

## **Translation and Culture: Allusions as Culture Bumps**

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### **Abstract**

Translating from different languages into another language, no doubt, translators go through ups and downs. That is, sometimes, the wheel of their work goes fast but from time to time some dilemmas stop them from going on. They should stop, examining their work and find reasons for them. Among them, the most challengeable is literary texts. A literary text is usually tightly knit to the culture that produced it, so it is tried to convey extensive cultural background or to represent another culture through literary translation. No literary text is focused on by itself, it is situated in the middle of a network of inter textual relations, the text's relation to the genre it is placed in, any references to other cultural texts, any presence of another text in it, and the other works by the same writer compose this network. Certainly the literary translator will encounter some problems, attempting to rewrite the text in another language for another thought and culture. One of the elements present in almost all literary texts causing intercultural gaps is allusion. This study is going to represent some definitions of allusion, as a culture – bound term, different forms and functions of it and finally look at the strategies translators have used in translating some examples of translating allusive phrases and sentences from Persian to English or vice versa. These strategies have been suggested by Ritva Leppihalme (1997) in her book entitled *Culture Bumps: An Empirical Approach to the Translation of Allusions*.

Keywords: allusion, culture bumps, intertextuality, translation strategies.

### **Introduction**

In a work of literature allusion is a brief reference, explicit or implicit, to a person, place, or event or to another literary work or passage (Abrames, 1971).

As Wheeler (1979) puts it, "Allusion helps to elucidate the meaning of each text and to indicate the literary modes and conventions in which its author works." (p.5).

According to Lass allusion is a figure of speech through which some counterparts are compared on the basis of their aspects to history, mythology, literature, religious books, etc.(qtd in Leppihalm, 1997, p.57). Allusion is bound up with a vital and perennial topic in literary theory, the place of allusive substitutions are as old as English. Thus, an allusion is understandable only to those with prior knowledge of the covert reference in question. What is important is that allusion moves in only one direction: if A alludes to B, then B does not allude to A. For example we can say that one sonnet of Shakespeare alludes to a specific part of the Bible but the reverse is not true.

Since allusion and intertextuality are two interrelated words one should know about these two words. The former mentioned above. Here there are some explanations about intertextuality. Intertextuality as a term was coined by Julia Kristeva in 1969 (in Montgomery, 2000, p.160), and has been much expanded by other academics since then. Intertextuality is used in literary criticism to describe the variety of ways that texts interact with other texts; in particular, the notion of intertextuality stresses the idea that texts are not unique, isolated objects but are actually made out of numerous other texts both known and unknown. Allusion is a form of intertextuality that works largely through verbal echoes between texts (Montgomery, 2000, p.161).

Another term used to describe allusion is 'culture bump', Carol M. Archer (1986) used it to refer to problems in face to face intertextual communication, this term is not as strong as culture shock (in Leppihalm, 1997). Leppihalm (1997) defines it as follows: "Culture bump occurs when an individual finds himself or herself in different, strange, or uncomfortable situation when interacting with persons of a different culture."(p.4). Of course, this author also used this term in literary translation in which the reader may not understand a source –cultured allusion clearly until he/she refers to its reference or some explanations are given.

Allusion is commonly manifested by a 'frame'. A frame is a 'combination of words that is accepted in the language community as an example of preformed linguistic material' (Leppihalme, 1997, p. 41). Leppihalme (1997) agrees that when one wants to recognize and translate something rooted strongly in another nation's culture he/she needs to have much knowledge other than what is seen explicitly, in fact, the understanding of an allusion is prevented by culture unless the receivers are biculturalized so this barrier should be removed.

This study focuses on strategies proposed by Leppihalm (1997) to solve the intercultural problem of translating allusions. It is clear that TT readers, who have grown up in a different culture, will often be quite unable to recognize the names or phrases used and to make the necessary connection in order to make sense of TT passages in which source-cultural allusions occur. Allusive names and phrases may carry meaning or have connotations perceived by members of the source culture but which may convey nothing to TT readers in whose culture allusions are provided by different texts altogether.

### **Functions of Allusions**

Allusions enrich the texts in which used since they as literary devices make the texts ambiguous or exaggerated and at the same time they are used to create ambiguity especially when it is not possible to speak directly because of social or political considerations.

It can rightly be said that allusion plays the most important role in persuading its readers to accept what the author says especially when they quote some parts from religious texts or famous literary works. According to Leppihalme (1997, p.10) Functions of allusions can be broadly divided into three groups: Creating humor, delineating characters and carrying themes.

The first of these, humor, tends to function on a more local level than the other two, which are essentially cumulative.

Humor (including parody and irony) is employed to detract from the importance of a situation or character. Conrad's allusion to the "whitened sepulcher" in his *Heart of Darkness* is an example of irony which depicts religious hypocrisy.

Allusion can also function as an economical aid to characterization. Characters who make use of allusions, as Leppihalm (1997,p.44)puts it ,seem to be well-educated ,literate and intelligent and they use allusions in order to serve their interests ,as when a central character, who is a professor with a well established reputation in the expanding field of children's literature frequently alludes to Lewis Carroll and other children's classics. On the other hand, naïve and ignorant characters fail to recognize allusive remarks as addressees, and they themselves usually use allusions which are trite and hackneyed.

A useful distinction might be drawn between allusions operating mainly on the micro- level of the text and those operating on the macro-level. Simply put, the macro-level involves the internal structure of the entire text and its interpretation, its narrative and poetic structure, dramatic intrigue and authorial comment.

The micro-level on the other hand is the lexico-semantic and stylistic level (ibid,pp.52-53).

Paul Lennon (2004) distinguishes five functional domains of allusions which may serve for writer of newspaper texts. These five domains are as follows:

1. The intratextual domain: to attract reader attention
2. The inter (con) textual: to achieve borrowed stylistic effects, to achieve physical economy of expression, to exploit the productive ambiguity of words and phrasal units
3. The meta textual: to evaluate new information against existing cultural values and vice versa, to achieve ironic effects of ridicule or criticism, to achieve humorously grotesque effects, to convince by appeal to cultural values
4. The processing domain: to ease the cognitive processing load for the reader and writer, to cognitively challenge the reader and encourage him to read on.
- 5.The interpersonal-affective domain: to establish common ground with the reader, to persuade the reader syllogistically by implicit analogy, to impart aesthetic pleasure to the reader , to display the writer's world knowledge, beliefs, values and wit .

Generally speaking, the intratextual domain is associated with stylistic foregrounding ,the inter(con)textual domain with implicatures,the metatextual domain with evaluation ,the processing domain with easing the communication process,or,conversely making it more riddle-

like, and the interpersonal –affective domain is concerned with phatic bounding between writer and reader (235-38)..

Wheeler (1979) says that the allusions with which he is concerned function mainly within three areas of references: cultural, generic, and textual. Cultural allusions help to identify or define national, regional, or class cultures. Generic allusions indicate the relationship between an adoptive text and a literary convention or tradition. Textual allusions are by far the most common kind in Victorian fiction, establishing links between specific adopted and adoptive texts .They fulfill one or more of four different types of local function, which often complement each other. The first very common type of textual allusion in the fiction exemplifies the Victorian habit of encapsulating and preserving wise sayings: The gnomic allusion, that is, a statement transcribed or adapted in order to underline some message or theme economically. The second type of textual allusion, which is called by the writer shorthand notations, is conveniently concise, often being used to suggest typicality of character succinctly.

The third type of textual allusion is the borrowed embellishment, such as a purple passage or a reference which merely gives the impression that a writer is learned. The fourth type textual allusion tends to be the most interesting and important: allusion as a plot –pointer or thematic pointer in the adoptive texts (pp.18-23).

### **Forms of Allusions**

It appears that while similar forms exist in ST and TT, the function and meaning of the ST allusions may often not be conveyed by corresponding TL words.

In a simple classification of allusions Leppihalme (1997) divides them into proper name (PN) versus key –phrase name (KP) allusions and the degree of fidelity to the performed wording regular versus modified allusions. On the lines of metaphor studies (Brook-rose, 1958) other possible criteria could be ,for example ,the word class or phrase type of the allusion , leading to such categories as noun -phrase allusions(these latter-day Sam Spades);verb-phrase allusions(you’ve porlocked me);adjective-phrase allusions (sear and yellow),etc. Or classification could be based on syntactic function, with such categories as premodifying allusions (her Chesir grine);subject complement allusions (you were a very Parfit gentile knight ),etc.Another possibility would be to divide allusions into phrases versus clauses (our Sceptred isle; there are strange things in this world than in all your philosophies, Horatio)(p.55).

On the other hand Leppihalme (1997) makes distinction between proper name allusion and key phrase allusion, in the former, author refers to a name like *Saint Mary* and in the latter no name is mentioned , instead there is an phrase refers to that name, e.g:

A moment before the ghost of *the ancient kingdom of the Danes* had looked forth through the vesture of the haze wrapped city. (*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p.610).*The ancient kingdom of the Danes* refers to Hamlet, but there is no explanation in this sentence.

Proper name allusions might be real-life or fictional figures, names of well-known people in the past, writers, artists, etc. Sometimes, they are borrowed from Holy Scriptures or myths.

Applying slogans from films, advertisement, and political campaign, various catch phrases, clichés, proverbs, popular beliefs, assumptions and stories form a group of key phrase allusions. Sometimes, phrases from religious texts are mentioned as key phrase allusions.

### **Types of Allusion**

Allusions can be sorted into four thematic groups; religious allusion, mythological allusion, literary allusion, and historical allusion. This division has been extracted from theses of Ghanooni (2008) and Sahebbonar (2006).

#### 1-Religious allusion

Religious scriptures have always been a source of inspiration for poets and authors of literary texts. In fact they allude to religious scriptures to attribute value to their works. They might be

a) In the form of a verse from the religious scriptures with explicit or implicit references. e.g:

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* one can find this phrase; **seed and snake** {serpent} **baptists** which refers to the tale of Adam and Eve in bible; Simply stated, serpent seed doctrine teaches that the sin of Eve was not simple disobedience, but sexual contact with the serpent, and that Cain was the son of Eve and the devil.

b) a proper name associated with a specific religion (the name of prophets, saints, battles, holy places).

Stephen's name is an allusion to Saint Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Stephen Dedalus, like Saint Stephen, has conflicts with the established religion (*A portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce).

#### 2-Literary allusion

A literary allusion is an explicit or implicit reference to another literary text that is sufficiently overt to be recognized and understood by a competent reader, it might be:

a) a reference to a literary character, e.g:

“Bend down your faces, *Oona and Aleel*” ( in *A Portrait of The Artist as a Young Man*). *Oona and Aleel* is a drama by William Yeats.

b) a specific style used in a literary work, e.g:

Joyce's *Ulysses* refers to Homer's *Odyssey*

### 3-Mythological allusion

Mythologies are fabulous stories, reaching back into the dim past, which consist largely of tales of gods and heroes, their births and deaths, loves, hates, spites, and intrigues, victories and defeats, acts of creation and destruction. For example:

Stephen Dedalus's very name (The hero of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce) embodies the idea of flight. Stephen's namesake, Daedalus, is a figure from Greek mythology, a renowned craftsman who designs the famed Labyrinth of Crete for King Minos. Minos keeps Daedalus and his son Icarus imprisoned on Crete, but Daedalus makes plans to escape by using feathers, twine, and wax to fashion a set of wings for himself and his son. Daedalus escapes successfully, but Icarus flies too high. The sun's heat melts the wax holding Icarus's wings together, and he plummets to his death in the sea.

### 4-Historical allusion

History is another basic source from which writers and poets draw their allusions. Historical events and figures have had a great effect upon the themes, characters, symbols, images and language employed in it. For example:

*The Wars of the Roses* were a series of civil wars fought in medieval England from 1455 to 1487 between the House of Lancaster and the House of York. The name Wars of the Roses is based on the badges used by the two sides, the red rose for the Lancastrians and the white rose for the Yorkists (*A portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*).

### **Recognizability of allusions**

The sources of allusions might be one or some of these factors; history, literature, religion, cinema and television, etc.

Recognizing allusions depends on the reader's familiarity with the cultural texts that are typically evoked; however, one only can evoke something that is already there. Leppihalme (1997, pp: 62-6) suggests a number of ways which may enhance the recognizability of allusions which include, among others, the length of the phrase, non-standard spelling and syntax, deviations in style, rhythm and rhyme, and overt phrases such as *they say*.

### **Potential strategies for allusions**

Theorists always have been debating on the best strategies for translation. The problem is that the issue is all too often discussed, without reference to the context in which translating takes place; the social circumstances of translation are lost from sight. In fact, the beginning of a solution to the problem will depend on: who is translating what, for whom, when, where, why and in what circumstances? (Hatim & Mason, 1990).

A competent and responsible translator, after noticing an allusion in a passage of the ST and after analyzing its function in the micro and macro context, must decide how to deal with it.

Leppihalme (1997) makes a distinction between proper-name allusions and key-phrase allusions. This is motivated by awareness that the two groups require slightly different lists of potential strategies. Retention of the allusion, changing it somehow and omitting the allusion altogether form the basis of both lists. Differences arise from the fact that key phrases may only exceptionally be retained in their source-language forms (p. 83). But the list for proper-name allusions (p. 78-9) is indeed based on retention of the name, replacement of the name by another name and omission of the name, each strategy with some additional variants. Here is the full list:

(1a) Retention of the name as such

Joseph→ جوزف

(1b) Retention of the name with some additional guidance

يوسف → John, the prophet

Thoth→ توت،الهه خط

(1c) Retention of the name with detailed explanations (footnotes etc.)

اسرافيل → Israfil is the angle who will below the last trump twice .At first all living will die ,at the second all the dead will rise to be judged.

(2a) Replacement of the name with another source-language name

God's son→ مسيح

Virgin→ مريم مقدس

Gate of heaven, Morning star, Tower of ivory, are some of titles of Saint Mary used by Catholics .Since TL readers from another religion may not understand these words the translator uses the general word.

(2b) Replacement of the name with a target-language name

ليلي و مجنون → Romeo and Juliet

(3a) Omission of the name, but the sense conveyed through a common noun

صحراى محشر → Jehosephat

Jehosephat is the name of a valley where, according to Joel 3:2, the God of Israel will gather all nations for judgment.

(3b) Omission of the name and allusion completely.

The exceptional cases of retention as such (strategy 1a) are a group of names with conventional target-language forms. Typically such names are names of monarchs, certain cities, books and films.

For key-phrase allusions the list of potential strategies is somewhat longer. The potential strategies are:

(A) Use of a standard translation, e.g:

حضرت مريم → Refuge of sinners

حواريون → Apostles

(B) Minimum change / literal translation) the same as (A)

(C) Addition of extra-allusive guidance (including typographical means)

Translators sometimes use inverted commas or italic forms in order to show an allusive sentence, another way which might be used is” an introductory phrase” ;such a phrase shows that this allusion is something cultural,e.g:.... {and according to Bible} .....

(D) Footnotes, endnotes, forewords and other additional explanations outside the text  
Itself.

(E) Simulated familiarity, internal marking (marked wording or syntax)

It occurs when the translators make use of stylistic contrast to signal an allusion. This Leppihalm (1997, p.118) suggests, can be achieved by using lines from an existing translation of a classic to render an allusion.

(F) Replacement by preformed target-language item

The elixir of life/youth→آب حیات

(G) Reduction to sense (making the connotations overt but dispensing with the alluding

Words), e.g.:

Eucharistic hymn→سرود عبادتی

→unreasonable fault finding  
ایراد بنی اسرائیلی

(H) Re-creation using a variety of techniques

It s an appropriate strategy when the translator is searching for a translation that would convey as much of the meaning and feeling –tone of the allusion, resembling the work of an author, had to describe and harder to implement (Leppihalm, 1997, p.122).

(I) Omission

In addition to these nine strategies Leppihalm suggests that it is possible that the allusion is left untranslated, that is, it appears in the target text in its source-text form. The use of a standard translation is obviously a choice only if one exists, and it may occasionally be identical with the minimum change translation. Re-creation is a demanding strategy, so it is not very likely to come up in my analyses. The potential strategies are organized on the basis of Jiri Levý’s notion of ‘minimax strategy’: a useful tool for translators pressed for time, as they can put in a minimum of effort to achieve the maximum effect (in Leppihalm 1997, p. 26). Omission is placed last in Leppihalm’s list for two reasons: firstly, it may be effortless, but it does not result in a maximum of effect (p. 130), and secondly, she perceives omission, on the basis of the norms discernible from her translator interviews, as the last resort; permissible only when everything else fails (p. 88).

## Conclusion

Naturally, allusions are culture-bound, and the extent to which they are intelligible across cultural and language barriers varies a great deal. Various strategies opted for by translators in rendering allusions seem to play a crucial role in recognition and perception of connotations carried by them. If a novice translator renders a literary text without paying adequate attention to



the allusions, the connotations are likely not to be transferred as a result of the translator's failure to acknowledge them. They will be entirely lost to the majority of the TL readers; consequently, the translation will be ineffective. Translation strategies are translatorial ways of solving translation problems. Being culture-bound, allusions are potential translation problems. In order to transmit the thoughts evoked by the allusions in source text readers to the target text readers, translators may add guidance to the translated text. Often guidance is not added, which may result in changes in handling of themes or character delineation, clear in the source text but confusing or incomprehensible in the target text.

Translating allusive texts, then, is complicated by two factors. Firstly, it is probable that the readers of the translation cannot make much of a number of allusions, even if the source is given, because the connotations of those allusions are not activated in the reading process. Secondly, readers of translations are not a homogenous group, and some of them will probably spot and enjoy allusions if they are given a chance to do so, but will resent being written down to in the form of additional explanations (Leppihalm, 1997, p.110).

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In *SKASE Journal of Translation and Interpretation* [online]. 2011, vol. 5, no. 1 [cit. 2011-03-28]. Available on web page <[http://www.skase.sk/Volumes/JTI05/pdf\\_doc/03.pdf](http://www.skase.sk/Volumes/JTI05/pdf_doc/03.pdf)>. ISSN 1336-7811.