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## Exploring Strategies Used by Costello in Rendering Cultural Elements while Translating 'The Blind Owl'

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### ABSTRACT

One of the most challenging tasks for all translators is how to render culture-specific items. The corpus used in this study was Sadeq Hedayat's Persian novel, "*Bouf-e Kour*" and its English translation "*The Blind Owl*" by Costello. The instruments were Ivir's (1987) model of translation and Newmark's (1998) cultural categories. More specifically, the present research has been conducted in order to find what strategies for translating Culture-Specific-Items, applied by a non-native translator have been used in terms of frequency. The results of the study indicated that the most translation strategy that the translator has used was literal translation, and the least strategy was omission.

**Keywords:** *Translation, Culture, Cultural Elements, Contrastive Analysis, The Blind Owl*

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### 1. Introduction

Since the creation of languages, translation began to come into being (Yan & Huang, 2014). Translation always occurs as a multi-level process and a broad interpretation that can be understood in many different ways (Dabaghi & Bagheri, 2012). To Hafizi (2014), translation is an important need of the world and it is not possible to imagine a world without translation. It is a phenomenon that has a huge effect on everyday life. Wu (2008) believes that the significance of translation is to transfer words and phrases from one language to another language, and translation is an art that retell the author's thought accurately with a completely different language from the original.

According to Wu (2008), the original meaning of expression should be kept in the translated version with no addition and no deletion. Therefore to Wu (2008), there are two factors in translation: accuracy and expressivity, and translation is the act or process of rendering what is expressed in one language or set of symbols by means of another language or set of symbols. In addition, he believes that as an important communication way, one of the basic

principles of translation is to be faithful to the original. According to this principle, translation should first be faithful to the content of original, with literal translation conveying the original cultural connotation in a precise way. In addition, he believes that a good interpreter needs special, highly developed skills to achieve the goal of translation that is to convey the meaning and style of the original language. This means that the translator must be skilled in more than vocabulary. He must also know the word's emotive aspects, as well as the culture's thought processes.

To Akbari (2013), while studying the language of a society or better to say country, it is not a good idea to focus just on the language and the process of communication. Indeed, there are other structures that help us reach a better understanding of a country more than language. One of these structures can be regarded as culture. Generally, language is an expression of culture and individuality of its speakers.

Wittgenstein (1958) once said, "The limits of my language are the limits of my world" (p. 53). Language, as a part of the cultural core, is at the heart of culture. What



people do with language; narrative, poetry, songs, plays, etc. are soft expressions of a culture. They are faces of culture. Languages are systems of verbal symbols – vocal and/or written, organized by particular rules (grammar) & used by particular rules (grammar) and used by particular communities in order to develop and communicate their thoughts and affections (Akbari, 2013). In addition, Akbari asserts that culture is the product of interacting human minds, and hence, a science of culture will be a science of the most complex phenomenon on Earth. So, while focusing on the issue of translation from one language to another, paying adequate attention to the culture of both languages in the process of translation is influential.

To Wu (2008), cultural gap is an obstacle when we do translation, but in his opinion, everything is translatable. To Akbari (2013), translation, involving the transposition of thoughts expressed in one language by one social group into the appropriate expression of another group, entails a process of cultural de-coding, re-coding and en-coding (Akbari, 2013).

To Yan and Huang (2014), culture and cultural exchange are the originations of translation, and translation is the product of cultural exchange. In other words, translation can never exist without culture. Translation and culture can never be separated. Based on Venuti's view, the viability of a translation is established by its relationship to the cultural and social conditions under which the translation is produced and read. So far what is clearly common among the majority of translation scholars is not ignoring the cultural consideration in translation process. According to Nida and Taber (1982), cultural translation is "a translation in which the content of the message is changed to conform to the receptor culture in some way, and/or in which information is introduced which is not linguistically implicit in the original" (Nida & Taber, 1982, p. 199).

It has already been suggested by many translation scholars such as Baker (1992) and Newmark (1988) that the notion of equivalence is problematic in the study of translation, and to overcome this problem, various translation strategies have been suggested by various authors within the field of translation. Although it is not easy to achieve exact textual equivalence, one may hint that equivalence could be achieved when a translation contains the meaning that

is similar, or as close as possible to that of the Source text. For this to happen, it is important for translators to have a thorough grasp of semantics, which is "the study of the meanings of words" (Walpole, 1941, p. 20).

One of the difficulties in translation that may be faced by a translator is related to culture-specific word because each language has its own cultural words. As Larson (1984) says, cultural word is the most difficult problem in translating (p.137). Furthermore, Newmark (1988) explains, "cultural word is defined as words referring to objects, processes, institutions, custom, ideas peculiar to one group of people" (p. 283). It is well-known that culture-specific items are among the most conflicting phenomena in translation which can make translation a difficult kind of task (Aixela, 1996).

The problem of how to render cultural elements (especially in literary translation) implied in the ST and finding the appropriate equivalence conveying these cultural aspects successfully in the TL can be the most challenging task for the translator (Masom, 1988). In addition, the meaning of the same cultural elements in literal translation or word for word translation, is distorted and do not transfer the same meaning as the ST. So, it causes many problems in understanding the meaning of ST. To Akbari (2013), cultural elements have historical background in our life and cause people of a community to feel more associated with their culture and society. Also, as a matter of fact, a good translator should be familiar with the culture, customs, and social settings of the source and target language speakers. He should also be familiar with different styles of speaking, and social norms of both languages. This awareness, can improve the quality of the translations to a great extent. According to Hatim and Mason (1990), the social context in translating a text is probably a more important variable than its genre. Also, Newmark (1988) mentions that a good translator or writer not only could often avoid errors of language use but he also simply applies his common senses and shows sensitivity to language. This makes the result of the translation process an admissible one.

In the same regard, this paper attempts at exploring the problems involved in the transferring of cultural elements and comparing these cultural elements in

translation of “The Blind Owl” from Persian into English. For this purpose, instances of cultural elements in the original version are compared with their translations rendered by Costello (1957). In this study, the researcher chose one of the famous literary works of Sadeq Hedayat (i.e., ‘The Blind Owl’) considered as one of the most famous literary works in modern Persian literature because of the author’s specific style and use of cultural words and symbols in his writings.

This study can be helpful for those who are interested in the translation of literary texts in order to be able to choose appropriate strategies in dealing with ST cultural elements. This study introduces many strategies for translating cultural elements that translators and translation students can apply while translating the cultural-literary texts. In fact, the present study embarks on an endeavor to fill cultural gaps reflected in translation process. The researcher investigates the cultural gaps that can be found in the following areas: cultural background, non-equivalence, extension and intention, and derivation. So, Ivir’s (1987) seven strategies are put forward to solve these translating problems. To achieve the purpose of this study, the following research question is proposed:

What strategies have been used by Costello in rendering cultural elements of “*The Blind Owl*” and in what extent?

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Material

In the current study, the researcher decided to investigate and analyze the cultural elements of a famous Iranian novel with its English translation in order to identify to what extent the translator has applied the strategies of translation on the cultural elements in its English translation.

For this study, the researcher chose a Persian novel “*The Blind Owl [Bouf-e kour]*” by Sadeq Hedayat which was translated by a non-native translator. The book, *The Blind Owl*, was translated by D. P. Costello and was published in 1957. The researcher chose the book because of the following reasons: this book is of the most well-known Persian pioneering literary works, and has been translated into different languages. *The Blind Owl* has been translated into more than forty languages. And also, this book is deeply culture-bound.

### 2.2 Instruments

In this study, the researcher used two instruments: Ivir’s (1987) seven-number model of translation and Newmark’s (1998)

cultural categories to identify the translation strategies applied by Costello.

#### 2.2.1. Ivir’s (1987) Seven-Number Model of Translation

In this paper, the researcher has taken advantage of the strategies of translation provided by Ivir’s seven-number model (1987) which will be briefly described below.

1. **Borrowing:** Transferring directly a SL (source language) expression into the TL (target language) (Munday, 2001). It also introduces a foreign element into the TL and reproduces the original term (Alqurashi, 2010).

2. **Definition:** Translators use definition in order to transfer cultural terms from the SL into the TL, and to explain terms that do not exist in the TL (Alqurashi, 2010).

3. **Literal translation:** Word-for-word translation, which Vinay and Darbelnet describe as being most common between languages of the same family and culture (as cited in Munday, 2001).

4. **Substitution:** This strategy involves replacing a culture-specific item or expression with a target-language item which does not have the same propositional meaning but is likely to have a similar impact on the target reader (Baker, 1992).

5. **Lexical creation:** It means that the translator produces a new vocabulary. Lexical creation is attempted by the translator when the communicative situation rules out a definition or literal translation, when borrowing is sociolinguistically discouraged, and substitution is not available for communicative reasons (Ivir, 1987).

6. **Addition:** Dickins defines addition as “something added to the TT (target text) which is not present in the ST (source text), and it is a common strategy in Arabic/English translation (Dickins, 2002).

7. **Omission:** Omission is when something occurs in the ST which is simply omitted from the TT. It reflects the different ways in which Arabic and English link text together (Dickins, 2002).

#### 2.2.2. Newmark’s (1998) Culture Categories

Newmark (1998) is on the belief that a large number of words can be reproduced to designate a special language or terminology of a speech community when that community concentrates on a particular topic. In line with this theory of cultural word, five different classes of “cultural categories” are distinguished from each other. Those categories are as follows:

1) **Ecology** (flora, fauna, winds, plains, hills)



- 2) **Material culture** (food, clothes, houses and towns, transport)
- 3) **Social culture** (work and leisure)
- 4) **Organizations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts** (political and administrative, religious, artistic)
- 5) **Gesture and habits**

The researcher decided to follow Peter Newmark's culture categories for identifying cultural items.

### 2.3 Procedure

As it was mentioned before, the Persian novel written by Sadegh Hedayat, *The Blind Owl* [*Bouf-e kour*] has been selected as the literary source text (ST) to be compared with its corresponding translated target text (TT) in English by D. P. Costello (1957). There are three steps in conducting this research: collecting the data, analyzing the data and presenting the result of analysis, as proposed by Sudaryanto (1993, p.57).

In collecting the data, the researchers applied 'non-participant observational' method. First, *Bouf-e kour*, as the source text, was read several times. Afterward, the researchers identified each sentence which contained Persian cultural word based on the category of cultural words as proposed by Newmark (1988). Next, the researchers collected all cultural words from the Persian novel. Then, they identified the cultural sentences and words of the English translation version based on the Persian cultural words selected. After collecting the data, the researchers analyzed using translation identity method. The researchers marked the sentences containing cultural words in the source text and compared them with their translations in the target text. The researchers paired the Persian and English versions. Then, the translation procedures applied by the English translator are analyzed based on Ivir's (1987) seven-number model of translation. Two texts were compared sentence by sentence and instances of culture-specific items were selected to find an appropriate answer to the research question.

### 3. Results

As it was stated earlier, the researchers read Persian version of the novel (*Bouf-e kour*) written by Hedayat carefully several times, and then, extracted 257 cultural elements from the novel and categorized them into five categories. After that, they found their English equivalents of the Persian CSIs in the English version. As Table 1 shows, the frequencies of CSIs

applied in Persian version novel are as follow:

**Table 1 Frequencies and Percentage of Culture Categories Applied by Hedayat**

Culture Categories	Freq.	Per.
Organization, Customs, ... (OC)	138	% 53.69
Material Culture (MC)	61	% 23.73
Gesture, Habits (GH)	49	% 19
Ecology (EC)	5	% 1.94
Social Culture (SC)	4	% 0.55

Freq. = frequency, Per. = percentage

As was stated before, the researchers analyzed 257 items. The following instances represent each cultural category found in the novel. Some examples of the cultural words found in the novel are as follows:

#### (Material Culture)

SL: *yek-bagali-sharab* (p.5)

TL: a bottle of old win

This cultural word is related to food (material culture).

#### (Ecology)

SL: *derakhte-sarve* (p.4)

TL: cypress tree

The cultural word *derakhte-sarveis* is categorized as cultural word related to flora (ecology).

#### (Social Culture)

SL: *sirabi-foroshi* (p.30)

TL: a triple-pedlar

The lexical item *sirabi-foroshi* is categorized as the cultural word related to work.

#### (Organization, Customs, Activities, Procedures, and Concept)

SL: *hamaye-ahmaghha-be-risham-khandidand* (p.31)

TL: *the fools all laughed in my face*

The lexical item *hamaye-ahmaghha-be-risham-khandidand* is categorized as cultural word related to social organization in terms of concepts.

#### (Gesture, habits)

SL: *se-ghabz-rish* (p.32)

TL: a beard three hands-breadths long

The item *se-ghabz-rish* is categorized as cultural word related to gesture.

#### 3.1 The Result Related to Research Question

The research question was what strategies have been used by Costello in rendering cultural elements of "*The Blind Owl*". In order to answer this question, the researchers calculated and analyzed the frequency and the percentage of strategies used by the translator for all CISs which is shown in Table 2:

Table 2: Frequencies and Percentage of Strategies Applied by Castello

Strategies of Translation	Freq.	Per.
Literal	139	% 54
Translation		
Substitution	59	% 23
Lexical creation	27	% 10.5
Borrowing	14	% 5.44
Definition	12	% 4.66
Addition	4	% 1.55
Omission	2	% 0.77

Freq. = frequency, Per. = percentage

As it is indicated in table 2, the translator has applied the strategy "Literal Translation" most of all (freq. = 139), and subsequently comes the strategy "Substitution" (freq. = 59). The strategies such as Lexical creation, Borrowing, Definition were somehow equally applied, while the translator has used these two strategies of Addition and Omission (freq. = 4, 2) very little. Some examples of applying these translation strategies in English version of *Blind Owl* can be seen as follow:

**Literal translation:** "Word-for-word translation", which Vinay and Darbelnet describe as being most common between languages of the same family and culture (as cited in Munday, 2001). As indicated in table 3, there are some words and expressions that were translated through the literal translation strategy.

Table 3: Literal translation strategy used by Castello

Persian idioms	Castello's translation
<i>Mesle-sibi-ke-az-vasat-nesf-kardeh-bashand</i>	Like two halves of the one apple
<i>Gardan-koloft</i>	Thick-necked

As for some instances of CSIs and cultural expressions translated through this strategy we can refer to the Persian expression "*Mesle-sibi-ke-az-vasat-nesf-kardeh-bashand*". This expression is used in Farsi for describing two persons who are completely similar. The translator has used linguistic translation strategy i.e., he has used a denotatively close reference to the original. The next Persian CSI is "*gardan-koloft*" which is attributed to someone who is bullhead. Here again the translator has translated it "Thick-necked" which is denotatively very close to the original.

**Substitution:** This strategy involves replacing a culture-specific item or expression with a target-language item which does not have the same propositional meaning but is likely to have a similar impact on the target reader (Baker,

1992). Table 4 shows some words and expressions that were translated through the substitution strategy.

Table 4: Substitution strategy used by Castello

Persian idioms	Castello's translation
<i>Ghabeli-nadare</i>	That's all right, don't bother
<i>Ghah-ghah-khandid</i>	He road with laughter

For example, the Persian expression "*Ghah-ghah-khandid*" is a Persian idiom which means anyone laughs loudly. While in translation, the translator translates it by substituting the English expression "*He road with laughter*" in a way that contains the same connotation and feeling as the original one.

**Lexical creation:** Table 5 shows some words and expressions that were translated through the Lexical creation. In this strategy, the translator produces a new vocabulary, when the communicative situation rules out a definition or literal translation, when borrowing is sociolinguistically discouraged, and substitution is not available for communicative reasons (Ivir, 1987).

Table 5: Lexical creation strategy used by Castello

Persian idioms	Castello's translation
<i>Jorge-adamha</i>	I must not defile her name by contact with earthy things
<i>Basati-pahn-ast</i>	An assortment of wares spread out

According to table 5, for example the Persian expression "*Basati-pahn-ast*" has been translated by creating a new word "An assortment of wares spread out", because in English there is no equivalent for the word "*basat*". So, the translator has created the new word "assortment of wares".

**Borrowing:** Table 6 shows some words and expressions that were translated through the Borrowing strategy. Transferring directly a SL (source language) expression into the TL (target language)" (Munday, 2001). It also introduces a foreign element into the TL and reproduces the original term (Alqurashi, 2010). Also, this strategy includes procedures like transcription and transliteration, which are mainly used when the original reference is expressed in a different alphabet from the one, target readers use.

Table 6: Borrowing strategy used by Castello

Persian idioms	Castello's translation
<i>Balkh</i>	Balkh
<i>Neishabour</i>	Nishapur



It is worth explaining that some examples in this sub-group are toponyms like "Balkh" and "Neishabour", cities of ancient Iran, which have been translated as "Balkh" and "Nishapur" respectively.

Of course, most of these CSIs have been explained by the translator through footnotes or notes. Meanwhile, many of the borrowed Arabic words and phrases are included in this sub-group. All the translated CSIs which are put in this sub-group have the same feature.

**Definition:** Table 7 shows some words and expressions that were translated through the Definition strategy. Translators use definition in order to transfer cultural terms from the SL into the TL, and to explain terms that do not exist in the TL (Alqurashi, 2010).

Table 7: Definition strategy used by Castello

Persian idioms	Castello's translation
<i>vozo</i>	The ceremonial washing of the bread
<i>Man-be-roye-mobarakam-namiavaram</i>	I suppose they were saying to one another

As it is indicated in Table 7, these Persian words and expressions "*vozo*, *Man-be-roye-mobarakam-namiavaram*," do not have any English equivalents and also, the translator could not create new ones instead of them. So, the translator had to define them in target text in order to transfer their meanings for the target readers.

**Addition:** Table 8 shows some words and expressions that were translated through the Addition strategy. Dickins defines addition as something added to the TT (target text) which is not present in the ST (source text), and it is a common strategy in Arabic/English translation (Dickins, 2002).

Table 8: Addition strategy used by Castello

Persian idioms	Castello's translation
<i>nanoy</i>	<b>Swinging</b> cradle
<i>Dar-in-gir-o-darha</i>	In the bustle of <b>by-gone</b> activity

So, according Table 8, to translate the word "*nanoy*", the translator has written an extra word "**Swinging**" with the word "cradle" that has come instead of "*nanoy*".

**Omission:** Omission is when something occurs in the ST which is simply omitted from the TT. It reflects the different ways in which Arabic and English link text together (Dickins, 2002).

Table 9: Omission strategy used by Castello

Persian idioms	Castello's translation
<i>Dokhtare-bakere</i>	A----- girl
<i>Deboro-ke-rafti</i>	-----

As indicated in Table 9, the Persian word "bakere" has been omitted in English translation of the expression "*Dokhtare-bakere*": a girl. Or in another example in the Persian expression "*Deboro-ke-rafti*", the translator has not translated it and has omitted it in the target text.

## 5. Discussion

After having conducted this study, it was revealed that, among the suggested strategies for translating CSIs, mostly literal translation has been used by the translator. It might have been caused by some reasons. First there were a lot of single cultural words for which there were a one-to-one equivalent in both languages although their cultural presuppositions were not the same, the translator preferred to use them rather than change them or use another strategy.

Based on this study, most of those CSIs in "The Blind Owl" referred to universal items (Samimi & Abbasi, 2014). But for those which were rooted in the culture of the source language, other strategies, mostly substitution, were used. Newmark supports this claim in this way: "Note also that the figurative element in language militates against literal translation when it is a cultural or a stock metaphor, but favors literal translation when it is universal and/or original" (1988, p. 76). To Samimi and Abbasi (2014), another reason sticks to this fact that idioms constituted a large part of the CSIs in "The Blind Owl". A lot of idioms were translated literally because of either the lack of their equivalences in the target language or the translators' unawareness. Furthermore, literal translation may be the last solution but not the best (Samimi & Abbasi, 2014).

In the current study, substitution is the second strategy which approves the following results. In fact, Samimi and Abbasi (2014) believe that cultural similarities pave the stage for the translator to make the closest connection between the two cultures. The translator has warmly welcomed each opportunity for maintaining the two cultures close to each other through possible substitution. It is believed that, to Ivir (1987), the best way to transfer a cultural presupposition is substitution. Since only this way seems to furnish the reader with a natural cultural representation. In effect substitution works best for those situations where the two given cultures have a lot of similarities (Ivir, 1987). In this way, a translator can help his reader get familiar with a similar existing cultural concept, not

completely the same, though, and transfer the very cultural presupposition into the other language (Samimi & Abbasi, 2014). In addition, they add that the translator draws on substitution specifically for translating idioms available in both languages. They believe that this happened because the two cultures had parallel involvements about parallel concepts but different ways to define them.

## **6. Conclusion**

As Kramersch (1998) states, language is a system of signs that is seen as having itself a cultural value. Speakers identify themselves and others through their use of language; they view their language as a symbol of their social identity. The prohibition of its use is often perceived by its speakers as a rejection of their social group and their culture. Thus, it can be said that language symbolizes cultural reality (Salehi, 2012).

On the interaction between translation and culture as House (2009) believes, translation is not only a linguistic act, but it is also a cultural one; i.e., an act of communication across cultures. Translation always involves both language and culture simply because the two cannot really be separated (House, 2009). Therefore, the main purpose of this case study was an attempt to do a contrastive analysis of cultural elements in "The Blind Owl" translated by D.P. Costello based on Ivir's translation model. As the results showed, the translator of 'The Blind Owl' has used all seven strategies presented in the framework of the study for translating CSIs. It is also concluded that literal translation was the most frequently used strategy by Costello.

The results of this study were in line with Dehbashi Sharif's and Shakiba's (2015) study. In their study, they investigated what translation strategies have been used by two translators in translating culture-specific items of the famous Persian novel 'The Blind Owl', and also whether there is any difference among the strategies applied by a native and a non-native translator or not. The results of the content analysis in comparing two translations showed literal translation was the most frequently used strategy by him with the percentage of 34.78. The least used strategies by Costello were deletion (5.43%) and transformation (5.43%) strategies. In addition, their study demonstrated that the most frequently used strategy by Bashiri was literal translation (38.4%). Deletion strategy was the least frequently used strategy by Bashiri with

only 0.5%, and, there was no significant difference among the strategies used by a native and a non-native translator in translating culture-specific items of 'The Blind Owl'. Although the results of their study showed that statistically there was no significant difference among the strategies used by Costello and Bashiri, the researchers found out that Bashiri as an Iranian translator who is familiar with Persian culture, has paid more attention to introducing Persian culture to target readers by deleting less items or using more extratextual and intratextual glosses.

So, it can be concluded that if a translator is familiar with the source culture, the translation can be more comprehensible and natural to the target readers. Also, Dehbashi Sharif and Shakiba (2015) believe that the type of the CSI is one of the factors that may influence choosing a specific translation strategy, for example in translating toponyms, borrowing and extratextual gloss were the only translation strategies used by two translators and also, in the current study, but in translating names of occupations the translators used different type of strategies. Therefore, it can be concluded that one strategy which is appropriate for one category, may be inappropriate in translating another category; for example, literal translation as a most frequently used strategy by both translators can be considered a suitable strategy for translating some CSIs, but in translating symbols as one type of culture specific-items, it does not work properly because these items carry a connotative meaning rather than their denotative meaning, and by using literal translation both translators failed to convey the symbolic and connotative meaning of these items (Dehbashi Sharif & Shakiba, 2015). In addition, in the current study, the researcher has found these results, too.

In addition, Farahani and Mokhtari (2016) believe that a translator tried to translate the text in a fluent way into the target language to make it more comprehensible for the readers. Moreover, they believe that translating fluently a text from two languages with different roots is only possible by adopting domesticating strategy and it is by doing so that the text translated into English can be read more fluently. Therefore, from the results of the current study and the other studies, it can be concluded that in translations of CSIs, a translator should select a strategy which transfers the real meaning and sense of the



cultural element to the target readers. Also, the translation of a text should be clear and fluent for the readers.

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