

## Preserving Meaning Across Dialects: Translation Strategies of Hadhrami Expressions by Yemeni Undergraduate Students

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores how Yemeni undergraduate students translate Hadhrami dialectal expressions into English and examines the extent to which their translations preserve the original cultural meaning. A qualitative descriptive design supported by quantitative analysis was employed to identify students' translation strategies and the challenges they encountered. Forty-four translation students from several Yemeni universities completed a validated test containing twenty Hadhrami expressions. The findings revealed that students primarily relied on literal translation and dynamic equivalence, while cultural substitution and paraphrasing were used less frequently. Many translations did not fully convey the intended cultural and figurative meanings of the source expressions. The study also found that linguistic, cultural, and strategic factors interacted to hinder accurate and contextually appropriate translation. These results highlight the importance of integrating cultural competence, dialect awareness, and strategy-based instruction in translation pedagogy to help students manage culturally bound dialectal expressions more effectively.*

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Published December 6<sup>th</sup> 2025



### KEYWORDS

Hadhrami dialect; dialect translation; translation strategies; cultural meaning.

### ARTICLE LICENCE

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### 1. Introduction

Language is more than a means of communication; it carries identity, memory, and culture. Dialects, in particular, reflect the history and social realities of the communities that speak them. They are shaped by geography, tradition, and everyday experience, and unlike standardized varieties, they tend to be rooted in oral practice rather than written form. Scholars such as Mašlan (2006) and Määttä (2004) noted that dialects emerge from historical and social contexts, while Baker (2018) emphasized that many of their idiomatic and cultural expressions resist direct translation.

Dialects often carry unique worldviews, emotions, and cultural nuances that standard language cannot fully represent. As Chambers and Trudgill (1998) pointed out, many dialects exist entirely in spoken form, especially in regions with strong local identities. In the Yemeni context, dialects such as the Hadhrami variety embody cultural knowledge, social identity, and oral heritage. They differ from Standard Arabic in vocabulary, pronunciation, structure, and pragmatic use. Translating such dialects poses challenges because meaning is not only linguistic but also cultural and situational.

Previous studies have highlighted that dialects involve idiomatic expressions, cultural references, humor, and symbolic meanings that do not always have equivalents in the target language (Federici, 2011; Kong, 2013; as cited in Shormani & Al-Samki, 2025). Al-Saedi (2020) described dialect as inseparable from lived experience, and Alharbi (2023) explained that dialects diverge from standard forms in grammar, vocabulary, and usage. Trudgill (2004) also added that dialects are not inferior or simplistic; they are full linguistic systems shaped by culture, environment, and history.

These cultural layers translate a demanding task. Ismail (2017) noted that translating dialects in literature and proverbs cannot rely on direct lexical substitution, since meaning depends on social and cultural context. Translators must think beyond words and consider the worldview behind them, as Cappuccio (2005) argued. Sophie (2025) and Malmadaliev (2023, as cited in Yan & Huang, 2014) also stressed that translators act as cultural interpreters, not just language converters. Bahameed (2007) showed that the fixed structure of dialectal expressions, especially proverbs, adds another layer of difficulty because altering wording risks changing meaning or losing style.

Despite these discussions, most research focuses on dialect translation in literature, cinema, or general linguistic theory. There is limited attention to how translation students, especially in Yemen, handle dialect in practice. Little is known

about how Yemeni learners approach the translation of Hadhrami expressions, what strategies they rely on, and how cultural meaning is preserved or lost in the process. This gap is significant because these students represent the next generation of translators who will mediate between dialects and standard or foreign languages.

This study addresses that gap by examining how Yemeni university students translate Hadhrami dialectal expressions and what strategies they use to convey meaning. It explores the extent to which their translations reflect or overlook cultural and contextual meaning. Accordingly, this study is guided by an investigation into the translation practices of Yemeni university students with regard to the Hadhrami dialect. Specifically, it examines the strategies these students employ when translating Hadhrami dialectal expressions into English. Additionally, the study explores the extent to which their translations are able to preserve the cultural meaning embedded in the original expressions. Finally, it investigates the challenges that students encounter when translating from the Hadhrami dialect into English. These considerations provide a foundation for understanding how meaning is negotiated, adapted, or potentially lost when dialectal expressions are transferred from a local context into a foreign language.

### **1.1 Concept of Dialect**

A dialect is more than a linguistic variation; it is a reflection of the history, culture, and identity of a specific community. Kakourous et al. (2020) defined dialect as a systematic linguistic variety characterized by distinct phonological, grammatical, and lexical features associated with a geographical or social group. Baker (2018) similarly described dialect as a language variety used within a particular community, shaped by the linguistic habits and social interactions of its speakers.

Despite their legitimacy, dialects are often perceived as deviations from an idealized standard. Chambers and Trudgill (1998) noted that while dialects are sometimes viewed as “non-standard,” linguistically they are fully developed systems with their own structures and rules. Alharbi (2023) reinforced this view, emphasizing that dialect emerges within defined cultural, social, and geographical boundaries. These variations are not linguistic flaws but rather markers of identity, shaped by migration, isolation, and contact with other languages.

Culture plays a central role in shaping dialect. Aziz and Lataiwish (2000, as cited in Himood, 2009) defined culture as a system of beliefs that governs societal behavior. Dialect, as an expression of culture, carries embedded values, traditions, and worldviews. Rather than fragmenting language, dialects enrich it by preserving local heritage and revealing the evolution of speech across time and communities. Studying dialects, therefore, provides insight into linguistic diversity, social structures, and cultural continuity.

### **2.2 The Hadhrami Dialect**

The Hadhrami dialect is one of the major varieties of Yemeni Arabic and is primarily spoken in the Hadhramaut region of Yemen (Ahmed, 2010). It is not only a regional speech form but also a carrier of local identity, shaped by centuries of migration, trade, and cultural interaction. Ferguson (1964, as cited in Al-Fattah, 2018) defined dialect as a geographical variant of a language, a definition that accurately applies to Hadhrami Arabic. Bahumaid (2015) noted that it is spoken both within Yemen and across diaspora communities in Southeast Asia, East Africa, the Arabian Gulf, and the Indian subcontinent. This widespread presence reflects a deep history of mobility and cultural exchange. Dewi (2020) added that dialects provide linguistic clues about speakers’ social, regional, and educational backgrounds.

Linguistically, the Hadhrami dialect differs significantly from Modern Standard Arabic in its phonology, syntax, vocabulary, and pragmatics, and it preserves several archaic features that have disappeared from other Arabic varieties, offering valuable insights into the historical development of the language (Al-Saqqaf, 2006). Its lexical inventory has also been shaped by contact with Persian, Urdu, Swahili, and other languages due to historical trade and migration patterns (Bahumaid, 2015), which makes it distinct not only structurally but also culturally. Beyond its linguistic features, the dialect functions as a symbol of regional identity in a country marked by tribal and cultural diversity, while its continued use, despite the dominance of Modern Standard Arabic and pressures of globalization, reflects a strong cultural connection and a commitment to preserving linguistic heritage.

### **2.3 Hadhrami Dialectal Expressions**

Hadhrami dialectal expressions include the unique words, idioms, proverbs, and culturally embedded phrases used by speakers of the Hadhrami Arabic dialect. These expressions are not only linguistic units but also carriers of cultural meaning, identity, and collective memory. Influenced by centuries of trade, travel, and intercultural contact, the dialect

incorporates elements from Arabic, Persian, Indian, and East African languages, making many of its expressions linguistically and culturally layered.

Many Hadhrami expressions are rooted in oral traditions, Bedouin customs, maritime life, and religious values. They often reflect local experiences, humor, wisdom, and social norms, making them deeply context-dependent. For example, certain proverbs and idioms may carry metaphorical meanings that cannot be understood through literal translation. As a result, their meanings are not always transparent to speakers outside the region or to those unfamiliar with the cultural background.

Because of this cultural depth, translating Hadhrami dialectal expressions into English poses significant challenges. Literal translation rarely captures the intended message, emotional tone, or sociocultural significance. In many cases, translators must balance accuracy and cultural resonance by using strategies such as paraphrasing, cultural substitution, or dynamic equivalence. This complexity underscores the importance of documenting and analyzing these expressions to preserve their meaning and support cross-cultural understanding.

## 2.4 Dialect Formation

Dialect formation is a natural outcome of social, geographical, and historical factors. Britain and Cheshire (2003) explained that dialects emerge as communities develop distinct identities through separation, migration, and localized interaction. Over time, differences in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar solidify into recognizable varieties of the same language. These differences gradually become more systematic as communities continue to interact within their own networks. In this way, what begins as small variations eventually develops into stable dialects that reflect each community's lived experience and social environment.

Kerswill (2018) noted that demographic shifts, social networks, and patterns of contact with other linguistic groups all influence the evolution of dialects. Dialect formation is not only a matter of geography; it can also reflect class, occupation, lifestyle, and education. These dynamics apply to Arabic-speaking regions, where tribal history, trade routes, and regional isolation have contributed to the diversity of dialects, including the Hadhrami variety.

## 2.5 Standard Arabic vs. Hadhrami Dialect

Standard Arabic (SA) functions as the formal and institutionalized variety of the language, used in media, education, religious discourse, and administration. In contrast, dialects like Hadhrami Arabic serve everyday spoken communication and are used in informal, familial, and local contexts. This coexistence creates a diglossic situation in which each variety has a distinct role depending on the context, purpose, and audience. The distinction between SA and dialects also affects vocabulary choice, sentence structure, and idiomatic expressions, which are often specific to each form. Consequently, translators must consider not only linguistic differences but also the communicative purpose of each variety to ensure that the intended meaning is accurately conveyed.

Bourdieu (1991) noted that standard languages gain prestige through institutional power, while dialects may be seen as informal or subordinate. However, Lane-Mercier (1997) argued that dialects carry unique cultural meanings that resist direct translation, leading to both gains and losses in meaning during language transfer. Although SA and the Hadhrami dialect share a linguistic root, they differ significantly in pronunciation, sentence structure, and vocabulary (Haugen, 1966). Speakers often switch between the two forms depending on social setting, purpose, and audience, which poses additional challenges for translation.

## 2.6 Translation Strategies for Dialectal Expressions

Translating Hadhrami dialectal expressions requires sensitivity to both linguistic form and cultural meaning. For example, Al-Harbi (2023) examined the translation strategies used to address the challenges of translating the Najdi dialect, noting that "each proverb was systematically translated into English, employing strategies such as dynamic equivalence, paraphrasing, and cultural substitution" (p. 213).

- a. **Dynamic Equivalence Strategy** focuses on preserving the intended meaning and emotional resonance, allowing the target audience to experience the text similarly to the original audience. It is particularly effective for translating culturally embedded expressions by adapting figurative language and references to align with the cultural norms of the target audience.
- b. **Paraphrasing Strategy** offers a flexible way to express a proverb's meaning using alternative wording. It is effective for addressing culturally specific elements, metaphors, or idioms that do not have direct equivalents in

the target language. The goal is to adapt proverbs to the linguistic and cultural norms of the target audience while preserving their core essence.

- c. **Cultural Substitution Strategy:** adapts proverbs by replacing culturally specific references with equivalents meaningful to the target audience. It ensures that proverbs resonate and that their meaning, pragmatic function, and emotional tone are preserved. Replacing unfamiliar imagery with culturally relevant equivalents bridges cultural gaps and ensures audience comprehension.

Hajiyeva (2025), furthermore, indicated that given the complexities and cultural embeddedness of idioms and slang, translators must employ a variety of strategies to preserve both meaning and communicative effect. These strategies range from literal rendering to adaptive paraphrasing, depending on the target audience, text type, and the translator's judgment. In addition, He outlined four primary translation strategies for handling idioms and slang:

- a. **Literal vs. Free Translation:** The preferred method is free translation, which conveys the intended figurative meaning rather than the surface form of the words. Literal translation is generally avoided for idioms and slang because their non-literal meanings often produce ineffective or absurd renderings in the target language.
- b. **Equivalence (Dynamic vs. Formal):** Dynamic equivalence is the more effective approach for these expressions, as it aims to produce the same emotional and communicative effect on the target audience, often by changing the linguistic form. Formal equivalence, which focuses on preserving linguistic structure, is only appropriate when a direct match already exists between the languages.
- c. **Paraphrasing or Cultural Substitution:** Paraphrasing is used to explain the idiomatic meaning in simpler, non-figurative terms, while cultural substitution involves replacing the source idiom with a different expression that performs a similar function and resonates within the target culture.
- d. **Omission or Explanation in Footnotes/Endnotes:** A translator may choose omission (with caution) in contexts where space is severely limited, such as in subtitling. Conversely, explanatory notes (footnotes or endnotes) are used in academic or literary translations when cultural authenticity is a priority, and the meaning needs to be preserved and clarified for the reader.

## 2.7 Previous studies

Several studies have examined the challenges of translating dialects, each highlighting linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic complexities.

Fathima et al. (2024) investigated the translation of three Tamil dialects—the Brahmin, coastal Muslim, and Dalit varieties—into English, focusing on the challenges of rendering culturally and socially embedded expressions. Their analysis examined key dialect markers, including phonetic, lexical, morphological, and syntactic features, in translated literary texts. The study found that translators frequently employed strategies such as transliteration, footnoting, compensation, amplification, and simile-based equivalents to address terms that lack direct equivalents in English. The authors emphasized that gain and loss of meaning are inevitable in the translation of dialects due to their cultural specificity. Finally, the study proposed practical solutions to help preserve both the linguistic and cultural functions of dialectal expressions while mitigating the impact of unavoidable losses.

Pokorni (2023) examined how Croatian students perceive different strategies for translating dialects. The study specifically compared standardized, colloquialized, and culturally transplanted versions of a source text. The major finding was that readers' translation background significantly influenced their preferences and their interpretation of the characters. While no single strategy was universally favored, the research clearly showed that culturally transplanted translations were the least preferred among the participants. Therefore, the findings ultimately stress the importance of considering audience expectations when dealing with dialect in translation.

Alharbi (2023) explored the translation of Saudi Najdi dialect proverbs into English, focusing on the linguistic and cultural challenges involved in conveying their metaphorical richness and contextual depth. The study demonstrated that literal translation was largely ineffective, as it failed to preserve the proverbs' intended meaning, tone, and cultural resonance. Instead, strategies such as paraphrasing, cultural substitution, and dynamic equivalence proved significantly more successful in communicating the proverbs' core messages to English-speaking audiences. Ultimately, the study highlighted that effective translation of Najdi proverbs requires attention not only to linguistic form but also to the cultural values and social norms that shape their usage.

Salih (2023) focused on the Mosuli dialect, identifying linguistic and cultural challenges in translating it from Arabic to English. The study found that the dialect's distinct phonetic and lexical features create significant comprehension barriers for translators who are not familiar with it. Analysis of translator responses confirmed that non-Mosuli translators frequently produced errors and misinterpretations due to the lack of one-to-one equivalence between the source and target languages. To address these difficulties, the study recommended strategies such as adaptation, explicitation, and domestication, which help preserve the pragmatic and contextual meaning of the original text. Salih also emphasized the need for "parity," ensuring that the translated text maintains the same communicative and cultural impact as the source, highlighting that novice translators face a dual challenge in both understanding and accurately rendering the dialect.

Parini (2022) analyzed the translation of the Sicilian dialect in the film *La mafia uccide solo d'estate* by comparing two English subtitle versions. The study found that many dialectal features were neutralized in the subtitles, leading to a loss of character differentiation and cultural nuance. Occasional use of colloquial expressions, such as "damn" for "minchia," only partially conveyed the original tone and intent of the dialogue. The analysis highlighted that the subtitling strategies often failed to reflect the social and identity markers embedded in the Sicilian dialect. Overall, Parini concluded that subtitlers face significant challenges in preserving both linguistic variation and cultural meaning when translating dialect-rich audiovisual content.

Al-Khanji and Ennasser (2022) examined English–Arabic and Arabic–English literary translations of dialects, focusing on dramatic texts such as *Pygmalion* and *Moby-Dick* to analyze how nonstandard varieties are rendered across languages. The study identified four major challenges: the overuse of standardization, the difficulty of selecting an equivalent regional dialect in the target language, the risk of stereotyping or negatively representing speakers of a chosen dialect, and the general lack of familiarity with dialectal variation among translators. These issues, they argued, often lead to the loss of crucial sociolinguistic markers that reflect a character's social identity, personality, and educational background. Drawing on descriptive and analytical examination of dramatic dialogue, the researchers showed that excessive reliance on standardization or neutralization tends to erase the socio-economic and cultural functions embedded in dialectal speech. Consequently, they argued that colloquialization—using an appropriate and contextually sensitive vernacular variety—offers a more effective strategy for preserving the original author's intended characterization and social marking.

Bilal et al. (2022) investigated the translation of the Palestinian dialect in Ibrahim Nasrallah's *Time of White Horses*, aiming to analyze the challenges faced by translator Nancy Roberts in rendering the Palestinian dialect from Arabic into English within the novel. They also sought to determine how the resultant loss in translation impacts the critical functions encoded within the dialectal expressions. The major results confirmed that the Palestinian vernacular serves several important functions—such as signifying familial closeness, marking social distance, creating humor, and most importantly, asserting the Palestinian national identity. Their analysis revealed that these functions are integral to the sociocultural texture of the narrative and significantly contribute to character portrayal. However, the study concluded that the translator primarily employed a standardization strategy to handle the dialectal markers, which is a form of domestication that risks concealing the dialect's existence in the target text and thus potentially undermining the narrative's national identity and the various functions the Palestinian dialect was intended to fulfill.

Berkal and Saudi (2022) examined the translation of English dialects in *Moby Dick* into Arabic, focusing on how the translator handled the novel's socially and historically marked varieties of speech. Their analysis showed that the translator employed both neutralization and standardization to address social and archaic dialects, using these strategies to simplify complex linguistic features in the target text. They noted that this approach was partly motivated by the desire to avoid misinterpretation, cultural ambiguity, and political sensitivity in the Arabic translation. However, they also observed that such strategies tend to smooth out distinctive linguistic markers that carry important social and contextual meanings in the original text. As a result, the study concluded that although neutralization and standardization help maintain clarity, they frequently eliminate sociolinguistic functions and diminish the stylistic impact that Melville's dialects were meant to convey.

In short, these studies demonstrate that translating dialect involves negotiating meaning, identity, and cultural context. They also show a recurring reliance on strategies such as domestication, functional equivalence, paraphrasing, annotation, adaptation, and standardization. Despite these strategies, translators often face inevitable challenges in fully conveying sociolinguistic markers, cultural nuances, and stylistic features. The studies further highlight that some gain or loss of meaning is unavoidable in the translation process. Overall, they emphasize that effective dialect translation requires balancing linguistic accuracy, cultural sensitivity, and audience comprehension.

Despite the growing interest in dialect translation across literary, audiovisual, and sociolinguistic contexts, most existing studies have focused on professional translators, source text analysis, or readers' perceptions rather than on student translators. Very few have examined how translation students—particularly in Yemen—deal with dialectal expressions in real practice. None of the reviewed research has explored how Yemeni university students translate Hadhrami dialectal expressions into English, what strategies they adopt, or how successfully they preserve cultural meaning. Since these learners represent the next generation of translators, this gap is both relevant and academically significant. Accordingly, the present study addresses this gap by analyzing the strategies Yemeni translation students use when translating Hadhrami dialectal expressions into English and evaluating the extent to which their translations retain cultural and contextual meaning.

## 2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive design to explore the translation strategies used by Yemeni undergraduate students in translating Hadhrami dialectal expressions from Arabic into English. This approach provides deeper insight into the cultural and contextual meanings embedded in dialect. It also aligns with Creswell and Poth's (2018) view that qualitative methods are suitable for examining language within its social and cultural context. By using this approach, the study is able to capture the nuances that may not appear through purely quantitative methods.

The population of the research consists of Yemeni undergraduate students enrolled in the Department of English and Translation across several Yemeni universities in Sana'a during the second semester of the 2024–2025 academic year. A purposive sampling approach was used to select 65 students for participation. Out of these, 44 students completed the translation test and provided usable data for analysis. The remaining 21 students were excluded because of absence or incomplete responses. This exclusion is acknowledged as a limitation that reduces the generalizability of the findings.

The primary instrument of the study is a translation test. Initially, the test contained 33 expressions taken from *Al-amthāl wa al-ta'bīr al-Ḥaḍramiyya: Al-juz' al-awwal* (Hadhrami Proverbs and Expressions: Volume 1). These expressions were chosen based on cultural embeddedness, frequency of use, and the level of translational difficulty. After expert validation, the number was refined to 20 expressions to ensure clarity and feasibility for undergraduate participants.

Content validity was ensured through expert review by specialists in translation and English linguistics, who recommended reducing and refining several items. Their feedback helped strengthen the accuracy and relevance of the instrument. Reliability was then assessed by administering the finalized test to the 44 participating students. Cronbach's Alpha, calculated using SPSS, yielded a coefficient of 0.81, which indicates a high level of internal consistency (Izah et al., 2024).

The test was administered in February 2024 in quiet, well-equipped classrooms to minimize distractions. Clear written and oral instructions were provided, and sufficient time was allocated for completion. Data collected from the translation test were coded and entered into SPSS for analysis. Frequencies and percentages were computed based on the scale adopted from Alharbi (2023). Additionally, the analysis sought to determine whether participants employed any translation strategies beyond those included in the established scale. Alharbi's scale includes the following:

- 1- Dynamic Equivalence
1. Paraphrasing
2. Cultural Substitution

A descriptive statistical approach was used to identify patterns in students' use of these strategies. The analysis was supported by qualitative interpretation to explain how the chosen strategies reflected or overlooked the cultural and linguistic nuances of the original expressions.

## 3. Result and Discussion

### 3.1 Results Related to the Strategies

The researchers used the SPSS program to analyze the collected data. Appropriate statistical procedures were followed to calculate the frequencies and percentages necessary to answer the research questions. The data analysis results are summarized below:

**Table 1. Frequency and Percentage of Translation Strategies Used by Students**

Items		Literal Translation	Dynamic Equivalence	Cultural Substitution	Paraphrasing
All items	F	351	324	119	86
	%	39.9%	36.8%	13.5%	9.8%
Rank		1	2	3	4

The table above shows the frequencies and percentages of participants' use of translation strategies when rendering Hadhrami dialectal expressions into English. The most frequently used strategy was Literal Translation (39.9%), followed by Dynamic Equivalence (36.8%). The Cultural Substitution strategy came third (13.5%), while Paraphrasing ranked last (9.8%). Each strategy is analyzed below using examples from participants' translations.

#### a. Literal Translation

The literal translation strategy was the most frequently used, accounting for 351 responses (39.9%). Participants often relied on literal translation when they struggled to find suitable English equivalents for Hadhrami expressions. This reliance reflects students' limited familiarity with dialectal expressions and their unawareness of alternative translation strategies. For instance, several participants translated the expression "جيت بآثر بيج رجعت رباح" as "I came to profit, I came profit" or "You came to win but you left as a loser" and "You came to win but you left as a loser." Another example is the expression "وحد من غمزه وحد من همزه وحد من رفسيه" which was translated literally as "One wink, one whisper, one kick" or "Someone from a wink, one from a whisper, and one from by kick." Such translations illustrate the participants' tendency to directly transfer each lexical item without considering the overall meaning or idiomatic naturalness of the expression. While literal translation felt easier and more straightforward for them, it frequently resulted in awkward or inaccurate renderings. The dominance of this strategy indicates that students often lacked the flexibility to adjust to cultural or contextual nuances. Therefore, although literal translation was the most common method, its overuse highlights the need for students to develop greater awareness of idiomatic and context-sensitive translation practices.

#### b. Dynamic Equivalence

Dynamic Equivalence was the second most commonly used strategy with 324 frequencies (36.8%) of the participants' responses. This strategy was employed when participants realized that a Hadhrami term or expression had no direct English equivalent. In such cases, they adapted the meaning to achieve a similar communicative effect in English. For example, the expression "بت الجرشه عاييه" was rendered as "Momy girl is not good" or "Do not marry a girl depending upon her mother." These translations reflect attempts to convey the intended meaning rather than the exact wording, showing a shift toward conceptual rather than lexical equivalence. Similarly, when translating "بدر ما يفدر إلا في عمائه" some participants produced translations like "Bader only bullies his aunts," "Brave only at home," or "A bull at home, a mouse in public." These examples show that participants aimed to preserve the pragmatic or humorous function of the expression, even if its literal form changed.

The use of dynamic equivalence demonstrates that participants possessed some awareness of cultural and communicative adaptation. However, while this strategy helped them maintain the intended tone, humor, or irony, it sometimes resulted in a slight loss of cultural precision. Nonetheless, this approach indicates progress toward meaningful and contextually appropriate translation.

#### c. Cultural Substitution

Cultural substitution was used moderately, accounting for 119 responses (13.5%). This strategy appeared when participants faced culturally bound expressions that lacked familiar equivalents in English. In such cases, they replaced the original expression with a culturally corresponding one that would be easily understood by English-speaking audiences. For example, the Hadhrami expression "ثعل" was often translated as "Fox" or "A cunning fox," a familiar metaphor in English that conveys the same meaning of cunning or cleverness. Another example is "ذيلها بذيل أمها" which many participants translated as "Like mother, like daughter" or "The daughter is like her mother." These translations show how participants substituted the original cultural concept with a parallel expression from English culture that carries the same connotative meaning.

This strategy made translations sound natural and relatable to target readers, preserving both meaning and cultural nuance. The moderate use of this strategy indicates that some participants were capable of adapting culturally specific expressions effectively, although this skill was less frequent compared to literal or dynamic equivalence strategies.

#### d. Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing was the least used strategy, appearing in 86 responses (9.8%). Participants tended to apply it only when they could not find a suitable English equivalent and needed to reformulate the meaning in their own words. For example, the expression “تَبَخَّصَّ تَسْلَمَ تَعْفَرَب تَقْتَل” was translated as “Pinch to warn, sting to hurt, and strike to kill” or “Be humble and you will be safe, but if you are arrogant, you will be killed.” Another example is “بُرْحُوبُهُ خَيْرٌ مِنْ تَقْرُوبِهِ” which was translated as “A kind greeting from afar is better than a cold shoulder up close.” These examples show that paraphrasing helped participants clarify the intended meaning, even when idiomatic precision was lost. Although less preferred, paraphrasing was useful when no direct equivalent existed. It demonstrated participants’ effort to convey the message clearly to English readers, prioritizing comprehensibility over stylistic or idiomatic accuracy.

The analysis reveals that Yemeni university students used four main strategies when translating Hadhrami dialectal expressions into English, with varying degrees of frequency. Literal Translation (39.9%) was the most dominant strategy, reflecting a tendency to depend on literal transfer due to limited familiarity with idiomatic and cultural translation techniques. Dynamic Equivalence (36.8%) followed closely, showing participants’ attempts to preserve meaning and communicative effect, particularly when no direct English counterpart existed. Cultural Substitution (13.5%) was moderately employed to make expressions more accessible and natural to English audiences. Finally, Paraphrasing (9.8%) was the least used strategy, often applied when participants could not find suitable equivalents.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that Yemeni university students rely primarily on literal and dynamic strategies, indicating limited flexibility and cultural sensitivity in translation. The lesser use of cultural substitution and paraphrasing suggests a need for enhanced translator training that emphasizes intercultural competence, contextual awareness, and creative problem-solving in dealing with dialectal and culturally embedded expressions.

### 3.2 Results Related to the Accuracy of Translation

**Table 2. Levels of Accuracy in Students’ Translation of Hadhrami Expressions**

Items		Accurate Translation	Semi-accurate Translation	Inaccurate Translation
All Items	F	154	245	481
	%	17.4%	28%	54.6%

The analysis of students’ translations reveals that Yemeni undergraduates encountered considerable difficulty in preserving the cultural meaning of Hadhrami dialectal expressions when translating into English. As presented in Table 3, the translations were categorized into three levels of accuracy—inaccurate (54.6%), semi-accurate (28%), and accurate (17.4%)—across 880 total translation items. This distribution demonstrates that more than half of the translations failed to convey the intended meaning, while fewer than one-fifth successfully captured both linguistic and cultural nuances.

These findings demonstrate that the students’ translations generally did not preserve the cultural meaning of the original expressions to a satisfactory degree. The data suggest that literal translation dominated their work, resulting in semantic distortion and loss of pragmatic intent. For instance, translating the expression “حتى لبست خيشة مكانها عيشة” as “Simple live and not Shaw off” reflects a fundamental misunderstanding: the original proverb celebrates natural beauty as independent of appearance, not modest living. This example illustrates how cultural misinterpretation, combined with linguistic weakness, leads to a shift in meaning from aesthetic philosophy to moral advice.

Similarly, the translation of “ذيلها بنيل أمها” as “Listen to his mom or shout with his mom” demonstrates a complete failure to interpret figurative meaning. The original idiom conveys a social observation—how a daughter tends to emulate her mother’s behavior—yet the student’s version alters the pronoun, distorts the syntax, and introduces an unrelated scenario. Such patterns reveal that many participants were unable to move beyond literal equivalence to grasp the metaphorical or relational meaning embedded in the dialect.

The large part of inaccurate translations (54.6%) suggests that most students struggled to bridge the linguistic and conceptual distance between Hadhrami Arabic and English. This may be attributed to a lack of familiarity with the dialect’s

figurative and cultural frameworks, as well as limited exposure to translation strategies that prioritize contextual meaning over lexical matching.

The semi-accurate translations (28%) reflect partial comprehension of the source meaning but incomplete transfer of nuance. For example, the expression “حد من غمزة وحد من همسة وحد من رفسة” was translated as “Some people understand fast and some not.” Although the general sense—differences in people’s responsiveness—is captured, the figurative richness of the original (contrasting levels of subtlety and force in communication) is lost. This indicates that while some students grasped the basic message, they lacked the expressive skill to recreate the idiom’s imagery or cultural tone in natural English. By contrast, the small percentage of accurate translations (17.4%) demonstrates that a minority of students managed to reproduce both the meaning and cultural force of the original expressions. For instance, translating “دعاء من غير حق ما يلحق” as “The prayer without right is never accepted” successfully conveys the idiomatic and moral essence, despite a minor grammatical flaw. Likewise, rendering “تعمل” as “A person like a fox (cunning)” shows awareness of metaphor and cross-cultural interpretation, as the student supplemented the literal word with an explanatory gloss. Such cases reveal a higher level of intercultural and pragmatic competence, indicating that successful translation required more than lexical accuracy. It depended on understanding the conceptual equivalence between two cultures.

To conclude, the data indicate that the extent to which cultural meaning was preserved is limited. The dominance of inaccurate and semi-accurate translations points to a general lack of interpretive and pragmatic awareness, where students tend to prioritize surface-level transfer over deeper meaning reconstruction. This pattern aligns with findings from studies on dialect translation, which emphasize that literal approaches often result in semantic and cultural loss when translating region-specific idioms.

### 3.3 Results Related to the Challenges

**Table 3. Categories and Frequency of Challenges Faced in Translating Hadhrami Dialect into English**

Items	Linguistic Challenges	Cultural Challenges	Strategic Challenges	
	F	313	259	228
All items	%	39.1%	32.4%	28.5%

Table 3 presents the distribution of the challenges Yemeni undergraduate students faced when translating Hadhrami dialect expressions into English. As shown, the total number of reported challenges was 594, classified into three categories: linguistic, cultural, and strategic. The linguistic challenges category recorded the highest frequency with 313 instances (39.1%), followed by cultural challenges with 259 instances (32.4%), while strategic challenges were the least frequent with 228 instances (28.5%). Although the percentages indicate only moderate variation among the three categories, linguistic challenges were the most common, suggesting that most students’ difficulties arose from lexical, syntactic, and semantic differences between the Hadhrami dialect and English.

#### a. Linguistic Challenges

Linguistic challenges emerged as the most frequent category, accounting for 39.1% of all recorded challenges. These challenges primarily stemmed from the students’ limited ability to identify accurate lexical, syntactic, and idiomatic equivalents between Hadhrami Arabic and English. The results show that many students resorted to literal translation, misinterpreting dialectal forms due to their unfamiliarity with local idioms and figurative uses. For instance, the expression “بت الجرشية عاييه” was translated as “the bit of something bad,” an example that reflects phonetic reliance rather than semantic understanding—the expression actually means “lazy girl.” Similarly, the expression “بدر ما يقدر الا في عماته” was translated as “the moon cannot do anything without its turban,” which distorts the meaning through confusion between عمَّاته (his aunts) and عمامته (his turban). These examples underscore the lexico-grammatical and semantic gaps separating the Hadhrami dialect and English. The students’ struggles suggest that they lacked the linguistic proficiency and structural awareness required to handle dialect-specific idioms and figurative expressions. Without firm command of both linguistic systems, their translations often produced grammatically correct but semantically nonsensical outputs. In short, the linguistic challenges reflected a gap not only in vocabulary knowledge but also in syntactic flexibility and idiomatic competence, both of which are essential for accurate and meaningful translation.

#### b. Cultural Challenges

Cultural challenges, which made up 32.4% of all reported cases, were nearly as significant as linguistic challenges. These challenges resulted from the deeply culture-bound nature of Hadhrami expressions, many of which encode local

values, humor, or social norms that lack direct English equivalents. For example, the idiom “تَنَارُهُ بَارِدٌ” was literally translated as “His kiln is cold.” While grammatically correct, the translation fails to express the intended figurative meaning—“a lazy or unproductive person.” Similarly, the expression “جِئْنَا فِي أَحَدٍ” was rendered as “We did it fast,” missing the original meaning of finding someone in a confused or awkward situation. Such examples highlight how cultural misunderstanding leads to semantic distortion even when the language itself appears correct.

The findings confirm that many students viewed translation primarily as a linguistic task, overlooking its cultural interpretive dimension. Literal translations thus stripped the idioms of their social resonance and pragmatic force. The results also suggest that students often struggled to balance cultural equivalence and linguistic naturalness—either retaining the cultural form at the expense of meaning or adapting the wording while losing its contextual depth. This underscores the importance of developing intercultural competence as a core component of translation training, particularly when dealing with dialects rich in metaphor and local symbolism.

### c. Strategic Challenges

Although less frequent than the other categories, strategic challenges (28.5%) still represented a substantial proportion of students' difficulties. These challenges were related to the methods and strategies used during the translation process, such as planning, revising, and selecting appropriate techniques. For example, the translation of “رَبِّ كَلْبِكَ يُعْفُرُكَ” into “When you raise a dog and it perfidy you” demonstrated a misunderstanding of word choice and register. The student correctly identified the idea of betrayal but used the rare and unnatural term “perfidy.” In another example, the expression “رَبِّكَ وَصَاحِبِكَ لَا تَكْذِبْ عَلَيْهِ” was rendered as “Do not lie to your Allah and to your friend.” Here, the student adopted a foreignizing strategy, maintaining the original structure and religious reference, which preserves meaning but sounds awkward in English. These examples showed that many students lacked awareness of when to apply different translation strategies. Some failed to revise their work carefully or make effective use of reference materials. In short, their main difficulty lay not in understanding the source text but in applying a methodical and flexible approach to the translation process itself.

In short, the results indicated that students faced three interrelated types of challenges when translating Hadhrami dialect expressions into English: linguistic, cultural, and strategic. The linguistic issues revealed gaps in vocabulary and structural understanding; the cultural challenges highlighted the lack of equivalent expressions across languages; and the strategic difficulties pointed to weaknesses in students' translation techniques and decision-making.

### 3.3 Discussion

The findings show that Yemeni university students relied primarily on literal translation (39.9%) when rendering Hadhrami dialectal expressions into English, followed by dynamic equivalence (36.8%), cultural substitution (13.5%), and paraphrasing (9.8%). This pattern aligns with previous research, which indicates that learners often default to literal strategies when faced with dialectal or culture-bound expressions. Alharbi (2023) reported a similar dominance of literal translation in Saudi students' work on Najdi proverbs, often resulting in loss of idiomatic and cultural meaning. Rafieyan (2016) and Chung (2024) similarly observed that literal approaches frequently produce semantically distorted renderings, while Zitouni et al. (2022) highlighted that paraphrasing can erase phonetic and stylistic markers critical to cultural identity. Mounadil (2023) also noted that literal translation and paraphrasing are common in proverb translation, though paraphrasing may distort meaning.

Dynamic equivalence, as the second most used strategy, reflects an emerging awareness of adapting meaning rather than form. This aligns with Nida's (1964) principle that effective translation reproduces the intended response in the target audience, though Nida (2004) acknowledged that achieving true equivalents is challenging when languages and cultures differ. Al-Khadem (2024) similarly emphasized that students face challenges in achieving optimal equivalence and identifying functional pragmatic alternatives. The limited use of cultural substitution and paraphrasing may also reflect restricted exposure to authentic translation contexts that encourage flexibility and creativity.

Accuracy results confirm these trends. Only 17.4% of translations were fully accurate, while over half were inaccurate, showing difficulty in preserving cultural and contextual meaning. Hajiyeva (2025) and Vula and Muhaxhiri (2024) similarly observed frequent misinterpretation of idioms and figurative expressions due to lexical gaps and unfamiliarity with the source culture. This reinforces that translation requires not only bilingual knowledge but also cultural competence and strategic application.

The study also confirms findings by Alharbi (2023), Al-Khanji and Ennasser (2022), and Salih (2023), which identify lexis, syntax, and idiomatic differences as major obstacles. Linguistic difficulties were most prominent, reflecting the

complexity of dialectal vocabulary, idioms, and non-standard structures. Cultural challenges were significant, while strategic challenges emerged in balancing meaning, form, and cultural resonance. Translating dialects thus involves navigating overlapping linguistic and cultural complexities rather than applying uniform strategies.

Yemeni students' struggles with figurative and pragmatic meaning indicate limited linguistic proficiency, intercultural awareness, and strategic competence. While they demonstrated basic meaning transfer, performance was constrained by gaps in cultural knowledge and strategic flexibility. These findings align with González-Davies and Soler Ortíz (2020) and Li (2025), who advocate for translation pedagogy that incorporates collaborative, culturally grounded tasks to enhance awareness of context, audience, and purpose. Such approaches could help students apply strategies more effectively, moving from rigid literalism toward functional, culturally responsive translation.

In sum, literal translation dominates early learning stages but often fails to achieve communicative or cultural adequacy. The use of dynamic equivalence and cultural substitution, though less frequent, indicates potential for improved performance under structured instruction. Translator education should therefore integrate linguistic mastery, cultural intelligence, and strategic awareness to enable students to produce translations that are both accurate and culturally meaningful.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study investigated the translation strategies employed by Yemeni undergraduate students when rendering Hadhrami dialectal expressions into English and assessed the extent to which their translations preserved the original cultural meaning. The findings underscore a critical gap in the students' translation competence, particularly concerning culturally-bound linguistic items.

The analysis revealed that students predominantly utilized literal translation and dynamic equivalence, while more nuanced strategies such as cultural substitution and paraphrasing were underutilized. This reliance on less context-sensitive approaches resulted in a significant number of translations failing to capture the rich cultural and figurative meanings inherent in the Hadhrami expressions. Specifically, the study identified that linguistic, cultural, and strategic challenges interplayed to impede the production of accurate and contextually appropriate target texts. Linguistic challenges included a lack of familiarity with the specific lexical and structural features of the dialect; cultural challenges stemmed from a deficit in cultural competence necessary to decode the deep-seated meanings; and strategic challenges related to the inability to select and apply effective translation techniques.

Consequently, this research provides strong empirical support for a necessary shift in translation pedagogy within Yemeni universities. The findings advocate for the explicit integration of cultural competence training, enhanced dialect awareness, and strategy-based instruction into the curriculum. Future translators must be equipped not merely with bilingual proficiency but with the cultural and strategic tools required to act as effective cultural mediators.

The study contributes to the field of translation studies by providing empirical data on a previously under-researched area: the translation of a specific Arabic dialect (Hadhrami) by student translators. Theoretically, it reinforces the notion that dialect translation is a complex act of cultural mediation that extends beyond mere linguistic transfer, aligning with the principles of Cultural Translation Theory. Practically, the results offer a clear roadmap for curriculum developers and educators to design targeted interventions that address the identified deficiencies in cultural and strategic competence.

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