

The Translation of Proverbs

A proverb is a saying, usually short, that expresses a general truth about life. Proverbs give advice, make an observation, or present a teaching in a succinct and memorable way.

To properly translate a proverb requires several steps, and it often requires a translator to search through the culture of the SL and TL to determine the idiomatic translation. Proverbs often have an equivalent in the TL. However, even if a linguistic equivalent exists, there may be *cultural differences* to consider. A literal translation would have made no sense in the cultural context while translating proverbs. **Equivalence** is the central technique used in this case.

The table below shows some examples of proverbs with their literal translations and equivalences:

Arabic proverb (SL)	Literal translation	Equivalent proverb (TL)
العين بصيرة واليد قصيرة	The eyes see but the hands cannot reach.	A moneyless man goes fast through the market.
يزيد الطين بلة	Add wetness to the mud.	Add fuel to fire.
لا ناقة لي فيها ولا جمل	I have nor a male nor a female camel in it.	It's no skin off my nose.
أكل الجمل بما حمل	He ate the camel and all it carried.	To eat someone out of house and home.
الدرهم مرهم	Money is medicine.	Ready money is ready medicine.
رحلة الألف ميل تبدأ بخطوة	A journey of a thousand miles starts with a step.	From small beginnings come great things.
من يأكل على ضرسه، ينفع نفسه	He who chews with his own teeth benefits himself.	God helps those who help themselves.
الصديق وقت الضيق	A true friend is for the time of trouble.	A friend in need is a friend indeed.

Here are some famous proverbs with their translations:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A man is known by his friends. ➤ A word to the wise is enough. ➤ Birds of a feather flock together. ➤ Death and life are in the power of tongue. ➤ Diamond cut diamond. ➤ Divide to rule. ➤ Do in Rome as the Romans do. ➤ Easy to come, easy to go. ➤ To make a mountain out of a molehill. ➤ Homer sometimes nods. ➤ Keep something for a rainy day. ➤ Lies have short wings. ➤ Necessity is the mother of invention. | <p>قل لي من تعاشر، أقل لك من أنت.
 إن اللبيب من الإشارة يفهم.
 إن الطيور على أشكالها تقع.
 لسانك حسانك، إن صنته صانك وإن خنته خانك.
 لا يفل الحديد إلا الحديد.
 فرق تسد
 إذا كنت في قوم فاحلب في إنائهم.
 ما تجلبه الرياح تأخذ الزواج.
 جعل من الحبة قبة
 لكل جواد كبة ولكل عالم هفوة.
 القرش الأبيض لليوم الأسود
 حبل الكذب قصير
 الحاجة أم الاختراع</p> |
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- Old habits die hard. من شب على شيء شاب عليه
- Once bitten,twice shy. لا يلدغ المؤمن من الجحر مرتين
- Prevention is better than cure. درهم وقاية خير من قنطار علاج
- The end justifies the means. الغاية تبرر الوسيلة
- Still waters run deep. تحت السواهي دواهي
- The arrow often hits the shooter. من حفر حفرة لأخيه وقع فيها
- Those who wear the shoe know best where it pinches.
صاحب البيت أدرى بالذي فيه
أهل مكة أدرى بشعابها
- What is learnt young is hard to lose. التعلّم في الصغر كالنقش على الحجر
- Words cut more than words. وخز اللسان أحد من وخز السنان
- A small spark makes a great fire. معظم النار من مستصغر الشرر
- One man's meat is another man's poison. مصائب قوم عند قوم فوائد