

# Investigating Translation of Cultural Elements in SALINGER'S *The Catcher in the Rye* by Ahmad Karimi

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**Abstract:** Culture is the background of every human communication. Cultural embedding as a feature of texts in general is also valid in technical and scientific texts. As translation by humans are based on understanding, the translator needs knowledge in order to detect cultural aspects. This is possible by putting down implicit cultural references to certain structures on the text level. Cultural elements appear in the text on all levels – from the concept and form of words, to the sentence and text structure, to pragmatics. In this research the cultural elements of the translation of *The Catcher in the Rye* by Ahmad Karimi have investigated.

**Keywords:** Culture, Translation, Cultural Elements, Persian Translation

## Introduction

Translation is an art, which has become increasingly important in today's world. Translators are responsible for better and more accurate transfer of this art. In the modern world the vast geographical distances are extremely decreased through communication facilities and the need to exchange thoughts and opinions among different nations is strongly felt. Being aware of other people's experiences, knowledge, and technical and cultural achievements help man in improving the standard of life. This kind of communication is obviously possible by means of language. And language cannot exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture. Language is the heart within the body of culture and it is the interaction between the two that results in the continuation of life. So language should not be seen as an isolated phenomenon suspended in a vacuum but as an integral part of culture. The role of a translator becomes more crucial because as a good translation can be useful, a bad or a wrong one can be misleading and to some extent dangerous. Thus, translation from one language to another cannot be done adequately without knowledge of the two cultures.

According to Nida as cited in Delisle (1980), in order to translate, one must not only know a language but also must be familiar with the culture i.e. customs, civilization and mores of those who speak that language. Nida also emphasizes that translation takes place in the context of the relation between two cultures, two worlds of thought and perception.

However, as we know translating is not merely passing from one text to another, transferring words from one language to another. Rather, it involves transposing one entire culture to another. According to Sapir (1949) translation is an essential means through which access to the cultures of the different nations is possible. Thus it can be realized just how important it is to be conscious of the ideology that underlies a translation i.e. when to add, what to leave out, how to choose the words and how to substitute cultural terms. It is no longer possible to limit oneself to the word or sentence as a translation unit: the translator must take into consideration both the

original and target cultures with which he or she is connected. If it is accepted that most people are shaped to the form of their culture because of the enormous malleability of their original endowments and they are plastic to the moulding force of the society into which they are born or may be exposed to, then it may be claimed that translation from one culture to another is to some extent possible.

Culture is defined as “the customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organisation of a particular country or group” (Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary of Current English, 6th ed.). Moreover, Newmark explains culture as “the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression” (1988). Since culture is so deeply connected with language, each language reflects its own culturally specific features. Wardhaugh suggests that the structure of a given language determines the way in which the speakers of that language view the world (1986). In other words, different languages reflect different cultures and values, and if the culture of the source language (SL) differs from that of the target language (TL), word selections or ways of making statements will be different in the target text (TT) from those of the source text (ST). Some words and expressions are unique and specific to a culture and cannot be simply translated word for word from one language to another. Jakobson acknowledges that interlingual translation involves two different codes, therefore there is no full equivalence between them (2000). According to Toury, translation is nearly always conducted within a certain cultural environment, and consequently, “translators may be said to operate first and foremost in the interest of the culture into which they are translating” (1995). Indeed, translators need to modify or compensate the messages of the ST that are greatly influenced by the source culture and language to communicative and familiar messages with a natural form of expression for the target audience to comprehend and accept. Translating the ST into an acceptable and suitable linguistic and cultural form for the target audience is part of the translator’s responsibility in transcultural communication. Translators should also carefully render culture-specific words and expressions without distorting the original message of the ST to achieve the goal of representing “the original message in the appropriate dominant cultural form in order to give it the greatest chance of success” (Coulthard, 1992). While Nida places equal importance on both linguistic and cultural differences between the SL and the TL, he concludes that “differences between cultures may cause more severe complications for the translator than do differences in language structure” (1999). Many theorists, like Toury and Lefevere, advocate that literary texts are cultural artefacts and are part of “a system operating in the larger social, literary and historical systems of the target culture” (Munday, 2001). Similarly, it can be postulated that translated texts are products of the target culture and have to meet the socio-cultural demands of the receiving system as this is initial yet critical role of translators in today’s worldwide quest for nurturing trust and understanding. Unless the messages of the ST are transported in a comprehensible and acceptable way for the receiving audience, the translators’ mission of building trust and understanding cannot be accomplished. Translators may therefore be said to face various constraints in making the TT acceptable and comprehensible for the target audience and in allowing the TT to fulfil a certain function assigned by the target system.

Language and culture may thus be seen as being closely related and both aspects must be considered for translation. When considering the translation of cultural words and notions, Newmark proposes two opposing methods: transference and componential analysis (Newmark, 1988). As Newmark mentions, transference gives “local colour,” keeping cultural names and concepts. Although placing the emphasis on culture, meaningful to initiated readers, he claims this method may cause problems for the general readership and limit the comprehension of certain aspects. The importance of the translation process in communication leads Newmark to propose componential analysis which he describes as being “the most accurate translation procedure, which excludes the culture and highlights the message” (Newmark, 1988).

Nida’s definitions of formal and dynamic equivalence (see Nida, 1964) may also be seen to apply when considering cultural implications for translation. According to Nida, a “gloss translation” mostly typifies formal equivalence where form and content are reproduced as faithfully as possible and the TL reader is able to “understand as much as he can of the customs, manner of thought, and means of expression” of the SL context (Nida, 1964). Contrasting with this idea, dynamic equivalence “tries to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture” without insisting that he “understand the cultural patterns of the source-language context”.

David Salinger is a famous American Jewish writer. The difference of his point of view on Jewish issues from that of other contemporary writers is in that Salinger is affected by American society to a certain degree and his works have a strong representativeness and the sculpture of the protagonist is also personalized. *The Catcher in the Rye* mainly tells the story in which the hero Holden is expelled from the school and strayed in New York area to find his spiritual home. This work reflects the interpretation on the spiritual world of the teenagers under the pressure from society and the confusion for self-existence and the wander sense of spiritual world. Through the first-person narrative, the work brings the readers into the hero’s inner world, and makes them experience the prosperous living scenes of the American society of that time with the hero. This makes readers feel the rich historical sediment of Jewish culture. The Jewish identity of Holden is not clarified in the novel, while the permeation of the Jewish culture reflects the drifting history and the confused spiritual process of the Jewish people with rich connotation.

Through *The Catcher in the Rye* Salinger describes important aspects of the 1950's. Salinger emphasizes several key characteristics of the 50's and criticizes them through Holden. In addition, Holden Caulfield is a very interesting character with several traits that put him at odds with society.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the cultural conflicts of the translation of this novel by Ahmad Karimi.

## Literature review

Considering that *Catcher's* language is the major reason for its notoriety, a translator working on translating the novel needs to be careful in choosing the translation strategies applied. This is due to the fact that the excessive profanity in the narrator's speech is an essential part of his characterization; a clear insight into his state of mind and personality (Kaplan 1956; Costello 1959; Edwards 1983). As such, translating the profanity can pose a challenging task, especially when translated into a language whose cultural attitude toward profanity is different from English. A translator, after all, is not only "linguistic mediators, but also cultural mediators" (Aisyah 2013:59). In mediating between the source culture and the target culture, the translator will have to rely on a number of translation strategies. Whatever strategies the translator chooses, they will affect the quality of the prose, especially in regard to the characterization of the narrator. Unfortunately, there are very few studies that focus on the issue of translation strategies of vulgar language found in *Catcher* and their effects on the text or the characterization. Heiserman and Miller, Jr. (1956), Barr (1957), and Costello (1959) argued that the main character (Holden)'s speech was both typical of teenagers of his time and at the same time individual enough to show the character's personality, as shown through the main character's idiosyncrasies of vocabulary and syntax. Riedel (1980) and Jasaitytė (2015) employed a similar paradigm in their studies. Despite examining two different translations and the 35-year gap between their studies, both Riedel and Jasaitytė found similar results. The former examined the German translation of *Catcher*, and the latter the Lithuanian translation. Both studies found that in translating the everyday teenagers' language depicted in *Catcher*, the translators employed similar strategies, mainly omission and softening. This choice of strategies was caused by the translators' attempts to make the book more acceptable in their respective societies, i.e. German and Lithuanian societies. As a result, both Riedel and Jasaitytė argued that the translations failed to convey everyday teenagers' language, as the original English edition did. In Riedel's findings, moreover, the main character's personality underwent a significant change: from the irreverent young man in the English original (Kaplan 1956; Trowbridge, 1968) to a well-behaved upper middle class young man in the German version. However, both studies did not elucidate the criteria for their claim that their respective societies were more conservative than US culture. Riedel, additionally, did not provide adequate elaboration for his argument that the German version of the main character is radically different from the English one. This study will address this research gap by providing further support for the argument regarding the effects that the translation strategies employed have on Holden's characterization. This study will do so by using Nida's (2012) claim regarding the importance of maintaining the characterization in translating a literary text. However, this study will not discuss in depth the possible reasons behind the translator's decisions to employ certain strategies.

## METHODOLOGY

The "*Catcher in the Rye*", written by J. D. Salinger, the famous American writer, was first published in 1951. It has been translated into almost all of the world's major languages. This novel has been among the 100 best English language novels written since 1923 and the best English-language novels of the 20th century. The story plot deals with issues of identity crises, belonging, connection, and alienation. "*The Catcher in the Rye*" means a safeguard for the garden, croft, or farm. It has been written in a subjective style as the forerunners stated and from their view point. It mirrors the teenage colloquial speech style of its own time. This book has been translated two times in Persian; the first one was done by Ahmad Karimi in 1966 and the second one has been brought out by Mohammad Najafi in 1998. In this study we used the translation of this novel by Ahmad karimi as our corpus to investigate the translation of the cultural elements in Persian. Hence, in this investigation, first, the original text was read thoroughly and then the ST was compared to its' translated text to find cultural elements in translation.

## DISCUSSION

A question that needs to be asked when considering a text for translation is for whom the original text was destined and whether this readership corresponds to the potential TT reader. Thus two types of ideal reader may be distinguished: the ST ideal reader and the TT ideal reader. In the text *The Catcher in the Rye*, this notion may be seen as particularly relevant due to the literary nature of the extract with the subject matter being specifically linked to culture. Coulthard (1992) highlights the importance of defining the ideal reader for whom the author "attributes knowledge of certain facts, memory of certain experiences ... plus certain opinions, preferences and prejudices and a certain level of linguistic competence." When considering such aspects, it should not be forgotten

that the extent to which the author may be influenced by such notions is dependent on his own sense of belonging to a specific socio-cultural group. These principles may be applied to "The Catcher in the Rye" and conclusions may be reached concerning ideal reader in the following way:

- **Certain facts:** The author supposes that his ideal reader has a knowledge of American culture as well as a certain cultural familiarity with the customs of these countries.
- **Memory of certain experiences:** The experiences in this instance may be considered as contact with cultural situations described in the text such as cultural elements.
- **Certain opinions:** preferences and prejudices.
- **A certain level of linguistic competence:** The text chosen corresponds to the description of the average text for translation given by Newmark, namely for "an educated, middle-class readership in an informal ... style (Newmark, 1988:13). It may be considered that the social category "middle class" may find an approximate corresponding category. On a semantic and cultural level, there are several potential problems for a reader not corresponding to the criteria of the ideal reader.

In the case of the extract translated here, it is debatable whether the ideal TT reader has "significantly different textual expectations," however his cultural knowledge will almost certainly vary considerably.

Applied to the criteria used to determine the ideal ST reader it may be noted that few conditions are successfully met by the potential ideal TT reader. Indeed, the cultural facts are unlikely to be known in detail along with the specific cultural situations described. Furthermore, despite considering the level of linguistic competence to be roughly equal for the ST and TT reader, certain differences may possibly be noted in response to the use of culturally specific lexis which must be considered when translating.

Although certain opinions, preferences and prejudices may be instinctively transposed by the TT reader who may liken them to his own experience, it must be remembered that these do not match the social situation experience of the ST reader. Therefore, the core social and cultural aspects remain problematic when considering the cultural implications for translation.

It has already been noted that the text in this case is surely intended for "an educated, middle-class readership" and, more specifically, an Iranian one with knowledge of the foreign cultural aspects implied. The problems when translating such a text are therefore not only of a purely lexical character but also of an equally fundamental nature - the understanding of a social, economic, political and cultural context as well as connotative aspects of a more semantic character. As with all texts of foreign literature, historical, political and other such cultural references are always of a certain importance and the TT reader is unlikely to have a full understanding of such notions. When considering the cultural implications for translation, the extent to which it is necessary for the translator to explain or complete such an information gap should be taken into account; on the basis of conclusions reached concerning the ideal TT reader, the translator should decide how much may be left for the reader to simply infer.

Adapting Nida, Newmark places "foreign cultural words" in several categories (Newmark 1988:95-102). Following these categories, in the text "The Catcher in the Rye," the examples leading to cultural implications for translation may be classed essentially as material culture, and as gestures and habits although other cultural terms are also present. These aspects translated in different ways according to their role in the text and the aims for the TT reader. Newmark also states the relevance of componential analysis in translation "as a flexible but orderly method of bridging the numerous lexical gaps, both linguistic and cultural, between one language and another" (Newmark, 1988:123). The two orientations in translation examined by Nida, namely formal or dynamic equivalence, also have been considered when analysing the cultural implications for translation of elements in these categories.

## CONCLUSION

It is evident that language and culture are tightly linked to one another in such a way that they can never be severed as the former is part of the latter. Within the realm of translation studies, this strongly tight connection between language and culture has resulted in formulating theories that view translation as a cultural act. Consequently, translating within this view involves a great deal of adaptation and cultural transposition.

One crucial result that has emerged due to the strongly tight connection between language and culture is that texts pertaining to any particular language are formulated on the basis of the language norms and culture to which these texts belong. This has unquestionably had significant bearing on translating this novel into Persian.

Domestication, as a cultural translation strategy, has predominantly been employed in translation by translators such that target texts would be produced in such a way that fits the culture of the target language and lives up to the expectations of the target reader.

Finally, it can be strongly argued that the use of pure domestication or pure foreignization, as cultural translation strategies, in translating text which comprises culture-specific elements does not seem appropriate as the text in question would include culture-specific terms along with other typical lexical items, which should be treated by the translator differently as they would appear different to the target reader. Moreover, pure

domestication and pure foreignization or familiarizing and foreignizing may lead to translation violence and exoticism respectively. It seems evident then that double strategy appears more plausible and effective in rendering texts of culture-specific elements than adherence to a single strategy as such elements should receive careful treatment and should be evaluated on their own merit.

A variety of different approaches have been examined in relation to the cultural implications for translation. It is necessary to examine these approaches bearing in mind the inevitability of translation loss when the text is, as here, culture bound. Considering the nature of the text and the similarities between the ideal ST and TT reader, an important aspect is to determine how much missing background information should be provided by the translator using these methods. It has been recognized that in order to preserve specific cultural references certain additions need to be brought to the TT. This implies that formal equivalence should not be sought as this is not justified when considering the expectations of the ideal TT reader. At the other end of Nida's scale, complete dynamic equivalence does not seem totally desirable either as cultural elements have been kept in order to preserve the original aim of the text, namely to present one aspect of life. Thus the cultural implications for translation of this kind of ST do not justify using either of these two extremes and tend to correspond to the definition of communicative translation, attempting to ensure that content and language present in the SL context is fully acceptable and comprehensible to the TL readership (Newmark, 1988).

### Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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