Translation of Taboos: *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Taboo terms are intensifiers which flavor our speech. The different outlooks of each society towards these expressions due to religious, political and social attitudes makes translating them difficult. Knowing the frequency of application of translation strategies for translating these terms can be of help to other translators. This study investigated the types of taboo terms and strategies applied in their translation in the novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie. This book has been banned in the home for its taboo terms. For the purpose of this study Cabrera's (2014) categorization of taboo terms and Davoodi's (2007) strategies for translating them were applied. Concerning the 150 found taboos in the novel the types of taboo terms in order of appearance were sexual reference/body part (55.92%), psychological/physical condition (11.84%), violence (9.21), animal name (6.57%), drugs/excessive alcohol consumption (6.57%), urination/scatology (3.94%), filth (1.97%), profane/blasphemous (1.31%) and death/killing (0%). The applied strategies in order of appearance were substitution (35.33%), taboo for taboo (26%), censorship (23.33%) and euphemism (15.33%). The 61% application of substitution and taboo for taboo strategies shows the tendency of the translator to maintain the force of effect of taboo terms than eliminating their force through censorship and euphemism by 38.66% application.

Key words: Taboo Terms, Translation, Davoodi's Strategies, The Absolutely True Diary of Part-time Indian, Young Adult Literature

INTRODUCTION

Translation is a problem-solving activity. Translators encounter some difficulties through the process of translation; finding solutions for these problems is one of the aims of Translation Studies. Culture is one of the problem-arousing areas in the translation process. Taboos are part of everyday language, and one of the cultural representations of each linguistic society. Different societies have different attitudes toward the taboo terms. Some of these expressions are culture-specific, so that some terms may be taboo in one language but not in another one due to religious and political attitudes. Studying this thorny area of language is of importance for better communication of the meaning to the L2. Knowing the strategies and frequency of their application in translation of the taboos can be of help to translators of these terms.

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-timeIndian is a comedy book which has been banned because of its taboo terms and scenes. The present study is an attempt to find out the type of taboo terms of the novel and strategies applied in their translation.

TABOO: DEFINITIONS AND TYPES

Many terms, definitions and categorizations have been provided for the term taboo in the literature.

"The term taboo is of Polynesian origin (the words "tabu" or "tapu" in the Tongan language) and was introduced to the English language only in the eighteenth century." (Fershtman, Gneezy& Hoffman, 2011, p. 139)

As Ávila-Cabrera (2015, p. 42)says diverse expressions have been used in the literature to refer to taboo terms. These expressions are presented in Table 1.

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2010) introduces taboo as "a subject, word, or activity that individuals avoid as a result of its extraordinary offensive or embarrassing."

Heatherington (1980) commenting on the relationship between taboos and euphemisms, defines taboos as "any action that is frightening …. merely those literally forbidden" (p. 185). He also asserts that since dreadful actions or topics are of different degrees, various levels of them are discerned: (1) mild taboos (e.g. money and mutilation), (2) middle level taboos (e.g. death and anatomy), and (3) never-never taboos (e.g. excretion and sex). (ibid.)

To Wardhaugh (2000, p. 234) "taboo is the prohibition or avoidance in any society of behavior believed to be harmful to its members in that it would cause them anxiety, embarrassment, or shame".

According to Gao (2013) taboo word is a word that people avoid using it because of religious, political or sexual reasons and usually use a euphemism instead of it.

Ávila-Cabrera (2015) presents a distinction between offensive and taboo language. According to Ávila-Cabrera (2015, p. 42) "'offensive words' refer to terms that are considered derogatory, abusive and/or insulting, whereas 'taboo words' may be regarded as unwelcome terms depending on the context, culture and language in which they are uttered […]".

In general, everything which is forbidden whether to eat, drink, wear, say or do due to religious, political and social considerations is called taboo.

There are also various categorizations for the taboo terms. In table 2 the taxonomies of taboo terms provided by different scholars are presented.

STRATEGIES FOR TRANSLATING TABOO TERMS

As taboos are part of the culture of each language, for translating a taboo the translator must be familiar with both source and target languages in order to know whether the taboo word in the SL, is known as taboo in the TL or not. According to Behzad and Salmani (2013, p. 227) three possibilities may arise in the process of translating taboo terms:

a) the taboo term in L1 is not taboo in L2, b) the taboo term in L1 is taboo in L2 too, and c) the term which is not taboo in L1 is considered as taboo in L2. Facing these situations, in part (a), the translator has no problem and can translate the word easily, but in parts (b) and (c), there are some choices to render if not exact but similar and acceptable meaning and feeling of the word into the second language.

There are different strategies for translating taboo terms. Each translator use one of them according to the context.

These strategies are presented in table 3.

In the present study the strategies proposed by Davoodi (2009) are applied as theoretical framework.

THE ABSOLUTELY TRUE DIARY OF A PART-TIME INDIAN

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian (2008) is a novel for young adults written by Sherman Alexie and illustrated by Ellen Forney. It is about a young Indian boy and has won several awards like *National Book Award for Young People Literature, 2008 American Indian Youth Literature Awards, American Indian Library Association Best Young Adult Book* and some others. Despite it's received rewards,

it has also been met with censorship. Examples of censorship include the removal of the book from libraries and school curricula, its exclusion from student reading lists, and other barriers to stop students from accessing the book. The topics addressed in the book that have been controversial are its perceived cultural insensitivity, provocative and explicit language, scenes that are sexually explicit or anti-family, and depictions of bullying and violence. This book has been translated into Persian by RaziHirmandi in 2011.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study was an attempt to answer the following questions:
1. What is the frequency of types of the taboos of the novel *the Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* based on Cabrera's categorization?
2. What is the frequency of application of Davoodi's strategies in translating taboo terms in Persian translation of the novel?

METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of gathering the data of this descriptive study, the taboos of this novel were identified and categorized based on Cabrera's categorization. The strategies applied in translation of the total 150 found taboos were determined based on Davoodi's proposed strategies. All these data were gathered in data sheets including a five column table containing No., English taboo term/expression, Persian translation, type of taboo term and the applied strategy.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the present study the strategies proposed by Davoodi are applied as the theoretical framework. The following is the description of these strategies.

According to Davoodi (2009), there are four possible strategies in translating taboo terms:

Censorship

The first possible way that a translator can choose when facing a taboo term in translation is censorship. As Davoodi asserted: "In this case, the translator ignores the term easily

Table 1. Expressions referring to the term taboo

No.	Expression referring to taboo term	Scholar as cited in Ávila-Cabrera (2015, p. 42)
1	Dirty language	(Jay 1980)
2	Strong language	(Lung 1998; Scandura 2004),
3	Bad language	(Azzaro 2005; McEnery 2006)
4	Foul language	(Azzaro 2005; Wajnryb 2005)
5	Rude language	(Hughes 2006)
6	Taboo language	(Allan and Burridge 2006; Jay 2009)
7	Emotionally charged language	(Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007)
8	Offensive language	(Hughes 2006; Díaz Cintas 2012; Filmer 2013)

Table 2. Taxonomies of taboo language by different scholars

No.	Scholar	Taxonomy of taboo language
1	Anderson and Hirsch (1985, p. 79)	1. Sexual organs, sexual relations
		2. Religion, church
		3. Excrement
		4. Death
		5. The physically or mentally disabled
		6. Prostitution
		7. Narcotics, crime
2	Allan and Burridge (2006, p. 1)	1. Bodies and their effluvia (sweat, snot, faeces, menstrual fluid, etc.)
		2. The organs and acts of sex, micturition and defecation;
		3. Diseases, death and killing (including hunting and fishing);
		4. Religion and church, naming and addressing sacred persons, beings, objects, and places
		5. Food gathering, preparation and consumption
		6. Prostitution, narcotics, and criminal activity
3	Habibovic (2010, p. 7)	1. Sex
		2. Religion
		3. Bodily functions
		4. Ethnic groups
		5. Food
		6. Dirt
		7. Death
4	Gao (2013, p. 2)	1. Bodily excretions
		2. Death and disease
		3. Sex
		4. Four-letter words
		5. Swear words
		6. Privacy
		7. Discriminatory language
5	Avila Cabrera (2014)	1. Animal name
		2. Death/killing
		3. Drugs/excessive alcohol consumption
		4. Ethnic/racial/gender slur
		5. Filth
		6. Profane/blasphemous
		7. Psychological/physical condition
		8. Sexual reference/body part
		9. Urination/scatology
		10. Violence

and censors it as an extra term" (2009, p. 1). But that's not an appropriate choice, "because in some occasions, the taboo term is a key term in the source text and the omission of it will distort the meaning of the text". (ibid.)

Substitution

Substituting the word with another one in target language is another way in translating a taboo term. But Davoodi believed that "it often certainly distorts the meaning" (ibid.).

Taboo for taboo

To Davoodi, "On the other hand, although the translator knows the expressions are not acceptable to target people and society, s/he prefers to translate them into taboo" (ibid.).

Euphemism

According to Davoodi: "euphemism is the substitution of an agreeable or inoffensive expression to replace one that offends or suggests something unpleasant" (ibid.).

DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Regarding the total 150 taboos in the novel, the types of taboo terms in order of appearance are sexual reference/body part (55.92%), psychological/physical condition (11.84%), violence (9.21), animal name (6.57%), drugs/excessive alcohol consumption (6.57%), urination/scatology (3.94%), filth (1.97%), profane/blasphemous (1.31%) and death/killing (0%). These data are presented in Table 4 and Chart 1.

Regarding the total corpus, the applied strategies in order of appearance are substitution (35.33%), taboo for taboo (26%), censorship (23.33%) and euphemism (15.33%). These data are presented in Table 5.

The data of Table 5 are depicted in Chart 2.

SAMPLES OF APPLIED STRATEGIES AND TYPE OF TABOO TERMS

In this part, some examples of each of the strategies in addition to the type of taboo terms are presented. The type of taboo term is shown by the No. of the related type based on Table 2.

Censorship

Concerning the total 150 taboos of the corpus, 35 (23.33%) was related to the censorship strategy. It was the third applied strategy in the corpus. Some samples of this strategy are presented in table 6.

Substitution

Concerning the total 150 taboos of the corpus, 53 (35.33%) was related to the substitution strategy. It was the most
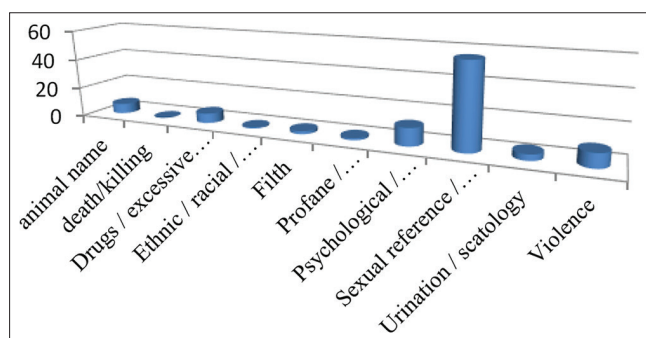

Chart 1. Frequency and percentage of application of taboos based on Cabrera's categorization
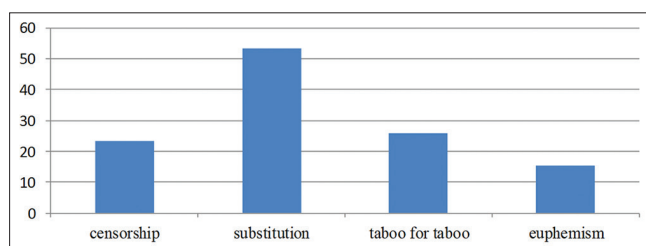

Chart 2. The frequency of application of strategies in translating taboo terms

frequent applied strategy in the corpus. Some samples of this strategy are presented in table 7.

Taboo for Taboo

Concerning the total 150 taboos of the corpus, 39 (26%) was related to the taboo for taboo strategy. It was the second applied strategy in the corpus. Some samples of this strategy are presented in table 8.

Table 3. Different strategies for translating taboo terms

No.	Scholar	Strategies
1	Venuti (1995)	1. Domestication
		2. Foreignization
2	Davoodi (2009, p. 1)	1. Censorship
		2. Substitution
		3. Taboo for taboo
		4. Applying euphemism
3	Vossoughi & Etemad Hosseini (2013, p. 3)	1. Omission
		2. Manipulation of segmentation
		3. Euphemism

Table 4. Frequency and percentage of application of taboos based on Cabrera's categorization

No.	Type of taboo term	Frequency	%
1	Animal name.	10	6.57
2	Death/killing	0	0
3	Drugs/excessive alcohol consumption	10	6.57
4	Ethnic/racial/gender slur	1	0.65
5	Filth	3	1.97
6	Profane/blasphemous	2	1.31
7	Psychological/physical condition	18	11.84
8	Sexual reference/body part	85	55.92
9	Urination/scatology	6	3.94
10	Violence	14	9.21
Total		152	

Two of the taboos are related to two of the categories, thus the total number of taboo terms has become 152 in the table

Table 5. Frequency and percentage of application of strategies in translation of taboo terms

No.	Strategy	Frequency of application	%
1	Censorship	35	23.33
2	Substitution	53	35.33
3	Taboo for taboo	39	26
4	Euphemism	23	15.33

Two of the taboos are related to two of the categories, thus the total number of taboo terms has become 152 in the table

Euphemism

Concerning the total 150 taboos of the corpus, 23 (15.33%) was related to the euphemism strategy. It was the least applied strategy in the corpus. Some samples of this strategy are presented in table 9.

CONCLUSION

Translating taboo expressions is a thorny challenge for translators, thus a worthy area of analysis. Knowing how translators encounter this challenge can be of help to other translators.

This study was an investigation of the types of taboo terms and strategies applied in their translation in the novel *The Absolutely True Diary of an Absolutely Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie. Knowing these facts help translators to choose an appropriate strategy in the translating taboo terms.

Concerning the 150 found taboos in the novel the type- of taboo terms based on Cabrera's (2014) categorization in order of appearance were sexual reference/body part (55.92%), psychological/physical condition (11.84%), violence (9.21), animal name (6.57%), drugs/excessive alcohol consumption (6.57%), urination/scatology (3.94%), filth (1.97%), profane/blasphemous (1.31%) and death/killing (0%).

The applied strategies based on Davoodi's (2007) strategies for translating taboos in order of appearance were substitution (35.33%), taboo for taboo (26%), censorship (23.33%) and euphemism (15.33%).

As 61.33% of taboos have been translated applying substitution and taboo for taboo strategies it shows that the tendency of the translator mostly was retaining strong effect of taboo term than eliminating its force by censorship and euphemism strategies.

Table 6. Samples of censorship strategy

No.	English corpus	Persian translation	Type of taboo term
1	Penis (164)	---	8
2	Gay people were seen as magical, too. (128)	---	8
3	She was wearing a white shirt and white shorts, and I could see the outlines of her white bra and white panties. (96)	---	8

Table 7. Samples of substitution strategy

No.	English corpus	Persian translation	Type of taboo term
1	Come on, you wuss. (15)	بیا، ریغونه.(28)	7
2	Roger and his friends were laughing likecrazy (54)	راجر و دوستانش داشتند مثل خر می‌خندیدند.(80)	7
3	With his poor-assfamily. (7)	با خانواده بدبختش (17)	1
4	Dumb-ass? (190)	کله پوک (262)	1

Table 8. Samples of taboo for taboo strategy

No.	English corpus	Persian translation	Type of taboo term
1	He was a funny and kind drunk. (59)	از آن مست‌های بامزه و مهربان.(86)	3
2	Hey, Asshole. (97)	سلام. خره!(134)	1
3	You are a little asshole. (152)	تو یه کره خری!(209)	1
4	I'm not a cruel bastard, okay? (175)	من یک حرامزاده ی سنگدل نیستم می فهمی؟ (241)	7

Table 9. Samples of euphemism strategy

No.	English corpus	Persian translation	Type of taboo term
1	We'll *kick your asses* next year. (163)	نوبت بعدی دهنتونو صاف می کنیم.(225)	8
2	He was exactly the kind of kid who would e-mail *his bare ass* (and bare everything else) to the world. (108)	دقیقاً از آن قماش بچه‌هایی بود که ماتحت لختش را (و هر چیز دیگرش را) برای تمام دنیا ایمیل می‌کرد.(151)	8
3	Who knew that tears of sympathy could be *so sexy*? (107)	کی فکرش را میکرد اشک‌های دلسوزی این قدر باحال باشند؟ (147)	8
4	A really *HOT* anorexic. (90)	یه بی‌اشتهایی از نوع جذابش.(151)	8

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