



## Translation of Cultural Specific Items: A Case Study of Gulistan of Saadi

Sarah Yousefi \*

Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literature, Islamic Azad University Science and Research Branch, Tehran, Iran

### Abstract

Everyone can learn the culture of a country by reading the literature of that country. It is important for a translator what strategies to apply to transfer the true and exact meaning of a culture. In other words, as Dehbashi Sharif and Shakiba (2015) believe literary works are deeply and firmly fixed in the source culture so those who translate these texts probably encounter troubles in translating cultural specific items. When it comes to works of great authors and poets, like Rumi, Hafez, Saadi and etc, doing different researches and studies about translations of their works becomes more vital and necessary. The researcher of the present research attempted to find out how Edward Rehatsek has translated the cultural specific items in Gulistan of Saadi. In order to reach this goal, first, the researcher had to find all of the cultural specific items in Gulistan of Saadi, then, compared them with their English equivalents by using Newmark's taxonomy of translation strategies for translating CSIs as a reference. Finally, the researcher found 102 cases of CSIs, and it was concluded that among other strategies such as Functional Equivalent, Through-translation, Synonymy, Descriptive Equivalent, Componential Analysis, Modulation, Cultural Equivalent and Naturalization which have been applied by Edward Rehatsek for translation of cultural specific items "Transference" strategy was the most frequently used strategy.

**Keywords:** cultural specific items (CSIs), translation strategies, literary translation, literature

### INTRODUCTION

Literature has always been the best way for introducing cultures, beliefs, thoughts, ideologies and traditions, so translation of literary works is really important as it can introduce something really knew like culture and people of a country to other countries and that way people can know each other better. So, here the burden is on the shoulders of translators and they are responsible for doing their best to convey meanings and concepts of every cultural symbol and introduce them to the world.

The relationship between culture and literature is undeniable, as Hesarak (2014, p. 23) believes "cultures consist of people's beliefs, traditions in any society, and the literature, on the other hand, discloses these elements in term of different literature. So, the literature is in interaction with and impacting on culture." Translation of literature

means translation of culture, so, it needs more effort and attention than translation of other types of texts. Culture has been defined by many scholars and they have considered it from different points of view. Larson (as cited in Vasheghani and Mokhtari, 2016) defines culture as “a complex of beliefs, attitudes, values, and rules which a group of people share. He believes that the translator should be familiar with the values, rituals, beliefs and behaviors of one culture ...” (p. 310) Transfer of culture and cultural meanings has never been an easy job, and it needs hard effort and good knowledge of both target and source language. Nida and Taber (as cited in Qing, 2010, p.60) admit that cultural translation is “a translation in which the content of the message is changed to conform to the receptor culture in some way, and/or in which information is introduced which is not linguistically implicit in the original”.

In every culture there are some concepts and meanings which belong to that culture and although some of them are known to foreigners due to globalization, many of them are unfamiliar to them; these concepts are called cultural specific items. Aixela (as cited in Vasheghani and Mokhtari 2016, p. 309) states “it is well-known that culture specific items are among the most conflicting phenomena in translation which can make translation an arduous kind of task”. Persson (2015, p. 1) considers cultural specific items as “concepts that are specific for a certain culture. These concepts can refer to domains such as flora, fauna, food, clothes, housing, work, leisure, politics, law, and religion among others.” These concepts can be different in every language or culture so translating them can be an arduous job. Newmark (1981, p. 7) asserts that “translation is a craft in which the translator tries to substitute a written message in the source language for another written message in the target language”, so, it will be a precious craft when a translator is able to transfer the cultural specific items of a source language correctly to a target language. Ranzato (2013, p. 72) explains cultural specific items “create networks of associations which are specific to the culture in which they are rooted”. When we talk about cultural specific items the first problem is defining these items. Franco Aixelá (as cited in Ranzato, 2013) believes “the first problem in defining a culture specific reference derives from the fact that, in a language, everything is practically culture specific, including language itself” (p. 67). Tobias notes that:

CSIs are linguistic items that cause problems for translation due to differences in cultural understanding”. He adds that they incorporate “proper nouns, objects, institutions, customs, expressions and concepts embodied in the ST that do not exist in the culture of the TL readership or would be perceived differently.” (2006, p. 27)

As Salehi (2013, p. 3) believes “there is no doubt that facing CSIs may cause different degrees of difficulty for the translator.” Akef and Vakili (2010) confirm that “the issue of translating culture specific items (CSIs) is primarily problematized by the diversity – and even heterogeneity – of opinion when it comes to defining culture”

Iran has a rich culture which is boosted by its literature especially pre-modern literature which deserves translations that are able to convey both the culture and esthetic aspects, so it is good to do researches which focus on translation of Persian literature and examine

how translators deal with cultural specific items. The main focus of the present research is on the translation of pre-modern Persian literature and specifically on English translation of Gulistan of Saadi. The researcher attempted to find the strategies used by the English translator of the aforementioned book for translation of cultural specific items. Literary translation specially translation of poems is one of the hardest types of translation for a translator as he is responsible to convey both meaning and esthetic aspects of the original texts in order to be a successful translator, and since all languages do not have similar capacities, producing similar texts in different languages is quite difficult. According to Jakobson (as cited in Venuti, 2000, p.118) "poetry by definition is untranslatable... and it requires creative transposition."

Cudden (1976, p. 678) defines poem as "a work of art, a composition, a work of verse, which may be in rhyme or may be blank verse or a combination of the two. Or it may depend on having a fixed number of syllables", so translation process will be harder when in addition to all these aspects a translator needs to learn more about CSIs and be able to deal with cultural specific items which are among the main important factors for representing the culture of a country. As H. Tisgam (2014, p. 511) states "translation is a highly complicated process. It is defined as a transfer of meaning from one language to another." So, here the role of translator is so crucial and as Narváez and Zambrana believe (2014 p. 71) "in the increasingly cross-cultural world we live in, translators and interpreters are seen as mediators between cultures."

Newmark (1988) is among other scholars who categories cultural specific items, his categories are as follows:

- 1) Ecology (flora, fauna, winds, plains, hills)
- 2) Material culture (food, clothes, houses and towns, transport)
- 3) Social culture (work and leisure)
- 4) Organizations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts (political and administrative, religious, artistic)
- 5) Gesture and habits

Ranzato (2013 p. 74) believes "other authors provide even more general lists divided into various categories." Newmark (1988) proposes different strategies for translating cultural specific items. His taxonomies includes, transference, naturalization, cultural equivalent, functional equivalent, descriptive equivalent, componential analysis, synonymy, through-translation, shifts or transposition, modulation, compensation, recognized translation, note, paraphrase, Couplets, triplet, quadruplet. Each of these strategies will be explained in this section to give more insight to the readers.

#### a. Transference:

Newmark (1988) believes that "only cultural objects or concepts related to a small group should be transferred." (as cited in Hosseini Maasoum and Davtalab, 2011, p. 1771)

b. Naturalization:

According to Hashemian and Daghoughi (2016, p. 172) “it conforms the SL word first to the normal pronunciation, then, to the normal morphology of the TL.”

c. Functional Equivalent:

Braçaj (2015, p. 477) defines functional equivalent as “using a referent TL culture whose function is similar to that of the source language (SL) referent”.

d. Descriptive Equivalent:

Hashemian and Daghoughi (2016, p. 172) define descriptive equivalent as “the meaning of the CBT is explained in several words.”

e. Componential Analysis:

Hashemian and Daghoughi (2016, p. 172) explain componential analysis as “comparing an SL word with a TL word which has a similar meaning, although not being its one-to-one equivalent, by presenting, first, their common, and then, their differing sense components.”

f. Synonymy:

Hashemian and Daghoughi (2016, p. 172) believe that “it is a near TL equivalent. Here economy trumps accuracy.”

g. Shifts or Transpositions:

Hashemian and Daghoughi (2016, p. 173) state that “It involves a change in the grammar from SL to TL, e.g., (i) change from singular to plural; (ii) when a specific SL structure does not exist in the TL, a change is required; (iii) change of an SL verb to a TL word, change of an SL noun group to a TL noun, and so forth.”

h. Modulation:

Hashemian and Daghoughi (p. 173) believes “it occurs when the translator reproduces the message of the original text in the TL text in accordance with the current norms of the TL, because, the SL and the TL may be different in perspective.”

i. Through-Translation:

Hashemian and Daghoughi (2016, p. 173) assert that through-translation “is the literal translation of common collocations, names of organizations and components of compounds. It can also be called: calque or loan translation.”

j. Compensation:

According to Newmark (1988, p. 90) “this is said to occur when loss of meaning, sound-effect, metaphor or pragmatic effect in one part of a sentence is compensated in another part or in contiguous sentence”

## k. Recognized Translation:

Newmark (1988, p.89) defines this procedure as “the official generally accepted translation of any institutional term”.

## l. Couplets, Triplet, Quadruplet:

As Newmark (1988, p.91) believes “it occurs when the translator combines two or more than two different procedures for dealing with a single problem.” Schaffner and Wiesemann (2001, p. 34) call this strategy “combination”. The term “double presentation” is used by Chesterman (1997, p. 95) for the aforementioned strategy.

## m. Paraphrase:

According to Hashemian and Daghighi (2016, p. 173) “in paraphrasing, the meaning of the CBT is explained. The explanation in paraphrasing is much more detailed than in descriptive equivalent.”

Newmark (1988, p. 90) asserts that “this is an amplification or explanation of the meaning of a segment of the text”

## n. Notes, Additions, Glosses:

Newmark (1988, p. 91) defines notes as “additional information in a translation”. Hashemian and Daghighi (2016, p.173) believe that “these are additional information which a translator may have to add to his version; the additional information that the translator adds are normally cultural.”

## o. Cultural Equivalent:

Newmark (as cited in Hosseini Maasoum and Davtalab, 2011) explains that cultural equivalent is “an approximate translation where a SL cultural word is translated by a TL cultural word.”(p. 1772)

## LITERATURE REVIEW

So far many works have been done on translation of cultural specific items as these are important to translators and the results of such studies can help them to become familiar with ways and strategies used by other translators for translating CSIs, so they can apply them in their future translations.

The first study is conducted for a Persian literary work and its translation by Shekoufeh Daghighi and Mahmood Hashemian in 2016 titled “Analysis of Culture-Specific Items and Translation Strategies Applied in Translating Jalal Al-Ahmad’s *by the Pen*”. The researchers tried to find the most frequently used strategies for translation of cultural specific items categorized by Newmark (1988). Based on the findings of the aforementioned research Daghighi and Hashemian (2016, p. 171) concluded that “functional equivalent was the most frequently used strategy, and modulation and

paraphrase were the least frequently used ones. Findings have pedagogical implications for translation students and literary translators.”

As cultural specific items are frequently used in architectural texts, Bagheridoust and Mahabad in 2016 did a research titled “Translation of Culture Specific Items: A Case Study of Persian Architecture Terminology” which focused on investigating the frequently used strategies for translation of cultural specific items. The researchers selected *Introducing Persian Architecture* by Pope and *Abbasid Guest House* by Ouliaienia as their corpus, and they tried to investigate strategies according to Van Doorslaer’s (2007) model. According to them:

The findings indicated that the translator (Ouliaienia) and the writer (Pope) were successful in finding appropriate equivalents for SL architectural terms. The comparison of Pope’s textbook and Ouliaienia’s translation demonstrated that they had made use of four of the strategies (i.e., Direct Transfer, Word for Word Translation, Interpretation, and Domestication). Accordingly, in pope’s book, Interpretation was the most frequently used strategy, while Direct Transfer was the most frequently utilized one in Ouliaienia. On the other hand, Word for Word Translation was the least frequently used strategy in Pope’s work, whereas Domestication was the least frequently utilized one in Ouliaienia’s work. The findings of the present study may have some significant implications for translation theory and practice. (Bagheridoust and Mahabad in 2016, p.46)

The third study is titled “Translating culture-specific items in Shazdeh Ehtejab: Examining Foreignization and Domestication” done by Shokri, and Katebi in 2015. The researchers of this study tried to find out either domestication or foreignization is more frequently used for English translation of cultural specific items found in Persian literary masterpiece Shazdeh Ehtejab, translated by Buchan (2005). As the first step thirty four items were selected and analyzed according to Newmark’s categorization (1988) of culture-specific items. As Shokri and Katebi (2015, p. 3) stated “these items were examined according to Aixela’s model of translating culture specific items (1996), which divides all the strategies into two broader categories of Domestication and Foreignization, to find the more frequent strategy.” Finally, the result of the study showed that domestication with 82% was more frequent and was the main approach of the translator and synonymy which is a subcategory of domestication was the most frequent strategy with 39%, and as Shokri, and Katebi (2015, p. 3) stated “by applying domesticated equivalents, the translator hides the local color of the source text”

The fourth research is titled “An Analysis of Culture-specific Items in the Persian Translation of *Dubliners*” Based on Newmark’s Model” conducted by Seyed Mohammad Hosseini Maasoum and Hoda Davtalab in 2011. As they (p.1767) explained “an attempt has been made to show how the translation of *Dubliners* jointly by Safaryan and Salehhosseini handled the translation of CSIs in this story based on Newmark’s model (1988).” After comparing the source and target text the researchers concluded that translator has used general words and borrowing more than other strategies, and they

believe “using these strategies is effective in many cases and the translator can make his translation more authentic and tangible in this way.” (p. 1777)

## METHOD

The present research is a descriptive and library research, and its main purpose is to carry out analysis and describe the strategies used by the English translator for translating the cultural specific items found in Gulistan of Saadi, and to find out what the most frequently used strategy is.

## Materials

This study focuses on English translations of cultural specific items in Gulistan of Saadi translated by Edward Rehatsek and edited by David Rosenbaum and published in 2010 by Omphaloskepsis. Edward Rehatsek was an Orientalist and translator of several works of Islamic literature including the Gulistan of Saadi Shirazi, ibn Ishaq's Prophetic biography, and the Rawzat aş-şafā. Eight entrances of this book were explored to find cultural specific items. These entries are:

- I. The Manners of Kings
- II. The Morals of Dervishes
- III. The Excellence of Contentment
- IV. The Advantages of Silence
- V. Love and Youth
- VI. Weakness and Old Age
- VII. The Effects of Education
- VIII. Rules for Conduct in Life

After a detailed exploration 102 cultural specific items were found.

## Procedure

This is a library research. A descriptive-interpretive analysis was done on both the source and target text in order to find the results. Newmark's (1988) classification of cultural specific items was adopted as the theoretical framework of the present research which its main goal was analyzing CSIs in Gulistan of Saadi, and finding the most frequently used strategy for translating these items into English.

In order to achieve this goal, first the researcher read the source text to find all of the CSIs based on Newmark's (1988) category, then read the translation text done by Edward Rehatsek in 2010 to find the English equivalents of the CSIs, and finally compared them to find out which translation strategy was used for translating each item. Each strategy is defined and elaborated by examples as represented in the following tables:

According to Daghighi and Hashemian (2016, p. 174) “transference includes transliteration and is the same as what is called transcription. The word, then, becomes a loan word.”

**Table 1.** Examples of transference applied in translating CSIs in Gulistan of Saadi by Edward Rehatsek

Strategy	Source Text	Target Text ( English)
Transference	درویش	Dervish
	فقیه	Faqih
	صوفی	Sufi

According to Daghighi and Hashemian (2016, p. 174) “in functional equivalent, a culture-free word is used, sometimes a new specific term is used; therefore, it generalizes the SL word.”

**Table 2.** Examples of functional equivalent applied in translating CSIs in Gulistan of Saadi by Edward Rehatsek

Strategy	Source Text	Target Text ( English)
Functional Equivalent	گلیم	Blanket
	چادر	Sheet

Nida (1964, p. 237) believes “descriptive equivalents are deliberate attempts to produce satisfactory equivalents for objects, events, attributes and relationals for which no regular term exists in the receptor language”.

**Table 3.** Examples of descriptive equivalent applied in translating CSIs in Gulistan of Saadi by Edward Rehatsek

Strategy	Source Text	Target Text ( English)
Descriptive Equivalent	عیالوار وقف	To have many eaters to provide for spend for pious uses

Newmark (1988, p.84) defines synonymy as “near TL equivalent to a SL word”

**Table 4.** Examples of synonymy applied in translating CSIs in Gulistan of Saadi by Edward Rehatsek

Strategy	Source Text	Target Text ( English)
synonym	جهاز گازران	Dowry Washermen

According to Newmark (1988, p. 88) “in modulation the SL and the TL may be different in terms of perspective.”

**Table 5.** Examples of modulation applied in translating CSIs in Gulistan of Saadi by Edward Rehatsek

Strategy	Source Text	Target Text ( English)
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Modulation	سالكان كلاه بركي	Traveler Cap of leaves
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Newmark (1988, p. 114) considers componential analysis as “comparing an SL word with a TL word which has a similar meaning but is not an obvious one-to-one equivalent, by demonstrating first their common and then their differing sense components.”

**Table 6.** Examples of componential analysis applied in translating CSIs in Gulistan of Saadi by Edward Rehatsek

Strategy	Source Text	Target Text ( English)
componential analysis	چمچه	Spoon
	دف	Drum

Daghoughi and Hashemian (2016, p. 174) state that “cultural equivalent intends replacing a cultural word in the SL with an, although not accurate, TL word.”

**Table 7.** Examples of cultural equivalent applied in translating CSIs in Gulistan of Saadi by Edward Rehatsek

Strategy	Source Text	Target Text ( English)
cultural equivalent	زكات	Tithes

Newmark (1988, p. 82) declares that naturalization “succeeds transference and adapts the SL word first to the normal pronunciation, then to the normal morphology of the TL”

**Table 8.** Examples of naturalization applied in translating CSIs in Gulistan of Saadi by Edward Rehatsek

Strategy	Source Text	Target Text ( English)
Naturalization	سنت	Sonna

Newmark (1988, p. 84) defines through-translation as “the literal translation of common collocations, name of organizations, the components of compounds and perhaps phrases, which is also known as calque or loan translation”

**Table 9.** Examples of through-translation applied in translating CSIs in Gulistan of Saadi by Edward Rehatsek

Strategy	Source Text	Target Text ( English)
through translation	غلام حلقه به گوش	slave with a ring in his ear

## RESULTS

Based on the nature of the present research the data were gathered by comparing English translation and source text, and the researcher tried to answer the research question.

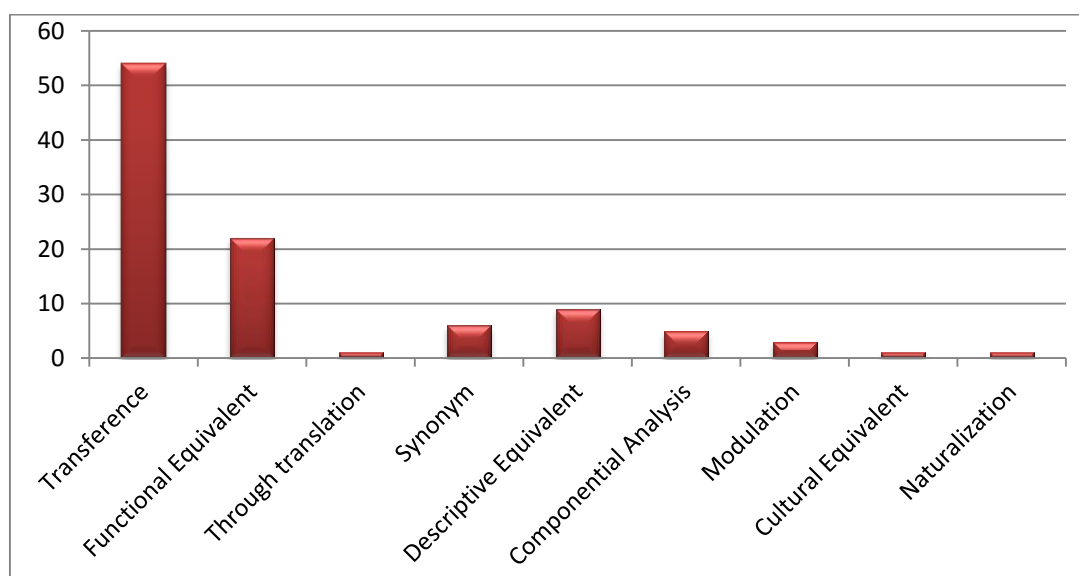
## Investigation of Research Question

The researcher attempted to answer the question that “what are the most frequently used translation strategies for translating cultural specific items in Gulistan of Saadi?”

After investigating eight entries of Gulistan of Saadi 102 cultural specific items were found, then each of these items was compared with its English equivalent to find out what translation strategy has been applied by the translator for translating it. Table 10 represents number and frequency of each translation strategy, according to this table “transference” is the most frequently used strategy for translation CSIs, and the least frequently used strategies are through translation, naturalization and cultural equivalent.

**Table 10.** Frequency and percentage of translation strategies applied by Rehatsek

Strategies	Frequency of Strategies	Percentage
Transference	54	52.94%
Functional Equivalent	22	21.56%
Through Translation	1	0.98%
Synonym	6	5.88%
Descriptive Equivalent	9	8.84%
Componential Analysis	5	4.90%
Modulation	3	2.94%
Cultural Equivalent	1	0.98%
Naturalization	1	0.98%



**Figure 1.** Frequency of all strategies applied for translating CSIs

## CONCLUSION

Iran’s great culture and literature must be shown to other people throughout the world and others must know Iran better and it is not possible either by visiting Iran or reading Persian literature, and by doing the latter they can both learn more about the Persian

thoughts and beliefs and become familiar with the best Iranian poets and writers, and these won't not be possible without the help of translation, as everyone does not have either enough time or the ability to learn a new language, so it can be said that translation of a literary work is as important as the original work.

A translator of a literary work not only has to produce a literary work in a target language, but also he must be able to represent the culture of the source language to the target readers as it really is. As Akbari (2013) states a good translator must know the culture, customs, and social background of speakers of the source and target language. She also expresses that culture is the result of human minds that cooperate with each other. Peeter Torop (2009) focuses on the relationship between culture and translation and believes that culture has a big role in the process of translation.

Every type of texts has its own features, characteristics and difficulties and the duty of a translator is to know them and be able to deal with them. Language is not apart from culture, so when someone learns a language he actually learns a culture, and a translator needs to know the culture of the target language more than a language learner. As Abbasi, Saleh zadeh, Janfaza, Assemi and Saadat Dehghan (2012) argue language and culture are interwoven, and translators must take them into consideration. They believe that there is no fixed way for dealing with source text and providing a translation, but all those translators who try to translate cultural and religious concepts may face some barriers in the process of translation.

Cultural specific items are among those obstacles which a translator may face during translation, and knowing the culture of the source language would be the first step for a translator to provide good equivalents for these items.

In order to do the present study, the researcher read all chapters of the book Gulistan of Saadi to find all of the cultural specific items used by Saadi and then those items were compared with their English translations done by Edward Rehatsek to find out what strategies have been used for translating those items from Persian into English. Finally, 102 items were found in the book "Gulistan of Saadi". The strategies were categorized based on the Newmark's (1988) categorization of strategies for translation of cultural specific items. As the result of the study shows the translator has used *transference* more than any other strategy. 54 out of 102 cultural specific items were translated by applying transference strategy, and application of this strategy is either due to the translator's respect to the culture of source text or not being able to translate the source text and finding better English equivalents, so he has decided to translate them by using this strategy. Newmark introduces 15 strategies for translating cultural specific items, and Rehatsek has only used 9 strategies for translating CSIs. Through-translation, naturalization and cultural equivalent are the least frequently used strategies in translation of CSIs.

A translator can be successful in his job when he is able to produce a translation which is as close as possible to the source text; it means that the source text conveys the true meanings and thoughts behind the words and sentences. In literary translation, a

translator is not only required to keep the esthetic aspects of the source texts in his translations, but also to convey all those concepts that are related to a specific culture. Doing researches like the present research help young translators and more importantly students of the field “translation” and “translation studies” to become familiar with the great works of the well-known translators around the world, and to learn how they deal with issues and difficulties when they are translating a specific genre. Reading about translation theories and translation modes is necessary for those who are either students of translation or would like to be a successful translator, but it is not suffice, so, studies like the present research would help them to know how to deal with different difficulties. By reading the present study they can learn more about translation strategies and how to deal with difficulties of a specific genre.

One of the main limitations of the present research was the time consuming process of gathering data, the researcher had to read 152 pages of Gulistan of Saadi in order to find all of the cultural specific items used by Saadi in this book.

For further researches it is suggested to work on other well-known Persian literary works which have been translated into English. There are some Persian poets who are popular in the world for their poems and books, so it is suggested to researchers to explore what strategies have been applied by translators of these works for translation of the cultural specific items that have made them successful in conveying the exact and true meaning of CSIs to the target readers. For instance, Rumi is one of the most popular Iranian poets in the world and Americans are among the greatest fans of his poems, so it is important to see how his poems have been translated that now they are so popular among people of different cultures. How translators have managed to introduce Iranian and Sufism culture to people who may have no idea about these beliefs, ideologies and cultures?

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