Slang Translation: A Comparative Study of J. D. Salinger’s “The Catcher in the Rye”

Habibollah Mashhady
English Department, University of Zabol, Iran

Maryam Pourgalavi
Department of Foreign Languages, Khorasgan (Isfahan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran

Abstract—This study aims to investigate the slang translation in dialogues from English into Persian using the model proposed by Venuti. For this end, “The Catcher in the Rye” with its two Persian renderings by Najafi (2010) and Karimi (2010) are considered. The findings obtained from the analysis of the related data show that translation of slangs based on the model proposed by Venuti does not convey the meaning as the target readers expect; a fact that shows the shortcomings of Venuti’s model.

Index Terms—literary translation, slang, dialogue, domestication, foreignization, culture

I. INTRODUCTION

Slang is one of the most arguable issues in language. Many scholars have been working on it for years (Hunsinger, 2011; Weintraub, 2004; Jackson, 2003; Eble, 1996; Allen, 1998; Flexner, 1960; Anderson and Trudgill, 1990; Strenstörm, 1999). It is not an entirely new concept (Cowden, 1925; Roberts, 2008); nevertheless, it is one of those phenomena that should be considered. Some scholars also believe that slang is a language with a known style and is used by a certain social group; for instance, teenagers may use a special slang which cannot be fully understood by the people standing outside (Leech and Svartvik 1981; Allen, 1998). In literary translation, translation of slang causes serious problems because slang is language and culture bound and never occurs in simple or denotative meanings (Stolt, 2010; Eriksen 2010). Particularly, when translating literary works that belong to two wholly culturally different countries may be indispensably and instantly recognized. In order to deal with this kind of problems in translation, different strategies are used by translators, so it is useful to discuss and categorize these strategies in order to help translators to make the best and appropriate decisions while translating.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

For the aim of this study, a novel called “The Catcher in the Rye” by Salinger was considered and the problems of slang translation were investigated based on Venuti's model. In spite of the copious translation papers and theses in Iran, few are related to translation of slang, thus regarding the above-mentioned novel in which so many slang expressions are used, it was found to be a suitable topic for demonstrating the success or failure of slang translations in the book.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Lamberts (1998) believes that the aim of literary translation is to meet a need in the literary culture of the target language; so to deal with these needs and the translation strategies applies to discuss them is useful for explaining the literary relationships and conventions, and consequently, the literary translation. Moreover, he emphasizes the impact of translated literary works in creating the dynamics of discourse and culture. He mentions that the nature of literary translation makes scholars consider and investigate the conditions under which translation is produced. Therefore, it is not easy to study state of translated literary works especially in terms of the visibility or invisibility of literary translation. According to Lambert, when a translation is produced in an explicit way, it is regarded as a visible translation and when it is disguised as an original work, it is considered as an invisible translation and for this reason, many foreign literary works remain unknown. He demonstrates that translations which are invisible indicate the valuable position of translated works which play a key role in the development of the target literature (Venuti, 1995 and Gentzler, 2001).

Culture is another key issue which should be considered in translation of literary texts. Snell-Hornby (1990) introduces a new concept called ‘the cultural turn’ and says that this is a viewpoint that regards translation as a cultural and political issue not merely as a textual one. Bassnett and Lefevere (1990) explain that cultural turn emphasizes on the relationships between language and culture and show that how culture influences and constrains translation and contains other areas such as history and conventions. Other scholars believe that translating cultural words and expressions in literary works is difficult due to cultural implications in translation (Newmark, 1988; Nida, 1964; Bassnett, 1991).
Concerning the conception of culture and translation, Toury (1978) believes that translation involves both language and culture (Schaffner, 1995). Thus, the way of treating the cultural aspects of a SL and finding the most appropriate technique for a successful conveying of these aspects in the TL is one of the most problems of translators. Baker (1992) states that sometimes in translation, a SL word express a social or religious concept which is not known in target culture, and it usually occurs due to cultural differences in languages which this cause problems in translation from SL into TL. Venuti (1995) notes that because of differences between SL and TL, linguistic and cultural similarities should be found. In addition, he believes that translation should emphasize on cultural differences. On the other hand, Shuttleworth & Cowie (1997) argue that cultural approach in translation is used for anthropological studies.

A. Invisibility of the Translator

One of the significant areas in the recent translation theories has been devoted to the fact that whether the translator should remain invisible. Venuti in his book, The Translator's Invisibility (1995) discusses invisibility in the canon of English translation and says that the translator should be visible by resisting and changing the condition under which translation is produced or theorized, particularly in English-speaking countries. Here this scope is restricted to literary translation, where more criticism is produced. He discusses invisibility with two types of translation strategy, domestication and foreignization. With regard to cultural issues in translation, Venuti's notions of foreignization and domestication provide a useful conceptual approach in the area of intercultural transfer. These strategies concern both the choice of text to translate and the translation method. Venuti's theory is based on Friedrich Schleiermacher's essay (1813/1992) “On the different methods of translating” where he introduces two concepts of foreignization and domestication. Venuti (1995) says that domesticated translation mirrors the author, considers the foreign text as the original text and the translated work as a derivative text. He says that foreignized translation can show the cultural differences or otherness in such a way the gains and losses in translation are shown and the cultural gaps are highlighted.

B. Slang

In the relevant literature, most definitions of slang show a tendency towards a sociological view of the phenomenon (Eble, 1996; Allen, 1998; Mattiello, 2008; Coleman, 2004). Roberts (2008) says that the slang words and expressions were frequently used in ancient Greek and Roman literature. Flexner (1960) says that slang is a subtype of vernacular language that is considered as a level of usage and is not accepted as good and formal usage by the majority. Dumas and Lighter (1978) reject the classical definition of slang and explain a 'true slang' devalues a formal speech or writing and it is regarded as a taboo term in ordinary speech with people who belong to a higher social class. Leech and Svartvik (1981) define slang as a language which is not unknown and is used by people who belong to a particular social group, for instance teenagers. People outside a particular social group cannot fully understand slang. Slang shows the intimacy and solidarity of the ones who use it. Anderson and Trudgill (1990) remark that slang is a wider concept than vernacular language, as it is not strictly indigenous local speech. It is, instead, a hybrid language and often permeated with foreign lexical material. Coleman (2004) notes that slang is not long-lived and is used to specify in-groups and out-groups. In this regard, Mattiello (2005) mentions that sometimes, slang is used to show the solidarity or intimacy among the members of a group and then he distinguishes between general and specific form of slang. General slang is used to violate the standard usage and is not restricted to groups, however, specific slang is used by people with common age and experience like college students.

III. This Study

This is a descriptive library research conducted in the form of “case study”. It discusses slang translation in dialogues both in English and Persian languages.

A. Materials

The corpus of this study is a body of slangs in dialogues extracted from Salinger's “The Catcher in the Rye” with two Persian renderings, one by Najafi (first edition in 1984 and the eighth edition in 2010) and the other by Karimi (first edition in 2002 and the eighth edition in 2010).

B. Procedures

The aim of this study is to investigate the extent to which slangs in dialogues are maintained in translation using the model proposed by Venuti. Based on the direction of data analysis, English text with its two renderings was thoroughly read in a way that the unit of analysis was a paragraph as a context. Then, 40 challengeable dialogue items were randomly selected and discussed. The next step was determination of the translators' strategies to translate the items into Persian; for this purpose, Venuti's (1995) theory of translation was selected as the theoretical framework of the study.

C. Criterion for Persian Slang: Farhange Farsi e Amianeh

Abolhassan Najafi is an Iranian writer and translator and a member of the Iranian Academy. He is the author of Farhang-e Farsi-ye Amiyâne, a dictionary published by Niloofar Publishers in 2008. According to Bateni (2008), citations and examples were derived from sources of the past 80 years. Bateni believes that although this book is not an appropriate alternative for general Persian dictionaries but sometimes it is badly needed.

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IV. RESULTS

As noted earlier, this study aims to analyze English culture-bound words and expressions in the two Persian renderings of “The Catcher in the Rye” to see whether they are domesticated or foreignized. To this end, examples from “The Catcher in the Rye” are provided in both English and Persian (see Appendix A).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Translation Procedure</th>
<th>Translation Strategies applied for Each Example</th>
<th>Percentage of Translation Strategies applied for Each Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1st Translator</td>
<td>2nd Translator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domesticated</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreignized</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutralized</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Untranslated</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domesticated-Foreignized</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As it is demonstrated in Table (1) and Figure (1), it can be understood that in the first translation, 32 items (80%) out of 40 were domesticated, two items (5%) were foreignized, three items (7.5%) were neutralized, three items (7.5%) were untranslated and no item was domesticated-foreignized. However, in the second translation, 36 items (90%) were domesticated, two items (5%) were foreignized, one item (2.5%) was neutralized, no items were untranslated and one item (2.5%) was domesticated-foreignized.

V. DISCUSSION

Based on Venuti’s model, this study aims to decide how successful the two Persian translations had been in preserving the slangs of the novel and to discuss the major problems in translating slang in the English novel “The Catcher in the Rye” using Venuti’s model. To this end, 40 slang items were randomly regarded, compared and analyzed based on the Venuti’s model. The results showed that in the case of preserving slang items in the translation of dialogues, based on the model proposed by Venuti and with regard to the results of table (2), both translations are similar in their application of the procedures in preserving slang items (both of them 5%). The results also indicate that the most frequently employed translation strategy for transferring slang in “The Catcher in the Rye” in both translations is domestication, although it seems that Najafi’s translation is more domesticated than the Karimi’s translation. Since there is a trend of domestication in the target text, it attests to the fluency of the translation and the translator’s invisibility. It should be considered that although many readers understand and accept translations which are domesticated, the cultural and linguistic features of the ST are sacrificed for the naturalness and fluency of the translation. However, using foreignizing strategy can reproduce the original picture and truthfully transform the human atmosphere and spiritual essence of the ST, especially to the parts where the source culture is different from the target cultures. It is good for combining two cultures and is beneficial for keeping the characteristics of the SL texts. Nevertheless, it may cause an information overload and cultural shock, and thus may be difficult for the TT readers to accept and understand the translation.

Concerning translation of slang, it is arguably the most complex and problematic task for translators because of the linguistic and cultural differences between TL and SL and it is difficult to remain faithful to the original when
translating as Venuti proposes. Slang cannot be translated literally or using the foreignization strategy because it has to do with culture and should be translated to convey the intended meaning and produce the intended effect. Therefore, it is worthwhile to note that with different translation purposes, translators should choose different translation strategies. Because both domestication and foreignization entail inevitable loses in the process of translation. Thus, translation strategies should be adopted with regard to the condition under which a translation occurs.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

This paper provides an in depth analysis of the extent to which the slang items in the English novel “The Catcher in the Rye” preserved in translation using Venuti’s model and discuss the major problems in translating slang in this novel. The results of this study show that slang items are considered to be a major challenge in the translation process, since it is not just a matter of rendering words, but rather a transforming of other’s culture. Although the versions translated by means of foreignization preserve the cultural flavor and formal features of the ST, show the cultural diversity, signal the linguistic as well as cultural differences, and help the target readers which is their purpose of reading translated works to understand the foreign culture, it may be difficult for the TT readers to accept, understand and enjoy the translation. Since in the translation of slangs as culture-specific items, it is better to find target equivalents for the unfamiliar and unknown terms instead of remaining them untranslated or using neutral terms, and if the translators cannot find the appropriate target equivalents, they can use foreignization strategy and retain the cultural terms so that the target language readers can understand and understand the source language culture. Finally, it should be emphasized that neither domestication nor foreignization are absolutely used in translation process and they should be concurrently used to produce a cultural and understandable translation for the target readers.

VII. IMPLICATIONS

This study focuses on translating vernacular language, exclusively slang, and shows how the translators deal with it according to the Venuti’s model. It indicates that slang does with culture and should be translated to convey the intended meaning and produce the intended effect particularly in the literary texts. The translators should discover the concrete meanings of slang because there are some different understandings within different cultures found in slang. Understanding slang words is not as easy as it seems because some slang meanings cannot be discovered in dictionaries. For that reason, studies that focus on slang translation are urgently needed. The findings of this study will be useful for the literary translators in order to choose the appropriate translation strategies. It also provides some insights into cultural factors which determine the strategies applied in the process of translating literary texts; observing the cultures of both source and target language is indispensable and requires a deep knowledge of the linguistic and cultural features of both the SL and TL. This study provides a useful framework to both translation critics and students of translation studies, too.

APPENDIX A. ST Slang Items and Their TT Equivalents Based on the Translation of the Two Translators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>SL text</th>
<th>Karimi’s Translation</th>
<th>TS</th>
<th>Najafi’s Translation</th>
<th>TS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Oh . . . well, about Life being a game and all. And how you should play it according to the rules. He was pretty nice about it. I mean he didn’t hit the ceiling or anything.”</td>
<td>که فکت که زندگی بسیار سوخته و آینه خود را نگرفته است. و این حق را با لحاظ شناختی ای به نظر می‌رسد. اگر این اتفاق را انتظار داشتید.</td>
<td>این حق را با لحاظ شناختی ای به نظر می‌رسد. اگر این اتفاق را انتظار داشتید.</td>
<td>د</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>“If I’m not mistaken, I believe you also had some difficulty at the Whooton School and at Elkon Hills.” He didn’t say it just sarcastic, but sort of nasty, too.</td>
<td>اگر این اتفاق را انتظار داشتید.</td>
<td>اگر این اتفاق را انتظار داشتید.</td>
<td>د</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Old Spenser asked me something then, but I didn’t hear him. I was thinking about old Hass. “What, sir?” I said. Do you have any particular qualms about leaving Pencey?</td>
<td>بعد از این اتفاق، چهره‌ی او هم در نظر هم می‌گرفت.</td>
<td>بعد از این اتفاق، چهره‌ی او هم در نظر هم می‌گرفت.</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>“I left the goddam foils and stuff on the subway.” I still didn’t look up at him. “On the subway, for Chrissake! Ya lost them, ya mean?”</td>
<td>شوونیم چه کاره‌ی دیگری را در نظر داشتید.</td>
<td>شوونیم چه کاره‌ی دیگری را در نظر داشتید.</td>
<td>Un</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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“I don’t know, and I don’t give a
damn. How ‘bout sitting down or
something, Ackley kid? You’re right
in my goddam light.” He didn’t like
it when you called him “Ackley kid.”

He shoved my book back with his
hand so that he could see the name of
it. “Any good?” he said.

“This sentence I’m reading is
terrific.”

“He sat down in a chair. Just
always on the arm. “Where the
hellja get that hat?” he said.

“I got about a hundred pages to read
tomorrow,” he said.

“Where the hellja get that hat?” he
asked.

“I’m crazy about you. He told me
he thinks you’re a goddamn prince,” I
said.

“I got about a hundred pages to read
for history,” he said.

“How ‘bout writing a composition for
me, for English? I’ll let the
church if I don’t get the goddamn
thing in by Monday, the reason I
ask. How ‘bout it?”

“No kidding,” he said.

“I’m a very weak guy. “Now
that’s to the point,” I said.

“Don’t give me any of that crap.
I’m not going to sit here and
listen to you.”

“Want me to cut out,
though.”

“Where the hellja get that hat?” he
said.

“Be a buddy. Be a buddy, okay?”

“Just don’t do it too good, is all,”
he said.

“That sonuvabitch Hartzel
thinks you’re a hot-shot in
English, and he knows you’re my
roommate. So I mean don’t stick all
the commas and stuff in the right
place.”

“Je-sus-Christ.” He put down his
razor, and all of a sudden jerked his
arms up and sort of broke my hold
on him. It was a very strong guy. I’m
a very weak guy. “Now cut out
the crap,” he said.

“She had a lousy childhood. I’m
not kidding.” That didn’t interest Stradlater,
though.

“No kidding, now. Do that
composition for me,” he said. He had
his coat on, and he was all ready to
go.

“You crazy? How the hell could we
go to New York if she only signed out
for ninety-five?”

“That’s tough.”

“Yeah, you may be getting the hell
out of here, but I have to stick around
long enough to graduate.”

I ignored him. I really did.

“What’d you do?” I said. “Give her
the time in Ed Banky’s goddam
car?” My voice was shaking
something awful.

“What a thing to say. Want me to
wash your mouth out with soup?”

“Get your dirty stinking moron
knees off my chest.”

“If I letcha up, will you keep your
mouth shut?”
“Now shut up, Holden, God damn it—I’m warning ya,” he said—I really had him going. “If you don’t shut up, I’m gonna slam ya one.”

“Listen, he said, “I don’t care what you say about me or anything, but if you start making cracks about my goddamn religion, for Chrissake—"

“—but that’s all I’m gonna shell out," he said. "Never any of them things. I

“—all those things. I mean after you go to college and all, and if we should get married and all. There’ll be oodles of marvelous places to go to. You’re just—"
34. “Did you ever get fed up?" I said. “I mean did you ever get scared that everything was going to go lousy unless you did something? I mean do you like school, and all that stuff?”

35. “It’s a terrific boring.”

36. “...After a while, he’d be sitting back there and then he’d start interrupting what old Spencer was saying to crack a lot of corny jokes...”

37. “I got my damn bags at the station,‖ said. “Listen. You got any dough, shopping at all yet?‖ I said. “Listen. You got any dough, I got my damn bags at the station,‖ "Just my Christmas dough. For my kids,‖ he said. “I mean did you ever get scared that everything was going to go lousy unless you did something? I mean..." "He ain’t my friend."

38. “Can’t your friend talk?‖ I said. “He ain’t my friend. He’s my bruda.”

39. “Listen, do you want to go for a walk?‖ I asked her. “Do you want to take a walk down to the zoo? If I let you not go back to school this afternoon and go for walk, will you cut out this crazy stuff?"

40. “I’m not mad at you anymore,‖ she said. “I know. Hurry up—the thing’s gonna start again.”

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Habibollah Mashhady is an assistant professor of Applied Linguistics in the Department of English Language, University of Zabol. He teaches various subjects including: Language testing, teaching methodology, research methodology, linguistics and translation courses. He has written many articles published in ISI, ISC and Refereed Journals. His main areas of research are: Language Testing, Language Teaching, and Learning, Discourse Analysis, and Translation Aspects.

Maryam Pourgalavi finished her MA in English translation in Azad University of Khorasgan, Isfahan, in 2012. She received her B.A in English literature in University of Sistan and Baluchestan in Iran in 2004. Her ideas of interest include psychoanalytical criticism, cultural studies in translation and discourse analysis.