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A Point about the Quality of the English Translation of *Gulistan* of Saadi by Rehatsek

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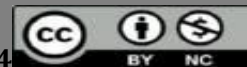
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ABSTRACT

This study was completed in two phases to check the reliability of some translations regarding the depth of the translators' understanding of the source language in this case Persian. First, a field work was carried out in the departments of Foreign Languages and of Persian language and literature of Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman during the spring semester of 2007. Secondly, a random selection of English excerpts was compared to the Persian source. We looked for structural, cultural and contextual probable mismatches. The objective was to raise consciousness in both Persian and English readers regarding the translations' level of accuracy. Consequently, some faults were identified in each and all the selected texts showing contextual, cultural and structural mismatches and misinterpretations.

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1. Introduction

A successful translation is one that conveys the explicit and implicit meaning of the source language into the target language as fully and accurately as possible. From the standpoint of the user, the translation must also meet the prescribed specifications and deadlines. For this reason, competence in two languages is necessary but not sufficient for any translation task. Though the translator must be able to (1) read and comprehend the source language and (2) write comprehensibly in the target language, the translator must also be able to (3) choose the equivalent expression in the target language that both fully conveys and best matches the meaning intended in the source language (referred to as *congruity judgment*).

Hence, schema as an affective factor in reading comprehension has an important impact on both the ability to translate and on the efficiency of translation. A schema (plural: schemata) is considered (Anderson, 1977) to be an abstract structure of knowledge, a mental representation stored in memory upon which all information processing depends. It is maintained (ibid) that schema may represent knowledge at different levels, e.g. cultural truths, linguistic knowledge or ideologies. These are mental templates that represent a person's knowledge about people, situations or objects, and which originate from prior knowledge or experiences.

On the other hand, translation is said to be the product of a process of language learning projected onto an interlanguage framework. Therefore, it is maintained that translation skills should be evaluated according to the state of learners' interlanguage in any stage of its development (Campbell, 1998). In addition, issues concerning the status of translation into

second language, in comparison with translation into mother tongue, have largely been accounted for in applied linguistics and translation studies. In fact, the problem of language development has frequently been disregarded, "tacitly assuming the existence of a perfectly bilingual translator" (p. 1). In the case of translating into one's own language, which is considered to be easier than the reverse, the abovementioned factors, including schema, deem necessary. They would be much more essential when translating from the L1 into the L2 and still more from L2 to L3.

In this respect, McAlester (1992) has stated that: "It is often claimed that translation of a competent professional standard can only be done into the translator's language of habitual use. However, in many countries, where the first language of population is not a major world language, and where there is a concomitant lack of translators who have a major world language as their language of habitual use, there exists, nevertheless, a powerful need for competent translation into such languages. (P: 229). However, the texts which such translators can be reasonably expected to handle competently will normally be different in type from those that are assigned to translators working into their mother tongue. It is unlikely, for example, that a translator would be professionally engaged in the translation of a literary text into a language that was not his or her language of habitual use except perhaps as a collaborator or member of a team.

It is also argued that, "Translation theories propose different methods for dealing with literary texts. Extracting the meaning of a text, in order to transfer it into the other language, is the core of translation work. Yet, because of its very special nature, reaching for the meaning of a literary text requires in-depth analysis of its form,



together with research carried out in areas as diverse as traditions, history, geography. etc., etc, in addition, of course, to a taste for literary writings - appreciating their beauty and understanding what they allude to. It is for this reason that no translation theory is capable, in its own, of providing an adequate approach for translating literary texts.”(Dyouma, 2005, Abstract).

Finally, a more controversial issue would be the case of the translator who translates from a second language into a third, and still more open to question when he or she translates literary texts of the second language into the third. This is the basis of investigation in this paper with focus on the credibility of the translation of Rehatsek, a Hungarian, who translated Persian literary texts into English. In the case of Persian literature, according to Encyclopedia Iranica, translations from classical Persian into English fall into two categories: a group of texts whose purpose is to convey the information of the original, most useful, prose or narrative poetry and not necessarily “literary.” and other translations designed to carry over the formal elements of a literary text: its nuances, its rhythmic peculiarities and rhyme schemes, and the relations of part to part that build up complex structures of meaning. The translation by Rehatsek falls under the second type. Champion, (1790); Wilson, (1924); *FitzGerald*(1899, 1997); Jackson, (1920); Browne, (1921); Arberry (2009); Bowen, (1948); Davis, (1989) are among many other translations from Persian completed through the past years.

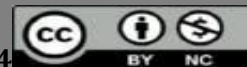
2. Rationale for the Choice of Texts

Saadi, who is one of the most famous Persian poets and prose writers of the late 12th and early 13th centuries, wrote *Boostan*

(The Fruit Garden) and *Gulistan* (The Rose Garden) which is a didactic work both in prose and verse. He is basically considered a moralist, whose stories have been compared with De La Fontaines’s fables. Translators interested in Iranian richness of culture, have translated the works of Saadi into different languages like the works of other Iranian poets such as: Khayyam, Ferdowsi, Molavi, and Hafiz. Saadi’s works were first translated into French in 1634 and into German 20 years later. *Gulistan* which deals with various subjects, from the manners of kings to the rules of conduct in life, has been translated by different famous translators like: James Dumoulin, Francis Gladwin, James Ross, Sir Edwin Arnold, Sir Richard Burton, G.M. Wickens and Edward Rehatsek.

The reason for selecting Saadi and Rehatsek for this study was the curiosity evoked among one of the researchers’ students majoring in English Translation and while doing a course which dealt with the translation of literary and Islamic texts. The students were assigned to do a comparative study of *Gulistan* and *Boostan* in Persian and English where some discrepancies and /or faults in the English version were observed with them. The students evaluated some of Rehatsek’s translations as really adorable and some others as misleading and unreliable. According to Classe (2000):

Rehatsek was a Hungarian who settled in India and, as the 19th-century phrase had it, "went native". He supported himself by teaching oriental languages at a British collage but otherwise avoided Europeans as far as possible. He produced versions from other Persian works (e.g. Jami’s *Baharistan*) and his deep sympathy for Asian culture clearly paid off in his translations. The version published under the name of the famous explorer



Richard Burton (whose knowledge of Persian seems to have been slight) is in fact Rehatsek's. Subsequent translations (Edwin Arnold in 1899, A.J. Arberry in 1945) have given versions of selections from *Gulistan*, but Rehatsek's is still the most recent complete translation. Wilberforce-Clarke's rather reverential *Bustan* (1879) remained the standard version until that produced by G.M. Wickens (*Morals Pointed and Tales Adorned*, 1974), this latter is extremely accurate, sometimes to the point that it is difficult to follow the meaning of the English; the translation reproduces the lineation of the verse in Persian (though no attempt is made to write English verse). Though it is to be highly recommended by its minute accuracy it does not for this very reason, read easily as English. (P:1058).

3. Literature Review

Thuy (2013: 56) has stated that translation quality assessment is not an undisputed issue in translation studies. Nonetheless, it is interesting for empirical research about the translating process, since some features that are consistently related to quality could be then systematically investigated. The main problem he has maintained that resides in how to express quality or what measure should be used for the quality of a translation. In this respect, Brislin (1970) investigated two aspects of translation: (1) factors that affect translation quality, and (2) how equivalence between source and target versions can be evaluated. The variables of language, content, and difficulty were studied through an analysis of variance design. Ninety-four bilinguals from the University of Guam, representing ten

languages, translated or back-translated six essays incorporating three content areas and two levels of difficulty. The five criteria for equivalence were based on comparisons of meaning or predictions of similar responses to original or translated versions. The factors of content, difficulty, language, and content-language interaction were significant, and the five equivalence criteria proved workable. Conclusions were that the translation quality can be predicted, and that a functionally equivalent translation can be demonstrated when responses to the original and target versions are studied.

Newmark (1981) questioning the possibility of reproducing the effect created by STs on TT audiences, he generally accepts Nida's (1964) concept of equivalent effect. Using Nida's dynamic and formal equivalences as a basis, he identifies two types of translation as "correct": communicative and semantic. The choice between semantic and communicative methods for Newmark seems to depend on the genre, for he assigns serious literature, autobiography and any important political or other statement to semantic translation where the criterion of assessment is the accurate reproduction of the significance of the ST. As for non-literary and technical writings, communicative translation should be applied, the criterion of evaluation being the accurate communication of ST message in the TL.

As *Gulistan* is a literary masterpiece, the close reproduction is required and this is what the researchers have investigated in the study. Researchers have apparently analyzed translations of this text from different viewpoints considering different elements. One such study was carried out by Taghizadehet. et.al., (2006) who focused on cohesive devices in terms of density, in Saadi's *Gulistan*. Sixteen stories from the second chapter of *Gulistan* (on the manner



of Dervishes) were selected and compared with their translated versions by Arberry (1945)/ Ross (1890) and Rehatsek (1964). Cohesive devices, as language specific markers for holding relationship between parts of a text were first identified and then classified into grammatical and lexical cohesive ones. Grammatical cohesive devices comprise reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction, while lexical cohesive devices comprise reiteration and collocation in which reiteration itself includes full repetition, synonym, superordinate and general word. The model followed in the research was Halliday and Hassan's (1976). The results obtained from the comparison of density of each type of cohesive devices between the original Persian text and the English versions reveal some differences, even among the very English versions. This suggests lack of one to one textual correspondence between the two genetically the same but typologically different languages, English and Persian, in so far as the base model is concerned.

4. The study

This study was done in two phases. First, a field work was carried out in the departments of Foreign Languages and of Persian language and literature of Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman during the spring semester 1385-86 (2007). Secondly, a random selection of English excerpts was compared to the Persian source. The aim was to check the reliability of the translations regarding the depth of the translators understanding of the source language, in this case Persian. We looked for structural probable mismatches. The objective was to raise consciousness in both Persian and English readers regarding the translations' level of accuracy.

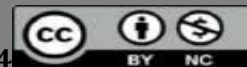
4.1 Sampling

In the first Phase, a sample of 46 subjects: BA, MA and PhD students of Persian literature, as well as BA students and professors of English translation were interviewed for this investigation. The number and distribution weight was haphazard and judgmental in that English translation majors were chosen judgmentally for back translation of texts into Farsi, and that Persian majors were selected to identify the contextual definition of the sample words from among a number of definitions given in dictionaries. Their details are presented into the following table:

Table:1 Participants of the study

Students	Persian majors	English majors	Total
Undergraduates	15	15	30
Graduates	11		11
Teachers		5	5
		total	46

An excerpt from the fifth anecdote of Saadi's *Gulistan* (chapter one: the manner of kings), translated into English by Rehatsek was selected. Copies of the excerpt from the anecdote with its English translation done by Rehatsek were distributed among a random sample of 46 subjects: BA, MA and PhD students of Persian literature, and BA students and professors of English translation. The students of Persian were asked about the deep and contextual meaning of two culture specific words i.e. /si:yæh gu:f/ and /væjh/ and their English equivalents. English majors and their teachers involved in the study were asked to back translate the excerpt from English version by Rehatsek into Persian. The results were then tabulated and analyzed.



In the second phase, excerpts from a random selection of the chapters in English were compared to the same excerpts in Persian. Since in the first phase chapter 1 was analyzed, then no.1 was doubled and so 2 was selected, 2 was doubled and so 4 was selected and 4 was doubled and 8 i.e the last chapter was added to the sample. So, chapters 1, 2, 4, and 8 were included in the study.

4.2 Results and Discussions

4.2.1 Findings of the first phase

Rehatsek's translation of the first sentence of chapter five reads:

A **donkey** having been asked for what **salary** he had elected to attend upon the lion, replied "that I may consume the remnants of his prey. ..." The word donkey is chosen as the equivalent for /si:yæh gu:f/ and the word salary for /væjh/.

In Persian, the first word i.e. /si:yæh gu:f/ is in fact a compound word meaning black eared. It refers to a mammal of the cat family viz. *felidae* (Dehkhoda Persian dictionary). It is a relative of cougar and the size of a fox (The Contemporary Persian Dictionary). It is also defined as a carnivorous mammal with big wide ears which have black hair with white margins. (The Big Dictionary of Sokhan; The Dictionary of Persian Language)

The second word i.e. salary is chosen as the equivalent for /væjh/. This word is defined (Dehkhoda Persian dictionary) as:

1. Cash, possession, gold
2. Reason, cause, incentive

The students and professors of English translation were asked to back translate both the excerpt as a whole and the words in isolation. Nobody (0%) chose any of the secondary meanings (2nd row above) of the word salary. On the contrary, none (0%)

of the students of Persian literature chose any equivalent from the 1st row which gives the options for the primary meaning of the word. That is, the students of Persian all agreed on the secondary meaning of the Persian word /væjh/ to fit this context. This means there is no equivalence between Rehatsek's choice of the word *salary* and the Persian word /væjh/ in this excerpt.

In the same way, the first word (that is, *donkey* used by Rehatsek for /si:yæh gu:f/) was examined in both back translation (by English majors) and identification of contextual meaning (by Persian majors). It was found that none (0%) English majors translated donkey into /si:yæh gu:f/ and neither did any (0%) of the students of Persian literature choose donkey for /si:yæh gu:f/

"They asked a Siyah-gosh, lion-provider; why you choose the service of the lion? He answered; because I subsist on the leavings of his prey, ..." (Ross 1823)ⁱ

4. 2.2 Findings of the Second Phase

In the second phase, the following types of discrepancies were found. A brief table is given first. Then, the examples are given in table 2. After that the detailed results are accounted for and discussed.



Table:2 Some types of discrepancies exemplified.

Cultural and /or contextual			Misunderstanding or slip of eye		Structural/contextual		
/vajh/	Incorrect Sense	salary	Donkey /derāz gu:f/.	/kheil/	/nakhl/ Palm grove	/keh/	because
	Correct Sense	cause	A wild cat /si:yæhgu:f/		Group/ carevan		who

Table: 3 Examples of structural discrepancies in their context along with correct forms.

Structural			
Persian	example	گفت دشمن آن به که نیکی ببند	
English	mismatched	That enemy is the greatest <u>who</u> does not see any good	In Persian: <i>Relative word refers to the point not the person!</i> (the patient not the agent) Also <i>sees</i> is interpreted as <i>does not see</i>
	correct	It is preferred that enemy sees goodness.	
Persian	example	مال از بهر آسایش عمر است نه عمر از بهر گرد کردن مال	
English	mismatched	Property is for the comfort of life, not[...] for the accumulation of wealth.	<i>The subject of the second clause is omitted</i>
	correct	property is for comfort of life not life for accumulation of property	
Persian	example	مُلک از خردمندان جمال گیرد و دین از پرهیزکاران کمال یابد	
English	mismatched	The country is adorned by intelligent and the religion [...] by virtuous men.	The scope of <i>adoration</i> is expanded to include the second clause and <i>perfection</i> is omitted
	correct	The country is adorned by intelligent and the religion is perfected by virtuous men.	

Story(Ch. 2: Anch 2)

It once happened that on a journey to the Hejaz a company of young and pious men, whose sentiments harmonized with mine, were my fellow-travellers. They occasionally sung and recited spiritual verses but we had with us also an a'bid, who entertained a bad opinion of the behaviour of the dervishes and was ignorant of their sufferings. **When we reached the palm-grove of the Beni Hallal**, a black boy of the encampment, falling into a state of excitement, broke out in a strain which brought down the birds from the sky. I saw, however, the camel of the

a'bid, which began to prance, throwing him and running into the desert.

تا برسیدیم به خیل بنی هلال

Tā beresididim bə **yeil-ə** bæni hæläl/

/.....

"Till we reached the palm plantation of the tribe of Hulāl when a boy of tawny complexion issued from the Arab horde" (Ross 1823, p.220)

Story(Ch. 4: Anech.1)

On the advantages of silence

I said to a friend that I have chosen rather to be silent than to speak **[most of the time]** because on most occasions good and bad words are scattered concurrently but enemies perceive only the latter. **He**



replied: "That enemy is the greatest who does not see any good."

The brother of enmity passes not near a good man

Except to consider him as a most wicked liar.

Virtue is to the eyes of enmity the greatest fault.

Sa'di is a rose but to the eye of enemies a thorn.

The world illumining sun and fountain of light

Look ugly to the eye of the mole.

گفت دشمن آن به که نیکی بیند

/goft dofmæn än beh keh niki binæd

He replied: The enemy **is better** to see goodness

He replied, O brother! That is our best rival, who does not, or will not, see our good!

Translations here are inconsistent with the source in that the maxim is about how one should behave towards one's enemy not which enemy is best. Priority is given by the source to the **situation** in which the enemy sees goodness. But in the translation, it is given to the **subject** (i.e. enemy)! In other words, in the source text, the scope of 'it is better' is on the patient not the agent.

Also, the written form of the verb / binæd/ = **بیند** (should see or sees) in Persian differs from the negative form **نبیند** in just 2 phonemes /næ/ used in initial position. The superscripted vowel /æ/ is not usually shown. This seems to have been another source of misunderstanding. Unless the translator used a different copy.

Maxim (Ch 8. M 1)

On rules for conduct in life

Property is for the comfort of life, **not for the accumulation of wealth**. A sage, having been asked who is lucky and who is not, replied: 'He is lucky who has eaten and sowed but he is unlucky who has died and not enjoyed.'

مال از بهر آسایش عُمر است نه عُمر از بهر گرد کردن مال

mäl æz bæhrə äsäyef-ə omr æst næ omr æz bæhrə gerd kærdæn-ə mäl
Property is for the comfort of life, not [life] for the accumulation of wealth

"Riches are intended for the comfort of life, and not life for the purpose of hoarding riches" (Ross 1823: 416)

Note: comparing Rhatsek's translation with that by Ross (given above) the mismatch regarding the omission of the subject of the second clause is clear.

Maxim (Ch.8: M5 (my copy M6))

The **country** is adorned by **intelligent** and the religion [is perfected] by virtuous men. Padshahs stand more in need of the advice of intelligent men than intelligent men of the proximity of padshahs.

مُلک از خردمندان جمال گیرد و دین از پرهیزکاران کمال یابد
molk æz xærædmændän djamäl giræd væ dîn æz pærhîzkârän kæmäl yäbæd

The **country** is adorned by **intelligent** and the religion [is perfected] by virtuous men.

The minimal pair **djamäl** and **kæmäl** are two nouns whose pronunciations vary minimally, and this could be the source of error in translation. However, the error is detrimental to rendering the point. This is correctly observed and accounted for in the following translation

"A kingdom is embellished by the wise, and religion rendered illustrious by the pious" (Ross 1823: 419)

Maxim(8: 6 (my copy M7))

Three things cannot subsist without three things: property without trade, science without controversy and a **country** without **punishment**.

سه چیز پایدار نماند مال بی تجارت و علم بی بحث و مُلک بی سیاست

sə tʃiz päydär næmänæd mäl bi tedʒäræt væ elm-ə bi bæhø væ molk bi siyäsæt

/molk/ in this context means kingdom/sovereignty (not country) and /siyäsæt/ in this context means politics/government. These are misunderstood and so mismatched by



Rhatsek but observed in the following translation.

“Three things have no durability without their concomitants; property without trade, Knowledge without debate, or a **sovereignty** without **government**” (Ross 1823: 420)

Admonition(8: 3)

Reveal not thy secret to any man although he may be trustworthy, because no one can keep thy secret better than thyself.

“... any private affair, that you wish to keep secret, don’t divulge to anybody; for, though such a person has your confidence, none can be so true to your secret as yourself.” (Ross 1823: 421)

Silence is preferable than to tell thy mind

to anyone; saying what is to remain unsaid.

O simpleton, stop the source of the spring. ((Ross 1823: 21 = O silly man)

When it becomes full, the brook cannot be stopped.

1. One line is missed out
2. /sæli:m/: adj. sound, intact, fit, in order, hale, robust, right, pure, undamaged

The last translated line is dangling. A problem which seems persistent!

Admonition4(my copy ch8. ad. 12)

Who despises an insignificant enemy resembles him who is careless about fire.

Extinguish it today, while it may be quenched,

Because when fire is high, it burns the world.

Allow not the bow to be spanned

By a foe **because an arrow may pierce.**

doʃmænkeh bæ tīr mītævæn düxt

دشمن که به تیر می توان دوخت

By a foe who can be pierced by an arrow

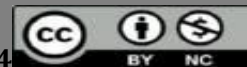
“Now that you canst transfix him with thy arrow, permit not thy antagonist to string his bow” (Ross, 1890)

Relative word /keh/ (who/that) is misunderstood with *because*. Moreover, no attention is paid to the rest of the line which is about the possibility of piercing and not of being targeted.

According to Newmark (1988: 17) “a satisfactory restricted translation of any poem is always possible, though it may work as an introduction to and an interpretation of rather than as a recreation of the original.” This is more of recreation than even an interpretation of the source.

5. Conclusion

Rehatsek’s translation shows shortcoming of the translator regarding comprehension of the source text which to some extent is inevitable, especially for one who translated from a second to a third language. Nevertheless, one should notice that such errors in translation of a literary text like *Rose Garden*, which is didactic and not escape literature, could not and should not be taken for granted. To sum up in the words of Newmark (1988: 16), “The point is that ‘expressive’ texts, i.e. serious imaginative literature and authoritative and personal statements, have to be translated closely, matching the writing, good or bad, of the original. Informative texts, statements that relate primarily to the truth, to the real facts of the matter, have to be translated in the best style that the translator can reconcile with the style of the original.



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Mohammad Shariati, assistant professor emeritus of Shahid Bahonar University, and a member of Azad University, holds a PhD in applied linguistics from Liverpool, an MA from, Texas, and a BA in English from Isfahan. He has presented papers in UK, Ireland, Korea, China and Malazia and has published nationally and internationally. (e.g., My Puce Rose by *Authorhouse* & apology strategies in *Pragmatics*)

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