



CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS AND ITS IMPACT ON RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATION

Kültürlerarası Analiz ve Dini Yorumlama Üzerindeki Etkisi

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ABSTRACT

The present study made an effort to analyze the effect of cross-cultural factors on interpretation by concentration on religious expressions as one of the main challenges in translation of holy books and religious texts. Interpreters' strategies such as adaptation, explanation and omission to confront this difficult task were analyzed as well. To conduct the study, researchers selected 50 common holy expressions in Iranian culture which were used by political and cultural speakers in speeches. A questionnaire, released by Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution (SCCR) in Iran, was utilized. The participants were 30 professional interpreters. The questionnaire was distributed among 30 professional interpreters; then the researchers classified the most common strategies for interpretation of religious expressions in utterances. The result demonstrated that adaptation strategy at 60% was interpreters' priority in translation of religious expressions. This originates in the fact that explanation and omission strategies only used in 17% and 23% of orders. Moreover, it was found that religious expressions take time to interpret and that is why adaptation was chosen as the main strategy. In addition, it was found that interpreters are supposed to have perfect knowledge of both Iranian and American cultures to choose the most appropriate equivalent to convey the message and take the time in the interpretation.

Keywords: Interpreter, religious expressions, culture, interpretation, utterance.

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, kutsal kitapların ve dini metinlerin tercümesindeki temel zorluklardan biri olan dini ifadeler üzerinde yoğunlaşarak, kültürler arası faktörlerin yorumlama üzerindeki etkisini analiz etmeyi hedeflemiştir. Tercümanların bu zor görevin üste-

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sinden gelmek için uyarlama, açıklama ve hariç tutma gibi stratejileri de analiz edilmiştir. Çalışmayı yürütmek için, İran kültüründe siyasi ve kültürel konuşmacılar tarafından kullanılan 50 yaygın kutsal ifade seçilmiştir. İran’da Kültür Devrimi Yüksek Konseyi (SCCR) tarafından yayınlanan bir anket kullanılmıştır. Katılımcılar 30 profesyonel tercümandan oluşmaktadır. Anket 30 profesyonel tercümana dağıtıldıktan sonra, araştırmacılar sözcelerdeki dini ifadelerin yorumlanması için en yaygın stratejileri sınıflandırmışlardır. Çalışma, dini ifadelerin tercümesinde tercümanların önceliğinin %60 oranında uyarlama stratejisi olduğunu göstermiştir. Bu, açıklama ve atlama stratejilerinin siparişlerin sadece %17’sinde ve %23’ünde kullanılmasından kaynaklanmaktadır. Ayrıca dini ifadelerin yorumlanmasının zaman aldığı tespit edilmiş ve bu nedenle ana strateji olarak uyarlama seçilmiştir. Ayrıca, tercümanların mesajı iletmek için en uygun eşdeğeri seçebilmeleri ve tercümeyle zaman ayırabilmeleri için hem İran hem de Amerikan kültürleri hakkında iyi bir bilgiye sahip olmaları gerektiği tespit edilmiştir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Tercüman, dini ifadeler, kültür, yorum, söz.

Introduction

In nowadays globalized society the communication plays an undeniable role. Moreover, various cultural backgrounds make a real dilemma to understand the message of given words or sentences. In addition, some particular cultural sentences in utterances which have been rap by religious thoughts are difficult to translate. This importance becomes barrier when an interpreter has to translate these special items from the SL (source language) into the TL (target language) without enough time to think about them in details. In such a context, being familiar with the religious aspects of both SL and TL cultures are essential elements. Hence, in this paper the researchers investigate the cross-cultural factors and their impacts on interpretation by concentration on religious expressions in Iranian utterances and their counterparts in USA.

Culture is known as shared beliefs and ideas that make differences with the vision of the world people’s behaviors which lead through the way communication is interpreted and formulated (Chaney & Martin, 2007: 5). Furthermore, cultures cover two main areas in a language. First, they get the concepts of vocabulary under charge and make them meaningful; and second, they specialize in expressions in a way which is particular to the source language culture. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952, as cited in Salehi, 2012) define culture as the item which is surrounded by certain patterns, transmitted by explicit, implicit and symbols which are supported through distinct human achievement in groups including their embodiment in arti-

facts; the significant core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values. Culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other hand, as conditioning elements of future action.

In other words, culture is being enriched in human minds and that is why it is one of the most complex factors to be analyzed. It will also be a science that must be built on interdisciplinary foundations, including evolutionary biology and ecology, neuroscience, individual development and anthropology. Hence, it is possible to say the exact definition of culture would be impossible since it comprises the nature of many sciences in the world. Such conceptual elements can create a myriad number of methodological problems for interpreters. That is why perfect knowledge of both languages is an essential task.

Furthermore, an interpreter has to deal with unfamiliar religious expressions from the source language into the target language. These expressions refer to cultural beliefs which are holy in both languages. This originates in the fact that religious concepts may be different from the SL into the TL. Moreover, Untranslatability of some presented religious expressions in utterances and especially in speeches make an obstacle for interpreters. In such a case, adopting the appropriate strategies is required.

Israel (2019) in his research, pointed to paradoxical relationship between religion and interpretation. He claimed that this contradiction is because of the verity in their natures. Christians and Muslims, for example, have unique differences in their definitions of their common expressions in holy books. Moreover, these mismatches are particularly visible in the way interpretation in religious contexts relies on creating a suitable equivalence or correspondence between religious concepts and linguistic aspects of a language and presenting this as self-evident truth. In this special issue, an interpreter is supposed to be careful in transferring any single item.

Cross-Cultural Analysis and Religious Expressions: Cross culture is a conceptual factor that classifies the differences including beliefs, desires, comparative tendencies and national backgrounds between two or more cultures. In other words, it is a bridge to identify the similar interests among people. This originates in the fact that other factors such as religious point of views make a dilemma for translators and especially interpreters. Some religious items are not interpretable and distinguishing the same counterparts is a difficult task. Any misinterpretation in any speech may cause to

hostilities among people in the source language and the receptor language. Hence, having perfect knowledge to translate plays a pivotal role and skills and experiences are required.

It is worthy to point out interpretation of religious expressions is transferring an ideological point of view from one language into another one. This importance is supposed to be included in all meaning prosperities from the SL into the TL. Mehawesh and Sadeq (2014) pointed that religious expressions include deep meaning that are difficult to understand. They added that religious expressions depend mainly on its realistic estimation or its prominence and they are so accurate and difficult to translate. Holiness is the main obstacle which makes obstacles in interpretation.

In analyzing religious expressions Al Zubi (2013, as cited in Khammyseh, 2015) pointed to the deep conceptual meaning of holy books such as holy Quran. He asserted that Islamic expressions in holy Quran produce a deep conceptual meaning more comprehensive than any other book. He believes that interpretation of religious expressions by an interpreter can easily radicalize the concepts and make the meaning weaker than what has been mentioned in the source language. This importance may decrease the effectiveness of expressions. Furthermore, in his research, he demonstrated that the most difficult task for an interpreter is decoding the words with the same sense without any distortion.

In addition, Ateeg and Al-Tamimi (2014) assume that religious expressions are supported by cultural factors and that is why they are so sensitive. Hence, for any interpretation, it requires an interpreter who is experienced enough to do so. He added that the interpreter is supposed to pay more attention to the lexical items to pick out the appropriate one. Ateeg and Al-Tamimi (2014) believe that there is a certain relationship between religious expressions and literary counterparts that both of them are immersed and expressiveness affections.

Research Questions and Hypotheses: The present study tackles two main research questions: To what extent cross-cultural items effect on interpreting? What are the main strategies to overcome this difficulty?

This paper provides the following hypotheses: Cross-cultural items do not effect on the process of interpretation. Adaptation, explanation and omission are not useful strategies in religious expressions` interpretation.

Statement of the Problem: Despite the fact that interpretation is a kind of a bridge that connects people around the world, there are some cultural

barriers, such as religious expressions, which create obstacles to interpretation. It is worthwhile to point out any religious expression was chosen from holy books, which makes the interpretation much more sensitive. In this regard, interpreters have to interpret the given expression simultaneously and without interruption. Hence, the current paper by analyzing cross-cultural factors and their effects on interpreting made an effort to present weighty information to translate religious expressions for other interpreters.

Significance of the Study: Dealing with religious expressions in interpreting always faces interpreters many problems. How to distinguish them and choosing the appropriate equivalents are two main difficulties. This paper by presenting the useful strategies tried to demonstrate effective ways to face these factors, which may be fruitful for interpreters, teachers, students and even researchers to develop related research.

1. Method

To achieve the aims of the study researchers drew on quasi-experimental research with qualitative and quantitative approaches. Participants of this paper consisted of 30 professional interpreters who are active in social, political and scientific seminars in universities and ministries. It is worthwhile to point out the selected population of the study is Iranian Muslim interpreters, including 20 males and 10 females.

After having participants and justifying them about the purpose of the study, researchers distributed the questionnaires which consisted of related questions about the religious expressions which they have faced with them at least once in their interpretation. Moreover, 50 common religious expressions which related to the commencement and end of any formal speeches in the frame of questionnaires were designed and asked to be translated as similar to a real seminar. It is worthy to point out the questionnaires have been released by Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution (SCCR) in November 2019. After collecting data, researchers classified the responses in three different strategies as adapting, explaining and omitting. At the final stage, the exact percentage of any used strategy was analyzed through a table and a chart.

2. Data Analysis

In this part of the study researchers investigate the nature of adaptation, explanation and omission as three main strategies in interpretation of religious expressions. Any of the given strategy explained in details and

related samples as main data have been collected through the questioner and the findings demonstrated in a table and a bar chart for the presented strategy. It is worthy to point out participants without awareness of the name of strategies only answered the questions based on their experiences in real seminars and the formal speeches.

2.1. Adaptation

Adaptation is a type of interpretation which the nature of the source language kept within the transferring the message to the target language. In this case an interpreter translates only the words without attending to the message. Furthermore, the listeners cannot understand what those words exactly mean. This importance becomes barrier when the speaker uses religious expressions in the form of meaningful indirect speech to praise, glorify, attack or notify somebody or a certain country. Another important factor in interpretation by adaptation strategy is that culture will not be kept. Religious beliefs and subsequently religious expressions have a strong relationship with the culture of a country. Hence, cultural awareness must be so significant for interpreters.

Moreover, religious expressions have fixed structures which are purposeful in different conditions. For example, “*على بركة الله*” is a religious expression that used by the president of Islamic republic of Iran in many cases. Based on adaptation strategy the presented expression means “let us move to God’s mercies”; however, in Iranian culture it points to the following meaning: “God will help us” and by usage of this expression the president points to the benefit of any project that starts with it. What is crystal clear in this case is any ignorance about both cultural and religious factors in any utterance may face audience to misunderstanding about the expression. Another example is the religious expression “*ما شاء الله*” which was utilized by Iran’s supreme leader. By interpreting based on adaptation strategy it means “whatever God wants”. This originates in the fact that this expression is usable to engage the addressee to continue his actions and means “perfect” or “well done”. However, adaptation strategy can be fruitful in the case of similar words with the similar content both in the SL and the TL.

2.2. Explanation

Despite the fact that adaptation strategy cannot convey the message from the SL to the TL, explanation as a certain one can fill in the gap in interpretation. It is worthwhile to point out some religious expressions are not translatable and do not have equivalent in the target language, so, inter-

preters can take advantage from explanation strategy. Further, an interpreter in this way makes an effort to explain more and clarify any obscurity. Due to the fact that explanation seems an appropriate way to translate religious expressions, the main obstacle is time. In any utterance which consists of religious expressions, the speaker without interrupting continues his speech. This originates in the fact that an interpreter does not have enough time to analyze and explain the expressions. In other words, beside correct timing, an interpreter is supposed to select not only short, but also meaningful explanation in the religious expressions' interpretation.

For instance, the religious expression “*آنان زمان داده؟*” is used by Iranian Supreme leader in Tehran's book show. This religious expression by taking advantage from explanation strategy translates as “Is it time for paying or has the time received yet?”. Further, it points to praising someone or something in Iranian culture. But, by knowing cultural point of views instead of the given interpretation, the interpreter used the word “time to pray” to glorify something. Hence, not only the interpreter could take the time, but conveyed the message into the target language.

2.3. Omission

Omission is a type of strategy which interpreters delete phrases, sentences and any single item to adjust the SL cultural and ideological factors with their counterparts in the TL. However, an interpreter is supposed to be considering about the content in the SL. In the case of any distortion of the message this strategy is not an appropriate choice. Sharma (2009) pointed that “omissions mean dropping of word/s that usually takes place when there is no equivalent word/s in the target culture”. Furthermore, this procedure can be the outcome of the cultural clashes that exist between the SL and the TL and it often occurs while translating from English into Persian or vice versa. For example, in one of the social conferences in 2017 in New York the speaker used the word “win” in his speech while it was playing live in Iran. Due to the fact that drinking is a forbidden task in Iran; hence, the researchers completely deleted this word.

2.4. Religious Expressions and Their Interpretations

The researchers present most used religious expressions in formal meetings and, particularly seminars in Iran which interpreted from Persian into English. Moreover, researchers classified these expressions based on the used interpretation strategies by interpreters (adapting, explaining and omitting).

Religious expressions	Adaptation	Explanation	Omission
افطاری خوردم.	I ate "Eftari".	I ate food to finish my praying duty up.
روزه ام رو شکستم.	I broke my fast.	Intentionally I finished my praying duty, because of necessity.
ریا نشه	Not to show off	Only know the result of the action by God and myself, others won't understand.

Table 1. Strategies by interpreters (adapting, explaining and omitting).

2.5. The Questionnaire

50 common religious expressions have been posed in the questionnaire and distributed among 30 interpreters. Moreover, after collecting data to improve the validity of the evaluation the researchers asked from two other scholars in translation studies to cooperate in the process of data analysis. Researchers as sample present 7 of them which are as follow:

1. How do you interpret "حاجی حاجی مکه" ?
a. I interpret word by word, b. I explain it more, c. I do not interpret
2. How do you interpret "نمازم قضا شد" ?
a. I interpret word by word, b. I explain it more, c. I do not interpret
3. How do you interpret "فربانی کردن" ?
a. I interpret word by word, b. I explain it more, c. I do not interpret
4. How do you interpret "افطاری دادن" ?
a. I interpret word by word, b. I explain it more, c. I do not interpret
5. How do you interpret "تواب کردن" ?
a. I interpret word by word, b. I explain it more, c. I do not interpret
6. How do you interpret "عقیقه کردن" ?
a. I interpret word by word, b. I explain it more, c. I do not interpret
7. How do you interpret "نمازم رو شکستم" ?
a. I interpret word by word, b. I explain it more, c. I do not interpret

3. Result and Discussion

Impact of the culture on interpreting and its obstacle has always been one of the main problems for interpreters. In other words, any step to convey the message from the SL into the TL is supposed to be cultural by selecting correct equivalents. Due to the fact that in religious expressions

choosing the most appropriate equivalent is not enough, an interpreter must recognize the taboos in both cultures. Hence, the present study investigates cross-cultural factors and its effect on interpreting by concentrating on religious expressions. In this part of the paper researchers present the obtained result that has been reached by frequencies and percentages. Moreover, the exact used percentages for any strategy (adaptation, explanation and omission) are shown through the table and a pie chart.

<i>Type of strategies</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Adapting	18	60%
Explaining	5	17%
Omitting	7	23%

Table 2. Strategies' frequencies and percentages

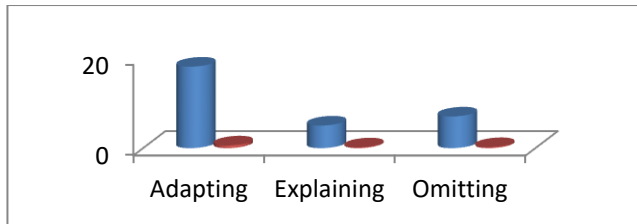


Figure 1. Pie chart of the used strategies

After collecting data and analyzing, the researchers found the following significant cultural elements which prevent or at least face interpreters to obstacles to interpret religious expressions: the very first one belongs to the taboo religious expressions which were given to interpreters in the study and asked them to insert their opinions as the real condition. It is worthwhile to point out these types of questions in questionnaire had the content of religious cultivation and interpreters tried to avoid them.

The second finding was timing. Approximately, all of participants in the study accentuated the time management and believed timing is an important factor in the interpretation. The third one, which discovered from the related papers in the theoretical aspect of the paper, was more attention to lexical items, particularly to religious expressions which interpreters are supposed to consider. And the last finding points to accurate interpretation in a way that is understandable from the source language into the target language. Moreover, adaptation, explanation and omission as three main strategies have been analyzed and researchers obtained the following results:

1. Adaptation: The purposeful religious expressions that rarely have direct equivalents in Iranian culture to American ones have been chosen in the questionnaire. The obtained result demonstrates the fact that interpreters preferred to be careful about the meaning of any word rather than the message in the religious expressions' interpretation. Out of 30 participants in the study (60%) would rather interpret the expressions as they are, rather than conveying the message.

2. Explanation: Due to the fact that the time management plays an undeniable role in interpreting, interpreters as the participants in the study preferred to take advantage of this strategy less than other two. Hence, only 17% of them choose this strategy. This importance shows the fact that an interpreter should not lag behind even in religious expression case.

3. Omission: cultural obstacles in any language can be one of the main problems for interpreters. Some religious expressions are not interpretable from the SL into the TL since they cannot match culturally. As a result, omission in the case of keeping message is the only choice. Furthermore, in this study 23% of interpreters selected omission as their strategy in interpretation.

Conclusion

In this paper, researchers made an effort to analyze cross-cultural effects on the interpretation. Further, religious expressions as the most difficult item in interpretation were chosen to be examined in a 30-interpreter society as the corpus of the study. The findings showed interpreters would like to utilize adaptation strategy at 60%. This originates in the fact that explanation and omission strategies only used in 17% and 23% of orders. Moreover, it was found that religious expressions take time to interpret and that is why adaptation was chosen as the main strategy. In addition, it was found that interpreters are supposed to have perfect knowledge of both Iranian and American cultures to choose the most appropriate equivalent to convey the message and take the time in the interpretation. The survey demonstrated the fact that interpreters believe that explanation strategy not only needs more time to be presented, but also based on the cultural and ideological obstacles, interpreters tend to avoid it and they choose adaptation strategy.

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