

# Methods of Translating Different Cultural Categories and Elements in Nahj ul Balagheh

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**Abstract**—One of the challenges and difficulties of translation, especially literary and religious texts is finding their equivalent because to make a translation understandable, both the interpreter and the audience must have access to presuppositions prior to entering the text. Vladimir Ivir is among the scholars suggesting seven approaches for translating cultural categories through which and after a survey of other examples of Nahj ul Balagheh, definition, literal translation, substitution, lexical creation, omission, addition, borrowing and on occasions substitution are considered among favorable approaches. As regards to the translation of Nahj ul Balagheh, interpreters such as Shahidi, Faghihi, and above all Faiz ul Islam come first, followed by Ayati and Dashti; Allameh Jaffari's translation has not been as successful.

**Index Terms**—Nahj ul Balagheh, cultural categories, translation, literal translation, omission, deletion

## I. INTRODUCTION

The importance of translation as a means to overcome language and cultural boundaries especially when it comes to religious texts such as Quran and Nahj ul Balagheh is a fact known to everyone. Because of their spiritual values and the lessons they give, these sorts of books play an important role in dialogue between cultures and civilizations.

Translation is not just limited to translating lexicons or grammatical junctions. The primary purpose of any translation is conveying the message or idea; so, this very objective must not be forsaken for grammaticality or word by word translation. Syntax, eloquence, grammar and equilibrium come next (Gholizadeh, 2004, 84).

Regarding translating religious text some believe that the source language is just like a flourishing flower whose translation into a target language makes it wither (Anis, 1958, 172). Actually translating a religious text to any other language is similar to walking on the edge.

Undoubtedly, Nahj ul Balagheh which is beyond human words is of great spiritual importance for all religions. For the spread of Islam, its translation seems of grave importance. If its translation is not based on prevalent and accepted translation theories, its outcome would be catastrophic and in its worst, it would lead to ignoring or misunderstanding the notions and teachings given in Nahj ul Balagheh. Among the most excruciating tasks in translating holy texts is finding exact equivalent for cultural elements and categories. However, up to now there are many weaknesses and gaps in the translations available.

Based on Vladimir Ivir approaches for translating cultural categories from source language, this paper tries to present the most appropriate methods for translating Nahj ul Balagheh cultural categories and elements. It is worth mentioning that after careful analysis of weaknesses and gaps, the only literary and invaluable work was "Finding Cultural Categories Equivalents in Translation of Nahj ul Balagheh" by Amini. Other texts in English were also used such as "Theories of Translation" by Nader Haghani and "Procedures and Strategies for the Translation of Cultural Categories" by Vladimir Ivir.

In this paper, first it has been tried to find the best approach or approaches for translating cultural categories for Nahj ul Balagheh. Secondly, this paper focuses on the translation of cultural categories in Nahj ul Balagheh by different interpreters; however, the focus still would be on finding the best way for translating cultural categories and finally, it would try to introduce the most practical approach for translating cultural categories and elements.

## II. THE CONCEPT OF TRANSLATION

Translation is the process of translating words or text from one language into another (Ibn Manzoor, 1978, 66). Nida believes translation consists of 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 (Shams Abadi, 2001, 29).

## III. TYPES OF TRANSLATION

Newmark divides translation into semantic and communicative. Although he states that the majority of texts require communicative rather than semantic translation, communicative translation is strictly functional and usually the work of a team. Semantic translation is linguistic and encyclopedic and is generally the work of one translator. It also takes into account the aesthetic value of the source language text (Nazemin, 2002, 25).

The difference between communicative and semantic translation is the difference between message and meaning. Meaning deals with context, while message deals with the effect.

In translation process, some have taken into account hyper-textual elements such as context, and cultural categories and elements. Translation consists of studying the lexicon, grammatical structure communication situation, and cultural context of source language text, analyzing it in order to determine its meaning and then reconstructing this same meaning using the lexicon and grammatical structure that are appropriate in the receptor language (Larsen, 2008,7).

Regardless of mastering syntactic structure such as linguistic and nonlinguistic context of the source language, interpreters are expected to excel in linguistic and nonlinguistic semiotics of target language. Therefore on translating a text, especially a meticulous and intricate religious one such as Nahj ul Balaghe, not only the lexicon but also nonlinguistic elements such as cultural elements and categories, denotations and connotations are important (Amani, 2012, 85).

#### IV. RELIGIOUS TEXTS AND TRANSLATION

A part of translation theories is limited to the text being translated (Munday, 2005, 88) according to which each text demands a different approach. If religion is to be considered as set of rules and orders set by God, religious texts include ethics, beliefs, laws and ... for the happiness of man. These texts include ideologies and religious beliefs of societies whose observance would safeguard the survival of the societies. Religious texts are divided into two groups: those based on testaments scripture and those based on the reading and interpretation of the testaments each of which demands different principles and approaches for translation.

##### A. *Translation of the Scripture and Testaments*

These revelations, words of God, have been handed down through prophets for the men. Not only is the sacredness of the texts in their original language, but also their source of great importance (Fakhr Roohani, 2000, 201). Because they are considered God's words, they are different from normal language used by man; however, they follow the structure used by men, so they can be analyzed according to the rules governing this language (Mansoori, 2001, 59). The significance of the words which have metaphysical source and the truth lying behind them which is beyond time and space as we know them, are among their unique characteristics which make rendering them into another language almost impossible. However, because of their universality, their translation is inevitable. Therefore, revelations are translatable under certain presuppositions. Actually, the translation is an interpretation of the source language and lexical substitution and juxtaposition demand careful selection of connotations and denotations. To have a better understanding, while translating these texts, special consideration must be given to the translation of figures of speech and literary devices used. Another point to remember is the style used. If the interpreter does not mimic the style, much of the connotative meaning might be lost and the sacredness of the text be questioned.

Since these texts are pedantically literary and full of connotative lexicons, they must be translated as literary as possible, in a way that all the senses are transferred to the reader of the translation. On the other hand, the interpretation must be a truthful one. Sometimes, translation of these texts demands innovations on the part of the interpreter to the extent that it does not give a distorted version of the original (Soltani, 2005, 407). However, not all languages come from the same family, and the presence of different lexicons, figures of speech, figurative language, literary devices and cultures demands an interpretation of the scripture (Khoramshahi, 2005, 297). Another difficulty is finding equivalents for the terms which are deeply rooted in the history and the culture of the source language. Besides, scriptures are sacred texts whose holiness must be conserved by the interpreter as much as possible if it has to leave the same impression on the reader. To do so, he has to resort to any tool among which ancient styles are the best examples to follow.

##### B. *Human-based Religious Texts*

These texts, which are the findings of men based on the scriptures and aim at spiritual happiness of man, are themselves divided into two categories: a. Texts ascribed to the men of God and text ascribed to researchers and interpreters. The translation of the former which are the products of men do not bring about as much dispute and controversy as the scripture. However, compared with the latter is still demands being more faithful to the original. Nahj u lbalagheh, first compiled by Sayyed Razi about a thousand years ago, is a combination of Imam Ali's speeches and letters and after Quran and Hadith ranks the third among the sacred texts. Texts written by scholars and clerics aiming at interpreting, explaining, training and spreading the religious lessons can be translated following the rules governing scientific texts.

#### V. TRANSLATION METHODS FOR CULTURAL ELEMENTS AND CATEGORIES

Newmark defines culture as "the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression thus acknowledging that each language group has its own culturally specific features (Newmark, 2011, 85). According to Amani "cultural categories are culture-bound items related to concepts, phenomena, tools, and physical and structural aspects of a specific society" (ibid, 133).

Therefore, in this paper the reader faces terms and lexicons deeply rooted in culture of the source language. Actually, it could be claimed that a text forms in the cultural context of a source society and one cannot separate the cultural categories from a language. Therefore, the interpreter is the link between the source and the target culture. He must not only master both cultures, but also have full command of both languages, and cultures (Haghani, 2007, 185).

Vladimir Ivir is among the scholars suggesting seven approaches for translating cultural categories through which and after a survey of other examples of Nahj ul Balagheh, definition, literal translation, substitution, lexical creation, omission, addition, borrowing and on occasions substitution are considered among favorable approaches. However, it is the cultural gap; second, to convey the cultural meaning thoroughly, a combination of the above-mentioned approaches seems necessary. The approaches proposed by Ivir are given in details here:

1. Borrowing means that the translator imports a SL expression into the TL. For instance, Allah, Quran, Haj, Mufti, Intifada, Jihad, radio, television, computer. Borrowing should be used when there is a need for it and it will only succeed if the borrowed term is frequently repeated. In addition, the borrowed expression should easily integrate into the TL, both phonologically and morphologically. This procedure is often combined with definition or substitution. However, the translator must not borrow too much in one text because this will impede communication. Using borrowing per se is not better or worse than mother tongue terms. Their selection depends on the familiarity of the target language audience with the source language realities.

2. Definition means that the translator defines a new term or concept and explains it in detail. This depends on the translator's knowledge about (what the target readers know and what they do not know). For example, Mufti is an Islamic scholar who is an interpreter of Islamic law (Sharia). Definition can be either within the text itself or as a footnote. Also, it is usually combined with borrowing. However, definition lengthens the text and this will lead to over-translation. Therefore, translators must focus on what is relevant to the context only.

3. Literal translation is the most common strategy used when it is combined with borrowing. The main value of this procedure is its faithfulness to SL expression and its transparency in TL. For instance, "Gone with the wind: بر باد رفته", 'the cold war: جنگ سرد', 'the black market: بازار سیاه. However, translators do not use literal translation when it would clash with some expressions in the TL, or if the translation leads to problems in the grammatical structure in TL.

4. Substitution is used when there is an overlap rather than a clear-cut presence vs. absence of a particular element of culture. Therefore, translators use something similar to it, but not exactly the same. For examples, cool vs. سرد, veil vs. حجاب, chapter vs. سوره. This method could be combined with addition. Here, the receptor has no difficulty to understand and identify the term and concepts. However, substitution removes the strangeness of the foreign culture. Therefore, substitution is easier if the terms have something in common, for example, tax vs. زکات or if the terms are functionally similar, for example, chapter and سوره. Other examples can be found in proverbs in both languages. For example, in English we have proverbs "a cat has nine lives, he who steals an egg steals an ox and diamond cut diamond". These have Persian equivalents with some substitutions. These Persian proverbs are:

مثل سگ هفت تا چون داره: تخم مرغ دزد شتر دزد می‌شود

However, to decide to use this technique is not easy and depends on the cultural compatibility of both categories.

5. Lexical creation means that the translator produces a new vocabulary, for instance, mobile: تلفن همراه, computer: رایانه, and helicopter: چرخبال. There is no restriction on how translators invent these new words as long as they are acceptable. However, this procedure is used less than the other procedures because it taxes the brain of both the inventor and the reader.

6. Omission is necessitated not by the nature of the cultural element, but by the nature of the communicative situation in which such a cultural element appears. For example, Iranians sometimes greet each other in the morning by saying "صبح عالی به خیر", so when we translate it into English it is enough to say "good morning" because English culture prefers simple greetings.

7. Addition of cultural information is used when translating implicit elements of culture. It is combined with lexical creation, borrowing or substitution. For example, if an English text has the abbreviation of MOD, then when we translate it into Persian; we simply add this explanation وزارت دفاع بریتانیا, as a Farsi reader may not recognise its meaning.

To sum up, Ivir provides the translators with helpful procedures in order to bridge the cultural gaps and achieve a communicative translation. However, no one procedure could be used fully for each single text. For an optimum transfer of message, a combination of procedures is better than single use. Therefore, a translator decides on the optimum strategy of translation depending on each individual text s/he is faced with. Now, the problem which faces any translator is how to deal with cultural references when they are only in the text as background. If the translator omits these references, then s/he will lose the faithfulness. At the same time, if the translator translates them, then s/he will give them more importance than what was originally intended. This is a no-win situation; translators can only use compromise and relativity (Ivir, 1987, 11).

## VI. FINDING CULTURAL EQUIVALENTS IN NAHJ UL BALAGHEH

In this section parts of Nahj ul Balagheh with cultural categories and elements are presented. Then by providing some famous translations, it has been tried to find the best equivalents.

Shahdi, (2001, 307). «فإنَّ المرأةَ ریحانةٌ وليست بقهرمانة»

Rayhanhe is actually an aromatic plant (Ibn Manzoor, 458). Ghahramaneh means heroin and worrier. Its other meaning is someone with authority in whose commands works are done (ibid, 496). Both words are culture bound and are among cultural categories of Nahj ul Balagheh.

- Because women are delicate like flowers and not rough like worriers (Ayati, 2007, 679).
- Because women are flower not worriers (Jafari, 2007,849).
- Women are like spring flowers and not hard-working worriers (Dashti, 2010, 383).
- That women like spring flowers are delicate and fragile, and not authoritative and brave (Shahidi, 2001, 307).
- Women are actually similar to aromatic flowers and not employers and lords (Faghihi, 2010, 296).
- Because women are like aromatic plants and not employers (Faiz ul Islam, 1996, 940).

Analysis: Among the above translations, Dashti, Shahidi and Ayati use substitution and borrowing in translating Rayhaneh and ghahremaneh respectively. However, besides literal translation, by adding the words *delicate* and *fragile*, Shahidi tries to give a comprehensive translation. On the other hand, Ayati and Dashti have added the words *rough* and *hard-working*.

For translating both words, Jafari uses borrowing and gives no definition. Undoubtedly, the reader would not understand the real meaning. Both Faiz ul Islam and Faghihi use literal translation, but in its true sense.

It is worth mentioning that translating Ghahremaneh as hero and worrier is wrong. In Arabic language it means employer, and tax collector, but many interpreters have taken it wrong and given wrong equivalents. Among the translations, Faghihi and Shahidi's are among the preferred ones.

2-«حَتَّى إِذَا نَعَرَ الْبَاطِلُ نَجْمَتَ نَجْمَ قَرْنِ الْمَاعِزِ» (Shahidi, 2001, 196)

Nojemat Nojuma Garn el Maez is a simile in which the appearance of goat's horn indicates cowardice and dastardness, since a goat's horn grows regardless of its strength (Gharshi, 2008, 858). It also indicates the mean and humiliating position (Ibn Abi Hadid, 2007, 130).

- And when the unrightful yelled, it was as though the goat's horn appears (Ayati, 2007, 443).
- Until the unjust screamed and you showed up like a goat's horn (Jafari, 2007, 559).
- And when the unrightful screamed, you came out of nowhere like a goat's horn (Dashti, 2010, 255).
- Then the unjust yelled and you sprang up out of nowhere like a goat's horn (Shahidi, 2001, 196).
- And when the unjust yelled, you grew up and rose just like a goat's horn which grows and rises (Faghihi, 2010, 196).

And when the unjust roared (you gained courage), you showed up like a goat's horn (As common among Arabs, Imam Ali compares his meanness and humility to goat's horn) (Faiz ul Islam, 1996, 610).

Analysis: All interpreters but Faiz ul Islam use literal translation. Shahidi uses addition when he used the term sprang up. To make the text more approachable to the target language reader, only Feiz ul Islam combines literal translation and definition which is quite effective. At the same time, he has remained faithful to the original text.

3-«إِيَّاهُ أَبَا وَدَّحَةَ» (Shahidi, 2001, 116)

Wazhah is dung stuck to a sheep fleece and Imam Ali uses the term to indicate the filthiness and meanness of Hojaj because of his cruelty and sins. As said earlier, to praise or denounce someone, Arabs use titles and epithets. Aba Wazhah is a culture-bound term that only through its connotative meaning the reader can understand what it means.

- stop it Abu Wazhah (Ayati, 2007, 273).
- Bring forward what you have, Oh father of every faked thing (Jafari, 2007, 355).
- Abu Wazhah stop it (Dashti, 2010, 159).
- Abu Wazhah! Stop it (Shahidi, 2001, 116).
- Oh, owner of the dung, put forward what you have in stock (Faghihi, 2010, 124).

- Bring forth what you have, oh, Aba Wazhah ( Wazhah means a dung attached to the lamb tail docking. Imam Ali wants to indicate his resentment and predict the advent of Hojaj (Faiz ul Islam, 1996, 366).

Analysis: A study of the above translations indicates that most of the interpreters used borrowing technique; however, their difference is that they take advantage of other methods too. Faiz ul Islam and Faghihi also use definition (the former in the context and the latter in the footnote). Jafari uses substitution for his translation and uses beetle instead of Wazhah. As already said a combination of methods seems to be the best approach.

4-«لَقَدْ حَنَّ قَدْحٌ لَيْسَ مِنْهَا» (Shahidi, 2001, 291)

- A glassware which was of different material made a sound and revealed itself (Ayati, 2007, 647).
- A glass made a sound not belonging to it (Jafari, 2007, 805).
- You put yourself in something you know nothing of (Dashti, 2010, 365).
- A terrible tongue in a terrible head (Shahidi, 2001, 291).

-Time and time again the glass made a sound different from that of the others (implying you should not meddle in what you have no knowledge about (Faghihi, 2010, 281).

A marble which was not of the same material made a sound is a proverb because when gambling, the Arabs covered their marbles and then hit them to each other. If any of them made a different sound, they realized that it is different (Faiz ul Islam, 1996, 895).

Analysis:

Dashti and Shahidi have used terms which by no means convey the cultural load of the source language, although Shahidi in his footnotes has defined the term, and Ayati, Faghihi and Faiz ul Islam have used both literal translation and

definition (Faiz ul Islam and Faghihi in the context and Ayati in the footnote). And Jafari has just sufficed to literal translation.

«فَكُنْتَ فِي ذَلِكَ كَنَاقِلِ التَّمْرِ إِلَى هَجَرَ» (Shahidi, 2001, 291)

To carry coal to Newcastle means doing something unprofitable.

-You are like the one who carries coal to Newcastle (Ayati, 2007, 647).

- You are like the ignorant one who carries coal to Newcastle (Jafari, 2007,805).

- Your story is like the one who carries coal to Newcastle (Dashti, 2010, 365).

- You remind others of the one who carried coal Newcastle (Shahidi, 2001,291).

- You are like the one who carries coal to Newcastle (Faghihi, 2010, 280).

- In doing so you are like the one who carried coal to Newcastle (Faiz ul Islam, 1996, 895).

Analysis: All the translators have used borrowing. The only difference is that they have used other techniques along with borrowing. Faghihi, Faiz ul Islam and Ayati have also used definition (Faiz ul Islam in the context and Faghihi and Ayati in the footnote). Besides definition, Shahidi uses substitution in the footnote and Dashti uses addition in the context and uses definition and substitution in the context.

## VII. CONCLUSION

After a close study of examples of cultural categories in Nahj ul Balagheh and the methods of finding equivalents, it could be said that literal translation along with definition are among the most widely used methods in translating cultural categories and elements. However, in cases like the fifth example, along with other methods, substitution seems to be of much more importance.

In the methods proposed which comply with the application and meaning of translation, besides faithfulness to the original text and conveying the message and style, the interpreters have tried to describe the cultural categories ( in footnotes and out of context) to convey the message. Based on the studies on translations of cultural categories and what was mentioned before, it could be said that Faiz ul Islam, Shahidi and Faghihi's are among the best ones. Dashti and Ayati's have somehow been successful, but Jafari's has not been that successful.

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