

Translation Lexical Shifts in *The Swing* with Reference to Culture-Specific Items

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Abstract

Translation shifts are the changes that occur when a text is translated into another language due to either the differences between the two languages or the translator's choices. This paper attempts to examine the translation shifts in Mohammed Khodair's short story *The Swing*. It aims to find out how culture-specific items found in the source text (ST) have been translated into the target language (TL); whether or not these items have undergone shifts; and what strategies that have been used in translating them. However, the present paper discusses different scholars' views related to translation shifts keeping track of this concept with the old views about it and going through the recent ones.

1. Introduction

Translation is a complicated process which includes two different languages. Each language has its own linguistic, stylistic, and cultural systems which make it very difficult, or sometimes impossible, to convey to the target text (TT) the exact features of the source text (ST). Translation shift, as such, is a phenomenon that cannot be avoided. Eugene Nida (1964: 156) illustrates this point stating that:

Since no two languages are identical, either in the meanings given to corresponding symbols or in the ways in which such symbols are arranged in phrases and sentences, it stands to reason that there can be no absolute correspondence between languages. Hence there can be no fully exact translations.

Nida emphasizes the fact that languages are different in wording and structure; thus, there is no way to avoid shifts.

There are two kinds of shifts: obligatory and optional. Obligatory shifts occur due to syntactic, semantic, phonological, and cultural differences between the source language (SL) and the target language (TL). The optional shifts, on the other hand, occur due to the translator's choice and not to linguistic or cultural differences between two languages

(Pekkanen, 2010: 37). Catford (1965: 141) is the first scholar who uses the term “shift” to refer to “departures from formal correspondence in the process of going from the SL (source language) to the TL (target language).” However, Catford is not the first to discuss the phenomenon of translation shift since Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) attempted to provide a systematic analysis of the differences between English and French.

2. Translation Shifts

In the following, the views of some scholars about translation shift are going to be addressed. Before that, the place of the concept of translation shift within the approaches toward translation will be indicated.

Descriptive translation studies (DTS) is put by James Holmes in the 1970s and developed by Gideon Toury (1995) who makes theoretical and methodological additions to it (Brownlie, n.d:77, 78). In his paper entitled “The Name and Nature of Translation Studies”, Holmes divides translation studies into “pure” and “applied”, and each one of these two branches is divided into further subdivisions. Holmes’ divisions of translation studies are presented by Toury in a map. DTS forms the second branch of pure research in Holme’s map of translation studies and has three possible foci: “examination of the product, the function, and the process”. Product-oriented DTS includes examining an ST with its TT or several TTs of the same ST. Function-oriented DTS includes examining of the translation in the TL sociocultural situation, while process-oriented DTS attempts to describe what is going on in the mind of the translator while s/he is translating (Munday, 2000: 10, 11). Toury considers DTS as an empirical science that attempts to describe, explain and predict translational phenomena. DTS emphasizes the importance of describing translations in an objective way since results of an objective description will help improving the translators’ competence (Qiaozhen, 2007: 73).

It can be assumed that the concept of “translation shift” is located within the “descriptive translation studies”. Product-oriented DTS is made to find out the translation shifts, function-oriented DTS is made to assess the naturalness of the translation within the target language and culture, i.e., to find out if the translation shifts help the translation sound more natural, while process-oriented DTS is made in order to discover the reason behind the translator’s resort to the shifts.

Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) are considered the first who discussed the notion of translation shift, although Catford (1965) is the first scholar who gives the name “shift” for this translational phenomenon, in their attempt to find the differences between English and French by a systematic analysis. The main aim of their systematic analysis is to enable the translators to overcome the difficulties that they may face in the process of translating. For this aim, they developed seven translation procedures, three of them are direct, or literal, and the others are oblique. The direct procedures are borrowing, calque, and literal, while the oblique ones are transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation. The differences between ST and TT are supposed to occur in the oblique procedures (Cyrus, 2009: 92).

Nida (1964), on his part, argues that there are no fully exact translations for there are no absolute correspondence between languages. Hence, he stresses the need to find the closest possible equivalent. Nida distinguishes between two types of equivalence: formal equivalence, and dynamic equivalence. The former, i.e. formal equivalence,:

focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content. One is concerned that the message in the receptor language should match as closely as possible the different elements in the source language (Nida, 1964: 159).

Formal equivalence is source-oriented which is mainly concerned with accuracy and correctness (Munday, 2000: 41). Nida and Taber (1982: 201) state that formal equivalence “distorts the grammatical and stylistic patterns of the receptor language, and hence distorts the message, so as to cause the receptor to misunderstand or to labor unduly hard.” An example of formal equivalence is “gloss translation” in which the translator tries to reproduce the form and content of the ST in order to enable students to gain knowledge about SL structure and culture (Nida, 1964:159). Translation shifts are thus not expected to occur when formal equivalence is adopted.

While the latter, i.e. dynamic equivalence, “aims at complete naturalness of expression, and tries to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture, it does not insist that s/he understand the cultural patterns of the source-language context in order to comprehend the message” (Nida, 1964: 129). Thus, the relationship between the TT and its readers should be the same as that of the ST and its readers. Dynamic equivalence is then reader-oriented. Nida (1964: 164) argues that the translation should meet the following four requirements in order to be successful:

1. Making sense,

2. Conveying the spirit and manner of the original,
3. Having a natural and easy form of expression, and
4. Producing a similar response.

It can be seen that these requirements are reader-oriented except the second one which is source-oriented. That means Nida prefers dynamic equivalence (Almanna, 2014: 33). In discussing dynamic equivalence, Nida and Taber (1982: 6) state that “to preserve the content of the message, the form must be changed.” He argues that these changes are important to improve the text and make it natural to the TT readers (Nida and Reyburn, 1981 in Doty, 2007:114). To achieve the same response of the ST readers, Nida recommends translators to use certain techniques of adjustment in the process of translating. These techniques include additions, subtractions, and alterations (Cyrus, 2009: 93, 94).

Addition can be noticed when the linguistic material of the TT is more than that of the ST. Nida claims that additions are only accepted if they make what is implicit in the ST explicit in the TT without changing the semantic content of the ST, a case which is reminiscent of overtranslation (Cyrus, 2009: 93, 94). Nida (1964: 227) divides additions into the following types:

- a. filling out elliptical expressions
- b. obligatory specification
- c. additions required because of grammatical restructuring
- d. amplification from implicit to explicit status
- e. answers to rhetorical questions
- f. classifiers
- g. connectives
- h. categories of the receptor language which do not exist in the source language
- i. doublets.

Subtractions are the opposite of additions; they make explicit information implicit without reducing the semantic content of the ST (Cyrus, 2009:94). “Subtraction is to omit whatever is not necessary in translation or leave out whatever may be detrimental to the language habit of the language translated into” (Lim, n.d. :481).

Alterations are a category which includes shifts that are neither additions nor subtractions. Kinds of alterations are adjustments at the level of sounds, changes of grammatical categories like number, tense or voice, and semantic changes at the level of individual words caused by a different organisation of the lexicon. In addition, exocentric

expressions like metaphors or proverbs that are replaced by different target expressions with a similar function are considered as types of alteration (Cyrus, 2009:94, 95).

To sum up, techniques of adjustment can be considered as shifts that are viewed as techniques used to make the translation sound natural to TL readers.

Catford (1965) uses the term “shift” to refer to “departures from formal correspondence in the process of going from the source language to the target language.” Catford’s definition of translation shift depends on his distinction between two types of equivalence: formal correspondence and textual equivalence.

Formal correspondence is defined by Catford (1965: 27) as “any TL category (unit, class, structure, element of structure, etc.) which can be said to occupy, as nearly as possible, the “same” place in the “economy” of the TL as the given SL category occupies in the SL.” It is concerned with the TL item that plays the same role in the TL system as the SL item plays in the SL system. The noun “door”, for example, can be said to occupy in English language system the same place that the noun "باب" occupies in Arabic. Thus, formal correspondence deals with the comparison and description of language systems (Hatim and Munday, 2004: 27).

Unlike formal correspondence, textual equivalence is concerned with a specific ST-TT pair (Hatim and Munday, 2004: 28). Such an interrelatedness between ST and TT is clearly manifested by Catford, (1965: 27) that “textual equivalent is ‘any TL text or portion of text which is observed on a particular occasion . . . to be the equivalent of a given SL text or portion of text’”.

Catford classifies translation shift into two types: shift of level, and shift of category.

1. Level shift: it happens when an “SL item at one linguistic level has a TL translation equivalent at a different level” (Catford, 1965: 141). This kind of shift can only occur at the levels of grammar and lexis. An example can be found in the translation of a grammatical structure by a lexical item such as the translation of a Russian perfective aspect with the English lexical verb “to achieve” (Cyrus, 2009: 90, 91). Another example is given by Almann (2014: 34, 35) related to the progressive aspect in English as in: “he is reading a novel”, “he has been reading a novel”, “he will be reading a novel”, etc. which can be expressed in Arabic using lexical items or expressions such as: لا يزال/ ما يزال “still”, الان “now”, في هذه الأثناء “at this moment”, etc.

2. Category shift: there are four types of category shift:

- a. Structural shifts: Catford states that these are the most common type of shifts and they include shifts in grammatical structures (Munday, 2000:61). For example, the structure “S+V+O” of the sentence “John ate the apple”, is shifted to “V+S+O” when translated into Arabic, "أكل جون التفاحة". Another example when the active voice is changed into passive voice and vice versa (Almanna, 2014: 35).
- b. Class shifts: Catford (1965: 145) follows Halliday to define class as “that grouping of members of a given unit which is defined by operation in the structure of the unit next above.” They occur when the part of speech of the TT item is different from that of the ST item. An example is the English “medical student” and its Arabic translation "طالب طب" where the adjective “medical” in English is shifted to noun "طب" in English.
- c. Unit shifts: These shifts occur when the ST unit and TT unit belong to different ranks. By rank Catford means the hierarchical linguistic units of sentence, clause, group, word and morpheme (Munday, 2000: 61).
- d. Intra-system shifts: these occur when the SL and TL have approximately corresponding systems but 'the translation involves selection of a non-corresponding term in the TL system' (Catford, 2000 in Munday, 2000: 61). Almana (2014: 35) gives the following example where the simple present tense expressed by the verb “show” is translated into the past simple tense in Arabic (TL) since the emphasis is on the completion of the action and not on its continuity and frequency:

SL:

Statistics show that about 9 out of 10 tobacco users start before they're 18 years old.

TL:

أظهرت الإحصائيات أن ٩ أشخاص من أصل ١٠ يبدأون التدخين قبل سن الثامنة عشر.

Popovic (1970, in Akbari, 2012: 578), in his essay *The Concept “Shift of Expression” in Translation Analysis*, defines translation shift as “all that appears as new with respect to the original, or fails to appear where it might have been expected, may be interpreted as a shift.” Akbari (2012: 578) argues that Popovic’s definition of translation shifts entails three

elements: (a) a relationship between the source and target texts (new with respect to the original); (b) a relationship between the target text and its reception in the target system (where it might have been expected); and (c) a descriptive point of view (may be interpreted).

Popovic divides shifts into the following types: constitutive shifts, individual shifts, retardation shifts, negative shifts, thematic shifts, generic shifts, and rhythmic shifts. Constitutive shifts refer to these shifts that occur due to the differences between SL and TL; while the individual ones occur due to the translator's choices. He then considers four levels at which translation shifts can occur:

- a. Subjective/objective: this level includes constitutive and individual shifts.
- b. Invariant/variant: this level involves the negative and positive shifts. To decide whether shifts are negative or positive depends on: "the character and size of the intertextual invariant, on the degree of loss and compensation, and on the preservation of the extent of semantic and aesthetic information in the text" (Biloveský, 2014: 1179).
- c. Macrostructure/ microstructure of the text: a wide range of shift types are involved at this level depending on the extent of text in which shifts occur.
- d. Functionality/ baselessness: this level is "understood as an expression of these aspects of translation style, canon, method and movement affiliation which are tied to the translation's particular time of creation" (Biloveský, 2014: 1179). Shift types that are included in this level are generic shifts, rhythmic shifts, thematic shifts, semantic-retardation shifts, etc.

Having suggested all these kinds of shifts and the levels at which they occur, Popovic attempts to show that translation shifts are phenomena which can occur at any process of translating.

Klaudy (2003, in Szilvasi; 2009; Akbari 2012; and Banhegyi, n.d) develops a system to describe the linguistic changes that occur during translation. She calls these changes "transfer operations" which she divides into lexical and grammatical operations. Lexical operations are sub-classified into:

- Narrowing of meaning (differentiation and specification): when the SL lexical item has several meanings, this operation is carried out to differentiate these meanings and choose only one.

- Broadening of meaning (generalization): when the SL word that expresses a specific meaning is replaced by a word that expresses a general meaning in the TL.
- Contraction of meanings: this is when two or more SL items can be expressed by only one item in the TL.
- Distribution of meaning: when the SL linguistic item refers to more than one meaning, so its meanings are distributed to several TL linguistic items.
- Omission of meaning: items of the SL that may confuse the TL readers are omitted from the TT.
- Addition of meaning: when new items are added to the TT in order to well transfer the exact meaning of the ST.
- Exchange of meaning: when the SL and TL phrasings are different, but they express the same meaning.
- Antonymous translation: when the SL linguistic item, especially idioms and proverbs, is translated into a linguistic item that expresses an opposite meaning in the TL in order to look natural for the readers.
- Total transformation: when the SL and TL phrasings are different and express different meanings.
- Compensation: when a certain SL meaning cannot be expressed in the TL, so the translator compensates for this loss either by refereeing to this meaning in a different place in the TT, or by using ways different from those used in the ST to express it.

Thus, lexical operations are used when the translator faces problems in translating ST words; s/he then resorts to these operations to transfer the meaning of these words. Grammatical operations are classified according to Klaudy into:

- Specification and generalization: when the SL grammatical unit is translated into more specific or general unit in the TL.
- Division: when the SL sentence is divided into two or more sentences in the TL.
- Contraction: when two or more sentences in the SL become one sentence in the TL.
- Omission: grammatical units of the SL that may confuse the TL readers are omitted from the TT.
- Addition: when the SL grammatical unit does not exist in the TL, so the translator has to add a grammatical unit in the TL that cannot be found in the SL text to compensate for this loss.
- Transposition: when the SL and TL word orders are different.
- Replacement: it refers to the change that occurs within the same grammatical category, e.g. the change from passive voice to active voice and vice versa (in Szilvasi, 2009, Akbari, 2012, Banhegyi, n.d).

These operations are used when the translator faces problems with translating ST grammatical structures.

3. *The Swing*

The short story Al-Urjuha “*The Swing*” by Mohammed Khodair in its Arabic version first appeared in the Beirut *Arts* magazine in 1968. It was a war story written after the June setback in 1967, where the author was at his 25 of age. The story tells about a soldier, named Sattar, who has just returned from the hell of war carrying a message for the family of his friend, Ali, who was killed in action, leaving his mother, his wife and his little daughter, Haleema .

The Swing was translated by Kadhim Sa’adedin and published in the *Iraq Today* Magazine in 1979. Sa’adedin is a prolific writer and translator whose translations range from translating novels, short stories, plays, poetry, biographical books, history, children literature, and methodology.

4. Translation Shifts in *The Swing*

In the following, translation shifts in the short story *The Swing* will be tackled with due emphasis being laid on the culture-specific items to know which shifts the TT underwent during the process of translation. That is, the paper is concerned with “lexical shifts”, which are part of “level shifts” to see which of their subtypes are applicable. The subtypes of lexical shifts, as said in the previous section, include: narrowing of meaning, broadening of meaning, contraction of meaning, distribution of meaning, omission of meaning, addition of meaning, exchange of meaning, antonymous translation, total transformation, and compensation. It is worth noting that the story under investigation, which has 2168 words, involves different kinds of shifts, other than shifts occurred in terms of level and category with their subtypes already mentioned. All other types and subtypes of shifts fall outside the scope of the present paper, and only lexical shifts that surface the culture-related items will be highlighted.

1. “كيس خيش” and “حصير” in:

- SL: ساعد الزائر الطفلة على الاستقرار في حمالة الأرجوحة المقتطعة من كيس خيش، ثم على الحصير الذي فرشته العجوز تحت الشجرة واسعة الظل.
- TL: “The visitor helped the child to settle on the swing seat made of canvas. He sat down on the palm leaf mat that the old woman spread out in the shadow of the tree.”

In the above example, the translator rendered the ST word “خيش” into “canvas” following the strategy of foreignisation, i.e. translation with an eye upon the TT

culture. The word “خيش” in this ST context here refers to a piece of hard rag used as a seat in the swing. Also, the ST undergoes what is called contraction of meaning when “كيس خيش” is rendered into just “canvas”. As for the word “الحصير” in the above example, it is paraphrased into “palm leaf mat”, a kind of transfer that is put under “broadening of meaning” in order to make the SL meaning clearer for the TT readers. What makes these two items, i.e. كيس خيش, and حصير somewhat difficult to render is that they occur only once, which denies the translator the chance of depending on the context.

2. “الحوش” in:

- SL: “أرى جزءاً منه كما أرى صفائح التناك المطلة على الحوش”
- TL: “I see a part of it and the tins overlooking the yard”.

In example (2), the transfer lies in the “compensation of the meaning”, i.e. the translator compensates the meaning of “الحوش” for “yard”, though the ST “الحوش” and the TT “yard” are not completely equivalent in terms of their implications.

3. “القنطرة” in:

- SL: “لم لا تعبر إلينا؟ القنطرة هناك”
- TL: “Why don’t you come across? The light bridge is over there”.
- SL: “ثم عبر قنطرة أنصاف جذوع النخيل المغطاة بالتراب المتماسك”
- TL: “and crossed the bridge of palm trunks held together by mud”.

In this example, the strategy of foreignisation is also used as “القنطرة” is rendered as “the light bridge” and “the bridge”. In the context of the ST, “القنطرة” refers to a special kind of bridge which is small and bent, and used by people to cross a river. Since the TT “the bridge” refers to a broader meaning than the ST “القنطرة” does, the transfer is put under the “broadening of meaning”.

4. “تكريب النخيل” in:

- SL: “أبوه خرج لتكريب النخل ومعه زوجة ابنه”
- TL: “His father has gone out with his daughter-in-law to cut off butts of leaves on the palm trees”.

Here, the ST “تكريب” is paraphrased into “cut off butts of leaves on the palm trees”. Since the ST and TT express the same meaning but with different phrasings, the transfer is categorized as the “exchange of meaning”.

5. “بمبر” in many instances such as:

- SL’s:

- "ما اسم هذه الشجرة يا حليلة؟" --- "بمبر"
 - "بمبر. إنها لا تنطق الاسم صحيحاً"
 - "ألم تأكل البمبر؟"
 - "ولكنه أخبرني أن البمبر يحتوي على سائل لزج"
 - "خلف شجرة (البمبر)"
 - "أحب البمبر؟"
- TL: in all the above example the ST "بمبر", which is a flowering plant growing in the topical regions, is transliterated into "bamber".

Since no equivalence can be found for the ST "بمبر" in the TL, the translator resorts to the strategy of transliteration supposing that TL readers will know from the context that "bamber" is a kind of trees. This is an example of localization,

6. "البن" in:

- SL: "أجابته العجوز التي عادت بقدر لبن"
- TL: "The old woman, who came back with a glass of laban (sour milk) explained".
- SL: "اللبن طيب حتى من دون ثلج"
- TL: "Laban is delicious even without ice".

Just as the case in the previous example, the strategy of transliteration is used when the ST "البن" is transliterated into "laban" since the concept of "البن" cannot be found in the TL. Equivalences such as "milk" or "yoghurt" are not suitable in this context.

7. "تنور" in many instances such as:

- SL's:
 - "ناراً تلتهب في تنور على الضفة المقابلة"
 - "وكان دخان خفيف رمادي يعقب ألسنة لهب التنور"
 - "وغير التنور كانت شجرة عالية عند الضفة"
 - TL: in all the above recurrences of the ST "تنور", the TT comes as "oven".
- The ST "تنور" refers to a special kind of oven made of mud in which bread is baked. The TT "oven" refers to a more general meaning than the ST is intended to, so the kind of the transfer in this example is the "broadening of meaning".

8. "دشداشة" in:

- SL: "خلع (دشداشته) وفانيته خلف شجرة (البمبر)"
- TL: "He took off his garment and flannel behind the bamber tree".

In this example, the translator tries to find an equivalence that looks natural for the TT readers, so the strategy of foreignisation is used again. The ST "دشداشة" is a special kind of clothes worn by people in Iraq. TT readers are not supposed to be familiar with this kind of clothes, so it has been translated into a general term, "garment". The transfer is then put under the "broadening of meaning".

9. In addition to the above culture-specific items, there are other groups of words that are not viewed as cultural items but they are translated differently in different places. Examples of that are: "جادة" which is translated into English as "way" and "path"; "فتى" as "boy" and "young man"; and "جدول" into "river" and "canal".

5. Strategies of Translating Culture-Specific Items

The translator has used different strategies in order to overcome the difficulty of translating culture-specific items. The following are the strategies used by the translator:

1. The strategy of foreignisation: the translator has used equivalences that go with the TT culture, what is termed as foreignisation, as in the translation of "حوش", "خيش", "قنطرة", and "دشداشة" into "yard", "canvas", "bridge", and "garment".
2. Using transliteration: the translator has used the strategy of transliteration when translating ST concepts that cannot be found in the TL, examples are the translation of "لبن" and "بمبر" into "laban" and "bamber".
3. Paraphrasing: this strategy has been used by the translator to explain the ST items for which equivalences cannot be found for them in the TL for the TT readers, examples of this strategy are the translations of "تكريب" and "الحصير" into "cut off butts of leaves on the palm trees" and "palm leaf mat" respectively.
4. The resort to left-out: the translator has also omitted some ST items that cannot be translated into the TL or the TT readers may be confused if such omitted items are rendered. The example of this is found in the case of the ST "حياة اثمار الأعذاق" "الناضجة" which has not been translated into the TL.

5. Conclusion

The present paper investigates the problem of shifts and arrives at the result that translation shift is an unavoidable phenomenon in translation, especially when dealing with culture-specific items which are very hard to be translated without resorting to shifts. All the shifts highlighted in this paper have occurred for the purpose of making the TT more

acceptable and natural for TT readers. As such, translation shift is a translation strategy in itself. Different translation strategies have been resorted to in manipulating shifts, and hence in achieving naturalness, among them are the strategy of foreignisation, transliteration, paraphrasing, and omission.

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