The role of culture-specific items in translation of children's literature: A case study of Alice's adventures in wonderland

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ABSTRACT

Cultural aspects devote a degree of significant importance in translation studies to themselves. This research tries to shed light on three important notions: culture, translation and children's literature (ChL). Translating cultural items has always been a delicate matter for translation scholars; however, translating these items in ChL makes the work more sensitive. The main purpose of the researcher in this study is to focus on the strategies applied by two Persian translators, namely; Hasan Honarmandi and Zoya Pirzaad, when facing CSIs in rendition of the book "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland". Having discovered 150 CSIs in the book and having sorted them according to Newmark's five categories for CSIs, the researcher found out that "cultural equivalent" was employed more frequently than the other translation strategies by the translators. Finally, by calculating the number of total strategies applied by the translators, the researcher identified that they were inclined toward domestication rather than foreignization in their translations of the book.

Introduction

Translation from a source language to a target language has always faced translators with many challenges and problematic issues. Tolnai (2011) believes that there is a difference between a translation difficulty, which relates to a difficulty encountered by an individual translator, due to a certain inability, and a translation problem, which is a universal problem. He also mentions that Translation theory mentions four types of translation problems: linguistic, cultural, pragmatic and text specific problems. Among those problems, cultural challenges have always been one of the most problematic issues for translators. Culture-specific items in translation are of that utmost importance that Ginter (2002) entitles translation as an act of culture-specific communication. Lorens sanz (1994) also believes that translation is communication and the purpose of translation is making both interlingual and intercultural communication possible. Therefore it seems to be an impossible task to translate without regarding cultural background of the writer and reader. Due to the above-mentioned significance of considering cultural items in translation, one of the main problems for the translator is how to deal with cultural items. The translator should decide on to take priority on cultural aspects of source language, target language or both of them. Ginter (2002) believes that this decision is crucial for the translator and asserts that "The choice of cultural strategy may result in source-culture bound translation (so called foreignization), target-culture bound translation (so called domestication) or in a ‘hybrid’, where the translation is a product of a compromise between two or more cultures. In this research the translation of culture-specific items is surveyed within the genre of children's literature. Although the domain of the study is devoted to one genre, working on this subject needs careful attention and notice. Anna Ginter (2002) also believes that no single strategy is applicable and enough for translating culture-specific strategies and asserts that it is extremely difficult to find a text in which all cultural issues would be translated by means of the same strategy. However, it would be worth observing how some translators resolve the problems that arise when the elements of one culture should be transposed to the environment of another."

Adaptation and foreignization are two of the many strategies employed by translators to render culture-specific items, and this research by surveying two Persian translations of the book "Alice's adventures in wonderland" tries to see what strategies are applied by Persian translators when facing CSIs in children's literature.

Literature Review

Culture-specific Items in Translation

Cultural items devote significant importance in the area of translation of texts. Talking about the translation of culture-specific items is also controversial, since a single identical word or phrase may be translated in different ways by different translators. However, what is important is the best solution of a translator when facing culture-specific items in a text for finding their appropriate meaning and a suitable equivalent for these items in the TT. Consequently, it is important for translators to be familiar with different methods and strategies in dealing with Culture-bound items.

Problems in Translating Culture-specific Items

Different nations and various languages comprise the world; these languages live in the context of different cultures manifesting different aspects of life. As far as the relation among these languages is concerned, translation becomes an indispensable necessity. Translators face many problems in translating Culture-bound items, and translation scholars suggest some methods to solve them (Hosseini Maasoum & Davtalab, 2011, p.1768). In translation of culture-specific items the translator may confront some problems. As Leppihalme (1997:2) reports, some researchers consider "extralinguistic phenomena from natural to man made. Extralinguistic problems
are often expressed as lexical. Others see culture-bound translation problems as a mainly intralinguistic and pragmatic”. He adds “Culturally oriented translation studies do not see the ST and TT as samples of linguistic material. The texts occur in a given situation in a given culture in the world and each has a specific function and an audience of its own” (ibid: 3).

Translation of Children’s Literature

In the 1960s and 1970s the attention of the academics turned to cross-cultural influences in children’s literature (Lathey, 2006) and unlike the past years in which children’s literature and its translation was not regarded as an independent genre in its own, from that time on, the common belief was that children should know and be familiar with other cultures to widen their knowledge span of the world and cherish their mind by knowing about other people’s customs, habits and way of lives.

At first glance, translating as well as writing for children may seem to be a straightforward matter, but due to its unique characteristics, it really is not as easy as it appears. As Thomson-Wohlgeguth (1998) states it's not just the translator who plays role in translating for children. Thomson-Wohlgeguth (ibid, 1998:45) believes that the four principal players in the translation process, who influence a child's book from its conception onwards, are the author, the translator, the publisher and the Critic.

Methodology

Corpus

The corpus of our study is mainly centralized around one of the best-selling books of children's literature which is "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" and two Persian translations of it, the first one in 1972 by Dr. Hasan Honarmandi and another by Zoya Pirzaad in 2011. Dr. Hasan Honarmandi has got his Ph.D in comparative literature and has translated many books into Persian; his translation of this book has been edited two times in thirteen years. Zoya Pirzaad translation has already been edited five times and has been one of the best-selling translations of this book in Iran.

The reason for choosing the book "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" for my research is that this book is full of culture-specific items which can help us show how translators have rendered each type of those cultural items that is what we need as a raw material for a detailed study on culture-specific items. The second reason is that this book is a best seller in the genre of children's literature and many children and even adults have read it since its publication in 1865.

Procedure

At first in this research sentences in which there is a culture-specific item, from the book "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" are chosen, then we survey in which of the categories of Newmark's model they fall. All the sentences together with their Persian translations will be included in a table and the frequency of using each method by the translators and a comparison between methods used by each translator will be shown. Fifteen methods of Newmark for translating culture-specific items are transference, naturalization, cultural equivalent, functional equivalent, descriptive equivalent, componential analysis, synonymy, through-translation, shift, modulation, accepted standard translation, compensation, paraphrase, couplet, and finally notes.

Data Analysis

Sentences containing CSIs from the book "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" together with their Persian translations and their literal meanings are selected below and based on Newmark's model for translating CSIs they are surveyed closely below.

Transference

"Transference is the process of transferring a SL word to a TL text as a translation procedure” (Newmark, 1988, p. 81).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source text</th>
<th>Literal meaning</th>
<th>Target text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>She had just begun to dream that she was walking hand in hand with Dinah.</td>
<td>She dreams that she is walking hand in hand with Dinah.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this example the proper name Dinah is kept without change in target text which is an instance of transference.

Naturalization

"This procedure succeeds transference and adapts the SL word first to the normal pronunciation, then to the normal morphology of the TL” (ibid, p. 82).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source text</th>
<th>Literal meaning</th>
<th>Target text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The rabbit-hole went straight on like a tunnel for some way.</td>
<td>The hole went straight like a long tunnel. (Pirzaad)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The word tunnel has the same meaning in the target text but a different pronunciation, it is pronounced /tun/ in Persian which is an example of naturalization.

Cultural Equivalent

This strategy is “an approximate translation where a SL cultural word is translated by a TL cultural word” (ibid, p. 83).

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Source text</th>
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<th>Target text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(it had, in fact, a sort of mixed flavour of cherry-tart, custard, pineapple, roast turkey, toffee, and hot buttered toast.)</td>
<td>In fact it was a mixture of flavor of cherry cake, custard, pineapple, roast turkey, toffee and hot bread which is covered with butter. (Honarmandi)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Custard is a pudding-like usually sweetened mixture made with eggs and milk. In Persian, the most natural equivalent for this word is فرنی /fern/, however it cannot have the same connotative meaning. Materials which are used for making فرنی do not include egg and it has a combination of some other materials. So according to Newmark's statement explained above, the word فرنی in Persian is not an "accurate" equivalent for the English word.

Functional equivalent

Functional equivalent “applied to cultural words, requires the use of a culture-free word, sometimes with a new specific term; it therefore neutralizes or generalizes the SL word and sometimes adds a particular.” (ibid, p. 83).

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Target text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. I give it up? Alice replied: what’s the answer?</td>
<td>Alice replied: no my wits don’t reach somewhere. What’s the answer? (Pirzaad)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Give it up" in the source text has been translated with an expression which is more specific and it is an instance of functional equivalent.

Descriptive analysis

In this strategy the translator uses some descriptions and explanations to clarify the meaning for his audience.
The compound noun daisy-chain instead of being translated by a compound noun in Persian has been described in target text which is descriptive analysis.

Componential analysis
It is defined as "comparing an SL word with a TL word which has a similar meaning but is not an obvious one-to-one equivalent, by demonstrating first their common and then their differing meaning than the TL word" (ibid: p. 114).

The word Hare in English based on Longman advanced American dictionary is defined as "an animal like a rabbit, but larger and with longer ears and longer back legs, that can run very quickly" but it is translated into "rabbit" in Persian which has a similar meaning but is not an obvious one-to-one equivalent and the SL word has more specific meaning than the TL word. Therefore it can be an example of componental analysis.

Synonymy
According to Newmark, synonymy is defined as a "near TL equivalent to a SL word" (ibid, p. 84).

Through-translation
It is "The literal translation of common collocations, name of organizations, the components of compounds and perhaps phrases, which is also known as calque or loan translation" (ibid, p. 84).

The compound noun daisy-chain instead of being translated by a compound noun in Persian has been described in target text which is descriptive analysis.

Shifts or transpositions
This strategy "involves a change in the grammar from SL to TL". The first type of shift occurs when there is a change from singular to plural. The second type of shift is required when an SL grammatical structure does not exist in the TL. Finally the third type of shift is the one where literal translation is grammatically possible but may not accord with the TL (ibid, p. 86).
This strategy occurs when the translator combines two or more than two different procedures for dealing with a single problem (ibid: 91).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source text</th>
<th>Literal meaning</th>
<th>Target text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alice noticed with some surprise that the pebbles were all turning into little cakes as they lay on the floor.</td>
<td>خیالی هم انداده خوبیست، کرم ابریشم عصبانی این را گفت و کمر راست کرد.</td>
<td>کرک دیست سه انج (هفت سانتی متر) بود.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the example above, at first transference strategy has been used by keeping the same proper name "Alice" in the source and target language and then synonymy has been used by changing the word "cakes" into Persian "sweet".

Notes

Notes are "additional information in a translation" (ibid, p. 91).

And finally in the last sentence, the translator after translating the name "William the conquerer" into Persian gives a footnote on the bottom of the page and elaborates it more. Therefore, the strategy of "notes" has been applied in this example.

Chart 1: Percentage of strategies applied by Persian translators for rendering CSIs in "Alice's Adventures in wonderland"

It should be noted that the strategy of borrowing occurred more than other strategies in the translations but since it was not among Newmark's strategies, it was not included in the chart.

Newmark (1988: 81) after explaining translation procedures and mentioning that contrary to translation methods which apply to the whole text, these procedures apply to sentences and small units of language, then he goes to cultural categorization and defines five categories for foreign words as 1. Ecology, 2. Material culture (artefacts), 3. Social culture (work and leisure), 4. Organizations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts and finally 5. Gestures and habits.

We include here some cultural items of the book "Alice's adventures in wonderland" and categorize them according to Newmark's above-mentioned five cultural categories:

1. Ecology: Newmark (ibid: 96,97) names items in ecology as Flora, fauna, winds, plains, hills and mentions that the main features of this group is that they are politically and commercially value free.

2. Material culture (artefacts): Food, clothes, houses, towns, and transport are four sub-category of Material culture and as Newmark mentions (ibid: 97) food is the most important among these four.

3. Social culture (work and leisure): In this category Newmark (ibid: 98) mentions that one has to differentiate between denotative and connotative problems of translation. He also believes that connotative words in this group are more difficult to find an exact equivalent for them than denotative ones.

In the mentioned examples, the sentence: "Alice noticed with some surprise that the pebbles were all turning into little cakes as they lay on the floor." The word cakes which is translated using the strategy of synonymy, is in the category of Material culture and subcategory of food. And also the words cherry-tart, custard and toffee in the sentence” It had, in fact, a sort of mixed flavour of cherry-tart, custard, pineapple, roast turkey, toffee, and hot buttered toast," are under the same category.

4. Organizations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts: in the sentence: "It is a very good height indeed!" said the Caterpillar angrily, rearing itself upright as it spoke (it was exactly three inches high) which is translated: "خیالی هم انداده خوبیست، کرم ابریشم عصبانی این را گفت و کمر راست کرد. کرک دیست سه انج (هفت سانتی متر) بود."

In this sentence, the translator, by using the strategy of paraphrase and changing the unit of measuring length from inch into meter, has rendered the cultural item and this culture-specific item which is a concept falls into fourth category of Newmark.

5. Gestures and Habit: As Newmark (ibid, p.108) believes, for gestures and habits there is a distinction between description and function which can be made where necessary in ambiguous cases. Giving an example, in the sentence "'May it please your Majesty,' said Two, in a very humble tone, going down on one knee as he spoke, 'we were trying—'" which is rendered into:
Despite their importance, culture-specific items are one of the problematic and difficult issues in translation. Many scholars have proposed theories and models for rendering CSIs, among them, Peter Newmark (1986) and his model in this field is one of the most influential.

We in this study, based on Newmark's model tried to shed light on different strategies of translation of CSIs in the genre of children's literature. To achieve this goal, a close survey about CSIs in the book "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" was conducted. CSIs in that book and their Persian translations were studied to see what strategy among fifteen strategies of Newmark for translation of CSIs was applied by the translator. The results demonstrated that synonymy and transference were useful for the translator and he resorted to applying omission, deletion and other strategies. We also categorized the CSIs in the book based on five cultural categories of Newmark and this analysis revealed that the second category of Newmark which is material culture had the most frequent occurrence among others.

Finally the researcher suggests further studies about CSIs for other books in the genre of children's literature due to newness of studies in this field and novelty of studies in the field of cultural debates.

References