

Culture-Specific Items in Sadi's the Bustan

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ABSTRACT

The Būstān or Sadinameh is the most celebrated piece of didactic poetry in Persian literature composed by Sheikh Sadi in 1257. The present article investigates the transfer of what are probably the most challenging elements of any text for translation, often called Culture-Specific Items (CSIs), concepts which refer to specific cultural phenomena of a particular society which are absent in another certain culture, in the English translation of the Būstān by G. M. Wickens (1974). To discuss the process of translating CSIs in three selected chapters of the aforementioned translation, the researcher, via a quantitative and source-oriented research, initially identifies the Persian CSIs according to the definition of culture-specific items stated by Mona Baker (1992) and H.F. Aixela (1996) and categorizes them. Secondly, the translation procedure through which each CSI has been dealt with is obtained from among five procedures: preservation of form, preservation of content, addition, omission and established equivalent. Finally, the frequency of each procedure is presented, and the most frequent procedure is specified. Two important findings of the study are: first, most of the CSIs existed in the selected data are religious concepts, and second, the most prevailing procedure by means of which the CSIs have been translated into English is preservation of form.

KEYWORDS: culture, culture-specific items (CSI), translation procedure, Persian literature, preservation

INTRODUCTION

Farzaneh Farahzad in an interview conducted by the Arman Translation Group in 2013 argues that the prominent reference in translation is no longer the original writer, whereas in the past most of the translators believed a faithful translation is one which represents both the appearance and the content of the ST without any creativity. Robert Frost (1959) says "Poetry is what gets lost in translations." However, today some translation theorists such as Dr Ali Khazaefar (2009) do not

regard translation as transference but as producing a new literary work whose writer are the translators themselves (Khazaeefar, 2009, p.14). A great challenge in literary translation is rendering CSIs. Different theorists have proposed different procedures for translating CSIs. In this article, *the Būstān* (1257), which is, without doubt, the most renowned moral poetic work in Persian literature, written by Sheikh Sadi Shirazi will be taken into consideration to examine cultural specific items. The Būstān is comprised of a preamble itself divided into five parts and ten sections of verse or chapters. The titles of the ten chapters of the Būstān have been translated as follows:

Chapter I: On Justice, Management, and Good Judgment

Chapter II: Beneficence

Chapter III: On Love, Intoxication, and Delirium

Chapter IV: On Humility

Chapter V: On Acceptance

Chapter VI: On Contentment

Chapter VII: Concerning the World of Edification

Chapter VIII: On Gratitude for Good Estate

Chapter IX: On Repentance and the Right Course

Chapter X: On Close Communion: In Conclusion

Each of these chapters includes numerous CSIs. It has been translated into English by G. M. Wickens (1974). The present article endeavors to investigate through what translation procedures G. M. Wickens (1974) has managed to render the CSIs of various forms existed in the Būstān into English.

One of the obvious features of Sheikh Sadi's works, particularly the Būstān and the Gulistān, is their deep immersion in Persian or Iranian culture mostly due to their direct references to religious concepts. In the Būstān, since Islamic moral principles are elaborated on through different stories, whose settings are usually Islamic territory, there exist plenty of specific concepts of Islam. In a great many stories of the Būstān, beliefs and customs of dervishes, a particular group among Muslims, are revealed; therefore, we can easily see a great many culture-specific concepts (CSIs) in the book. Translation of these CSIs into English, which does not possess the equal concepts, is a challenging task.

Maybe the most famous definition for CSIs is that proposed by Javier Franco Aixela (1996). He defines them as "those textually actualized items whose functions and connotations in a ST involve a translation problem in their transference to a TT, whenever this problem is a product of the nonexistence of the referred item or of its different inter-textual status in the cultural system of the readers of the TT." Another definition which has been taken into consideration in this that suggested by Mona Baker (1992: 21) who defines CSIs as follows:

"The source-language word may express a concept which is totally unknown in the target culture. The concept in question may be abstract or concrete; it may relate to a religious belief, a social custom, or even a type of food. Such concepts are often referred to as 'culture specific'".

Previous Relative Investigations

Various studies have been done on analyzing the translation of culture-specific items in literary works three of which will be briefly taken into consideration in this part.

Jelena Pralas, from the University of Montenegro, carried out a research titled "Translating French Culture-Specific Items in Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*" and published it in 2012. In the study,

she has discussed the process of translating CSIs in Flaubert's *Parrot*, a novel written by Julian Barnes from English into Serbian. The conclusion of the research is that Barnes's novel *Flaubert's Parrot* is a very specific work in English literature because it contains plenty of CSIs written totally in French without any definition or description in English. In the Serbian translation in question, the translator frequently could do nothing but make himself visible in translation by providing intra-textual or extra-textual gloss, the latter being dominant.

Moreover, Brigita Brasiene (2013) in her MA thesis whose topic is "Literary Translation of Culture-Specific Items in Lithuanian Translation of Orwell's *Down and out in Paris and London*" aimed to reveal what translation procedures Arvydas Sabonis, the translator of the novel *Down and Out in Paris and London* written by Orwell in 2007, has been employed for rendering each of the CSIs used in the literary work. Translation procedures suggested by Davies (2003) make up the theoretical framework of the study. She concluded that the most prevailing translation procedures for transference of CSIs are preservation, localization and addition.

The last study which will be discussed in this part is in the form of article titled "*Fred* or *farīd*, *bacon* or *baydun* ('egg')? Proper Names and Cultural-specific Items in the Arabic Translation of *Harry Potter*" and carried out by Erika Mussche and Klaas Willems (2010). It investigates the transfer of proper names and references to food in the Arabic translation of the first three *Harry Potter* volumes. Important results of the study are: first and foremost, the common strategy in the Arabic translation in question is simplification, and foreignization is, occasionally, involved, yet domestication is virtually absent.

METHODOLOGY

This is a library, source-oriented and descriptive research. To achieve the aims of the research, three of ten chapters of the "Būstān" or "Sadinameh", a Persian poetic work written by Sheikh Musleh-iddin Sadi Shirazi in 1257, and its English translation provided by G. M. Wickens (1974) have been specified as the corpus of this study. Based on the translation Wickens (1974) has provided the three selected chapters are as follows:

Chapter 2: ON Beneficence,

Chapter 3: On Love, Intoxication, and Delirium,

Chapter 4: On Humility

These chapters will be taken into account because, as Wickens (1974) emphasizes, they include numerous references to Islamic cultural system (p. 8).

The exact data which are to be analyzed encompass all the culture-specific items (CSIs) existed in the three mentioned chapters and their corresponding English translations. It should be noted that evaluating the quality of the translation has not been the aim of the present study.

This study examines Būstān based on the following procedures:

Preservation of form refers to the procedure of choosing the same culture-specific item as that of the ST in the translation (Davies, 2003, p. 72).

Preservation of content refers to the procedure of translating a cultural entity literally without adding any explanation and clarification (Davies, 2003, 73).

Addition happens when the translation of CSI through preservation is vague, the strategy of addition is suggested. The translator chooses addition when he/she decides to add more information about the CSI to explicate the meaning of that (Davies, 2003, p. 77).

Omission appears when a problematic CSI is left out in the translation so that the readers have no idea of its existence. According to Davies (2003), there are three reasons for employing omission. First of all, omission can be used when the translator cannot find the equivalent in the TL. Secondly, it may be used when the translator may find a solution for the translation of CSI but, having in mind the TC and target readers decides that translation is not justified. Finally, omission is used when the translation by explanation or paraphrase gives a prominence it did not possess in the original.

Established equivalent refers to the use of a term or expression recognized (by dictionaries or language in use) as an equivalent in the TL (Molina & Albir, 2002, p. 510).

Four of the procedures have been taken from the eight translation procedures for handling with CSIs proposed by Davies (2003), and only the procedure of *established equivalent* has been caught from the techniques Molina and Albir (2002) have presented.

In the next step, the frequency and percentage of each five procedures' occurrence have been investigated.

Findings

Some typical randomly examples of each translation procedure are given in this part as follows:

1. Preservation of form

Preservation of form is one of the means by which a translator seeks to translate literally and foreignize the translation. This procedure has been mostly used for translating proper names, particularly people's appellations and names of regions, in the Būstān. Here are some examples from each of selected chapters.

Examples from Chapter 2: On Beneficence

Javānmardī-e āl-e hātām kojāst: But what of Hātīm's family's generosity!
Ke shebli ze hānūt-e gandomforūsh: How Shibli from the wheat-merchant's warehouse

Examples from Chapter 3: On Love, Intoxication, and Delirium

Be raqs andar āmad parī-peikarī: One with a parī's form did once begin to dance
Yekī shahedī dar Samarqand dāsht: One in Samarqand had a witness-to beauty

Examples from Chapter 4: On Humility

Ze garmābe āmad borūn bāyazīd: From a bathhouse there emerged Bāyazīd
Yekī pādshahzāde dar ganje būd: Once in Ganja lived a king's son

2. Preservation of content

Examples from Chapter 2: On Beneficence

Hadīs-e dorost ākher az mostafā: And is there not a sound Tradition from the Chosen One
Raḡībān-e mehmānsarāy-e khalīl: Those in attendance in the Friend's guest-house
Sometimes, as illustrated above, some CSIs categorized as people's appellations concerning religion (Islam) have been translated through this procedure. 11.9% of the CSIs found in chapter 2 have been translated by the procedure of preservation of content.

Examples from Chapter 3: On Love, Intoxication, and Delirium

Be yek jor'e tā nafkhe-ye sūr mast: Drunk on one draught till the trumpet's blast
Harīfān-e khalvatsarāy-e alast: Associates in the privy-place of 'Am I not?'

For the translation of many specific concepts, two of them have been presented above, which have been derived from Koran the procedure of preservation of content has been applied.

Examples from Chapter 4: On Humility

Lema-o lāosallem dar andākhtand: Casting about with 'Why?' and 'That we grant not!'
Be eblāq-e tanzīl-o feqh-o osul:

In order to expound the Revelation, Jurisprudence, **Basic Principles**

3. Addition

An Example from Chapter 2: On Beneficence

Hamī goft-o dar **rozehā** mīchamīd: Saying as he stalked through **Paradise gardens**

An Example from Chapter 3: On Love, Intoxication, and Delirium

Mīān-e do **amzāde** vaslat fetād: **Two cousins on the fathers' side** chanced two be united

An Example from Chapter 4: On Humility

Ze **sonnat** nabīnī dar īshān asar: No mark you'll see in them of **the Practice of the Prophet**

4. Omission

Examples from Chapter 2: On Beneficence

Kolāhash be **bāzār**-o meizar gero: With his hat up for auction and his drawers in pawn

Ze dīvār-e **mehrabā**sh āmad be gūsh: A voice came to his ear from out the wall

1.99% of the CSIs found in chapter 2 have been translated employing the procedure of omission.

In the third and fourth chapters, no omission has been found for rendering CSIs.

5. Established Equivalent

An Example from Chapter 2: On Beneficence

Cho āmad bar-e mardom-e **kārevān**: When to the **caravan**'s members he returned,

An Example from Chapter 3: On Love, Intoxication, and Delirium

Dar-e **masjedī** dīd-o āvāz dād: And seeing a **mosque**-doorway, gave voice

An Example from Chapter 4: On Humility

Borūn āmad az tāq-o **dastār**-e khīsh: At length, indeed, the latter quit his gown and **turban**

Table 1. Frequency of translation procedures in each chapter and the mean

Procedures	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Mean
Preservation of form	29.5%	17.1%	23.1%	23.2%
Preservation of content	11.3%	31.3%	19.5%	20.7%
Established Equivalent	8%	6.5%	11%	8.5%
Addition	0.8%	2.3%	1%	1.4%
Omission	2.1%	0%	0%	0.7%
Other procedures	48.1%	42.6%	45.2%	45.3%

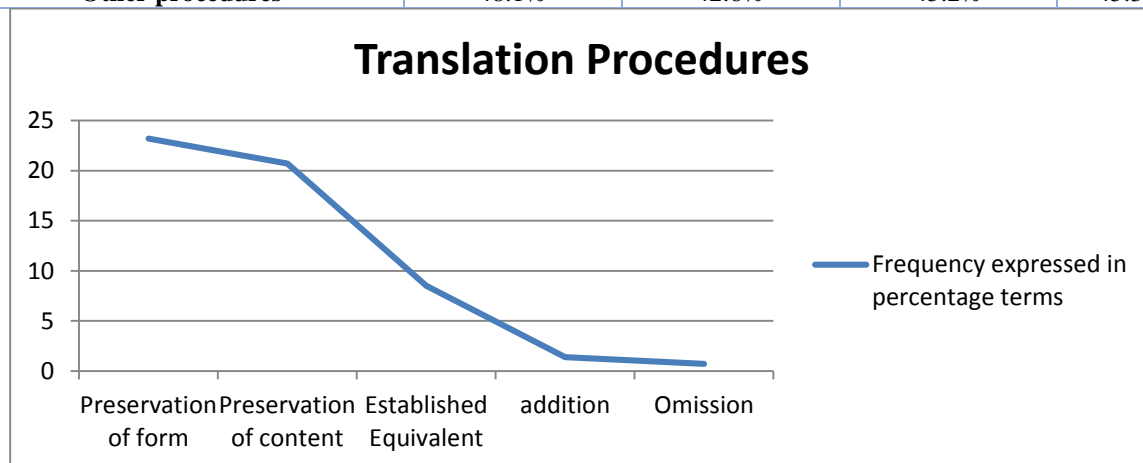
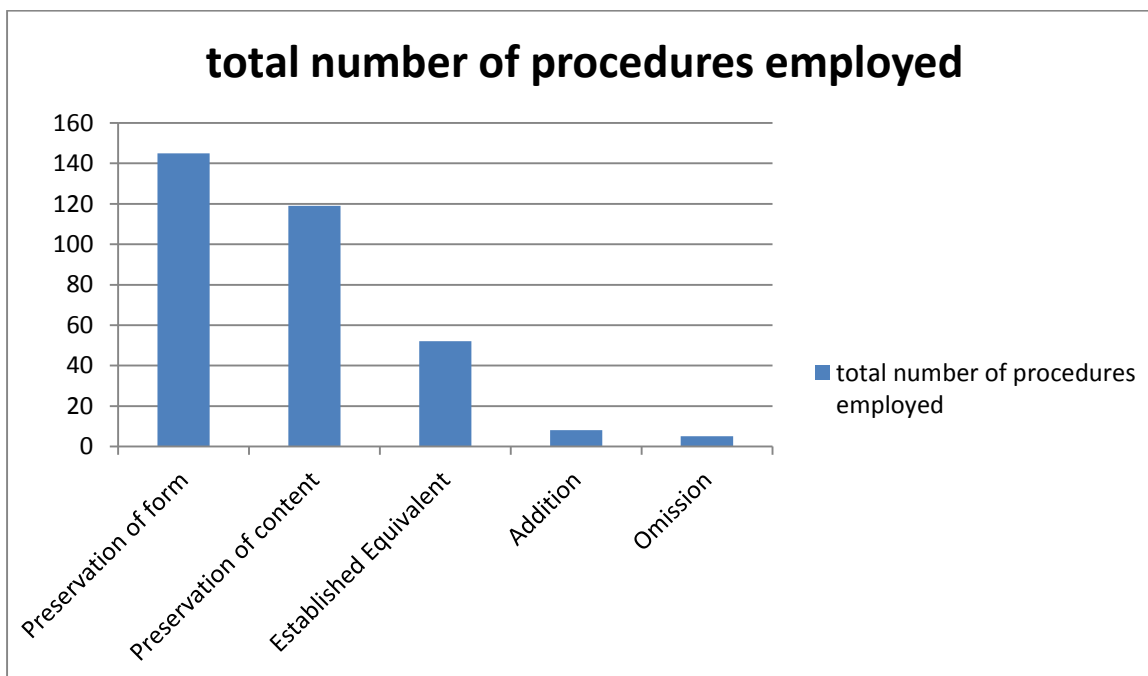


Figure 1. Frequency of the types of translation procedures

Table 2. Number of the translation procedures employed for rendering CSIs in each chapter and the mean

Procedures	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Mean
Preservation of form	70	29	46	48.3
Preservation of content	27	53	39	39.6
Established Equivalent	19	11	22	17.3
Addition	2	4	2	2.6
Omission	5	0	0	1.6
Other procedures	114	72	90	92
Total	237	169	199	201.6

**Figure 2.** Total number of procedures employed in the selected data

DISCUSSION

As it is shown in the selected English translation of the *Būstān*, the translator G. M. Wickens (1974) has frequently used some specific procedures for dealing with the Persian CSIs. In spite of the wide differences between two cultures and languages, the translator has preferred to preserve the form or content of the Persian CSIs probably in order to respect the original and foreignize the translation. In other words, G. M. Wickens (1974) has taken the readers to the author's culture. Thus, comprehending the translation is, more or less, difficult for ordinary readers who are not familiar with Persian culture.

Sometimes a CSI which has repeated in two or more places of the *Būstān* has been translated differently usually because their deep meanings are different. For instance, the Persian CSI “Kherqa”, a specific item of clothing dervishes wore in the past, which is categorized in personal life is seen in different places in chapter three. In the first and second place “Kherqa” has been applied in chapter 3, it conveys the mentioned meaning, yet in the next place in the chapter Sheikh Sadi has metaphorically used the word.

Sometimes although there is an established equivalent in the TL for a CSI in the SL, the translator has preferred to apply another term instead. For instance, he has usually translated the Persian CSI “Sheikh” as elder, while the word “sheikh” (also written as Shaikh), which has borrowed from the same Arabic word, exists in English language. Still, Wickens (1974) has rarely translated the CSI as “Sheikh” through the procedure of established equivalent.

Another point is the items which can be CSIs or not, depending on the meanings they convey. For example, “Darvīsh”, a Persian word which has used 44 times in the Būstān, 14 of which are in the 3 selected chapters of the present research, conveyed three meanings in the past: 1. a member of a Muslim religious group whose members make a promise to stay poor and live without comforts or pleasures and which has an energetic, fast and lively dance as part of its worship; 2. A pauper; and 3. A very pious, devout and ascetic person. The word is considered a CSI only when it conveys the first meaning. In the Būstān, “Darvīsh” has been used in its three meanings. So interpreting what exactly the author has meant is essential in this study.

Sometimes it looks that, in the translation of G. M. Wickens (1974), the translator did not have a perfect and comprehensive knowledge and understanding of some concepts in the SL and SC and did not manage to interpret correctly what the original author had meant. As an example to illustrate the point, we can refer to a story in the third chapter of the Būstān, On Love, Intoxication, and Delirium, where the Persian word “Bam” which has two different meanings: rooftop and morning has been incorrectly interpreted by the translator. Qolam Hossein Yusefi (1980) is a literary critic who has worked on the Būstān and Gulistān for years. According to him, “Bam” means morning in this story (Yusefi, 1980, p. 316), whereas Wickens (1974) has translated it as rooftop (p. 259). The reason why Wickens (1974) or other translators sometimes have misinterpretation when translating the Būstān is, most of the time, because the statements can be interpreted in many different ways.

CONCLUSION

In translation of CSIs the translator Wickens (1974) has chosen to use different translation procedures some of which more than others. The prevailing translation procedures from among the five mentioned ones for transference of CSIs are primarily preservation of form (22.3%), secondly preservation of content (21.5%) and next established equivalent (8.4%). In the second chapter (On Beneficence) and the fourth chapter (On Humility) of the Būstān, the most frequent procedure for translation of CSIs is preservation of form (26.6%), while in the third chapter (On Love, Intoxication, and Delirium), the most typical procedure is preservation of content (32.5%). The successive employment of preservation (both form and content) reveals the translator’s attempt to take the TT readers closer to the writer’s culture and foreignize the translation. He has preferred to preserve the form or content of the Persian CSIs, also, probably in order to respect the original.

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