

## Translation and Language Treatment in Anthropological Books<sup>1</sup>

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### *Abstract:*

Anthropologists conduct their research in different fields by traveling to somehow unknown geographical places. In different stages of the research including gathering the data and then writing the text, translation is an inevitable part. On the whole, anthropologists translate the unknown culture and oral experience in the field into a written text. The purpose of the study was to shed light on how anthropologists treated the language and whether they elaborated on the translation issues. To this end, 30 full-length English anthropological books were selected and the data was gathered based on the matrix method (Garrard, 2011) and De Casanova and Brown's (2017) coding scheme. The results revealed that the issue of translation and language was addressed only by the limited number of researchers and not enough attention was paid to the actual linguistic translation that is happening in the text. However, those who addressed the issue and elaborated on the strategies that they adopted to overcome the translation difficulties and cultural barriers provide valuable information.

**Keywords:** Cultural anthropology, translation, power relations

### 1. Introduction

As it is emphasized by Guldin (2016, p. 70), Translation Studies has been changed to a "source discipline" and "the widespread use of the metaphor of

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translation might also reveal theoretical links or convergences between disciplines that are generally not considered to be related to each other." Translation as a source domain was depicted by Guldin (2016, p.71) to have different connections to medicine, biology, literature, postcolonial theory, psychoanalysis, media and communication theory, gender studies, cultural studies, semiotics, sociology, anthropology and ethnography. The interdisciplinary connection between Translation Studies and anthropology has been emphasized by different scholars (Hermans, 2002; Churchill, 2005; Buzelin, 2007; Guldin, 2016). It is believed that what anthropologists do is to translate culture (Sturge, 1997; Marcus, 1998; Wolf, 2002; Rubel & Roseman, 2003; Churchill, 2005; Agar, 2008; Buzelin, 2007). Translation happens on different levels in anthropologies. First, while data gathering procedure, ethnographers use interpreters to communicate with their participants, then the oral experience of the ethnographer is textualized. In the process of cultural translation, linguistic translation is also required. Not enough attention has been paid to the actual linguistic translation that happens in the anthropological texts as the anthropologist is often but not always someone who is speaking a language other than the native language of the target culture. In this respect, the way that anthropologists or cultural translators deal with the language and translation is worth examining.

In the process of writing an anthropology, as Churchill (2005, p. 14) holds, three levels of translation occur. "The first level of translation is between two individuals, the researcher and his or her chief informant." In this sense, the anthropologist needs to translate herself to the informant who is a connector between her and the target community. This kind of interaction usually happens when the target community does not accept the presence of the researcher. "The second level of translation again involves the researcher and informant but adds to these two the entire community" (Churchill, 2005, p. 15). The informant translates the anthropologist to the community and on the other hand, the community is

translated by the informant for the anthropologist. The final step is the translation “between ethnographer and reader” (Churchill, 2005, p. 16). The oral experience of the ethnographer in the field is translated into a written text that is to be read by the target readers.

As for the final product, Different aspects of translation are happening in the ethnographic text, one of them is interlingual translation. As Churchill (2005, p. 13) believes, the ethnographer should be able “to translate himself” into the participants’ world and the ethnographer’s ability “to translate their [participants’] world into an ethnographic report.” The study aims to answer the following question:

1. How translational aspects and language are treated in full-length English anthropological books?

## **2. Related Studies**

One of the prominent studies regarding translation-related aspects of recent anthropologies and more specifically different translation strategies that “implicated in the construction of the unequal relationships between source-and-target language cultures” is for Sturge (1997, p. 21). She names normalizing translation strategies in anthropology that domesticate the source language, estranging strategies, and reflexive. As for delving into the anthropologies and finding the traces of language and translation, De Casanova and Brown (2017) examined 47 book-length English ethnographies on Latin Americans to find out how authors dealt with the language differences and translation issues. The result of their study revealed that language was not generally addressed by the authors and they “saw little acknowledgment of the theoretical import or the difficult practical aspects of translation” (De Casanova & Brown, 2017, p. 16).

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Corpus

Among all the anthropologists who once came to Iran to conduct research, many wrote their Ph.D. dissertations, some wrote articles, book chapters, or full-length books. Moreover, some limited number of Iranian anthropologists (native Persian speakers) published their works in English. For the purpose of the present study, in order to examine patterns in employing the Persian language in English anthropological texts, a list of 30 books was compiled. Many of these books are among the prolific works and listed in the book entitled *Conceptualizing Iranian Anthropology* as the select bibliography for the anthropology of Iran. The authors were Persian native and non-native speakers who published full-length anthropological books in English. Among the authors of the anthropologies, 6 were Persian native speakers while 24 were non-native speakers.

#### 3.2. Procedure

In order to gather the data from the books, matrix method (Garrard, 2011) and the coding scheme devised by De Casanova and Brown (2017, p. 7) were used. In matrix method as Garrard (2011, p. 108) asserts, first the documents are organized, then the topics that are needed to be explored are chosen, and finally the documents are summarized. Based on De Casanova and Brown's (2017, p. 7) coding scheme, eight main factors were highlighted, they include:

1. Which language(s) were used in the field
2. Whether language and representing participants' speech in the text was explicitly discussed
3. Whether a special section of the book was dedicated to discussing translation practices
4. Whether a special section dealt with the orthography of non-English language(s)
5. Whether a glossary of non-English terms was present

6. Whether the author self-identified as a native speaker of the participants' language, a non-native speaker, or did not say
7. Whether there were extended passages of text in the original source language (at least three printed lines)
8. Whether the author mentioned using a translator

All anthropological books including their prefaces, introduction, the text, and appendices were explored to find whether the authors discussed the issue of language, translation, and possible difficulties they faced while conducting the research or writing the final text.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

Among the examined books, 8 main languages/dialects were used by anthropologists; they include Persian, Azerbaijani Turkish, Hebrew, Lori, Kurdish, Baluchi, Urdu, and Turkish spoken among Yomut community (Gurgan Plain). In almost all cases, Persian was the intermediary language to communicate with at least one of the informants or as a means to learn the language of the field. For example, Salzman (2000, p. 53) mentions that "Shams A'din also knew elementary Persian, which in initial stages of my research made it easier for me to converse with him than with others who knew only Baluchi or Urdu."

After examining the books, the percentage for each category was calculated and the result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Discussion of language and translation in anthropological books

<i>Category</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Total number of the books</i>
<i>Explicit discussion of language</i>	28%	20
<i>Special section for translation</i>	12%	9
<i>Discussion of orthography</i>	25%	18
<i>Glossary of non-English terms</i>	21%	15
<i>Passages of text in the original source text</i>	0%	0
<i>Authors who mentioned that they used translators</i>	14%	10

#### 4.1. Explicit Discussion of Language

As it is shown in Table 1, 28 percent of the books explicitly discussed the language and representing participants' speech in the text. For example, Irons (1975) conducted his field research among the Yomut Turkmen in the Gurgan Plain. He (1975, pp. 13–14) describes the process of learning the local language:

Turkmen is closely related to standard Turkish, a language for which excellent elementary grammars and textbooks are available for native English speakers. Turkmen is not as similar to standard Turkish as most written sources claim. The phonology is quite distinct, roughly half of the vocabulary is different (consisting either of noncognates or false cognates), and although the grammar is similar in its general form almost every grammatical structure is different in its details.

As another example, Erika Fridle spent a long period of time in Iran and wrote different books. She learned Lori in Deh Koh and then conducted her research with no problems. Fridle (1997, p. ix) names Gordafarin Boir Ahmedi Fard who helped her to learn Lori. She (1997, p. xxi) goes on to say that:

Over the years, I have learned enough of the local language, a dialect of Luri, to be able to follow conversations easily. My deficiencies in fluency of speech are rarely a problem because my style of fieldwork does not include speech-making, and the people around me have adjusted most generously to my accent and other shortcomings. My only real communication problem is with some educated young men who insist on speaking formal (in contrast to vernacular) Farsi laced with Arabic, which I, having learned both Luri and vernacular Farsi from the villagers, do not command well.

The point that is worth mentioning here is that among these 20 authors who mentioned the language which was spoken in the field, only three authors elaborated on the process of learning the field language. In this regard, Gibb and Iglesias (2017, p. 139) maintain that ethnographers do not usually explain in details how they learned the language.

#### 4.2. Explicit Discussion of Translation

As in doing social researches including anthropology, the data is collected in one language and then presented and reported into another language (Birbili, 2000), translation is an inevitable part in anthropologies. Nevertheless, in the corpus of the study, only 12 percent of cases (9 authors) discussed translation. One instance that can be mentioned is in Loeffler's (1988, p. 4) book:

Exact English equivalents of terms and idioms often are lacking. An individual's choice of words (literate, technical, old-fashioned, and so forth) is, in many cases, only imperfectly replicable. Finally, grammatical particularities, like the use of the first person plural for oneself, which is especially frequent among the less-educates, cannot always be retained for reasons of clarity. These conditions also make styles of presentation appear more similar than they actually are. [...] For the same reasons, the translations have been kept as literal as possible. Language is not a clean instrument of symbolizing like mathematics or abstract logic. Beyond the overt message, it communicates a flood of cues about the speaker's cultural background, social status, regional origin, occupation, education, and so forth. This principle is of course made use of by gifted authors when they impart different dialects or speech styles to the characters of their novels, plays, and films. Therefore, letting the individuals talk in idiomatic American would necessarily create the impression that they are essentially Americans who happen to hold these views, a suggestion I wanted to avoid.

Regarding Loeffler's (1988) comments on translation issues and presenting the data, Sturge's (1997) categorization for anthropologies can be employed. She (1997, p. 26) proposes "three categories of approaches to translation strategies: more normalizing, more estranging, and more reflexive modes." In this case the second approach is applicable; as Sturge (1997, p. 30) asserts, the second approach is estranging or retrospective translation. She (1997, pp. 30–33) goes on to say that there are various non-strict strategies to show the distance between the

two languages. The strategies used to achieve this purpose include: a) archaizing, b) transferring source items, c) italicizing source items, d) “using native words as souvenirs in the text,” e) “using quotation mark to question equivalence,” f) stylistic choices like direct speech, extensive glossary, “translation of source-language definitions follow the source terms,” g) “an extended gloss,” and h) “discussion of translation procedures.” On the whole, as Sturge (1997, p. 33) asserts, “In contexts of less accountability such a strategy could reinforce the discourse of otherness used to legitimize imperialism.”

#### 4.3. Orthography of the Source Language

Another point that can be seen in Table 1 is orthography and original source language alphabets and transliteration i.e. “the transfer of written notation into another writing system” (Sturge, 2007, p. 68). In the anthropological books of the corpus, 25% of the books had a special section for note on transliteration or talked about the writing system. For example Beck (2015, p. xiv) in the introduction of her book explains, “The system of transliteration used in this book is a modified version of the format recommended by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. I exclude all diacritical marks except for the *hamza* (‘) in “Qashqa’i” and “Qur’an” and the *‘ain* (‘) in “Shi’i” Islam, to follow the usage of other scholars.” However, none of the books had even one paragraph in the Persian alphabet that was somehow surprising.

#### 4.4. Further Discussion

The glossary of non-English words and phrases was present in 21% of the books. As for mentioning using the translator, 14% of the authors asserted that they used a translator/interpreter while conducting their research, or they used a translator for writing the final product or for translating related documents. However, in many cases, the use of translators was mentioned briefly or indirectly.



The hegemonic anthropological view that is mainly created by Malinowski (1922, 1926, 1967) and Margaret Mead's (1939, 2001) comments and fieldwork emphasize the fact that all researchers should use the native language of the field and be able to communicate with the participants without any language problems. Therefore, as discussed by Borchgrevink (2003, p. 100), either many anthropologists have not talked about related issues about language or in cases that they were not fluent in the language and used interpreters, they mentioned it only in passing.

Whenever we talk about translation, "hierarchy, hegemony, and cultural dominance" are inseparable part of the process" (Rubel & Rosman, 2003, p. 6). As it is clear, in making a text comprehensible for the audience, the anthropologist has to comply with the "(Western) target cultural repertoire" (Wolf, 2002, p. 183). The intercultural activity as Wolf (2002, p. 183) believes refers to "the transfer between "Third" and "First World." The data collected in the field and the information in the text that are "other's voice" in many cases are "filtered through the translator's or the ethnographer's consciousness." That is mainly because of the power relation that was emphasized by different scholars including Niranjana (1992) and Sturge (1997). Since what the ethnographers do is at the first step interpreting "social discourse of his informants" (p. 128), and then to textualize the interpretation into the First World language.

## 5. Conclusion

As it is so important for the anthropologist to understand the participants' words, the study aimed at shedding light on the fact that how anthropologists reflected the Persian language in the anthropological texts. For gathering the data, thirty English anthropological books were selected to examine different aspects of translation issues and language discussion. The results revealed that not enough

attention was paid to the language and translation issues by anthropologists. In line with this finding, Temple and Yung (2004, p. 163) maintain that language issues have not been addressed by social researchers, and “results are presented as if interviewees were fluent English speakers or as if the language they used is irrelevant.” However, those authors who elaborated on the translation-related issues, the way that they tackled the language barriers, and the strategies that they used to transfer cultural loaded items can be used as authentic materials in the translation classrooms. Moreover, the study can emphasize the interdisciplinary nature of Translation Studies. The fact that the issue of translation can be highlighted in cross-cultural studies including anthropologies. Not to mention that delving into anthropological texts written into other languages than English can shed more light on different aspects.

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## ترجمه و کارکرد زبان در کتاب‌های مردم‌شناسی<sup>۱</sup>

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### چکیده

مردم‌شناسان با سفر به مناطق دوردست و ناشناخته تحقیقات میدانی خود را انجام می‌دهند. در مراحل مختلف تحقیق شامل جمع‌آوری داده و سپس حین نگارش مطالب، ترجمه همواره جزو جدایی‌ناپذیر محسوب می‌شود. به‌طور کلی مردم‌شناسان فرهنگ ناشناخته و آنچه را که در میدان می‌شنوند به قالب متنی ترجمه می‌کنند. نحوه برخورد مردم‌شناسان با زبان و مسائل مرتبط با ترجمه شامل اهداف پژوهش حاضر بود. برای این منظور پیکره‌ای شامل ۳۰ کتاب مردم‌شناسی جمع‌آوری شد و براساس روش ماتریکس (جرارد، ۲۰۱۱) و روش رمزگذاری دی‌کاسانوآ و براون (۲۰۱۷) داده‌ها جمع‌آوری شدند. نتایج نشان داد که تنها تعداد محدودی از نویسندگان به مسئله زبان و ترجمه در متن توجه خاص نمودند. با این وجود آن‌هایی که به مسئله ترجمه در متن اشاره کرده بودند راهکارهایی ارزشمند جهت رفع مشکلات حین ترجمه ارائه کرده بودند.

**واژه‌های راهنما:** مردم‌شناسی فرهنگی، ترجمه، روابط قدرت

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