

Exploring Cultural Awareness in Literary Translation of Religious Concepts

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Abstract :

The term "cultural awareness" has long been a controversial topic in many fields, also considered as a factor that hampers translators when dealing with religious concepts. Lacking such awareness, however, may lead to using inappropriate translation strategies that can affect the readers' understanding of the source culture. Accordingly, cultural acceptance may not take place. This paper is an attempt to highlight the compulsion of cultural awareness vis-a-vis translating religious concepts and expressions. This study is carried out through analysing religious concepts extracted from the novel of Tahar Watar entitled "El Waliy Ataher Ya3oud Ila Makamihi Azzakiy" and its translation into English "Saint Tahar Returns to his Holy Shrine". The analysis shows the incongruity that the translator has undergone when transposing the religious concepts from the source culture to the target culture. As a result, it has created ambiguity among readers.

Keywords: cultural awareness- religious concepts and expressions- source culture- target culture- translation- translator.

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Introduction:

Translation is a cultural practice that is not smooth and easy to be carried out. It is a complex process, which requires considerable awareness and knowledge about both the source and the target cultures. During this process, a translator may encounter problems with the cultural elements that are deeply rooted in the source culture. Such cultural capacities elucidate the reason why languages differ from one another. In this regard, transposing religious terms across cultures is problematic. This matter poses considerable difficulties to the translator. To illustrate, the Arabic language, according to Baker (1992), is loaded with cultural terms with no equivalent in English in most cases. The key to preserving the cultural reference of these terms is revealed in understanding the translated elements in the target text (TT). However, it is hard to find an equivalent that would keep the source text (ST) value and meaning. To overcome this issue, the translator operates to find solutions to the problems that s/he frequently encounters once dealing with the religious concepts. The stage of comprehension, hereof, remains very crucial in the process of translation. Hence, the challenging problem that arises in this paper is the difficulty of translating religious terms and the attempt to keep the same meaning that the translator tries to preserve. This study is of interest to investigate the crucial role of cultural awareness for translators and language learners. This study addresses several further questions on the translation strategies that the translator has used when translating the novel. Another question is related to the role of the strategy in stabilising the cultural meaning between the SL and TL. To answer these questions, we hypothesize that the translation difficulty and strategy choice are connected with the fact of lacking a higher level of cultural awareness and sensitivity towards religious concepts. What is more, this paper tends to adopt a descriptive method to explore the translation strategies used to express the importance of cultural awareness for the translator and the reader. Through this method, we opt to extract different religious concepts from the novel. Moreover, we clearly state the strategy that the translator tries to use to avoid misinterpretation or ambiguity.

I. Translation, Language, and Culture:

Research on the inter-relationship between the three elements had a long tradition. It started from the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis in 1940, and it revealed the connection between language and culture. Needless to explain, Sugimoto expounded the idea for the researcher as introduced the art of translation as:

The exchange of one set of clothes for another set of clothes that will cover the same meaning or thought. However, when we think of translation culture, first we must understand its background and give some thought to the age in which it was born. (2005, p. 1)

Combining translation, language, and culture has been described by Adewuni (2006) as a "reality despite the complications and doubt attached to it based on the nature of the elements involved, the languages, the cultures, and the

translator" (p. 1). On this basis, both the translator and the reader should be more acquainted with cultural knowledge and awareness. While the former should be able to start the translation process, the latter should understand the source message from the target message.

1. The Translation Process:

The translator cannot easily fulfill the translation process, especially when surfing cultures, since it is a craft by itself. Following a certain process as shown below in Figure1, Nida and Taber (1982) explained it as a reproduction of the source language by transferring it into the receptor language after reforming the message to be entirely acceptable by the translator first; then, the reader in terms of meaning and style.

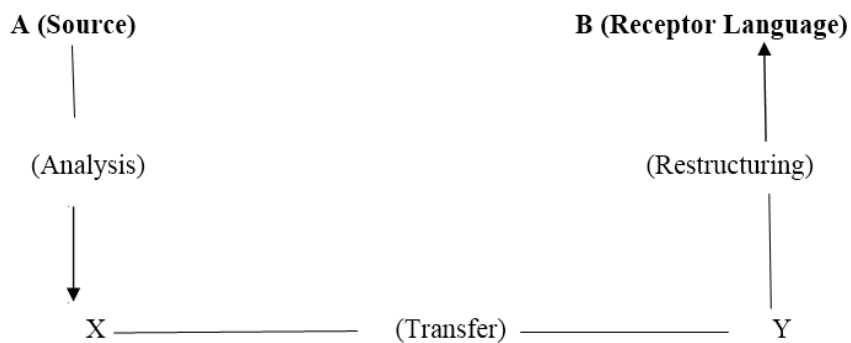


Figure1. The translation Process (Nida and Taber, 1982, p. 12)

2. Translation Strategies:

Translation has witnessed a long crossroad until the researchers agreed on a common explanation. They used it to refer to the mental process that the translators undergo. Séguinot defines strategies as "a term which has been used to refer to both conscious and unconscious procedures, to both tactics and mental processes." (1991, p. 82). In other words, to choose the correct procedure, the translator must know which strategy to use in order to overcome the problems that might hinder the translation task. At this level, the following strategies highlight their appropriate use.

2.1.Literal Translation:

It is also known as Word for Word Translation. Another key thing to remember, it is used when the two languages are increasingly close to each other because the words are translated with respect to the grammatical rules of the target language.

2.2.Translating by Superordinate:

In the case of non-equivalence, Baker (1992) indicated that "it is one of the commonest strategies for dealing with many types of non-equivalents, particularly in the area of propositional meaning" (p. 26). This method is used in all languages

because meaning is not language-dependent in the semantic field. To illustrate, Baker (1992, p.27) provided the following example:

Source text:

Shampoo the hair with a mild WELLA-SHAMPOO and lightly towel dry.

Target text 2 (Arabic):

يغسل الشعر بشامبو من "ويللا" على أن يكون من نوع الشامبو الملطف . . .

The hair is **washed** with 'wella' shampoo, provided that it is a mildshampoo . . .

2.3. Translating by Cultural Substitution:

It is highly used to replace a culture-related term in the source text with another one that can be understood in a similar context. To make it clear, 'cream tea' is translated into 'pastry' since it does not have an equivalent in the Italian culture:

The Patrick Collection has restaurant facilities to suit every taste –from the discerning gourmet, to the Cream Tea expert.

Target text (Italian):

. . . di soddisfare tutti i gusti: da quelli del gastronomo esigente a quelli dell'esperto di **pasticceria**.

. . . to satisfy all tastes: from those of the demanding gastronomist to those of the expert in **pastry**. (Baker, 1992, p. 33)

2.4. Translating by Paraphrase using Related Words:

This strategy is mainly used "when the frequency with which a certain form is used in the source language is significantly higher than would be natural in the target language" (Baker, 2011: 36), i.e., it is more used in the source language than target one as described in the example below:

Source text:

The rich and creamy KOLESTRAL-SUPER is easy to apply and has a pleasant fragrance.

Target text (Arabic):

كولسترال سوبر غني ومكثف في تركيبته التي تمنح مستحضرا يشبه الكريمة

Kolestral-super is rich and concentrated in its make-up which gives a product **that resembles cream** . . . (Baker, 1992, p. 37)

2.5. Translating by Paraphrasing using Unrelated Words:

This strategy can be used when a source language item is complex in the target language. The paraphrasing strategy here may replace related words that

are based on modifying a super-ordinate by unpacking it. Baker (1992) explained it in this example:

In the words of a Lonrho affidavit dated 2 November 1988, the allegations. . .

Target text (Arabic):

وحسب النص الوارد في افادة كتابية مشفوعة يمين قدمتها مؤسسة لورنو بتاريخ 2 نوفمبر 1988، فإن الإدعاءات . . .

According to the text of a **written communication supported by an oath** presented by the Lonrho organization and dated 2 November 1988, the allegations . . . (p. 38)

2.6. Translating by Loan Words:

When facing cultural-specific items, the translator uses this strategy by preserving the word without translating it in the target language. It is selected whether to show respect for the source text language or to retrieve an equivalent way of expressing the difficulty to translate the bounded cultural concepts in the target language. Therefore, they opt for borrowing the same terms when the target culture lacks their equivalents justified by the lexical gap in the target language. For example:

Dilettante is a loanword in English, Russian, and Japanese; but Arabic has no equivalent loanword. This means that only the prepositional meaning of *dilettante* can be rendered into Arabic; its stylistic effect would almost certainly have to be sacrificed (Baker, 1992, p. 25).

2.7. Translating by Omission:

When translators come across a cultural word that is not crucial in the source text with no equivalent in the target language, it can be omitted. For that reason, the translators may turn to the omission strategy to avoid lengthy explanations that could confuse the target readers.

2.8. Translation by Illustration:

If the translator did not find the corresponding word, it is possible to illustrate with a physical entity that exists in the target language. This translation strategy is usually helpful when the target text needs to be kept brief and relevant as Baker (1992) explained the fact that “There is no easy way of translating *tagged*, as in *tagged teabags*, into Arabic without going into lengthy explanations which would clutter the text. An illustration of a tagged teabag is therefore used instead of paraphrase” (p. 42).

3. Language Barriers and Cultural Encounters in Translation:

Manipulating a language through the translation process may be a risk to the source language. It might change the readers' views of its culture and people as it can be termed a violation of the language norms and perspectives. That is to say, the effect can be positive or negative since the diversified attitudes that are related to translating Arabic literary works emerged from the glitches in the intercultural context. Yowelly and Lataiwish claimed: "the greater the gap between the source and target culture, the more serious difficulty would be" (2000, p. 107). Having said that, overcoming language barriers and cultural hindrances forces the translator to go beyond the language. These problems can be fixed by focusing on the interaction between culture and translation without eliminating how cultural terms restrict this process.

Thus, translators need to use their knowledge, cultural awareness, performance, skill, experience, and proficiency to do their task. To such an extent, it is more crucial than the author's assignment. As Shunnaq (1998) puts it:

It is axiomatic to say, therefore, that the translator's task is more difficult than the writer's because the former is confined to the ideas of the latter. Moreover, he is obliged to convey the ideas of the source language translation into the target language translation giving utmost care to the linguistic and cultural norms of the target language, as well as its naturalness. In other words, the translator is expected to produce a target language translation, which should be equivalent, creative, and genuine, and has the source language cultural flavour. (p. 33)

II. Methodology:

1. Method:

The researcher undertook this study through a descriptive method. It is, therefore, an attempt to describe the decision-making process of the translator when facing the challenge of rendering the meaning of the religious concepts between two languages. Initially, we attempted to locate and extract various religious concepts out of both versions of the novel. Next, we analysed these terms by detecting the strategies followed by the translator and tracing the effect of the choices that he made on the resistance of the meaning.

2. The novel:

Our case is the English translation of Tahar Wattar's novel, "Saint Tahar Returns to his Holy Shrine," by an Algerian translator, Pr. KhemissiBougherara.

3. Instruments and Tools:

In line with the study objectives, the descriptive method fits best. Moreover, there is a need for using Arabic-English parallel corpus as an efficient tool to detect similarities and differences between these religious terms. This tool served in

pointing out the strategies adopted in treating these terms and expressions as well as revealing how the translator tried to preserve the religious dimension without jeopardizing or scratching the meaning.

To sum up, the current study goes through three main steps:

- Identifying the religious terms along with expressions in the original text and their English translation using a parallel corpus.
- Indicating the strategies used by the translator and the constraints he encountered.
- Analysing the translator's choice of strategy and to what extent he managed to preserve the meaning expressed in the original text.

III. Results and Discussion

The use of the chart (Appendix 1) paved the way towards a remarkable writing Latin phonetic system to ease the pronunciation of the Arabic words mentioned in the table shown below:

Arabic script	Transliteration	Page	English translation	Page
الولي	Al waliy	5	Saint	5
الوضوء	Al wodho	12	Ablution	12
القبلة	Al kibla	11	The kibla	11
حضرة	Hadhra	7	Hadhra	7
باسم الله مجرأها و مرساها	Bismi Allahi majraha wa marsaha	19	« in the name of Allah, whether it moves or be at rest »	9
لا حول ولا قوة الا بالله	La hawla wala kowata illa billah	27	« The power and the might are God's only »	14
غيط الريبة يحرز في قلبي	ghayTH Al- raya yahuzu fi kalbi	٣٨	The fury of the flags gnawing at my heart	21
الاستحمام بالذكر	Al istihmam bi athkr	٤٠	Bathe in the praise of God	22
صلاة الغائب	Salat al Ghayb	٤٣	The prayer of the Absent	23
سبحان الذي يعلم الجهر وما يخفي	Subhana alladhi ya3lamou ljahra wa ma yakhfa	72	Glory to him who knows what is manifest and what is hidden	41
لا إله إلا الله. أشهد أن لا إله إلا الله. أشهد أن محمدا رسول الله	la ilaha ila Allah. Achehadu anna la ilaha ila Allah. Achehadou anna muhammadan rassulu Allah	89	There is no God except Allah. There is no God except Allah. And Muhammad is his prophet	51
ام المؤمنين	Um al-moummime	122	Mother of believers	70
واقعة الجمل	Waki3at al-Jamal	122	The battle of the camel	70
الملكوت	Al-malakoute	118	Devine	68
عيد الفطر	3id al-fitr	113	Aid al-fitr	65
علم اليقين	3ilma al-yakine	116	Knowing for sure	67
بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم	Bismi Allah al-Rahman al- rahim	113	In the name of Allah ,Most Gracious ,Most Merciful	65
السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته	A-Salam 3alaykum wa rahmat Allah wa barakatuh	113	Peace and God's mercy and benedictions be upon you	65
الولي الطاهر	Al-waliy tahar	133	Saint Tahar	78

Table1.The Extracted Religious Expressions from Both Versions of the Novel

The comparative analysis of certain cultural elements with their translation aimed to show how expressions are different from one culture to another, demonstrating the translator's decision-making process. According to Munday (2008), translation is "a process that happens in a sociocultural environment and ideology"(p. 43). In Tahar Watar's novel, culture and ideology are a core part where cultural components are intensively used to manifest the Algerian identity. Thus, the crucial task that the translator challenges is to treat those components without losing the original meaning.

EFL learners should keep in mind that using an inappropriate translation strategy may jeopardize meaning. To illustrate, the cultural equivalent "Saint" for the word "Al waliy" does not originally fit the novel's context. Since the term "Al

waliy" refers to the person with a purified soul, obeying God's orders and prohibitions, it cannot be the same as translated. Yet, "Saint" is more related to Christianity, referring to "any believer in Christ and in whom Christ dwells, whether in heaven or in earth." This controversy between the two words cannot make them equivalent in translation. This is mainly because they express very different religious connotations. However, it is appropriate to suggest that the translator's intention was to dis-mark foreignness between the two religious concepts in order to reduce the conflict of ideologies.

The same translation can be practiced with the word "wodho" which is rendered by "ablution". In the Islamic context, the word "wodho" is a religious ritual of washing certain parts of the body to purify them before praying. On the other hand, "ablution" in the Christian context refers to the ritual washing of a priest's hands or sacred vessels. The concept of ablution differs from one religion to another; therefore, using an equivalent as a translating technique does not preserve the intended meaning of the original text. We may conclude that since the words "wodho" and "ablution" belong to a religious ritual and both are used to purify body and soul; the translator finds it adequate to use both words as substitutes.

In some cases, the ignorance of the source culture or the target one creates ambiguity in the interpretation of meaning. It may lead to misinterpretation and, in some cases, losing meaning. Translating cultural components through preserving the same original meaning provides the reader with the opportunity to be familiar with these elements.

One of the famous religious symbols in the Islamic world is the word "Kibla". The translator was obliged to keep this term as it is in the original text because no equivalent in the target culture can convey the same spiritual significance as in the source text. In this case, using it as a loan word becomes a convenient strategy to reach two goals: maintaining the meaning of that religious term and exposing the source culture via the target one.

Remaining in the same realm of religion, "du3a" is one of the cultural elements that takes a huge part in the novel. In addition to the two expressions: "la hawla wala kowata illa billah", which is rendered to "the power and the might are God's only" and "Bismi Allahi majraha w2a marsaha" transferred into "in the name of Allah, whether it moves or be at rest". It is evident from both expressions how people perceive divine power. They reveal a lot about their beliefs and faith, in the Islamic context, and believe that God has the power over everything and they are totally convinced that God controls destiny. Thus, the translator used a literal translation as if he wanted to express people's way of thinking and believing. Likewise, "to bathe in the praise of God" shows the literal translation of the idiomatic expression that most English readers will not understand and find abnormal. It means to thank Allah, read the Quran and ask Allahnot to get lost or

commit the forbidden things. The translator preferred to use a literal translation so that he will not affect the reference in the cultural context.

In the following example from the novel and its translation, it would be hard for a non-skilled to understand the sentence "the prayer of the Absent" that was translated literally from "Salat El-Ghayeb". The Muslims are genuinely rooted in religion; they are engaged in this special prayer, which is a type of funeral prayer that Muslims perform when one of them dies where there are no other Muslims to pray for the dead. Such a phenomenon is unlikely to happen in the English environment. The difficulty of translating such religious concepts is when the target culture has no verbal image that conveys the English word.

In Islam, one of the five pillars is Shahada. It expresses the two fundamental beliefs "La ilaha illa Allah wa-Muhammad rassulu Allah" declaring that there is no God but Allah and that the prophet Muhammad PBUH (Peace Be Upon Him) is His messenger. This essential religious Islamic expression was translated literally word by word from Arabic to English, which ran the risk of losing its religious and cultural value. This strategy misleads the reader and fails to transfer the same effect of the ST to the TT. As well as for the Quran verse "Subhana alladhi ya3lamou ljarah wa ma yakhfa", the translator decided to replace this holy verse with a target text expression by using an equivalent ready-made word in the TL. Though the phrase "Glory to him who knows what is manifest and what is hidden" sounds literally translated, the translator substituted cultural words of the SL by those of the TL, which have a similar context and impact that would make readers familiar with the concept.

Translating religious terms is quite difficult because there are clearly huge differences between religions, as in Islam and Christianity. For example, a cultural-bound word "Um al Mouminine" is translated into "mother of believers"; the translator utilized the literal translation strategy here because this word is purely religious. In Arabic, "Um al-mouminine" refers to one of the wives of the prophet Muhammad PBUH who was well known as a wise woman that played a significant role in disseminating Islamic behaviours in various situations. A target-text receiver may not grasp this translation because the English reader who does not know the Islamic culture will find it hard to understand the term appropriately; it is not part of his culture. That is why the translator has chosen the strategy mentioned above to cover the absence of cultural equivalence.

Another religious aspect appears in the expression "Waki3at al-jamel" which is literally translated to "the battle of the camel". This phrase has a purely Islamic reflection that is given to it. In the Arabic context, "Waki3at al-jamel" took place at Basra. It was between two forces allied to Ali and the superior forces of rebel Arab joined Aisha Um al- mouminine. Moreover, it represents "Fitna" that may raise a cultural gap in the target culture of the English readers due to the use of the non-equivalent religious term, which can be only clear for readers who are

aware enough of the source culture. Subsequently, many cultural terms cannot be treated out of social context, so that the translators should be careful when choosing a strategy that helps them show respect to the source culture.

The key success in translation is to be familiar with the religious aspects of the source language. Additionally, it is equally important to be aware enough of treating them while translating in order to keep the cultural indications and the spirit of the original text. To illustrate, the term (Al-malakoute) means the unknown world devoted to souls and selves. It is translated into English as "divine" which refers to all that is connected with God. In this respect, we can conclude that two diverse cultures lead more or less not to maintain the cultural equivalence in the target language. The translator, here, used the term that exists in the target culture and this may not be viewed suitable as it is in the source one.

Another term "3id al-fitr" refers to the feast of breaking the fast, and it is an important religious day celebrated by Muslims. A foreign reader, however, cannot understand this term. No equivalent exists in this case; that is why the translator used a borrowing strategy to respect the cultural context of the source language even though the target-text reader may not understand it. Similarly, the cultural-bound term "3ilma al-yakine" is translated into "knowing for sure," in Arabic translation, the term means that one has known something, and then he confirms its truthfulness. "3ilma al-yakine" is mentioned in Qur'an. However, English readers may not reach the target meaning because of its absence in the English culture. The translator utilized this strategy to avoid changing the significance of the cultural context.

Most of the time, the translator tried to provide a cultural equivalent to the term that is a part of the target reader's culture. This may facilitate the understanding of the translation product with a more naturalized attribute. The expression "Bismi Allah al-Rahman al-Rahim" is translated into "in the name of Allah, Most Gracious, and Most Merciful." This phrase is recited before each surah in Qur'an; Muslims generally use it before starting any action to wish Allah to empower them in all their deeds. In this sense, the literal translation that is used may not lead to the equivalent meaning as it is in the Algerian context. The translator attempts to create the same reaction as in the SL by finding similar terms in the TL.

In the same way, "al-Salam 3alaykum wa rahmat Allah wa baraktuh" is a gesture of respect, homage, or to make a formal salute to someone. The translation is literal and far from the original context "peace and God's mercy and benedictions be upon you." This translation, then, is perceived as the mercy and benediction of God upon the people and has a religious trait. Still, the cultural equivalent of "al-Salam 3alaykum wa rahmat Allah wa baraktuh" is "hello," which is an utterance of greeting in the target culture.

Conclusion:

This research was about the need for cultural awareness in translation. This necessity presented a way to introduce a new culture through literature. The overall purpose behind our study was to shed light on the fact that maintenance of meaning caused the difficulty of translating cultural elements. This paper was carried out through the descriptive method, which enabled us to study and analyse the religious terms and expressions from the novel. This research also presented the results obtained from the translation product that relied on the cultural aspect. The findings showed that the translator attempted solely to focus on preserving the meaning of the natural frame, which cannot be well grasped by the target-text reader, by maintaining the meaning depending on particular strategies. The cultural attribute was not considered a foremost priority in the translation process since it may jeopardize the meaning of the cultural information. This spotlighted the fact that the translator had other tendencies, such as re-expressing ideas in a way he found suitable and respectful to the source translation or as an artistic activity in the literary novels. Therefore, preserving the cultural references of the religious concepts is considered an essential factor that shows respect to the source culture on the one hand and cover the failure of not finding equivalence in the target culture on the other hand. We will attempt to plan lessons including the novel understudy and its translation in the EFL classroom in future research. It will be important to investigate the effect of the suggested lesson plans on the learners' cultural awareness.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Key to Right Pronunciation

Arabic alphabet	Trans-literation	Sounds as in	Arabic alphabet	Trans-literation	Sounds as in	Arabic alphabet	Trans-literation	Sounds as in
alif ا	a	ram	zi ز	z	zeal	qaf ق	q	Qatar
ba ب	b	bat	siin س	s	sing	kaf ك	k	Kent
ta ت	t	tab	shiin ش	sh	shall	laam ل	l	lamb
tha ث	th	thanks	Saad ص	S	salt	miim م	m	mark
jiim ج	j	jet	Daad ض	D	dart	nuun ن	n	nasty
ha ح	h	harsh	Ta ط	T	tore	waaw و	w	word
kh خ	kh	loch	THa ظ	TH	those	ha ه	h	hand
daal د	d	dad	ayn ع	3, 3a, 3i, 3u	eel	ya ي	y	yet
thaal ذ	dh	that	ghayn غ	gh	Ghana	hamza ء	a, i, u 'a,'i,'u, '	
ra ر	r	ran	fa ف	f	far	-		