

Strategies Used in Rendering Humor in Translations of “A Man Called Ove” by Fredrick Backman

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Abstract

In the current study, two translations by Farnaz Taimorzuv (2017) and Hossein Tehrani (2016) of the book “A Man Called Ove” by Fredrick Backman, which is abundant in humor, were selected. The transition of humor from the source language to the target language was investigated by the syntactic strategy of Chesterman (2016). During the analysis of humor, the humorous excerpts were identified. Afterwards, the transference of humorous effects was investigated in both Persian translations. The results showed that, in translation of humor at the linguistic level, the translators have not been fully successful. Neither have they effectively rendered malapropism. Finally, in translation of repetition and parallelism, Taimorzuv applies some strategies to transfer the humoristic effect to the target text, whereas Tehrani seems to have ignored the aesthetic values of the source text.

Keywords: Satire, humour, translation strategy, comparative study

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Introduction

Humor can be both in verse and prose. It challenges the human’s errors or unfavorable behavior, sociopolitical deviations, and philosophical notions. Humor has a significant statue in literature. It goes back to the entrance of the theatre to Greece and Rome. In Iran, the tendency to use humor goes back to the Persian classical verse and prose (Hossieni, Mobaraki, & Rabani Nia, 2017).

Significance of the study

Humor is an extremely powerful artistic structure which is used to criticize particular human behaviors. In addition to the content, form is also significant in humoristic task. It is a tool used by a poet and a creative author. Humoristic or some satirical pieces can be seen in literary words, in nearly all languages. As a result, having the knowledge of translating humor is valuable. The translator requires some guidance or theories to transfer the humoristic affects into the Target text. Translators should know some strategies which make the humor of the Source text more prominent for the readers of the Target text, recreating a proper translated piece of literature (Hossieni et al., 2017). This research is accomplished in order to discover the humoristic tools applied in a notable satirical novel, “A Man Called Ove”, and to explore different strategies which are used in translating humoristic tools.

Research questions

Were the translators able to reproduce the same humoristic features of the source text in the target text by applying the presented strategies? Which translator was more successful in transference of humor?

Research hypothesis

Both translators could reproduce the humoristic feature by applying the presented strategies.

Types of humor

Accordingly, it is clear that among these literary devices there are so many overlapping devices which lead to more confusion in understanding the intention of the author. In this study, two linguistic features in humor are examined: repetition and parallelism.

Repetition: In her thesis, Broeder (2007) stated that the item from the source text is not changed but is directly moved into the target text. All or several formal features of the item are recreated in the target text with no considering maximum semantic equivalence.

Repetition is a literary device in which the same words or phrases repeat more than once to make an idea clearer and more memorable. There are several kinds of repetition generally used in both prose and poetry. As a rhetorical device, it could be a word, a phrase, or a full sentence, or a poetical line repeated to emphasize its significance in the whole text (Literary Devices Editors, 2018b).

Parallelism refers to the use of elements in a sentence that grammatically or in their construction, sound, meaning, or meter are the same. Parallelism examples are seen in literary works and in common conversations (Literary Devices Editors, 2018a).

Translation of humor

Huang (2011) believes that, in literary translation, not only the common features of the source text need to be regarded but also the effective elements from the target view such as the linguistic and cultural differences and the target audiences must be regarded. Literary texts are specified by rhetorical and aesthetic principles, which are expected to be taken and preserved in a literary translation. One of the essential duties of the literary translator is to recreate the rhetorical and aesthetic principles of the original text. In literary translation, the form connects to the content; but in non-literary translation, the content may be considered separable from the form or structure. In prose, like poetry, a definite linguistic feature can also have a definite textual function.

Rener (1989, p.161) says that a 'rhetorical' term is "a carefully and skillfully assembled construction".

Content and form have an effect on each other. Venuti (2012, p. 157) believes that "the content of a message can never be completely abstracted from the form and form is nothing apart from content". The linguistic diversities, however, create a great challenge in literary translation. In prose, the linguistic diversities should also be cautiously considered Venuti(2012).

Liu Lei (2010) believes that humor is distributed between people from every nation. However, various nations have different kinds of perception of humor, nearly related to religion, ideology, society, politics and culture. Therefore, however humor has been examined for a very long time, most are from the point of literature, art, sociology, psychology, pragmatics or linguistics view. Some scholars are uncertain that humor can be fully translated into another language because humor is language-specific and culture-specific. Just a few scholars investigate the translation of humor.

According to Attardo (1994), we have two kinds of jokes, referential and verbal jokes. The referential one is based exclusively on the meaning of the text and do not make any reference to the phonological perception of the lexical items, while the second, additionally to being based on the meaning of the elements of the text, make reference to the phonological perception of the text.

Referential jokes refer to humor which focused on the pragmatic level and plays with language. whereas, verbal jokes refer to humor which focused on the linguistic level and plays through language.

Concerning humor at the linguistic level Gledhill (2003) states that the translation of humor and pun is still an abandoned scope in literary translation theory.

Fredrick Backman's humor

As stated before, the focus of the present research is "A Man Called Ove" and its two Persian translations. The logic behind choosing this work as the focus of this study is that Backman is a famous satirist and this novel is a rich resource of satire and humor.

Theoretical framework

What translators need is to translate with a theory which makes some sense to them. To translate without perception or understanding and with no self-awareness, no self-criticism it would mean trusting entirely on common sense, one might say (Chesterman, 1993).

According to Chesterman (2000), Strategy memes are the most effective sets of professional translation memes. These memes are, in an especially obvious sense, main conceptual tools of the translator's trade. By "strategy" here his mean any well-established method of solving a translation problem. These strategies are applied and well known in the profession. He believes that the difference between a professional and an amateur is that the professional generally knows at a time, or can decide quite immediately, what kind of strategy to use. Professionals can do this either because they have learned the strategies clearly during training, or because they have found them from their own experiment, or because they have imitated them from colleagues.

Chesterman (2016) specifies comprehension strategies and production strategies. Comprehension strategies deal with the analysis of the source text and the type of the translation commission. Production strategies are the results of several comprehension strategies: they deal with how the translator uses the linguistic material in order to create a proper target text.

Chesterman (2016) divides production strategies to 3 classes: semantic, syntactic and pragmatic strategies. Each class has 10 techniques. In this paper, the writer focuses on one of the techniques of syntactic strategy.

Syntactic strategies

According to Chesterman (1997, p. 94), these strategies "may be thought of as involving purely syntactic changes of one kind or another. Larger changes may obviously tend to involve smaller ones too. Syntactic strategies primarily manipulate form". Those strategies include: (a) literal translation, (b) loan, claque, (c) transposition, (d) unit shift, (e) phrase structure change, (f) clause structure change, (g) sentence structure change, (h) cohesion change, (i) level shift, and (j) scheme change.

Scheme change: Chesterman (1997, p. 99) said that "this refers to the kinds of changes that translators incorporate in the translation of rhetorical schemes such as parallelism, repetition, alliteration, metrical rhythm,

etc."

Chesterman (1997, p. 100) stated that the translator may choose between three basic alternatives:

1. ST scheme X → TT scheme X. That is, if the ST scheme is judged to be appropriate to the translation practice, it can be (to some extent) maintained: in fact, no change.
2. ST scheme X → TT scheme Y. That is, the ST scheme can be changed to another scheme that is considered to serve a proper or similar function in the TL.
3. ST scheme X → TT scheme \emptyset . That is, the scheme is abandoned altogether.
4. ST scheme \emptyset → TT scheme X. Here, the translator decides to use a rhetorical scheme of some kind, although not prompted directly to do so by the ST.

Review of literature

The research on humor is a wide field, and many researchers have worked on it. The purpose of this study is to focus on the translation of humor. Salvatore's (1994) general theory of verbal humor concentrated on linguistic methods of humor translation. He presented six parameters for producing humor. Using these six parameters helps translators to recreate the humor in the target language.

Methodology

Corpus

As mentioned above, to investigate the extent that the translators had been successful in transferring humor using strategies, a book entitled "A Man Called Ove" written by Swedish columnist Fredrik Backman (2012) was chosen. The target texts that were used were two translated versions of "A Man Called Ove". Farnaz Taimorzuv translated the first target text (TT1). She is an Iranian translator of works from English into Persian. And Hossein Tehrani translated the second target text (TT2).

Data collection

The researcher analyzed different models, approaches as well as quotes and suggestions by the scholars in the field of parallelism, repetition, and wordplay translation in order to come up with a model for the translation of humor. In this study, the unit of investigation was text. The first step in data collection was to recognize and find parallelism and repetition in English text and its translations. Therefore, 337 pages (all pages) of the novel and their translations were studied in order to find 30 examples of repetition and 20 examples of parallelism.

Procedure process

Firstly, the researcher tried to recognize parallelism and repetition in the source text and found their equivalents in the target texts. Then, each translation version was compared and contrasted based on scheme change strategy to see whether it was applied. After specifying the strategy applied by each translator, the tables are drawn as follow.

Data analysis

1 - When Parvaneh, with panic in her eyes, runs right into Ove's hall and continues into the bathroom without even bothering to say "Good morning. "Ove immediately disputes how one can become so acutely in need of a pee in the space of twenty seconds it takes her to walk from her own house to his. But "hell has no fury like a pregnant woman in need," Sonja once informed him. So, he keeps his mouth shut. (Backman,2014, p. 298)

TT1: پروانه که با دستپاچگی به راهروی او می دود و بدون سلام و علیک بلافاصله سراغ دست شویی می رود، طبیعتاً او در ابتدا نمی تواند تصور کند چطور ممکن است آدم توی این بیست ثانیه فاصله بین خانه خودش و خانه او آن قدر دست شویی لازم شود که قبل از این که در توالت را ببندد حتی فرصت نکند مثل هر آدمی که در ست تربیت شده «صبح به خیر» بگوید. ولی زن او یک بار بهش گفته بود: «خشم اژدها در مقایسه با زن بارداری که توالت لازم است هیچ چی نیست.» بنابراین، او جلو زبانش را می گیرد. (ص.329)

TT 2: وقتی پروانه با دستپاچگی تمام، یک راست وارد راهروی خانه ی او می شود و بدون این که سلام کند، به سمت توالت می رود، طبیعی است که او نتواند در ابتدا تصور کند که چه طور امکان دارد در این بیست ثانیه ی خنده داری که طول می کشد تا پروانه خودش را از خانه اش به این جا برساند، نیازش به دست شویی رفتن آن قدر زیاد می شود که حتا نمی تواند مثل یک بچه ی با ادب یک «صبح به خیر» بگوید. ولی همسرش او یک بار به او گفته بود: «خشم شیطان هم مقابل زن بارداری که در وضعیت اضطراری قرار دارد، هیچ محسوب می شه.» بنابراین دهانش را بست. (ص.313)

Both translators have used syntactic strategy in this humorous statement. They used the second subclass of Scheme change which is ST scheme X → TT scheme X, because "خشم اژدها" and "خشم شیطان" are relevant to "hell".

2 - And, as Ove's wife often says: "If there's one thing you could write in Ove's obituary, it's "At least he was economical with gas." (Backman,2014, p.29)

TT1 : و به قول زن او: «اگه یه چیز باشه که آدم بتونه توی آگهی فوت اوه بنویسه، اینه که او همیشه به میزان مصرف سوخت توجه نشان می داد.» (ص.40)

TT 2 : و آن طور که همسر او همیشه می گوید «اگه چیزی وجود داشته باشه که بشه از اون به عنوان شهرت ا و استفاده کرد، اینه که اون همیشه به میزان مصرف بنزین توجه می کنه.» (ص.40)

Taimorzuv used semantic strategy to translate it. She used the second subclass of hyponymy which is ST hyponymy → TT superordinate because “gas” is more specific than “سوخت”. Tehrani used the syntactic strategy; he used the first subclass of Scheme change which is ST scheme X → TT scheme X because “بنزین” is the same as “gas”.

3_He hated being late. It ruined the planning. Made everything out of step. His wife had been utterly useless at it, keeping to plans. But it was always like that with women. **They couldn't stick to a plan even if you glued them to it**, Ove had learned. (Backman,2014, p. 140)

TT1 :اصلا دوست نداشت دیر برسد. این تاخیر همه برنامه را عوض می کرد، همه چیز را از کنترل خارج می کرد. زنش در پیاده کردن چنین برنامه ریزی هایی ناامید کننده بود ولی خب زن ها این جورى اند دیگر. او به این نتیجه رسیده بود که اگر آنها را سوار جت هم بکنی ، نمی توانند طبق برنامه پیش بروند. (ص.158)

TT 2 : از دیر رسیدن متنفر بود، چون تمام برنامه هایش به هم می ریخت و او ضاع از کنترلش خارج می شد. در چنین موقعیت هایی به همسرش هیچ امیدی نبود. ولی حال و روز اکثر زن ها همین طور بود. آن ها وقت شناس نبودند و نمی توانستند طبق برنامه پیش بروند. او آموخته بود که حتی اگر برنامه را به آن ها بچسبانی، باز هم موفق نمی شوند خودشان را به موقع برسانند. (ص.152)

Taimorzuv used the second subclass of Scheme change which is ST scheme X → TT scheme Y, because of adding the phrase “if you glued them to it”. Tehrani used the first subclass which is ST scheme X → TT scheme X.

4- “It’s me who’s bloody dying!” Ove objects. (Backman,2014, p. 329)

TT1 : اوه مخالفت می کند: “این منم که باید بمیرم!” (ص.363)

TT2 : اوه می گوید “اونی که داره می میره، منم نه تو!” (ص.346)

Both translators used the first subclass of scheme change which is ST scheme X → TT scheme because Taimorzuv used “for the rendition of “It’s me who’s bloody dying!” and Tehrani presented “! “اونی که داره می میره، منم نه تو”.

5 - “If you start crying now, you’re not having it,” warns Ove. (Backman,2014, p. 300)

TT1 : اوه به زن اخطار می دهد: “اگه الان شروع کنی به آبغوره گرفتن , تخت بی تخت)”. (ص.331)

TT2 : اوه به او اخطار می کند “اگه شروع کنی به زار زدن, اونو بهت نمی دم!” (ص.315)

Taimorzuv used the second subclass of Scheme change two times which is ST scheme X → TT scheme Y, because of adding the “ آبغوره ” and “ تخت بی تخت ” to the TT. Tehrani used the second subclass which is ST scheme X → TT scheme Y.

6-Ove sighs— “Bloody women” (Backman,2014, p. 300)

TT1 : اوه فقط آه کشان می گوید: “امان از این زن ها.” (ص.331)

TT2 : اوه آه کشان می گوید: “از دست این زن ها.” (ص.315)

Both translators used the first subclass of scheme change which is ST scheme X → TT scheme X. In fact, no change happened.

7-Maybe it was because Tom had put the blame on him for the theft in the carriage. **Maybe** it was the fire. **Maybe** it was the bogus insurance agent. Or the white shirts. Or **maybe** it was just enough now. (Backman,2014, p. 113)

TT1: دیگر کاسه صبرش لبریز شده بود. شاید به این دلیل که تام دزدی توی واگن را به گردنش انداخته بود، شاید به دلیل آتش سوزی؛ شاید هم به خاطر مامور بیمه قلابی بود، شاید به خاطر پیراهن سفید ها بود، شاید دیگر بس بود. (ص.128)

TT2: شاید به این ربط داشت که تام گناه دزدی کردنش را گردن او انداخته بود. شاید به آتش سوزی، شاید به بیمه های تقلبی. شاید به آن پیراهن سفید پوش ها. شاید هم همین مسئله باعث شد که طاقتش تمام شود. (ص.126)

- This sentence has a special scheme as Parallelism. As said before, it is the repetition of the same pattern of words or phrases within a sentence or passage to show that two or more ideas have the same level of importance. Backman used it in his novel as a humoristic device. The structure of the five sentences above is repeated and both translators perfectly maintained the repetition based on the grammatical structure of the Persian language. Based on Chesterman's syntactic strategies, they used the scheme change strategies to translate these sentences. Both translators used the first procedure which is ST scheme X → TT scheme X. It means that the parallelism is preserved.

8 - "Rules are rules," the man in the white shirt explained in a monotone voice when Ove protested. (Backman, 2014, p. 95)

TT1: اوه اعتراض کرد، پیراهن سفید با صراحت توضیح داد: «قانون قانونه». (ص. 107)

TT2: وقتی صدای اعتراض اوه بلند شد، مرد پیراهن سفید پوش گفت «مقررات، مقرراتند». (ص. 108)

The term "Rules" is repeated two times. Taimorzuv translated both of them as "قانون" but Tehrani translated them as "مقررات". Therefore, both translators have used the first strategy of the scheme change. Taimorzuv has used "پیراهن سفید" for the rendition of "the man in the white shirt" which the proper natural equivalent for the phrase is "مرد سفید پوش".

Table 1. The Frequency of Strategies Used in Translation of Repetition

| | ST scheme X → TT scheme X | ST scheme X → TT scheme Y | ST scheme X → TT scheme ∅ | ST scheme ∅ → TT scheme X |
|-----|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| TT1 | 27 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| TT2 | 4 | 0 | 26 | 0 |

Table 2. The Frequency of Strategies Used in Translation of Parallelism

| | ST scheme X → TT scheme X | ST scheme X → TT scheme Y | ST scheme X → TT scheme ∅ | ST scheme ∅ → TT scheme X |
|-----|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| TT1 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| TT2 | 4 | 0 | 16 | 0 |

Discussion

As illustrated above, two translators transferred parallelism and repetition in different ways. As it is shown in the Table 1, 30 instances of repetition were identified and investigated. Taimorzuv used the first strategy of Scheme change which is ST scheme X → TT scheme X, in 90% of instances and the third strategy which is ST scheme X → TT scheme ∅, in 10% of instances. These results showed that he could transfer the humoristic effect of repetition in most cases. It was also shown that Tehrani used the first strategy in four instances and the third one in 26 instances. It is clear that Taimorzuv is more faithful to the linguistic form of the ST and the first strategy is the best one in conveying the repetition which is a humoristic device in this novel. According to Table 2, 20 examples of parallelism were investigated. Taimorzuv used the first strategy in all 20 instances, but Tehrani used the first strategy in 20% of examples and the second one in 80% of examples. It seems that Taimorzuv created the same effect in the TT in all cases, but Tehrani could not transfer the humoristic effect.

Conclusion

As mentioned above, translation of humor has an important position in the literary translation. The linguistic and cultural features of humor make some problems in translation. Because of the unequal structures of the source and target language, the translator encounters difficulties in translating linguistic features of humor. Therefore, the investigation of the transference of humor is a significant field in comparative literature. In order to produce a version which contained the same humorous effects of the original, the translator should be able to utilize creative strategies. According to the tables, it can be said that the two translators rendered completely different and used

different strategies. Generally, Taimorzuv could transfer repetition and parallelism to the target language, but Tehrani was not successful in its transference and could not recreate humor in the target text. The results of this study fostered several points of discussion such as the problems with transferring humor, the amount of creativity a translator can use, and different strategies of scheme change, which can be used in translating parallelism and repetition as two humoristic tools. The findings of this study may be useful for translators entering the area of literary translation and humoristic works. The results can also be used in the evaluation of a translated satirical work.

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