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Strategies Used for Translating Idioms in Harry Potter Books

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Translation Studies

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Abstract

The present study aimed to find the most frequently used strategies for translating idioms in the book “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows” by three different Persian translators: Eslamiyeh, Noorollahi, and Eshraq. The framework used for the analysis was Baker’s (1992) four strategies for translating idioms: a) use of an idiom with the same form and meaning, b) use of an idiom with the same meaning but a different form, c) paraphrasing and d) omission. The results of the analysis showed that the most frequently used strategy for translating idioms was paraphrasing. A comparison of the three translations indicated that Eslamiyeh used Persian idioms in translating ST idioms the most, and Eshraq, the least.

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Chapter One:

Introduction

1.1 Background

Children's literature is an important tool for children to gain knowledge not only about the world, but also about their language for it has direct educational impact on them. Translated children's books will introduce to them different cultures, beliefs, ideas, customs, etc. Today children's novels and movies are translated to be available all over the world within days of their release in the SL. But since children have a limited experience of the world, presenting cultural items in the text is a rather difficult task. According to Newmark (1988), the translator tries to determine the readership of the original and the translation, and if necessary, determines the level of education, social class, the age and the sex of the TL readers and takes these into account in their translation. Translators of children's books encounter challenges specific to this genre, for they have to take the needs of their minority audience into consideration. Children's age is a determining factor in the choice of translation strategies, since they are still in the process of mastering their mother tongue and the books they read influence this process. Another issue translators and authors of children’s literature are faced with is the fact that they have to be appealing to two groups: first, the genuine audience, i.e. children and secondly the authorities monitoring this audience: parents, critics, teachers, etc. It is actually the adults who decide whether a book is good for children. They are the ones who buy the books. Therefore, translators and authors of children’s books have to consider adult’s value systems in producing their works. Adults want their children to learn something from the book, from moral values to vocabulary and reading skills.

Harry Potter books are among the most popular books in children's literature. In fact, the widespread interest of children and adolescents in the stories has resulted in the books being translated into forty languages across the globe. The unique atmosphere created by Rowling and her intelligent use of mythology, other languages such as Latin and French, her interesting and clever word-plays, etc. have caused several challenges for translators of her books into all target languages.

Idioms are an important part of every language. They provide the text with local color and influence the style of the text. Since they vary from one language to another and are part of beliefs and customs of cultures, they are at times difficult to translate. Failing to provide an appropriate rendition will lead to deviation of the style as a result of which idiomatic effect will be lost and this may make the text look too foreign for readers, especially for children. Texts that are too foreign for children might be difficult for them to comprehend and this might discourage them from reading. Furthermore, children can learn their mother tongue idioms through reading such kind of books.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Cultural differences raise problems for the translator. One of these problems involves idioms. Idioms present how people of different languages and cultures view and present realities of the world. Since idiomatic expressions are different in languages and sometimes an idiom has no idiomatic equivalent in the TL, translators face problems in rendering them. In the case of translating a book for young readers, the translator has to take into consideration their expectations and try to make use of up to date vocabulary and idioms and avoid obsolete ones. Using old idioms which young people do not use or hear in their everyday language will make them disinterested in the text.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Children's literature has a low status in scholarly works and its translation is no different. However, as we are living in an age of technology and children are more inclined to playing computer games and are less willing to read books, the quality of books produced in this genre, whether original or translation, has a significant role in their acceptance by the audience and attracting their interest. Children's books have a great impact on children's reading ability and comprehension. Researches done in this area help translators in finding better strategies to solve translating problems they face and this, in turn, result in the improvement of the genre.

Idioms are stylistic tools used by the author and they might reflect the level of formality of the text or in the case of novels, represent characters' age, gender or social class, therefore the way the translator deals with them is important. Rendering idiomatic expressions poses a problem for the translator and investigating the strategies used by different translators to overcome this obstacle could be helpful for other translators.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The present research aimed to investigate the strategies used by three different Iranian translators to render idiomatic expressions in the book “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows” by Rowling. The model of the analysis is that of Baker's (1992) which will be explained later.

1.5 Research Question

Which of Baker’s strategies is the most frequently used in translating idioms in Harry Potter books into Persian?

1.6 Theoretical Framework

The model used for the analysis in this research is presented by Baker (1992) in her book, *In Other Words.* She defines four strategies for translating idioms which include: 1) using an idiom with the same meaning and form, 2) using an idiom with a similar meaning but a different form, 3) paraphrasing, and 4) omission. The first strategy is used when two languages use the same image to talk about the same situation. In this case even the words making up the idiom are the same. The second strategy is used when there is an equivalent idiomatic expression in the TL, using different words to express a similar meaning. Paraphrasing is used when the translator expresses the meaning using a non-idiomatic equivalent. In this case, the idiomatic effect of the ST expression is lost. In paraphrasing, the idiomatic expression is conveyed using a) a word or b) a phrase. Omission according to Baker (1992), is allowed only in some cases:"first, when there is no close equivalent in the target language, secondly, when it is difficult to paraphrase and finally, for stylistic reasons"(p.77).

1.7 Methodology

The present study is by nature a descriptive one, aiming to find the most frequent strategies employed by Iranian translators in rendering idiomatic expressions in the book “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows”.

1.7.1 The Corpus

The corpus used in this study was the book “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows” and its three Persian translations by Eslamiyeh, Noorollahi, and Eshraq.

1.7.2 Procedure for Data Collection

The analysis was done manually using data collection sheets. First the original text was read and the idioms were gathered. Then the translation of each idiom by each of the three translators was gathered as well. Then the strategy used for translating each idiom by each translator was determined in order to find the most frequently used strategy.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

1.8.1 Strategy

Lorscher (1991) defines a translation strategy as "a potentially conscious procedure for the solution of a problem, which an individual is faced with when translating a text segment from one language into another" (p. 76).

1.8.2 Idiom

Baker (1992) defines idioms as "frozen patterns of language which allow little or no variation in form and often carry meanings which cannot be deduced from their individual components" (p.63).

1.8.3 Paraphrase

Newmark (1988) defines paraphrase as "an amplification or explanation of the meaning of a segment of the text" (p.90).

1.8.4 Literal translation

According to Newmark (1988), in literal translation "the SL grammatical constructions are converted to their nearest TL equivalents but the lexical words are translated singly, out of context" (p.46).

1.9 Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of this study was that all volumes of the original Harry Potter books in English were not available in the market. Another problem was that only a few translators had translated all Harry

Potter books into Persian. Eslamiyeh, the official translator of Harry Potter novels in Iran has translated six of the volumes and edited one of them(the first volume “Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone” translated by Kebriaee). Almost twenty translators have translated at least one volume, but as mentioned before, only a few have translated all of them. Therefore analyzing the work of each translator and comparing it to the works of two other translators using a large corpus, consisting of all the volumes was impossible.

Chapter Two:

Review of the Related Literature

2.1 Children’s Literature

2.1.1 Definition

Hellsing(1963, cited in Oittinen, 2000) defines children’s literature as “anything the child reads or hears, anything from newspapers, series, TV shows, and radio presentations to what we call books” (p. 62).

Klingberg(1972, cited in Oittinen, 2000) describes children’s literature as “literature produced specifically for children” (p. 62).

Darton (1982, cited in in Lesnik – Oberstein, 1996) defines children’s literature as “printed works produced ostensibly to give children spontaneous pleasure and not primarily to teach them, nor solely to make them good, nor to keep them profitably quiet” (p. 21).

Rose (1984, cited in Lesnik – Oberstein, 1996) believes that the child is not actually an observable, objective or scientific entity, but a construction which critics and authors of children’s literature have invented to serve their needs. But her arguments are not used in the field, because the existence of children’s literature and its criticism are dependent on the existence of the child.

Wall(1991, cited in Oittinen, 2000) distinguishes between adult’s literature and children’s literature saying

> if a story is written to children, then it is for children, even though it may also be for adults. If a story is not written to children, then it does not form part of the genre writing for children, even if the author or publisher hopes it will appeal to children. (p. 63)

Therefore, in her view, children’s literature is defined in terms of the purpose of the author and the audience she/he has in mind for her/his work.

Oittinen(1993, cited in O’Connell, 2006) talks about the lack of consensus among scholars on the definition of the child, childhood and children’s literature. According to her, these definitions depend on the point of view and situation. These concepts could be considered from the child or the adult’s point of view. She defines children’s literature as “literature read silently by children and aloud to children” (Oittinen: 2000, p. 4).

Knowles and Malmkjaer(1996, cited in O’Connell, 2006) define children’s literature by stating: “for us children’s literature is any narrative written or published for children and we include the teen novels aimed at the young adult or late adolescent reader”(p. 16).

Lesnik – Oberstein (1996) believes that “the definition of children’s literature lies at the heart of its endeavor: it is a category of books the existence of which absolutely depends on supposed relationships with a particular reading audience: children” (p. 15).

In her view, critics believe that children’s literature means books which are good for children and most particularly good in terms of emotional and moral values (Lesnik – Oberstein, 1996).

2.1.2 Characteristics

Tabbert(1980, cited in Oittinen, 2000) categorizes the functions of children’s literature as didactic and creative. The reader is free to fill the gaps in creative texts, while in didactic texts, she/he only learns specific lessons and morals.

Reiss (1982, cited in O’Sullivan, 2005) states three characteristics justifying the need to specifically study children’s literature:

> a) the … asymmetry of the entire translation process: … adults are translating works written by adults for children and young people;
>
> b) the agency of intermediaries who exert pressure on the translator to observe taboos or follow educational principles;