

Idioms in Translation of Children's Literature: *The Big Clay Jar* by Moradi Kermani

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Abstract—Translating for children requires special considerations particularly in terms of style. This study addresses use of idioms as a stylistic device and the way they are translated in a children's fiction. Choosing Hooshang Moradi-Kermani's *Khomre* and its English translation by Teimoor Ruhi, the following research questions were formulated: 1. What procedures are used to translate idioms in children's literature? 2. What is the most frequent procedure used in translating idioms in *Khomre* as a children's book? 3. What is the translator's preferred strategy in translating *Khomre* as a piece of children's literature? In order to answer the first and second questions and find out the procedures opted for in translating children's literature, Baker's (1992) proposed procedures were taken as the framework of the study. And to answer the third question Venuti's (2004) model of domestication and foreignization strategies was adopted as the framework. To collect and analyze the data, first, the Persian idioms occurring in the book *Khomreh* as a piece of children's literature and their English translations given by Teimoor Ruhi were identified and paired. Next, the procedures used by the translator were identified and their frequency and percentage were calculated, the results were presented in a table and a chart for subsequent analysis and discussion. Then the general translation strategy related to each example and procedure was identified. The analysis revealed that in the English rendering all the procedures proposed by Baker (1992) as well as a combination of some of the procedures were used. The most frequent procedure was paraphrasing and the general translation strategy applied was that of domestication.

Index Terms—children's literature, Moradi-Kermani, *Khomre*, idioms, translation procedure, domestication, foreignization

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature is composed of those works which seek to attract, impress and influence readers. What makes literature have such qualities may be the language it uses; a kind of masterful use of language that most of the times draws on a different discourse from the ordinary language. Since for a group of people, it is not possible to read some literary texts in their original language, Translation becomes inevitable. One of the most difficult concepts about literary translation is that *how* one says some thing can be as important, sometimes more important, than *what* one says (Landers, 2001, p.7). As in literary texts form may be inseparable from meaning and sometimes this is the form that expresses meaning, form and content should not be treated separately. Therefore, problems faced by literary translators are more visible. Style is one of the defining features of every literary text and should be taken seriously. Unfortunately, it seems that for some translators, the content is more important than style and style has been treated as a secondary matter. For example, Nida and Taber (1969) define translation as an activity which "consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style" (p.12). However, some scholars such as Landers (2001) and Bassnet (2002) have underlined the importance of preserving the style as far as possible while translating. Preserving the style may be of paramount importance in literary translation as in literary texts, form is closely related to the meaning and sometimes the form itself expresses the meaning. Thus, it is the translator's responsibility to preserve the style as faithfully as possible. Hence, a reliable rendering of a literary text is possible only when the translator tries to preserve nuances of the narrative style, features contributing its unique style which discriminate it from ordinary language.

Idioms encompass an integral part of language and according to Baker (1992, p.65) for a translator "the difficulties involved in rendering various aspects of meaning that an idiom or fixed expression conveys into the target language... are much more pronounced in the case of idioms than they are in the case of other fixed expressions". Idioms have a supplementary and particular aspect that simple words do not have: because they are motivated signs and contribute significantly to giving a text local color. And "they give information about conceptions of the world considered by linguistic communities" (Carine: 2005, p. 495). And conveying such local color to a target language is one of the main

concerns of translators. As Lennon (1998) maintains idioms are used to give life and richness to language by taking the existing words, combining them in a new sense and creating new meanings, just like a work of art.

An Idiom has been defined as a set phrase semantically opaque, whose meaning cannot be deduced from the meanings of its constituents. Although it shows an expressive and particular value, and sometimes (a lexical or syntactic) archaic structure, it behaves as a single semantic unit." (Carine, 2005).

According to Karin (2005), children's literature consists of a category of books whose existence depends on the relationship with a particular reading audience: children. And in Hunt's words is comprised only of texts that were "written expressly for children who are recognizably children, with a childhood recognizable today"(Qtd. in Karin 2005) The work of children's literature is supposed to be socialization of young readers and making them familiar with the thought patterns, norms and habits of a specific culture (Metcalf, 2003). And literature is a very effective way to help children understand the world. Even before they can read, their parents and teachers read them stories about people in the other places of the world. Children's literature not only entertains readers, but also broadens their minds and their view of the world helping them to know other cultures, ideas and values. Besides, since cultural elements and idioms (as one of the cultural-bound items) locate the story of a piece of literature in a specific culture and period of time and imply certain values, also considering children as the audience in our case, the most appropriate translation procedure should be sought to convey the source language culture, especially if the work contains considerable use of idioms which contribute to local color of the story and effectiveness of its language. As Larsen (1984, p. 142) points out, "idioms carry certain emotive connotations not expressed in the other lexical items".

II. DISCUSSION

According to Salajeghe (1380; 2002), there are different aspects which contribute to the style of a piece of literature one of which is defamiliarization achieved in MoradiKermami's works through different techniques. One of such techniques is the use of proverbs and local idioms which are abundant in *Khomre*, the work under study.

Shavit (1981) argues that because of the peripheral position of children's literature translators may have greater freedom regarding the text. He believes that, the translator is allowed to manipulate the text in various ways by changing, enlarging, or abridging it or by deleting or adding to it". (p.112). All these procedures are authorized if (1) the text is adjusted to make it appropriate and useful to the child, in accordance with what society considers as educationally "good for the child"; and (2) plot, characterization, and language are adjusted to prevailing society's perceptions of the child ability to read and comprehend (Shavit,1981, p112). Therefore, in order to be considered as an acceptable translated story for children, the final translated text must follow these two principles, or at least not violate them. And these complementary principles determine the progression of the translation process.

Translating children's literature can either bridge cultural differences or obscure them. If culture-bound elements are foreignized, the story can serve as a tool for learning about foreign cultures, and provoke readers to find out more about them. In other words, foreignizing children's stories is a way of attracting attention to cultural matters: to learn what is different and what is shared between the reader's culture and that in which the story is set.

Translators, particularly those of children's literature, can hardly avoid coming across the local color conveyed by the idioms, ignoring of which may distort the style of the narrative. And now the question is how to make this local color accessible to the target text receivers.

This study follows a descriptive framework, building on the theory of descriptive translation studies (DTS) proposed by James S Holmes (1987) which involves describing translating and translation as they are manifested in real world (Holms,1987). From among the three areas of DTS namely product, function and process of translation, this study focuses on the product of translation.

Within the DTS framework, the present study specifically employs Baker's model of translating idioms for identifying the translation procedures used in translating idioms as a stylistic feature of the work under study. And for answering the third research question, that is, to identify the translator's preferred strategy in translating *Khomreh* as a piece of children's literature the researcher has referred to Venuti's (1995) model of translation strategies.

In other words, the study aims at finding the procedures which were mainly adopted by the translator to convey the form and content of the idioms of a fictional text for children, and also surveying the dominant translation strategy adopted. After determining translation procedures used by the translator according to Baker's model (1992) and taking into account procedures and the meaning and form of idioms in both the ST and TT the corresponding strategies were recognized according to the procedures introduced by Venuti (1995). Looking at translation from a cultural point of view, he proposes the concepts of "domestication" and "foreignization" as means of providing general classification for translation strategies; on the one hand, there is foreignization, the translator's visibility and resistance that tends towards the author and the source text, and on the other hand, there is domestication, the translator's invisibility, fluency and transparency that relies on the target culture and readers.

Domestication refers to the target-culture-oriented translation in which unusual expressions to the target culture are turned into some familiar ones so as to make the translated text intelligible and easy for the target readers. If the translation is to provide a smoother text without many difficulties for common readers, domesticating method should be taken, it will overcome the cultural barriers as well as the language ones for providing an easy reading. In domesticating

translation, the translator tries to make the target text familiar and natural for the readers, so s/he effaces any cultural differences in his/her translation.

Foreignization is a source culture-oriented translation which tries to keep the foreign flavor and coloring as much as possible in order to transfer the source language and culture into the target one. If a translation is to widen the target addressee's vision and to introduce the source culture into the target culture, the translator may choose foreignization. In this way, the source culture can be transferred into the target culture and further enrich the target culture as well as language. In other words, foreignization means preserving cultural or linguistic differences, protecting the source text from the "violent colonizing effect of the TT and the TL". (p.147)

III. MATERIAL

For the purpose of this study, *Khomre* has been selected, which is a Persian literary text written for children by Houshang Moradikermani in 2003 and translated into English by Dr. Teimoor Roohi. Moradi-Kermani is a famous Iranian writer who has written many award-winning books for children. One of the defining characteristics of his style is the use of idioms in his stories, particularly in the story *Khomre*, to add local color and render the language more familiar and effective.

IV. RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

The sample comprises altogether 292 idioms appearing in the book *Khomre* identified according to the working definitions of an idiom and intuition of the researcher. Also in order to examine the correct meaning and see whether they can be classified as idioms the researcher has enjoyed consulting the supervisor as well as some monolingual dictionaries both in Persian and English. The following table shows the result of such data analysis in which P1 is used to show idiomatic translation, P2 represents using an idiom in the target language with the same meaning of the original idiom but different form, P3 represents paraphrase, P4 shows literal translation and finally P5 is used to refer to omission.

TABLE.1.
FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE OF TRANSLATION PROCEDURES

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Frequency	7	62	180	17	27
Percentage	2.38%	20.81%	61.43%	5.80%	9.21

And the following chart shows the percentage frequency of each procedure for idiom translation in the book *Khomre* as a piece of children's literature:

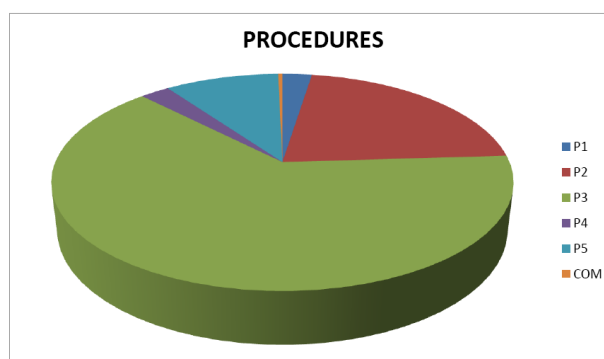


Chart 1. Translation Procedures

V. SOME EXAMPLES

♦ The expression *زبان بسته* which is used figuratively in the source text, once is omitted in the target text using the fifth procedure and in other cases is translated as *poor innocent animal* and *poor animal* using the third procedure and making the target text domesticated as well.

♦ The Persian sentence *آب دهان بچه ها راه افتاد* is a Persian idiom meaning "to make others jealous and regretful". The English equivalent given by the translator; *make the other's mouth to water* for this Persian idiom is also an idiom conveying the same image as the original idiom. So the procedure here is that of idiomatic one and the strategy tends toward domestication.

♦ The equivalent given for the Persian idiom *به گردن کسی انداختن* in *شرش می افتد گردن ما* in one case is "to be the cause of shamefulness to somebody" and in another case is "to put the blame on somebody" which are chosen according to context and in the latter case an idiom from the target language is used that has the same meaning as the original one but

with a different image and form, so the adopted translation procedure is P2, and in the first case an explanation of the source text idiom is given and the procedure is P2. In both cases the strategy tends toward domestication.

♦ An example of paraphrase procedure in which the translator explains the meaning of a source text idiom is the translation of *عبداللهی چه بادی کرده بود* as *how he showed off and boasted at school*. As it can be seen *باد کردن* is used figuratively because the meaning of the whole phrase, *to be proud and show off* can not be deduced from the literal meaning of its individual parts, which is to swallow up, but in the English phrase there is not any figurative meaning nor idiomaticity. And the strategy used here is again domestication, since no sign of source culture or ST style is transferred to the target text.

♦ Translating the Persian idiom *عین مرغ سرشان را کرده بودند زیر بالشان* as *they had put their heads down like the hens putting their heads under their wings* which is not an idiom; it is a clear example of the forth procedure, literal translation. As it can be seen in this case and other cases of literal translation, this procedure foreignizes the text.

As far as the first question is concerned it was shown that the procedures were the same as the procedures used to translate idioms in adult's literature, namely; idiomatic translation, using an idiom in the target language with the same meaning but different form, paraphrase, literal translation and omission. However, in one case the translator has utilized a combination of two of the above procedures, which seems an effective approach, since by adhering to this procedure the translator can both transfer the culture and the meaning of the original as far as the combined procedures are literal translation and paraphrase. Using literal translation one can transfer the local color and culture of the original and paraphrasing will make the meaning of the original text accessible to the target readers.

The research verifies Baker's hypothesis that paraphrase or giving the meaning of the idiom in the target language is the most commonly used procedure in dealing with idioms, and the frequency of the used procedures in the work under study showed that her Hypothesis is true in the case of children's literature too. This procedure is adopted in translation when the translator cannot find a similar idiom in the target language or she/he believes using an idiom is not suitable for stylistic matters. Adhering to this procedure surely will make the target lose its original impact and cultural significance; however, it seems to be the safest procedure when the two languages and cultures are very different.

The translator's preferred strategy was that of domestication, which shows that he has favored fluency and transparency over local coloring. Opting for domestication, the translator of the work under study opposes the current belief that domesticating a text for children is no more useful and acceptable, because foreignizing children's literature will make children learn more about other cultures and communities. And it is not clear why the foreignness of a text for children should be neglected in translation today. But an important point to remember is that every foreign word or concept which is unfamiliar to a child should be defined and described in footnotes.

Finally, one must take into account the fact that, when choosing the procedures for translating local idioms the aim of the translation must be kept in mind. Should it have the same effect as the original, or should it have the same function in target culture as the other translations of the same type have? Domesticating a text for children is not acceptable, if the purpose is to familiarize them with other cultures.

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