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SCHOOL OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

**MYSTICAL TERMS IN TRANSLATION: THE CASE  
OF TRANSLATING SHABESTARI'S GULSHAN-I-RAZ**

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN  
TRANSLATION STUDIES

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*In the name of God*  
*The Compassionate, the Merciful*

## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text. This work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

Dedicated:

To my teachers

To my parents

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## Abstract

Translation is by itself a difficult task, especially when it is done in the field of cultural matters. More intricate is translating culture-bound terms (CBTs) in general and mystical terms (MTs) in particular. Various scholars have proposed a variety of procedures for translating cultural terms because the issue of how to handle cultural implications of languages has always been a hot debate among the scholars of the field and translators are permanently faced with the problem of finding the most appropriate techniques of successfully rendering these cultural aspects in the target language (TL). Taking into account this reality, the current study followed two objectives: 1) based on Newmark's model of translating culture-bound terms, to investigate the procedures employed in translating Shabestari's poem (*Gulshan-i-Raz*) in two translations by Pasha (2002) and Whinfield (1880) to see how these different procedures employed can convey the underlying concepts and meanings of the MTs to the target text (TT) readers, 2) to find out which procedures were more successful in conveying the meaning component of the MTs which are the culture-bound stretches of language in Shabestari's poem. To do so, Persian MTs in *Gulshan-i-Raz* and their English equivalents were identified in two English translations by Pasha (2002) and Whinfield (1880). The MTs which have been translated insufficiently as well as the procedures and strategies employed in the translation of each MT were specified by the researcher. It was determined whether each translator has been consistent in applying a certain procedure/ strategy or he has been inconsistent on different occasions. The results of this study showed that the most frequent procedures used were *literal translation, addition and cultural equivalence*. The important point to mention is that although these procedures were used much frequently, it cannot be considered that they are more effective to convey the underlying meaning of MTs. The findings reveal that although each translator transmitted some parts of meaning components of the MTs in Shabestari's poems, however, none of them could convey a fully understandable meaning and underlying concept to the TT readers.

Key terms: Translation, Translation procedure, Culture-specific item, Mysticism.



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## **List of Abbreviation**

CBT: Culture-bound terms

CSI: Culture-specific terms

SL: source language

TL: Target language

ST: Source text

TT: Target text

# Chapter One

## Introduction

# Chapter One

## Introduction

### 1.1. Overview

*“Translation is always a shift not between two languages but between two cultures “*

*(Umberto Eco)*

Translation is a kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions." (Toury 1978:200). As this statement implies, translators are permanently faced with the problem of how to treat the cultural aspects implicit in a source text (ST) and of finding the most appropriate technique of successfully conveying these aspects in the target language (TL). These problems may vary in scope depending on the cultural and linguistic gaps between the two (or more) languages concerned (Nida 1964). It is generally accepted that



translating poetry is more difficult than other genres in literature because it is intimately tied to its original language. Thus, differences in the source and target languages make its translation a difficult task. Problems lie not only in the words and their significations but also in figurative language, culture, diction, rhyme, sound, beat, feel and even length of words. The translation of culturally marked words are a problematic issue that has been explored by a number of authors (Inchaurrealde, 2003; Newmark, 1988, 1991).

The main problem for the translator is how to comply with cultural issues, i.e. to decide which issues take priority: the cultural aspects of the source language community, the cultural aspects of the target language community, or perhaps a combination of the two, and a compromise between two or more cultures. The choice of cultural strategy may result in source-culture bound translation (the translation stays within the source language culture – so called foreignisation), target-culture bound translation (the translation stays within the target language culture – so called domestication) or in a ‘hybrid’, where the translation is a product of a compromise between two or more cultures.

According to Nida (1945:194), the person who is engaged in translating from one language into another ought to be constantly aware of the contrast in the entire range of cultures represented by the two languages. Aixelá (1996:58) describes culture-specific items as “textually actualized items whose function and connotations in a source text involve a translation problem in their transference to a target text, whenever this problem is a product of the non-existence of the referred item or of its different intertextual status in the cultural system of the readers of the target text” One of the most recurrent difficulties encountered by translators, whether they are working on general, literary or specialized texts, is to find equivalents for so-called ‘culture-bound’ terms. Culture-bound terms, whether single-unit lexemes, phrases or collocations, are

those which are readily perceived, according to Newmark (1988:94), as being particularly tied to the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression.

The *Gulshan-i- Raz* was composed in A.H. 717 (A.D. 1317), in response to fifteen questions on the doctrines of the Sufis, or Muhammadian Mysticism, propounded by Amir Seyyed Hosseini, a celebrated Sufi doctor of Herat. The author's name was Sa'd ud din Mahmud Shabestari, so called from his birth-place, Shabestar, a village near Tabriz, in the province of Azarbaijan. The first European authors to notice the *Gulshan-i- Raz* were the travellers Chardin and Bemier, both of whom described it as the "Summa theologica" of the Sufis. In the course of the eighteenth century, several copies of the poem found their way to the great European libraries. (Whindfield, 1880).

*Gulshan-i- Raz* is a mystical work reflecting ideologies of Islamic mysticism and Sufism. The existence of a lot of Sufi jargon in this literary masterpiece and the fact that it enjoys Qur'anic associations or connotations for which there are few equivalents in other religions, make it imperative for the translator to ensure that a comprehensive and acceptable rendition of it be made available. The present study aimed to investigate the problems which translators encounter in the translation of culture-specific terms in mystical poems. In doing so, the procedures used in dealing with mystical terms were identified and the frequency of the applied procedures was studied in detail.

## **1.2. Statement of the problem**

According to Barnwell (1986:23), a good translation does not sound like a translation and the translator aims to communicate the message in a way that people can readily understand it. But, in translation of cultural words, language barriers and contextual differences make it impossible.

In translation of such words, because TL readers are not conscious of various aspects of meaning, they are usually the most difficult ones to translate.

In this study, the researcher chose mystical terms (MTs) as Culture-Bound (CB) stretches of language since in translating MTs, the translator meets various difficulties that are not so easy to overcome. The main problem is the lack of equivalence and their unpredictable meaning; therefore, in order to transfer a source MTs into the target language, the translator must choose the most appropriate procedure. It seems that the translation of MTs of *Gulshan-i-Raz* is more difficult than that of MTs in other works such as *Gulestan-i Saadi and works of Hafez*. That is because in *Gulshan-i-Raz*, Shabestari attributes a mystical load to simple and non-mystical terms. For instance, he has used the words **نور سیاه**، **درخت عصا**، **حقیقت وجود** respectively. **انسان**، **تعلقات و نور حق**

چو موسی یک زمان ترک عصا کن

ره دور و دراز است آن رها کن

درختی گویدت انی انا الله

در آ در وادیمن که ناگاه

به تاریکی درون، آب حیات است

سیاهی گر بدانی نور ذات است

In other mystical works, the poets have employed the words which are mystical per se, for example, شراب، ساقی، می، as we can see in the findings of researches conducted by Zarei, Ordudari and Yusefi.

Now, how should translators react to and deal with these CBTs when there is an imperative need for translation between languages with different cultures?

The present study aimed at identifying the most effective procedures the translators have selected to cope with the problem of translating culture-specific concepts in Shabestari's *Gulshan-i-Raz*.

Different theorists have suggested different procedures for the translation of culture-bound terms. Among the long list of classifications made by different scholars, the model proposed by Newmark (1988) was chosen as the framework of this study. This model will be investigated through translation of *Gulshan-i-Raz* by Whinfield (1988) and Pasha (1999).

### **1.3. Significance of the study**

Translation mostly takes place between languages. Language and culture, like content and form, live upon and affect each other. As a cross-cultural event, translation is influenced largely by the culture in the source language. The notion of culture is essential to considering the implications for translation and, despite the differences in opinion as to whether language is part of culture or not, the two notions appear to be inseparable. Discussing the problems of correspondence in translation, Nida confers equal importance to both linguistic and cultural differences between the SL and the TL and concludes that "differences between cultures may cause more severe complications for the translator than do differences in language structure" (Nida, 1964:130). The significance of this study lies in finding the differences between the procedures of translation adopted for the translation of culture-specific items in *Gulshan-i-Raz*, as a great literary masterpiece reflects Shabestari's mystic ideology and culture.

It is hoped that the results of this study help the translators in solving problems arisen from translating culture-specific concepts. This study tried to help translators take the nuances underlying this problem into consideration. It is worth noting that ignoring such nuances can