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“M.A” Thesis

On English Translation

Subject:

**The Analysis of the Most Used Strategies of Translating Idioms in
the Translation of “The Catcher in the Rye” by J. D. Salinger**

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Abstract

The present study aimed at describing the strategies Iranian translators have applied to render English idioms in literary texts into Persian. For the purpose of this study the novel of "*The Catcher in the Rye*" by J. D. Salinger and its two translations by two different Iranian translators were selected by the researcher as the corpus of the study. For the next step, all English idioms were extracted from the novel and also their Persian equivalents were derived from two Persian translations. Then, they were analyzed to see which strategies have been applied by the translators to render them and the number of the most and the least strategies used. The researcher has used descriptive approach to conduct the study.

Research findings show that the strategy which has been used mostly by the two mentioned Iranian translators for rendering idioms is Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form and the least used strategy is Translation by omission.

CHAPTER I

Background and Purpose

1.1 Introduction

Translation is an activity comprising the interpretation of the meaning of a text in one language -the source- and in the other language-the target. Translation must take into account a number of constraints, including context, the rules of grammar of the two languages, their writing conventions, and their idioms. In translation, both the source language and the target one are important. Sometimes in translation, the translator will face some problems related to the equivalences of the source and the target languages. Finding a good equivalence is an important job which the translator should care about. In translating from the source text into the target text, the translators usually face some problems, which are related to the cultural differences, and to the source and target language differences in grammar as well as in vocabulary. Because of these, sometimes there will be a big gap between the source and the target language that translators should try to fill. One of the causes of differences relates to the idiomatic expressions.

In order to achieve a good translation, a translator should have good knowledge, in both source and target languages. It means that the result of translation should not be like a translation, so that the readers feel that they are reading the original text.

The quality of translation of literary works indicate the importance of translation in literature, since it is a reflection and the conveyance of the attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, ideology and the culture of a community. It is the responsibility of a translator to convey all those mentioned items.

As one of the results of the openness of cultures, Persian readers have become more interested in reading translated books of western culture. These books are usually full of idioms, similes, metaphors, puns and culturally-bound expressions that need to be carefully translated into Persian. This study is focused on the translation of idioms as one of the significant literary figures.

“Idioms and fixed expressions are at the extreme ends of the scale from collocations in one or both of these areas, i.e. flexibility of patterning and transparency of meaning. They are frozen patterns of language which allow little or no variation in form and, in the case of idioms, often they carry meanings which cannot be deduced from their individual components.” (Baker, 1992, p.63)

“An idiom such as *bury the hatchet* (‘to become friendly again after a disagreement or quarrel’) or *the long and the short of it* (‘the basic facts of the situation’) allows no variation in form under normal circumstances. Unless the speaker or writer is consciously making a joke or attempting a play on words, s/he cannot normally do any of the following with an idiom:

1. Change the order of the words in it (e.g. *'the *short* and the *long* of it');
2. Delete a word from it (e.g. *'spill beans');
3. Add a word to it (e.g. *'the *very* long and short of it' ; *'face the *classical* music');
4. Replace a word with another (e.g. *'the *tall* and short of it' ; *'bury a hatchet');
5. Change its grammatical structure (e.g. *'the music was faced').” (Baker, 1992, p.63).

The English language is very rich in the use of idioms. They are used in formal styles and in slangs. Idioms may appear in poetry, literature, in Shakespeare language and, even, in the Bible. Therefore it is necessary to define and compare idioms in any two languages including, English and Persian. McMordiew (1983) provides a definition for the idiom:

“We can say that an idiom is a number of words which, taken together, mean something different from the individual words of the idiom when they stand alone”. (McMordiew, 1983, p.4).

Moon (1998) defines idiom as *“an ambiguous term, used in conflicting ways. In lay or general use, idiom has two main meanings. First, idiom is a particular means of expressing something in language, music, art, and so on, which*

characterizes a person or group. Secondly (and much less commonly in English), an idiom is a particular lexical collocation or phrasal lexeme, peculiar to a language". (Moon, 1998, p.3).

Baker distinguishes idiom from collocation by the transparency of meaning and flexibility patterning. According to Baker, idioms are "frozen patterns of language which allow little or no variation in form and often carry meanings which cannot be deduced from their individual components". (Baker, 1992, p.63).

One of the main difficulties for the translators may be lack of equivalence in the target language. As Baker (1992, p.68) writes, "different languages express meanings using different linguistic elements such as fixed expressions, idioms, words, etc. and it is very hard to find an equivalent of the same meaning and form in the target language. The main factor that causes problems is culture specific idioms or expressions. They are not necessarily untranslatable, however, they may refer to some specific item or event common to that particular culture, and therefore it is hard to translate such idioms as well" (p.68). Another difficulty that Baker (1992, p.69) points out is "the use of the idiom similar to its form and meaning in different contexts in the target language. A large number of idioms are used in the literary texts in both English and Persian languages. They mostly appear in dialogues, belong to the informal register and can be used both in their literal and idiomatic sense" (p.69). To continue, Baker (1992, p.69) writes that

“idioms may be used in both literal and idiomatic senses at the same time. In this case, if the target-language idiom does not correspond to the source language idiom in its form and meaning, then it is hard to make a play of words and transfer the meaning”.

In this research the strategies of translating idioms in one of the most famous leading books of American Literature “The Catcher in the Rye” (1951) a novel by J. D. Salinger , one of the most significant literary works of the twentieth century, frequently found in high school literary curricula throughout Europe and North America. The controversy concerns its alleged profanity, vulgar language and treatment of sexual themes, elements that typify Holden’s (the main character of the book) use of the English language, or his idiolect. Idiolect refers to individual speech. It is based on grammar, word selection, phrases, idioms, and includes pronunciation, and its translations by Mohammad Najafi and Ahmad Karimi from English into Persian, which are going to be analyzed and studied according to Baker’s (1992) model of translating idioms.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The purpose of the study is to find which strategies are mostly used in translating idioms from English into Persian according to proposed model of Baker. The way an idiom or a fixed expression can be translated into another language depends on

many factors. It is not only a question of whether an idiom with a similar meaning is available in target language. Other factors include for example, the significance of the specific lexical items which constitute the idiom, i.e. whether they are manipulated elsewhere in the source text, as well as the appropriateness or inappropriateness of using idiomatic language in a given register in the target language. The strategies could be as follows:

- a) *Using an idiom of similar meaning and form*
- b) *Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form*
- c) *Translation by paraphrase*
- d) *Translation by omission* (Baker, 1992, p.72).

The translator considers the original structure and element of the source text relevant for the wording of the translation, then “he must bring the reader to the text“(Gottlieb, 1997, p.317). That is the translator must try to transfer all the culture specific items and language specific elements, such as idioms, that are found in the original text. So, here if those strategies were not used, there would arise some problems in translation.

On the whole, the usage of different strategies in translation of idioms in literary translation illustrates the diverse ways of treatment of this interesting, peculiar and difficult part of language. However, idioms express the uniqueness of the language

and culture in which they are originated and therefore, the strategies for their translation need careful consideration and the translators need deep knowledge of the source and target languages and cultures.

Thus, in this research the significance of the translation of idioms will be shown, to indicate that the translator's work is important to convey the message of the writer as close as possible, both to form and meaning to pave the way for translation.

In this regard the researcher is going to study the main original story and find different kind of idioms within the sentences and then make them checked by the professors of the English literature to make sure that the chosen idioms are idioms by nature, and then she will find the same parts in two related translations and find the strategies which are mostly used by the translators. As the researcher is going to work on the main book and its translations, this research is a corpus- based one. It is intended to see how idioms of this book are translated from English to Persian. To indicate that which methods are more popular or in other words, more routine and more acceptable in translating these parts.

1.3. Research Questions

With this research, the researcher intended to answer to this question that what strategies are mostly used to translate the idioms of the "Catcher in the Rye" in

both present translations one by Mohammad Najafi and the other by Ahmad Karimi. And in the end to illustrate:

What strategies are used by Persian translators for translating English idioms in the translation of “The Catcher in the Rye”?

Which one of the strategies is the most used and which one is the least used by translators in the translation of “The Catcher in the Rye”?

Also, to indicate the analytical use of strategies of translating idioms according to Baker’s (1992) model of translating idioms. Here, researcher tries to analyze the most used strategies of translating idioms in Mohammad Najafi’s and Ahmad Karimi’s translation of “The Catcher in the Rye” by choosing and analyzing all the idioms and then their translation strategies. So, this research aims to answer this question that “what are the most used strategies in translation of idioms in The Catcher in the Rye?”

1.4. Definition of the Key Terms

Idiom: Every language has its own idioms, a special kind of set expressions that have developed within a language. English and Persian are abundant in idioms. As an important part of the general vocabulary of every language, idioms are the gems of a language, which have been described as the crystallization of human wit and wisdom.

In linguistics, idioms are usually presumed to be figures of speech contradicting the principle of compositionality; yet the matter remains debated. John Saeed (2003), defines an “idiom” as *words collocated that became affixed to each other until metamorphosing into a fossilized term. This collocation — words commonly used in a group — redefines each component word in the word-group and becomes an idiomatic expression. The words develop a specialized meaning as an entity, as an idiom.* (Saeed, 2003, p.60). Moreover, an idiom is an expression, word, or phrase whose sense means something different from what the words literally imply. When a speaker uses an idiom, the listener might mistake its actual meaning, if he or she has not heard this figure of speech before. Idioms usually do not translate well; in some cases, when an idiom is translated into another language, either its meaning is changed or it remains meaningless.

Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American English (1988) defines “idiom” as:

- 1) The language proper or peculiar to a people or to a district, community or class; the syntactical, grammatical or structural form peculiar to a language;
- 2) An expression established in the usage of a language that is peculiar to itself either in grammatical construction or in having a meaning that cannot be derived as a whole from the conjoined meanings of its elements;

3) Style or form of artistic expression (as in painting, writing, composing) that is characteristic especially of an individual, a period or movement, or a medium or instrument.

It can be concluded from the definitions that an idiom is an expression whose meaning is not compositional, and does not follow from the meaning of the individual words which make it up. It is “an accepted phrase, construction, or expression contrary to the usual patterns of the language or having a meaning different from the language.” (*Webster’s New World Dictionary, 1972*) In some senses, idioms are the reflections of the environment, life, historical culture, etc. of the native speakers and are closely associated with their innermost spirit and feelings. They are commonly used in all types of language, informal and formal, spoken and written.

Proverb: “a proverb is a short sentence that people often quote which gives advice or tells you something about life.” (*Collins Cobuild English Dictionary for Advanced Learners, p.1234*).

Translation Strategies: Chesterman (1997, p.87) mentions that in the area of translation strategies there is “considerable terminological confusion”. He lists some of the general characteristics of translation strategies: (1) that apply to a process, (2) they involve text manipulation, (3) they are goal-oriented, (4)

problem-centered, (5) potentially conscious and (6) they are intersubjective, meaning that they can be experienced and understood by someone other than the person using them.

Also, Baker (1992, p.72) has proposed four strategies for translating idioms and proverbs which are described briefly as follows:

a) Using an idiom of similar meaning and form

First category of strategies consists of those idioms and proverbs that convey the same meaning in both source and target languages, as well as the same lexical items which are used in their surface structures. It means that a same pattern of lexical items is used in both languages to express a single concept of meaning.

Using a single pattern of lexical items in these idioms or proverbs shows that there is a cultural and social relation between two languages of Persian and English. However, this similarity may be as the result of borrowing an idiom or a proverb from one language.