2nd GLOBAL CONFERENCE on LINGUISTICS and FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING, LINELT-2014, Dubai – United Arab Emirates, December 11 – 13, 2014

The Effects Of Religion On Translating Humor From English Into Persian Through Figurative Language

Elaheh Rasouli[a]* Ali Rahimi[b]

[a]*M.A. in Translation Studies, Islamic Azad University of Bandar Abbas, Bandar Abbas, Iran*
[b]*Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics at Bangkok University, Thailand*

Abstract

The present study investigated the integral role of religion and culture in translation of humor from English Christian short stories into Persian. The main focus was to discover how figurative languages could be transferred from source text into target text. Four humorous Christian short stories were given to ten M.A. Persian students of Translation Studies to observe whether they could transfer the whole humorous concepts. To this end, through Newmark's faithful, cognitive, and adaptation methods, translated texts were scrutinized. Due to the religious and social differences between English and Persian cultures, the researcher concludes that the transference of figurative languages and humor from English into Persian could not take place thoroughly.

1. Introduction

Humor, as an inseparable part of everyday life, is combined with most of the social communications. In different cultures, there are various humorous concepts, meanwhile, every single nation has different religious and behavioral patterns of life. Therefore, this study revolves around the humorous subjects which contain Christian short stories in relation to religion and culture. The main focus of the paper is to explore and evaluate the transference of humor from English into Persian. Owing in the main to the surprising challenges of translating humor, the writers researched into the principal obstacles of transferring humor. Furthermore, this study attempts to provide an appropriate share of critical attention to overcome the obstacles of translating humor in the forenamed languages.

* Elaheh Rasouli Tel.: +87576587
E-mail address: k4elaheh.rasouli@gmail.com

Prior to the exploration of humor, we should have a glance at the status of culture. Newmark defines culture as "the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression" (1988, p. 94). Thus acknowledges that each language has its own culturally specific features and goes on to state that operationally he does "not regard language as a component or feature of culture" (Newmark, 1988, p. 95). When a translator embarks on translating the religiously oriented figurative languages used for humorous purposes, cultural specifics give birth to misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and misconceptions. Lotman states "no language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture; and no culture can exist which does not have at its center, the structure of natural language" (Lotman, 1978, p. 211-32).

By and large, the primary goal of the present study was to investigate whether the religious beliefs impacted the transmission and faithful reproduction of humor through figurative forms from English into Persian. The final aim of this work was to demonstrate that the Persian translation of the humorous elements within religious context was unconceivable for Persian readers. Undoubtedly, the gap between Christian and Islamic religion could play an essential role in this lack of transference of humor from English into Persian.

1.1Research questions

1. What is the role of religion in translating humor through figurative language?
2. How is the manifestation of religious humor in the translation of humor through figurative language?

2. Related Literature

In Longman contemporary dictionary, humor is defined as "the ability or tendency to think that things are funny, or funny things you say that shows you have this ability". Many studies have been done during the previous decades, which have been proved the significant role of humor in societies. Humor and culture are inextricably intertwined with one another. Through the humor, (Klein, 2003) presented a series of proven techniques for overcoming the negative effects of loss, setbacks, upsets, disappointments, trials, and tribulations through humor considering the mutual subject matter of religion and culture. (Forbes and Mahan, 2005) focused on the connection between American popular culture and religion which is the subject of this multifaceted and innovative collection. However, in the present paper the researcher aimed at investigating the barriers of transmission of humor from one language into another.

2.1 The selected figurative languages

(Abrams, 1999) defines pun as "a play on words that are either identical in sound (homonyms) or very similar in sound, but are sharply diverse in meaning. A special type of pun, known as the equivoque, is the use of a single word or phrase which has two disparate meanings, in a context which makes both meanings equally relevant" (253). Allusion as "a passing reference, without explicit identification, to a literary or historical person, place, or event, or to another literary work or passage" (10). As defined in *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* irony is "an unusual situation or amusing because something strange happens, or the opposite of what is expected happens or is true". In most of the modern critical uses of the term "irony," there remains the root sense of dissembling or hiding what is actually the case; not, however, in order to deceive, but to achieve special rhetorical or artistic affect"(134-135). Metaphor is defined as "a word or expression that in literal usage denotes one kind of thing is applied to a distinctly different kind of thing, without asserting a comparison" (97).

2.2 Theoretical framework

Among Newmark's methods of translation, the researcher focused on faithful, adaptation, and cognitive methods which will be taken into account. Based on Newmark's remark (1988) faithful method attempts to reproduce the precise contextual meaning of the original within the constraints of target language grammatical structures. It is faithful to the intentions and text-realization of source language writer. Adaptation method, the freest form of translation, is used mainly for poetry and plays (comedies) in which the themes, characters and plots are usually

preserved. Finally, by converting source language grammar to target language transpositions and reducing any figurative language to literal, cognitive method attempts to reproduce source language information by converting source language grammar to target language transpositions and reducing any figurative language to literal.

3. Methodology

In the present study the researcher attempted to explore and discover the reason behind the human behavior, thus this paper followed a qualitative design. The main material of this study was the translation of Christian short stories. The researcher sought the humorous religious short stories to find the figurative languages, then analyzed the original and target text to observe whether the religious humorous concept had been transferred to the Persian text and culture. Moreover, that the difference in religion can affect the manifestation of humor in different cultures was investigated as well. Ten male M.A. students of Translation Studies, between 25 to 28, have been chosen to translate the selected texts. In fact, their translation demonstrated which translation methods could be the most successful way in transference of figures of speech. Furthermore, two raters monitored and confirmed the selected and the evaluated texts of the researcher. Additionally Dr. Ali Rahimi and Dr. Abbas Zare-ee confirmed the figurative languages of the mentioned texts.

3.1. Translation task and assessment

More than 60 humorous Christian short stories examined but a few of them contained figurative language. The texts were examined and analyzed through a text analysis process. Then the short stories which contained figurative languages were chosen. Irony, metaphor, pun, and allusion were the figurative languages which were recognized in the stories and tabulated to compare the original sentences with their Persian translation. Subsequently, the Persian translation of these short stories came to the fore. Persian texts treated in detail scrutinizes to find out whether the humorous concepts have been transferred thoroughly. Even if the humor has been transferred completely, the figurative languages must be taken deeply into account both in source language and target language; i.e. to find out whether the figurative forms have been translated and substituted by the same figurative form in target language or with another equivalent figurative form or to a non-figurative language.

3.2. Material and data analysis

Transferring humor from one language into another is a difficult task, due to the fact that there are several obstacles during this process. To clarify this issue, some humorous Christian short stories were studied to show how the cultural context, social attitude and religious beliefs could impact the transference and manifestation of humor from one language into the other. The area of study is through Persian and English languages. The evaluation of selected stories will be treated momentarily.

The first story named "Moses". In this story the figure of speech by which the humor is made is pun. The proper noun of "Bush" manifested as the President of United States, on the other hand, "Bush" was as a shrub. Some translators tended to provide a literal translation of the short story; at the same time, some of them decided to provide footnote for Persian readers to perceive the exact meaning of the text. Only two translators presented successfully in transferring the pun, which was the core part of the text, from SL to TL. Although the translators did not apply any footnote but the exact meaning had transferred thoroughly. The word "Bush" was translated and transferred to the Persian text which was "Butteh", in the Persian translation almost already there was a pun with "Butteh" as a word, but it could not make sense as well as in original text, furthermore in the ST the readers know George Bush as a political character however in Persian translated text the readers do not know Butteh as a well-known character.

Giving footnotes distract the readers from the humorous part of the story. The reader should join in laughter simultaneously with reading the humorous situation inside the text. It is not enjoyable for them to read the story for the first time without understanding the points, then after getting the true humorous meaning by reading the footnotes burst to laughter, it is not as enjoyable as it is expected. All three Newmark's methods of translation

applied by translators. Two translators applied cognitive method (translators 7 and 8, two translators utilized adaptation method (translator 3 and 6), and the rest of them applied faithful method in their translation. As a matter of fact, translator 3 and 6 were more successful in transferring pun from source language into target language.

Table 1. The transferring methods of pun

Transference of pun	Transferring method
Translator 1	Using footnote
Translator 2	Using footnote
Translator 3	Using Persian equivalent
Translator 4	Using footnote
Translator 5	Using footnote
Translator 6	Using Persian equivalent
Translator 7	Explanation
Translator 8	Explanation
Translator 9	Using footnote
Translator 10	Using footnote

"Adam and Eve" is the second story which represents its humor through allusion. In this story Eve is going to count Adam's ribs because she is suspicious about his loyalty, therefore she was counting Adam's ribs to know whether there is any other woman whom he is falling in love with. Translating allusion depends not only on the translator but also on the target readers as the main audiences. Background information about the history, religion, and important events in each society with different social cultural incidences are crucial. Literal translation of this part is not a difficult task, but to make this translation conceivable for the target readers needed a considerable effort. Here, some translators utilized faithful method (translators 1, 6, 9, and 10) and some of them utilized cognitive methods (translators 2, 4, 5, 7, and 8) but only one of them applied adaptation method (translator 3). Translator 3 could transfer allusion thoroughly; but despite of the fact that the translator has attempted to substitute the same figure of speech in the target text, the Persian text could not be as humorous as in the source text. Consequently, none of them could render humor in the target language thoroughly.

Table 2. The transferring methods of allusion

Transference of allusion	Transferring method
Translator 1	Using footnote
Translator 2	Literal
Translator 3	Applying Islamic allusion
Translator 4	Literal
Translator 5	Literal
Translator 6	Using Footnote
Translator 7	Literal
Translator 8	literal
Translator 9	Using footnote
Translator 10	Using footnote

The third story "Two Trouble Maker" falls into one of the main categories of irony so-called "dramatic irony". The situation is different from other stories, as if there is something that the protagonist is not aware of, but the readers know the true meaning and this atmosphere caused laughter. Eight translators utilized dramatic irony as an appropriate equivalent for their translation method (translator 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, and 10) and two translators could not perceive the true meaning of the story and therefore could not translate it thoroughly. The eight named translators were successful in transferring the figure of speech; they were faithful to the source text and translated the same as the source text words and sentences while the same dramatic irony is transferred. Two translators (translator 5and7) could not perceive the meaning.

Table 3. The transferring methods of irony

Transference of irony	Transferring method
Translator 1	Using Persian equivalent
Translator 2	Using Persian equivalent
Translator 3	Using Persian equivalent
Translator 4	Using Persian equivalent
Translator 5	Faulty understanding
Translator 6	Using Persian equivalent
Translator 7	Faulty understanding
Translator 8	Using Persian equivalent
Translator 9	Using Persian equivalent
Translator 10	Using Persian equivalent

In the last story "The Pastor and the Christian", faithful, cognitive, and adaptation methods were chosen by the translators. Translator 1, 3, 4, 8, and 10 applied faithful method, while translator 2, 5, 7, and 9 utilized cognitive method; but it was adaptation method which manifested the core concept of the story in the target language socio-cultural context. As it is mentioned in the table only translator 6 applied this method. The translator applied the Persian equivalent metaphor and simultaneously adopted some characters close to Persian religion and culture. For instance, in this method the word "Sheikh" was substituted for "Priest", or the title of the story was totally changed from "the Pastor and a Christian" to "Sheikh and a Muslim Man".

Table 4. The transferring methods of metaphor

Transference of metaphor	Transferring method
Translator 1	Using Persian equivalent
Translator 2	Faulty Understanding
Translator 3	Using Persian equivalent
Translator 4	Using Persian equivalent
Translator 5	Faulty understanding
Translator 6	Using Persian equivalent
Translator 7	Faulty understanding
Translator 8	Using Persian equivalent
Translator 9	Faulty understanding
Translator 10	Using Persian equivalent

4. Data Analysis and the Results

The percentage of the results of the ten translations has been shown in the following table.

Table 5. The Percentage of the transference of figurative language and humor from English into Persian

Figurative Language	Pun	Allusion	Irony	Metaphor
The Percentage	20%	10%	80%	60%

5. Interview with Translators

Religion has a significant role in the process of translating humor. Therefore in order to demonstrate its significant role and to achieve a better conclusion, an interview was done with the chosen translators. For each English story the following question was posed, "During the process of translation, did the differences of culture and

religion influence you?." For the ten translators' "No" and "Yes" answers, the percentage of 0 to 1 was considered. After observing all of the percentages, we came into the total percent of %67.5. The result was also tabulated in chapter four.

Table 6. The effects of cultural and religious differences in transference of humor

Translators	Moses	Adam & Eve	Two Trouble Maker	The Pastor & the Christian	Total%
Mitra Baghery	1	1	0	1	75%
Homa Hejazi	1	1	0	1	75%
Farzaneh Nekoonam	1	1	0	0	50%
Motahare Heidary	1	1	0	1	75%
Reza Keramat	1	0	1	1	75%
Sara Mansoory	1	1	0	0	50%
Mohsen Khodadadi	1	0	1	1	75%
Farid Mossadeghi	1	1	0	1	75%
Mohammad Reza Jadidi	1	1	0	1	75%
Hosein Dianat khah	1	1	0	0	50%
Sum					67.5%

After the translation process, the translated texts have been evaluated and analyzed totally, the researcher interviewed all ten translators. She asked them through a phone call whether cultural and religious differences could affect their translation or not. As a result all 10 translators stated that religious and cultural differences could be as an obstacle in translation process.

6. Conclusion

As mentioned before, the concerns of this study were to discover how the humorous religious concepts could manifest in Persian translations. Many humorous remarks were scrutinized. From the strategies applied by ten different translators to translate humor from English to Persian, a few of them could transfer the same sense of humor and laughter to Persian readers. In fact, translation and transference of the religious humor was not totally practicable. This study could find some essential factors for the translators of this type. To render a satisfactory translation, the translators must be acquainted with religious and cultural systems of both SL and TL to find standard equivalents, give an explanation or otherwise convey the author's intended meaning to the TL readers. The most problematic area in rendering humorous points were distinctive religious culture, that is, some religious concepts were known to their people but in Persian religion it was something weird. The ethics of the religion play an integral role in translating humorous texts and this peculiarly the case with Islam. In other words, at times the mentioned religion acts as a catalyst and defines, changes and even omits the whole meaning of the original texts in order to prevent the transference of the profane texts from entering into the holy realm of Islam. Needless to say, translators must be well-acquainted with both culture and religion. At times it is necessary for them to apply their knowledge of other religion to the target language reader. Nonetheless, it is obvious that the translators' joined-up thinking, and creative decision-making can result in successful translation even with a culturally or religiously bound element in a contextually bound text.

References

--------------. (1988). *A Textbook of Translation*. Hertfordshire: Prentice Hall.
Abrams, M. H. (1999). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Seventh Edition. Boston: Heinle and Heinle.
Adam and Eve. (n.d). Retrieved from http://godslittleacre.net/funnies/short_christian_jokes_1html.
Forbes, B. D., & Mahan, J. H. (2005). *Religion and Popular Culture in America.* California: University of California Press.
Klein, A. (2003). *The Healing Power of Humor: Techniques for getting through Loss, Setbacks, Upsets, Disappointments, Difficulties,Trials, and all That not-so-Funny Stuff.* Waterville Maine: Thorndike Press.
Lotman, J., & Uspensky, B. (1978). *On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture*. America: *New Literary History.*
Moses. (n.d). Retrieved from http://godslittleacre.net/funnies/short_christian_jokes_2.html.
Newmark, P. (1988). *Approaches to Translation*. Hertfordshire: Prentice Hall.

Pastor and the Church. (n.d). Retrieved from http://godslittleacre.net/funnies/short_christian_jokes_1.html.
Two Trouble Maker. (n.d). Retrieved from http://godslittleacre.net/funnies/short_christian_jokes_1.html.