Norms of Translating Taboo Words and Concepts from English into Persian after the Islamic Revolution in Iran

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ABSTRACT

The research attempted to discover the norms of translating taboo words and concepts after the Islamic Revolution in Iran using Toury's (1995) framework for classification of norms. The corpus of the study composed of Coelho's novels between 1990 and 2005 and their Persian translations which were prepared and analyzed manually to discover the norms. During both the selection of novels for translation and the process of translating by translator norms were at work. It was also discovered that the translators of the novels complied with the target language norms, i.e. the translators had attempted to produce acceptable translations. Regarding preliminary norms, the research suggested that the translation policy was based on popularity of the author that could guarantee the salability of translations. The frequency of the norms suggested that euphemism with 37.87 percent was the dominant norm in translating taboo words and concepts. The frequency of the norms in each of the books, as well as their frequency in the entire corpus was measured and presented in tables and discussed. Finally, it was found out that the dominant ideology in Iran was a determining factor in the process of decision making by the translators.

Keywords: censorship, euphemism, norm, taboo, translation

Introduction

In the process of translation, culture is one of the issues that create many problems for the translator, especially when the source text and the target text belong to different cultures. The problem is even more serious when some concepts exist in both cultures, but have different expressive meanings. Differences in expressive meanings are likely more difficult to handle when the equivalent in the target culture is more emotionally loaded than the source language item. According to Baker (1992), homosexuality is not pejorative in English, but the equivalent expression is pejorative in Arabic and it will be difficult to use it in a neutral way without showing strong disapproval.

After the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the government imposed strict rules on book publication and translation. It is obvious that Islamic culture in Iran does not tolerate all aspects of translated texts from other languages.

The concept of norm and translation as a norm- governed activity is under- researched in Iran. Because translators are not allowed to transfer every concept or expression into their language and culture, the strategies and the approaches used by translators are very important and critical. The present study tried to find the influence of norms upon the translator's decision making and choices in order to specify the norms governing translating forbidden words and concepts in the Coelho's works while translated from English into Persian after the Islamic Revolution in Iran. The study aimed at answering the following question:

Which of Toury's norms govern translating taboo words or concepts from English into Persian in Coelho's works?

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As mentioned in Munday (2001, p.113) norms are sociocultural constraints which are "specific to a culture, society and time". People acquire them from the general process of education and socialization. Baker (1997, p. 164) believes that norms provide options for translators to select on regular basis. Toury (1995) believes that every community has its own values and the people share these values and ideas. He puts that norms are translation of what is wrong or right. He points that they tell us what is considered adequate or inadequate. Toury introduces three kinds of norms in translation: Initial norms that form the continuum of adequate and acceptable translation. In fact Toury refers to a general choice the translator makes. If the translator subjects himself to the norms realized in the source culture, adequate translation results; if the target culture norms prevail, translation will be acceptable. He also describes two types of norms: "preliminary" and "operational" (pp. 58-59).The preliminary norms refer to "translation policy and directness of translation" (p. 58). By translation policy, Toury means the factors governing the selection of texts to be translated in a specific language, culture, or time: directness of translation relates to whether translation occurs through "an intermediate language" (e.g. Portuguese to Persian via English) (p. 58)

Sometimes the governing norms of a society proscribe something to be mentioned and lead to censorship. Kuhn (1988, cited in Freshwater 2004:226) does not consider censorship as "either fixed or monolithic" but as "an ongoing process embodying complex and often contradictory relations of power". Raynolds (2007, p. 187) refers to "semi-censorship" and puts that in some situations a book is translated into another language and undergoes many censorial operations and after being bowdlerized is put at the reach of public, but at the same time the copies of the original could be still sold freely. Reynolds refers to the existence of the bowdlerized translations alongside the untouched original in the same society as a condition of "semi-censorship" in which the translation has meanings in two distinct ways. Brownlie (2007, p. 205) distinguishes three kinds of censorship: "public censorship, structural censorship and self-censorship". Brownlie puts that by virtue of laws, public authorities impose public censorship and it happens either prior to the publication or after it. In Structural censorship, "it is the structure of society itself, or more spe-

cifically the structure of the field in which the discourse circulates" that controls the discourse and constitute censorship (p, 206). The third category, self-censorship, happens prior to publication, "when the cultural agent censors his or her work voluntarily, in order to avoid public censorship" or to meet with the approval of the "dominating sector in society (p.206).

Freude (1950, p. 18) puts that "taboo is a Polynesian word. It is difficult for us to find a translation for it". He also points that the source of taboo can be attributed to a specific "magical power" and taboos can be "permanent or temporary" (pp. 19-20). He maintains that taboo can denote everything, whether a person or a thing, and it also denotes the "prohibitions arising from the same attribute" (p. 22). Robinson (1996, p. 24) points that taboos pass from one generation to another "at deep unconscious levels of our behavior, through the contagion of somatic response" and they never die. Robinson (1996, p. 26) offers "addiction" as another psychological term for taboo, addiction to "behaviors and thought and speech patterns as well" in order to conform to ideological norms in the society. Schaffner (2003, p. 23) refers to the multifarious nature of translation and believes that translation is ideological "since the choice of a source text and the use to which the subsequent target text is put is determined by interests, aims, and objectives of the social agents".

Method

In classifying the norms governing translation of taboo words and concepts in the works of Coelho, the research followed Toury's model as described below:
'**Initial norms**' form the continuum of adequate and acceptable translation which refer to translator's basic decision whether subject him/her to the SL norms to produce adequate TT, or to TL norms to produce acceptable TT (1995, p. 56).
'**Preliminary norms**' refer to 'translation policy' and 'directness of translation'. By translation policy, Toury refers to factors governing the selection of texts to be translated in a specific language, culture, or time and directness of translation relates to whether translation occurs through an intermediate language (p. 58).
'**Operational norms**' direct translation decisions during the act of translation (p. 58). 'Matricial norms' and 'text linguistic norms' are subcategories of operational norms. Matricial norms deal

with the fullness of translation and the degree to which omission, addition, changes of location and manipulation of the text are done and text linguistic norms govern the selection of TT linguistic material: lexical terms, phrases and stylistic features (p. 58-59).

Corpus

For investigation of the dominant norms in translating taboo words and concepts after the Islamic Revolution in Iran, among different foreign novelists, four English novels written by Paulo Coelho were randomly selected, all written and translated from 1990 to 2005.They were translated from Portuguese into English by Margaret Jull Costa. The corpus of the study includes *Brida, Veronica Decides to Die, Eleven Minutes, and The Zahir.*

Procedure

In order to achieve the aim of this research Coelho's novels were compared to their Persian translations to find the strategies used by Persian translators to render taboo words and concepts. As the aim of this research was to single out the norms of translating taboos, the English texts were read line by line and all taboos were underlined. No randomization was done and the unit of analysis ranged from one word or phrase containing taboo to the whole sentence or paragraph discussing a taboo subject. After detecting all taboos in the English texts, the Persian texts were read to find their counterparts in Persian. Then, data were gathered to be put into charts to find the discursive strategies by translators. In summarizing the results of the analysis of each and every norm, the number of taboo words and concepts was counted and then the frequency of the norms

observed was measured.

Results

Three main strategies were at work in translating taboo words and concepts into Persian: omissions, manipulations of segmentation, and euphemisms. Each strategy has been shown in a separated table.

Omissions

As shown in table 1, the frequency of omissions in Persian translations of *Eleven Minutes* and *Brida* were 36.7 and 26.4 percent respectively. The highest number of omissions was observed in Persian translation of *Eleven Minutes*. The novel *Eleven minutes* discusses a taboo subject and as the title of the book offers, it refers to the duration of a sexual act. It can justify the great number of omissions in the Persian translation of the novel. The translator omitted those parts which could not be tolerated in the target culture. Comparing with other three novels, *Eleven minutes* had the largest number of data containing taboo words and concepts and then *Brida*. All the deletions emphasize the differences in value systems of the two cultures. The translator's awareness of the expectations of the target readers led to adopting the strategy of omission in certain parts of the texts.

Example:

'Just look at the sky' said Lorenz, <u>stroking her hair</u> (Coelho 1990: ۴۶)

لورنز گفت به آسمان توجه کن. (حجازی و جعفری : ۹۰ ۲۰۰۰)

In the example provided above, a single phrase has been omitted. It should be noted that this omission did not have any negative effect on the theme of the story.

Table 1.The Frequency of Omissions in Persian Translations

The English sources	Number of data containing taboo words or concepts	Number of data in which the norm was observed	frequency of the norm In Persian translation
Brida	53	14	26.4 %
Veronica Decides to Die	42	8	19 %
Eleven Minutes	109	40	36.7 %
The Zahir	31	3	9.7 %
Total	235	65	27.65 %

Table 2.The Frequency of Manipulations of Segmentation

The English sources	Number of data containing taboo words or concepts	Number of data in which the norm was observed	Frequency of the norm In Persian translation
Brida	53	0	0
Veronica Decides to Die	42	3	7 %
Eleven Minutes	109	22	20 %
The Zahir	31	0	0
Total	235	25	10.63 %

Manipulation of Segmentation

Investigation of the corpus of the study indicated that manipulations of segmentation were not as frequent as omissions and euphemisms. In fact the manipulation of segmentation was observed in Persian translations of *Eleven Minutes* and *Veronica decides to die.* While the largest number of manipulations of segmentation belonged to the Persian translation of *Eleven Minutes* with the frequency of *20* percent, the frequency of the norm in Persian translation of *Veronica Decides to Die* was only 7 %.

The examples below, explain the relationships between the characters of the novel. It seemed that the translator felt to be permitted to censor these paragraphs. No need to say that discussing such issues in Iran is just a matter of register and they are just referred to in scientific and psychological books. Finding them against the common poetics in Iran, the translator censored these parts. The manipulation of segmentation ranged from a single paragraph to successive pages. Example:

Edward laughed; she didn't know why (Coelho 1998:132-133) (Five paragraphs have been deleted). The following examples explain the relationships between Maria and her customers. Maria writes them in a step by step manner in her diary. It seemed likely that the translator has removed these parts until they happened to fit the dominant ideology in Iran.

She wanted to die because she already knows all its secrets. (Coelho1998:133) (The whole paragraph has been deleted).

He pulled. It remained shut. (Coelho 2003:252-255) (Seven paragraphs have been deleted

Euphemism

In most of Coelho's novels, the use of rude, obscene and taboo words and concepts is frequent. The study indicated that the translators tried to use euphemisms when they encountered language in the ST which was considered rude or unsuitable in the target culture. In some cases, there was no direct, but implicit reference to matters which could be considered unsuitable for the TL audience. Investigation of the corpus showed that the frequency of using euphemistic language in Persian translations of *Brida*, *Veronica Decides to Die*, *Eleven Minutes*, and *The Zahir* was 43.39%, 52.38%, 22%, and 64.5% respectively. The underlined parts below refer to the words and phrases which have been euphemized by the translators. In the following example, in an attempt to respect the cultural values of the receptor language, the translator has euphemized the word 'boyfriend' and substituted it with the word 'fiance' (namzad).

Her <u>boyfriend</u> was neither strong nor powerful (Coelho1990:35)

اما نامزد بريدا نه تنومند بود نه نيرومند. (حجازی وجعفری ٧٤:٢٠٠٠)

Table 3. The Frequency of Euphemisms

The English Sources	The number of data containing taboo words or concepts	The number of data in which the norm was observed	The frequency of the norm In Persian translation
Brida	53	23	43.39%
Veronica Decides to Die	42	22	52.38%
Eleven Minutes	109	24	22%
The Zahir	31	20	64.5%
Total	235	89	37.87%

Table 4.The Final Result of the Analysis of the Data

The English Sources	Frequency of omissions In Persian translations	Frequency Manipulations Of segmentation in Persian translations	Frequency of euphemisms In Persian translations	Frequency of complete translation of taboos
Brida	26.4 %	0	43.39%	30.18%
Veronica Decides to Die	19 %	7 %	52.38%	21.42%
Eleven Minutes	36.7 %	20 %	22%	21%
The Zahir	9.7 %	0	64.5%	25.8%
Total	27.65 %	10.63 %	37.87%	23.82%

As shown in the table ۴, the highest frequency was related to Euphemism in Persian translations, 37.87percent, and omission was the second highest frequent strategy in Persian translations with 27.65 percent. The lowest percent belonged to manipulations of segmentation.

Figure 1 shows the percentage of occurrences of different strategies. As shown below, euphemism was the highest frequent strategy, while a manipulation of segmentation was the lowest frequent strategy.
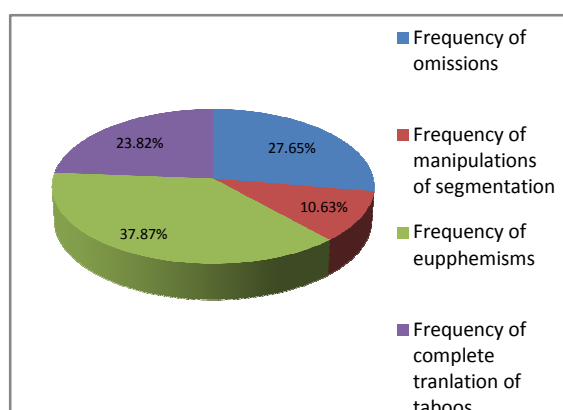

Figure 1. Frequency of Different Strategies in Persian Translation

Conclusion

1. Regarding initial norms, it should be noted that three Persian translators tried to produce acceptable translations and they tried to comply with the target language norms. The choice of the translators between the acceptability and adequacy poles, likely points to the translators' ideological decisions.
2. The reason for indirect translation could be unfamiliarity of Persian translators with the original language in which the novels were written.
3. It seems that a translation can be considered successful when it reaches a wide range of audience which, in itself, entails a guaranteed salability. This author was known enough in Iran to guarantee the success of translation. This choice also refers to the selection of texts as a non-random activity which is, sometimes, based on ideological and economic purposes. But in the case of Coelho's novels, the translation policy was based on economic reasons as well as ideological ones.
4. About 78.18 percent of data containing taboo words and concepts were subjected to changes, in order to make them fit the target language values and beliefs. It should be noted that the study revealed a kind of regularity among the translators in using euphemisms. Catford (1965) believes that when one type of shift occurs more than 30 % in a text, it can be concluded that this shift is turned into a norm in translation, so it can be inferred that in translating taboo words and concepts, using euphemistic language was a norm.
5. In the case of manipulation of segmentation, which entailed large scale bowdlerization, the study suggested that it could be a case sensitive strategy, not a norm. It can also be concluded that ideology was a determining factor in translation of taboo words and concepts.
6. When the translated literature and even national literature belong to pre-Islamic Revolution period in Iran is compared with those of post-Islamic Revolution period, great differences can be observed regarding translation of taboo words and concepts or writing about them in Persian. When it comes to national literature before the Islamic Revolution in Iran, as an example *Zane Ziadi* (Unwanted Woman) by Jalal Al-e-Ahmad (1970-1349) should

be mentioned which is abundant with taboo words and concepts. It shows that this is the dominant ideology which assigns the limit or scope of action for the translators.

7. No need to say that in every society, translation is likely the carrier of ideas coming from other languages. So, based on this fact that foreign texts are not always in line with the social and cultural norms of the target text, the translators try to manipulate or bowdlerize the literary works to fit the ideological framework of the target language. This is not the translator who makes the final decision, but the dominant ideology that assigns what should or should not be imported to the target text and gives license to the translator to act in favor of his own culture.

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