Translation procedures, strategies and methods

by Mahmoud Ordudari

Abstract

Translating culture-specific concepts (CSCs) in general and allusions in particular seem to be one of the most challenging tasks to be performed by a translator; in other words, allusions are potential problems of the translation process due to the fact that allusions have particular connotations and implications in the source language (SL) and the foreign culture (FC) but not necessarily in the TL and the domestic culture. There are some procedures and strategies for rendering CSCs and allusions respectively.

The present paper aims at scrutinizing whether there exists any point of similarity between these procedures and strategies and to identify which of these procedures and strategies seem to be more effective than the others.

Keywords: Allusion, culture-specific concept, proper name, SL, TL.

1. Introduction

Translation typically has been used to transfer written or spoken SL texts to equivalent written or spoken TL texts. In general, the purpose of translation is to reproduce various kinds of texts—including religious, literary, scientific, and philosophical texts—in another language and thus making them available to wider readers.

If language were just a classification for a set of general or universal concepts, it would be easy to translate from an SL to a TL; furthermore, under the circumstances the process of learning an L2 would be much easier than it actually is. In this regard, Culler (1976) believes that languages are not nomenclatures and the concepts of one language may differ radically from those of another, since each language articulates or organizes the world differently, and languages do not simply name categories; they articulate their own (p.21-2). The conclusion likely to be drawn from what Culler (1976) writes is that one of the troublesome problems of translation is the disparity among languages. The bigger the gap between the SL and the TL, the more difficult
the transfer of message from the former to the latter will be.

The difference between an SL and a TL and the variation in their cultures make the process of translating a real challenge. Among the problematic factors involved in translation such as form, meaning, style, proverbs, idioms, etc., the present paper is going to concentrate mainly on the procedures of translating CSCs in general and on the strategies of rendering allusions in particular.

2. Translation procedures, strategies and methods

The translating procedures, as depicted by Nida (1964) are as follow:

I. Technical procedures:
   A. analysis of the source and target languages;
   B. a through study of the source language text before making attempts translate it;
   C. Making judgments of the semantic and syntactic approximations. (pp. 241-45)

II. Organizational procedures:
   constant reevaluation of the attempt made; contrasting it with the existing available translations of the same text done by other translators, and checking the text's communicative effectiveness by asking the target language readers to evaluate its accuracy and effectiveness and studying their reactions (pp. 246-47).

Krings (1986:18) defines translation strategy as "translator's potentially conscious plans for solving concrete translation problems in the framework of a concrete translation task," and Seguinot (1989) believes that there are at least three global strategies employed by the translators: (i) translating without interruption for as long as possible; (ii) correcting surface errors immediately; (iii) leaving the monitoring for qualitative or stylistic errors in the text to the revision stage.

Moreover, Loescher (1991:8) defines translation strategy as "a potentially conscious procedure for solving a problem faced in translating a text, or any segment of it." As it is stated in this definition, the notion of consciousness is significant in distinguishing strategies which are used by the learners or translators. In this regard, Cohen (1998:4) asserts that "the element of consciousness is what distinguishes strategies from these processes that are not strategic."

Furthermore, Bell (1998:188) differentiates between global (those dealing with whole texts) and local (those dealing with text segments) strategies and confirms that this distinction results from various kinds of translation problems.
Venuti (1998:240) indicates that translation strategies "involve the basic tasks of choosing the foreign text to be translated and developing a method to translate it." He employs the concepts of domesticating and foreignizing to refer to translation strategies.

Jaaskelainen (1999:71) considers strategy as, "a series of competencies, a set of steps or processes that favor the acquisition, storage, and/or utilization of information." He maintains that strategies are "heuristic and flexible in nature, and their adoption implies a decision influenced by amendments in the translator's objectives."

Taking into account the process and product of translation, Jaaskelainen (2005) divides strategies into two major categories: some strategies relate to what happens to texts, while other strategies relate to what happens in the process.

Product-related strategies, as Jaaskelainen (2005:15) writes, involves the basic tasks of choosing the SL text and developing a method to translate it. However, she maintains that process-related strategies "are a set of (loosely formulated) rules or principles which a translator uses to reach the goals determined by the translating situation" (p.16). Moreover, Jaaskelainen (2005:16) divides this into two types, namely global strategies and local strategies: "global strategies refer to general principles and modes of action and local strategies refer to specific activities in relation to the translator's problem-solving and decision-making."

Newmark (1988b) mentions the difference between translation methods and translation procedures. He writes that, "[w]hile translation methods relate to whole texts, translation procedures are used for sentences and the smaller units of language" (p.81). He goes on to refer to the following methods of translation:

- **Word-for-word translation**: in which the SL word order is preserved and the words translated singly by their most common meanings, out of context.
- **Literal translation**: in which the SL grammatical constructions are converted to their nearest TL equivalents, but the lexical words are again translated singly, out of context.
- ** Faithful translation**: it attempts to produce the precise contextual meaning of the original within the constraints of the TL grammatical structures.
- **Semantic translation**: which differs from 'faithful translation' only in as far as it must take more account of the aesthetic value of the SL text.
- **Adaptation**: which is the freest form of translation, and is used mainly for plays (comedies) and poetry; the themes, characters, plots are usually preserved, the SL culture is converted to the TL culture and the text is rewritten.
- **Free translation**: it produces the TL text without the style, form, or content of the original.
• **Idiomatic translation**: it reproduces the 'message' of the original but tends to distort nuances of meaning by preferring colloquialisms and idioms where these do not exist in the original.

• **Communicative translation**: it attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the original in such a way that both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership (1988b: 45-47).

Newmark (1991:10-12) writes of a continuum existing between "semantic" and "communicative" translation. Any translation can be "more, or less semantic—more, or less, communicative—even a particular section or sentence can be treated more communicatively or less semantically." Both seek an "equivalent effect." Zhongying (1994: 97), who prefers literal translation to free translation, writes that, "[i]n China, it is agreed by many that one should translate literally, if possible, or appeal to free translation."

In order to clarify the distinction between procedure and strategy, the forthcoming section is allotted to discussing the procedures of translating culture-specific terms, and strategies for rendering allusions will be explained in detail.

### 2.1. Procedures of translating culture-specific concepts (CSCs)

Graedler (2000:3) puts forth some procedures of translating CSCs:

1. Making up a new word.
2. Explaining the meaning of the SL expression in lieu of translating it.
3. Preserving the SL term intact.
4. Opting for a word in the TL which seems similar to or has the same "relevance" as the SL term.

Defining culture-bound terms (CBTs) as the terms which "refer to concepts, institutions and personnel which are specific to the SL culture" (p.2), Harvey (2000:2-6) puts forward the following four major techniques for translating CBTs:

1. **Functional Equivalence**: It means using a referent in the TL culture whose function is similar to that of the source language (SL) referent. As Harvey (2000:2) writes, authors are divided over the merits of this technique; Weston (1991:23) describes it as "the ideal method of translation," while Sarcevic (1985:131) asserts that it is "misleading and should be avoided."
2. **Formal Equivalence** or 'linguistic equivalence': It means a 'word-for-word' translation.
3. **Transcription** or 'borrowing' (i.e. reproducing or, where necessary, transliterating the original term): It stands at the far end of SL-oriented strategies. If the term is formally transparent or is explained in the context, it may be used alone. In other cases, particularly where no knowledge of the SL by the reader is presumed, transcription is
accompanied by an explanation or a translator's note.

4. **Descriptive or self-explanatory** translation: It uses generic terms (not CBTs) to convey the meaning. It is appropriate in a wide variety of contexts where formal equivalence is considered insufficiently clear. In a text aimed at a specialized reader, it can be helpful to add the original SL term to avoid ambiguity.

The following are the different translation procedures that Newmark (1988b) proposes:

- **Transference**: it is the process of transferring an SL word to a TL text. It includes transliteration and is the same as what Harvey (2000:5) named "transcription."
- **Naturalization**: it adapts the SL word first to the normal pronunciation, then to the normal morphology of the TL. (Newmark, 1988b:82)
- **Cultural equivalent**: it means replacing a cultural word in the SL with a TL one. however, "they are not accurate" (Newmark, 1988b:83)
- **Functional equivalent**: it requires the use of a culture-neutral word. (Newmark, 1988b:83)
- **Descriptive equivalent**: in this procedure the meaning of the CBT is explained in several words. (Newmark, 1988b:83)
- **Componential analysis**: it means "comparing an SL word with a TL word which has a similar meaning but is not an obvious one-to-one equivalent, by demonstrating first their common and then their differing sense components." (Newmark, 1988b:114)
- **Synonymy**: it is a "near TL equivalent." Here economy trumps accuracy. (Newmark, 1988b:84)
- **Through-translation**: it is the literal translation of common collocations, names of organizations and components of compounds. It can also be called: calque or loan translation. (Newmark, 1988b:84)
- **Shifts or transpositions**: it involves a change in the grammar from SL to TL, for instance, (i) change from singular to plural, (ii) the change required when a specific SL structure does not exist in the TL, (iii) change of an SL verb to a TL word, change of an SL noun group to a TL noun and so forth. (Newmark, 1988b:86)
- **Modulation**: it occurs when the translator reproduces the message of the original text in the TL text in conformity with the current norms of the TL, since the SL and the TL may appear dissimilar in terms of perspective. (Newmark, 1988b:88)
- **Recognized translation**: it occurs when the translator "normally uses the official or the generally accepted translation of any institutional term." (Newmark, 1988b:89)
- **Compensation**: it occurs when loss of meaning in one part of a sentence is compensated in another part. (Newmark, 1988b:90)
- **Paraphrase**: in this procedure the meaning of the CBT is explained. Here the explanation is much more detailed than that of descriptive equivalent. (Newmark, 1988b:91)
- **Couplets**: it occurs when the translator combines two different procedures. (Newmark, 1988b:91)
• Notes: notes are additional information in a translation. (Newmark, 1988b:91)

Notes can appear in the form of 'footnotes.' Although some stylists consider a translation sprinkled with footnotes terrible with regard to appearance, nonetheless, their use can assist the TT readers to make better judgments of the ST contents. Nida (1964:237-39) advocates the use of footnotes to fulfill at least the two following functions: (i) to provide supplementary information, and (ii) to call attention to the original's discrepancies.

A really troublesome area in the field of translation appears to be the occurrence of allusions, which seem to be culture-specific portions of a SL. All kinds of allusions, especially cultural and historical allusions, bestow a specific density on the original language and need to be explicated in the translation to bring forth the richness of the SL text for the TL audience.

Appearing abundantly in literary translations, allusions, as Albakry (2004:3) points out, "are part of the prior cultural knowledge taken for granted by the author writing for a predominantly Moslem Arab [SL] audience. To give the closest approximation of the source language, therefore, it was necessary to opt for 'glossing' or using explanatory footnotes." However, somewhere else he claims that, "footnotes ... can be rather intrusive, and therefore, their uses were minimized as much as possible" (Albakry, 2004:4).

2.2. Strategies of translating allusions

Proper names, which are defined by Richards (1985:68) as "names of a particular person, place or thing" and are spelled "with a capital letter," play an essential role in a literary work. For instance let us consider personal PNs. They may refer to the setting, social status and nationality of characters, and really demand attention when rendered into a foreign language.

There are some models for rendering PNs in translations. One of these models is presented by Hervey and Higgins (1986) who believe that there exist two strategies for translating PNs. They point out: "either the name can be taken over unchanged from the ST to the TT, or it can be adopted to conform to the phonic/graphic conventions of the TL" (p.29).

Hervey and Higgins (1986) refer to the former as exotism which "is tantamount to literal translation, and involves no cultural transposition" (p.29), and the latter as transliteration. However, they propose another procedure or alternative, as they put it, namely cultural transplantation. Being considered as "the extreme degree of cultural transposition," cultural transplantation is considered to be a procedure in which "SL names are replaced by indigenous TL names that are not their literal equivalents, but have similar cultural connotations" (Hervey & Higgins, 1986:29).

Regarding the translation of PNs, Newmark (1988a:214) asserts that,
"normally, people's first and sure names are transferred, thus preserving nationality and assuming that their names have no connotations in the text."

The procedure of transference cannot be asserted to be effective where connotations and implied meanings are significant. Indeed, there are some names in the Persian poet Sa'di's work *Gulestan*, which bear connotations and require a specific strategy for being translated. Newmark's (1988a:215) solution of the mentioned problem is as follows: "first translate the word that underlies the SL proper name into the TL, and then naturalize the translated word back into a new SL proper name." However, there is a shortcoming in the strategy in question. As it seems it is only useful for personal PNs, since as Newmark (1988a:215), ignoring the right of not educated readers to enjoy a translated text, states, it can be utilized merely "when the character's name is not yet current amongst an educated TL readership."

Leppihalme (1997:79) proposes another set of strategies for translating the proper name allusions:

i. **Retention of the name:**
   a. using the name as such.
   b. using the name, adding some guidance.
   c. using the name, adding a detailed explanation, for instance, a footnote.

ii. **Replacement of the name by another:**
   a. replacing the name by another SL name.
   b. replacing the name by a TL name

iii. **Omission of the name:**
   iv. omitting the name, but transferring the sense by other means, for instance by a common noun.
   v. omitting the name and the allusion together.

Moreover, nine strategies for the translation of key-phrase allusions are proposed by Leppihalme (1997: 82) as follows:

i. Use of a standard translation,
ii. Minimum change, that is, a literal translation, without regard to connotative or contextual meaning,
iii. Extra allusive guidance added in the text,
iv. The use of footnotes, endnotes, translator's notes and other explicit explanations not supplied in the text but explicitly given as additional information,
v. Stimulated familiarity or internal marking, that is, the addition of intra-allusive allusion,
vi. Replacement by a TL item,
vii. Reduction of the allusion to sense by rephrasing,
viii. Re-creation, using a fusion of techniques: creative construction of a passage which hints at the connotations of the allusion or other special effects created by it,
ix. Omission of the allusion.

3. Conclusion

Although some stylists consider translation "sprinkled with footnotes" undesirable, their uses can assist the TT readers to make better judgment of the ST contents. In general, it seems that the procedures 'functional equivalent' and 'notes' would have a higher potential for conveying the concepts underlying the CSCs embedded in a text; moreover, it can be claimed that a combination of these strategies would result in a more accurate understanding of the CSCs than other procedures.

Various strategies opted for by translators in rendering allusions seem to play a crucial role in recognition and perception of connotations carried by them. If a novice translator renders a literary text without paying adequate attention to the allusions, the connotations are likely not to be transferred as a result of the translator's failure to acknowledge them. They will be entirely lost to the majority of the TL readers; consequently, the translation will be ineffective.

It seems necessary for an acceptable translation to produce the same (or at least similar) effects on the TT readers as those created by the original work on its readers. This paper may show that a translator does not appear to be successful in his challenging task of efficiently rendering the CSCs and PNs when he sacrifices, or at least minimizes, the effect of allusions in favor of preserving graphical or lexical forms of source language PNs. In other words, a competent translator is well-advised not to deprive the TL reader of enjoying, or even recognizing, the allusions either in the name of fidelity or brevity.

It can be claimed that the best translation method seem to be the one which allows translator to utilize 'notes.' Furthermore, employing 'notes' in the translation, both as a translation strategy and a translation procedure, seems to be indispensable so that the foreign language readership could benefit from the text as much as the ST readers do.

References


Translation procedures, strategies and methods

Translation procedures are methods applied by translators when they formulate an equivalence for the purpose of transferring elements of meaning from the Source Text (ST) to the Target Text (TT). (Delisle). Vinay and Darbelnet first proposed seven methods or procedures (loan, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, equivalence, adaptation) in 1973. Translation 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. (Emphasis is mine). Bell (1991: 5-6) seems to have pursued the same line of emphasis on meaning and style in his translation of the definition given by the French theorist, Dubois (1974) According to him translation methods relate to whole texts, on the other hand translation procedures are used for sentences and the smaller units of language. He goes on to refer to the following methods of translation: 1. Word-for-word translation. The SL word order is preserved and the words translated singly by their most common meanings, out of context.