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Cultural Elements and the Methods of Their Translation in "A Tale of Two Cities" by Charles Dickens, Translated by Ebrahim Younesi

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In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Dedicated to:

My *Mother*

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The memory of my *Father*

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Abstract

Every language has its own culture and this at times creates cultural gaps. Also, every culture has some typical terms that may not be found in another, and these are cultural references. For transferring the meaning of such terms to the receivers of the target culture the translators are required to have the sufficient knowledge of both the source culture and the target culture. In the present research the cultural classification of Newmark has been used for identifying the cultural references in the original version and translated Persian version of *A Tale of Two Cities*. For recognizing the applied strategies by the translator of the novel, Ivir's seven translation strategies for translating the cultural elements have been used. After analyzing the results of the comparative study of the four chosen characters of the novel the researcher came to this conclusion that the predominant cultural elements in the novel include the material culture terms and the mostly used strategy by the translator for translating the cultural elements of the novel is the strategy of literal translation. The results of this study reveals that since the words related to cultural elements having different cultural impression in two societies (source and target languages), literal translation is assumed to be the most frequent strategy among ones presented by Ivir for translation of cultural elements. But the simultaneous combination of strategies according to the regarded cultural category seems beneficial for such translation.

Keywords: culture, source culture, target culture, cultural references, cultural gaps

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List of abbreviations

TL- Target language

SL- Source language

TT- Target text

ST- Source text

CSI- Culture specific items

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Introduction

Introduction

Translation is an effort for assimilating knowledge in the world and a firm step towards the relationship among nations. So, the act of translation is a pure and ingenuous movement. Translation brings an existence of a cultural relationship among nations, speaking different languages.

According to Snell- Hornby (2002: 92-110) translation is an "interdiscipline". He views translating less as a linguistic and more or even exclusively as a cultural procedure. This view is optimized in statements such as "one does not translate languages but cultures" and "in translation we transfer cultures not languages". (Quoted in Juliane House)

According to Said Faiq (2004: 1) "Culture involves the totality of attitudes towards the world, towards events, other cultures and peoples and the manner in which the attitudes are mediated. In other words, culture refers to beliefs and value systems tacitly assumed to be collectively shared by particular social groups and to the positions taken by producers and receivers of texts, including translations, during the mediation process. Intercultural contacts that resulted in the great cultural shifts from one civilization to another have been made possible through translation: this has meant a good deal of exchange, naturally through language."

The conception of the intrinsic relationship between language and culture in translation studies has led to theories and arguments calling for the treatment of translation as a primarily cultural act.

Venuti (1996: 18) tries to mention that "the aim of translation is to bring back a cultural other as the same, the recognizable, even the familiar."

Statement of the Problem

One of the most challenging tasks for all translators is how to render culture- bound elements in literary texts into a foreign language. Indeed, not much attention has been paid to this problem by translation theorists. According to Newmark (1988: 7) "translation is a craft consisting in the attempt to replace a written message and/or statement in one language by the same message and/or statement in another language." However, with culturally-bound words this is often impossible. Indeed, the meaning which lies behind this kind of expression is always strongly linked to the specific cultural context where the text originates or with the cultural context it aims to recreate.

Long debates have been held over when to paraphrase, when to use the nearest local equivalent, when to coin a new word by translating literally, and when to transcribe. Douglas Robinson (2003: 188) says that these "untranslatable" culture-bound words and phrases continue to fascinate translators and translation theorists.

The second half of the twentieth century had been witnessing an increasing cooperation and communication among countries and regions all over the world in fields such as economy, politics, science and technology, culture, etc. Literary works contain rich and colorful information of the culture in a country. Therefore, study of the translation of cultural information in the literary works has become both necessary and important.

Translation is closely related to culture, then how to deal with cultural elements in texts. As to cultural difference in literary translation, translation scholars at home and abroad have long been in hot discussion over it with different theories and opinions they put forward.

Research Questions

The present research will answer several questions in relation to the various types of culture-specific items existing in *A Tale of Two Cities*, the strategies adopted by translator, Ebrahim Younesi, and also the major strategy applied for translation of this literary work into Persian. The questions are as follows:

1- What are the predominant cultural elements and categories in *A Tale of Two Cities*?

2- What are the strategies employed by the translator for translating cultural elements in *A Tale of Two Cities*?

3- What is the predominant strategy for translation of cultural elements in *A Tale of Two Cities*?

The Novelty of Research

There are many researches which are done about several types of cultural concepts in literary works and their translation strategies. The main focus of this study is categorizing the cultural elements of *A Tale of Two Cities* written by Charles Dickens, translated by Ebrahim Younesi and discovering the strategies used by translator for translating this literary work. As far as the author of the present thesis knows no comparative research from cultural perspectives has been done on Persian translation of *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Hypotheses of the Research

There are three hypotheses suggested in this research.

1- The predominant cultural elements in *A tale of Two Cities* include material culture and gestures and habits which are Newmark's categories for classifying cultural concepts.

2- The strategies used for translation of cultural elements of *A Tale of Two Cities* match with strategies proposed by Ivir.

3- The major strategy for translating cultural elements in *A Tale of Two Cities* is literal.

Objective of the Research

In the present study for the analysis of cultural elements in translation of *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens done by Ebrahim Younesi, the researcher has used Newmark's categories (1988, pp. 94-103) for finding the cultural concepts. The goal of this study is discovering the degree of translator's success in transferring cultural concepts of *A tale of Two Cities* according to Ivir's model (1987).

Method of the Research

In the present research the researcher has studied and analyzed the English version written by Charles Dickens and also the translated version of *A Tale of Two Cities* by Ebrahim Younesi for the purpose of discovering cultural elements of this literary work. The researcher has chosen four main characters of the novel and has classified the cultural concepts and categories for each of

four characters according to the five categories which Newmark (1988) has introduced for different types of cultural concepts and elements. Then these concepts are listed in several tables along with their percentage. Afterwards the researcher has used Ivir's (1987) classification of procedures and strategies for translation of cultural concepts of four main characters in *A Tale of Two Cities.* Ivir divides translation strategies into seven categories which will be explained in this research. This study will show how the translator of *A Tale of Two Cities,* Ebrahim Younesi*,* has translated the cultural elements of each four main characters and which strategy, according to the Ivir's classification, he has used the most.

Structure of the Thesis

Regarding the structure, this thesis is composed of an introduction and four chapters which can be illustrated as follows:

The **Introduction** part which is the present chapter shows the importance of strategies used for translation of cultural elements in literary works especially in *A Tale of Two Cities* written by Charles Dickens and translated by Ebrahim Younesi. In this part the aim of this study and also the methods applied for analyzing the cultural elements of this literary work have been shortly explained.

In Chapter One theoretical framework of this research and definition of key concepts will be presented. It describes the concept of culture, its classifications and its effect on translation studies, especially on the notion of translation. It also provides explanations about literary translation and translation strategies. And at the end of this chapter, explanations about Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* and its translator, Ebrahim Younesi are presented.

Chapter Two includes the review of related literature. It shows other works done about literary translation regarding the notions of culture and cultural concepts and more specifically those works which are related to cultural concepts regarding novels, including *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Chapter Three is dedicated to the analysis of data. In this chapter data gathered from the comparative study of the original version and translated version of *A Tale of Two Cities* are analyzed according to the models proposed by Newmark and Ivir.

Chapter Four will represent concluding points about the strategies used in translation of *A Tale of Two Cities* and the degree of translator's success in translating cultural elements of the mentioned literary work. It also gives suggestions for future studies concerning the main theme of the thesis that is cultural concepts and the strategies used for translating them.

Chapter One

Theoretical Framework

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Definition of Key Terms

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter the theoretical framework of the present study and definition of key terms will be explained. Furthermore, in this part of thesis some information about the novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, its author Charles Dickens, its translations in Iran, and a short biography of the translator, Ebrahim Younesi, will be given.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the present research is based on Newmark's (1988) cultural classification and Ivir's (1987) model for translation strategies of cultural words.

1.2.1 Newmark's Cultural Classification

Newmark (1988: 94) distinguishes "cultural" from "universal" and "personal" language. He says that "die", "live", "star", "swim" and even almost virtually ubiquitous artifacts like "mirror" and "table" are universals- usually there is no translation problem there. But "monsoon" and "steppe" are cultural words- there will be a translation problem unless there is cultural overlap between the source and target language. Universal words such as "breakfast", "embrace", "pile" often cover the universal function, but not the cultural description of the referent. He believes that where there is cultural focus, there is a translation problem due to the cultural "gap" or "distance" between the source and target languages. Newmark categorizes foreign cultural words as (1) Ecology, (2) Material Culture (artifacts), (3) Social Culture- work and Leisure, (4) Organizations, Customs, Activities, Procedures, Concepts, (5) Gestures and Habits. According to Newmark (1988: 96), a few general considerations govern the translation of all cultural words: "Your ultimate consideration should be recognition of the cultural achievements referred to in the SL (source language) text, and respect for all foreign countries and their cultures. Two translation

procedures which are at opposite ends of the scale are normally available; transference, which, usually in literary texts, offers local color and atmosphere, and in specialist texts enables the readership to identify the referent- particularly a name or a concept- in other texts without difficulty. However, transference, though brief and concise, blocks comprehension. It emphasizes the culture and excludes the message, and does not communicate; some would say it is not a translation procedure at all. At the other end, there is componential analysis, the most accurate translation procedure, which excludes the culture and highlights the message. The translator of a cultural word has to bear in mind both the motivation and the cultural specialist and linguistic level of the readership."

1.2.1.1 Ecology

Newmark (1988: 96) classifies this category to the terms and concepts for plants of a particular place, animals, mountains, winds, plains and hills. He observes that Geographical features can be normally distinguished from other cultural terms in that they are usually value- free, politically and commercially. Nevertheless, their diffusion depends on the importance of their country of origin as well as their degree of specificity. All these words would normally be transferred, with the addition of a brief culture- free third term where necessary in the text.

1.2.1.2 Material Culture (artifacts)

According to Newmark (1988: 97), this category includes food, clothes, houses, towns and transportation terms. Food is for many the most sensitive and important expression of national culture; food terms are subject to the widest variety of translation procedures. Clothes as cultural terms may be sufficiently explained for TL (target language) general readers if the generic noun or classifier is added. Again, many language communities have a typical house which for general purpose remains untranslated.