

Culture-Specific Items in Iranian Journalistic Texts

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ABSTRACT

Culture is a unique characteristics of every language. In some cases these differences are not big, but in some others, the difference is huge. Persian language compared to English could be supposed as one of the prominent case of this difference. Islamic culture has affected persian culture greatly and has entered countless arabic words into Persian. This has increased persian vocabulary but it has also created a confusion among the original Persian and the mixed-with-arabic one. On the other hand journalistic texts are becoming popular for the world is becoming more interested in Iranina affairs for political, social, technological etc. the present paper attempts to investigate the issue of culture-specific-items in journalistic texts. In order to accomplish the task, three major domestic news agencies were chosen and the news items in Persian and English were compared and contrasted. It is worth mentioning that the translations were not evaluated and the broadcast versions considered to be correct. The comparision revealed that most of the cultural items in Persian texts have Islamic and arabic roots and some others have their roots in ethnic groups living in Iran.

KEY WORDS: Culture-Specific-Items; Journalistic Texts; News Agency; Islamic Culture; Persian Culture

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper tries to show culture-specific items (CSIs) in journalistic texts. In order to accomplish this, the author selected texts which were posted on Persian news broadcasting website i.e. IRNA, ISNA and IRIB and after reading both Persian and English versions, crossed out the seemingly CSIs. The proof of this selection firstly was the authors intuition and secondly the categorization done by three scholars. Then they were checked both in a bilingual dictionary of political and journalistic texts.

2. Culture

What is culture? Culture is a term that specialists in cultural studies try to avoid. The reason for this avoidance is that culture can mean almost everything. According to social scientists culture consists of shared ideas and concepts (beliefs, values, norms and goals) and material possessions of a society that are passed on from one generation to another. In other words culture refers to the entire way of life of the society. The point here is that “culture is like an iceberg with a big part of its real substance hidden in the sea. Culture hides much more than it reveals.” [1]

3.1. Language and culture

A language perfectly interprets the lifestyle or activity practiced in every unique culture. In the broad sense language is the symbolic representation of a people and their historical background. Language and its cultural influence are exemplified in Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which states that language is a guide to a social reality. This hypothesis implies that language is not simply a means of reporting experience but it is a way of defining [2]. Besides, Newmark does not regard language as a component or feature of culture. But he believes that language does contain all kinds of cultural deposits [3].

3.2. Culture and Translation

The definitions of culture are commonly supposed to be beyond the scope of translation theory. Thus, studies on cultural issues in translation and on the difficulties of the cross-cultural communication

have flourished in recent times. Translation research can expose and explain what is culturally shared and what is not. It has been argued that translation is a relation between cultures; in fact, it is a cultural process and mixes two or more cultures. The notion is essential to considering the implications for translation and as Toury states “translation is a kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions” [4].

Language and culture may be seen as being closely related and both aspects should be considered for translation. In other words, due to the close link between them, translation involves not just two languages but a transfer from one culture to another. Since every text is a result of a particular extra linguistic situation and is determined by its cultural, historical, and social contexts, every translation is the process of conveying message across both linguistic and cultural lines.

Snell-Hornby [5] proposes that translation scholars move from “text” to “culture” as translation unit. She argues [5] that translation studies has to develop its own particular ‘models of convention’ and to focus on the ‘web of relationships’ in the context of text, situation and culture.

3.4.1. Culture-specific Items (CSIs)

Language is both universal and individual; therefore, one can say ‘die’, ‘live’, ‘star’, ‘swim’ and ‘dream’ for example, are universal and they represent general aspects of nature and humans, and their physical and mental activities. In this case, some scholars argue that translation is more or less possible because there is cultural and universal overlap between languages. But although some cultural aspects may be universal, the manner in which they are expressed vary widely from culture to culture. For instance, ‘red’ is ceremonial and happy in Chinese but ‘cruel’ or ‘frightening’ in English; mourning is black in English but white in Chinese; the ‘sun’ is oppressive in Arabic countries as it is lovely in England. Also dwellings take many forms, depending on the environment and technological development of a particular society. This culture has its own unique character and contains its own unique patterns of behavior, which seem alien to people from other cultural backgrounds.

3.4.2. Cultural Categories

3.4.2.1. Peter Newmark

Adapting Nida, Newmark places ‘foreign cultural words’ in several categories [3]

1. Ecology

Flora, fauna, winds, hills (For example: آبهای گرم خلیج فارس)

2. Material culture (artifacts)

Food, clothes, houses, transport (For example: حجاب اسلامی)

3. Social culture- work and leisure (For example: نظام وظیفه)

4. Organizations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts

Political and administrative, religious, artistic (For example: برائت از مشرکین، نهضت سواد آموزی، سپاه پاسداران انقلاب اسلامی)

5. Gestures and habit

3.4.2.2. Natasa Povlovic

N. Povlovic compared British and Croatian culture-specific concepts in translation.[6] They can be categorized as follows:

1. Ecology

This area includes different aspects of nature, such as winds, plains and hills, and other geographic concepts, as well as flora and fauna. (For example: اراضی اشغالی)

2. Everyday life

It encompasses types of dwellings, household appliances, food, meals, clothes, means of transport and public services.

3. Material culture

It comprises different products, trademarks in particular.

4. History

These items relate to historical events, institutions, functions, and personalities; literature, including different characters from works of art well-known in the source culture; as well as famous quotations; folklore and traditions. (For example: جنگ تحمیلی، حماسه کربلا، انتفاضه)

5. Religion

The predominant religion in Croatia is Catholicism, while most British belong to one of the protestant denominations. (Some examples in Persian may be: بیعت، امر به معروف و نهی از منکر، آیت الله العظمی)

6. Economy

Until 1990, the economic system in Croatia was socialist, but now it has a free-market economy. (Some examples in Iran may be: احتکار، تعاونی اقتصادی، وقف)

7- Political and administrative functions and institutions

The Communist rule in Croatia had generated its own terminology. (Some examples in Iran may be: نهضت سواد آموزی، سازمان استخدام کشوری)

8. The armed forces

The armed forces and their ranks and formations are different in the two societies. (For example: سپاه پاسداران انقلاب اسلامی، بسیج)

9. Education

The education system in the two countries are quite different. (For example: حوزه علمیه، نهضت سواد آموزی)

10. Forms of address

11. Gesture and habits

12. Work

There is a close connection between this area and economy.

13. Leisure and entertainment

This area includes sports, games, places where people go out, things they do and so forth.

3.4.2.3 C. Thriveni

According to Indian culture, C. Thriveni [7] classified the problems which the translator faces when translating a text from or to Indian languages.

1. Names
2. Social relationships
3. Food values
4. Dress and ornaments
5. Customs and traditions
6. Beliefs and feelings
7. Religious elements, myths, and legends
8. Geographical and environmental

4. Results

Cultural categories in the corpus under study could be categorized as follows:

4.1. Clothes: Investigating the strategies applied by different translators of journalistic texts under this study shows that they transferred clothes terms by using omission, borrowing and calque. In fact 5.4% of the extracted words were under the category of clothes out of which 72% were not translated and omission was made, 14% of them were borrowed and for the remaining 14% calque was used. This is not in accordance with Newmark's [3] claim that clothes as cultural terms may be sufficiently explained for TL general readers if the generic noun or classifier is added.

4.2. Cosmetics: About this domain there was not any samples in the corpus of the present study.

4.3. Food and drinks: The most cursory look at a menu or the shelves of a shop is enough to reveal how much lexis in this area is internationalized, croissant, pizza, vodka, kebob, etc. the terms coming under this category are further complicated due to the foreign elements presence. Probing the corpus of this study reveals that out of 6.2% of all cultural items in this study related to foods and drinks, 66.6% were translated simple by not translating them and they were omitted. 11.3% were borrowed, 11.1% were translated by descriptive equivalences and for the remaining 11.1% calque strategy was applied.

4.4. Ecology: According to Newmark [3] geographical features “would normally be transferred, with addition of a brief culture-free third term where necessary in the text.” But the corpus of this study did not have any ecological words or phrases.

4.5. Furniture: Also in this case no items were found in the corpus.

4.6. House: Newmark [3] states “many language communities have a typical house which for general purposes remains untranslated.” In this case, again there were not any examples.

4.7. Music: There was not any word or phrases under this category.

4.8. Relationships: in the case of relationships, there were only two examples which composes only 1.5% of all CSIs. Half of them (50%) were translated by cultural equivalents and the other half was translated using descriptive equivalents.

4.9. Religion: As can be very frequently found in journalistic texts, religious features present cultural implications for translation. Religious terms composed most of the CSIs found in journalistic texts. 50.7% of all CSIs were related to religion. 22.25 % of these items were translated by calque, 22.25% were translated by limited universalization, 13.5 % were translated using more neutral words, 6% were translated using a general word, 6% were translated using cultural equivalents, 3% were translated by borrowing and finally the remaining 3% were translated by a combination of borrowing and calque.

4.10. Social culture: Newmark [3] states about this domain that ‘there is rarely a translation problem since the words can be transferred.’ In the present study, 7% of all CSIs were related to social culture out of which 44.4% were translated by calque, 22.2% were translated via limited universalization, 11.1% by

cultural equivalent, 11.1% by a combination of calque and borrowing, 11.1% was translated using a loan word from a third language and finally 11.1% was simply omitted.

4.11. Technology: In this field there were no samples in the corpus under study.

4.12. People's titles: It must be noted that this notion deserves to be classified as a CSI. 11.5% of the CSIs in the corpus were categorized under the subcategory of people's title. 33.3% of them were translated by calque. 20% had used neutral words, 13.33% had used cultural equivalents, 13.33% had used descriptive equivalences, 6.6% of items were translated by limited universalization, 6.6% were borrowed and at last 6.6% had been translated using a combination of calque and borrowing.

4.13. Transportation: Newmark [3] holds that in translating transport terms, 'an accurate description has to be appended to the transferred words.' But in the corpus of this study there was not any CSIs which could be categorized under transportation.

4.14. Organizations: 11.5% of all the CSIs were related to organizations. 73.3% of all these organization titles were translated using calque, 13.33% were translated using descriptive equivalents, 6.6% had used cultural equivalents and at last 6.6% of the phrases had used a combination of calque and borrowing. A variety of different approaches have been examined in relation to the cultural categories of journalistic texts. The purpose was to identify if there is any regularity in the strategies the translators use or they are idiosyncratic ones. The comparisons made in this study represents that the translators used similar strategies to cope with a CSI belonging to a particular domain. In other words, there is regularity more than idiosyncrasy in the strategies followed by the translators.

5. Conclusion

Culture has always been a controversial issue especially in case of journalistic texts and fields concerning culture of a community. Many attempts have been made in order to categorize cultural fields and strategies applied to tackle the issues concerning their transfer between languages. The present paper investigated the cultural categories in journalistic text according to Newmark, Natasa Povlovic and Thriveni categories and made a list of possible examples found in Persian journalistic texts.

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