



A Study of Translators' Approach in Dealing with Culture-specific Items in Translation of Children's Fantasy Fiction

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate translators' approach in dealing with culture-specific items (CSI) in translation of fantasy fiction for children. For this purpose, the culture-specific items in Persian translations of John Ronald Reuel Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* as well as Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* were taken into consideration. Since children have limited amount of knowledge and language ability, translators of children's novels may encounter difficulties while dealing with culture-specific items. They cannot easily decide whether to domesticate or foreignize such items. The reason to select these novels was that these are highly fantasy, localized novels, and are expressive of the country where they were developed. They are also very popular novels and strongly related to fairy tales, myths, and legends. They demonstrate obvious deviation from reality and abound in culture-specific items. This descriptive research employed a parallel corpus study and a consolidation of translation procedures introduced by four theorists, i.e. Aixelá, Davies, Fernandes, and Klingberg as the theoretical framework. The results of the study were indicative of the translators' source-oriented tendency and the most frequently applied strategy was transliteration.

Keywords: Children's literature, Culture-specific items, Fantasy fiction, Literary translation

INTRODUCTION

Children's literature is a term used to refer to fictional texts written for children. This kind of literature, therefore, address children who have a limited amount of knowledge. Fantasy fiction abounds in Culture-Specific Items (CSI) and this might be difficult for a child to understand. The problem of understanding such items and words

becomes more evident in translation because they may not have direct equivalent in the target language. Translators cannot easily decide whether to domesticate or foreignize such words. Culture-specific items include meals and food items, proper names, names of plant and animal species, historical references, games, customs and measurements.

The problem of translating culture-bound terms can be investigated from various aspects.

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Some of them such as genre-specific norms and discourse structure belong to text level. Others, which refer to culture-specific entities such as clothes, food, games, and so on, are problems at the lexical or semantic level. The present study aimed to investigate the second type, which involves conveying the meaning of particular culture-specific items in the target language.

Many scholars dealt with the problem of translating culture-specific items so far. For instance, Klingberg (1986) proposed nine procedures for translating culture-specific items, i.e. added explanation, rewording, explanatory translation, explanation outside the text, substitution of an equivalent in the culture of the target language, substitution of a rough equivalent in the culture of the target language, localization, deletion, and simplification. Newmark (1988) also introduced some procedures including transference, cultural equivalent, neutralization, naturalization, componential analysis, gloss, notes, using classifiers, couplet, paraphrase and zero translation. Hervey and Higgins (1992) proposed five procedures for dealing with cultural transposition. They range their procedures along a scale between the extremes of exoticism and cultural transplantation. Aixelá (1996) considered eleven procedures for translating culture-specific items. His procedures could be divided into two categories: conservation and substitution. The former refers to those procedures applied by the translator to preserve the foreign flavor of the Culture-Specific Items (CSI). In other words, the CSI in the source text is retained in translation. The latter refers to those procedures applied by a translator to substitute a CSI with another one in the target language. Therefore, the foreign flavor is neutralized or lost. The strategies, which belong to the first category, are repetition, orthographic adaptation, linguistic (non-cultural) translation, extratextual gloss, and intratextual gloss. Substitution category also includes synonymy, limited universalisation, absolute universalisation, naturalisation, deletion, and autonomous creation.

Aixelá (1996) asserted that:

“In translation a Culture-Specific Item (CSI) does not exist [of] itself, but as the result of a conflict arising from any linguistically represented reference in a source text [which], when transferred to a target language, poses a translation problem due to the nonexistence or to the different value (whether determined by ideology, usage, frequency, etc.) of the given item in the target language culture (p. 57)”.

In addition to Aixelá (1996), Davies (2003) suggested some procedures to deal with culture-specific items. He used these procedures in translating of such items in the Harry Potter books. He introduced two dimensions, i.e. the micro-level and the macro-level. Concerning micro-level dimension, he suggested some procedures including preservation, addition, omission, globalization, localization, transformations, and creation. These are related to the level investigated in the present study. Katan (1999) suggested a different approach, which involves the concept of chunking. It refers to moving between different cultural frames, either to a more specific one (chunking down), to a more general level (chunking up), or to an equivalent frame at a similar level (chunking sideways).

Fernandes (2006) investigated the translation of names in children's fantasy literature and focused on the most important types of 'meanings' conveyed by such names. He used Hermans's (1988) ways of translating names from the source language into the target language and offered a categorization of ten procedures that were identified in the Portuguese-English Parallel Corpus of Children's Fantasy Literature (PEPCOCFL).

Translation of children's literature can be different from translation for an adult audience. Translation for children can be considered less constrained. Shavit (1986) pointed out that “unlike contemporary translators of adult books, the translator of children's literature can permit himself great liberties regarding the text” (p.112). On the other hand, Rudvin (1994) explained about the relative status of the source and target cultures and was of the opinion that usually in the

process of translating from a minor to a dominant culture a translator feels that he/she can exercise more freedom. Therefore, the source text is manipulated based on the target culture's conventions to make translations more comprehensible for children.

The term fantasy refers to something, which is imaginative or fanciful. With regard to fantasy fiction, it is difficult to give an exact definition of the term because all scholars including Manlove (1975) , Hume (1984) , and Mathews (2002) do not agree on a particular definition for this literary genre. However, they all agree that the most outstanding characteristic of this genre is deviation from reality. Moreover, what is expected in fantasy fiction is magical content. In fact, fantasy fiction abounds in cultural elements because it is something inseparable from mythological and legendary elements of the local culture of that particular country. The aim of the present study was to investigate cultural elements found in some popular novels written for children. For this purpose, three popular novels, i.e. The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien as well as The Chronicles of Narnia by Lewis were selected and a consolidation of the translation procedures suggested by the four aforementioned scholars, i.e. Aixelá (1996), Davies (2003), Fernandes (2006) and Klingberg (1986) were applied. The aim of this research study was to answer the following two questions:

1. How did the translators deal with culture-specific items in translating the supernatural novels for children?
2. Concerning the procedures suggested by the four aforementioned scholars, what are

the most frequently applied strategies?

METHODS

This descriptive qualitative study investigated the procedures that the translators use, to translate culture-specific items in literary works of fantasy fiction for children. The corpus of this study was comprised of three novels including The Hobbit (one book) and The Lord of the Rings (three books) by J.R.R. Tolkien as well as The Chronicles of Narnia by Lewis. The two works of Tolkien were translated by Reza Alizade and the work by Lewis was translated by Omid Eghtedari and Manouchehr Karimzade. The parallel corpus (English novels and their Persian translations) was scrutinized and CSIs including names of characters, geographical names, supernatural elements, festivals, domestic life and activities, measurements, etc. were detected. Thereafter, the procedure(s) applied to translate each of these items were identified. The procedures were eclectically selected from four models introduced by Aixelá (1996) , Davies (2003) , Fernandes (2006), and Klingberg (1986) to form the theoretical framework of this study. These procedures included transliteration, rendition, convention, substitution, intratextual addition, extratextual addition, naturalization, omission and cultural dilution.

Transliteration: A translation procedure in which a CSI is translated by its closest corresponding sound in the target language. It also referred to as phonetic translation. The procedure has been the most frequently used in the translation of personal names, geographical places and proper names (Zhang, 1993). This procedure refers to what Aixelá (1996) named as orthographic adaptation.

Table 1
Examples of Transliteration

Novels	Source text (ST)	Target text (TT)
The Lord of the Rings	Bilbo Baggins	بیل بو بگینز
The Hobbit	Arnor	آرنور
The Chronicles of Narnia	Cair Paravel	کایر پاراول

Rendition: It is applied when the item is translated by its meaning. In this case, the actual

word order of the source text is not necessarily the same in the target text. In other words, rendi-

tion is a procedure by which the sense of the CSI is rendered in the target language.

Table 2
Examples of Rendition

Novels	ST	TT
The Lord of the Rings	Lonely Mountain	تنها کوه
The Hobbit	Old Noakes of Bywater	بابا نوکس اهل بای واتر
The Chronicles of Narnia	Nymphs	پریها

Convention: It refers to a procedure in which an item is translated in a conventionally accepted way. It is usually used in translating literary or historical characters as well as geographical names. However, this procedure is not in Aixelá's

(1996), Davies's (2003) and Klingberg's (1986) categorizations. Fernandes (2006) suggested this procedure to deal with translation of historical or literary figures and geographical locations.

Table 3
Examples of Convention

Novels	ST	TT
The Lord of the Rings	April	آوریل
The Hobbit	September	سپتامبر
<i>The Chronicles of Narnia</i>	London	لندن

Substitution: It is often applied when translating names of characters or geographical names. According to Hermans (1988), it means

that a formally and/or semantically unrelated name is substituted in the target text for any name in the source.

Table 4
Examples of Substitution

Novels	ST	TT
The Lord of the Rings	Penny	سکه
The Hobbit	Sky-high	آسمان هفتم
The Chronicles of Narnia	Mile	کیلومتر

Intratextual addition: In is applied to provide additional information when translators think that an item is not ideologically appropriate or comprehensible. According to Aixelá (1996), the

strategy functions to make explicit something that is only partly revealed in the source text. Therefore, it might be also used to clarify ambiguities as well.

Table 5
Examples of Intratextual Addition

Novels	ST	TT
The Lord of the Rings	Fireworks	مراسم آتش بازی
The Chronicles of Narnia	Dryads	پریهای جنگلی

Extratextual addition: It is similar to the previous procedure described above (i.e. Intratextual addition). The only difference is that additional

information is provided through a preface, commentary, glossary, footnote, endnote, etc.

In the Lord of the Rings and the Hobbit, the

translator provides detailed information (e.g. about the characters) in preface. About Narnia, we see the use of footnote:

Bacchus:

باکوس (از اساطیر یونانی است که طبیعت را همراه
آیین‌های مذهبی و احساس برانگیزی بارور می‌کند. او شیفته‌ی
شعر و موسیقی است.)

Naturalization: It is used to make translation

more transparent and fluent for the TL readers. In this case, the translator reproduces a cultural reference with its closest natural equivalent in the target language (Aixelá, 1996; Davies, 2003; Klingberg, 1986; Nida & Taber, 1982). It, therefore, refers to the substitution of a source culture reference with a target one.

Table 6

Examples of Naturalization

Novels	ST	TT
The Lord of the Rings	Penny	سکه
The Chronicles of Narnia	mile	کیلومتر

Omission: This procedure is similar to deletion in Aixelá's (1996) and Fernandes' (2006) categorization and omission in Davies's (2003) categorization. Klingberg (1986) ignores it in his classification. It is used when a ST cultural reference is deleted during the process of translation because it is either ideologically or stylistically inappropriate for the TT reader.

Cultural dilution: It aims to produce a more general or neutral rendition; therefore, target readers can more easily understand the cultural backgrounds of the source text. Davies (2003) calls this procedure "globalization", Klingberg (1986) calls it simplification and Aixelá (1996) calls it limited universalisation and absolute universalisation.

RESULTS

The present study investigated the procedures adopted by translators to translate culture-specific items in fantasy fiction for children. For this purpose, three popular works of this genre, namely The Lord of the Rings, The Hobbit and The Chronicles of Narnia, were scrutinized for application of nine procedures including transliteration, rendition, convention, substitution, intratextual addition, extratextual addition, naturalization, omission and cultural dilution. The results of applying these procedures are provided for each book to clarify translators' behavior in dealing with CSIs (Table 7 below).

Table 7

The Frequency of Procedures Applied in Translating CSIs

Procedures	The Lord of the Rings	The Hobbit	The Chronicles of Narnia
Transliteration	61%	60%	51%
Rendition	12%	5%	20%
Convention	2%	5%	13%
Substitution	5%	2%	6%
Intratextual addition	2%	0%	2%
Extratextual addition	15%	28%	4%
Naturalization	3%	0%	4%
Omission	0%	0%	0%
Cultural dilution	0%	0%	0%

Concerning the first research question on translator's tendency to deal with CSIs, there are

generally two approaches. One is foreignization and the other is domestication with the former

being a more source-oriented approach to reflect and retain the culture of the original in translated texts and the latter tending to be more target-oriented. The procedures of naturalization, convention and substitution are the clearest and the most typical examples of domestication since these aimed to make the text closely conform to the culture and expectations of target text audience. Transliteration, on the other hand, is inevitably representative of foreignness in target text with transferring the source item into the target language with least changes possible. Accordingly, the translators of the three works investigated in the present study were more inclined to foreignization of CSIs as it is evident in Table 7 above. Although the translators made use of domestication procedures in certain cases, the high frequency of transliteration (more than 50 percent in all works) well demonstrated their preference in taking foreignization approach to clearly mirror the culture of the original.

Regarding the second research question on the most frequently adopted procedures, the results of investigating all three works were more or less similar. The most frequently applied procedure in all the three works was transliteration. Thereafter, in the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, translated by the same translator, the second most frequently applied procedure was extratextual addition while in Lewis's work rendition was the second most commonly adopted procedure. The translator of *The Chronicles of Narnia* made little use of extratextual addition as compared with that of Tolkien's works. Finally, cultural dilution and omission were not detected in any of the translations, hence, considered as the least frequent procedures applied while encountering CSIs in fantasy fiction for children. Figure 1 below compares the use of procedures in the three works under the investigation of this study through visual aids.

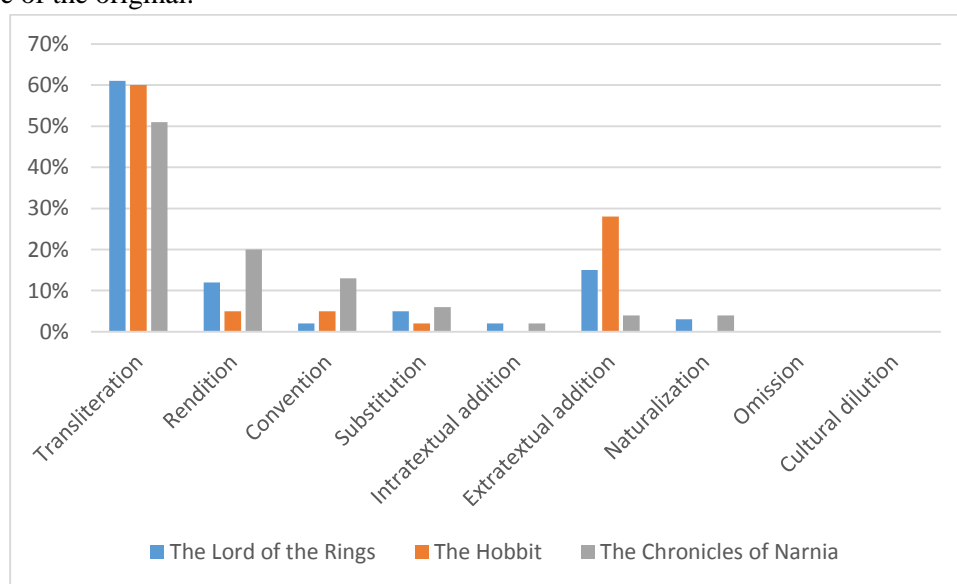


Figure 1. Frequency of Procedures Applied in Translating CSIs

DISCUSSIONS

This study investigated and compared the application of various procedures in dealing with CSIs in fantasy fiction for children. As demonstrated in the result section, the most frequent procedure adopted by both translators in three works was transliteration. This strategy that was the most commonly used with a significant departure from others, suggests the inclination of translators

toward foreignizing culture-specific elements. The other reason for high frequency of transliteration is that most CSIs detected in these works were names of characters for which transliteration is a simply commonplace method. Although most of these proper nouns were selected purposefully by the original author to convey a particular semantic load relevant to the role of the character, the translators only transliterated these

nouns and sought to consistency to render all names with the same method. The name Chubb, for example, in *The Lord of the Rings*, has to do with the adjective “chubby” in English referring to the fat and round character, which was simply transliterated irrespective of its semantic burden. Sackville and Baggins were also indirectly related to words “bag” and “sac”, an intentionally used play of words by the author, but again lost partly by simple transliteration.

While rendition was the second most frequent procedure in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, it was the third most common in the two works by Tolkien. This reveals the tendency of the translator of Lewis’s work to provide close denotative equivalence for CSIs more than that of Tolkien’s. In the same way, convention was more commonly used in translation of *The Chronicles of Narnia* than in Tolkien’s fictions. This, possibly, is due to the point that in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, geographical names and supernatural elements were derived from the true concepts in the real world, thus, having more familiar equivalents in target language for target audience. On the contrary, the author in a fantasy world for which no conventional equivalence was prevalent in target language mostly invented the proper nouns used in the works of Tolkien.

The use of naturalization and substitution was so rare in all translations on the account of translators’ tendency to avoid domestication as much as possible. No case of omission was detected in any of the translations, which to some extent; emphasize the translators’ faithfulness to render all materials of the source resorting to various methods.

Finally, the choice of works for this study was in a way that it allowed the possibility to compare two translations of the same translator on two works of the same genre directed to the same audience. Almost close results in taking procedures to deal with CSIs in translations of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* revealed the translator’s consistent and systematic use of methods

and procedures.

CONCLUSION

This study was set out to investigate the behavior of translators in encountering culture-specific items in fantasy fiction of children literature. To this end, a consolidation of procedures proposed by Aixelá (1996), Davies (2003), Fernandes (2006), and Klingberg (1986) were taken into account including transliteration, rendition, convention, substitution, intratextual addition, extratextual addition, naturalization, omission and cultural dilution. The utilization of these procedures was scrutinized in three fantasy fiction works of children literature i.e. *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien as well as *The Chronicles of Narnia* written by Lewis. The results revealed that translators were more inclined to foreignization of CSIs on target text. In other words, source-oriented strategies were more commonly used to retain the culture of the original in translation. Furthermore, transliteration was the most frequently adopted procedure to translate CSIs particularly the name of characters. The least frequent procedures were omission and cultural dilution for which no cases were detected in any of the translations. Fidelity to source text and necessity felt by translators to render all material of original in target text were probably the reasons why no omission took place.

Particular nature of fantasy fiction especially those in relation to children, brings about certain features that can be rarely found in other genres. Therefore, translation of such works is a challenging task particularly with regard to CSIs. The tendency of translators whose works were investigated in this study, towards sticking as closely as possible to the original is rooted in the point that it is difficult and sometimes impossible to find an equivalent in target language, which entirely matches with that of the source. Hence, a transcription of original and direct transfer of source items into target language is done to let the target audience have access to the source and decide on his/her own on how to decipher it.

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