



Relevance, Processing Effort, and Contextual Effect in Farsi Translation of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

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Abstract

Relevance Theory of Communication has various implications in translation. Since translation can be considered as expression and recognition of intentions, and based on the presumption that a large number of Farsi translations are not successful in this process, this study aimed at detecting the obstacles which hinder this process and effective procedures in avoiding and overcoming such obstacles. To this end, five sample paragraphs were selected from Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and two translations of it into Farsi. Then five instructors of translation studies were asked to evaluate the selected texts and list the factors which increased processing effort based on the guidelines adopted from principles of Relevance Theory and the criteria proposed by Vandijk (1979). The results indicated that there were some factors that decreased the relevance level of the text for the Persian audience. Taking the raters' notes into consideration and analyzing the texts of each translation, the researcher came up with some helpful guidelines to avoid such obstacles in the process of translation e.g. avoiding uncommon phonological patterns or concepts which are unknown to the Persian audience.

Key words: Translation; Relevance; Processing effort; Contextual effect; Communication

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INTRODUCTION

According to Relevance Theory in the case that all other factors are equal, higher amount of effort expended for processing results in lower level of relevance of the input. Therefore, the relevance level of a text is assessable through the criteria proposed in the Relevance Theory i.e. contextual effects and processing effort (Sperber & Wilson, 1986).

Another fact which is inferable from the principles of Relevance Theory is that obeying cooperative principle or maxims or following any other communicative routine is not what results in raising expectations (Para.1). In fact, looking for relevance is one of the basic features of human cognition which is exploited in the process of communication. In relevance-theoretic terms, relevance level of an input for an audience depends on the positive contextual effect which is yielded as a consequence of processing it based on the assumptions available in the context. Indeed, a contextual effect is considered positive when it is "a worthwhile difference to the individual's representation of the world – a true conclusion, for example" (Relevance and Cognition, Para.2). Consequently, false conclusions are naturally rejected, for they are not positive contextual effects (Para.4).

Since translation can be viewed as expression and recognition of intentions, the related issues of this discipline are approachable from relevance point of view. Gutt is the first scholar who applies this theory in translation and in his numerous works he has approached different aspects of translation especially Bible translation from this perspective. Gutt (1992) introduces the notions of referential model and Relevance Theory and applies this theory in Bible translation. In 2006 also he applies the conceptual tools of this theory in the study of the knowledge which the comprehension of a text depends on (Gutt, 2006). Literary texts are also among the text types which have been dealt with from Relevance point of view. Sang Zhonggang (2006) adopts this approach in

his cognitive study of the literary texts and the implicit information conveyed by them. In his work, he proposed an explanatory framework for translation of the implicit information in contexts other than the original one. Drama, as one of the literary genres, and its translation into Farsi has been studied by Talebinejad (2008) in the framework of relevance theory. He comes into the conclusion that many aspects of the drama, which has been studied, cannot be rendered fully in the Farsi translation of this work and the Farsi version of this play is highly relevant only to the elites who are familiar with the original work and the premises provided by the source text.

Novel translation as one of the most prevalent literary genres can also be approached from Relevance Theory point of view. Although translation of novel into Farsi has become popular in Iran, there are few works which dealt with linguistic and theoretical aspects of translating this genre into Farsi. There is almost no study of Farsi translations of English novels from Relevance Theory point of view. Since this theory and its applications in translation can provide translators with better insight into their professional career and the principles derived from this theory may vary from language to language, this study intends to find Farsi-specific factors extracted from Relevance theory which are applicable for translators of English novels into Farsi.

1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Reviewing available Farsi translations of the English novels, an expert in translation studies will come to the conclusion that there are some instances of Persian translations of English novels whose relevance level is to some extent low for Persian audience. Such translations are full of concepts and meaning components (rendered from the context of the source language) which are irrelevant to the Persian audience with his/her own specific presumptions and background. It is worth mentioning that there are successful translations which are considered masterpieces in Farsi literature. But there are also a number of so-called translations of many famous, interesting, and appealing English novels which are in many cases boring, unappealing, and difficult to understand. In a comprehensive analysis of the present trends of translating novels in Iran, Mollanazar (2001) mentions a number of problems and issues regarding natural translations of first-rate novels into Farsi. Furthermore, he refers to the general low quality of translations because there are so many translators which are inexperienced. Investigating a number of translations into Farsi, Talebinejad (2008) also deduces that moving the message embedded in the text is not possible in translation into Farsi when it is adapted by the translator.

The issue of translations with low quality is investigable in Relevance theoretic terms. According to Gutt, the act of communicating an informative intention

may result in miscommunication or “total breakdown of communication when the intended audience is not the one for whom the original work has been created” (1992, p.27). In other words, an inferential communication is not possible without provision of appropriate premise. When the audience is provided with inappropriate or irrelevant premises (the case that is likely to happen in translation for the audience whose background is totally or partially different from that of the intended audience of the source text), the conclusion drawn by the audience will be totally or partially different from the ones drawn by the original text audience (p.27). As Gutt maintains, regarding the condition of communicability, “an intended interpretation is recoverable not in just any context, but only in a context, where the requirements of optimal processing are fulfilled” (p.28). So in a “secondary communication situation” (the term developed by Gutt) like Iran, an English novel intended for the English audience with its own presuppositions and available premises will need a very high amount of processing effort to be interpreted and it will be consequently misinterpreted if the translator fails to supply the appropriate premises.

Regarding all factors and issues mentioned above, this study intended to answer the following questions:

1. Are there any specific factors involved in increasing the amount of processing effort needed in understanding and interpreting Farsi translations of English texts by the Persian audience?
2. What are the possible procedures for reducing the processing effort required at three levels of phonology, semantics, and pragmatics in such translations?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Raters

The raters of this study were five instructors of translation studies from Sheikhbahaei University, and University of Isfahan. The rationale of this selection was the participants' prior familiarity with theories of translation, the novel, and some of the translators of the novel under study. All raters had experience in teaching courses on literary translation, theories of translation, translation quality assessment as well as studies on Joyce and his works and the problems they posed in translation.

2.2 Materials

Joyce's novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and two different translations of this novel into Farsi by *Manoochehr Badiiee* and *Asqar Jooya* were selected to be studied.

The rationale behind selecting this novel was the cultural-bound nature of the text and inclusion of some specific factors such as references to cultural, social, political, and religious issues of Ireland in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century especially the

ones related to Christianity which may cause dramatic problems for translators in rendering concepts and linguistic items which are totally or partially irrelevant in Farsi. Consequently, it will be a hard-to-accomplish task for the translator to make final product relevant to Persian audience and in relevance theoretic terms, a text with the minimum effort needed in the process of interpretation. Although it is believed by a number of scholars that Joyce rejected to be involved with Catholic beliefs and political attitudes, and this rejection was manifested in most of his works, especially the later ones, as mentioned by J. Belanger, in the introduction of *A Portrait of the Artist*, states that this novel is "profoundly engaged with the cultural, social, and political events of the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Ireland." (1992, p.XIX). She believes that one of the unique aspects of the Joyce's work is that this novel is closely tied with Joyce's urban and religious background. (p.XIX).

Hence, to conduct a more precise study, five paragraphs with a maximum length of three hundred words were selected after a meticulous study of the whole novel. These paragraphs were the ones which included more items referred to the aforementioned factors which seemed suitable for the purpose of this study.

2.3 Procedure

The raters were provided with a researcher-developed questionnaire whose credibility approved by six translation scholars and professors of Sheikhabaei University and University of Isfahan and some necessary instructions and descriptions (see. questionnaire design) to assist them in the process of evaluation of the selected texts. The following is a brief description of the questionnaire.

2.3.1 Questionnaire Design and Rating Process

In order to evaluate the relevance degree of a text, the elements of processing effort and contextual effect should be taken into consideration. In the present study the former was the main focus and in this regard a questionnaire was designed and developed.

The questionnaire used in this study was composed of four parts: An introduction, the selected paragraphs of the original text, their Farsi translations, and a table for recording the scores. The introduction included a brief summary of the notions of the Relevance Theory, as well as explanations and criteria based on which the text should be rated and the scores should be assigned. The raters were provided also with criteria (adapted from vandijk, 1979) to assign scores from 1 to 4 regarding the factors categorized in three linguistic levels i.e. phonology, semantics, and pragmatics. Score 1 meant the highest amount of processing effort and consequently lowest level of relevance and score 4 meant the lowest amount of processing effort and consequently highest level of relevance. The raters were also asked to identify and write down the items in the sample paragraphs which required more processing effort by the intended audience in three

linguistic levels mentioned above.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Badiee and Jooya have both translated Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* into Farsi and their works were selected to be studied. Based on the scores assigned by the raters, Jooya's translation was ranked higher in general with regard to the score.

3.1 Phonological Level

At phonological level, the means of the scores marked by the raters were 3.20 and 3.50 for Badiee's translation and Jooya's translation respectively.

Based on the rater's opinion, one of significant factors in these two translations which brought about higher processing effort was the proper nouns of the novel. English proper nouns are generally transliterated into Farsi by translators and the final product is a word whose phonological pattern is not familiar for Persian audience in most cases and it requires higher amount of effort by the intended audience to read the proper names out. For example, the name "Charles" which is translated into *Charlz* by both translators is difficult to pronounce in Farsi because of the consonant cluster of /r/, /l/, and /z/; a phonological order which is not common in Farsi. In the first line of chapter 3, the word "December" is transliterated into *Desambr* by Jooya; another example of occurrence of three consonants /m/, /b/, and /r/ which increases the effort needed in pronunciation of the word; the hard to pronounce word which is avoided in Badiee's translation through omitting the word and substituting it with the word *Zemestan* (winter).

Another instance is the name of the main character, Stephen which has been translated into *Esteeven* by Badiee and *Estefen* by Jooya. The transliteration of this noun by Badiee is read with less effort by the Persian audience because pronunciation of long vowels is generally easier in Farsi and use of the vowel /i:/ by Badiee makes the word easier to pronounce in comparison to that of Jooya who used the short vowel /e/. Another method of transliteration of Stephen into Farsi which is found in other translations is starting the word with the consonant /s/ following the consonant /t/ which is really hard to pronounce for the Persian audience. No word in Farsi starts with a two-consonant pair without a vowel in between.

One creative procedure to avoid this effort-increasing factor utilized by these two translators (especially by Badiee and rarely by Jooya) is the citation of original English proper noun immediately after the Farsi word in the text. Even usage of this strategy demands an extra effort which lowers the relevance of the text.

Other instances of the proper nouns abundantly found throughout the novel were the ones which referred to the religious rituals and ceremonies of Christianity. An

example of such proper nouns whose translations are hard to pronounce and need much effort by the reader is the term "Holy Trinity" (translated to *Tathlite Moqadas* by Jooya and *Tathlithe Moqadas* by Badiee). What makes these two translations hard to pronounce is occurrence of the consonant /^o/ which is not a Farsi allophone. This occurrence increases the amount of processing effort needed in pronunciation of the terms used by both translators, especially in the case of Badiee's translation which includes two /^o/ sounds.

3.2 Semantic Level

In semantic level, the mean of the raters' scores for Badiee was 2.70 and 3.20 for Jooya.

As mentioned above, due to its culturally bound text and existence of many religious terms related to Christianity, as well as many references to Irish society, history, and geographical names, Joyce's novel is a text very hard to render. All of these factors cause the problem of providing the Persian audience with all the premises needed to understand and interpret the novel while the required elements are available for the intended audience of the original text. Facing this situation and all situations like this in other novels and texts, the translator is able to follow at least these three tentative procedures: providing the audience with the necessary premises, substituting unfamiliar items of the original text with more familiar ones from the context of the intended target audience in a manner that it does not damage the original, and finally assigning the task of looking for the necessary premises in original context and culture to the audience. Among these procedures, the second one results in a text the interpretation of which needs the least effort for the audience.

Although the product of following the first procedure requires a little more effort for interpretation, the necessity of taking the contextual effect into consideration demands that the translators apply this procedure. The first procedure seems to be applied by Jooya in his translation and the second one by Badiee. In translation of an unfamiliar item into Farsi, Jooya has provided the audience with necessary premises in foot notes and Badiee has substituted that items with more familiar ones selected from Islamic traditions and Persian culture. An instance of this type of words in the novel is the term "tabernacle" whose meaning is completely unknown to the Persian audience. Encountering this word, translators followed different procedures. Jooya followed the second procedure mentioned above and substituted the unknown term tabernacle with the term *Mehrab* which is a familiar one for the Persian audience since it is a common term in the Islamic religious context. Badiee translated this term into *Mahfazeye Nane Moqadas* that is not the exact equivalent of the original word and is also a term which belongs to the Christianity context. Therefore, he followed the third procedure i.e. putting the burden of finding the

premises of the original on the shoulders of the audience; the process which leads to increase of the processing effort.

3.3 Pragmatic Level

The mean computed in pragmatic level for Badiee's translation was 3.00 and for Jooya's translation 3.25.

Also at this level, Joyce's references to Christianity and Irish culture, it becomes difficult for the translator to render the intentions of the original text. Following are some of the examples of numerous instances of words and sentences the pragmatic references of which are not clear even in the immediate text of the original work, although they are described in the notes of the text in original novel. This fact may result in some problems for the translator in providing the audience with the necessary premises and references to the cultural-bound concepts.

- The sentence "...and imagined that he was kneeling at mass in the catacombs." (p.113) that refers to the early Christians in Rome that were forced to worship in the catacombs to avoid detection during the years of their persecution.

- The sentence "...offering of its every moment of thought or action for the intentions of the sovereign pontiff ..." (p.113) that pragmatically refers to the fact that a daily prayer for the pop is traditionally made by devout Catholics.

- The sentence "on each of the seven days of the week he further prayed that one of the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost might descend upon his soul..." (p.114) that refers to the seven gifts that are derived from Isaiah II: 2-3 and are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord.

- The sentence "We must pack off to Brother Michael because we have the collywobbles!" (p.15) in which the term 'Brother' is referred to as a novitiate accepted as a lay member of the order to conduct domestic/temporal duties but not to be ordained as a priest.

In this case also the procedures mentioned in semantics level are applicable to decrease the processing effort needed in grasping the intentions of the translated text. It is notable that Badiee has translated all of the notes provided by the original writer in the ending pages of the novel, but, Jooya contended himself with citing a small number of these notes briefly in footnotes.

To elaborate the procedures followed by each of the two translators, one of the examples above is taken into account. In translating the sentence "...and imagined that he was kneeling..." the two translators followed procedure different from what they followed in the semantic level. Badiee translated the sentence and in a note introduced the reader with the presuppositions provided in the original text i.e. the historical and political background of this part of the novel. Jooya on the other hand put the burden on the reader's shoulder and just translated the sentence literally. This sentence besides so many other cases throughout the

Joyce's novel are bodies without soul when the historical, cultural, religious, and political references and intentions of which are omitted. What makes this novel and other works of Joyce unique is all these references and other factors intertwined inextricably and such decontextualised translations we have in the case of this sentence in Jooya's rendering is far from the spirit of the masterpiece of Joyce whose organizing principle is according to Richard Ellmann the "gestation of a soul" (1982, p.297).

CONCLUSIONS

In this study, the researcher investigated some of the factors in Farsi translations of English novels at three levels of phonology, semantics, and pragmatics. These factors are the ones that play a crucial role in increasing the amount of processing effort needed for reading, understanding and interpreting the Farsi text. These factors consequently make the text not relevant, not interesting, and finally not appealing for the intended Persian audience.

Relevance theoreticians believe that the relevance level of a text that needs a high amount of processing effort for the intended audience will be low and consequently it will not be interesting, appealing, and worthy enough to be picked up by the audience.

Based on the above fact and some other notions of Relevance Theory, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. There are some items in Farsi texts which increase the processing effort and consequently decrease the relevance level of the text for the Persian audience. For example, phonologically hard to pronounce (to read) words especially English proper nouns whose phonological patterns and the general rhythm are not familiar patterns of today's spoken and written language of the Persian audience are considered to be some of the determining factors in this regard. There are also some cultural-bound factors that play a significant role in increasing the processing effort e.g. using historical, religious, and cultural-bound terms and expressions like the ones related to Christianity, historical and political affairs related to Ireland or specific historical period, the concepts that are unfamiliar for the audience in the Iranian culture context.

2. There are some procedures which are helpful for the translators to avoid the effort-increasing factors in the text. One useful procedure in this regard is avoiding the words and expressions whose phonological structure and pattern is not common in Farsi and is hard to analyze and perceive for the Persian audience. It is necessary for the translator to make necessary adjustments in this regard. Examples of the measures to be taken in this regard are avoiding three-consonant clusters without a vowel in between in the middle of the words or two-consonant pairs

without a vowel in between in the beginning of the words, avoiding the allophones which are hard to pronounce for the Persian audience like the consonant /^o/, and avoiding too much short vowels in a word.

In the case of semantic level, in dealing with the words whose meaning is completely or partially absent in Farsi language, there are at least three procedures to be followed by the translator described in 4.2 above among which the one that demands the translator to bring the original into the text and provide the reader with the necessary premises and backgrounds seems to be more appropriate. In Relevance-Theoretic term, in this procedure, the contextual effect is in the maximum amount and because of the availability of premises to the audience, the processing effort is very low. Consequently, the relevance level of the text will be higher.

In pragmatic level also, where the references and intentions of the original text are unknown to the target audience, the three aforementioned procedures can be followed. Because of the reasons mentioned, in this level also the second procedure seems more appropriate and applicable in increasing the relevance level of the text.

Regarding the conclusions drawn, it would be really helpful for the translators of English novels to take the notes brought here into consideration and try to follow the procedures of avoiding effort-increasing factors to make their translations more relevant to the Persian audience. The criteria mentioned in this paper are also applicable in teacher training courses in that they provide helpful points to be taught to the novices who are learning translation strategies. The principles proposed in the study are also helpful ones in establishing long-term strategies and policies in regard to translation of novels and other literary works.

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