

Domestication and Foreignization in Key Cultural Text Translation: A Case Study of the English Translation of *Lost in the Crowd*

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ABSTRACT

Translation of key cultural texts is a challenging area since these texts not only present intricacies of cultures but also distinguish them from each other. In spite of it, investigating the translation of key cultural texts is one of the neglected areas in the field of translation studies. In the light of Venuti's (2008) concepts of domestication and foreignization strategies, this research examines translation of Islamic religious cultural terms in *Lost in the Crowd* by Al-e Ahmad from Persian into English. It also investigates possible relationship between the accuracy of translation and the choice of strategy. The findings of the study reveal that domestication was the dominant strategy opted for by translators in the translation process. Moreover, the findings show that majority of the Islamic Persian terms were rendered into English adequately but the rate of adequate translation using a domesticating strategy was much higher than foreignizing.

INTRODUCTION

In linguistic approach, translation is assumed as merely a linguistic activity, a mechanical act of transferring semantic meaning of an original text to the host culture, and faithfulness to the ST is a criterion to evaluate a good translation. Later, translation is viewed in the wider context of culture and link between language and culture is highlighted. In cultural approach, translation is assumed a cross-cultural form of communication between two different worlds and language is the reflection of peculiarities between cultures. As Toury (2012, p. 170) puts it, "translation is a kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions". In the same vein, Shuttleworth and Cowie (1997, p. 35) note that, cultural translation refers to "any translation which is sensitive to cultural as well as linguistic factors".

Key cultural texts, as a tool in many cultures, "play central roles in presenting and representing the culture to itself and in defining its cultural others (people, places, and customs)", specifying concepts such as identity, nationhood, and sacredness being central to the cultures and contributing to the shaping of them among other cultures (Malmkjær, 2018, P. 1). In this regard, religious texts are one of the "paradigm cases" of key cultural texts (ibid.). Religious texts represent specific type of texts known as sensitive texts¹.

Religious language as Keane (1997, p. 49) notes, signifies "underlying assumptions about the human subject, divine beings" with extraordinary "capacities and agencies". Such assumptions about "human matters and divine beings" in religious texts make them distinguishable compared to other types of texts. Religious text translation being a kind of key cultural text translation is essential since cultural interaction and global communication has proliferated. Long (2005, p. 1) believes that international dynamism is a significant motivating factor for translating religious texts due to the necessity of rejoining cultural backgrounds. According to him, growth of migrants and diaspora inhabitants, put religious texts in direct contact with "other cultures" and became "a means of introducing different religious ideas to new audiences". The complexity of religious language on the one hand and the importance of religious texts as key cultural texts in representing the source culture needs the recognition of patterns of similarity and differences between the hosted and the target culture in the translation of such texts and their essentially contested nature. Inadequate translation of them might cause misunderstanding for the target readers being unfamiliar with the source culture and urge the need for retranslation. Since the aim of translation is to communicate across cultures and to introduce different aspects of cultures, this study is a step towards examining the

success in rendering Islamic terms² from Persian, a Middle Eastern Muslim culture, into English, a Western secular culture. In doing so, the present study follows three objectives. First, it investigates the distribution of strategies of domestication and foreignization applied in the translation of Islamic religious cultural terms (IRCTs hereafter) in the *Lost in the Crowd*. Then, it determines to what extent the IRCTs in the *Lost in the Crowd* were translated adequately and finally, it examines if there is a meaningful relationship between distribution of translation strategies of domestication and foreignization and inadequate translation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Religion and Culture

Religion plays a prominent role in the lives of individuals in almost all communities and encompasses many aspects of one's life. For instance, in Muslim people's belief, dog symbolizes impurity and because of that keeping dogs at home is strongly prohibited. The ritual impurity attributed to dogs is far from the concept of uncleanness related to lack of hygiene (see Mikhail, 2016). Understanding religious cultures enables people with no cultural attachment to understand far better each other. Hence, translation of key cultural texts, as a tool, plays a pivotal role in introducing intricacies of a culture. Moreover, accurate translation of key cultural texts dispels misconceptions about people's religious cultural beliefs and increases mutual cultural respect.

Similar to many cultures, religion is the cornerstone of Persian culture. According to Karimi-Hakkak (1997, p. 195), "religious values [are] most associated with Iranianness". Islamic values presenting the contemporary Iranian identity and Persian culture was highlighted in the socio-political upheavals of 1960s which later led to the Islamic revolution in 1978. In the years prior to the Islamic revolution in Iran, Islam as a "cultural banner ... [was] waved ... as a means of assuring cultural survival" (Hillmann, 1985, p. xxii). In this period, Islam revived in the Iranian society and became the ground for the production of texts with Islamic content. Hence, since 1960s "the idea of religion as a rallying point around which social energies could be mobilized began to permeate literary works" (Karimi-Hakkak, 1991, p. 512). Translation of religious Persian texts proliferated in the West in the post-Islamic revolution period because of the political upheavals in Iran that had captured the Westerners' attention to themselves. After classical Persian literature, religious texts became the second most frequent Persian literature translated in the US. Hence, Western readers' access to Persian key cultural texts increased through the medium of translation and Western non-Muslim readers became familiarized with the main tenets of Islamic thought and Islamic concepts that form Persian culture. However, translation from Persian compared to other languages is in periphery in the U.S. One reason is the inconsistency in the selection of translation strategy among the translators for the translation of Persian texts (see Nanquette, 2016).

Religious Culture and Translation

Addressing the problem of translating religious culture, Nida (1947, p. 203) notes that "religious systems usually differ far more widely than any other part of culture". It can be inferred that cultures with particular religious beliefs tend to draw line between themselves and other cultures with different religious perceptions. For instance, texts written in an Islamic context represent "a discourse that ... speak[s] from outside the orbit of the West and ... challenge[s] notions of universality based on European models" (Holt, 2004, p.63). In the same vein, Nasr (1975, p. 20) points out that, Islamic discourse authorities address "an audience whose demand for causality and whose conception of the levels of reality are not identical with that of Western reader". Hence, translating religious texts necessitates a constant shift between two different discourse worlds. Moreover, features of religious texts are far more intricate. Nida (ibid.) brings to the fore the point that "the religious culture of any people contains by far the most complicated lexical problems" highlighted in the translation process. Terms carrying religious connotative meaning specific to a language and cultural setting might differ largely from other languages and cultures. Hence, inaccurate translation of "these words ... [makes them] intangible" and incomprehensible to the target readers (Larson, 1984, p. 198).

The key issue in the translation of key cultural texts is the translation orientation. Two directions are available for the translators. They either maintain the features of original text or adapt target text to the target context. The two directions are referred by Holmes (2000) as retention versus re-creation and defined by Toury (1995) as adequacy versus acceptability. The most frequently used terms as the two dominant strategies of translating are proposed by Venuti (2008) known as domestication versus foreignization. He derives these two terms from Schleiermacher's (1813) discussion of translators' option between two methods of translating. According to him, translators either leave "the writer in peace as much as possible" and then, push "the reader towards him" or they leave "the reader in peace, as much as possible" and move "the writer towards him" (Venuti, 2012, p. 49). Venuti defines domestication as "an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to receiving cultural values" (2004, p. 20). By reducing linguistic and cultural peculiarities of original texts to produce texts in a fluent and transparent style, translators minimize the foreignness of the target texts. Disagreeing with this trend, Hatim and Mason (1997, p. 145) claim that consequence of employing domestication strategy is "depriving source text producers of their voice and re-expressing foreign cultural values in terms of what is familiar to the dominant culture". Foreignization is defined by Venuti as "an ethnovevant pressure on those [target-language cultural] values to register the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad" (2004, p. 20). In this method, "the difference of the foreign text [is signified by] disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the target language" (ibid.). Venuti (2008, p. 23), beyond prioritizing any of the two methods, indicates that advocating "foreignizing translation in opposition to ... American

tradition of domestication” is also an advocacy of an agenda such as “cultural political agendas”.

The main point in discussing the two strategies is recognizing to what extent a translation assimilates a foreign text to the translating language and culture and to what extent it rather highlights the differences of the original text. However, there are some determining factors in deciding how far to go in either domesticating or foreignizing the TT including context and historical period (Holmes, 2000, p. 49); the text type, the nature of the target audience, and the relationship between the source and target languages and cultures (Davies, 2003).

Larsen (2001), claims that translation is the matter of transferring the meaning to a targeted audience. In this sense, a translation depends on the target reader. Similarly, Hermans (1999, p. 63), addressing to the readers’ role in realizing the value of translation, notes that “a text, as an artefact, only comes to life as an aesthetic object when a reader responds to it ... when it serves as a stimulus in an actual communication process”. Emphasizing on the role of target readers as a medium to evaluate fidelity in the translation of culture specific terms, Farghal and Al-Masri (2000, p. 28) explain that “target language readers’ response will be important for deciding whether a certain translation is successful or not”. In other words, “correctness must be determined by the extent to which the average reader for which a translation is intended will be likely to understand it correctly” (Nida & Taber, 1982, p. 1). It signifies that translation is prepared for the target readers and their satisfaction is required to prevent cultural misunderstanding and miscommunication.

Previous Studies

Analysis of translating religious terms in key cultural texts highlights the cultural and linguistic nuances between two languages and their different value systems. Few researches have been conducted on the translation of religious terms in key cultural texts. Sharififar (2009) scrutinized the linguistic and cultural nuances between English and Persian in the translation of Christian terms traced in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, an allegorical text by John Bunyan. The researcher addressed certain complexities of translating from Western Christian context into Persian Muslim context because of the different value systems and religious restriction in the case of Persian culture, on the one hand and lexical void in the target context, on the other hand. He also showed some religious concepts which are common between Islam and Christianity and those Christian terms that reflect no religious association in the Persian context. To tackle with the latter problem, procedures of adaptation and deletion were applied frequently.

In *Translation of Cultural Specific Terms: English Rendering of Religious Terms of Hajj in Focus*, Mardiha (2013) investigated the procedures used in conveying the underlying meaning of thirty Persian Islamic terms in one of the key cultural texts entitled *Hajj* by Shariati into English. The result of her investigation revealed that transference, using notes, and functional equivalent were the most frequent procedures. Moreover, she claimed that these procedures, in spite of being more effective in transmitting the meaning of

Islamic terms into non-Islamic English language, however, failed to convey connotative meaning of Islamic terms successfully to non-Muslim readers.

Mehawesh and Sadeq (2014) investigated the rendering of Islamic expressions from Arabic into English in *The Beginning and the End*; a novel by Naguib Mahfouz. They examined challenges of translating a key cultural text containing religious expressions. The researchers extracted 169 religious expressions but selected 13 samples associated with Quranic concepts to analyze and highlight translation loss. They concluded that to reduce the risk of translation loss, translators of key cultural texts need to be familiar with the cultural setting of the religious expressions and culturally competent in the original and target languages. Moreover, they recommended a domesticating strategy as an appropriate way to convey original meaning hidden in Islamic concepts.

Aldweikat (2015) investigated the procedures opted for translating Christian religious concepts in *The Da Vinci Code*, an American novel by Dan Brown. Drawing on Toury’s adequacy and acceptability norms and Newmark’s translation procedures, he analyzed one hundred Christian concepts and categorized them into three taxonomies to uncover the translation orientation. The findings of this research revealed the application of five most frequent procedures including literal translation, recognized translation descriptive equivalent, cultural equivalent and couplets procedure. He concluded that orientation of applied procedures in the TT is neither towards SL nor TL.

AlGhamdi (2016) adapted a translation quality assessment model to analyze qualitatively the accuracy in rendering of a culture-bound text containing Islamic terms originated in Arab culture into English with a different linguistic and cultural system. In the first phase of her research, she modified House’s model and evaluated the applicability of it to the book entitled *The Sealed Nectar*; biography of the Prophet Muhammad, a key cultural text calling for an overt translation. In the second phase, she examined patterns of translation procedures that the translator adopted when translating religious terms and culture and then, investigated the contribution of these procedure to a successful overt translation. Application of the model uncovered mismatches between the ST and the TT reflecting the use of a cultural filter following the norms of English discourse, and the overt errors leading to the distortion of the original message of such a sensitive text. In the end, she suggested some alternative translations as refinements to compensate translation loss. As for translation procedures, borrowing was the most frequent procedure adopted for rendering religious culture and the second most prevailing procedure was literal translation.

As it is obvious, in previous researches on rendering religious terms in key cultural texts, peculiarities in the translation of these terms, translation loss, frequency of translation procedures and orientation of translation have been the focus of attention by the researchers. However, more research is needed to address adequacy of translation.

METHODS

In fulfilling the objectives of the study, descriptive content analysis and inferential statistics were applied. All stages of analysis were done qualitatively. The corpus includes a key cultural Persian text entitled *Lost in the Crowd* by Al-e Ahmad translated into English in 1985. It was selected for three reasons. First, the author, a leading figure among other intellectuals constituting the discourse of religious revolution in 1960s (Karimi-Hakkak, 1991), has become the second most translated author of Persian literature in the US in post-revolution period (Nanquette, 2016). Second, it was selected by the American Institute of Iranian Studies in the US in 1984 as the best translation accepted for publication and third, the selected corpus which describes the author's pilgrimage to Mecca abounds in IRCTs which provides the researchers with suitable data for the analysis. The data were collected manually in the ST and then, original terms were compared with the corresponding translated parts in the TT. Distribution of strategies employed by translators in the translation of the Islamic terms was calculated in excel. To examine the general tendency in translating Islamic terms, Venuti's (2008) translation strategies were selected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the first step, descriptive statistics was employed to investigate the degree of distribution of translation strategies in rendering IRCTs in the present study. As table 1 shows, results of the analysis of data, based on the scale of domestication and foreignization, reveal that 120 items out of 355 IRCTs in the Persian corpus were translated into English through using foreignization strategy. In other words, foreignization occurred in 33.8% of cases, while 235 cases out of 355 IRCTs were rendered into English through domestication strategy. In other words, domestication was employed in 66.1% of cases.

As for the adequacy of translated terms, five people, two English native speakers and three tourists were requested to check independently whether the respective presented terms were translated in an adequate manner. The respondents were met in George Town in Penang Island in Malaysia. Table 2 illustrates that 237 cases were translated adequately which

Table 1. Degree of distribution of domestication and foreignization strategies

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Foreignization	120	33.8
Domestication	235	66.1
Total	355	100.0

Table 2. Frequency and percentage of adequate and inadequate translation

Adequacy	Frequency	Percentage
Adequate	237	66.7
Inadequate	118	33.2
Total	355	100.0

means 66.7 % of IRCTs while 118 case were translated inadequately. That is to say, it includes 33.2 % of the whole IRCTs in the corpus of the study. Parts of the respondents' opinion are presented.

An example of foreignization in the corpus is /akhound/, a religious personage. The term was borrowed in the target text. Imran, a 31-year-old Canadian native English speaker who became familiar with Islamic tradition through taking several trips to Muslim countries, having Muslim colleagues at his workplace, and watching some Persian movies says that it is an ambiguous term for the non-Muslims. He suggests "mullah" as an appropriate equivalent since it is a familiar Islamic term in the West. He adds that in the post September 11th world, this term has been used extensively by Western media though its association heavily leans on radicalized Muslim clergymen. The second example of foreignization, the Islamic term /eyd/, a religious event, was translated as "ayd" in the target text. It is a well-known term in the West and Marijke, a 27-year-old tourist from Netherland, mentions that the translated term is clear to her. She puts emphasis on the role of her Muslim friends in making her familiar with Muslim culture and tradition to some extent.

Foreignization with literal translation in /zaer-e khaneh khoda/, a typical religious personage, translated as "a visitor of the house of God". Lyndsay, a 47-year-old woman from England asserts that she became familiar with Islamic terms because of talking to her Muslim friends in Malaysia and adds that Islam is a frequently discussed topic in Britain. To her, the translated term is ambiguous since there is no cultural reference in English that is similar or related to it. She suggests "a pilgrim to Mecca" as a more appropriate equivalent since the term Mecca is a familiar Islamic term in Europe and pilgrim bears a religious connotation. In the second example, the original Persian term /bandeh khoda/ is rendered into "devotee of God". Lucas, a 53-year-old tourist from Sweden whose familiarity is due to his multiple trips to Muslim countries, agrees with the translate term and said that it is clear to him.

Foreignization with explanation in the Persian word /torbat/ is presented. It was translated as "holy soil". Nicholas is 59 years old and comes from Sweden. He is quite familiar with Muslim culture because of frequent trips to Muslim countries and living near community of Muslim migrants in his homeland. He agrees with the translation as it reflects similarity between Muslim and Western cultures. He explains that to Christians church is assumed as a holy land covered with holy soil. Foreignization in the form of compound borrowing is exemplified in the Persian term /ghebleh Moslemin/ translated "Muslim qebleh". To Lyndsay, "Muslim prayer direction" is much more appropriate because the word "qebleh" has no cultural reference in the target context and therefore, is a vague term to the non-Muslims.

The application of domestication strategy is exemplified in the following terms. The Persian term /ashianeh Haj/ translated "Hajj assembly point" is a religious site. To Imran, it could have been the best if it had been translated "pilgrims assembly point". Another example for domestication strategy is /etekaf/, a religious activity, rendered "seclusion".

Lucas suggests that elaboration of the term will convey the religious meaning of the original term more appropriately. Hence, a better equivalent is “seclusion for spiritual alleviation”. In the next example, the original term /*tabarrok*/ was translated “a spiritually powerful gift”. To Nicholas, it has cultural resemblance to a specific Christian religious ceremony known as Holy Communion wherein pieces of bread and wine are distributed among participants; bread is the attribution of a piece of Jesus body and wine is ascribed to Jesus blood. It is in fact reenacting last supper of Jesus. The last term, /*nejasat*/ is an abstract term rendered into English by adding an equivalent to the original term “nejasat (uncleanliness)”. Imran believes that it failed to convey the specific Islamic religious meaning. Uncleanliness is a neutral term associated with hygiene with no cultural connotation. So, it is an inappropriate translation.

In order to examine the relationship between inadequacy of translation and application of foreignization and domestication strategies, descriptive statistics was done. Table 3 depicts adequacy of translated terms in relation to the degree of distribution of two translation strategies. According to Table 3, just 47 out of 120 items were rendered into English using foreignization strategy, that is to say, 39.1 % were translated adequately while 73 out of 120 original items were translated into English by applying a foreignizing strategy, that is to say, 60.8 % were translated inadequately. As for the adequacy of translation using domestication strategy, the table shows that 190 cases out of 235 items were rendered into English adequately. However, 45 out of 235 items were translated inadequately using a domesticating strategy including 33.2 % of total items.

To examine the relationship between the translation strategies and inaccuracy, correlation test was run. According to table 4, the Pearson Correlation result for inadequate

translation is $r = -0.426$, $N = 355$, $p < .01$. The r-value reported is negative and $p < .01$, hence there is a large and negative correlation between inadequate translation and domestication strategy. According to Table 4, the Pearson Correlation result for inadequate translation is $r = 0.426$, $N = 355$, $p < .01$. The r-value reported is positive and $p < .01$, hence, there is a large and positive correlation between inadequate translation and foreignization strategy.

Translation of sensitive terms highly rooted in a Muslim culture and tradition is a translation resistant area for non-Muslim readers with no cultural attachment. To accomplish this task, three translators cooperated together in order to render *Lost in the Crowd* from Persian into English. Result of the analysis of data in the present study shows that domestication is a widely used strategy in the translation process. The high rate of this strategy reveals that translators by applying it attempted to contribute to the naturalness and removal of traces of foreignness from the TT and in return, to create a fluent and transparent text for the target readers who are unfamiliar with Middle Eastern cultures. In fact, translators, by applying domestication in the translation of IRCTs, intended to diminish Iranian-ness of the translated text and accordingly, to accentuate the dominant monolingual Western culture and language through replacing the original Eastern Islamic terms for the target reader and make translation of Persian Islamic cultural terms in accordance with the ethnocentric norm dominant in the West. Moreover, the high frequency rate of this strategy indicates that translators by opting for this strategy assume that they are translating a text for a readership that has a lesser knowledge of Eastern Muslim cultures and consequently, Islamic terms and concepts. Hence, translators attempted to avoid maintaining strangeness of the text in the TL and interrupting the flow of reading of the text for the reader by putting strange and unknown terms in the TT. According to Venuti (2005, p. 312), “the dominance of fluent strategies and the transparency” undoubtedly limits “the recognition of translation as a significant cultural practice” and consequently, “translation is led to marginalization”. However, Abdul-Raof (2005, p. 172) claims that domestication of the original linguistic and cultural expressions and exegetical footnotes is an appropriate way “to bring the message home to the TL audience, increase the level of source text informativity, and maintain SL intentionality”.

Table 3. Adequacy of translation in applying foreignization and domestication strategies

Translation strategy	Adequacy	Adequate	Inadequate	Total
Foreignization	Frequency	47	73	120
	Percent	39.1	60.8	100.0
Domestication	Frequency	190	45	235
	Percent	80.8	19.1	100.0
Total	Frequency	237	118	355
	Percent	66.7	33.2	100.0

Table 4. Correlation between inadequate translation and translation strategies

	Inadequate
Foreignization Pearson Correlation	.426**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
N	355
Domestication Pearson Correlation	-.426**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
N	355

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate the strategies applied in the English translation of Islamic terms in one of the Persian Key cultural texts entitled *Lost in the Crowd*. Venuti’s domestication/foreignization model was applied to investigate the direction of translation in rendering IRCTs from Persian into English. It was argued that religious term translation is not only a linguistic issue but also a cultural one. Due to the Persian cultural and linguistic peculiarities which has no similarity with that of English and also, in order to increase the chance of more adequate translation, the study suggests that domestication is an appropriate strategy while the use of a foreignizing strategy increases the risk of inadequate

translation in the case of translating sensitive terms. The findings of the study contribute to the production of good translations. Recently, with the state financial support, a considerable number of Persian key cultural texts have been translated into English. The findings of this study enable translators exclusively working in this area to render sensitive terms in key cultural texts more appropriately.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Any type of text that seeks to persuade or convince the reader is called a sensitive text such as religious, political or legal texts (Hatim & Munday, 2004, p. 103).
- 2 It is worth mentioning that Arabic as the language of Islam in the world has the highest status among other Islamic languages. In spite of it, Arabic is not the only language for Islamic religious discourse. Persian also plays a significant role in spreading Islamic thoughts and beliefs in the world. Iranian scholars and intellectuals have written books in Persian to illuminate the doctrines and principles of Islamic discourse and philosophy for the Muslim people, especially for Shi'ite communities. There are Islamic terms in their discourses that are either rooted in Persian or modified in Persian. For example, المصلى [al-musallâ], a place for prayer, is an Arabic term adjusted to Persian language system, as مصلى /mosallâ/, i.e. the Arabic prefix 'al-' is deleted in Persian. In terms of etymology, the origins of many Islamic terms in Persian are Arabic such as *zakât*, *ma'âd*, and *ihrâm*. However, there are Islamic terms rooted in Persian such as *namâz* (prayer), *roozeh* (fasting), *goldasteh* (minaret). In addition, there are neutral terms rooted in Arabic but bear religious connotative meanings in Persian such as *rowzeh* and *rowzehxân*. The former word (*rowzeh*) means garden in Arabic, while in Persian it means mourning for the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, and the person who performs *rowzeh* for people is called *rowzehxân* (Nahvi, 1989, p. 173). Hence, it is evident from the above examples that there are Islamic terms either rooted in Persian or carry religious connotative meaning exclusively in Persian. Abundance of Islamic terms in the translated Persian texts justifies the need for a research on how translators tackle with them in the process of translating.

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