Processing effort in Farsi translations of English novels; Salinger's *the catcher in the Rye* approached from relevance theory

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ABSTRACT

The shortcomings of Code model of communication have motivated the scholars of the field to adopt more adequate models including the inferential model and Relevance Theory which seem to be more appropriate ones (Gutt, 1992). Based on the fact that translation is expression of intentions and the act of reading it is recognition of those intentions, and the presumption that a considerable number of Farsi translations of English novels are not successful in this bi-lateral process (Mollanazar, 2001), this study was conducted in order to detect a number of impeding factors in that process as well as some procedures to avoid them. The researcher selected 10 sample excerpts from Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* and 2 Farsi translations of each text. In the next step, 7 professors of Translation Studies were asked to analyze the selected excerpts and list the effort-increasing factors based on the criteria adapted from vandijk (1979). According to the results of the study at 2 levels of Phonology and Semantics there were specific factors which decreased the relevance level of the text. Considering the raters' notes and analysing the excerpts, the researcher also proposed a number of instructions on the way such obstacles can be avoided in translation.

Introduction

The concept of "encoding and decoding" is one of the most-cited concepts in the literature of the human communication studies. According to the Code model, when one intends to communicate a message, firstly s/he encodes it by use of the rules of the language s/he speaks. The outcome will be a signal to be received by the addressee who decodes it to get the message encoded by the addresser. Although this bi-lateral process is one of the crucial factors involved in human communication, it fails to explain many aspects of this communication (Gutt, 1992).

One of the problems with this model is the lack of any account of how a linguistically encoded signal is decoded differently by two different addressees in two different contexts. Consider for example, the utterance 'Oh, it's cold!' which can be decoded as 'please close the window!' in one situation and 'please bring me a hot tea!' in another. It might be suggested that context is the determining factor in this process, but the way it can be explained is not clear in Code model. Another problem with the Code model is the fact that the information which was encoded linguistically does not guarantee the intended meaning to be conveyed completely. As Gutt states, 'further information is needed to develop the linguistically specified skeleton to a full proposition' (1992, p. 12).

What can be suggested as a substitution to Code model of communication is inferential communication in which the communicator provides the addressee with what is called *stimulus* in Relevance theoretic terms. The two functions of this stimulus are informing the addressee that the addresser has the intention to provide him with a piece of information (communicative intention) and conveying the intended information to the addressee (informative intention) (Sperber & Wilson, 2004). In theory of Relevance, a communication which includes both of these intentions is called ostensive-inferential communication. The condition which is considered in RT for success of a communication is the successful inference of the informative intention by the addressee. (Gutt 1992).

Regarding the issue of successful inference, what we have in RT "is not just an all-or-none matter but a matter of degree" (sperber & Wilson 2004, p. 609). According to this theory, when all other factors are equal, investing more effort for processing and recognising the intentions behind the text results in lower level of relevance of the input to the audience. Therefore, the relevance of an utterance can be assessed utilizing the criteria proposed in the RT i.e. cognitive effects and processing effort (Sperber & Wilson, 1986).

Translation is one the other linguistic issues which has been approached so far mostly from Code model point of view. Therefore, the problems and drawbacks of the Code model on the one hand and more adequate accounts of the inferential model on the other hand, makes one to come to the conclusion that it will be more appropriate to approach translation and linguistic issues related to it from this point of view and as Gutt maintains "we can also expect better insights into the nature of translation" (1992, p. 15). Since translation is believed to be in the first step, recognition of the intentions of the source text by the translator, in the second step, expression of those intentions, and in the third step, recognition of the expressed intention by the audience, it can be completely approached and analysed in the framework of inferential model and RT. All steps and conditions mentioned above in the case of communication are therefore applicable for translation as a means of as well as process of communication. For instance, the criteria proposed by this theory in assessment of relevance level of an utterance are valid for translation as well; the more the reader invest processing effort to understand the text and to recognize the

intentions behind the text, the less successful the process of communication will be.

Relevance theory was applied in translation studies by E.A. Gutt for the first time. Gutt (1992) presents an introduction to the principles of inferential model and RT and applies the latter in the issues related to Bible translation. In 2006, Gutt also conducted a study of the knowledge which is necessary in the comprehension of a text in which he applied the conceptual tools of RT (Gutt, 2006). One of the text types which can be dealt with from Relevance point of view is the literary texts. In his cognitive study of the literary texts and the implicit information conveyed by them, Sang Zhonggang (2006) also adopted this approach. In his work, he proposed a framework for explaining the issue of translating the implicit information in the target contexts which are different from the original one. Drama and translation of this literary genre into Farsi is the theme of a study by Talebinejad (2008) in the framework of RT. In his work, he concluded that a number of the aspects of the drama under his study are not transferrable fully into the Farsi and the translation text of the play into Farsi is relevant only to the elites with prior familiarity both with the original work and the premises embedded in the source text.

Translation of novel as one of the most popular literary genres can also be studied in the framework of RT. Recently, novel translation has been regarded with great favour in Iran, but unfortunately few studies dealt with linguistic and theoretical aspects of it (Esfandiari and Jamshid, 2011). There is almost no study of Farsi translations of English novels from Relevance point of view, except for the work of Esfandiari and Jamshid (2011) which deals with Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and the way cultural and historical references of this novel can be viewed as effort-increasing factors when the premises needed in interpreting them are absent in the target text.

What this work has in common with Esfandiari and Jamshid (2011) is application of RT in analyzing the translation text in order to detect the effort-increasing factors which decrease the relevance level of the text for the intended audience, but the main focus of this study is on the effect of using spoken forms of the words in the text as well as socially unfamiliar or unknown factors as effort-increasing factors.

Statement of the Problem

There exist a number of masterpieces of English novel which are not appealing and attractive for the Persian audience when they are translated into Farsi. In this regard, Esfandiari and Jamshid (2011) stated that "There are some items in Farsi texts which increase the processing effort and consequently decrease the relevance level of the text for the Persian audience" (p. 90). Mollanazar (2001) conducted a comprehensive study of the history and present status of translating novel into Farsi. Problems and issues related to natural renderings of first-rate novels into Farsi are listed and elaborated in his work. He refers in addition to the low quality of translations as the aftermaths of so many inexperienced translators. (Mollanazar, 2001). Surveying a number of the Farsi translations, Talebinejad (2008) also comes to the conclusion that moving the message conveyed by the original text is almost impossible in translation into Farsi when it comes to adaptation into Persian situation.

It is possible to investigate the issue of low-quality translations from Relevance point of view. As stated by Gutt, communicating the informative intention may result in miscommunication or "total breakdown of communication"

when the intended addressee is not the same as the one the original work has been meant for (1992, p. 27). In other words, without provision of appropriate premises, no inferential communication is possible. When inappropriate or irrelevant premises are supplied for the audience (the likely case in translation for the addressee with background totally or partially different from what is possessed by originally intended addressee), the inferences made by the addressee will be totally or partially different from the ones made by the source context audience (Gutt, 1992). According to Gutt, taking into consideration the condition of communicability, "an intended interpretation is recoverable not in just any context, but only in a context, where the requirements of optimal processing are fulfilled" (1992, P. 28). Therefore, in a "secondary communication situation" (the term developed by Gutt, 1992) like Iran, reading and interpreting a novel intended for the English addressee with specific range of presuppositions and premises demands a very high amount of processing effort and consequently the text will be misinterpreted if the translator fails to provide the addressee with appropriate premises.

Considering the above discussion, this study is firstly after detecting the specific factors which play a role in increasing the amount of processing effort needed in reading and interpreting Farsi renderings of English novels by the Persian audience and secondly intends to propose the possible procedures for reducing the required processing effort at three levels of phonology, semantics, and pragmatics in such translations.

Methodology

Raters

The raters who evaluated the translated texts under this study were seven professors of translation studies from Sheikhbahaei University, Azad University, and University of Isfahan. Moreover than familiarity with the theories of translation, the raters were also familiar with the principles of RT and were experts in literary translation and translation quality assessment.

Materials

The English novel selected for this study is Calinger's *The catcher in the Rye*. Two different translations of this novel into Farsi were also selected; translations by *Mohammad Najafi* and *Ahmad Karimi.*

The writer of *The catcher* was born on January 1, 1919, in New York City. Although the number of novels published by him is limited, Salinger's reputation as one of the greatest novelist in English is unquestionable.

The Catcher in the Rye is a novel with so many cultural references and cultural-bound terms and expressions as well as idioms and slangs translation of which is a demanding task especially to a cultural context like Iran whose religious and cultural limitations resulted in absence of so many social elements which are absolutely normal in western cultures.

To make the process of the study more manageable, five paragraphs with a maximum length of four hundred words were selected as the sample texts. In order to select these parts, the whole novel was studied meticulously and the parts which seemed to include more items suitable for the purpose of this study were extracted by the researcher.

Procedures

Each rater was provided with a researcher-developed questionnaire and a number of guidelines and descriptions which were necessary in evaluation process. It is worth noting that this questionnaire was utilized in Esfandiari and Jamshid (2011) and

its credibility was approved by a number of scholars and professors of translation and research methodology at Sheikh Bahaei University and Azad University of Isfahan.

Questionnaire Design

In the present study, the main focus was detecting and analyzing the effort-increasing factors and in this regard a questionnaire was designed and developed with four main parts: An introduction, the excerpts of the original text, two Farsi translations of each text, and the table for recording the scores. In the introduction part of the questionnaire, the raters were supplied with a brief explanation of the general priciples of RT and a more specific description of the notions of the theory which are helpful in evaluating the texts and check the relevant boxes in the questionnaire. The notion of processing effort that is a key concept in this research was elaborated in the introduction as well. The raters have been provided also with criteria (adapted from vandijk, 1979) to be taken into consideration in assigning scores from 1 to 4 by checking the corresponding box.

The Rating Process

As mentioned above the raters were asked to assign scores 1 to 4 to the selected texts. Score 1 corresponds the highest processing effort and consequently the lowest level of relevance. The score 4 corresponds the lowest amount of processing effort and consequently the highest level of relevance.

The raters were also asked to detect, list, and explain the items in the sample pieces of text which are recognized as the ones that require more effort to be invested by the intended audience.

In order to make the study more precise and narrowed-down, the raters were asked to evaluate the text and assign scores at three separate linguistic levels: phonological level, semantic level, and pragmatic level. For example, at phonological level, there are some words and expressions which increase the processing effort invested by the Persian audience to read the text because of being unfamiliar and unnatural in phonological system of Farsi language.

Results and Discussion

Phonological Level

At this level, *Karimi* gained 3.05 and *Najafi* 3.25 as the means of the scores marked by the raters. *Karimi*'s translation is not of the same style and level of formality of the original text, but his choice of word allows the final product to be familiar for the intended audience and reading it needs no extra effort. However, there are some instances in *Karimi*'s text that are hard to read and need investment of more processing effort. Some examples of these words are *Lastex* (p. 208)(for the word "lastex", p. 107), *Maalt daar* (p. 207)(for the word "malted", p. 107), *Nekbat baar* (p. 5)(for the word "lousy", p. 1),*Gharaney zan* (p. 114)(for the word "clarinet player", p. 60), and *Seaans* (p. 115)(for the word "show", p. 60).

Najafi's translation is on the other hand more homogenous and has hard-to-read words, but in his translation there are also some words and expressions like *Khoonraveshe doghabzeh* (p. 5)(for the expression "hemorrhages apiece", p. 1), and *Mozakhrafate deyvid kaaperfildi* (p. 5)(for the phrase "David Copperfield kind of crap", p. 1) that needs more effort to be read by the Persian audience. Another point in *Najafi*'s translation is overusing slangs, darns, curses and informal words and expressions that although they help the translator to preserve the style of the original text, reading the written form of such verbal expressions needs a high amount of effort. Some examples of

these kind of words are *Chaarom* (p. 133)(for the word "fourth", p. 107), *Tiyatr* (p. 124)(for the word "theater", p. 99), *Miyoon term* (p. 8)(for the word "midterm", p. 3), and *Tonboon* (p. 11)(for the word "pajamas", p. 6).

There seems to be two tentative explanations for what happens in reading the terms which are originally the spoken utterances that makes them hard to read and increases the amount of processing effort invested by the audience. The first is the fact that based on the common expectations, the reader expects to face the written form of the words, and usually the formal from of them. Therefore, encountering such forms, the reader has to put more effort to establish a new set of rules which are helpful in reading the forms that do not obey the conventions of the written utterances. The second explanations for the increase of the processing effort in such cases refers to the fact that when the audience faces a written text in a language of which s/he has good mastery, especially in the native or mother tongue, s/he usually reads the words logographically rather than alphabetically. Therefore, when the reader faces a word whose logo is not familiar, s/he has to invest more processing effort to read the word alphabet by alphabet. In the case of overusing spoken form of words in the text, like the words *Charom* instead of *Chaharom* (absence of the letter H) (means "fourth"), *Shaso Panj* instead of *Shasto Panj* (absence of the letter T) (means "sixty five"), and *Maam* instead of *Maa Ham* (absence of the letter H) (means "me too"), the reader reads the logographically unfamiliar word alphabetically and then recognizes the word as a morpheme or bundle of morphemes. Something which is worth mentioning is that having problem in reading is to some extent normal in literary texts, especially the ones whose style is original and is used for the first time by the writer. Another point to be mentioned in regard to the first problem mentioned above is that it is the problem which is faced in the first pages of a book like *The Catcher in the Rye* and the more the reader goes ahead throughout the novel, the less s/he fells uneasy in reading the words which are considered abnormal in common conventions. Then, one the reader establishes new conventions, reading will need less processing effort.

Another group of words which are hard to read is the words which includes hard-to-pronounce phonetic pairs like in the case of words which include tow-consonant pairs one consonant of which is /l/ like in the words *Roberta Vaalsh* (consonants /l/ and /ʃ/), *Elekton Hilz* (consonants /l/ and /z/), and *Maalt Daar* (consonants /l/ and /t/).

Semantic Level

The mean of the scores gained by *Karimi* and *Najafi*'s translations are 2.55 and 2.95 respectively in semantic level. Some factors like using culturally and socially bound words and expressions like the terms related to drinking, dating, and dancing; word for word translation of some sentences and expressions; using some social and cultural taboos that are mostly avoided in Farsi novels; make *Karimi*'s translation a hard to grasp and interpret text that needs high amount of addressee's processing effort. All of the mentioned factors are applicable to *Najafi*'s translation too. But the homogenous text of his translation and professional creation of a translation of the same level of formality as the original text, makes the reader to ignore these shortcomings. In other words the high contextual effect of the text compensates the extra effort's influence on the total level of relevance.

Other instances of the words whose meaning is totally or partially unknown for the Persian audience are the word *Teramva* (for "subway") which is an unnatural word except for the audience who is good at foreign languages, *Metres-ha* (for "dates") used by *Karimi* which is completely unknown for the audience and seems it had been the common term in Iran for "girl friend" about 4 decades ago.

Conclusions

In the present study the researcher was after detecting some of the factors in Farsi translations of English novels, at two levels of phonology and semantics, which are believed to increase the amount of processing effort invested by the audience to read the text and infer the meaning conveyed by that. The higher the load of such effort-increasing factors in the text, the less worthy the text will be to picked up by the audience.

Regarding the notions of Relevant theory related to this study, and the results which have been discussed above, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. There are some specific factors uses of which in Farsi translations of English novels result in increasing the required processing effort and consequently decreasing the relevance of the translated text for the Persian audience. In terms of phonology, the hard-to-pronounce words and expressions which are consequently hard-to-read ones which are not consistent with the natural phonological patterns of Farsi are determining factors in the high amount of effort needed in reading the texts translated into this language. At semantics level, there are cultural specific concepts which are completely or partially unknown to the Persian audience. The terms and expressions related to alcoholic drinks, dating, and dancing are instances of the items which include the culturally inappropriate meanings; the concepts which are unfamiliar for the audience in the context of the present Iranian culture. It is worth noting that the conclusions drawn in the present study were in line with those of Esfandiari and Jamshid 2011.

2. There are some procedures which are helpful for the translators to avoid the effort-increasing factors in the text. Some of these procedures are avoiding the words and expressions whose phonological structure and pattern is hard to be analyzed and perceived for the Persian audience and making necessary adjustments in this regard; avoiding overuse of spoken form of the words in the written text; eliminating the concepts which are unknown or less familiar for the Persian audience and substituting them with appropriate items.

The findings of this study are applicable in a number of areas including literary translation, especially translation of novel into Farsi, translator training, and policy making. In the case of translating literary works especially English novels into Farsi, the items listed as effort-increasing ones in this study can be considered by translators as a list of to-be-avoided factors whose presence in the text will result in lower level of relevance of the text for the Persian audience. The other area the conclusions of this study can be applied in is translator training programs where the translators are provided with guidelines for eliminating their errors in the process of translation. Policy making, individually or in the level of organizations and governments, is one of the crucial parts of each translation project. Taking the findings of the present study into consideration can enhance the relevance level of the final product of the projects for the intended audience.

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