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A pragmatic approach to translation: a case study of deictic expressions in translations of hafiz

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Abstract

In the present world, with the huge amount of cultural exchanges between nations and countries happening, Literary Translation can act as a very useful approach toward introducing our native culture to the world and finding a proper place for ourselves within the global multicultural relations. The importance of this research is in providing the translators with a deep insight into preserving meaning as the basic part of a message and to transfer the cultural elements attached to deictic expression during translation. In this case study the researcher has found the deictic expressions inside a Persian version of Hafiz poetry (Divan) and then has examined their translations in two other English versions, analyzing the information gathered in order to find the sources of errors. Then attempts have been made to find solutions for them and finally present a pattern or some general formulas for the adopted strategies.

Keywords: Translation, Hafiz, Deictic expressions, pragmatic approach

1. Introduction

Translation in our current world works as an important factor in the process of many different types of exchanges including cultural ones. Culture is what forms many social behaviours and norms. Through translation of precious works of literature significant cultural and artistic values find their way to people with their own system of values which definitely plays a vital role in forming their personalities. Therefore there is a heavy duty upon translator to transfer what is considered as sacred or determinative factors of source cultural identity in order to preserve as much as possible the original.

Poems of Hafiz, the great classic poet whose name is famous around the globe and was admired by many great thinkers and poets of the entire world, are considered to be an important source for cultural exchanges between east and west. His poems are highly rich in theosophy and mysticism. As a result the need for its translations to be accurate and to the point is tangible.

Deictic Expressions, as a sub category of Pragmatics in current Applied Linguistics are frequently used in Hafiz’s poems.

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2. Methodology

In this study attempts has been made to extract deictic expressions from a selection of Hafiz poems translated by a number of translators and compare the. Then efforts were made to categorize translators’s behaviour while dealing with these translations to find out their strategies. Then the points of ambiguity were discussed to find out the weakpoints and problems related to translation of these expressions.

3. Results and discussion

Here is the result of a research on the translation of deictic expressions in poems of Hafiz with the knowledge that one cannot interpret works of this master artist just by translation of words used in them. The translation by Wilberforce Clarke: The Divan-I- Hafiz and the selection of translated Hafiz poems gathered by Arberry were chosen to be studied in order to find answers to these questions: Is there any error in their translation of deictic expressions? If yes what seems to be the source of error? And finally to establish a pattern if there is any for a correct and accurate translation of deictic expressions in Hafiz poems.

Followings are the results categorized under 10 Headings:

1- Theosophy: “literally, theosophy is a way of living that those in search of truth choose to follow in order to rich to the desired one”. (Sajadi, 1991: 577) The main challenge in translating deictic expressions related to Theosophy is that the kind of theosophy that exists in Hafiz poems is an oriental-Iranian-Islamic kind. A kind that is hard to understand and therefore to transfer into another language and culture. (Not to mention that all deictic expressions are not necessarily theosophical) Take a look at this example:

hozuri gar hami khahi az ou ghafel masho hafez
mata ma talgha man tahva da’a donya va ahmelha

Hafiz! If thou desire the presence (union with God most high) from him be not absent:
When thou visitest thy Beloved, abandon the world; and let it go.”(Clark, 2007:3)

Hafiz! If thou wouldst win her grace,
Be never absent from thy place,
When thou dost see the well-loved face,

Be lost at last to time and space” (Arberry, 1993:84)
You can see that Clark has used parentheses to mention God’s name but Arberry used “her” as a mistress or loved one. Looking at related resources and because presence, as opposed to absence means to be present in front of God and be absent from his people and because Absence means to be absent from God and his grace (Sajadi, 1991) Clark’s translation is closer to the original.

2- Culture: Problems coming from cultural differences and misunderstandings were also observed. For example:

shokre izad ke miane mano ou solh oftad
Soufian raghs konan saghare shokrane zadand

(ghanni,Gazvinni,2003:126)

“Thanks to God, between me and him, peace chanced,
(On account of this peace) the cup of thankfulness, the hours, dancing, cast.”(Clark,2007:408)

“Between my Lord and me such concord lies
As makes the huris glad in paradise.” (Arberry,1993:103)

Both translators have thought that this pronoun refers to God but Bell in Arberry’s Collection decided that it is not a deictic expression. First of all in some Old Persian versions of this poem there is “Glad that or Thank for”,

Secondly, “Thanks to God or Thank God” is an expression commonly used not only in Persian but in English and many other languages and does not necessarily refer to God. Finally, the meaning of this verse as mentioned in some sources is to show joy for the peace between him and his beloved one (Khoramshahi, 1992).

3- Language and thoughts of Hafiz: Having a good understanding of Hafiz’s literature, view and thoughts is important for the translator to do a good job. Unawareness from poets’ idea about fatalism and free will and not being acquainted with those poets who inspired him are only some of the problems that were observed:

rez be dade bedeh vaz jabin gereh bogsha
Ke bar mano to dare ekhtiar nagshadast

(Ghanni,Gazvinni,2003:30)

“Give contentment to that (God) given; unloose the frown from thy forehead:
For the door of choice is not open to me and thee.”(Clark,2007:89)

“Be pleased with what the fates bestow,
Nor let thy brow be furrowed thus;
The gate to freedom here below
Stands not ajar to such as us.”(Arberry,1993:89)

In the above example Clark, used God as the source of deictic expression but Arberry gives the same place to Fate. According to some scholars Hafiz like many other great thinkers of his time was a fatalist who saw choice only for God and not man himself. (Khoramshahi,1992) Although both translations seem to be correct it is interesting that Clark, by using God, shows his knowledge of Hafiz thoughts.

4- Observing the translations we suggest three categories of translation: word for word, poetic and conceptual translation. The word for word translation as the most common of them proved to be correct in most of the cases. The poetic translation was the characteristic of Arberry’s collection and considered to be ‘wrong’ many times (11 times)! Sometimes in order to preserve the rhythm, the translators of this collection sacrificed the exact words in the original Persian poem. Doing so without knowing what exactly we are going to lose is risky. The conceptual translation does not bring the whole concept on paper but only the concept of the deictic expression which was used frequently in both translations.

5- Addition, Replacement, Omission and Distortion:

Addition is used when there is need to state something that is not in the source text but is understandable from the whole or a part of the text. It is either: adding to the main text, using parentheses or stating in footnote. Although addition is very useful in translation, in case of deictic expressions some errors were observed. Choose of suitable type of translation, looking into inter textual information, finding most appropriate meanings and equivalents, having all the sources to use if needed and good perception of cultural elements are to be advised.

Use of replacement also was observed in the translations in hand and proved to be helpful if and only if the meaning is preserved. It is especially useful in poetic translation where the rhythm works as an obstacle.

Omission as a way to get rid of poetic problems is also advisable again with this condition that the meaning is kept intact. It can also be a good help in order to beautify the work of translation.

The deliberate act of distortion as observed is also a good way to prevent the problems with poetic translations in Arberry’s collection providing that it is harmless to the meaning.

During this study we observed some important points to consider while translating Hafiz’s poems in terms of deictic expressions. Using the findings in the act of translation is crucial to preserve the meanings of the poems and the ideas of the poet.

4. conclusion

We can sum up as follows:
Deictic expressions in Persian and English are problematic for the translators. Of course it is not their form that is source of error but it is rather the invisible meaning attached to them that is challenging. The problems are mostly caused by being unfamiliar with theosophy, paying less than enough attention to cultural matters, unfamiliarity with the poet’s literature and system of belief and have poor knowledge of those who inspired him. Use of word for word translation as long as it preserves the meaning or there is no way for the translator to find the invisible meaning is acceptable. Poetic translation is risky for the limitations it imposes. Considering the concept of the whole poem while translating deictic expressions is also helpful to realize the meaning attached to them. Use of addition omission, replacement and distortion is also useful providing that the meaning is preserved.

Being accustomed to Hafiz, have access to sources about him and his poetry, knowledge of theosophical information extracting theosophical meanings when required. Reading the whole poem before taking any action, paying attention to the text, understanding Hafiz’s literature and his ideas and ideals, supportable presumptions, preserving the meaning against rhythm, being aware of the cultural matters and not insisting on finding a source for the deictic expression in hand when it is not possible are the most important guidelines resulted from this study.

In the end we can formulate the process of translating deictic expressions as follows:

a. Use of word for word translation when the resources are not helpful and when the simplest way is the best way;

b. Use of conceptual translation by benefiting from the available sources or supportable self-presumption;

c. Use of addition with parentheses translations into prose in order to introduce the source of the deictic expression;

d. Use of addition inside the main text especially in poetic translation;

e. Use of replacement if the meaning is preserved especially in poetic translation and in order to overcome it’s obstacles;

f. Use of omission again if the meaning is preserved in order to beautify the work of translation and overcome the difficulties;

g. Use of distortion with meaning kept unchanged and to beat the obstacles.

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