

A Comparative-Interpretative Study of the Role of Native and Non-Native Translators in Preserving National Identity

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Extended abstract

1. Introduction

Identity has its roots in a nation's culture. Persian translators have strived to render a lot of Persian literary works into English in order to introduce Persian culture to the world. However, not all Persian works are rendered for the first time by Persian translators.

Normally, native translators are expected to have full familiarity with their own culture. But, the question is whether their acquaintance would result in a more accurate rendition of culture-specific terms or not? Can it be claimed that native translators are more capable than non-natives as far as the preservation of cultural values is concerned?

In order to answer the aforementioned questions, the present paper have studied and compared two English translations of Sadeq Hedayat's "*The Blind Owl*", one by the native English D. P. Costello (1957) and the other by the native Persian Iraj Bashiri (2013).

2. Methodology

The present study is descriptive in nature. Newmark's (1988) model has been employed as the method of analysis of the data gathered from the comparison of the two English translations of "*The Blind Owl*", one by a native and the other by a non-native.

The following are the different translation procedures offered by Newmark (1988): Transference, Naturalization, Cultural equivalent, Functional equivalent, Descriptive equivalent, Componential analysis, Synonymy, Through-translation, Shifts or transpositions, Recognized translation, Compensation, Modulation, Paraphrase, Couplets, and Notes.

The study was carried out through several steps:

- Persian culture-specific concepts in *The Blind Owl* and their English equivalents were identified and classified into different cultural categories.
- The mistranslated and untranslated CSCs were identified.

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- Procedures employed in the translation of each CSC were specified according to the classification of procedures proposed by Newmark (1988a).
- Finally, a number of untranslated or challenging cultural terms were meticulously investigated.

3. Discussion

The biggest barrier in the way of translation seems to be the problem of finding congruent equivalents for source language culture-specific concepts in the target language.

Scrutinizing the two translations of *The Blind Owl* revealed that about 20 terms were left untranslated. The words “azal” and “abad” were omitted by Costello, but rendered by Bashiri as “the beginning of eternity” and “the end of eternity”, respectively. It is noteworthy to mention that according to the *Oxford Dictionary* 'eternity' has no beginning and no end. Although Bashiri's equivalent does not seem to be an accurate one, his attempt to find an equivalent, instead of omitting it, as Costello did, should be appreciated. 'Pre-eternity' and 'post-eternity' may also be considered as better equivalents for *azal* and *abad*.

The term “tanbur” is rendered by the two translators as “lute”. However, Bashiri resorts to the following supplementary information in footnote to offer a more accurate rendition: “Setar or sitar is a lute-like instrument with a long, fretted neck, a resonating gourd or gourds, and usually six playing strings and a number of strings that vibrate sympathetically”. Via the procedure of “note”, Bashiri explains the differences between the two cultural terms and reminds the TT reader that “tanbur” is not the same as “lute”; it has its own specifications, and it has its own independent identity, it is just “like” a lute in English culture. Moreover, Costello, not making much effort to show the differences between the ST and TT culture-specific terms, rendered the three terms related to Persian musical instruments “setar”, “tonbak”, and “sanj”, respectively as “sitar”, “drum”, and “cymbals”.

The term *juki*, being rendered by Costello as 'fakir', refers to the word *jugi*, which is derived from *yuga*. Remember that *juki* is an Indian ascetic, not a beggar.

The word *faghih* is translated as 'a jurist' and 'an interpreter of the law' by Bashiri and Costello, respectively. In Islamic culture, a person who becomes *faghih* has certain characteristics (e.g. being a man, and being just and righteous, etc.). The term *faghih* is a CSC. It is categorized in the realm of religion and is fully understood in Islamic culture, but “lawyer” or “jurist” is a relatively neutral word and is not categorized in the same realm.

4. Conclusion

By analyzing the data presented in this study, it was found that the procedures ‘functional equivalent’ and ‘notes’ would have a higher potential for conveying the concepts underlying the CSCs embedded in *The Blind Owl*. Moreover, it can be claimed that the combination of these procedures would result in a more accurate understanding of the CSCs than other procedures.

Costello, comparing to Bashiri, seemed to have been less concerned with cultural issues and preservation of national identity. He had majorly selected English cultural goods as an equivalent for the original Persian cultural goods as if there is actually no difference between them. When an English audience reads his translation, he may think with himself that the goods in the source culture (SC) are exactly like the ones in the target culture (TC), or worse, the SC has no independent identity and the superior TC has exported the goods to the SC. Although it seems a little bit exaggerated, through such an analysis, the work of Bahiri, in particular, and any native translator, in general, becomes conspicuous. All in all, native translators are likely to attempt more than non-natives to demonstrate their national identities and preserve their own cultural values.

Key words: comparative-interpretative literature; culture-specific terms; national identity; native translator; non-native.

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