

A Descriptive Study of Culture-Specific Items in Persian Translations of Harry Potter Novels

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Abstract:

Cross-cultural translation of children's literature is one of the areas that easily trap a translator with lots of problems. It is rather a difficult task for a child to establish a connection with some other cultures and their exclusive features. Even if a child-reader enters the scene and decides to read a child a translated text, s/he needs to fully grasp the message and meaning of the text in order to be able to deal with the child's numerous questions satisfactorily. Hence the matters get worse, there the translator is, hesitating which path to take; domesticate or Foreignism? This study is going to analyze translations of culture-bound food and goods in two books of Harry Potter series and translation strategies adopted. The criterion for analysis is a list of strategies to tackle with culture-specific terms, proposed by Davies (2003). Afterwards, the translations are examined for being either acceptability-oriented or adequacy-oriented. The findings of the study assert that it is hardly possible to identify the tendency of translations towards being adequacy-oriented or acceptability-oriented because translation strategies of preservation and localization, derived from the proposed list, are very close in times of occurrence.

Keywords: Children's Literature Translation, Culture-Specific Items, Translation Strategies, Foreignization, Domestication, Acceptability-Oriented, Adequacy-Oriented.

1. Introduction:

It has long been controversial what children's literature is and what the traits are. In fact ChL gets meaningful in comparison to adult literature. If a piece of an adult literature is something that is read by adults, then ChL is something which is read by children. This is the simplest sense-making definition that may be attributed to ChL. According to Education Encyclopedia (2008),

"It is any literature that is enjoyed by children. More specifically, children's literature comprises those books written and published for young people who are not yet interested in adult literature or who may not possess the reading skills or developmental understandings necessary for its perusal" (In Zeinab, 2010, p. 12). Because every literary genre takes into account matters such as age, needs, demands, interests, comprehension ability and so forth of its reader, the differences between ChL and adult literature increase. Such nuances can be visible in language structure, pictures and colors, the number of pages, textual structure and so many other areas.

There are many functions ascribed to ChL. Puurtinen (1998) believes that children's literature plays a significant role as an educational, social and ideological instrument (In Zeinab, 2010). Pedagogical and educational function is rather

highlighted in ChL and perhaps that is why it has been in a periphery position in literary polysystems over the time (Ham, 2007). Akbari (2012) asserts:

"Children's literature provided young audiences with information that was deemed useful for their education. After the 19th century the objectives of children's literature got blurred and the didactic purposes were not portrayed as vividly as before. And the ideas about children and childhood changed along with the social changes toward an industrial society" (p. 577). Ham claims:

"Children's literature as a peripheral genre in most western polysystems enjoys less attention from scholars. Because very few authors become internationally famous or wealthy from the profits of their children's books. Finally because they use fewer and simpler words, children's books may also be regarded as easily written and their translations quick task of language transfer" (Ham, 2007, p. 25).

Literature has a significant role in child rearing and it can nourish the child with the desired values and outlooks. It gets the child to know her/his own environment and all its features perfectly (Shammas, 2004). The child gets acquainted with cultures, costumes and traditions, religions, worldviews, lifestyles and many other

aspects of other nations by means of literature translation. As an instance, in the translation of Robinson Crusoe the child might begin to accept the idea of Whiteman superiority (Zeinab, 2012). Hunt (1992) thinks that ChL goes to become universal because of its didactic and acculturating role. Another reason for its universality is that children share much in common (In Zeinab, 2010).

The difficulties in translating ChL contribute to challenge its translatability. Sometimes it is believed to be translatable; sometimes, much far from translatability. In translating ChL one may be trapped in the crisis of whether to foreignize or to domesticate. Oittinen (1993), Puurtinen (1995) and Pascua (1998) do not approve of foreignization in translation. Klingberg (1986) and Shavit (1986) think otherwise. They argue that domestication is a negative process for target reader. Shavit (1986) stresses that "domestication is a sign of disrespect for the child" (p.380).

Harry Potter novels were initially written for British and American audience. But the books were soon translated into other languages. So it would not be surprising if they seemed too English and culture-bound to children of other nations. One of the goals of literature could be to equip children with more literature; another one, to expand children's international engagements and their comprehension ability. In this light, it is vital to get closer to the original text. Elimination of foreign culture or change of foreign elements of source text into local ones would stub the reader's interest in learning about other cultures (Klingberg, 1916).

Mathew Grenby (2008) classifies children's literature into seven main genres: fairy tales, poetry, moral and instructive tales, the school story, the family story, fantasy, the adventure story. He argues: "These genres have existed since children's literature was first established as a separate part of print culture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and sometimes even before that" (Grenby, 2008, p.1). Harry Potter is also a piece of children's literature. With a glance over the work one may come to realize that it nearly covers the features of all genres of ChL mentioned above. However, literature scholars would view it as a School story as well as a Fantasy (Grenby, 2008).

"Fantasy" Grenby asserts "includes stories of magic, ghosts, talking animals and superhuman heroes, of time travel, hallucinations and dreams", however, "No children's books are pure fantasy, but combine fanciful and realistic elements. To increase the amount of fantasy is not to diminish the reality, nor vice versa"(p. 144-166). He continues:

"Fantasy is clearly central to any understanding of children's literature. Some have argued that fantasy is the very core of children's literature, and that children's literature did not properly exist until the imagination had been given an entirely free rein to entertain children in unreservedly fantastical books like Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) or Edward Lear's *Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany, and Alphabets* (1870). Indeed, Wonderland, like Neverland, Narnia, Oz or *Tom's Midnight Garden* in Philippa Pearce's 1958 novel, can be regarded as spatial – or perhaps psychological representations of childhood, places from which one is exiled as soon as one grows up. But it has also been argued that all children's literature is necessarily a fantasy"(p.145). This is precisely true about Harry Potter, a boy who's taken to Hogwarts as soon as he reaches the right age to go there. Hogwarts is no less than Alice's Wonderland in terms of fantastical elements.

The necessity of ChL translation rises from the demand to read from other cultures and actually centers on the child as a young reader. This has led children's literature and translation studies towards a new horizon. Van Collie and Verschuere (2006) emphasize the missionary role of ChLT. Didactic/ pedagogical, cultural/ sociological, psychological, cognitive and academic aspects form this missionary role. In the level of culture, that is the focus of this research, literature is emblematic of cultural concepts, a channel to the world understanding (Xeni, 2006). According to what Metcalf (2003) points out, children's literature translation makes children acquainted with various lifestyles of other cultures as well as expanding their cross-cultural understanding. Batchelder explains: "children of one country who come to know the books and stories of many countries have made a beginning towards international understanding" (in Metcalf, 2003, p. 324).

Bearing all of these in mind, one may be able to imagine literary polysystems in such a shape as indicated in Figure 1 (Appendix).

This study is going to investigate the strategies adopted in Persian translation of Harry Potter series, and consequently make it possible to decide whether the translated works are adequacy-oriented or acceptability-oriented. According to Toury (1995) Adequacy-oriented strategies are those strategies that are accurate in accordance with source text circumstances. On the other hand, acceptability-oriented translations are those which are adjusted to the target reader's demands, i.e. the target reader's acceptability is a primary yardstick; hence the target culture standards are preserved in the translation (In Liang, 2007). In this light, Davies's (2003) model is chosen to analyze applied strategies. According to this model, a translator may take advantage of the following strategies to translate cultural items:

Addition, Omission, Globalization, Localization, Preservation (in Liang, 2007).

2. Methodology:

The author J.K Rowling took advantage of numerous odd and amazing names to introduce things and people in her serial novels of Harry Potter. The present study has been intended to analyze the strategies translators get help from in translating culture-specific items, particularly, food and goods items. Translating culture-bound items is sometimes so much a difficult task that the translator may decide not to translate them at all, a decision that eventually results in losing the message of the text.

In the present study the translations of such terms from books 1 and 4 of these series are compared with the original ones. The researcher took the liberty to choose two of books which are more potential to be analyze in terms of food and goods items translation. The mentioned cultural items are more frequent in these two books.

Translation strategies have been intended to mean any conscious method adopted by translators to solve a difficulty. Even Zohar (1990) states, once a literary system occupies a central position in the literary Polysystem, its repertoires bear innovative elements and the strategies of translation are mostly adequacy-oriented (In Liang, 2007). The

purpose of this study is to examine whether and how foreign elements are implanted in translation. Books deemed to be analyzed are:

- 1- Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone (Book #1)
- 2- Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (Book #4)

Davies (2003) proposes a list of translation strategies for dealing with culture-specific items. They are as the following: Addition, Omission, Globalization, Localization, preservation (In Liang, 2007). These strategies will be discussed in some examples from Harry Potter translations. It should be noted that not all of these strategies are used in the case of this study.

3. Results and Discussion:

Culture-specific elements are supposed to be those factors that the author produced in her British circumstances and may sound alien to foreign children and induce unfamiliar values. Such items may pose translating challenges for translators since they may not have equivalents in the target culture.

A brief definition will be presented for every strategy as we go by.

Preservation: it occurs when there is no equivalent for cultural items in the target language and the translator does not present any additional explanations. Sometimes the translator prefers to transfer the foreign element into the target language.

- 1) He was ready to buy as many **Mars Bars** as he could carry. ... (Stone: p.76)

- می توانست هر چندتا شکلات مارس که می خواست بخرد.
(44)

(Back translated: He could buy as many Mars Chocolate as he wished.)

In 'Mars Bar' case, it's been preferred to transfer a part of the original script into the target language. This would not give any idea of what this edible can look like. According to Liang (2007): "Mars Bar is a common brand of chocolate bar in Britain made of chocolate-malt nougat topped with a layer of caramel and covered with milk chocolate" (p.98).

2) Harry, taking a large bite out of a **pumpkin pasty**... (Stone: p. 76)

- هری یکی از پیراشکی های کدوتنبل را برداشت و گاز زد. (44)

(Back Translated: Harry picked one of pumpkin pasties and took a bite.)

'Pumpkin pasty' is a kind of pasty that is filled with pieces of pumpkin. It is rendered into Persian as کدوتنبل پیراشکی. There's no such a pasty in Iranian cuisine and the translator has introduced it into the translation by literally translating the item.

3) Taped to the note was a **fifty-pence** piece. (Stone: p. 147)

- یک سکه پنجاه پنیسی با نوار چسب به یادداشت چسبیده بود. (85)

(Back translated: a fifty-pence coin was attached to the note.)

'Pence' is a small unit of money in Britain and is rendered here as پنس (پنجاه). It seems that the translator was willing to keep the foreign flavor and subsequently got help from 'preservation' strategy through preserving the original script.

4) Said very clearly to his plate, "**Pork chops!**" (Goblet: p. 169)

- بشقاب خود را خطاب کرد و شمرده و روشن گفت: "پورک چاپ!" (494)

(Back translation: Said very clearly to his plate: Pork Chops!)

'Pork chop' is a British dish, consisting of hog-meat chops. The lack of any equivalent for the food item stimulated the translator to borrow the item and fill the gap by a loan translation. It is simply transferred into the translation.

Preservation plus Addition: the actual application of such a strategy can be found in the use of footnotes, endnotes, glossaries, parentheses, italics, and so forth. The negative point in the utilization of "Addition" strategy is that additional information may hinder the process of reading or bore the reader with irritating details (Liang, 2007).

5) Helping himself to a **Cornish pasty**... (Goblet: p. 537)

- و مشغول خوردن کلوچه ی کورن- وال شد. ... (730)

(Back translated: Helping himself to a Cornwall cookie.)

As Liang argues: "Cornish Pasty is developed from the simple diet of Cornish people hundreds of years ago" (p.99) in this translation case, the original word 'Cornish' was not preserved, but translated with its meaning in details. A footnote about Cornwall region was also provided by the translator, meant to help the reader get the point much easier.

Localization: occurs when the translator translates with respect to target culture norms.

6) Harry was just helping himself to a baked potato when... (Stone: p. 127)

- هری سرگرم پوست کردن یک سیب زمینی تنوری بود که... (73)

(Back translated: He was just in the middle of peeling a baked-in-oven potato...)

Here, 'Baked Potato' is replaced by سیب زمینی تنوری which is very similar to the original term in nature. Liang (2007) asserts: "it is a traditional English food: a baked potato served with the skin on; it can be served with a wide variety of stuffing (such as cheese, salad or anything leftover from a previous meal)" (p.98-99). سیب زمینی تنوری is also served in its skin and baked in an oven.

7) Perhaps it had something to do with living in a dark **cupboard** ... (Stone: p. 20)

- شاید بی ارتباط به انباری که در آن زندگی می کرد نبود. (9)
(Back translated: it may had something to do with the storeroom.)

In this example the word 'Cupboard' is replaced by an equivalent item in Persian; i.e. انباری. The translator referred to it in some other part of the book as انباری زیر پله that would only complete the meaning rendition. Liang says that: "In Britain, 'cupboard' usually refers to an item of furniture for storage or a built-in space under the stairs" (p. 100).

8 & 9) A moment later the desserts appeared, ... **jam doughnuts** and**treacle tarts**. (Stone: p.99)

- لحظه ای بعد انواع و اقسام دسر ها روی میز پدیدار شد،... پیراشکی مربایی و... نان قندی. (53)

(Back translated: a moment later desserts of various types appeared on the table ... jam doughnuts...and treacle tarts.)

Treacle Tart is a traditional British desert, yet the translator identified نان قندی as a proper equivalent for it. Therefore, the gap is filled by the process of Localization. The same justification is true about Jam Doughnuts.

Globalization: Davies defines this translation strategy as “the process of replacing culture-specific references with ones which are more neutral or general, in the sense that they are accessible to audiences from a wider range of cultural backgrounds” (Davies 2003, p. 83). In addition, Davies states that the use of this strategy may cause loss of effect in translation (Davies 2003). The strategy of globalization means that the culture-specific items of the source language are replaced by the ones that have less cultural associations.

10) Grabbed the **gillyweed**, and put it into his pocket. (Goblet: p. 200)

- عصاره ی علف دریایی را قاپید و در جیبش گذاشت. (586)
(Back translated: He grabbed the essence of seaweed and put it in his pocket.)

Gillyweed is a magical plant native to the Mediterranean Sea. When it is eaten by a witch or wizard, one grows gills and webbing between the fingers and toes (Retrieved from HarryPotter Wikia). Bearing this in mind, the translator found it sufficient to present a general idea about the type of Plant, i.e. علف دریایی, which could be recognized as a Globalization.

The application of preservation strategy demonstrates that the literary system assumes a central position and its repertoires tend to be adequacy-oriented, i.e. foreign elements appear in the target text. In the examples, adopted strategies were examined for being either adequacy-oriented or acceptability-oriented. According to Toury (1995), once translations in a literary polysystem tend to be adequacy-oriented, i.e. to be willing to implant foreign elements, the translation strategies are further innovative. As a result, the literary system tends to move to a central position from a periphery position. On the

other hand, if the translations tend to be acceptability-oriented, the translation strategies are less innovative and the literary system tends to sit in a peripheral position (In Liang, 2007).

As it is visible through the study, 5 examples out of 10 were translated by Preservation strategy, 4 of them enjoyed Localization and 1 of them was rendered by Globalization. The difference between the times of preservation and localization strategies adaptations is so small that it seems quite naïve to decide about the tendencies of translations on the whole. In another study on culture-bound magical edibles, launched by the same researcher, the tendency of the translator was identified as adequacy-oriented because the preservation strategy was adopted the most. Magical edibles are much further culturally loaded than any other items are, due to the fact that they are exclusive to the small community of magicians and bear the creativity of the original author in most cases and hardly match any equivalent in another language (and culture). Therefore, it comes as no surprise if the translator preserved the foreign flavor of the items.

4. Conclusion:

This study was going to compare two Persian translations of Harry Potter novels, authored by J.K Rowling, with the original ones and consequently analyze the translators' strategies according to a list of translation strategies for dealing with culture-bound terms by Davies (2003). With regard to adequacy-oriented/acceptability-oriented translation theory proposed by Toury (1995), the tendency of strategies towards one of these two extremes was investigated. Based on findings of the study, preservation strategy was applied most frequently but the localization strategy was frequently adopted as well. The times of occurrence for both are close in number and hardly indicate the tendency of translations towards the poles.

5. Suggestions for further research:

Keeping an eye on what was discussed here, other researches can also be done to challenge the position of children's literature and its translation in the literary polysystem of Iran. One possibility is to study the impact of Harry

Potter phenomenon on the literary polysystem of Iran and the position of children's literature in it. In so doing, one can investigate the number of translations done in children's literature, specially in Fantasy genre, prior to and after the first published translation of Harry Potter novels in the country and consequently compare them. This may lead to find out how this literary phenomenon revolutionized the literary position of: first, children's literature; second, children's fantasy fiction and third, translation of children's literature.

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Appendix:

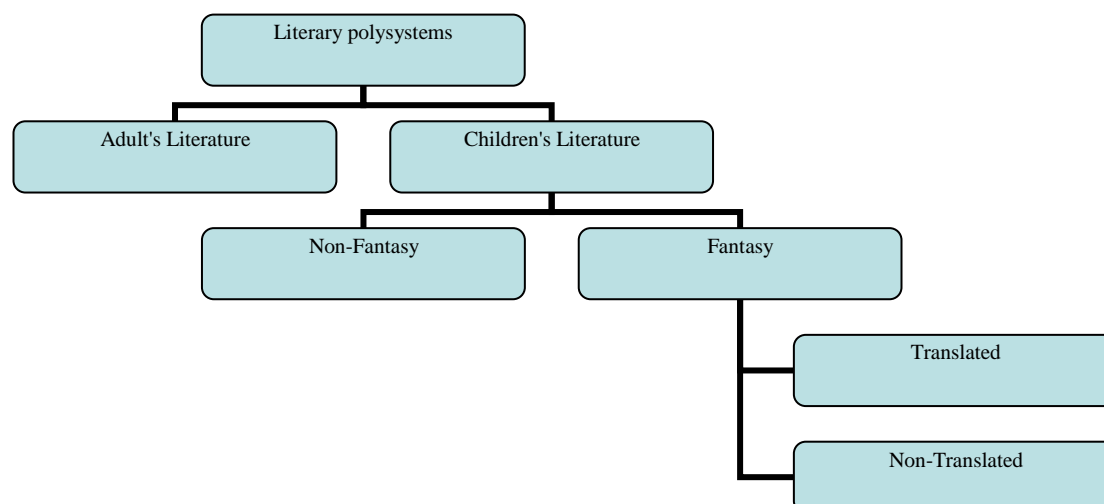


Figure 1: Literary Polysystem/ Fantasy in Focus