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TRANSLATORS' STRATEGIES FOR THE TRANSLATION OF CULTURAL MARKERS FROM ENGLISH INTO PERSIAN IN A LITERARY TEXT

DARIUSH SABERI

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By

DARIUSH SABERI

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts

January 2015

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Dedicated to my wife Nafiseh,
my children Setayesh and Arsam
and my ever-encouraging parents
Mohammad Hassan and Parvaneh for their love,
without whom none of my success would be possible

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

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By

DARIUSH SABERI

January 2015

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This study examined the strategies adopted by six translators in the translation of the cultural markers from English to Persian in *The Alchemist,* a novel by Paulo Coelho (1992). The study aimed to identify the strategies that the translators have adopted in rendering the cultural markers in the Persian translation of the novel, as well as to analyze to what extent the translators have been observant of the receiving culture. The Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) theories underlie the study. Data of the study comprise words and compounds extracted from a corpus of six different Persian translations of the English novel based on a database and search tool designed for this purpose. The classification of cultural markers proposed by Newmark (1988) was used as a basis for searching and extracting the cultural markers from the source text. A total number of 256,342 words constitute the corpus, from which 39,483 words are in English and 216,845 words are in Persian. The identified translated words and compounds were then analyzed to find out how the translators dealt with cultural markers and to determine the strategies adopted by them in translating the sensitive cultural concepts and phenomena. The analysis of the data revealed that certain concepts such as religious names, traditions and rituals are lost in the translated texts, which is attributed to the cultural differences and religious beliefs of the translators and their preferences for the receiving culture. The comparison of the translated data also revealed that Persian translators could have intentionally or unintentionally omitted or changed certain concepts and meanings due to cultural, religious and translatability issues. These changes considered both as translation mistakes and/or translators' intentions to avoid the religious and morality issues in the receiving culture.

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Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Sarjana Sastera

STRATEGI PENTERJEMAH BAGI MENERJEMAHKAN PENANDA KEBUDAYAAN DARIPADA BAHASA INGGERIS KEPADA BAHASA PARSI DALAM TEKS LITERASI

Oleh

DARIUSH SABERI

January 2015

Pengerusi: Sabariah bt. Mhd Rashid, PhD
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Kajian ini mengkaji strategi yang digunakan oleh enam penterjemah dalam menerjemahkan penanda budaya daripada Bahasa Inggeris kepada Bahasa Parsi dalam *The Alchemist*, novel karya Paulo Coelho (1992). Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti strategi yang diguna oleh para penterjemah dalam menerjemahkan petanda budaya dalam novel tersebut, serta menganalisis sejauh mana para penterjemah memerhati and mengkaji budaya itu. Kajian Terjemahan Deskriptif merupakan asas teori dalam kajian ini. Data kajian ini mengandungi kata-kata dan sebatian yang diekstrak daripada enam koleksi novel terjemahan Parsi daripada novel Inggeris, semuanya daripada pangkalan data yang direka untuk kajian ini. Pengelasan penanda budaya yang dicadangkan oleh Newmark (1988) telah digunakan sebagai asas untuk mencari dan mengekstrak penanda budaya daripada sumber penulisan. Sejumlah 256,342 perkataan terdapat dalam koleksi. Antaranya, 39,483 perkataan dalam Bahasa Inggeris dan 216,845 perkataan dalam Bahasa Parsi. Perkataan yang diterjemahkan telah dikenal pasti dan dianalisis untuk mengetahui bagaimana penterjemah menerjemahkan penanda budaya serta strategi yang mereka gunakan bagi menterjemahkan konsep dan fenomena budaya yang sensitif. Analisis menunjukkan bahawa unsur-unsur tertentu seperti nama agama, tradisi dan ritual telah hilang dalam penulisan terjemahan. Ini disebabkan oleh perbezaan budaya dan kepercayaan agama penterjemah dengan budaya dalam novel tersebut. Perbandingan data juga mendedahkan penterjemah Parsi secara sengaja atau tidak sengaja, mengubah atau tidak memasukkan sesetengah unsur dan konsep, disebabkan isu-isu kebudayaan, agama dan kebolehterjemahan. Perubahan ini dianggap sebagai kesilapan terjemahan dan/atau niat penterjemah untuk mengelakkan isu-isu agama dan moral dalam budaya tersebut.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the Study

Literary texts, especially those containing culturally or religiously bounded concepts and ideas are usually difficult for translators to render because the receiving society may reject those ideas. This creates a situation where the translators should work cautiously and avoid violating the norms in the target audience.

Such violations are not easy to handle, and therefore they cannot be taken for granted nor can they be ignored. A movie, a song or a novel which violates the religious beliefs can stimulate the mobs to condemn it harshly in public. On the other hand, it is expected that the translator is a member of the target lingual community and being a member of the receiving society means that the translator himself has more or less the same rationales, fixations and feelings. In this way, he would have the right attitude toward observance of those norms.

Even the popular literary works may not be to the greatest degree proper for all societies and they may contain some expressions and ideas, which will cause a challenge for the translators. These ideas may not invalidate the whole text for the receiving society, but sometimes translators feel that it is better to avoid certain sections, paragraphs or words. This fact leads them to adopt some strategies to handle such occurrences. Among them, the "cultural markers" seems to be more problematic for the translators. As "cultural marker" is not a popular term, a variation of "cultural reference" or "cultural implication" are also used to refer to the translation of cultural aspects of the texts.

The current study focuses on the translation of cultural markers in the novel, *The Alchemist*, which has been translated from English into Persian. The source novel contains a mixture of Western culture, Christian characters and various religious beliefs and practices, which may not be necessarily acceptable for the conservative society of Persian readers in more than 3 countries and several other regions, mainly in the Middle East and Central Asia.

Therefore, the current study focuses on *The Alchemist* novel to explore how the cultural markers are dealt with by the Persian translators.

2. Statement of the Problem

As cultural expressions and terms are rooted in the native cultures and communities, their significance and value stem from the culture which they are part of. Their position in the culture is intrinsic (Aldebyan, 2008). Such situation makes the translators' task difficult. For instance, translators encounter several obstacles when they are translating such texts, and among them cultural markers are the most formidable tasks to deal with.

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The behavior of the translators in rendering cultural markers and semantic features differs and they employ different methods and ideologies to progress in their tasks. The strategy that the translator adopts in his task is of paramount importance as it reveals the translation process. Moreover, strategies used not only influence the translation quality of the translated text, but also they uncover the translator's objectives. These objectives are mostly directed by the power sources and also the translators' feelings, as they are members of the receiving culture. The self-censoring by the translators mostly happens because of external sources such as a government policy. As a result, it would be useful if a research can find out whether translators have self-censored themselves because of their own beliefs as well as by considering their own audiences, free from any external force. The current study has looked into self-censoring from this perspective i.e. what the translators have done in confrontation with the obstacles in the text. An exhaustive search of the literature revealed that there are no studies on cultural marker in Persian. This study aims to fill the gap in the literature by focusing on the strategies used by the translators in the translation of cultural markers from English into Persian.

Various studies have been conducted on the practice and process of the translation of cultural markers. One of the related studies was done by Aldebyan (2008) in which he analyzed the strategies employed by the translators in the translation of cultural markers from Arabic into English. The study investigates a vast scope of more than seven prominent Arabic literature works which were translated from Arabic into English and they bear a rich sense of Arabic culture and history. He compared and analyzed the source and target texts to find out the translators' attitude toward cultural features.

Another study was done by Camargo (2004). She compared three different genres, namely literary, journalistic and technical texts with their translations. Accordingly, she identified the strategies that translators had adopted in the translation of these genres.

In the same way, Camargo and Martins (2008) have analyzed the translation of cultural markers in *Sergeant Getulio*. The focus of their study was on the translation of 'specific Brazilian cultural markers into the English language and culture' (Martins & Camargo, 2008). The results of the study suggest that the translator "seeks to bring the reader of the English text closer to the source text by using modulations, explicitations and adaptations" (Martins & Camargo, 2008, p.118). However, the researcher could not find any Persian study with the focus on cultural markers.

In the above studies, scholars have focused on the translation of cultural markers from several angels. They have compared and analyzed the source and target texts to find out how the translators react to specific cultural obstacles and barriers. Their main focus, however, has mostly been on the translation of Arabic or Brazilian Portuguese cultural markers into English, while the current study has taken the opposite focus whereas it has analyzed a cultural novel which has been translated from English into Persian. Looking into the translation of cultural markers from this angel will help in clarifying the translators' reaction to the so-called "Western ideology invasion" as stated in some of the Asian and Islamic countries. Moreover, the aim of this study was to find those strategies that the

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translators have invented or used to alter, modify and or delete certain concepts and ideas.

3. Why Cultural Markers?

Some scholars listed a set of concepts and characteristics, which are specific to a given culture, and they have named them as 'cultural markers'. Such so-called cultural markers are conveyed by some concepts and terms that are usually bounded to a given culture. Cultural bounded terms often cannot be translated or they may cause some difficulties for translators. Thus, according to Anna Trosborg (2011), such terms are "exophoric references". By this, she refers to the "references outside the text" which requires "presupposed knowledge" of the source language (Trosborg, 2011).

The cultural terms or components are classified into some categories. For example, Peter Newmark (1981) has suggested some categories which are used as the basis for searching the cultural markers in the current study. Samples are searched in the corpus of the study based on the terms and expressions found in the following categories suggested by Peter Newmark (Newmark, 1988, p. 95):

1) Artistic and folkloric names and terms;
2) Religious terms and expressions;
3) Animals, Plants, Food, Clothes;
4) Medicine, magic, colors and body organs;
5) Social entities and organizations;

4. Why *The Alchemist*?

The data in this study contains selected texts from 6 translated works in Persian from the novel "*The Alchemist*" written by Paulo Coelho (1992). This novel has been translated by at least 10 different translators into Persian. Among those translated versions that the researcher has found in the Persian book market, the oldest published one is dated 1995 (DelAra Ghahraman) and the most recent one has been published by Mitra Mirshekar in 2011.

The English source is the copy published in Paulo Coelho official website (http://paolocoelho.com), and it can be downloaded for free. In the history of the book, it is mentioned that Paulo Coelho is a Brazilian Portuguese writer and the original book was translated from Brazilian Portuguese into English. Throughout this study, the English copy of The Alchemist is referred to for the aim of comparison and analysis. As only certain searched and selected cultural markers in the word level are analyzed and syntax, sentence and paragraph levels are not included, the re-translation of the source has no effects on the study. For example, the word "wine" or the compound "Son of God" were analyzed based on the assumption that translators have problems in transferring them into Persian due to their cultural implications and connotations. As the cultural markers are culturally bounded, they move between languages with the minimum changes, therefore their transfer from Portuguese to English has no or very limited impact on the current study. Another example is the word "Allah" which refers to the God in Islam and it is transliterated in almost all languages.

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The novel was selected based on its popularity and because several Persian versions of it are available. The Alchemist as reported by Agence France-Presse (AFP) "has sold more than 65 million copies in 56 different languages, becoming one of the best-selling books in history and setting a world record for most translated book by a living author" which has been also cited in Wikipedia. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Alchemist_(novel)). In addition, the novel is listed as the all time best seller by The New York Times website. (http://www.nytimes.com/best-sellers-books/overview.html).

The main aim was to create a large corpus from a single book and its selection is not politically motivated. Although the novel "Alchemist" has been translated into Persian by at least 10 translators in different years, the researcher could find only 6 translated books in the market. The researcher could not find the rest of the translations because of the recent ban on publishing the Alchemist in Iran. Here is the list of the published translations of Alchemist by different translators which the researcher could find in the Iran book market:

1) Paulo Coelho's Alchemist (1992) translated by Susan Ardakani as Kimiagar, 5th Edition (2010), Negarestan Ketab Publishing, Tehran, Iran.
2) Paulo Coelho's Alchemist (1992) translated by Nahid Irannejad as Kimiagar, 7th Edition (2003), Roozbahan Publishing, Tehran, Iran.
3) Paulo Coelho's Alchemist (1992) translated by Bahram Jafari as Kimiagar, 7th Edition (2003), Mehrab-e-Danesh Publishing, Tehran, Iran.
4) Paulo Coelho's Alchemist (1992) translated by Delara Ghahraman as Kimiagar, 32nd Edition (2009), Farzan Rooz Publishing, Tehran, Iran.
5) Paulo Coelho's Alchemist (1992) translated by Mitra Mirshekar as Kimiagar, 5th Edition (2011), Novin Publishing, Tehran, Iran.
6) Paulo Coelho's Alchemist (1992) translated by Arash Hejazi as Kimiagar, 1st Edition (2004), Karvan Publishing, Tehran, Iran.

5. Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to investigate the strategies that the translators adopted in translating a literary text from English to Persian and to study whether any cultural barrier has forced the translators to alter the words and phrases during the transfer or not. This study assesses the translators' behavior in different circumstances arising from the linguistic and cultural differences between Persian and English as two different systems. The translators' attitudes might be toward the observance of religious, political and social rules as well as the views of the target audience expectations. In cases where a biased attitude occurred, it may be resulted from prejudices or it is used as a mask to cover the lack of understanding of the source text meaning or lack of proper equivalent for the cultural markers.

The source text is an English novel and the target texts are drawn from Persian translations of the novel by different translators with different attitudes, views, norms, style and strategies for translation. The range of different translated texts from one source could help in formulating a generalization on English to Persian translation methodology. With regard to the fact that cultural markers are culturally bounded lingual elements, it is also determined whether the translators have tried to find the most proper and referenced equivalents for the cultural markers.

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So, this study was undertaken to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine strategies the translators adopted in translating the cultural markers from English into Persian.
2. To determine to what extent the translators have been observant of the norms in the receiving culture when translating the cultural markers.
3. To evaluate to what extent the translators have used proper and referenced equivalents for cultural markers.
4. To assess to what extent the translators have self-censored themselves.

5. Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study, the following research questions were answered:

1. What strategies have the translators adopted in translating the cultural markers from English into Persian?
2. To what extent, have the translators been observant of the norms in the receiving culture when translating the cultural markers?
3. To what extent, have the translators used proper and referenced equivalents for cultural markers?
4. To what extent, have the translators self-censored themselves?

6. Scope of the Study

This study was limited to "Lexicon" level of cultural markers. It does not focus on the deep structure of the texts nor the syntactic equivalence and it does not provide direct comparison between sentences and paragraphs in the source and target languages.

7. Theoretical Framework

This study is a qualitative study and it was done mainly based on Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) methodologies while some methods from Contrastive Analysis (CA) are employed. DTS is rooted in target-oriented approach to the translation. It also holds the view that translation is a task for problem solving in which the translator tries to keep the identity of the original text unchanged and intact.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1977), the German scholar, believes that translation of the text should "give the same image and the same delight" (p. 80) as that of the original text. He points to two paths for translators:

> "Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him. The two roads are so completely separate from each other that one or the other must be followed as closely as possible, and that a highly unreliable result would proceed from any mixture, so that it is to be feared that author and reader would not meet at all." (Schleiermacher, 1977, p. 74)

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He also mentions the translator task as a "duty above all to observe at least the same care for the purity and perfection of language, to strive after the same light and natural style for which his author is famous in the original language" (Schleiermacher, 1977, p. 81)

In Schleiermacher (1977) point of view, the identity of the original text is the element that should be maintained. This identity is inherited from all aspects of the linguistic, syntactic, semantic and cultural features, and attaining all of them in the rendered text is of a certain difficulty. But it is believed that translator should utilize all available tools and strategies to deliver them in the best possible way.

Researcher of the current study believes that in the translation of the culturally complicated novel which relates certain aspects of the target culture, adopting a "domestication" orientation is preferred so that the reader can feel more natural. It is due to the fact that the novel scenario is within the target culture boundaries, and it is recited by a foreign writer. It is opposed to the "forignizing" orientation in which some scholars like Schleiermacher maintain that "a foreign spirit should blow towards the reader".

'Addition' or 'deletion' in the translation can be deemed as a violation if it happened to omit certain meanings or parts or changed them in negative or positive ways. Of course, there are some other forms of additions and deletions which help in reproducing the intended and real meaning of the original text. In some cases, these types of additions and deletions are more faithful than keeping the unnatural language of the source text. Translators can use them as far as they are not harmful to the intended meaning and a professional translator can employ them to reproduce a more natural looking product.

The study puts the emphasis on the content and it did not refer to syntax. The context in the word, sentence and paragraph levels were analyzed semantically and pragmatically, although the form is not also ignored as in any case it is the carrier of the meaning too.

The word order in Persian is different from English and this may lead to some losses of the meaning as par Benjamin's point of view: "A literal rendering of the syntax completely demolishes the theory of reproduction of meaning and is a direct threat to comprehensibility." (Benjamin, 1992, p. 79). However, the impact of the word order on the translation should be compensated using different methods.

8. Definition of Terms

Contrastive Analysis (CA): Contrastive Analysis is the systematic study of two or more languages to find their similarities and differences.

Cultural Markers: A set of concepts and characteristics which are specific to a given culture. For example, "Son of God" refers specially to Jesus Christ, and "Robe" that can be referred to as white and long clothes which Arabs wear.

Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS): DTS is a school of thought in Translation Studies which was founded by Toury (1995). It focuses on the 'translation

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product' rather than translation process and rejects prescriptions for translators. Toury (1995) also believed that translation has a position in the social and literary system of the target language.

Domesticating: It is a method of translation by which the translator tries to make the translation more local and removes the foreign elements of the text as if the source is written in the target language.

Foreignizing: It is a method of translation supported by Lawrence Venuti (1998). He believes that the translation should blow the sense of foreign concept to the reader so that the audience in the target language can feel that the text is foreign.

9. Structure of the Thesis

This dissertation is divided into 5 chapters. The first chapter introduces the study with the focus on the statement of the problem and specifically on the burdens that cultural markers have for the translators. Chapter 2 covers the history of the different schools of thought on translation synchronically. The focus is on the translation of cultural phenomenon. Chapter 3 describes the design of the study and its theoretical framework. This chapter also describes the corpus search tool and the output. Chapter 4 provides the detailed results and discussions of the study. Chapter 5 is the conclusion of this dissertation with some implications and suggestions for the future studies.

10. Conclusion

In short, the aim of this study was to find the most cultural barriers in the translation of a novel into Persian, and it goes beyond the concepts of "translatability" and "equivalence" and analyses the comparison made between TL (target language) and SL (second language) in a board range of cultural and semantic aspects to find the strategies employed by the translators to transfer the meaning. The source text contains the story of a Christian man who travels into Egypt which is depicted as an Islamic country. The encounter of the religions and cultural differences between West and East are considered as the main barriers for the Persian translators who come from a community where certain words, expressions and ideas are sensitive, or abstract or have no equivalence. This mixture created a situation where the attitude of the translators towards the target culture is analyzed and interpreted. In the next chapter, the literature review related the study subject is presented.

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BIODATA OF STUDENT

Dariush Saberi was born on July 31, 1975 in Semirom, one of the tourist attractions in Isfahan province of Iran. He completed elementary, middle, and high school studies in his hometown. Dariush obtained his BA degree in the field of English Translation from University of Kashan in 1997. He worked as an international relations coordinator, translator and research assistant in Iranian Research Institute for Information Science and Technology from 1999 to 2001. With the expansion of Internet in Iran, he launched the first Iranian online translation service in 2001 and with the success of the new innovation, he started his own company at the same time. He has served as Chief Executive Officer of Tarjomeh Localization Ltd since then. He has translated and localized documents for more than 250 international world-known companies. He has been engaged in translation, proofreading, editing and translator training all over his career time.

He pursued his studies in Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) in 2010. The selection of Malaysia was not by chance. He decided to continue his studies in a country that is rich in translation experience. Malaysia as a real multilingual country is the home to three major races who speak their formal mother tongues. Although the formal languages in Malaysia are English and Malay, most of the informal and public documents like business announcements, information boards, signs and many other documents are presented in four languages namely English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil. Such a situation has created a vast knowledge of translation, which cannot be compared to English native speaking countries where Translation Studies courses are offered while these countries are monolingual.

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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Publications

1. Dariush Saberi*, Sabariah Mhd Rashid, "Selecting the most appropriate translation of a novel for the analysis of semantic and cultural losses" *Submitted*
2. Dariush Saberi*, Sabariah Mhd Rashid, "Unethical and religious cultural markers in the banned literary works" *Submitted*
3. Dariush Saberi*, Sabariah Mhd Rashid, "Designing a mini parallel corpus for Translation Studies" *In process*

Conferences Presented

1. Dariush Saberi, "2nd Corpus Research Colloquium". Universiti Putra Malaysia. UPM CALC, Serdang, Malaysia. *Presenter*

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