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A comparative study of translation of cultural elements of Suvashun: A postcolonial analysis based on Venuti's domestication and foreignization theory

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To my dearly beloved family

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Abstract

Postcolonial studies has found an important place in literary translation studies. After the advent of translation in cultural studies, postcolonial and translation theorists have also come to realize the importance of translation in the process of colonization and decolonization and in the unequal power relations between languages and cultures and started to study the reaction and resistance of translators against these inequalities. The main concern of this study was to conduct a postcolonial analysis of the translation of cultural elements of Simin Daneshvar's *Suvashun* based on Venuti's domestication and foreignization theory. For this purpose, two translations of the book were selected and compared to find which one of the two domestication and foreignization methods was most frequently used by the translators and which one of the translators used more foreignization than the other as a sign of resistance to dominant target-language translation norms. First, the cultural elements of the book were extracted from the unit of word to sentence according to a taxonomy devised on the basis of Newmark's model of culture-specific items and were juxtaposed by their translations. Then the strategies used for translation of each cultural element were analyzed according to a taxonomy devised on the basis of Aixela´'s model of domestication and foreignization methods. The findings showed that both translators used more domestication than foreignization and Ghanoonparvar used more foreignization than Zand. The findings also showed that the translators did not have much resistance against dominant translation norms and could not preserve a postcolonial reading of the text as such. But in comparison between the two translators, Ghanoonparvar used more resistance and preserved more postcolonial reading of the text.

Key Words: Domestication, Foreignization, Postcolonial translation, Postcolonial literature, Culture, Lingua Franca, Imperialism.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Overview

In this chapter some brief information is given about the aims and objectives of the research as well as the questions, hypotheses and method of the research and its novelty compared to other researches. The key terms are also defined in this chapter.

1.2. Introduction

Translation is not only the transference of linguistic elements from one language to another. Culture is also transferred in the process of translation which is very important in the introduction and preservation of a nation's beliefs, values and traditions. Nevertheless, introduction of the culture, lifestyle, custom and habits of nations may sometimes take a one-way and unequal process. The rush and influence of the culture of powerful nations may lead to the annihilation of cultural beliefs and values of other nations and less translation of some languages. Postcolonial literature is an attempt to resist against this unequal power and the cultural colonization of some countries which used to exploit other nations for their own economic interests and which are continuing this process of colonization in a different shape and manner. Translation of postcolonial literature is also important for the preservation of postcolonial reading in translation and the techniques used by translators to translate postcolonial works of literature is of special importance.

The expansion of English as an international language and lingua franca in the last decades has resulted in the translation of a bulk of literary works and technical and non-technical works from this language into Persian but there has not been as many number of works translated from Persian into English. The problem of translators in rendering Persian words and expressions and cultural references into the world dominant languages seems to show that translators are constrained to domesticate the cultural references of their own language and translate in a transparent way when translating Persian works

into these languages to make them more intelligible for the target reader. Although Iran has never been officially colonized, due to its history as a country which has been under the domination of colonizing countries and has been affected by the consequences of colonization and imperialism, some of its literary works may therefore be regarded as postcolonial literature (Spooner cited in Daneshvar, 1990). *Suvashun* by Simin Daneshvar is a novel which can be regarded as a postcolonial literature because of its anti-colonial features. Therefore, the translation strategies used by the two translators of this postcolonial work are of a special importance to see whether they preserved the postcolonial reading of the work and resisted against the hegemony of English and whether, as two Iranian translators, they communicated their voice and articulated their linguistic and cultural specificity.

1.3. Statement of the problem

A mere glimpse on Iran's book market clearly shows that a lot of books are translated from English into Persian, especially novels. According to Naghdi and Davarpanah there have been 6677 books translated during 1991-2000 and most of these books were translated from English with a frequency of 87.2 percent. Britain and America had a crucial part in translation of technical and scientific books with the frequency of 79.91 percent (2005: 34). Moreover, according to Fars News Agency (2012), among the published books in 2011, 14091 were translations and the number of translated books has increased up to 7 percent in 2011. On the contrary, needless to be occupied with figures and numbers, a glimpse on internet e-book markets clearly shows that Iran's part in translation of books from Persian to English has been too small. Many English words and expressions pertaining to English culture, activity and lifestyle such as "Halloween", "Valentine", "Ballet", "Christmas", etc. have been introduced into Persian via translation of books from English and the mass media, which as a result, helped Persian translators to have less difficulty in translation of these concepts and, by the same token, Iranian readers to understand and read English cultural references without difficulty. Translation of books from Anglo-American imperial powers as well as the mass media which is mostly dominated by these imperial powers not only affected the readings of translations but also the lifestyle of Iranians. You can

see kindergartens celebrating Christmas and presenting ballet training programs in Iran today. On the contrary, few Persian words and concepts have been introduced into English if any, and Persian culture has not had the same power in the mass media for spreading its culture as much as the USA or Britain. Consequently, translation of Persian works into English may not be as easy as translation of English works into Persian and there might not be much the same chance for the voice of Persian writers and translators to be heard as other writers and translators from powerful countries.

1.4. Purpose of the thesis

As Venuti points out, "a fluent domesticating translation masks both the translator's work and the asymmetrical relations- cultural, economic, political- between English-language nations and their others worldwide" (Venuti, 1995: 38). Therefore, as postcolonial theorists of translation usually favor and choose foreignization strategy as a resistance to dominant target-language cultural values to demonstrate the linguistic and cultural difference of the original, Venuti's domestication and foreignization methods are chosen to analyze whether the two translators of *Suvashun* translated the cultural elements more with foreignization or domestication and whether they chose foreignization as a resistance to dominant Anglo-American translation norms. The researcher chose to study the two translations in a comparative procedure to demonstrate which one of the translators preserved a postcolonial reading of the text and showed more resistance against the dominant target-language norms and values.

1.5. Significance of the study

The strategies used by translators for translation of their country's postcolonial and literary works have a crucial part in introduction, development or extinction of their culture, beliefs, and traditions. Therefore, Persian translators and researchers may acquire more information about the condition, place and role of translation in their own country using the results of this research and try to use a better translation strategy when translating postcolonial works.

1.6. Questions of the research

As postcolonial theorists of translation favor foreignization method in translation to celebrate their own culture and to resist against western literary and translation norms (Xu Yanhong cited in Ning and Yifeng, 2008: 8), the researcher is intended to answer the following questions in this thesis:

1) Which of Venuti's domestication or foreignization method is most frequently used in Persian translations of the cultural elements of Simin Daneshvar's *Suvashun*?

2) Which one of the translators used more foreignization than the other in translation of the cultural elements?

1.7. Hypotheses of the research

1) As mentioned before, due to Iran's situation as a country which is affected by the consequences of neo-colonialism and cultural imperialism, the researcher hypothesizes that the translators inevitably used domestication more than foreignization.

2) The researcher hypothesizes that Ghanoonparvar used more foreignization in comparison to Zand. A glimpse at some of the sentences translated by Zand seems to show that she used some deletions, additions and paraphrasing to make the translation more transparent or intelligible, i.e. more domesticated for target language readers. Some sentences are even replaced to make the translation more coherent. However, as the focus of this research is analyzing the two translations only on the level of cultural elements not on every level of translation, the researcher is to analyze the cultural elements of the two translations on a comparative manner to find the frequency of foreignization used by translators as a resistance to English literary and translation norms.

1.8. Novelty of the research

Most of the researches on domestication and foreignization of cultural elements have been carried out on English to Persian translations and their purpose of research has not been the study of translations on a postcolonial context or postcolonial works. In regard to postcolonial translation theory, very few researches have been carried out in Iran. These few researches compared translations in the colonization and postcolonization periods on English to Persian works or Persian to English Poetry but in regard to Persian to English prose literary works, no postcolonial study has been ever since carried out.

1.9. Method of the research

In order to achieve the aim of this study, the researcher tries to first, find the cultural elements in Simin Daneshvar's novel *Suvashun* according to a taxonomy presented for finding the cultural elements. Then the two translations of the novel which are rendered by M.R. Ghanoonparvar entitled *Savushun: A Novel about Modern Iran* and Roxane Zand entitled *A Persian Requiem* are analyzed in a comparative way on the basis of Venuti's domestication and foreignization methods according to a taxonomy presented by the researcher.

1.10. Definition of key terms

1.10.1. Domestication

According to Venuti, a translation is domesticated when a translator adheres to the current usage of language and makes the translation read fluently or seem transparent or natural by removing the linguistic or stylistic peculiarities which gives it an appearance that the translation is not a translation but the "original" and reflects the foreign writer's intention or the real meaning of the original. So a domesticating translation, as Norman

Shapiro quotes in the first chapter of Venuti's *The Translator's Invisibility*, is like a pane of glass and never calls attention to itself (1995: 1).

1.10.2. Foreignization

Unlike domesticating translation, a foreignizing translation is not a fluent translation and tries to show the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text by deviating from the cultural codes and norms that prevail in the target language. It tries to make a new and alien reading experience for the target readers and send them abroad. So a foreignizing translation is not read as though it is an original and does not give the reader an unobstructed access to the original (Venuti, 1995: 20).

1.10.3. Lingua Franca

Lingua franca which comes originally from the Arabic term *Lisan al farang* is an intermediary or contact language which is used for communication between two or more groups with different native languages. It was formerly used by Arabic speakers to communicate by travelers from Western Europe and its meaning is extended to mean a language of commerce. English is sometimes referred to as a lingua franca (House, 2010: 11).

1.11. Structure of the thesis

This thesis is compiled in five chapters. In Chapter One the whole idea of the research is briefly introduced. Chapter Two includes two sections: theoretical background and review of literature. In the first section, some of the concepts and ideas which are essential to the understanding of the relation of postcolonialism to translation are explained in detail, and in the second section, a review of the related literature is presented. The third chapter of the thesis, 'methodology' deals with the analysis of the case under study and its translations and the procedure of data collection. Chapter Four, deals with data analysis and the findings of the analysis. In Chapter Five, the results of the findings and conclusion of the research are presented.

Chapter Two

Theoretical Background and Review of Literature

Theoretical Background

2.1. Overview

In this chapter an attempt is made to give some information about culture and cultural studies as the concepts which are associated with translation studies and then some of the theories and concepts such as poststructuralism, deconstruction, postmodernism, feminism etc. which were important in the change of the world view as well as the meanings and assumptions that has been prevailing through the history of western and European academy up to the nineteenth and twentieth century and that led to the advent of postcolonial theory and criticism and finally a change in the theory and practice of translation will be introduced. As a final point, Venuti's domestication and foreignization methods and its relation to postcolonial translators will be explained. In the second section of this chapter a brief review of the literature related to the present research will be presented.

2.2. Culture

Culture has been one of the most difficult concepts to define may be because the concept as Barker puts it "does not represent an entity in an independent object world" but it is a signifier that enables us to talk about human activity (2004: 44). Culture is believed to be shared social meanings which help us understand the world. Goodenough believes culture to be the expectations which make the standards and rules of social conduct according to which we perceive, believe, communicate, and act (1970: 99). Definition of culture has been one of the major attempts of anthropologists and one of the earliest definitions of culture pertains to Edward Burnett Tylor in 1871 who defined culture as follows:

> "Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014).

So culture is shared patterns of life and expectations which are learned unconsciously by human beings in a particular group or society according to which we make judgments of accepted or unaccepted behavior. Geertz (1973: 89), a cultural anthropologist, argues against the use of multiple referents by anthropologists for description of culture and uses a semiotic approach for describing culture. He describes culture as follows:

> "In any case, the culture concept to which I adhere has neither multiple referents nor, so far as I can see, any unusual ambiguity: it denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life."

As mentioned above, culture is no longer considered an entity to be defined, rather it is constituted by the meanings and representations which are made by human signifying practices and are transmitted to us through time and history within a particular social group or nation. Exploring the meaning of the concept of culture has been one of the major attempts of Cultural Studies.

2.3. Cultural studies

Cultural studies is an interdisciplinary field of study and involves a cluster of theories and approaches from sociology, anthropology, philosophy and literature like Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Structuralism, Poststructuralism, Marxism, Postcolonial theory, etc. and is generally concerned with, as it is self explanatory, culture as constituted by signs, meanings and representations which are generated by human signifying practices. Cultural studies is also concerned with power and politics as the consequences of the meanings and representations which constitute and are constituted by institutions and social

agencies. Therefore, politics is one of the purposes of cultural studies and may assist in comprehending and changing the world (Barker, 2004: 42-43). Cultural Studies has also contributed to promote the current thinking about translation.

Before the influence of cultural studies on translation studies during the 1990s which was called "the cultural turn" by Mary Snell-Hornby, translation was mainly evaluated and studied on the basis of linguistic and formal aspects of texts, and translations were only judged by juxtaposition of the source and target texts without consideration of the cultural and ideological matters effective in the writing and translation of texts (Munday, 2001: 127). Bassnett in her article *The Translation Turn in Cultural Studies* declared that before the 1970s, translation studies had a minor position in Applied Linguistics, Literary Studies and Cultural Studies; and people were still tangled with old concepts of "accuracy" and "faithfulness" in the study of translation (Bassnett, 1998: 123-124). Bassnett mentions the similarity of translation and cultural studies in questioning the distinctions made between "high" and "low" culture and challenging the concept of literary canon. (Bassnett, 1998: 126). The concept of literary canon is now challenged for its discrimination and exclusion of popular culture or those works which are considered as "low" culture because of their lack of the assumed universal aesthetic and artistic values. Contemporary cultural studies question the idea of literary canon because the inclusion and exclusion of works as "great" or "low" are the matters of power and taste and there are no universal criteria based on which we can evaluate and judge the works as great or low. There has also been an attempt to include postcolonial and feminist works in the canon of literature (Barker, 2004: 19). Bassnett also refers to the contribution of Even-Zohar and his polysystems theory in evolution of translation studies which came to consider the place of translated literature in the target language from the social, historical and cultural points of view. Even-Zohar criticized the way some works of literature are ignored and excluded from the literary canon and is aware of how translated literature works as a system in the target language in the selection of texts for translation and also creating norms of translation. He also points out how some translated literature gain the "peripheral" or "weak" position and have to follow the norms and conventions of "primary" or "dominant" literature. (Munday, 2001: 109-110). However, Translation studies and cultural studies were confined to opposition to the study of canonical texts and the necessity of study of popular culture in Europe until