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**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
of Master of Arts in Translation Studies**

**Strategies Applied by the Translators in Translation of
Culture-specific Items in Religious Texts**

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In the Name of God

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Abstract

Translators, as mediators between linguistic and cultural communications encounter several constraints in the process of translation. One of the major constraints in translation is the translation of culture-specific items which forms the basis of the current research. The foundation and connotations of these items in source text are said to involve a translation problem in transference into a target language. The whole matter gains even more importance when it comes to more culture-bound texts such as religious texts. The researcher to explore what sort of strategies is adopted by translators to deal with these items in religious texts. Two Persian religious books were compared with their translations in English to render culture-specific items. Newmark's definition and categorization for culture-specific items and their translation strategies were used for their analysis. 232 culture-specific items were detected in the corpus and the results of comparison showed that strategy of naturalization were used most frequently in translation of culture-specific items which means that the translators had a clear tendency for naturalization in translation of culture-specific items.

CHAPTER ONE

Background and Purpose

1.1. Introduction

One of the most difficult problems to which a translator may face, is the translation of objects and events which are absent in the target culture, that is no equivalence exists as a word or phrase in the receptor language which can act as an available item for translation. In this situation, the translator is not only faced with language differences, but s/he should be careful about cultural differences which can cause great difficulties in the process of conveying the message between the target and receptor languages. Any language is culturally embedded and no culture can be separated from culture, so translation can be considered as a cross cultural communication and cultural meaning is woven into the texture of language.

Regarding the fact that translation is a cross-cultural communication, culture is of great importance in this regard. So the translator do not merely translate linguistic forms, but deals with the whole texts which are culturally embedded. According to House (2006) culture is defined as “a group’s shared values and conventions which act as mental guidelines for orienting people’s thought and behavior. So people of a social group have different values, beliefs and conventions and a translator should be aware of these values, beliefs and conventions when moving a text from one culture into another. The more the source and target language frameworks differ, the more important is the cultural work translators have to do. This indicates an

awareness and knowledge of cultural implications of the source text and familiarity with the culture into which the translation is to be fitted.

Always there are so many differences between two languages and also between two cultures which do not have any lexical equivalent in the target language. The cultural implication may take several forms in two different cultures. Due to the fact that any language separates the reality differently, meanings are not conveyed in distinct languages identically. Any culture expresses its particularities in a way that it is “culture-bound”, so the origin and the use of cultural words are uniquely bound to the given culture. The problematic or crisis points such as culture-bound items in translation can cause difficulty for the translator in the process of translation between two different languages or even two different cultures who shares many points in common. Even if there are near equivalents between two languages which represent reality in two different cultures, they would not convey the message entirely and absolutely. One of the most revealing translation problems is that some reference to the source culture is made, and there is no obvious equivalent in TL. So one of the most challenging tasks for all translators is how to render culture-bound elements into a foreign language. Indeed, not much attention has been paid to this problem by translation theories. Indeed, the meaning which lies behind those expressions containing culture-specific items is always strongly linked to the specific cultural context where the text originates or

with the cultural context it aims to recreate. And what is inevitable in translation is cultural differences between two languages, and the more the translator is aware of cultural differences, the better would be the quality of the translation . All of the culture-specific concepts which occur in the source language but are totally unknown in the target language are the most notorious for the creation of problems with finding equivalents. There may be also a situation where the source culture and source language make different distinctions in meaning from the target culture and target language. The target language may also lack a more specific concept or term or a more general one .

1.3. Statement of the Problem

Where there is a cultural focus, there is a translation problem due to the cultural gap or distance between source and target languages. Languages differ both linguistically and culturally. As Delabastita (1993,p.10) states: “Languages are structured systems and different languages are structured in different manners. Interlingual translation then will not be a simple mechanical substitution process. Moreover, the meaning of a linguistic item is the product of its relational value within the semantic network of the language it belongs to.(Delabastita,1993,p.7). On the other hand Stolze (2009) puts it, culture is the background of every human communication and since in many cases the translator is not necessarily a member

of the same culture, so s/he may encounter problems in translating cultural items belonging to the source cultural system into the target one.(Cited in Shabanirad,1383). Also House (2009) defines culture as “a group’s shared values and conventions which act as mental guidelines for orienting people’s thought and behavior.” So people of a social group have different values, beliefs and behaviors and a translator should be aware of these values, beliefs and conventions when moving a text from one culture to another. The more the source and target cultural frameworks differ, the more important is the cultural work. So as discussed earlier the areas of difficulty that translator face in the process of translating from one language into another may be both linguistic and cultural but this study specifically focused on the problem of translating cultural-specific items from Persian into English in translation of religious texts.

According to Aixela (1996,p.56) “Cultures are usually expressed in a text by means of objects and of systems of classification and measurement whose use is restricted to the source culture,or by means of the transcription of opinion and description of habits equally alien to the receiving culture.” These items are categorized differently by different scholars. As evident in the term CSI, These items refer to some certain cultural aspects, specific to a source language and therefore not present in TL system. So, it is important how these items are dealt with in the process of translation and what strategies translators resort to treat them.

Rendering from one language into another, namely translation has no doubt been a powerful force through human history or as long as it had been practiced, allowing for circulation and diffusion of scientific, technological, linguistic, and literary knowledge across great geographical and cultural distances. In the realm of religion its force has been particularly evident, with the translation of scriptures and related works initiating and sustaining the spread of religion far from their places of origin, and attending societies' ways of life and understanding of human and Divine.(Ronit,2011,p.30). Despite the certainty the circulating translated materials played a major role in the spread of religions, it remains less clear that how translations of religious texts articulated, implemented and practiced, and what were the challenges faced by translators of religious texts. Religions with holy books or scriptures require ongoing traditions of interpretation and commentary that contribute to pressing the sacredness of those books and adapting them to the changing social and historical circumstances of communities that process them. These texts make the sacred texts meaningful to new generations of adherents. These texts play an important role to make sacred texts meaningful especially regarding the matters of law and tradition.(Campo,2009,p.652). According to Hinnells (2010) tradition is an authoritative yet contested chain of memory which describes disciplines, beliefs, practice, and identity in the present with reference to a sacred vision of the past and/or future. The texts written by

Islamic scientists and philosophers, on the religious topics including tradition and practice of Islam can be considered to be of the books which are written to make sacred texts meaningful. Therefore their translation can be a key factor in spreading Islam all over the world.

Some efforts have been made in the field of translating religious texts, which seems to be insignificant, and lack of great works in this area is evidently felt. Almost no remarkable measure is taken to introduce Islam to the world, despite having access to great religious and scientific resources and also generating such texts. Therefore, many studies can be carried out for dealing with the Persian texts written in the field of religion and their corresponding translations into English. Several works have been carried out on the translation of religious texts, mainly sacred texts of Islam. In this field some researches have been done on the translatability and untranslatability of religious texts, such as the research done by Mansouri (2004) with the title of *theoretical foundations of religious texts: an argument*. Which discusses the theoretical foundations of translation and two approaches toward translatability or untranslatability of religious texts are introduced. There are some other works on challenges and strategies applied by translators in lexical equivalence such as the research fulfilled by Anoushirvani (2005) with the title of *lexical equivalence in translating religious texts: challenges and strategies*. But the focus of these researches are primarily on

the translation of Quran or Nahj-al-Balaqa. So lack of works in dealing with problems faced by translators in translation of other religious books, which are written in large numbers in Persian language and are translated into other languages such as English, can be felt in this area.

In line with above studies, the purpose of the present study is to investigate cultural specific items as suggested by Newmark (1998) in order to find what strategies translators used in the translation of such items in two religious texts, namely “Greater Sins” and “Islamic Laws”.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the most frequently used strategies in translation of culture-specific items in English translations of Persian religious texts of “Greater Sins” and “Islamic Laws” according to Nemark’s (1998) model of categorizing CSIs?
2. Are the most frequently used strategies equally distributed among different categories of CSIs?

1.5. Definition of Key Terms

Culture-specific items: Culture bound words or culture-specific items are those lexical items that just belong to a certain culture and language and their

connotations and meanings are not known in any other culture. Newmark (1998) refers to CSLs as cultural words (Newmark ,1988, p.94), for example:

baccalaure'at- 'French secondary school leaving exam'

cricket

baseball

sejm- Polish parliment

Newmark's (1998) classification of CSIs: In 1988 Newmark introduced '*Cultural word*' which the readership is unlikely to understand and the translation strategies for this kind of concept depend on the particular text-type, requirements of the readership and client and importance of the cultural word in the text.

1. Ecology (flora, fauna, winds , hills)

2. Material culture (artifacts)

a. Food

2. Clothes

c. Houses and towns

d. Transport

3. Social culture -work and leisure

ajha, amah, condottiere

4. Organizations, customs , activities , procedures and concepts

a. Political and administrative

b. Religious

c. Artistic

5. Gestures and habit

Translation strategies according to Newmark's (1998) classification of strageies: Newmark (1998) discusses translation procedures, whose use allways depends on a variety of contextual factors which are as the following:

Transference: is the process of transferring a SL word to TL text as a translation procedure, e.g. *de'cor, ambiance, coup d'e'tat, Image*

Naturalization: this procedure succeeds transference and adapts SL word first to the normal pronunciation, then to normal morphology (word-form) of the TL, e.g. *Edinburgh, humeur ,redingote, thatche'risme.*

Cultural equivalent: this is an approximate translation where a SL cultural word is translated by a TL cultural word; thus *baccalaure'at* is translated as '(the French) "A" level'.

Functional equivalent: this common procedure, applied to cultural words, sometimes with a new specific term; it therefore neutralises or generalises the SL word thus; 'Roget-*dictionnaire ide'ologique anglais*.

Descriptive equivalent: in this situation description has to be weighed against function. Thus for the word *machete*, description and function are combined in 'knife'.

Synonymy: Newmark (1998) used the word 'synonym' in the sense of near TL equivalent to an SL word in a context, where a precise equivalent may or may not exist, thus *personne gentille*, 'kind' person; *conte piquant*.

Through translation: the literal translation of common collocations, names of organisations, the component of compounds (e.g. 'superman', *Übermensch*)

Shift or transposition: is a translation procedure involving a change in the grammar from SL to TL, e.g. 'furniture'; *des meubles*.

Modulation: Vinay and Darbelnet coined the term ‘modulation’ to define ‘a variation through a change of viewpoint, of perspective and very often of category of thought, e.g. *château*, ‘water-tower’.

Recognized translation: is normally using generally accepted translation of institutional terms. If appropriate, you can gloss it and in doing so, indirectly show your disagreement with this official version. Thus *Mitbestimmung* has to be translated first as ‘co-determination’; *Rechtsstaat* as ‘constitutional state’.

Translation label: this is a provisional translation, usually of a new institutional term, which should be made in inverted commas, which can later be discreetly withdrawn, thus: ‘heritage language’, *Erbschaftssprache*, *langue d’he’ritage*.

Compensation: this is said to occur when loss of meaning, sound-effect, metaphor or pragmatic effect in one part of a sentence is compensated in another part or in a contiguous sentence.

Componential analysis: this is splitting up of a lexical unit into its sense components.

Reduction and expansion: There are rather imprecise translation procedures, which you practice intuitively in some cases, ad hoc in others.

Paraphrase: This is an amplification or explanation of the meaning of a segment of the text.

Couplets: This procedure is used when two of the above-mentioned procedures are used for dealing with a single problem.

Notes, additions, glosses: This is a procedure when some additional information is added to the translation.

1.6. Significance of the study

This study investigates the translation problem, or crisis point, which may be caused by culture-specific items, with particular focus on religious texts written by Iranian writers of Islamic texts. In the present study the researcher aims at finding the most frequent strategies applied by the translators to the religious texts in translating culture-specific items at least in the genre selected. Such an investigation may be helpful for those who are interested in the translation of religious texts, particularly Islamic texts to choose appropriate strategies in dealing with source text culture-specific items. The corpus selected to be studied by the researcher are mainly written in Persian which are translated into English. Most translators at any level of proficiency may have difficulty in translating CSIs in different texts. The most frequent strategies used by translators are investigated to