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Translation of English Passive and Unaccusative Verbs into Farsi: A Comparative Study of Three Translations of ‘Animal Farm’ by Three Iranian Translators

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Abstract
Translation should be done by considering the function of a text in the two languages. Verbs can be regarded as the main argument in translation because of their crucial function in the text. Translation of some verbs, like passives and unaccusatives, is more challenging since they require undergoing more changes to be transferred to the new language. This article tries to investigate the inherent challenge in translation of these verbs from English into Farsi by describing the strategies three Iranian translators used to provide Farsi equivalents for English passives and unaccusatives in Animal Farm written by George Orwell (1945). Moreover, to find complementary data, some extracted translations of these verbs were given to 36 readers in a questionnaire to grade them by considering their fluency, simplicity and acceptability. The questionnaire was designed to examine the effect of the translators’ decisions on the readers. The results of the study revealed that the translators used unaccusatives as the most frequent forms in translation of both verbs. And the results of the questionnaire indicated that the readers were inclined to read actives in translation of passives and unaccusatives in translation of unaccusatives. The researcher came to the conclusion that shifts were more common in translation of passives although change of verbs into other parts of speech (like phrases) was more common in translation of unaccusatives than passives. Also, based on the results obtained from the questionnaire, it was concluded that using actives in translation of passives and unaccusatives in translation of unaccusatives was more in concordance with Farsi grammar.

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1. Introduction

The foundation of translation is language. A translator must have enough information about the source and the target language to deliver a good translation. There are many elements that constitute language, one of which is grammar. Proper grammar provides a vital role for understanding language. One of the main components in any grammar is the verb. Thus, the translator has to give the most attention to the translation of verbs. One of the possible problems a translator may face is related to passive voice. Because of the diverse functions and usage of passive voice in a language, the translator should know how to translate it with appropriate function and acceptable usage. Another verb category which seems simple but may cause problems for the translator, like passive verbs, is the unaccusative verb.

The major purpose of this study is to help translators to translate passive and unaccusative verbs with the fewest problems so that they can produce high quality translations. The other focus of the study is to examine the quality of some translations of passive and unaccusative verbs by using their target readers’ judgments.

The present study tries to answer the following questions related to these verbs in the process of translation:

1. What are the differences between translating passive and unaccusative verbs?
2. How does a translator deal with the differences?
3. What is the effect of this kind of translation on the readers?

Brief definitions of these verbs will be given below to clarify the similarities and differences between them:

Since passive verbs are different from active verbs in voice, first, we take a quick glance at voice. “Voice is a grammatical category which makes it possible to view the action of a sentence in either of two ways, without change in the facts reported” (Quirk et al., 1985: 159). Similarly, Persian has voice and distinguishes it as siqe-e.

Voice has two forms in English and Farsi:

English: active voice and passive voice

Farsi: siqe-e ma’lum and siqe-e majhul.

The Passive voice is made of a form of be + the past participle of the main verb. In Farsi, passive voice is built as:

past participle + ﻪ + form of ﻪBased on the main verb.

According to Vinary and Darbelnet (1995), one of the strategies in translation is the usage of active voice instead of the passive. Many writers agree that English speakers have a tendency to use passives more frequently, especially in formal texts (Zhonghua Xiao, 2007). In English, Passives are used more in written texts than spoken ones. In addition, they appear more in scientific texts than the other types of texts. Farsi speakers use the passive to signify the action more than the agent of the action. The function of passive seems to be the same in the two languages, however, passive is used more in English than in Farsi (Jabbari, 2003). Therefore, a translator is faced with a challenging situation in translating passive verbs.

The unaccusative verb is an intransitive verb whose subject is not responsible for the action of the verb and it is acted upon like the subject in passive verbs. For the first time, Perlmutter (1978) within the context of relational grammar proposed the Unaccusative Hypothesis (UH). He assigned intransitive verbs, based on semantic characteristics of the subject, into two classes: unergative and unaccusative verbs. In his work, unergative is defined as the clause for which its argument is the real and canonical subject (E.g. Sleep, stand). In contrast, for the unaccusative, the surface subject is not the real subject, but it has the role of the direct object for this kind of verb.
(e.g., arrive, die). In Farsi there are two categories of intransitive verbs too: the unaccusative and the unergative. According to Karimi (2005, p. 72), “The unaccusative shows alterations in the surface structure, their object moves to the subject position in the surface structure; and the theme in the unaccusative verb acts as the grammatical subject of the clause”

Example 1. Yakh zoub shod.

Example 2. The ice melted.

2. Studies on Passives and Unaccusative

Great attention is given to the passive construction from a pedagogical view. These studies investigated why second language learners are inclined to overuse or underuse the passive in their interlanguage. There is a study that is similar to the present one. It investigated translation of passive voice from English into Farsi in Animal Farm. It was conducted by Tabatabaei and Rostampour in 2011. They analyzed different equivalents in translation of English passives. The results showed that the translators preferred to render English passives to different forms in Farsi, and their general tendency was to avoid using passives in translation.

For unaccusative verbs, the studies are somewhat different from Passive verbs. Because of the similarity between passive and unaccusative verbs, second language (L2) learners of English are inclined to use the unaccusative instead of passive. This field has attracted much attention and there are some researchers who have investigated unaccusativity in the course of second language acquisition (SLA) (in English (Zobl, 1989), in Italian (Sorace, 2000), and in Persian (G. Samar; Karimi-Alvar, 2007 and Abbasi, 2010)).

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The participants of the study were selected by a convenient sampling method. The researcher selected 38 samples who agreed to share their information and answer the questionnaire. The sample set was adults with age range of 22 - 45. They had different levels of education: 6 high school diplomas, 11 bachelors in Arts or Science, 16 MAs, 3 PhDs and 2 MDs. A high percentage of the contributors, 26 samples or 68 percent, were fluent speakers in English as well. They had some experiences in translation from English into Farsi professionally.

3.2. Materials

The study used a corpus and a questionnaire for data collection. The corpus was Animal Farm, a novel written in English by George Orwell (1945). This book was used as the original text for comparing its three translations in Persian. The books were translations by Mohamad Firooz Bakht (1368), Homayoon Noor Ahmar (1366), and Amir Amir Shahi (1388).

To achieve information about the readers’ response to different kinds of translations, a questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire included 31 questions; the first 18 questions were about passive verbs and the last 13 questions were about unaccusative verbs. Every item had three or four options which were different translations by the translators. The items on passives had three options that included active, passive and unaccusative verbs; and the items about unaccusative had 4 options that comprised active, passive, unaccusative and unergative verbs. The respondents were asked to rate the quality of translation or language proficiency from A to C, that is, from the most to the least fluent.

3.2. Procedure
After extracting all passive and unaccusative verbs from the original novel, their Farsi equivalents in the three translated books were compared and seven translation strategies were identified in the translations. They were:

1. Translation of passives and unaccusatives by passive verb.
2. Translation of passives and unaccusatives by unaccusative verb
3. Using active verb in translation of passives and unaccusatives
4. Using unergative verb in translation of passive and unaccusative.
5. Changing passive and unaccusative verbs into phrases in translation
6. Reduction in translation of passives and unaccusatives. In reduction, the translator is more likely to reduce the number of elements in the source language text.
7. Omission of passives and unaccusatives in translation. Omission is used for the cases in which the translator has deleted the source verb with its sentence without any translation at all.

4. Results

The comparison culminated in the data revealing that translators used different forms to transfer the meaning of passive and unaccusative verbs from English into Farsi. All the data, based on their translations, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Translations of passives and unaccusatives by the translators

| Translator   | Verb | Unacc. | Unreg. | Passive | Active | Phrase | Reduc. | Omiss. |
|--------------|------|--------|--------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Firooz Bakht | Passive | 230    | 30     | 79      | 126    | 44     | 32     | 36     |
|              | Unacc. | 203    | 42     | 13      | 21     | 36     | 34     | 16     |
| Amir Shahi   | Passive | 300    | 22     | 80      | 98     | 49     | 19     | 9      |
|              | Unacc. | 215    | 36     | 5       | 21     | 47     | 29     | 12     |
| Noor Ahmar   | Passive | 286    | 28     | 125     | 91     | 40     | 6      | 1      |
|              | Unacc. | 252    | 36     | 6       | 18     | 39     | 14     | 0      |
Notes:

Unacc. = unaccusative; Unerg. = Unergative; Reduc. = Reduction; Omiss. = Omission

Analyses of the translations revealed the interesting result that all three translators transferred the passive meaning by use of the unaccusative verb most frequently. Firooz Bakht and Amir Shahi used the active form as the second most frequent form and the passive as the third most applied construction in their translation. Noor Ahmar selected the passive as the second most frequent form and the active structure as the third most frequent form. Analyzing the data, with regard to unaccusative translations, indicated that the unaccusative was the most frequent form used by all of the translators. The unergative verbs and the phrase structures were used as the second and third highest form, respectively.

In order to evaluate the acceptability of different translations. The analysis of the data was prepared in EXCEL. Figure 1 is a visual representation of the findings.

Figure 1. Tendency of the readers toward different translations of passives

The data collected from the questionnaire revealed that the respondents differentiated the constructions which were used by the translators. They have graded these constructions in different levels. In the passive questionnaire, the readers have chosen the active voice as the best translation of passive.
Figure 2. Tendency of the readers toward the different translations of unaccusatives

By analyzing the unaccusative items, it was found that the readers tended to read the unaccusative as the best translation of unaccusative. Although their tendency to read the active verb did not show this form as the most frequent; they selected active as the second form in translation of the unaccusative.

4. Conclusion

The results of the study showed that the translators tended to translate the passive by the most frequent form of unaccusatives. Moreover, it confirmed the fact that passives and unaccusatives are treated differently in translation. Analyses of the unaccusative translations revealed that there was more consistency among the translators. They preferred to translate unaccusatives by unaccusatives and there were slight differences in other forms used by all of them. In addition, the usage of unergatives was more common in translation of unaccusatives, in contrast, the active and passive forms were used more in translation of passives than unaccusatives.

Frequency counts of the answers in the questionaire offered valuable information about the readers’ preference. The analyses of the passive items showed that respondents selected the active verbs more as the best form for passive translation. The readers demonstrated that their preference was to read Persian unaccusatives as translations of English unaccusatives. They selected unaccusative as the best translation.

| Series 1 | Active verbs | Unaccusative verb | Passive verb | Unergative |
|----------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|------------|
|          | 148          | 213               | 63           | 70         |
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