Translation of Onomatopoeia in Holy Defense Literary Works*

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Abstract

Onomatopoeia refers to the signs in which a natural relationship is detected between the word and its meaning and concept in the real world. In fact, in these words, there is an innate connection between signifier and signified based on particular sound features. Some types of onomatopoeia are similar in different languages since they are the reflections of the same feelings in humans and have similar implications in human mind. Nevertheless, since the creation of these signs is optional, they might take entirely different forms in different languages which poses serious challenges to their translation. The purpose of this study was to investigate the application of onomatopoeia in Holy Defense literary works and the strategies adopted to translate them. In this regard, the onomatopoeia words utilized in literary works of Holy Defense including fiction and poem were studied and the applied translation strategies were analyzed based on the model proposed by Flyxe. The results of this study indicated that Persian onomatopoeia words were mostly translated by using an equivalent onomatopoeia in English. If the appropriate equivalent was not found, explicative paraphrases were used instead.

Keywords: Holy Defense literary works, onomatopoeia, translation strategies

1. Introduction

The study of language and its relevant topics has drawn the attention of philosophers, scientists and scholars since long time ago and dates back to several centuries before Christ. Gradually, these studies continued in a systematic way and linguistics was created which is not older than a hundred years. In order to carry out precise and comprehensive studies on language, which is a social phenomenon, the integration of relevant scientific disciplines in interdisciplinary studies seems necessary. Thus, the contemporary linguistics encompasses a wide range of scientific fields including semiology. In semiology, which investigates different signs and the laws governing them, two types of relationships are defined between the signifier (the physical form of a sign) and the signified (the meaning or concept that sign expresses) as natural or conventional. Plato believed that all words have a somehow natural relationship with their signified. This relationship might sometimes be obvious but at times, it is not so clear that only philosophers are able to decipher (Vahidian Kamyar, 1996). Aristotle, on the contrary, believed that the relationship between a word and its meaning is always conventional and he mentioned the difference among words of various languages as a proof to this claim.

Ferdinand De Saussure, the Swedish semiologist, believed that the main principle in semiology is the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified i.e. there is no natural and innate relation between the word and its meaning or concept. He regarded the iconicity, when the signifier encompasses the natural features of its signified, as marginal and unimportant since it is not compatible with the abovementioned principle (1959). Pierce (1894), on the other hand, assumed a continuum of signs arranged based on the type and amount of iconicity. This continuum begins with entirely natural signs and ends in symbolic ones. Therefore, despite the conventional nature of this relationship, certain linguistic signs are found in every language in which the relationship between form and meaning is natural and innate and some degrees of transparency are met.

The most natural and transparent signs in each language are the onomatopoeia. In these words, the relationship between form and meaning is direct and on the basis of similarity, symmetry and even direct imitation (Sharifi Moghaddam & Abolhasani, 2012). Since this innate

connection is based on particular sound features, it is expected that different languages apply identical or similar onomatopoeic words. In fact, for certain onomatopoeic words, there are detected a number of similarities among different languages; for example, the onomatopoeic word for "cuckoo" in English is similar to "cou cou" in French, "cuculo" in Italian, "cuelillo" in Spanish, "kakuk" in Hungarian and "کوکو" in Persian (Vahidian Kamyar, 1996). However, some factors such as different implications and interpretations made by the speakers of different languages, the difference among phonemes in various languages and the inability of human vocal system to precisely imitate the sounds, which leads to a close but not entirely compatible imitation of the sounds, make these onomatopoeic words different in form from language to language. This will pose some problems for translation of onomatopoeia, which was investigated in this study in the context of literary works of Holy Defense.

Since onomatopoeia is resorted to in different literary genres including poetry, novel, short story, drama and etc. along with rhetorical devices so as to create literary masterpieces and add to their aesthetic sense, it presents challenges to the translators of such texts. In onomatopoeia, form plays a role in conveying the meaning hence making it difficult to transfer form and meaning in sync from one language to another. Moreover, it is necessary to reflect the literary works of eight years of Holy Defense by virtue of translation. Therefore, this study was aimed to investigate the translation of onomatopoeia in literary works of Holy Defense and its methods of transfer. To accomplish this goal, the model proposed by Flyxe (2002) was utilized which has outlined six strategies to translate onomatopoeia. These strategies are:1. Selecting an equivalent onomatopoeia in target language(TL), 2. Translating onomatopoeia as an adjective, 3. Translating onomatopoeia as an adverb, 4. Translating onomatopoeia as a verb, 5. Paraphrasing the onomatopoeia and 6. Omitting the onomatopoeia.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the strategies adopted by the translators while facing the challenge to translate onomatopoeia and determine the most commonly utilized strategies. The present study was also intended to provide answer to the following research questions:

1.   To what extent were the strategies proposed by Flyxe adopted in translation of literary works of Holy Defense?

2.   In translating the onomatopoeia in literary works of Holy Defense, which strategy was the most commonly utilized?

2.   Literature review

A number of researches have been dedicated to study various aspects of onomatopoeia in linguistics. Albein (1999) used the more general term "sound symbolism" instead of onomatopoeia to describe the natural relationship between form and meaning. He restricted the onomatopoeia to the words that imitate the sounds in the real world. In Persian, however, onomatopoeia is not only the imitation of natural sounds but also that of action, movement and feeling.

After describing the characteristics of onomatopoeia, Anderson (1998) stated in a paper that it was impossible to imitate natural sounds due to the limitations of human vocal system and its structure. It doesn't, nevertheless, mean that there is a conventional relationship between form and meaning in onomatopoeia but it suggests that onomatopoeia can only be a relative imitation of natural sounds.

Vahidian Kamyar (1996) compiled the dictionary of onomatopoeia in Persian. In the detailed preface, he clarified the concept of onomatopoeia and proposed strategies to classify these words. These strategies were also the basis of classification in the present study. He also pointed out the significance of onomatopoeia, the characteristics of Persian onomatopoeia and the use of onomatopoeia in different languages. Thereafter, a list of Persian onomatopoeia was provided as a proper reference for researches concerning onomatopoeia.

The analysis of onomatopoeia was carried out in different areas of linguistics as in the study by Sharifi Moghaddam and Abolhasani (2012) which was aimed to investigate the onomatopoeia and its internal and external motivations in Kermani dialect. The results of this study revealed that onomatopoeic words in Kermani dialect had distinctive features and were different from symbolic icons. A number of sounds or chains of sounds in onomatopoeic words were related to and compatible with certain concepts in language.

Seyyedi and Akhlaghi (2013) also investigated the application of onomatopoeia in the Holy Quran. Just nine onomatopoeic words and expressions were detected in this Holy scripture and the reasons why these words were so few in Quran were elaborated as well.

Despite its significance, particularly in literary works and their translation, onomatopoeia has not been duly investigated in translation studies. Amongst the few studies dedicated to translation of onomatopoeia, it is worth mentioning the study by Flyxe (2002) proposing strategies to translate onomatopoeia, which was the theoretical framework of the present study. He investigated the translation of Japanese onomatopoeia into Spanish and came to the result that the most common strategy was to translate onomatopoeia as an adjective and an adverb in TL.

Inose (2007) adopted the model of Flyxe to analyze translation of Japanese onomatopoeia into English and Spanish. She added some more strategies to those of the Flyxe and believed them to be significantly important in correctly transferring the meaning of the original.

Another study was carried out by Casas-Tost (2014) which investigated how Chinese onomatopoeia in novels was translated into Spanish. After giving a description of the features of onomatopoeia, she mentioned two common practicesto translate onomatopoeic expressions as suppressing them and substituting them for another type of word. They were, nonetheless, not regarded as the only ways to translate onomatopoeia. She believed in other choices to maintain the expressive sense of onomatopoeia during the translation which were based on the role of the translator.

Although the importance of translating onomatopoeia in literary works is evident, no studies have been published in this field in Persian as far as the researchers are concerned which proves the significance of this study. The onomatopoeia is inevitably utilized in literary texts to create an aesthetic sense and help transfer the meaning more effectively. Since in onomatopoeia, form plays a role, together with meaning, in conveying the message and according to the differences in various languages in the forms of onomatopoeia, the translation of onomatopoeic expressions encounters certain difficulties. The Holy Defense works are among the important works in Persian literary canon for they have reflected the eight years of resistance and self-sacrifice. Therefore, the significance of investigating the translation of onomatopoeia in literary works of Holy Defense is obvious.

3. Methodology

Since onomatopoeic expressions are different from other words of a language in the relationship between signifier and signified i.e. the relationship between form and meaning is natural but not conventional and optional, the significance of investigating them in literary works is evident. Its importance is even more highlighted when these expressions are translated from one language into another. Hence, this study was intended to investigate the strategies adopted to translate onomatopoeia in literary works of Holy Defense.

This study was a descriptive-analytical one which was aimed to investigate the application of onomatopoeia in literary works of Holy Defense and the strategies implemented to translate it. In order for data collection, a selection of literary works of Holy Defense in Persian including poetry, novel, short story and collections of personal memories and notes were used. For children poetry A star from the desert (Setarei az kavir), for children stories dearson of the desert (Farzande khoobe kavir), for novel Fortune told in blood (Fal-e-khoon), for the collection of personal memories and notes Nights of Bombardment (Shabhay-e-bombaran) and There was Allah and Nothing Else (Khoda bood va digar hich nabood) and for short stories Dusty Room (Otaghi por ghobar) were selected. Both the source (Persian) and target (English) texts were scrutinized and the onomatopoeic expressions as well as their corresponding equivalents were extracted.

In the preface of "The dictionary of onomatopoeia in Persian", Vahidian Kamyar (1996) classified onomatopoeia as follows:

   I. The onomatopoeia whose form is derived from its sound
  II. The onomatopoeia whose form is derived from the producer of its sound
 III. The onomatopoeia whose form is not related to the sound but to the action accompanied by the sound
  IV. The onomatopoeia whose signified has no sound in reality but people feel a sound with it

Thereafter, the collected data were analyzed based on the strategies proposed by Flyxe (2002) to translate onomatopoeia. He believed that onomatopoeic expressions are translated via one of these six strategies:

a)   Selecting an equivalent onomatopoeia in target language

One of the most appropriate strategies to translate onomatopoeia is to choose the corresponding one available in TL. As previously mentioned, some onomatopoeic expressions are common in different languages and suggest similar concepts. Thus, certain onomatopoeic expressions are regarded as equivalents across languages, which can properly be transferred through translation. However, some other onomatopoeic expressions are interpreted differently in various languages. There might even be an onomatopoeia in one language which is an ordinary word with conventional relation in another. Therefore, if an appropriate equivalent is determined for the original onomatopoeia in TL, the first strategy is the best choice, otherwise, other strategies are resorted to.

The examples of applying this strategy in translating onomatopoeia in literary works of Holy Defense are provided:

- «**پشنگه** های خون در سرزمینی بیگانه»

In this phrase, the word "**پشنگه**" which refers to the voice of liquids when falling and hitting, is translated with the equivalent onomatopoeia in English as:

- "The **splattering** of blood in a strange land"

In another phrase, the onomatopoeia "**شلپ شلپ**" whose meaning is similar to the previous expression, is translated as "splashing":

- «**شلپ شلپ** آب زیر پوتین ها»
- "The sound of water **splashing** under his boots"

Finally the word "زوزه" which refers to the long noise made by animals like dog or wolf and is used here to describe the sound of wind, is translated with the equivalent onomatopoeia "howl" in English.

- «از بیرون صدای **زوزه** باد همراه سرمای گزنده از درزهای اطراف دهانه سنگر می آمد تو»

- "The wind was **howling** outside and the biting cold was penetrating through the cracks of the opening of the bunker."

b)   Translating onomatopoeia as an adjective

In this method, the onomatopoeia is translated as an adjective regardless of its part of speech in the source text. This strategy involves keeping the onomatopoeic sense or dismissing it. For example, the onomatopoeia "گزگز می‌کرد" is translated as the adjective "stung" which is also an onomatopoeic expression. In the phrase "آب قوری جوش آمده بود و قل قل می‌کرد" the onomatopoeia "قل قل" is translated as "the bubbling sound". But the adjective is not always an onomatopoeia like in the phrase "حس کرد گونه‌هایش از خجالت گر گرفته" in which "گر گرفته" is translated as "burned with" which is a non-onomatopoeic adjective.

c)   Translating onomatopoeia as an adverb

Based on the model proposed by Flyxe (2002), onomatopoeia can also be translated as an adverb. In the corpus of this study, nonetheless, no onomatopoeia was found to be translated by this strategy.

d)   Translating onomatopoeia as a verb

Another common strategy to translate onomatopoeia is to render it as a verb and transfer its meaning. Sometimes the selected verb is an onomatopoeia too:

- «برگ های خشم زیر قدم هایش خشک شد و **خش خش** صدا داد»

- "The dry leaves **crunched** under his feet"

In this case, the verb "crunch" is also an onomatopoeia in English. Some other times, the translated verb is not an onomatopoeia like "تاتی تاتی" translated as "take a step or two".

e)   Paraphrasing the onomatopoeia

One strategy to translate parts of text in which the form plays a role in conveying the message is to use the explanatory phrases so as to clarify and transfer the meaning. In this strategy, which is named paraphrase, it is not possible to transfer form and meaning simultaneously, thus, merely the meaning is conveyed. Like in the phrase " شلیک توپی در دوردست‌ها" in which the onomatopoeia "شلیک" is paraphrased as "the sound of an artillery gun".

f)   Omitting the onomatopoeia

In some cases, due to untranslatability, the onomatopoeia can be deleted as the last resort. This, nevertheless, is only adopted when the omission of onomatopoeia doesn't lead to a loss of meaning and content like when the onomatopoeia is not among the keywords of the text. In the translations of literary works of Holy Defense into English, which were analyzed in this study, no onomatopoeia was detected to be omitted through translation, in other words, the translators have attempted to leave no onomatopoeia untranslated by resorting to different strategies.

The findings of this study would be significant for literary translators particularly those involved in Holy Defense translation. Since in teaching translation and training the translators it is important to know how to translate onomatopoeia with certain strategies, the results of this study would be of use to translation teachers and students.

4. **Results and discussion**

This study was carried out with accordance to the importance of utilizing onomatopoeic expressions in literary works of Holy Defense and the strategies to translate them. The results derived from data analysis were to provide the answer to the following questions:

1. To what extent were the strategies proposed by Flyxe adopted in translation of literary works of Holy Defense?

The results revealed that in the literary works relevant to eight years of Holy Defense translated into English, which were selected from amongst poems, novels, short stories and collections of personal memories and notes, 46 onomatopoeic expressions were detected.These expressions were translated into English by means of the strategies provided by Flyxe (2002). The results revealing the number and percentage of applying each strategy are presented in table 1.

Table 1: the strategies applied to translate onomatopoeia

Translation strategies	Number of applications	Percentage of applications
Translation using equivalent onomatopoeia	20	43%
Translation using adjective	4	9%
Translation using adverb	0	0
Translation using verb	14	30%
paraphrase	8	18%
omission	0	0

From the whole46 onomatopoeic expressions detected in Persian works of Holy defense, 20 ones (43 percent) were translated by selecting the equivalent onomatopoeia in English. The second strategy, which was translating onomatopoeia with an adjective, was applied to 4

onomatopoeic expressions. None of the onomatopoeic expressions were translated by an adverb i.e. the third strategy was not adopted at all. As per the fourth strategy, 14 onomatopoeic expressions (30 percent)were translated as verbs. 8 cases of onomatopoeia were paraphrased in the target text. Finally, no onomatopoeic expressions was omitted as per the sixth proposed strategy.

2.	In translating the onomatopoeia in literary works of Holy Defense, which strategy was the most commonly utilized and which one was the most appropriate?

After analyzing the data, the frequency of applying each strategy was determined which would clarify the most commonly adopted strategy. The results are depicted in figure 1.

Fig. 1: The frequency percentage of applied strategies
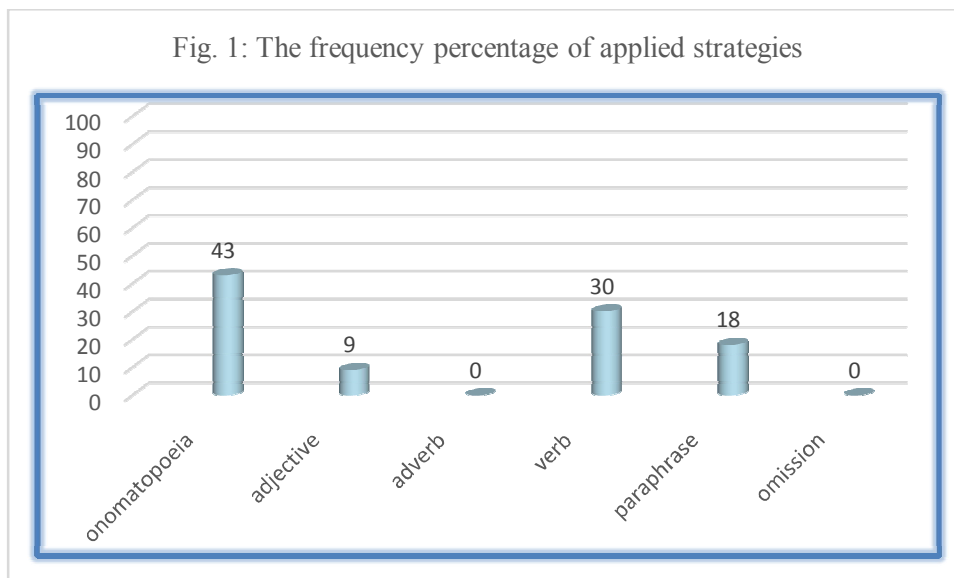
According to Fig. 1, selecting the equivalent onomatopoeia in TL was the most common strategy to translate the onomatopoeic expressions in literary works of Holy Defense. If an appropriate equivalent onomatopoeia was not found in English, then the onomatopoeic expressions were mostly paraphrased i.e. clarified with an explanatory phrase. The adoption of this strategy revealed that if simultaneous transfer of form and meaning was not possible, the translators were more inclined to render the meaning or concept rather than form. The omission

strategy was not used in the analyzed translations which suggested that translators have attempted to transfer the onomatopoeia with resort to any possible strategy rather than omitting the whole onomatopoeia and its meaning.

Finally, the translation of onomatopoeia using an adverb didn't occur in any cases. This might be due to particular structure of English language which normally doesn't use onomatopoeia as an adverb. It might also be because of the tendency of translators to preserve and stick to the structure of source text. In other words, since the onomatopoeic expressions in source text were not commonly used as adverbs, the translators have also attempted to follow the source text and not translate the onomatopoeic expressions as adverbs.

Finding the appropriate equivalent for onomatopoeia in TL which can transfer the intended concept and meaning of the original and can preserve a natural relationship between form and meaning is challenging. If this equivalent is found, it will be the most appropriate and acceptable substitution for the original onomatopoeia. Thus, the most appropriate strategy to translate onomatopoeia is translation by using an equivalent onomatopoeia (the first strategy) which was correctly adopted for most of the cases analyzed in this study.

5.   Conclusion

For the majority of lexicons in a language, the relationship between the signifier and signified is conventional, to wit, nothing is found in the form that indicates the meaning. Nonetheless, in every language, there are certain group of words that are distinguished from the rest of the words in keeping a natural and innate relationship between form and meaning. These words which are sometimes the imitations of natural sounds and at other times suggest the feelings, actions and movements are called onomatopoeia. Onomatopoeia is regarded as a very effective tool in creating the aesthetic sense in various types of literature. However, the translation of this category usually encounters certain difficulties and challenges since dismissing the natural relationship between the signifier and signified might cause some losses in the meaning and concept of the original and would even have stylistic effects.

With the purpose of investigating the translation of onomatopoeia in literary works of Holy Defense, this study analyzed seven literary works of Holy Defense including poetry, novel, short story and collection of personal memories and notes from the viewpoint of onomatopoeia. Accordingly, the adoption of six strategies proposed by Flyxe (2002) in translation of onomatopoeia was studied. The frequency of applying each strategy and the most common and appropriate strategies were determined.

The research results demonstrated that using an equivalent onomatopoeia in TL was the most frequent strategy in translating onomatopoeia. This revealed that if the equivalent onomatopoeia exists in the TL, it is not only the most appropriate strategy but also the only acceptable way to translate onomatopoeia. Despite the differences in various languages concerning the rendering of a concept via onomatopoeia and the interpretations made by the speakers on the sounds of nature and how to imitate them, there are some similarities between Persian and English. According to the results of this study, for about half of Persian onomatopoeic expressions, an equivalent English one could be detected. Although the implications of these two languages in imitating natural sounds and using vowels and consonants to reflect these sounds are not identical in many cases, it is worthy of consideration that both Persian and English have attempted to imitate nature for expressing a particular set of concepts.

Lastly, according to the results of this study, the following recommendations are provided:

- Since the model proposed by Flyxe (2002), the framework of this study, mostly emphasized the role of onomatopoeia from lexical point of view, the application of other models can also be useful to investigate translation of onomatopoeia from other perspectives.

- The study of Persian onomatopoeia is partly carried out by compiling the dictionary of Persian onomatopoeia. However, these dictionaries are not sufficient and more researches are needed in this field.

- According to the fact that few studies are dedicated to the investigation of translation of onomatopoeia from Persian to English and vice versa, it is recommended that more studies be done in this area from various dimensions and in different text types.

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