Proper Names: Translating Reference and Application

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Abstract

The translation of proper names has often been considered a simple automatic process of translation from one language into another, due to the view that proper names are nothing but mere labels used to identify a person or a thing so they do not require to be translated as they have no meaning and do not carry senses.

This assumption could be faulty because most of the proper names are not simply identifying labels but rather have sort of meaning or meanings of their own that lead to significant consequences in the process of translation.

There are no rules for the translation of proper names, yet generally, it represents a real challenge for both professional and novice translators.

Key words: Proper names, Reference, Application, source text, target text

O. Introduction

Generally speaking, nouns are divided into common and proper names. Proper names refer to a specific referent, which serve to distinguish a particular individual from others, for instance, John, Peter, Helen, etc. Common names, on the other hand, refer to a class of individuals such as man, woman, and boy. It is noteworthy that distinction between these types of nouns gets blurred in some cases.

A Proper name is a name used for an individual person, place, animal, country, title, etc. and spelt with a capital letter, and it is a compulsory element that a translator encounters specially in literary translations. They play an essential role in a literary work as they may refer to the setting, social status and nationality of characters, and really demand attention when rendered into a foreign language. All languages have particular personal names, some of which are deeply rooted in the culture of the speakers of the specific language; consequently, they can pose unique difficulties in the comprehension of culture-specific texts. It is interesting to note that some personal names have specific connotations, and omitting this implies information that results in unacceptable translation.

As a categorization of proper names, there are "Conventional names" and "Loaded names"; "Conventional names" are unmotivated names for translation as they do not carry a semantic load. But, on the other hand, "Loaded names" are motivated for translation and consist of different other sub-categories. This is where the translator is faced with a challenge in translation of them, such as translation of descriptive names, bicultural names, names with a connotative meaning, etc (Hermans :1988).

1. Proper Names

In English, it is the norm for recognized proper names to be capitalized (Huddleston & Pullum 2002:1758).

Words or phrases derived from proper names are generally capitalized, even when they are not themselves proper names. For example, Londoner is capitalized because it derives from the proper name London, but it is not itself a proper name (It can be limited: the Londoner, some Londoners). Similarly, African, Africanize, and Africanism are not proper names, but are capitalized because Africa is a proper name. Adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and derived common nouns that are capitalized (Swiss in Swiss cheese; Anglicize; Calvinistically; Petrarchism) are sometimes loosely called proper adjectives (and so on), but not in mainstream linguistics. Which of these items are capitalized may be merely conventional. Abrahamic, Buddhist, Hollywoodize, Freudianism, and Reagonomics are capitalized; quixotic, bowdlerize, mesmerism, and pasteurization are not; aeolian, and alpinism may be capitalized or not. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proper_names.

A proper name is used to utilize words for the denotation of specific objects (Sciarone 1967:81).

Balazs thinks that, in their primary function, proper names are linguistic signs used for individual designation of an identifying nature (1963:52). Alexander thinks that it is used for a particular person, place, thing or idea which is, or is imagined to be, unique (1988:38). The list of proper names they give includes geographical names, titles of pieces of art, names of institutions and organizations, periodicals, and newspapers as well as brand names. In the English speaking tradition the concept is generally supposed to include the names of days, months, and seasons.

Proper names are not empty marks for reference, but they may also carry certain added meanings though they may be not precise but important property of the proper name, " the utterance of the name communicates a proposition to the hearer",(Searle 1975:140). This will have a bearing on the decisions concerning the treatment of proper names during translation. For example, in the Arab culture, Hatim Al-Taaei—the name of a very generous man in ancient stories—is a symbol of generosity; accordingly, if a translator, who, unaware of this fact, encounters the sentence, "*My father*

is Hatim Al-Taaei " in a conversation of two friends talking about their fathers' characteristics, the translator may erroneously assume that the speaker introduces his or her father's name, not his personality.

Proper names, thus, are used primarily for referring, while other definite description may just as often be used attributively in other words. While the denotation of an expression is part of the semantics of a language, reference belongs to the realm of pragmatics. Words like that "do not have reference, but may be used as referring expressions or, more commonly, as components of referring expressions in particular contexts of utterance"(Lyons 1995:79). Balazs goes in line with this point of view stating that, every proper name may be associated with a definition-like synonym (1963:51).

"They function not as descriptions, but as pegs on which to hang descriptions"; that is what Searle (1975:139) concludes concerning proper names. Then they are connected with the characteristics of the referent. In other words, it can be said that proper names have a sense, but this sense is radically different from that of definite descriptions. Anyway, proper names denote specific referents within context; and it is still debatable whether they only have reference but no sense or not.

Christiane Nord (2003:48) defined the term "name" as the word by which an individual referent is identified, that is to say, the word whose main function is to identify, for instance, an individual person, animal, place, or thing. She continues by stating that in this sense, names possess a certain deictic quality in that they point directly to a single, concrete referent. However, sometimes they may also acquire a semantic load which takes them "beyond the singular mode of signification." Therefore, names are viewed as mono-referential—they refer to a single entity—but not as mono-functional, since they may function as carriers of semantic, semiotic, and/or sound symbolic meanings in literary works. Then she also stated that in the real world, proper names may be non-descriptive, but they are obviously not non-informative: If we are familiar with the culture in question, a proper name can tell us whether the referent is a female or male person (Alice—Bill), maybe even about their geographical origin within the same language community or their age. She explained this by stating that some people name their new-born child after a pop star or a character of a film that happens to be fashionable (ibid).

2. Translation of proper names

Newmark reports that proper names, which include personal names, represent a translation difficulty in different text types (1993:15).

Being familiar with the culture, translators sometimes can infer some implied information such as gender, nationality, race, class, or religion from personal names. It is clear that translators must be familiar with culture of both the source and target languages, since awareness of these culture-bound names can lead to the most appropriate translation. Based on the foregoing information, it is significant to stress that the influence of culture on translation of personal names is undeniable.

In general, proper names cover several categories: names of persons, animals, companies, geographical places, zodiac signs and festivals, etc. Although many scholars provide their own definitions of proper names, the definition given in *The Oxford Concise English Dictionary* (2001:1146) is : " a proper name is "a name for an individual person, place, or organization having an initial capital letter ".

Sources of proper names vary in quality, at least for a language pair like English and Arabic, in which there is tremendous variation, both in how English (and other western European) names are rendered in Arabic, and in how Arabic names are rendered in English. One cannot assume a given source of names translations will have useful spellings. Coverage can be poor, and the translations may not match the spellings.

Bachman (1990) specifically points out that the knowledge of cultural references and of the figurative use of language should be considered as a focal element in the translation process. He holds that the readers and listeners need this type of knowledge to make sense of culture-specific names whenever such names occur.

In the case of personal names, there is another point relevant to a peculiarity of some languages; translators must consider the fact that the order of first name and surname is not the same in all languages.

The general view has come to be that whereas translation may be made difficult by linguistic and cultural differences, it is never as difficult as to be utterly impossible, "translation can never be completely finished, which also demonstrates that it is never wholly impossible either"(Mounin 1963:279).

From the translational perspective, Hermans (1988) also broadly divided names into two categories (i) conventional names and (ii) loaded names. Conventional names are those seen as 'unmotivated' for translation, since they apparently do not carry a semantic load; their morphology and phonology do not need to be adapted to that of the target language system; or perhaps because they have acquired an international status. Loaded names, which are those seen as 'motivated' for translation, range from faintly 'suggestive' to overtly 'expressive' names and nicknames. They include those fictional and non-fictional names in which historical and cultural inferences can be made on the basis of the 'encyclopedic

knowledge' available to the interlocutors of a particular culture. The distinction between them is one of degree: expressive names link with the lexicon of the language. The semantic load of the expressive names is more in evidence than in the case of suggestive' names. Hermans (1988) introduced at least four ways of rendering names from one language into another: They can be copied, i.e. reproduced in the target text exactly as they were in the source text. They can be transcribed, i.e. transliterated or adapted on the level of spelling, phonology, etc. A formally unrelated name can be substituted in the target text for any given name in the source text. And insofar as a name in a source text is enmeshed in the lexicon of that language and acquires 'meaning', it can be translated.

He (ibid) goes on to explain that various combinations of these "modes of transfer" are possible and that deletion of a source-text name or the insertion of a new one is also a possible translation procedure. These different ways of translating names are interpreted by Hermans in terms of the relationship between Target Text (TT) and Source Text (ST) along two poles of a continuum: adequacy vs. acceptability.

Concerning the translation of proper names Newmark (1988) stated that they are normally transferred in order to preserve nationality, assuming the proper names have no connection to the text. He pointed that regarding names that have connotations in imaginative literature like comedies, allegories, fairy tales and some children's stories, procedure of translation should be taken into account, unless nationality is important as in folk tales. If both nationality and connotation of proper name is important, Newmark suggested that at first the name should be translated into target language then the translated word should be naturalized into a new proper name.

Peter Vermes (2003) introduced four basic operations for translating a proper name: transference, translation proper, substitution and modification.

Lincoln Fernandes (2006), in his paper about translating names proposes the following procedures in the translation of proper names:

1- Transcription:

a procedure in which an attempt is made to transcribe a name in the closest-sounding letters of a different target alphabet. In other words, this procedure occurs when a name is transliterated or adapted at the level of morphology, phonology, grammar, etc., usually to conform to the target language system. In this procedure the translator may suppress, add, and change the position of letters, probably as a way to preserve the readability of the text in the TL context.

E.g. Democracy → ديمقراطية

2- Substitution:

In this procedure, a formally and/or semantically unrelated name is a substitute in the target text for any existent name in the source text. In other words, the TL name and the SL name exist in their respective referential worlds, but are not related to each other in terms of form and/or semantic significance.

E.g. Urwa Ibnul Ward   →   Robin Hood

3- Rendition:

This is a "coincidental" procedure used when the name is transparent or semantically motivated and is in standardized language, that is, when the name in a source text is trapped in the lexicon of that language, thus acquiring "meaning", should be rendered in the target language.

E.g. Ritchard the Lion Heart   →   ريتشارد قلب الاسد

4- Recreation:

This type of procedure consists of recreating an invented name in the SL text into the TL text, thus trying to reproduce similar effects of this newly-created referent in another target cultural setting. Fernandes noted that recreation differs from substitution in the sense that in recreation the lexical item does not exist in the SL or in the TL (ibid).

E.g. Radio   →   مذياع

5- Copy:

In this procedure, the names are reproduced in the translated text exactly as they appear in the source text without suffering any sort of orthographic adjustment. He confirmed that his procedure bears resemblance to Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) concept of "borrowing" as the simplest type of translation. From a phonological perspective, however, Nord (2003) points out that these names often acquire a different pronunciation in the TL. For example, in the name Artemis, which is the name of the Greek Goddess of Hunt, the stress is placed on the second syllable in Brazilian Portuguese [ar'temis] and on the first syllable in British English ['a:temIs]. Therefore, despite being copied, these names often acquire a different character in the target context.

E.g. Le Président de la Republic   →   President of the Republic

وزارتي امور خارجة   ←   وزارة الشؤون الخارجية

6- Addition:

This procedure is used to solve ambiguities that might exist in the translation of a particular name. Fernandes considered it as the one in which extra information is added to the original name, making it more comprehensible or perhaps more appealing to its target audience.

E.g. Shylock   →   شايلوك المرابي اليهودي

7- Deletion:

Fernandes considered this procedure as rather a drastic way of dealing with lexical items, but even so it has been often used by translators. According to him deletion as a translation procedure involves removing a source-text name or part of it in the target text. It usually occurs when such names are apparently of little importance to the development of the narrative, and are not relevant enough for the effort of comprehension required for their readers.

E.g. the character of " Shaiboob " in Antar and Abla love story.

8- Transposition:

This procedure is defined as the replacement of one word class with another without changing the meaning of the original message. Fernandes stated that this procedure also involves structural changes, "but it is often useful to isolate the word-class change as being of interest in itself" .

E.g.   حاتم الطائي →   Generosity

9- Phonological Replacement:

A procedure in which a TT name attempts to mimic phonological features of a ST name by replacing the latter with an existing name in the target language which somehow invokes the sound image of the SL name being replaced. He notified that phonological Replacement must not be confused with transcription. Transcription involves adaptation of a SL name to the phonology/morphology of a target language while this involves the replacement of a SL name with a TL name which is phonemically/graphologically analogous to it.

E.g. Othello   →   عُطيل

According to Sarkka (2007) proper names can be dealt with in a number of ways in translation because the communicative situation itself imposes certain limits on the translator's freedom of choice. In addition to the fact that there are pragmatic factors that dictate the strategies that can or indeed must be used in the translation of proper nouns, such as:

1- A proper name can be transported wholesale from the target text (allowance being made for possible transliteration or transcription depending on the languages concerned).

2- It can be partly transported from the source language (SL) and partly translated.

3- It can be replaced with more or less different names in the target language (TL).

Names of countries seldom pose a problem to the translator, variation does occur depending on the degree of formality involved(ibid).

Names of towns, municipalities and villages are examples of settlement names. There is no problem with names of relatively unimportant settlements that are carried over unchanged in translation. *London* or *Ontario* does not change its name in translation. With smaller

places, however, a gloss is often in place to give the reader an indication of the type of place concerned.

As for names of buildings and man-made structures, the general rule applies according to which the descriptor part is translated. There are exceptions, however. A proper name may be a converted common noun in which case the name is translated as a whole into most languages. (ibid).

3. Personal names

The basic rule concerning personal names is that they are left untranslated. In some cases, transliteration or transcription may be needed depending on the language. There are however, exceptions to this basic rule. A trivial one is that in certain languages the order of a person's first and last name is the opposite to the most common Western order of first name + last name. In Europe, English last names come before first names.

Like names of countries and large cities, well-known historic figures have conventional names used abroad: *William the Conqueror*, *Charlemagne*,. With improving communications and increasing knowledge of foreign languages, this practice may be becoming outdated. When Prince Charles ascends the throne, he will be called *Charles III* rather than *Kaarle III* in Finnish. Similarly, the present king of Spain is called *Juan Carlos II* خوان كارلوس الثاني.

There are also changing fashions in selecting this or that name for a well-known historical figure. Knowledge or lack of knowledge of the foreign language obviously plays a role here. The French *Louis XIV* and his namesakes with other ordinals are known in Finland under their Swedish name *Ludvig*, while they keep their French names in Britain(Albin: 2003).

An interesting case is the names of ordinary persons recorded in a language other than their mother tongue in historical documents. Should the names found in the documents be considered the 'real' names of the persons and therefore retained in translation or should the translator seek to infer the name form probably used by the person himself and his neighbors.

4. Other names

4.1. Names of works of art including book titles:

The first pragmatic consideration is finding whether or not the book has been translated into the TT language. If so, use the title of the translation. For major European languages, can be consulted for translated names of works of art, both literary and non-literary. Retaining the name of the original shows that no translation exists (ibid).

Names of musicals, operas and ballets are sometimes retained in translation. *My Fair Lady*, *West Side Story* and are known all over the world by the original names, as well as by its translated name(سيدتي الجميلة / قصة الحي الغربي). Similarly, titles of Russian operas (*The Swan Lake* etc.)

are normally translated, with the not surprising exception of names consisting of a personal name only (ليو تولستوي / يوري كاكارين).

4.2. Names of organizations and institutions:

Names of international organizations normally have translation equivalents in the member countries: *the International Red Cross* . الصليب الأحمر الدوليIn major languages, the acronym of an international organization is formed from the national name of the organization (e.g. الناتوfor English *NATO*). Only the most important organizations have acronyms based on the national-language name of the entity (UNESCO يونسكو).

5. Some special problems

5.1. Extended proper names in translation:

A problem point in the translation of English proper names is whether or not to translate the appellative part. Should it be left in the SL form with a second descriptor added in the TL or should the original descriptor be stripped. Usage varies here from one translator to the next. The choice is partially dictated by how likely the TL reader is to understand the SL descriptor in the TL equivalent. The less well-known the SL is in the target culture, the more likely it is for a SL descriptor (not recognized as such) to be retained in translation in addition to the TL translation of the same.

5.2. 'Second-hand' names:

The term 'second-hand' name is used to refer to source-text names from outside the source-text culture. An example would be a Russian name in an English-language text. Foreign names, that is, names foreign to the source text culture in the ST should always be tracked to the original language and translated directly from that. Failure to do so can be construed as ignorance at best and as a political statement at worst.

5.3. Adding a clarification:

Like cultural allusions unlikely to be comprehended by the TL audience, names that may be well-known in the SL culture, often need to be provided with an explanatory comment. or probably mean nothing to most foreigners. Similarly, small natural features need a descriptor as opposed internationally known places like *the Amazon, the Atlantic, or Antarctica.* Even with smaller features, after a descriptor has been used once, it is often more natural to leave it out in the continuation.

5.4. Transliteration of names:

Looking at the number of translation errors actually occurring in texts, a more frequent problem is that of the translator not paying attention to transliteration rules.

Conclusion:

As long as translation is considered a form of mediation between languages, and cultures; this imposes different procedures to be taken while translating proper names. Nord (2003) has pointed out that just a quick glance at translated texts can reveal that translators do all sorts of things with names; such as substitute, transcribe and omit them.

The treatment of proper names in translation is not a trivial issue but it is rather complex as much as other expressions which require a delicate decision –making process of careful consideration to their pragmatic function as well as the semantic one in the given context knowing that translation is not merely a linguistic exercise but rather an act of communication which involve the transaction of information from the source author to the target reader.

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أسماء العلم:

ترجمة الإشارة والمدلول

المستخلص

لطالما اعُتبرت ترجمة أسماء العلم عملية آلية بسيطة تُترجم فيها هذه الأسماء من لغة إلى أخرى. ويعُزى هذا إلى الطريقة التي يُنظر بها إلى أسماء العلم باعتبارها مجرد سمة يشار بها إلى شخص أو شيء وعليه فليست هناك حاجة إلى ترجمتها كونها خالية من أي معنى أو منطق.

إن هذا الافتراض قد يُحمل على محمل الخطأ لان مُعظم أسماء العلم ليست فقط سمة تستخدم للإشارة بل هي أسماء تحمل معاني خاصة بها والتي إذا ما تُرجمت فإنها ستؤدي إلى نتائج مهمة في عملية الترجمة.

ليست هناك من قواعد مُتبعة تحكم عملية ترجمة أسماء العلم. إلا إنها تمثل تحدي حقيقي للمترجم المحترف والمبتدى على حد سواء.

كلمات مفتاحيه : أسماء العلم – الإشارة – المدلول – النص الأصلي – النص المترجم إليه