



Hyperbole in Translation: A Case Study of the English Translations of The Tragedy of Rustam and Sohrab

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ABSTRACT

The diversity among the languages and the variation in cultures throughout the world make the process of translating so difficult a task that there are a few successful translators in each country. Among the problematic factors concerning translation such as form, meaning, style, implicatures, proverbs, idioms, etc., this article will focus on the figurative language of hyperbole. Therefore, the present paper was conducted to explore 1) if hyperbolic expressions are similar in English and Persian i.e., if an equivalent can easily be found for them 2) if there is any semantic-oriented loss concerning hyperbole in translation. For this purpose, some excerpts of the English translation of Rustam and Sohrab were chosen to be compared with the original text abundant in hyperbolic expressions. The result obtained through comparative study are as follows: a) hyperbole may not be problematic in translation of Rustam and Sohrab into English, b) hyperbolic expressions may mostly translatable from Persian into English.

KEYWORDS: Hyperbole; The Shahnameh; Transference; Translation

INTRODUCTION

If language were simply a nomenclature for a set of universal concepts, it would be easy to translate from one language to another. One would simply replace the French name for a concept with English name. If language were like this, the task of learning a new language would also be much easier than it is. But everyone who has attempted any of this task has acquired, alas, a vast amount direct proof that languages are not nomenclatures, that the concepts... of one language may differ radically of those of another. ...each language articulates or organizes the world differently. Languages do not simply name the existing categories; they articulate their own. (Culler, 1976)

From the above statement, it can be concluded that one of the problems of translation is the disparity among languages. The bigger the gap between two languages, the more difficult the transference of message from the source language to the target language. Among the problematic factors involved in translation, as mentioned earlier, this study will focus on the figurative language of *hyperbole*. The purpose of this study is to investigate the problems associated with the translation of *hyperbolic expressions*. Hyperbole is a kind of figurative language where the speaker says something while meaning another thing (Stern, 2000). In other words, the literal meaning of what is said does not match the intended meaning (Recchia, Howe, Ross & Alexander, 2010). When using hyperbole, speakers do not say X, rather they say something is more than X (Claridge, 2010). They exceed the limits that the hearers expect by using exaggeration (Burgers, Brugman, Lavalette & Steen, 2016).

“Hyperbole or overstatement is the use of exaggerated statements made for effect and not intended to be taken literally” (Abrams, 1993). “We use this figure almost too often in our daily speech as well as some poetical works” (Tajalli, 2000). Examples of daily hyperbolic expressions are as follows:

- I cried blood.
- They are poles apart.
- Sally is a block of ice.
- This story is as old as time.



According to Edward Sapir (1956), no two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same worlds with different labels attached". The discrepancy among languages causes different views toward the world in the speakers of those languages since each specific language has its own influence on the thought and behaviors of its speakers. Although no one can ignore the overlaps among languages, there are still critical problems caused by the diversities among them that translators have to deal with in translation.

So far, some scholars have studied the loss and gain in translation and mostly tries to make us aware of the pitfalls in translation caused by different factors such as equivalents, intertextuality, semiotics, metaphor, simile, idioms, etc. and explored different issues in translation; yet, *hyperbole* has received scant attention in this respect and deserves further exploration. The purpose of this study is to shed some light on the probable problems raised by *hyperbolic expressions* in translations. "*The Tragedy of Rustam and Sohrab*" of *The Shahnameh* and its different translation into English will be used as a means of research in this study.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Ever since the need arose for translation, translators have attempted to render the SL text in such a way that there would be as little contrariness and awkwardness as possible between the two texts. Nida and Taber, in their theory on dynamic equivalence, stated that the translated text should produce almost the same effect on the target language receptors as the source text does on its receptors: "dynamic equivalence, therefore, is to be defined in terms of the degree to which the receptors of the message in the receptor language respond to it in substantially the same manner as the receptor in the source language" (Nida and Taber, 1982). In his book *Approaches to Translation (1988)*, Peter Newmark elaborates on the problematic issues as discussed by Nida and Taber (cited above) and coins the process as communicative translation. *The Shahnameh* is a valid document that has passed from one generation to the other, will be cherished by posterity. It has deeply affected the lives of people from all strata of society and thus vastly spread throughout the country after eleven centuries. The significance of this study is to explore the important role of hyperbolic expressions in the English translation of "*The Tragedy of Rustam and Sohrab*" one of the fifth stories of *The Shahnameh*. Translators should take heed of hyperbolic expressions when translating so that they can transfer them as best as they can.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study aims at answering the following questions:

Q1: Are hyperbolic expressions used in *The Tragedy of Rustam and Sohrab* similar in English and Persian? i.e., can an equivalent be easily found of them?

Q2: Is there any semantic-oriented loss concerning hyperbole in translation?

METHODOLOGY PROCEDURE

Qualitative approach was applied in this study under the reason that the data were written text in the form of metaphors, as stated by Moleong (2004) that qualitative study aims to comprehend a phenomenon by describing it in words. After studying *Rustam and Sohrab* carefully, those parts containing hyperbolic expressions were extracted and then compared in the three translations. These translations were chosen following the recommendation of one the professors in the foreign language department of Isfahan university named Dr. Afghari – a Stanford university graduate. These are the best ones available in the world of literature to date. The researcher also compared the original poem to its different versions and tried to consider the differences in some parts of the poem in order to choose the version which was more similar to others to be selected as the source text. The samples were studied to find out 1) to what extent the translators could preserve the form of the original hyperbolic expressions in their translations, 2) to what extent the meaning of the original hyperbolic expressions was preserved in the process of translating, and 3) what kind of hyperbole was used in the original text.

As there was no access to educated English native speakers majoring in translation, there was no way to conduct experimental research on the translation of the selected parts of *Rustam and Sohrab*. Therefore, the researcher endeavored to focus on the law of commonality of the most frequent chosen equivalents by the translators and to base his conclusions and judgements on this fact as well as using dictionary definitions.



The following poems are the chosen parts of Rustam and Sohrab which contain hyperbolic expressions:

غمی بود دلش ساز نخجیر کرد کمر بست و ترکش پر از تیر کرد (1)
سوی مرز توران چو بنهاد روی چو شیر دژ آگاه نخجیر جوی
Clinton: ...was sad at heart, and so prepared to hunt
He armed himself, put arrows in their sheaf,
Then like a fearsome lion on the chase,
He galloped toward the borders of Turan.

The Warners: Girt him, filled up his quiver, mounted Rakhsh,
And hied him to the marches of Turan,
A savage lion prowling after prey.

Zimmern: And his mind was filled with forebodings,
He bethought him therefore to go out to the chase,
So, he saddled Rakhsh and made ready his quiver with arrows,
Then he turned him onto the wilds that lie near Turan.

چو نزدیک شهر توران رسید بیابان سراسر پر از گور دید (2)
Clinton: As he approached the Turkish borderlands,
He saw the plain was filled with onagers.

The Warners: When he drew near the marches and beheld
The plain well stock with onager, ...

Zimmern: When he was come night onto it,
He started a herd of asses, ...

که در چنگ او پر مرغی نسخت یکی نره گوری بزد بر درخت (3)
Clinton: He placed a heavy stallion on that tree,
That was a feather in his palm, no more.

The Warners: And set there on a lusty onager,
A feather's weight to him!

Zimmern: Then caught one and slew it and roasted it for his meal.

نماند پی رخش فرخ نهان چنان باره نامدار جهان (4)

Clinton: The track of shining Rakhsh, a steed who is
Well-known to all, will not stay hidden long.

The Warners: ... And Rustam's Rakhsh,
A steed so known, will not continue hidden.

Zimmern: Surely Rakhsh cannot be hidden.

چو یک ماه شد همچو یکسال بود برش چون بر رستم زال بود (5)

Clinton: In but a single month he'd grown a year.
His chest was Rustam's, the son of Zal
The Warners: He looked a year old in a month,



His chest was like his sire's

Zimmern: And when he numbered but one month,
He was like unto a twelve. (Then second half is omitted in the translation)

(6) چو ده سال شد زان زمین کس نبود که یارست با او نبرد آزمون

Clinton: When he was ten, in all of Semengan,
Not one would dare to meet him in the field.

The Warners: At ten none dared encountered him in fight.
Zimmern: And when ten years were rolled above his head, There was
none in the land that could resist him in the games of strength.

(7) چو رستم پدر باشد و من پسر به گیتی نماند یکی تاجور

Clinton: For when Rustam's the father, I the son,
Who else in all the world should wear the crown?

The Warners: Since Rustam is the sire,
And I the son none other shall be King.

Zimmern: For since Rustam is my father and I am the son,
No other behoveth it to wear the crown of might.

(8) کنون گر تو در آب ماهی شوی وگر چون شب اندر سیاهی شوی

Clinton: Now should you fishlike plunge into the sea,
Or cloak yourself in darkness like the night,

The Warners: Now wert thou fish, or wrapped like night in gloom,

Zimmern: Yet, I say unto thee, if thou shouldest become a fish, that swimmeth in depth of the
ocean. (The second half is omitted in the translation)

(9) و یا چون ستاره شوی بر سپهر ببری ز روی زمین پاک مهر

Clinton: Or like a star take refuge in the sky,
And sever from the earth your shining light,

The Warners: Or quit of earth wast soaring like a star,

Zimmern: If thou shouldest change into a star that is concealed
In the farthest heaven, (The second half is omitted in the translation)

(10) بزد نعره و خونش آمد بجوش همی کند موی و همی زد خروش

Clinton: Omission.

The Warners: He reved, his blood seethed, and with groans
he plucked his hair up by the roots.

Zimmern: Omission.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

(1) In the first example the hyperbolic expression of <چو شیر دژ آگاه> can be categorized to simile hyperbole. According to Amid Persian Dictionary (1375), <چو شیر دژ آگاه> means “like an angry and provoked lion” which expresses the same meaning as well as the simile hyperbole. The Warners translated it as “A savage lion” which contains the simile hyperbole. Zimmern did not translate this part and omitted it. Clinton and The Warnes used different equivalents in their translations. ‘fearsome’ and ‘savage’ are the equivalents they chose for this word <دژ آگاه>. Both of these equivalents collocate with the word ‘lion’.

(2) In the second example <بیابان سراسر پر از گور دید> there is a normal hyperbole.

Clinton translated this part as “He saw the plain was filled with onagers” in which there is the same exaggeration. The Warners translated it as “the plain well stocked with onagers” in which the normal hyperbole can be seen. Though Clinton and The Warnes used different equivalents to translate this part into English, they expressed the same meaning and translated the same hyperbole into the target language. Zimmern did not translate this part in other words she omitted it.

(3) یکی نره گوری بزد بر درخت که در جنگ او پر مرغی نسخت

In this example, there is a normal hyperbole as well. It is clear that an *onager* cannot be as light as a feather. By saying so, the poet intended to overstate the strength of the hero i.e., Rustam. Clinton translated it as “He placed a heavy stallion on that tree, That was a feather in his palm, no more” in which there is the same hyperbolic expression. The Warners’ translation is “And set there on a lusty onager, A feather’s weight to him!” in which there is the same hyperbolic expression. Zimmern translated it as “The caught one and slew it...” in which there is no hyperbolic expression. Actually, by not translating the second half of the original poem, Zimmern failed to transfer the intended hyperbolic expression into English.

(4) چنان باره نامدار جهان نماند پی رخس فرخ نهران

In this example, *Rakhsh* is so famous that it cannot be hidden from the whole world. This is a normal hyperbole. Clinton’s translation is “The track of shining *Rakhsh*, a steed who is Well-known to all, will not stay hidden long”. Apparently by substituting the word <جهان> with the word <all>, the translator did not stick to the form of the original text; however, he transferred the normal hyperbole into the target language. The Warners translated it as “... And Rustam’s *Rakhsh*, A steed so known, will not continue hidden” in which the problem of equivalent exists since the word <جهان> was ignored to be translated. However, hyperbole is transferred. In both translations, the transferred exaggeration is milder than the one which is in the original poem. Zimmern translated it as “surely *Rakhsh* cannot be hidden” in which there is no hyperbole. Zimmern’s translation seems to be more a paraphrase than a translation.

(5) چو یک ماه شد همچو یکسال بود برش چون بر رستم زال بود

In this part, there are two hyperboles 1) a-month-old infant who seems to be a one-year-old child that is a normal hyperbole. 2) the infant’s chest is compared to *Rustam*’s in size that is a simile hyperbole. Clinton’s translation is “In but a single month he’d grown a year. His chest was like *Rustam*’s, the son of Zal” in which both of the hyperbolic expressions can be recognized. The Warners translated it as “He looked a year old in a month, His chest was like his sire’s”. Both Clinton and The Warners could transfer both hyperbolic expressions though they used different equivalents. Zimmern translated it as “And when he numbered but one month, He was like onto a twelve”. As it is obvious, she omitted the second half of the poem, but she transferred the hyperbole which exists in the first half.

(6) چو ده سال شد زان زمین کس نبود که یارست با او نبرد آزمون

It is a normal hyperbole to claim that no one could fight a ten-year-old boy. Clinton translated it as “When he was ten, in all of *Semengan*, Not one would dare to meet him in the field” which contains a hyperbolic expression. Clinton used his interpretation by adding the word “*Semengan*” in his translation; however, he transferred the normal hyperbole. The Warner’s translation is “At ten none dared encountered him in fight” in which they omitted <زمین زان> in their translation; however, they could also transfer the same hyperbole into the target language. Zimmern translated it as “And when ten years were rolled above his head, There was none in the land that could resist him in the games of strength.” The normal hyperbole exists in this translation as well.



(7) چو رستم پدر باشد و من پسر به گیتی نماند یکی تاجور

There is a normal hyperbole expressing that when *Sohrab* and *Rustam* are respectively the son and the father, no one else in the world deserves to wear the crown i.e., to be King. *Clinton's* translation is "For when *Rustam's* the father, I the son, Who else in all the world should wear the crown?" The Warners translated it as "Since *Rustam* is the sire, And I the son none other shall be King." *Zimmern's* translation is "For since *Rustam* is my father and I am the son, No other behoveth it to wear the crown of might." In all of the above translation the normal hyperbole can be seen.

(8) کنون گر تو در آب ماهی شوی و گر چون شب اندر سیاهی شوی

In this part, *Sohrab* is telling *Rustam* that he cannot escape his father anywhere in the world even if he disguises as a fish in the sea or becomes invisible in the dark. Here there is a hyperbole of the normal kind. *Clinton's* translation is "Now should you fishlike plunge into the sea, Or cloak yourself in darkness like the night". *The Warner's* translation is "Now wert thou fish, or wrapped like night in gloom". *Zimmern's* translation is "Yet, I say unto thee, if thou shouldst become a fish, that swimmeth in depth of the ocean". In all of the above translation the normal hyperbole can be seen. *Zimmern* missed the translation of the second half of the poem, so she did not transfer the hyperbole which exists in the second half of the poem.

(9) و یا چون ستاره شوی بر سپهر ببری ز روی زمین پاک مهر

One cannot be a star to go to the sky, which indicates another normal hyperbole. *Clinton's* translated it as "Or like a star take refuge in the sky, and sever from the earth your shining light". *The Warner's* translation is "Or quit of earth wast soaring like a star". In this translation the word <سپهر> which means 'sky' is omitted. *Zimmern's* translation is "If thou shouldst change into a star that is concealed in the farthest heaven". Although they all used different equivalents, normal hyperbole exists in all the above translations. *Zimmern* failed to translate the second half of the poem.

(10) بزد نعره و خورش آمد بجوش همی کند موی و همی زد خروش

In this part, there is a metaphoric hyperbole. <<بجوش آمدن خون>> means to be enraged. The exaggeration is that never does the blood boil. *Clinton* and *Zimmern* did not translate this part; however, *The Warner's* translation is "He reved, his blood seethed, and with groans he plucked his hair up by the roots". In this translation the metaphoric hyperbole can be seen.

DISCUSSION

Translating is a complicated process during which translators surely confront with lots of obstacles including form, content, sign, style and so on. These problems are all due to the differences between languages and cultures. Nida confers equal importance to both linguistic and cultural differences between the SL and the TL and concludes that "differences in cultures may cause more severe complications for translators than do the differences in language structure" (Nida, 1964). However, in this study, one can conclude that despite cultural disparity, as stated by Nida, that causes severe problems in translation, the translation of hyperbole does not seem to be problematic for translators. This is truer when the gap between cultures is not so big. The findings of this study are in agreement with Edward Sapir (1956) who stated that no two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same worlds with different labels attached. The discrepancy among languages causes different views toward the world in the speakers of those languages since each specific language has its own influence on the thought and behaviors of its speakers. Although no one can ignore the overlaps among languages, there are still critical problems caused by the diversities among them that translators have to deal with in translation.

CONCLUSION

Hyperbolic expressions are mostly transferable from Persian to English without making much differences in the essence of the exaggeration conveyed by the source text author. Translators should be demanding in choosing a good equivalent for the part containing a hyperbolic expression and then by considering the importance of hyperbolic expression, try to transfer it in a way that is as close as possible to the hyperbolic expression in the original text.



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