

IN THE NAME OF GOD



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Idioms in Translation of Children's Literature: *The Big Clay Jar* by Houshang Moradi-Kermani

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Abstract

Translating for children requires special considerations, particularly in terms of style. This study addresses idioms as a stylistic device and the way they are translated in children's fiction. For this, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What procedures are used to translate idioms in children's literature?
2. What is the most frequent procedure used in translating idioms in *Khomre* as a children's book?
3. What is the translator's preferred strategy in translating *Khomre* as a piece of children's literature?

In order to answer the first and second questions and find the procedures opted for in translating children's literature, Baker's (1992) proposed procedures were taken as the framework of the study. And to answer the third question Venuti's (2004) model of domestication and foreignization strategies was adopted as the framework. To collect and analyze the data, first, the Persian idioms occurring in the book *Khomreh* (Moradi-Kermani, 1984) as a piece of children's literature and their English translations given by Teimoor Ruhi (2000) were identified and paired. Next, the procedures used by the translator were identified and their frequency and percentage were calculated, the results were presented in a table and a chart for subsequent analysis and discussion. Then the general translation strategy related to each example and procedure was identified. The analysis revealed that in the English rendering all the procedures

proposed by Baker (1992) as well as combinations of some of the procedures were used. The most frequent procedure was paraphrasing and the general translation strategy applied was that of domestication.

Keywords: children's literature, Moradi-Kermani, Khomreh, idioms, translation procedure, domestication, foreignization.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Overview

In this chapter, some matters regarding idioms and children's literature will be presented, followed by difficulties of translating idioms, particularly when used as a stylistic device in texts written for children. Further, significance and objectives of the study will be discussed and research questions will be posed. Finally, Key terms of the study will be defined.

1.2. Introduction

Literature is composed of those works which seek to attract, impress and influence readers. What makes literature have such qualities may be the language it uses; a kind of masterful use of language that most of the times draws on a different discourse from the ordinary language. Since for a group of people, it is not possible to read some literary texts in their original language, translation becomes inevitable. One of the most difficult concepts about literary translation is that *how* one says some thing can be as important, sometimes more important, than *what* one says (Landers, 2001, p.7). As in literary texts form may be inseparable from meaning and sometimes this is the form that expresses meaning, form and content should not be treated separately. As Brooks (1988) maintains, “in a successful literary work, form and content cannot be separated, form is meaning” (p.45). Therefore, problems faced by literary translators are more visible.

One of the most outstanding features of every literary work is its style. As Abrams and Harpham(2005) put it, ”style has been defined as the manner of linguistic expression in prose or verse –as how speakers or writers say whatever is that they say”(p.216). Cuddon (1999) suggests that “the analysis and assessment of style involves the examination of writer’s choice of words, his figures of speech, the devices (rhetorical and otherwise), the shape of his sentences (whether they be loose or periodic), the shape of his paragraphs –indeed, of every conceivable aspect of his language and the way in which he uses it” (p.872). Therefore, style is one of the defining features of every literary text and should be taken seriously. Unfortunately, it seems that

for some translators, the content is more important than style and style has been treated as a secondary matter. For example, Nida and Taber (1969) define translation as an activity which “consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style” (p.12). However, some scholars have underlined the importance of preserving the style as far as possible while translating. For example, Landers (2001) suggests that “the translator should adapt to the style of each author translated— now tense, now rumbling, sometimes abstruse, but always as faithful to the original as circumstances permit” (p.90). Iser (as cited in Bassnett, 2002) believes that “sentences within a literary text ‘are always an indication of something that is to come, the structure of which is foreshadowed by their specific content. If the translator, then, handles sentences for their specific content alone, the outcome will involve a loss of dimension” (p.119). Therefore, preserving the style may be of paramount importance in literary translation as in literary texts, form is closely related to the meaning and sometimes the form itself expresses the meaning. Thus, it is the translator’s responsibility to preserve the style as faithfully as possible.

Moradi Kermani is a famous Iranian writer who has written many award-winning books for children. Moradi-Kermani’s style is unique in Persian children’s literature. One of the defining characteristics of his style is the use of idioms which he employs in his stories, particularly in the story *Khomre*, to add local color and render the language more familiar and effective.

An Idiom has been defined as a set phrase semantically opaque, whose meaning cannot be deduced from the meanings of its constituents. Although it shows an expressive and particular value, and sometimes (a lexical or syntactic) archaic structure, it behaves as a single semantic unit." (Carine, 2005).

Hence, a reliable rendering of a literary text is possible only when the translator tries to preserve nuances of the narrative style, features contributing to the identity of the text and its unique style.

1.2. Statement of the problem

According to translation scholars languages are the most effective methods of communication between different nations throughout the world, but dissimilarity of languages seems to be an obstacle in the way of communication. In today's world translation has made communication between different nations with different languages possible, but difference in culture makes some challenging problems in the translation process, especially when the audience of the translation is children.

According to Bassnet (2002) translation involves far more than replacement of lexical and grammatical items between languages, as can be seen in the translation of idioms and metaphors. Idioms are arguably among the most complex and problematic aspects of texts for translators, especially those who translate from their native language to another language, and the problem is much more complex when the audience of the text being translated happens to be children. As

Gottlieb (1997, p. 260) states, “an idiom is difficult- if not impossible - to decode correctly for someone who only knows the normal meanings of its constituent element”. According to Beatriz (2005) in *Encyclopedia of Linguistics*, during the institutionalization process idioms acquire a national or cultural flavor that makes understanding and acquiring them highly difficult for the outsider. Considering idioms in literature written for the children makes the issue much more complicated. Because as Gibbs (1991) mentions the evidence shows that children attempt to do compositional analysis when understanding idioms.

The expression of ideas varies from one language to another. Idioms are semantically opaque and cannot be understood literally in a compositional way. They cannot be interpreted from the total of individual words that constitute them. Even if you know and understand each constituent, the meaning of the whole phrase remains confusing. Because idioms cannot be understood literally they cannot be translated literally. "The translation of idioms is characterized by a double problematic, as it is necessary to express not only the meaning and the form but also the aspect of fixation of the expression used in the source language"(Carine, 2005, p. 495), it is not always possible to meet this requirement. If the utterance in the target language is not a set phrase, the translation cannot be satisfying (ibid). Thus one of the biggest challenges for the translators of children's books is posed by idioms as cultural elements, which may be unknown to the target culture, and as such may not have a direct equivalent in the target language.

Idioms encompass an integral part of language and according to Baker (1992, p.65) for a translator "the difficulties involved in rendering various aspects of meaning that an idiom or fixed expression conveys into the target language... are much more pronounced in the case of idioms than they are in the case of other fixed expressions". Idioms have a supplementary and particular aspect that simple words do not have: because they are motivated signs and contribute significantly to giving a text local color. And "they give information about conceptions of the world considered by linguistic communities"(Carine: 2005, p. 495). And conveying such local color to a target language is one of the main concerns of translators. As Lennon (1998) maintain, idioms are used to give life and richness to language by taking the existing words, combining them in a new sense and creating new meanings, just like a work of art.

According to Karin (2005), children's literature consists of a category of books whose existence depends on the relationship with a particular reading audience: children. In Hunt's words it is comprised only of texts that were "written expressly for children who are recognizably children, with a childhood recognizable today"(Qtd. in Karin 2005) The work of children's literature is supposed to be socialization of young readers and making them familiar with the thought patterns, norms and habits of a specific culture (Metcalf, 2003). And literature is a very effective way to help children understand the world. Even before they can read, their parents and teachers read them stories about people in the other places of the world. Children's literature not only entertains readers, but also broadens their minds and their view of the world helping them to

know other cultures, ideas and values. Besides, since cultural elements and idioms (as one of the cultural-bound items) locate the story of a piece of literature in a specific culture and period of time and imply certain values, also considering children as the audience in our case, the most appropriate translation procedure should be sought to convey the source language culture, especially if the work contains considerable use of idioms which contribute to local color of the story and effectiveness of its language. As Larsen (1984, p. 142) points out, "idioms carry certain emotive connotations not expressed in the other lexical items".

Since language and the way we use it play a significant role in making works of literature and the written signs as constituents of language make the comprehension of text possible, in translation of a literary work especial attention must be paid to language and the way it is adopted. Surely adoption of language by different writers is significantly different and this difference along with other factors contributes to the style of the writers and makes their works occupy different positions in the literary canon.

According to Salajeghe (1380;2002), there are different aspects which contribute to the style of a piece of literature one of which is defamiliarization achieved in MoradiKermani's works through different techniques. One of such techniques is the use of proverbs and local idioms which are abundant in *Khomre*, the work under study.

Translators, particularly those of children's literature, can hardly avoid coming across the local color conveyed by the idioms, ignoring