree, Neutral, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree) that best represents your opinion about each statement.

<b>Linguistic and Conceptual difficulties</b>		Agree	Strongly agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Equivalence in the source language is no longer used in the target language.					
2	I am not familiar with words in the source language.					
3	I encounter lexical ambiguity in translating this type of text.					
4	Words in the source language have no equivalence in the target language.					
5	Equivalence in both languages has different grammatical category.					
6	Language style is different in both languages.					
7	Figurative meaning is different in both languages.					

<b>Cultural and Discourse difficulties</b>		Agree	Strongly agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Words in both languages have different historical background.					
2	Words in the source language have no cultural equivalence in the target language.					
3	Words in each language change their discourse through time.					
4	Words in the source language are used in different discourses in the target Language.					
5	Though I know the words, I do not know their discourses.					
6	Words in the source language are culturally bound.					

<b>Psychological Difficulties</b>		Agree	Strongly agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	I feel stressed to find the right equivalence.					
2	I lost my focus because of the text length.					
3	I concentrate more on accomplishing the translation task than on the translation adequacy.					
4	I feel stressed to be exposed for the first time to a text containing cultural elements.					
5	I am not ready to undertake the task.					
6	I get confused which word fits the context.					