



Investigating Translation Strategies of Culture-Specific Items in Alignment with Nord's Binary Translation Typology: A Case Study of Unaccustomed Earth

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Received: 11 May , 2014

Accepted: 12 November , 2014

Abstract

Culture is an extremely complex concept. Translating cultural elements is a demanding task due to the fact that these elements comprise specific meanings and implications belonging exclusively to the language and culture from which they have emerged. Regarding this point, the present article investigated the strategies employed for translating culture-specific items (CSIs) in an English novel, *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) by Lahiri, which was rendered into Persian by three translators. After extracting and classifying CSIs based on Pavlovic and Poslek's categorization (1999), the translation strategies were determined in the three Persian TTs according to Davies' model (2003), and then, the researchers went on to compare every source item to its three target equivalents, which were in turn compared to one another, to determine their translation strategies. It should be mentioned that a total of 284 CSIs were identified. Finally, the frequency of the strategies was computed and the strategies were classified under Nord's binary translation typology (2005) in order to pinpoint whether each TT belonged to documentary or instrumental type. According to the results, *preservation* was the dominant translation strategy in the three TTs, and all the TTs belonged to *documentary* translation.

Keywords: culture- culture-specific items- documentary translation- instrumental translation.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the centuries, translations have fulfilled a crucial role in the processing and exchange of information among people. At first glance, translation is the phenomenon of transferring the linguistic elements from one language into another, however, it has recently come to be perceived as a cultural system; therefore, it is treated regarding the cultural aspects. According to Miremadi (1991), "It is a two-way process: from one culture to the others and from

other cultures into one's culture. In other words, there is a give and take process" (p.11). Miremadi just considered the element of culture in the process of translation, whereas Faiq (2004) regarded culture and language as the two crucial components of translation. Since translation, as a human activity, is in close interrelationship with culture and language, Faiq stated that "translating involves the transporting (carrying-over) of languages and their associated cultures to foreign receivers" (p. 36). Translations of popular fictions from English have constituted a

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considerable portion of translated texts. Therefore, the translator has a significant role in transferring the author's message transparently, and attracting the readers' attention. However, there are some elements in the TT, such as culture-specific items which may cause major difficulties for the translator. In fact, translators have to make many intellectual decisions on how to make these items more comprehensible for target audience, and how to use the most appropriate style and structure in order to satisfy their audience, and to convey both the meaning and the form of the source cultural item (Hosseini Maasoum & Davtalab, 2011).

The notion of culture has been analyzed by various scholars considering different aspects of the notion. It is a rather complicated concept and can be approached from various angles. Many linguists have categorized culture into different groups such as food, dress, drink and some other materials. Brake et al. (as cited in Che Suh, 2005) are among those linguists who considered culture as: "Laws, customs, rituals, gestures, ways of dressing, food and drink and methods of greeting, and saying goodbye ... These are all part of culture, but they are just the tip of the iceberg" (p. 95). However, some scholars did not agree with the notion of considering culture as including materials. For example, Goodenough (cited in Che Suh, 2005) asserted that culture is not a "material phenomenon", but rather consisting of "the end product of learning: knowledge" (p. 92). Snell-Hornby (2006), like Goodenough, regarded culture as "a totality of knowledge, proficiency and perception", not including any concrete materials (p. 55). Faiq (2004) also considered culture as involving "the totality of attitudes towards the world, towards events, and towards other cultures and peoples, and the manner in which the attitudes are mediated" (p. 36). Vermeer's (1987) definition of culture included: "the entire setting of norms and conventions an individual as a member of his society must know in order to be "like everybody" – or to be able to be different from everybody" (p. 28). It should be mentioned that culture is not an innate feature of human, as

Staskeviciute (2005) stated, "a person is not born with culture; he or she has to learn it from other people in a society" (p. 14). Holding the above definitions, it can be noted that culture and its specific items are regarded as a knowledge or something to be learned which any individual of a society must acquire in order to be accepted by his/her society and its members.

The culture of any nation includes its own CSIs. Due to the exclusiveness of these items, their translation is one of the most challenging tasks every translator may encounter. Actually CSIs are not like many other words whose equivalents can be easily found in dictionaries. There has always been this matter how translators can deal with cultural items when it is required to translate between two languages with two completely different cultures, backgrounds and histories (Hosseini Maasoum & Davtalab, 2011). Most of the translators, being unfamiliar with CSIs, may come upon problems when translating CSIs of an ST. This may cause the entire deletion of the cultural item in the TT, or the cultural item may lose its sense and effect in the receptor text. Moreover, translators may not even be able to identify CSIs in the ST. This may result in producing an inaccurate TT. Thus, it is important that the translator first identifies the cultural items in the SL, and then, finds the most appropriate strategies to translate those specific items.

Regarding the aforementioned, the study of the translation of cultural items in the literary works is both essential and significant, and translators are required to achieve an adequate knowledge of strategies frequent in translation of cultural items, since it is a necessary task for all translators to introduce their homeland culture to the people all over the world. Such studies as the present one can best provide useful methods for translators and also university students of translation to deal with the cultural items properly.

Research Questions

The present study was designed to investigate the following questions:

1. What is the dominant translation strategy in each TT of Unaccustomed Earth in rendering CSIs?
2. Which one (if any) of the three TTs of Unaccustomed Earth best matches Nord's documentary translation in rendering CSIs?
3. Which one (if any) of the three TTs of Unaccustomed Earth best matches Nord's instrumental translation in rendering CSIs?

Various Categorizations of CSIs

In dealing with the cultural dimension of translation, there often exists a lack of agreement on what should be assigned as CSI. Various theorists and linguists have adopted different terms to refer to the cultural items and have also considered different categorizations for classifying CSIs. Halloran (2006), for example, noted that CSIs pertain to a particular culture and encompass cultural identities which do not have direct equivalents in another culture. Halloran proposed a concise classification including institutions, history, toponymy, or art of a given culture. Baker (1992) applied the term “culture-specific concept” which may be “abstract or concrete; it may relate to a religious belief, a social custom, or even a type of food” (p. 28). Newmark (1988) called them “cultural words”, and related the existence of cultural words to “gaps” between the SL and TL; he believed that where there is a focus on culture, the cultural

“gap” or “distance” between the SL and TL will cause a translation problem (p. 94). He divided the cultural words into five categories: ecology-material culture- social culture- organizations, customs, activities, procedures- and gestures and habits (p. 95). Aixela (1996, p. 58) used the term “culture-specific items” due to the fact that there always exists a potential translation problem in a concrete situation between two languages and two texts. According to Aixela, CSIs refer to:

those textually actualized items whose function and connotations in a source text involve a translation problem in their transference to a target text, whenever this problem is a product of the nonexistence of the referred item or of its different intertextual status in the cultural system of the readers of the target text (p. 58).

Aixela (1996) identified CSIs with those items “especially linked to the most arbitrary area of each linguistic system - its local institutions, streets, historical figures, place names, personal names, periodicals, works of art, etc.” (p. 57).

There is another classification of cultural items proposed by Pavlovic and Poslek (1999, pp. 160-163) which includes a wider range of items than those of Newmark, and whose entire items were applied for categorizing CSIs in the present study's text:

Table 1.
Pavlovic and Poslek's Categorization of CSIs (1999, pp. 160-163)

No	CSI	Description
1	Ecology	Different aspects of nature, such as winds, plains and hills, and other geographic concepts, as well as flora, and fauna. Some samples in the novel under study included: delphinium, phlox, Elliott Bay, parrotfish.
2	Everyday life	Different kinds of dwellings, household appliances, food, meals, clothes, means of transport, public services specially the names of public service companies. Examples: Euro Rail, sari, begunis, and station wagon.
3	Material culture	Various products, trademarks in particular. Examples: Windex, Yashika, Nice biscuits.
4	History	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 tradition Examples: Ann Frank House, Pujo, Labor Day
5	Religion	Pavlovic and Poslek described this category by comparing different religious items between Britain and Croatia, and by demonstrating that there are some religious concepts in any society which may not have any equivalent in another society, so their translation may raise problems for the reader, since they might be unfamiliar to a target average speaker. Examples: christening, convent school, the Lent term.

6	Economy	Many concepts relating to the stock exchange, money market, equity or commodities. Examples: quarters, check.
7	Political and administrative functions and institutions	Concepts related to the western democracies. Examples: Democratic Party, the guerrillas.
8	The armed forces	The armed forces and their ranks and formations (no samples found in the novel).
9	Education	The difference between the education systems in the two different countries. Examples: Boarding schools, Montessori education.
10	Forms of address	In Croatian, titles are usually used in front of people's names, such as " <i>dr., Mr., prof., lord, lady and sir</i> ". The translator must determine how to translate such titles. Examples: kaku, bou-di, dadu.
11	Gestures and habits	There are often some gestures and habits which might be reflected in language, like "the old-fashioned Croatian greeting <i>ljubim ruke</i> (lit. <i>I kiss your hand.</i>)", which shows the gesture of the time, but has no equivalent in English (no samples found in the novel).
12	Work	This area is closely related to economy. Examples: the Floating Market, tenure-track job.
13	Leisure and entertainment	<i>Sports</i> (cricket, rugby, curling, hurling), <i>games</i> (bridge), <i>places</i> where people go out (pub, kafić), things they do (karaoke), and so on. Examples: cafeteria, minibar, trumpet, scrabble.

Different Translation Solution Types for Rendering CSIs

There are various viewpoints among scholars on the notion of whether to use 'strategy', 'procedure', 'method' or 'technique'. Majhut (2012) believed that in rendering of CSIs there is a usual problem of "terminological inconsistency" in using these four terms. This inconsistency affected the entire discipline of Translation Studies. Newmark (1988, p. 81) stated that translation methods are associated with whole texts, whereas translation procedures are applicable for "sentences and the smaller units of language." Molina and Albir (2002), referred to translation method as the way a translator carries out a certain translation process in terms of his/her objectives. In their viewpoint, translation methods affect the whole text, while translation techniques affect "micro units" of the text. Pedersen, cited in Majhut (2012), mentioned that translation strategies should be used for making the main general decisions, "such as whether to translate the whole text in a domesticating or in a foreignizing way" (p. 30).

The present study is a synthesis of the four translation solution types, the researchers resorted to translation procedures and techniques when studying the translation of individual cultural items, while to translation methods and strategies in deciding whether each TT was translated in a documentary or instrumental

way. However, in this study the researchers used the term translation strategies, since it is a more common term in the translation of CSIs and also they used translation strategies presented by Davies (2003). In fact, Davies herself has called her categories "translation strategies".

Many linguists have introduced various strategies for translating CSIs. For example, Aixela (1996) categorized the translation strategies of CSIs into two groups: "conservation" and "substitution" (p. 61). The conservation pole encompasses: "(1) Repetition, (2) Orthographic adaptation, (3) Linguistic (non-cultural) translation, (4) Extratextual gloss, (5) Intratextual gloss" (pp. 61-62); and the substitution pole includes: "(1) Synonymy, (2) Limited universalization, (3) Absolute universalization, (4) Naturalization, (5) Deletion, (6) Autonomous creation" (pp. 63-64). Also, Hervey, Higgins and Haywood (1995) proposed "Exoticism, Cultural borrowing, Calque, Communicative translation, and Cultural transplantation" as strategies in translating CSIs.

In the present study, the researchers applied Davies' model (2003, pp. 65-100) including seven strategies for rendering CSIs:

1. Preservation. The translators may use this strategy when they cannot find almost any close equivalent for a special case in the target language, so they "decide to maintain the source text term in the translation." The ST term is transferred without any changes or is changed

phonologically. Davies considered two types of preservation: the first type is preservation of the ST item, i.e. preservation of the form of the item, and the second is "a straightforward translation of the meaningful elements", i.e. direct translation or preservation of the meaning of an element. Examples are:

Preservation of form: Delphinium: دلفینیوم

Preservation of meaning: Girl Scout meeting: جلسه‌ی دخترهای پیشاهنگ

2. Addition. This strategy is used when the translator decides to maintain the original item but complements the text with the information he/she may feel as necessary for more comprehension of the target reader. Here, a CSI of the ST is transferred into the TT but explanatory information is also provided. Examples are: Chanachur: چاناچور (آجیل تند هندی شامل دانه های بوداده ی گوناگون)

Montessori education: آموزش ماننتسوری (نوعی روش آموزشی تحصيل کودکان)

3. Omission. Davies defines this translation strategy as the "omission of a problematic CSI." When the translator encounters difficulties in translating a CSI, he/she may simply decide to omit it in the TT. However, Davies states that a CSI can be omitted if this does not do any harm to the TT. Examples are: Liquor: -----. Tabouli: -----.

4. Globalization. Davies describes this strategy as the replacement of the ST culture-specific references with "more neutral or general" ones, in order that they be accessible to readers from a broader range of "cultural backgrounds." Examples are: Echinacea tea: چای. Touch football: فوتبال

5. Localization. this strategy is opposed to globalization and is applied when "translators try to anchor a reference firmly in the culture of the target audience". In fact, it is the replacement of the original culture-specific references with ones that are more familiar to the target readers. Examples are: Begunis: کوفته ها. Liquor store: میخانه

6. Transformation. On occasions the translator might decide to go beyond globalization and

localization, and to modify a CSI, that means "alteration or distortion of the original." Although in globalization and localization the meaning of the original item is changed to some extent in the TT, transformation alters the meaning to a far greater extent. Examples are: Cornucopia: نان کره ای. جوجه تیغی: Burrrito.

7- Creation: This strategy is opposed to omission because it is the creation of a CSI which is not present in the ST. Only one sample was identified for this strategy:

Frescoes in churches: محراب ها، گچکاری کلیسا ها

The word "frescoes in churches" is a CSI belonging to the category of *religion*. As seen in this sample, the translator has created a Persian CSI which is not present in the ST.

Nord's Binary Translation Typology

Nord in her book, *Text Analysis in Translation* (2005), introduced a binary typology of translation: *documentary* vs. *instrumental*. "Documentary translations ... serve as a document of an SC communication between the author and the ST receiver" (p. 80). Examples are word-for-word, literal, philological translations, and generally what Nord has called exoticizing translations. In a documentary translation, the translator reproduces some specific dimensions of the ST or the whole ST- in hand for the TT receivers, who are conscious of reading a text of a community to which they do not belong. In this kind of translation, any features of the ST are focused. There is an attempt to maintain the local color of the ST (p. 81). According to Chesterman (2000), a documentary translation, being plainly a translation of something else, is clearly "a document of another text."

On the other hand, an instrumental translation serves as an independent message-transmitting instrument in a new communicative action in TC, and is intended to fulfil its communicative purpose without the receiver being aware of reading or hearing a text which, in a different form, was used before in a different communicative action (Nord, 2005, p. 81).

As Nord stated, an instrumental translation is a “communicative instrument in its own right, conveying a message directly from the ST author to the TT receiver” (p. 80). Nord mentioned that an instrumental translation is applicable only if the intention of the author is not addressed exclusively at the SC readers, but can also be transferred to the TC audience. If this is not the case, the translation must “document” the ST situation in the TT environment, and therefore giving the TT receivers an indication that they are reading a translation (p. 81). Chesterman (2000) pointed out that instrumental translation “functions as an instrument of communication in its own right, it works independently of a source text, and is judged on how well it expresses its message.” Therefore, it is a bit like “direct speech.”

Unlike many other scholars who have proposed binary translation strategies, Nord in her article published in TEFLIN Journal (2006, p. 142) did not suggest that one of the two types is “generally better or more appropriate than the other.” In fact, Nord believed that choosing one strategy or the other all depends on “the translation brief” or the information the translator receives about the type of audience the translation is addressed to and the goal it is intended to fulfil in the target culture (p. 142).

Methodology

The present study is a comparative research which aims at comparing three translations of the same source text. According to Williams and Chesterman (2002), “the analysis of translated texts involves the textual comparison of a translation with its original” (p. 6). Williams and Chesterman further argued that analyzing every aspect of the texts would be impossible in an individual research, therefore, the researcher should confine the study to a particular dimension of the ST. This is just as the case in the present study that culture-specific items are the aspect of the original text taken, and according to Davies’ model the corresponding elements in the three TTs are examined and compared once

to the ST ones, and then together in order to find out how they have been treated by their translators based on Nord’s typology.

Source Materials

The corpus adopted in this study included a short story collection: *Unaccustomed Earth* by Jhumpa Lahiri, an American author of Indian origin. It was published on April 1st 2008, comprising eight short stories which take the reader from Cambridge and Seattle to India and Thailand. This book has been translated into Persian by three translators: Amir Mahdi Haghghat (1387/2008), Mahi publication, Faranak Bajelan (1387/2008), Morvarid publication, and Goli Emami (1387/2008), Cheshme publication.

The book considered for investigation in this study met the following criteria: (a) originally written in English, (b) is recently written, (c) classified as collections of short stories, (d) received great attention by many readers from all over the world, (e) won several awards. And also, its Persian translations are available in different bookstores.

Procedure

This descriptive research aims to analyze the different strategies applied by the three Persian translators to deal with CSIs. First, the entire pages of the source text *Unaccustomed Earth* in English were read carefully in pursuit of CSIs with the help of Pavlovic and Poslek’s categorization of cultural items presented in Table 1. After studying the three translations of the novel, the corresponding equivalents of the original CSIs were determined in the TTs. Then, the researcher applied Davies’ model to elicit the translation strategies used to render the cultural items into Persian, which were elaborated above. And finally, after analyzing and interpreting the achieved data and measuring the frequency of each translation strategy, the most and least frequently adopted strategies were determined, and thereby the researcher was able to express, according to Nord’s binary typology of translation, whether each of the three TTs matched *documentary* or *instrumental* translation.

Translation Strategies as Subcategories of Documentary vs. Instrumental Translation Typology

As stated above, the last stage of this study was to classify the strategies as subcategories of Nord's translation typology. Classifying each strategy under either documentary or instrumental translation is based on the definition of each strategy stated in the previous parts and the rationale could be elaborated as: In the case of *preservation of form*, the item which is put into the TT is taken over unchanged, exactly as it was for the SL and source audience. Therefore, preserving the form of an item in the ST is an element adjusted to the documentary type of translation, making the reader aware of reading a text not in his/her own language. Also in the case of *addition*, the ST item is maintained in the TT with some supplementary information. Here again, the foreign element of the source culture is transferred into the TT. So, addition is categorized under documentary translation, too.

The meaning of a CSI is translated directly into the TT in the case of *preservation of meaning*. Here the reader receives the meaning of a source item in his/her language. So, preservation of meaning may not produce a foreignness in the TT. Thereby, this strategy can be classified under instrumental translation. In the strategy of *omission*, a problematic CSI which may be incomprehensible for the target reader is omitted in the TT.

Therefore, one element which may cause the audience to understand that they are reading a text in another language is eliminated. In *globalization*, a cultural word of the ST is replaced by a more neutral or general one, and the foreignness of the ST is not transferred to the TT.

When *localization* happens, the original culture-specific item is replaced with one more familiar to the target readers. Here again the foreign element of the ST is transformed to a local target item. It should be noted that the strategies of *transformation* and *creation* seemed not to belong to either of the categories of documentary or instrumental translation, because they have neither the features of documentary nor instrumental translation. So, these two strategies are not taken into account in the tables of documentary vs. instrumental translation.

Results and Discussion

In this study, the total number of CSIs extracted from the ST was 284 all of which have gone through careful analysis because of the researcher's interest in achieving valid output. The process of counting the number of CSIs and frequency of each translation strategy were done manually. And then, the data were inserted into Microsoft Office Excel software application in order to provide the figures. Figure 1 presents a comparison of Davies' translation strategies adopted by the three translators.

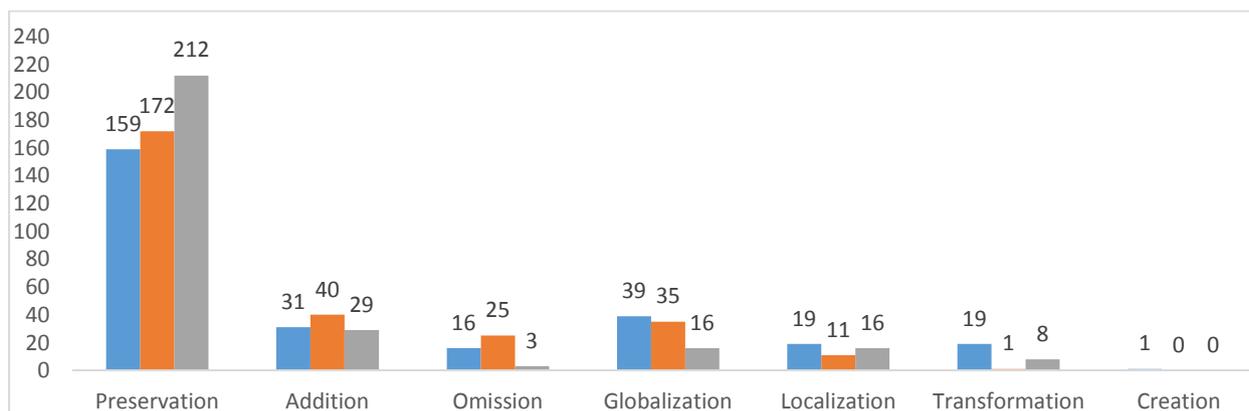


Figure 1. Number of translation strategies applied in the TTs (In each strategy from the left: Emami-Bajelan-Haghghat)

As demonstrated in Figure 1, the researchers came up with several findings: Preservation (including the total of form & meaning) comprises the highest number and frequency in all the three TTs. Whereas, creation with 1, 0 and 0 cases respectively has got the lowest number in Emami, Bajelan and Haghghat's texts. So, a remarkable point attainable from this comparison is that the three TTs have two features in common concerning the highly and lowly adopted strategies that are preservation and creation. In the following tables, translation strategies adopted by the three translators are categorized under Nord's typology: Documentary vs. Instrumental.

Table 2.
Status of Translation Strategies as Subcategories of Documentary Typology in the Three TTs

Translation Strategies	Emami	Bajelan	Haghghat
Preservation of form	107	125	163
Addition	31	40	29
Total Number	138	165	192
Percentage	48.6	58.1	67.6

As shown in Table 2, preservation of form from the subcategories of documentary translation is the most highly adopted strategy in all the three TTs with the total numbers of 107, 125, and 163.

Table 3.
Status of Translation Strategies as Subcategories of Instrumental Typology in the Three TTs

Translation Strategies	Emami	Bajelan	Haghghat
Preservation of meaning	52	47	49
Omission	16	25	3
Globalization	39	35	16
Localization	19	11	16
Total Number	126	118	84
Percentage	44.3	41.5	29.5

As Table 3 demonstrates, preservation of meaning from the subcategories of instrumental translation is the most highly adopted strategy in all the three TTs with the total numbers of 52, 47, and 49.

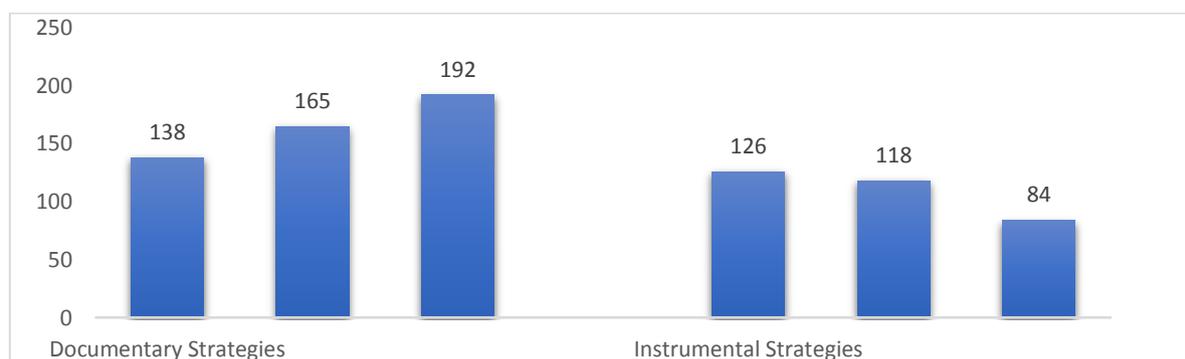


Figure 2. Translation strategies adopted as subcategories of documentary & instrumental translation typology (In each part from the left: Emami-Bajelan-Haghghat)

As Figure 2 shows, documentary strategies from Emami to Haghghat have gone through an ascent, whereas, instrumental ones show a descent. It is noticeable from Figure 2 that the three translators have employed documentary strategies more than instrumental. Thereby, all the TTs belong to documentary translation. It means that the TTs included many foreign elements of the ST which can make the target receiver aware of reading a text not originally written in his/her own language (the main focus of documentary type).

Since CSIs have always caused challenges in the process of translation, it may be supposed that the translators usually prefer to delete the cultural items in the TT. However, according to the findings of this research presented in Figure 1, it is worth noting that all the three Iranian translators have preferred to maintain the majority of English CSIs in the TTs (*preservation*), and also to provide additional and explanatory information they have felt necessary for better comprehension of the Persian readers. There-

fore, the translators have tried best to decrease the amount of omitting CSIs, but rather to preserve them in the TT. That is either due to the lack of appropriate equivalences in the TL or due to the translators' respect to the SL.

Conclusion

In general, 284 instances of CSIs as well as their respective translations were studied and significant conclusions were extracted concerning the results: Based upon the numbers that Tables 1 and 2 represented, it turned out that *preservation* with the total numbers of 159, 172, and 212 items in Emami, Bajelan and Haghghat's translations respectively is the dominant translation strategy in all the three TTs which is in itself the answer to the first research question. And also, the least frequently applied strategy by the three Iranian translators was *creation* with the total numbers of 1, 0, and 0 respectively in their TTs. So, an interesting point was that the three TTs under study were similar in the most and the least frequently employed strategies which included preservation and creation respectively.

According to the data collected, numbers and frequencies determined, and describing each TT based on Nord's binary translation typology, the answer to the last two research questions was revealed. It was proved that all the three TTs belonged to *documentary translation*, demonstrating that the foreign elements of the ST were so frequent in the TTs.

It is worth noting that the three translators have dealt with 118 cultural items out of 284 similarly. In other words, identical translation strategies have been adopted for rendering 118 cases. Therefore, 41.5 is the rate of consistency of translators in treating similar ST-TT pairs altogether.

According to the results obtained, it is noticeable that the three translators have tried best to decrease the amount of omitting CSIs, but rather to provide additional and explanatory information they have felt necessary to make CSIs clear and comprehensible as much as possible for the Persian readers.

Though by no means comprehensive, this

study can help novice and future translators to become aware of some useful strategies to cope with the difficulties of translating cultural cases, and to deal with them more efficiently. Also, this study can present the translators with the most appropriate strategies to translate these items, so as not to decrease or spoil their sense and effect in the receptor text.

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