Grounds for Modern Persian Pseudotranslating

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1. INTRODUCTION

The present study is an effort to cast light on the most prominent causes of emergence of pseudotranslations in contemporary Persian. The study first provides a review of the literature focusing on the motivations for production of pseudotranslations around the globe, and then moves to study the Persian instances. Adopting library research, it analyzes Persian pseudotranslations within their socio-cultural context to find out what elements have triggered production of such texts.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is a descriptive one, adopting library research. The data have been analyzed based on Toury's (1995; 2012) descriptive and target-oriented approach. The present study focuses on modern Persian given the scarcity of pseudotranslations in old times and high probability of false identification of texts as pseudotranslations for lack of access to the source texts and inaccurate data available on the sociocultural context of the texts.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show seven main causes for shaming an authored text behind a façade of translation within the Persian context. One of the principal causes of pseudotranslating in Persian has been communicating intellectual and revolutionary ideas and rigor to the society in Pre-revolution Iran, which could not otherwise be expressed due to censorial measures. Thus, many of the books pushing such purposes resorted to translation as there is generally more tolerance in the host culture for beliefs socially, culturally, or politically incompatible with those at home when expressed indirectly from the viewpoint of a different culture or from within the confinements of a distant geographical area. Many such fake translations, mostly by communist authors, were produced in form of drama and philosophical dialogues, mostly depicting Latin American countries—which had a vast repertoire of communist activities and struggle for freedom—as the setting. Censorship was also the factor triggering some of the pseudotranslations in post-revolution Iran as well, mainly due to limitations in voicing trenchant social and cultural criticism.

Denouncing political figures and parties was also a target shot at by the opposing political parties by resort to false translations, a trend mostly evident in the last few decades.

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Another primary motivation for concoction of such texts in Persian is the central position of the translated literature in the Persian literary polysystem. Before the Qajar era, the center of the Persian literary polysystem was occupied by poetry and poetic prose, which was then replaced by prose. Yet after the literary encounter with the west, it was noticed that some of the subgenres of fiction are lacking in Persian in comparison to the West, which resulted in translation of these subgenres into Persian—so extensively that translation found its way to the center of the polysystem. One such subgenre was crime fiction, which covered almost a third of the translation of fictional works. With translation in this area attracting so packed audience and providing financial advantage, no wonder vast number of pseudotranslations appeared in the market, forming one of the busiest and most lucrative periods of fictitious translation in Iran for the authors and publishers. It should be noted that pseudotranslating due to the peripheral position of authorship in the Persian polysystem was not limited to crime fiction and was practiced in other literary and non-literary areas as well.

Pseudotranslations were also used by some poets unsure of their literary fame at the outset of their literary adventure. In these cases, the poet could hide behind the veil of translation if the reception of their work were not satisfactory or sparked negative reaction by the readers or critics; at the same time, the author's name presented as the translator's would allow the poet to claim for the credit if the critiques turned out to be otherwise. In addition, some poets embarked on their literary course adopting a certain poetic style, yet they abandoned this style as they found it inadequate in the course of their trajectory. Nonetheless, when they composed poetry in harmony with the abandoned style and they did not appreciate such return to be noticed by literary circles; they opted for presenting their own poetry in the semblance of translation.

Yet others benefited pseudotranslations to adopt new personas and voices and alter these personas as deemed appropriate in their authorship and pseudotranslatorship.

Last but not least, limitations of characterization in some literary subgenres directed the authors to adopt foreign characters and setting for their stories as such elements were more compatible with what they pursued. This is particularly true of crime fiction as the Iranian police organizational chart did not allow for private detectives, generally the key character in detective fiction. Moreover, the Persian detective was incompatible with the presuppositions of the Persian reader of the detectives they had encountered in Western crime fiction through translation. Thus, Iranian authors either produced western stories from scratch by using western characters and settings or otherwise they used western characters within Iranian settings or depicted Iranian characters in foreign settings.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings show that a wide range of elements, including socio-cultural, socio-political, economic, and literary, have given rise to production of pseudotranslations in modern Persian, with some works triggered by more than one single element and that Persian pseudotranslations share many of these grounds with fictitious translations in many other parts of the world. The findings put a spotlight on the causes of pseudotranslating in modern Persian and help project a more complete picture of the activity across the globe.