Factors Influencing the Translator’s Choice of Foreignisation and Domestication in Translation into Arabic of Neologisms and Idioms in the Harry Potter Series

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Abstract: This study investigates the translation of three novels from the well-known children’s fantasy fiction series about Harry Potter, written by the English writer J.K. Rowling, into Arabic. The main aims are to determine the translation strategies used to deal with idioms and neologisms, the use of domestication or foreignisation, and the factors that have influenced the translator’s choice. The study uses an adapted model of analysis together with idioms and neologisms typologies. The findings show that paraphrase was the main strategy used to render idioms while transliteration was the most common way of dealing with neologisms. In addition, the study shows that the translators tended to combine domestication and foreignisation in general, with idioms being mostly domesticated and neologisms foreignised. The discussion suggests that the source text genre as well as the influence of foreign literature are the major factors influencing the translator’s choice. Two main impacts of the translator’s choice on Arab readers have been identified, namely enhancement of Arab children’s knowledge of foreign culture and values, and shaping their identity in terms of becoming a global citizen.

Keywords: translation, children’s literature, idioms, neologisms, Harry Potter, fantasy, domestication, foreignisation, factors influencing translators, cultural understanding.

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the translation of the world famous Harry Potter series in the context of children’s literature in translation from English into Arabic. The book series has sold millions of copies around the world, been made into a movie and been translated into seventy-three languages (Time, 2013). The success and popularity of the series are among the factors that brought about an interest in the translation of this book as a focus for the present work.

Even though each book about Harry Potter is a multilevel novel that comprises elements of a school story, an adventure story, a thriller, a mystery and a romance, the predominant genre of the novel is fantasy (Fry, 2005: 1). Recently, linguistic features of the fantasy genre have been placed at the centre of academic study (Rehling, 2011: 71). According to Sedia (2005: 1) the fantasy genre is abundant in neologisms which are used to express the imaginative mood of the story. According to Epstein (2012: 102) neologisms can be challenging for children to recognise and comprehend, which implies that extra care is needed with their translation for a young audience, and Baker (1992: 71-75) highlights the complexity of idioms that have two meanings (literal and figurative) as well as their culture-specific use. For these reasons, this article will look at the challenge of translating idioms and neologisms in literature for children.

1.1. Related Research

Several studies have investigated translation of Harry Potter into Arabic. Mussche and Willems (2010) analyse 'culture-specific items' which are mainly placed in the categories of food and names, although education, family and the use of dialect and slang are also discussed briefly (Mussche and Willems, 2010: 491). The
authors analyse extracts from the first three novels in the series and conclude that the strategy of omission predominated in the translation of culture-specific items, which suggests that the translator applied a degree of cultural filtering. The writers also point out that a combination of omission and simplification has resulted in a text that does not endanger the cultural and ideological norms governing the target text culture.

Dukmak (2012) investigates a similar area of cultural aspects and norms. She analyses the first, fourth and sixth novel in the series, extending the work done by Mussche and Willems (2010) by not only looking at cultural references and names, but also investigating wordplay and the translation strategies used by each translator. Dukmak’s study shows that there is no coordination among the three translators as they use different translation strategies, varying from abridgement through adequacy to acceptability. Her main finding is that the translation strategies used for children’s stories focus on the preservation of the names of food items and customs of the foreign text and occasional explicitation. The amount of poor quality translation is relatively small.

Al-Daragi (2016), his most recent study, examines the relationship between the entertaining and didactic functions in three chapters in each novel in the Harry Potter series, focusing specifically on the amount of deletion and omission as an indicator of the degree to which the source text has been altered to fulfill a didactic function in the Arabic World. The results suggest that the translations of the first four novels in the series show features of didacticism by demonstrating a lack of professionalism in the amount of deletion and simplification used. By contrast, the translation of the last three novels in the series shows hardly any signs of deletion which, the author argues, indicates that a more professional translator rendered these novels and the entertaining function of the story has been preserved.

As shown above, all work done so far on the topic of translating Harry Potter into Arabic focuses on the strategies used in the translation, and deals with culture-specific terms, while overlooking the extent to which foreignisation and domestication strategies are applied. The current research has been undertaken to fill in this research gap.

1.2. Theoretical Background

This section outlines basic terminology and theories in the field of translation that the current study draws on. To begin with, the genre of children’s literature can be best defined by comparing its distinctive features to literature catering for adult readers. McDowell (1973: 51) outlines features specific to children’s literature: 'Children’s books are generally shorter: they tend to favour an active rather than a passive treatment, with dialogue and incident rather than description and introspection: child protagonists are the rule: conventions are much used: the story develops within a clear-cut moral schematism which much adult fiction ignores'. This definition suggests that the translator’s job is not only to render the plot of the story for children, but also to ensure that the translation includes features of a text for children.

Another definition relevant to this study is that of an idiom. Ayto (2006: 518) defines it as 'an institutionalised multiword construction, the meaning of which cannot be fully deduced from the meaning of its constituent words, and which may be regarded as a self-contained lexical item'. This definition indicates that the main features which separate idioms from other expressions is their meaning and functioning as one lexical item. This broad understanding of idioms is supported by further discussion of semantic opacity, compositional fixity and syntactic function.

The definition of an idiom can be enriched with a detailed typology, as presented by both Fernando (1996) and Moon (1998). Both typologies offer insight into the meaning of an idiom and the degree to which the idiom with its individual components is figurative. This information is relevant to the discussion of the extent to which the original meaning of an idiom has been reflected in the target text, and thus whether it was domesticated or foreignised. So the following new typology has been developed for this study drawing on Fernando’s (1996) and Moon’s (1998) categorisations:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pure idioms</td>
<td>Opaque idioms</td>
<td>Figurative idioms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semi-pure idioms</td>
<td>Semi-transparent idioms</td>
<td>Semi-figurative idioms</td>
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<td>Literal idioms</td>
<td>Transparent idioms</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Variants of an existing idiom</td>
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As Table 1 shows, the new typology makes some adjustments which are necessary for the purpose of the present study. Because the Harry Potter series belongs to the fantasy genre and is primarily aimed at children, it is highly likely that the writer uses idioms from the English language in a changed form in order to entertain as well as to build the magical world and mood of the story. For that reason, an additional type has been included in the new typology, namely variants of an existing idiom. Also, the category of literal idiom has been removed since the primary focus of this study is on idioms which have a degree of figurative meaning.

The second area of focus is neologisms as a distinctive feature of the fantasy genre. Newmark (1988: 140) describes neologisms as 'newly coined lexical units or existing lexical units that acquire a new sense'. The typology of neologisms used in the current work is based on the existing typologies developed by Newmark (1988) and Yule (2010). The former is a very detailed typology of which only certain types has been identified in my analysis and thus included in the new typology, while the latter is related to the process of neologism formation which also informs the present work.

TABLE II: New Typology of Neologisms Based on Newmark’s (1988) and Yule’s (2010) Typologies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The new typology</th>
<th>Newmark’s (1988) neologisms typology</th>
<th>Yule’s (2010) neologisms typology</th>
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<tr>
<td>New coinages</td>
<td>New coinages</td>
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<td>Derived words</td>
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<td>Abbreviations</td>
<td>Borrowing</td>
<td>Multiple process</td>
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<td>Transferred</td>
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As Table 2 shows, three types of neologisms are mentioned by both scholars, two of which have been included in the new typology: new coinages and borrowings. An additional strategy is borrowed from Newmark’s typology, namely derived words, and one additional type of neologisms is borrowed from Yule, namely multiple process.

Another two key terms in the current work are domestication and foreignisation. These terms were introduced by Venuti (1995: 20) who based his consideration of the two strategies on the work of the nineteenth century scholar, Schleiermacher. Venuti (1995: 21) defines domestication as 'an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to [Anglo-American] target-language cultural values' which relates to Schleiermacher’s idea of moving the author towards the reader (1813: 49). In other words, a domestication strategy entails the translator becoming invisible to the reader in order to produce a text that is natural and devoid of any degree of features foreign to the target text audience. By contrast, foreignisation was presented by Venuti (1998: 242) as the strategy that 'entails choosing a foreign text and developing a translation method along lines which are excluded by dominant cultural values in the target language'. Venuti links the concept of foreignisation to Schleiermacher’s notion of moving the reader to the author of the text. Through foreignisation, the readership is presented with the foreign elements of the source text.

Finally, a number of factors have been identified to have had an influence on the translator in the Arab world which include: influence of foreign literature, censorship, didacticism, source text genre and the publisher. These aspects have been chosen for a closer discussion with regards to the translator’s choice of domestication and foreignisation as well as the general choices made by the translator when rendering the source text.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This research aims to contribute to the field of translation studies by addressing the general issue of how accessible the source text culture is in the target text translation. In particular, it focuses on the strategies that the

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translators use when dealing with neologisms and idioms, and the way the nature of these two linguistic features influences the translation approaches of domestication and foreignisation. Moreover, since domestication has been identified as a common approach in the translation of children’s literature (Puurtinen, 1995: 23), this study investigates whether this is the case in translation into Arabic by looking at how and when foreignisation or domestication are applied. It identifies whether or not the translators follow the same approach, and determines which of the two approaches is predominant. This will allow discussion of the factors influencing the translator’s choice of these approaches and possible effects this choice may have on Arab child readers.

2. Research Methods

A comparison of the source texts and the target texts has been chosen as the research method for the current study since it facilitates exploration of problematic areas of translation such as idioms and neologisms (Williams and Chesterman, 2014: 6). The data collection involved the following steps: looking at the pages of the original novels, identifying the idioms and neologisms, and categorising them according to their typology. A review of the existing models of idiom and neologism translation strategies was undertaken with the aim of creating a new comprehensive model, suitable for the purposes of this study. The third stage of the methodology was data analysis, during which idioms and neologisms were juxtaposed with their translations, with particular reference to their typology. The data analysis also included examining the predominance of foreignisation and domestication, by identifying the translation strategies related to them. Finally, the factors that influence the translator’s choice of these approaches were investigated, including the context and genre, the publisher’s impact, didacticism, censorship and foreign influence.

The data of this study consist of three books from Harry Potter series. The main reason for the selection of the Harry Potter series is that it is well-known for the abundance of neologisms and idioms it contains, and these are the focus of this study. The books chosen for the current study include: the second novel in the series, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, which was translated by Raja’ Abdullah (2003); the fifth novel, Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, translated by the team of translators of Nahdet Misr Publisher under the supervision of Dalia Mohammed (2007); and the seventh novel, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, translated by Sahar Jabr (2008).

2.1. Model of Analysis

Since this study focuses on idioms and neologisms, different models were applied in the analytical parts. For idioms, Baker’s (1992) framework of translation strategies provides a comprehensive outline of several broad categories used by professional translators, as well as strategies specific to translation of idioms. Similarly, Epstein (2012) looks at the translation of idioms but in the context of children’s literature and outlines the translation strategies used to deal with them. In order to analyse idioms, these frameworks have been combined in order to create a new model of analysis that suits the needs of this research. The new model of analysis includes a new typology of idioms based on Fernando (1996) and Moon (1998), enriched with a new category of variants of an existing idiom.

In addition, since neologisms are the second aspect investigated in this study, the work of Baker, Newmark and Epstein is considered. Baker (1992) looks at general strategies used by professional translators while Newmark (1988) presents an extensive discussion of neologism translation strategies, and offers a detailed categorisation of them. More specifically, Epstein (2012) ponders on strategies of neologism translation in children’s literature, and provides a more general overview. The three models complement each other, and were drawn on to establish the new model used in my analysis. The new model includes a newly created typology of neologisms drawing on the existing typologies of Newmark (1988) and Yule (2010).

3. Findings and Discussion

Regarding the use of strategies to render idioms and neologisms two strategies have been found to be predominant. In the case of idioms, the findings of the current work suggest that paraphrase was the main
strategy used in all three books which accounted for two hundred and one cases. The use of paraphrase seemed an effective strategy to present English idioms, which could be hard to understand for children in the Arab world due to cultural differences. Similarly, one strategy was predominant when translating neologisms in all three books, namely transliteration, which was applied in one hundred and ten cases. Because neologisms relate to the magical setting of the story, this suggests that the translators aimed at presenting this feature of the source text to Arab children. An interesting finding is that there has been extensive use of deletion in the second book compared to the other two books, which shows a clear difference between the translators’ use of this strategy.

As for the predominance of domestication and foreignisation, the main outcome of the current study is that the translators combined these two approaches by following domestication in the case of idioms and foreignisation when dealing with neologisms. This supports previous research done on the use of domestication and foreignization in children’s literature which has found that domestication and foreignisation can complement each other rather than be seen as two separate approaches (Wu, 2010; Coles, 2011).

The main factors influencing the translators’ choice are the influence of foreign literature and the source text genre. As for the influence of foreign literature, lack of consistency between translators as well as the amount of omission of source text elements have been found to lessen as the series progress. However, there was a noticeable discrepancy in the competence of translation between the second, and the fifth and seventh books since the second book used a great amount deletion which resulted in incomplete representation of the source text, which was not present in the other two books analysed. In addition, the source text genre seems to have had an influence on the translators’ choice since all translators aimed at including features of the fantasy genre across the series, especially by including in the target text neologisms that portray the magical setting of the story.

Other factors identified in the analysis include didacticism, censorship and the publisher’s impact, but these aspects seemed less prominent. Firstly, didacticism and its traditional side was found to play some role in the translation of the second book which was domesticated to a great extent, but was less visible in the fifth and seventh book which tended to teach readers foreign elements as well. Also, more emphasis has been placed on the entertainment elements than on didacticism. Secondly, very little censorship was identified in terms of dealing with idioms and neologisms which could be attributed to the source text having few instances of taboo expressions that are considered inappropriate for children. Finally, the preference for foreignisation with neologisms could be due to the publisher’s aim of attracting child readers by depicting fantasy well.

In terms of the effects that the translator’s choice has on Arab readers, two main elements have been identified, namely children’s knowledge and identity. Preference for domestication of idioms suggests that the translators aim at preserving children’s Arabic identity by reducing the number of source text culture-specific items in the translation. However, children’s knowledge could still be extended by being exposed to foreign elements regarding English words and presenting a British boarding school environment.

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5. References


