

**A Cultural Approach to Identity in Translating Young
Adult Literature: The Case of *The Sun Is Also a Star***

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Introduction

Self-knowledge and identity-formation, as two inter-related concepts central to one's perception of existence, start emerging from childhood and evolve around adolescence. Considering that books are among the resources that are potentially capable of reflecting young adults' inner world and opening up avenues for self-discovery and enjoyment, they are regarded as strong tools which have the power to shape identities. However, the books intended for young adults are not always authored with an eye on the cultural background of their society and its accepted value system; instead, they could be translational and, therefore, rooted in a community with differing norms and values.

Background

In response to the differences in the value systems of the two communities, some prefer to take preventive measures. Such measures are put into effect through both the selection of books to be translated and the content to be imparted through translation. The former is telling of a situation in which works which disseminate opposing values are not selected for translation; the latter entails the use of such institutional manipulative operations in translation as censorship so that the output becomes “suitable” for the young adults in the target community. Nonetheless, viewing the issue from the lens of cultural approach to Translation Studies, such preventive measures are repressive. Given the power imbalance between young adults and adults, through such restrictive manipulations made by translators and/or other controlling agents, young adults are dictated what is suitable for them to study and what needs to be excluded. According to the cultural approach, this reinforces the imbalance.

Purpose and Method

In a situation like this, replete with theoretical controversies, and considering that in Iran translated literature constitutes a large share of children’s literature, it is informative to investigate the actual practice of translators in the face of clashes in value systems and to gain insight into the dominant trend of young adult translated literature. However, there is a dearth of research on issues pertaining to different aspects of translated young adult literature in Iran. Against this backdrop, the present study investigated the translations of a best-selling young adult novel in terms of the components of cultural identity. The corpus of the

study comprised the young adult novel *The Sun Is Also a Star*, by Nicola Yoon, along with its two Persian translations. This novel was chosen on the ground that it centers on such themes as God, fate, love, identity, morality, and relations. As these controversial themes are value-laden concepts rooted in the ideological, political and moral value systems of each society, the novel lends itself not only to a linguistic analysis but, more importantly, to a socio-cultural and ideological analysis of the themes and their realization in translation.

To conduct this study, according to the framework given by Holliday, the elements of cultural identity were identified in the English novel. Then, by adopting a cultural approach to translation, the two Persian translations of this novel were investigated to identify the components that were majorly affected through manipulative procedures.

Results and Discussion

The study revealed that the most important components of cultural identity in the source text were language (including names and sociolect), food, ontological attitudes of the characters in the novel, education and occupation, and relationships. The analysis of the Persian translations revealed that language was the component which had undergone manipulative procedures more than other components in the novel. This was particularly because the sociolects used in the source novel to introduce and mark the first-generation immigrants to the U.S and also the young adults were standardized in the Persian translations. In addition, although the general sexual content of the novel was preserved in the translations, it had undergone manipulative procedures using such techniques as omission, summarizing, and toning down. It

was also observed that each translation developed its own approach to manipulating the sexual content of the novel, and no systematic pattern of omission and toning down was found. This means that, in some cases, the content that was omitted, summarized and toned down in one translation, was largely preserved in the other. This observation implies that manipulations in the sexual content were not merely imposed by such supervisory institutions as the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance; they, rather, could also be the result of the translators or publishers' choices.

As for the ontological views of the characters, they were kept in the translations despite being in partial contrast with the dominant attitudes in the Iranian society. These observations confirm the claim that translations involve less supervisory strictness and monitoring compared with authored works. To investigate the effect of manipulations on the translations in their entirety, the observations were discussed in terms of Bhabha's concepts of "hybridity" and "third space" with the purpose of highlighting the importance of sociolects in defining characters' cultural identity. It was discussed how sociolect plays an important role in the identity of the characters, and how the standardization of sociolects distorted the identities of the young adult characters as well as first-generation immigrants.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current position of Iranian young adult translated literature was sketched out in light of polysystem theory, and the possible future trend was reflected on. It was argued that considering the core position occupied by translated literature for young adults in

Iran in the literary polysystem, it is expected that the norms of the source community overveil those of the target community. The expectation was corroborated by the data from this study; although manipulative procedures were found, especially in the sexual content of the novel to make it more appropriate for the target readers, the overall content of the novel opened the pathway for new themes to be introduced to the body of our young adult literature. This, when reiterated in translated works, can even affect the future direction of authored young adult literature in Iran.

Key terms: Cultural approach, cultural identity, manipulation, Polysystem theory, young adult literature

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