Cultural-specific items in translation of the Holy Quran by Irving

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Abstract

Translation of cultural-specific items (CSIs) has always been a challenge for translators. To overcome this problem, they employ different strategies. The present study focused on the role of CSIs in English translation of the Holy *Quran* by Irving and how he has used different strategies in rendering them. The design of the study was a descriptive one and the data were collected from the second surah of the Quran (Baqara). The theoretical framework was Venuti's (1995) *domestication* and *foreignization* Model. This study analyzed the differences in the use of these two strategies through descriptive statistics by presenting frequency and percentage of each alternative. The analysis of the data showed that Irving used domestication as the main technique to render CSIs. The findings of this study could be beneficial for both students of translation and the practitioners in the field to get familiar with the most influential strategies in rendering cultural specific items.

Keywords: : Cultural Specific Items, Domestication, English Translation of the Holy Quran, Foreignization.

Introduction

Translation is a kind of communication between different languages. Newmark (1988) defines it as a craft in which a written message in one language is replaced by the same message in another language. According to him, translation is a craft consisting in the attempt to replace a written message and/or statement in one language bye the same message and/or statement in other language. A good translation is the one which has the same influence on the audience in the target language as the original text has in source language. To achieve a qualified translation, translator needs to be aware of different aspects. Some scholars in translation have noticed that an important problem of translating the holy texts is dealing with religious concepts and cultural specific items.

Nida (1964) pointed that translation is the process of finding the closest natural equivalent of source language (SL) in target language (TL), in terms of message and style. Larson (1998) has declared that dealing with religious-cultural items is the most difficult, both in finding equivalence and analyzing the source vocabulary. Among many challenges which exist for a translator to transfer the in-depth meaning of a concept of the source language to the target one, the main problem is how to render CSI, the meaning of which is tightly linked to the specific cultural context.

Translating books can be a hectic job. When it comes to religious texts like the Holy Quran, it might be even more hectic. The Holy Quran is regarded as the deposit of revelations made at various times to the prophet Muhammad.

Although true believers and Muslims believe that the Holy Quran is inimitable, there have been different translations of it in other languages. For instance, the text which is translated in English by Sale

(1734) is still regarded as an accurate literal translation text. In the previous century, Arberry's (1964) translation of the Holy text has been regarded as the closest translation to the original with respect to form and style. Among recent scholars who translated this sacred text, one can refer to Abdul-Rauf (2001).

When it comes to the translation of the Quranic CSI, two alternative strategies can mainly be employed. Domestication and foreignization strategies are usually adopted by translators to overcome the problem. Venuti (1995) discussed these strategies for translating different texts. Munday (2007) highlighted the point that foreignization entails choosing a foreign text and developing a translation method along lines which are excluded by dominant cultural values in the target language. Domestication, on the other hand, entails translating in a transparent, fluent and invisible style in order to minimize the foreignness of the target text.

In the act of translating, one must be aware of two points: on one hand, form and style; on the other hand, content and message. In general, translation of holy texts has involved carrying the themes and rhetorical subtleties of meaning that have to be carefully considered. The important fact is that sacred books are open to different interpretation. One word can be interpreted to many other denotative meanings which may not imply the intended meanings. Consequently, translators are faced with limitations and problems as far as finding adequate equivalent is concerned. This failure further makes target readers struggling to understand the meaning.

One of the most important reasons that make translation of CSI a hard task is the cultural differences. Every word in its own essence contains a wide range of meaning which is highly dependent on cultural components. Cultural norms may cause different perceptions of the same phenomenon.

The translation of the Holy Quran is a debatable process, because Arabic is full of cultural-specific concepts with no equivalent in other languages; consequently, some equivalents fail to convey their cultural meaning thoroughly. Translation is seen as the process of reconstructing a text into other languages.

As the Holy Quran mentions in the second verse of the Surah of Yusuf: "we have sent it down as an Arabic Quran", the translated text has been merely seen as a commentary, explaining, or paraphrasing of source text. In general, exact translation never occurs; rather this can be a basic interpretation of the Holy Quran. In the process of translation of the Holy Quran, language and CSI items and rhetorical features were not inimitable and reproducible into other languages. So, some parts of in-depth meanings would be missed.

Many research studies have been conducted on the translation of the Holy Quran. The current research aimed to focus on translation strategies employed by the English translator in order to transfer absolute and in-depth intended meanings of the CSI in the Holy Quran. Domestication and *foreignization* were two strategies utilized during the process of translation.

Generally speaking, there have been two major approaches to cultural translation, target oriented and source oriented, or as Venuti (1995) puts it; domestication and foreignization. They are two basic translation strategies which provide both linguistic and cultural guidance. According to Venuti, the former refers to an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, bring the author back home while the latter is an ethno deviant pressure on those cultural values to register the linguistic difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad. Domestication designates the type of translation where a transparent, fluent style is adopted to

minimize the strangeness of the foreign text for target language readers, while foreignization means a target text which deliberately breaks target conventions by retaining something of the foreignness of the original (Shuttleworth & Cowie, 1997).

Some researchers have preferred the first strategy, moving reader towards the writer or as Venuti (1995) puts it, foreignization. In his opinion, a translator must valorize the foreign and transfer them into the target language (Munday, 2001). Venuti insists on foreignization or, as he often calls it, minoritizing translation, to cultivate a varied and "heterogeneous discourse".

There are other definitions of foreignization and domestication presented by other scholars. Foreignization is the introduction into the target text of concepts and language forms that are alien to and/or obscure in the target language culture. Domestication is the accommodation of the target text to established target language/target culture concepts, norms and conventions. Lindfors (2001) defines domestication as making the text recognizable and familiar and thus bringing the foreign culture closer to the reader in the target culture. She also defines foreignization as taking the reader over to the foreign culture and making a reader feels the culture and linguistic differences.

There have been a large number of articles and thesis on domestication and foreignization either in Iran or abroad. Birdwood-Hedger's (2006) study was a diachronic and comprehensive work of tension between domestication and foreignization in English language translations of Anna Karenina. She chose five English translations of Lev Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, covering over a century of the history of translations into English. She analyzed the relationship between earlier and later translations and showed how the history of translation of Anna Karenina into English reflects different stages of translation evolution.

Another remarkable work on foreignization and domestication strategies was conducted by Zare-Behtash and Firoozkoohi (2009). They investigated six books of Hemingway in the Persian translations examining the two strategies and found out that domestication has been the most pervasive cultural translation strategy in rendering them.

Beh-Afarin (2015) discussed that possible role of translation in the formation of Iranian ideologies and explored the prospects and possibilities of setting up domestication policies and serious impediments the State might impose to translation projects in Iran.

Pakatchi (2005) also studied translation of children's literature in a descriptive study using Venuti's (1995) framework to show the relationship between the period of time in which translations were done and the tendency to domestication or foreignization or a combination of both in the works which were specifically translated for children and juvenile. The purpose was to find out the different strategies (deletion, simplification, naturalization or standardization, etc.) used for translating cultural terms (names of characters, foods, places, pictures and illustrations, etc.), which show whether a translation was more domesticated or more foreignized.

Although domestication and foreignization have been studied by some researchers in Iran, not many research studies have been conducted on these strategies in translation of the Holy Quran. For instance, Salimi, Nosrati, and Sadoughi (2014) have studied CSIs in the Holy Quran and pointed out that culture and translation are intrinsically linked but it doesn't cover the strategies used in rendering. Therefore, this study aimed at investigating the strategies employed in rendering CSIs by Irving (1985) in translating the Holy Quran. It also checked domestication and foreignization to find

out which one was the preferred strategy used by the translator. In order to achieve the objectives of the study the following research questions were posed:

1. To what extent have Venuti`s domestication and foreignization been employed in English translation of the Holy Quran by Irving?

2. Which strategy was used more frequently by Irving in translating CSIs in the Holy Quran?

Methodology

Research Design

The present study employed a descriptive analytic method to analyze the data collected from the Holy Quran and its translation by Irving (1985). It was a comparative descriptive approach to determine the occurrence of the domestication and foreignization in English translation in terms of frequency and percentage.

Data

The data for this study were collected from the second chapter (Surah) of the Holy Quran, *Baqara (The Cow),* and its English translation by Irving (1985). The reason for choosing Irvin's translation was that he has provided the first American English translation of the Holy Quran. His modern style of translation in contrast to the other translations is obvious. In other words, he has never followed biblical style and his translation is considered a sort of a modest interpretation for English-speaking readers, especially for Muslims. The reason for choosing Baqara Surah for collecting the data was that there are ample instances of CSIs in this Surah to which Irving had to pay special attention in translation. Moreover, Baqara is the second and longest chapter (Surah) of the Quran. The chapter comprises 286 verses *(Ayat).* Therefore, it is a good source for collecting enough data for the purposes of this study.

Coding Framework

To examine the strategies used by Irving (1985) in his English translation of the Holy Quran, Venuti's (1995) framework was employed. The categories of his classification include domestication and foreignization. This framework was selected in this study because it is the most commonly used, robust and valid framework for dealing with CSIs and their translations in the literature at hand.

Raters

The raters of the study were the researcher himself, and one of his experienced instructors who rated the whole data. To contribute to the issue of reliability, the reproducibility (inter-rater reliability) of the coding framework was established by analyzing and categorizing the data by two raters. The raters worked together to come to a consensus about what category they would give to the data.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

To account for the translation of CSIs in this research, the original text of the Holy Quran in Arabic and its English translation translated by Irving were studied. After reading the whole Surah of Baqara and its translation a couple of times, every *Ayat* and its translation in English were examined to identify the instances of CSIs and the strategies employed by the translator to render them into English. Accordingly, foreignized and classified CSIs in the verses of Baqara Surah were identified and the number of the verse as well as the English translations were calculated. The instances of the CSIs found were then classified into four distinct class; namely, religious activities, proper names, names of places, and miscellaneous ones. To analyze the data, based on Venuti's (1995) model, the number of domestication and foreignization strategies used in translating the text was counted and classified. Then, their frequency and percentage were tabulated.

Findings

After collecting the data, the instances of CSIs were presented in two tables and the frequency and percentage of each strategy were calculated and reported as follows.

Table 1: *Foreignized Cultural Specific Items*

#	Verse	Verse #	English Translation
1	الم	1	A.L.M
2	وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الأَسْمَاء كُلَّهَا	30	Adam
3	يَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ اذْكُرُواْ نِعْمَتِيَ الَّتِي	40	Israel
4	وَظَلَّلْنَا عَلَيْكُمُ الْغَمَامَ وَأَنزَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَنَّ وَالسَّلْوَى	57	Manna
5	وَالصَّابِئِينَ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الآخِرِ	62	Sabean
6	فِي السَّبْتِ فَقُلْنَا لَهُمْ كُونُواْ قِرَدَةً خَاسِئِينَ	65	Sabbath
7	إِنَّ الصَّفَا وَالْمَرْوَةَ مِن شَعَآئِرِ اللّهِ	158	Safa
8	إِنَّ الصَّفَا وَالْمَرْوَةَ مِن شَعَآئِرِ اللّهِ	158	Marwa
9	شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِيَ أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ	185	Ramdan
10	شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِيَ أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ	185	Quran
11	فَإِذَا أَفَضْتُم مِّنْ عَرَفَاتٍ فَاذْكُرُواْ اللّهَ عِندَ الْمَشْعَرِ الْحَرَامِ	198	Arafat

As Table 1 shows, only 11 cases of Foreignized CSIs were traced in the English translations of Baqara Surah. Some of these items were used more than once in the Surah but the frequency of occurrence of repeated items were not checked. Table 2 refers to the Domesticated CSIs in Irving's translation. As the Table 2 shows, 42 cases of domestication were identified in the data.

Table 2: Domesticated Cultural Specified Items

#	Verse	Verse #	English Translation
1	ثُمَّ اسْتَوَى إِلَى السَّمَاء فَسَوَّاهُنَّ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ	29	Heaven
2	وَآتُواْ الزَّكَاةَ وَارْكَعُواْ مَعَ الرَّاكِعِينَ	43	Tax
3	وَإِذْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ وَالْفُرْقَانَ	53	Standards
4	ادْخُلُواْ هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةَ فَكُلُواْ مِنْهَا حَيْثُ شِئْتُمْ	58	Town
5	اهْبِطُواْ مِصْرًا فَإِنَّ لَكُم مَّا سَأَلْتُمْ وَضُرِبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الذِّلَّةُ	61	City
6	وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَكُمْ وَرَفَعْنَا فَوْقَكُمُ الطُّورَ	62	Mountain
7	قُلْ مَن كَانَ عَدُوًّا لِّجِبْرِيلَ	97	Gabriel
8	وَرُسُلِهِ وَجِبْرِيلَ وَمِيكَالَ فَإِنَّ اللّهَ عَدُوٌّ لِّلْكَافِرِينَ	98	Michael
9	وَاتَّبَعُواْ مَا تَتْلُواْ الشَّيَاطِينُ عَلَى مُلْكِ سُلَيْمَانَ	102	Solomon
10	وَمَا أُنزِلَ عَلَى الْمَلَكَيْنِ بِبَابِلَ هَارُوتَ وَمَارُوتَ	102	Babylon
11	وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ لَيْسَتِ النَّصَارَى عَلَىَ شَيْءٍ	113	Jews
12	وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ لَيْسَتِ النَّصَارَى عَلَىَ شَيْءٍ	113	Christian
13	وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّن مَّنَعَ مَسَاجِدَ اللّهِ	114	Places of worship
14	وَإِذِ ابْتَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ	124	Abraham
15	قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا	124	A Leader
16	مَّقَامِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ	125	Abraham`s Station
17	وَاتَّخِذُواْ مِن مَّقَامِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ مُصَلًّى	125	Place for Prayer
18	إِلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ	125	Ishmael
19	أَن طَهِّرَا بَيْتِيَ لِلطَّائِفِينَ	125	Who circle around it
20	رَبَّنَا وَاجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمَيْنِ لَكَ وَمِن ذُرِّيَّتِنَا أُمَّةً مُّسْلِمَةً	128	Nation
21	وَوَصَّى بِهَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ بَنِيهِ وَيَعْقُوبُ	132	Jacob
22	وَإِسْحَاقَ إِلَهًا وَاحِدًا وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ	133	Isaac
23	وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَى وَعِيسَى وَمَا أُوتِيَ النَّبِيُّونَ	136	Moses
24	وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَى وَعِيسَى وَمَا أُوتِيَ النَّبِيُّونَ	136	Jesus

25	مَا وَلَّاهُمْ عَن قِبْلَتِهِمُ الَّتِي كَانُواْ عَلَيْهَا	142	Direction of Prayer
26	مَن يَشَاءُ إِلَى **صِرَاطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ**	142	Straight routs
27	**الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ** وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنتُمْ فَوَلُّواْ وُجُوهَكُمْ	144	Hallowed Mosque
28	مِن شَعَآئِرِ اللّهِ فَمَنْ حَجَّ الْبَيْتَ أَوِ **اعْتَمَرَ**	158	Pilgrimage
29	لُواْ مِمَّا فِي الأَرْضِ حَلاَلاً **طَيِّبًا**	169	Lawful
30	وَلاَ تَتَّبِعُواْ **خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ**	169	Satan footsteps
31	آمَنُواْ كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ **الْقِصَاصُ**	178	Compensation
32	آمَنُواْ كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ **الصِّيَامُ**	183	Fasting
33	**فَعِدَّةٌ** مِّنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ	184	A number of other days
34	**فِدْيَةٌ** طَعَامُ مِسْكِينٍ فَمَن تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا	184	Making up for it
35	**الشَّهْرُ الْحَرَامُ**	194	Hallowed months
36	ثُمَّ أَتِمُّواْ **الصِّيَامَ إِلَى اللَّيْلِ**	187	The night of the fast
37	**وَأَنفِقُواْ** فِي سَبِيلِ اللّهِ	195	Spend
38	أَوْ **صَدَقَةٍ** أَوْ نُسُكٍ فَإِذَا أَمِنتُمْ فَمَن تَمَتَّعَ بِالْعُمْرَةِ	196	Charity
39	**مَنَاسِكَكُمْ** فَاذْكُرُواْ اللّهَ	200	Your ceremonies
40	رَبَّنَا آتِنَا فِي الدُّنْيَا **حَسَنَةً** وَفِي الآخِرَةِ **حَسَنَةً**	201	Something fine
41	أَن تَدْخُلُواْ **الْجَنَّةَ** وَلَمَّا	214	The garden
42	مَاذَا يُنفِقُونَ قُلْ مَا **أَنفَقْتُم** مِّنْ	215	In taxes

The findings of the study showed that foreignization was less than one-fourth (20.25%) of the whole CSIs, while more than three-fourth (79.75%) of the data fell into the domestication category. In other words, the latter was the most frequently used strategy employed by Irving in translation of the Holy Quran. Figure 1 depicts the percentage of CSI strategies employed by Irving in his English translation.
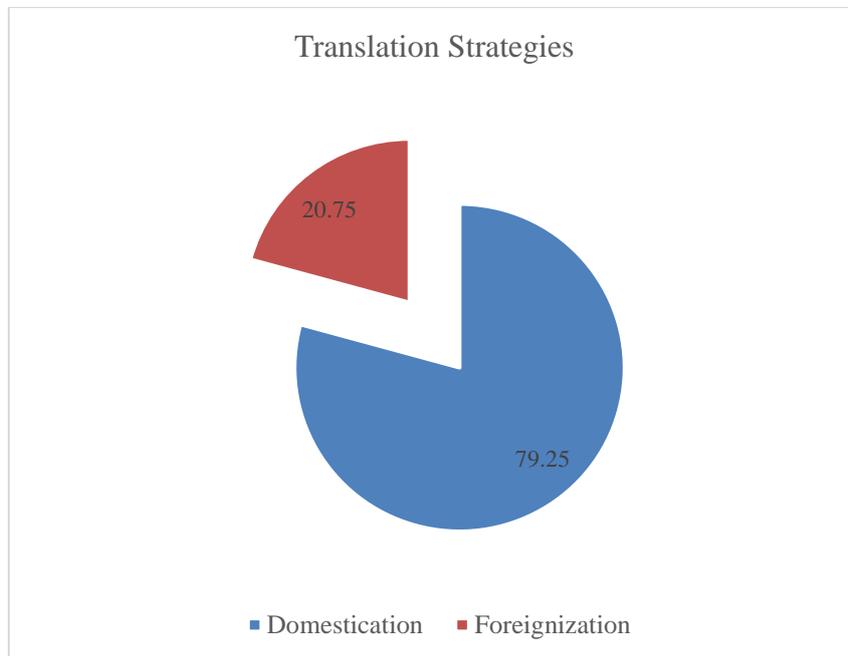

Figure 1. Percentage of domestication and foreignization in Irving`s translation.

Examining the whole 286 verses of the Baqara Surah in the Holy Quran also revealed that those CSIs found in the text body of this very surah can be classified into of four distinct major types encompassing (a) Religious activities, (b) Proper names, (c) Places, and (d) Miscellaneous items. The Figure 2 presents

these types as well as their percentage in   comparison   to   each   other.
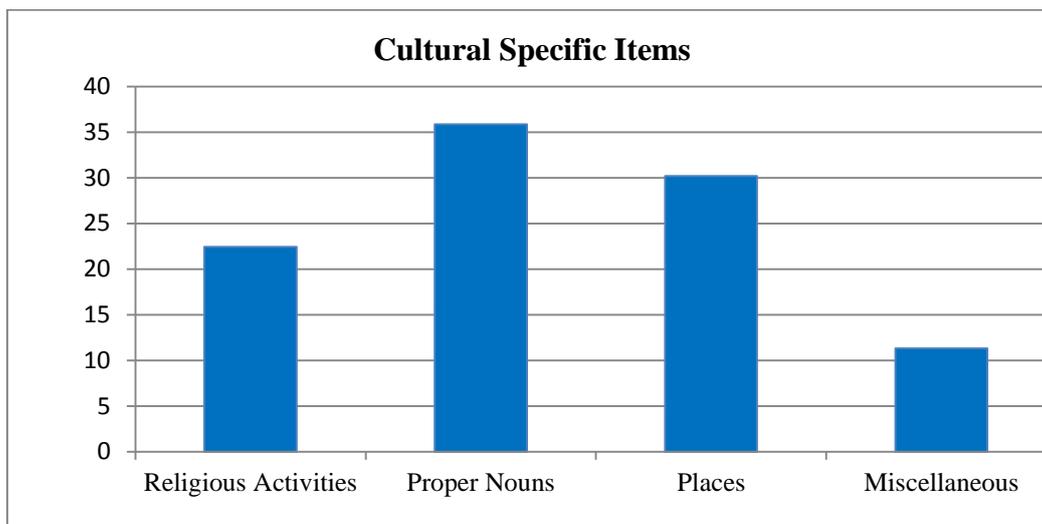
Cultural Specific Items

Figure 2. Percentage distribution of CSIs.

As Figure 2 shows, Proper names were the most frequently used types in the original text in Arabic (about 35%), followed by Places (such as Arafat and Jannat, about 30%). Religious activities (for instance Hadj and Omrah) were about 20% occupying the third place.

The remaining items labeled as Miscellaneous items were about 10%. Figure 3 depicts these four types of CSIs in terms of domestication and foreignization strategies used by Irving to translate them to English.
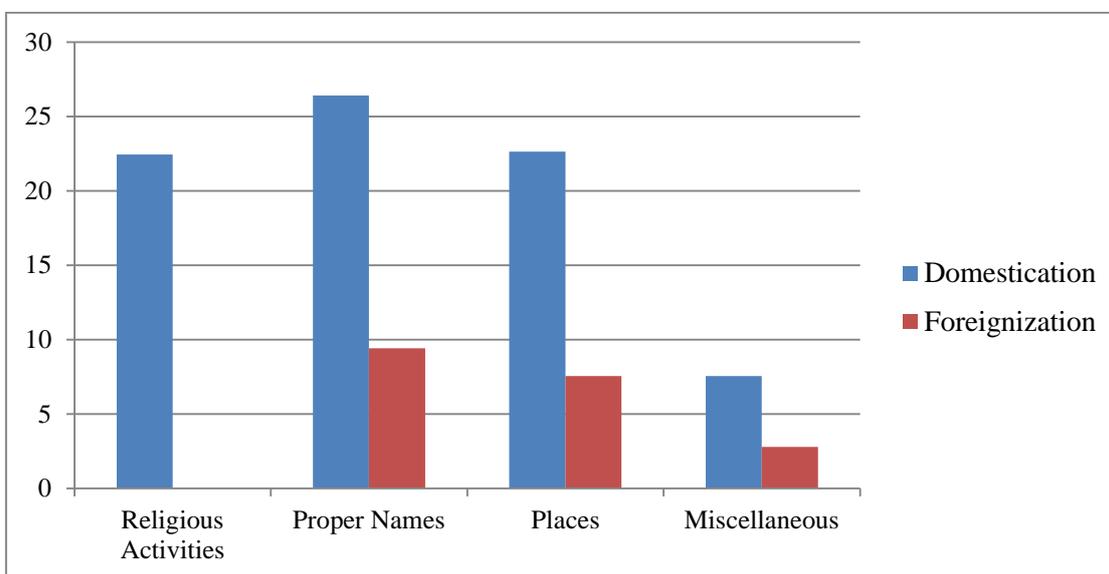

Figure 3. Percentage of domestication and foreignization.

Considering each aforementioned category of the CSIs traced, there was still a considerable difference between the application of domestication and foreignization strategies. Irving has employed the domestication method more than the foreignization one, and the differences between these two categories were consistent for all the types. Such a domesticated translation could show the

inclination of the translator toward the TL.

Conclusions

The findings from Irving's (1985) English translation of the Holy Quran showed that there was a clear use of domestication as the dominant translation strategy. The most frequently used strategy (almost one-fourth of the data) was domestication in rendering the proper Names. The frequency of this strategy was 26.42%. Therefore, it can be argued that Irving used domestication strategy to render the proper nouns to the target culture, which could be more familiar to the target audience. In contrast, the frequency of foreignized proper nouns was 9.43%. In rendering the meaning of the Religious activities, 22.44% of the obtained samples were domesticated and 22.64% were allocated to the names of places. On the other hand, no Religious activities were foreignized in translation, and 7.55% of the Names of places were foreignized. The rest of the sample consisted of those words which could not be categorized in any other groups; 7.55% devoted to domesticated items and 3.77% to foreignized ones.

As the findings showed, the target orientation was at the prime importance because the main strategy of translation was domestication. In other words, it can be concluded that domestication has always been the most pervasive translation method in Irving's (1985) translations.

What is worthy of mention is that translation is not a pure linguistic phenomenon but other meta-linguistic factors like the cultures of SL and TL should be considered in translation process. This study showed that employing different translation strategies in translating CSIs could form either a target-oriented or a source-oriented rendering, but the findings of this study supported the target orientation.

As Venuti (1995) asserts, translation of texts from one culture into another usually requires more than a simple choice of what gets translated or what does not, that is it requires a choice between translation procedures.

However, this study similar to other studies might have a number of limitations which need to be taken into account. The study focused on one Surah translated by one translator. Examining different Surahs of the Holy Quran and their translations by other authors from different cultures might lead to interesting facts or they might confirm the findings of this study. Different translators might employ different strategies. Further research is needed to confirm or disconfirm the findings of this study. Venuti's theory of domestication and foreignization is not limited to cultural features of language. But it also covers the linguistic specifications. To narrow down the subject of the study, the linguistic aspects of the text were ignored. Comparing these linguistic aspects could be another interesting topic and venue for further research.

The findings of the study might help students of translation and practitioners in the field of translation studies to get familiar with the most influential strategies in rendering cultural specific items. They can use the findings of the study to employ the translation tasks in translation workshops. Educational planners can use the findings of this study to specify the most influential, dominant strategies to conduct a target-oriented/source-oriented translation. To sum up, it should be emphasized that the focus of this particular study was on religious genre. Investigating CSIs in different genres could lead to new arenas of research for the interested researchers.

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