

## Assessing Equivalents Selected by Translators' of '*The Blind Owl*' Based on Componential Analysis and Semantic Load of the Words: Proposing a New Analytical Model Based on Data Analysis

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### Abstract

Among the most challenging problems encountered by translators, especially those dealing with literary texts, seems to be the problem of finding adequate and acceptable equivalents for the original text's culture-specific terms in the TL. Therefore, assessing translation of literary texts, specifically that of culture-specific references, is a crucial issue in translation studies. Componential analysis is one method of translation assessment which focuses on semantic relations of ST and TT lexical items. It should also be noticed that any lexical item can have positive, neutral, or negative connotations. Interestingly, the situational context can play a pivotal role in specifying the particular semantic load of the lexical items. The present study aimed at criticizing equivalents selected by a native and a non-native translator of a contemporary Persian novel based on componential analysis and semantic load of the words.

Sadeq Hedayat's '*the Blind Owl*' is a masterpiece in the modern Persian literature. The work was first rendered into English by D. P. Costello in 1957. Iraj Bashiri also translated the work into English in 1974 and then revised it in 1984. However, his last revision, being used as part of the research corpus of the current study, came about 2013. Since the source language is Persian, Costello is considered as the non-native and Bashiri, the native translator.

On the whole, native translators may be expected to possess a somehow comprehensive acquaintance with their own culture. However, the main question that may arise here is that whether their familiarity would lead to a more precise translation of culture-bound concepts and terms or not? Can it be claimed that a native translator is more skilled than a non-native translator as far as dealing with cultural items is concerned?

In order to assess the performance of the two translators, the following seven procedures or occurrences were detected and described by the author: retention,

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amplification, compensation, expansion, reduction, omission, and transliteration. Mistranslated items were also analyzed separately and, consequently, 'mistranslation' was taken into consideration as an occurrence along with the seven aforementioned occurrences. The collection of procedures was employed as the framework of the study.

The following steps were taken to conduct the study: studying *the Blind Owl* for identifying terms and expressions (especially culture-specific ones); categorizing the items into various groups; specifying the equivalents in the two translations; and finally, analyzing the data based on the framework suggested by the author.

In order to categorize the culture-specific terms, a combination of classifications presented by Vlahov and Florin (1980), Newmark (1988), Thriveini (2002), and Espindola and Vasconcellos (2006) was employed and the CSIs were classified into the following categories: objects, plants, relationships, proper names, measurements (of weight, money, distance, etc.), religious-bound terms, customs, ideas and rituals, foods and drinks, clothes and special garments, games and specific hobbies, occupations, symbols, gestures, terms related to social life, etc.

Concentrating on the two key criteria of componential analysis and semantic load of the words, the researcher has made an attempt to find answers to the following questions: 1) Which categories contained the most challenging culture-specific items? 2) Which translator (the native or the non-native) has been more consistent in observing the componential analysis and semantic load of the CSIs? 3) Which occurrences have had the most or the least frequency? 4) How the occurrences attributed to the native are comparable to the non-native translator? 5) How successful have been the two translators in their equivalent choice?

The findings revealed that the fields of religion, occupation and object contained the most challenging terms and concepts. Also, translators' tendency towards transliteration, in some cases, had deprived the TT readership of the information essentially needed for better understanding the source text. Based on the findings, it was also realized that neither native translator, nor the non-native has been consistent in resorting to specific procedures.

Moreover, it was found that while 'expansion' and 'compensation' had occurred most, the occurrences of 'amplification', 'omission' and 'mistranslation' had the least frequency in the works of the two translators.

Overall, based on the results of the study it was concluded that the native translator has been more successful than the non-native in observing the meaning-components and semantic-load of the lexical items embedded in the novel. One reason to justify the event seems to be the deep familiarity of the native translator with the source culture. Therefore, professional native translators interested in modern (and even classic literature) are highly recommended to try their hands at rendering masterpieces of their own nation. They can even have a more active role in retranslating literary works (including poems, short-stories, plays, novels, etc.) already rendered into a foreign language by non-native translators.

**Keywords:** Translation assessment, Literary text translation, *The Blind Owl*, Componential analysis, Semantic load