

## Cultural Inequivalences from Albanian into English in the Translation of “Pallati I Ęndrrave” by Ismail Kadare

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### Abstract

*This article focuses on cultural translation, especially addressing the issue of cultural inequivalences or losses occurring in the translation of “Pallati i Ęndrrave” written by Ismail Kadare. The main aim of this article is to investigate how different cultural aspects of source text are transmitted into the target text, causing cultural losses. As we might know, cultural losses are defined as the losses of cultural norms, social customs, idioms, and proverbial wisdom that are inherited through generations and comprise the identity of the source culture. Such losses occur during the process of correlating the verbal signs of one culture to another different culture and result mainly from misrepresenting the literariness of the source text and its pragmatic forces. Therefore, to present such cases, many examples of cultural losses are given, which are divided based on different type of losses in both version. Thus, in order to illustrate cultural aspects in literature, we analyze figurative language such as culture items, idiomatic expressions, proverbs in two texts: Albanian (the source text) and English (the target text). The analysis of examples have shown that translation of cultural aspects of the source text was communicatively successful, however, it failed to represent the culture-bound words which represent the implicit level of the source text. In this sense, we argue that figurative language and cultural terms of the source text are unfamiliar for target text and they should be looked at from the perspective of a cultural insider.*

**Keywords:** cultural translation, translation and inequivalence, cultural losses, figurative language, context.

### 1. Introduction

We know that there exist a strong relation between culture and translation and interest in the mutual relationship between culture and translation has increased in recent years motivated largely by the awareness of the need to develop human communication and the translation of texts across cultural and linguistic boundaries. Different from other types of translation, literary translation can reflect the interrelationship of culture, ideology and communication (Katan 1999/2004; Bassnett and Lefevere 1990). The influence of such translation on communication within a specific cultural and ideological context can also affect target readers' reception of a certain literary work.

We are aware that differences between cultures play an important role in the process of conveying a text from one language into another, particularly when these languages do not have much in common. Therefore, I aim to discuss in this paper the cultural problems of translating Albanian into English and how these issues affect the translator's decisions. Translators should be aware of the smallest detail while conveying a novel from its source culture context into the target culture context as well as of the strategies available to them in order to produce the TT.

This article investigates ‘cultural losses’ occurring in the translation of “Pallati i Ęndrrave” written by Ismail Kadare. Before we present the examples of cultural losses, we discuss the reasons which led to these cultural losses. First, cultural losses or inequivalences result mostly from figurativeness of the source text. Omitting or altering the figurativeness (cultural metaphors, idiomatic expressions, and proverbs) of the source text is particularly sensitive in literary translation and will result in a translation that is unfair to the source text, the source culture and the target audience. Second, we argue that cultural losses are losses on the deep symbolic level of the source language; hence, they require an effort on the part of the translator to retain these symbolic levels and capture the cultural implications meant by the source author.

Accordingly, the translation product would be culturally more suitable if the translator assumes the function of a cultural insider. Finally, cultural losses are context-sensitive; they are, by and large, losses of the unfamiliar and so are marked to the target readers. In this article, we first introduce a general review of literature on figurative language and then, we proceed with an analysis and discussion of cultural losses. Thus, culture-oriented problems can be divided into two categories: extralinguistic and intralinguistic (Leppihalme 1997: 2). Extralinguistic phenomena range from natural (winds, flora and fauna, etc.) to man-made phenomena (social institutions, buildings, markets, etc.). Whereas intralinguistic culture-oriented

problems include metaphors, allusions, idioms, proverbs and ways of addressing a person, complimenting her/him or apologizing.

The process of translating idioms and fixed expressions from one language into another is a fine work which obliges a translator to have a good knowledge of both languages and cultures being shared or transferred as well as being able to identify and cope with the contingent problems in the process of finding an efficient equivalent for the inter-lingual idiomatic pairs. People of different languages use completely different expressions to convey a similar meaning, in a way that while an expression might be completely tangible and easy-to-understand for the interlocutors of a specific language, the same set of words and expressions may seem fully vague and dim and even in some cases nonsense to the speakers of the other. This originates in the fact that each language has got some culture-specific items that are completely different from the corresponding items in another language. Besides, there are some differences in such factors as religion, geographical locations, different ideologies, and social classes of languages and societies that harden the process of understanding and translating idiomatic pairs from one language into another. Hence, there are two main problems in this case: 1) How to understand the meaning of idioms and fixed expressions of a specific language; and 2) How to recreate the same sets of idioms and fixed expressions of one language in another language in a way that they might convey exactly the same ideas of the original language.

For the purposes of this article, cultural losses are broadly defined as the losses of cultural norms, religious beliefs, social customs, and proverbial wisdom that are inherited through generations and comprise the identity of the source culture. Cultural losses could be explicit (causing a loss of the cultural meaning of the source text both on the surface and deep levels), implicit (causing a loss on the deep level/ concealed cultural information), modified (altering the realities of the source text, as experienced by the source readers), or complete (deleting cultural characteristics that are unique to the source language). Before we present the cases of cultural losses from the source and target text, we will shortly discuss the figurative language, explaining their meaning and how a translator can deal with such cultural elements.

## 2. Figurative Language (idioms expressions, proverbs)

### Idioms

Idioms are treated as figures of speech, which are defined in the Collins English Dictionary (2006) as “*an expression such as a simile, in which words do not have their literal meaning, but are categorized as multi-word expressions that act in the text as units*”. Longman Idioms Dictionary (1998) defines them as “*a sequence of words which has a different meaning as a group from the meaning it would have if you understand each word separately*”. Accordingly, idioms should not be broken up into their elements because they are sometimes referred to as a fixed expression (Cowie and Mackin, 1975, viii cited in Balfaqeeh, 2009).

Therefore, they are generally viewed in the literature as a special category of lexical items which are not only determined through their structure, but also show a specific type of behavior in language use (Strässler 1982: 11). An idiom is traditionally defined as “*an expression whose meaning cannot be worked out from the meanings of its constituent words*” (Trask 1999: 119). Strässler (1982) points out that there are few studies dealing with idiomaticity—a general term referring to the syntactic and semantic properties of idioms—although it is not a new subject in linguistics. He mentions that most of the works on idioms are collections that do not comprise a unified theory of idioms. Strässler comments “*the general lack of idiomatic theories might certainly be a reason, for it is extremely difficult to incorporate an ill-defined phenomenon into a new concept*” (26). Weinreich (1969: 42) refers to the idiom as “*A phraseological unit that involves two polysemous constituents, and in which there is a reciprocal contextual selection of subsenses.*” Makkai (1972) in Strässler (1982: 43) describes idioms as “*unitary in meaning, 12 Translation and Cultural Equivalence: A Study of Translation Losses unpredictable as to syntax, and complex, hence misleading in expression*”.

According to Baker (1992: 63), idioms are frozen patterns of language which allow little or no variation in form and often carry meanings which cannot be deduced from their individual components. Baker (1992: 65) explains that the main problems that idiomatic expressions create in translation relate to two main areas: the ability to recognize and interpret an idiom correctly and the difficulties involved in rendering the various aspects of meaning that an idiom conveys into the TL. Baker (1992: 71-8) suggests different procedures for the translation of idioms such as:

- *Using an idiom of similar meaning and form.* Baker (1992: 72) argues that this strategy entails using a TL idiom which communicates the meaning of the SL idiom and at the same time includes similar lexical items. The point to be mentioned here is that the more two cultures are identical to each other the more cases of such equivalents

are possible. Contrarily, if the two cultures are not similar and the cultural differences are clearly remarkable between them, then the possibility of making such equivalents for the idiomatic expressions is decreased to its lowest degree. So it can be said that when the SL and TL cultures are identical in some cases there is an "Automatic" process of domestication" proposed by Venuti (1995), i.e., in some cases the idioms in the SL are domesticated in the TL without any considerable difficulty or idiosyncrasy for both of the languages have got exactly the same idioms and ideologies resulting in an automatic domestication.

- *Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form.* Baker (1992: 74) states that it is often possible to find a TL idiom which has similar meaning to the SL one but with different lexical items. This means that the lexical items of the SL idioms are not kept in the TL; instead a semantic equivalent is given in the TL.
- *Paraphrasing the idiom.* Baker (1992: 74) explains that this is the most common strategy when an idiomatic match cannot be found in the TL.
- "Translation by omission" (Baker, 1992, p. 77). This means that an idiom is entirely deleted in the TL because "it has no close match in the target language, its meaning cannot be easily paraphrased, or for stylistic reasons".
- This strategy is done mostly in the sentence or paragraph level. The reason for this phenomenon is that when an idiomatic expression is omitted, nearly always there is a "loss" in the meaning. To "compensate" the resulting loss, one is obliged to mention some supplementary words in some parts of the sentence or paragraph where an omission has been done.

### Proverbs

The definition of a proverb according to the Concise Oxford English Dictionary is "a short pithy saying in general use, stating a general truth or piece of advice" (Soanes and Stevenson 2008: 1156). A saying, Ridout and Witting (1967: 8-9) argue, needs to be assimilated by the common people to become a proverb, and a proverb to become popular must be wise, and to remain popular must contain 'enduring wisdom'. For example, make hay while the sun shines is a saying originated in farm work where every farm worker would have felt the truth of this thought. But after a great many people had expressed the thought in their many different ways, it had at last found its memorable form; it was that form that lived as a proverb. Ridout and Witting (1967: 9-19) mention different origins of proverbs such as the Bible and literary works and they suggest that proverbial expressions should be distinguished from proverbs. Proverbial expressions such as cry for the moon, according to Ridout and Witting (1967: 14), do not offer advice or warning and are sometimes considered idiomatic phrases, however, they can very easily be turned into proverbs by incorporating them in the form of advice, e.g. only fools cry for the moon. Baker (1992: 64) explains that proverbs are like idioms in that they allow little or no variation in form. However, unlike idioms, proverbs often have fairly recognizable meanings. Proverbs may be culture-specific and as a result may not have equivalents in the TL. Let's consider the following examples: "A cat may look at a king" or "There is a reason in roasting eggs". In these two cases, we can adjust the meaning but not giving their equivalents in the Albanian culture.

Whereas, Brown et al (1998: 525) generally define proverbs as "the short, generally known, sentences of the folk that contain wisdom, truths, morals and traditional views and which are handed down orally from generation to generation". Bakalla (1984: 248) adds to this definition that a proverb is "often used colloquially and set forth in the guise of a metaphor and in the form of a rhyme, and is sometimes alliterative." Accordingly, proverbs can be looked at as illustrations of contexts, not a representation of a particular one. In other words, they are not limited to one context in the source language, rather they are used over and over, and are extended to many variable contexts because of the morals they teach, or their "folk wisdom," as anthropologists prefer to describe them.

### 3. Analysis of Cultural Losses based on their types

#### Explicit Losses:

'Explicit losses' refer to any loss of cultural information both on the surface level (the verbal signs and structures), and on the deep level (the hidden information that are culture-specific) of the source text. It was observed that such losses result mainly from literal translation, whereby linguistic equivalence is achieved on the expense of cultural equivalence, thus posing major difficulties in the decoding of the meaning intended in the source message. In these losses, translation adheres to the "principle of adequacy" (Toury 1986: 1123), but violates the "equivalence effect principle" (cf. Farghal, 1995b: 54). These 'linguistic gaps', as Farghal (1995a: 198) calls them, are purely linguistic as they are present in the experiential world of the culture in question.

<p>Për çudi, i zoti i ëndrës nuk ishte muzikant, por shitës lulelakrash, nga kryeqyteti. <i>Ç`më polli tha me vete Mark-Alemi, pa i hequr sytë nga fleta. Të dilte një perimtar i mallkuar dhe të ngatërronte mendjen.</i> (P.Ë, f.76).</p>	<p>Strangely enough he wasn't a musician- he was a street trader who had a market stall in the capital. <i>Lord!</i> Said Mark-Alem to himself, unable to take his eyes off his information. (P.D,p.45)</p>
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The above example shows that cultural expressions cause difficulties in understanding them and consequently, during the translation process there is cultural losses. In this case, the meaning of the context where this expression “*ç`më polli*” is used, is crucial because it plays an important pragmatic role in understanding the source expression. In Albanian language “*pjell*” (produce/give birth) is a word used especially for animals, meaning the process of giving birth. However, in our case, this phrase is used in an idiomatic meaning, signifying that a person has a problem, a concern, or restlessness related to something that might have happened to him/her. Thus, the abovementioned phrase is transmitted in English version with a word only. The translator has chosen to give the word “*Lord*” as the equivalent in the target text, which does not give the intended meaning as it is in the original. Another important thing seen from linguistic perspective is that, by using this word, the translator has not taken into consideration the formal equivalence and substitutes it with one word as “*Lord*” and the usage of this word is a religious term which might be related to different situations. Whereas from cultural perspective, translation causes explicit loss of cultural values in expressing the phrase of source language. Therefore, in this example, we have both linguistic and cultural loss.

### Implicit Losses

‘Implicit losses’ refer to the loss of cultural information implicitly present in the source text. They are losses of the source-culture spirit, as echoed in its literary heritage. It should be pointed out that this type of losses is challenging because its understanding requires, what Bailey (1996: 152) calls, “reading between the lines”. That is, target readers are expected to “search for some special possibility of hidden and certainly situation-specific interpretations”. In contrast to explicit losses, where translation causes a loss both to the ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ of the source language, implicit losses are losses to the ‘inside’ of the source culture, and so, they are culturally-oriented.

<p>Po s`kam ç`tu bëj, <i>më ka zënë rrota bishtin.</i> (P.Ë,f.146)</p>	<p>But there's nothing I can do – <i>I have no choice.</i> (P.D,p.110)</p>
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In the above example, we can say that from functional and communicative perspective the translation has transmitted the meaning of the source expression and the idea is understandable, but, however; this does not mean that we don't have cultural losses. This translation has led to cultural and social implication. The above expression “*më ka zënë rrota bishtin*” is transmitted with the equivalence as “*I have no choice*”. In this case, in Albanian culture, the abovementioned phrase a wide range of usage among people and it expresses to describe a situation where a person is worried or upset because he/she can't do anything about a particular thing. In English version, what we notice is that the expression is conveyed with the same feeling and intensity as in the original one, and moreover, it is given with a normal sentence and not with an idiomatic phrase as an equivalence, in order to transmit the same sensation as in the source culture.

### Modified Losses

‘Modified losses’ refer to losses resulting from the replacement of cultural expressions in the source text by culturally equivalent expressions in the target text. Losses of this kind have a mild effect on the source text. In a sense, they are similar to implicit losses in not seriously affecting the theme of the message conveyed. However, they differ in that they achieve more cultural equivalence than implicit losses. Modified losses are indicators of how the two cultures in question reflect realities, and how people of one culture denote the world from their own perspectives.

<p>Në bisedat e pafundme për Tabir Sarajin, ashtu sikurse në bisedën e turbullt të Vezirit, Mark-Alemi kishte kuptuar se, sa më keq t'i kishte punët Pallati i Ëndrave, aq më mirë ishte për Qyprillinjë. Pra, rrjedhimisht, sa më e zezë të</p>	<p>In the course of his endless conversations with the Vezier, not to mention their last interview, he'd got the idea that the worse things were for the Palace of Dreams the better they would be for the Quprilis. So the unluckier</p>
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<p>ishte kjo ditë për Tabirin, aq më i gëzuar duhej të ndihej ai. Duhej të ndihej...Megjithatë, s'ishte aspak kështu. <u>Kjo pasiguri përreth s'i jepte asnjë gëzim, përkundrazi, i drithëronte eshtrat.</u> (P.Ë, f.177)</p>	<p>today proved to be for the Tabir, the more reason he himself ought to have to rejoice. But it wasn't like that at all. <u>The uncertainty all around him, far from giving him pleasure, only made him more afraid.</u> (P.D, p.140)</p>
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In the above example, the idiomatic phrase “*Kjo pasiguri përreth s'i jepte asnjë gëzim, përkundrazi, i drithëronte eshtrat*” is given equivalent with the sentence “The uncertainty all around him, far from giving him pleasure, only *only made him more afraid*”, which does not give to the target readers the same feeling and meaning as in the original one. The translator has not expressed the idiomatic expression of the source culture with the same heaviness and emotion as in the original. In Albanian culture, “*i drithëronte eshtrat*” is used to show that a person is experiencing a bad situation and everything around him/her arouse fear in all the body. In our case, the main character, Mark-Alem, is having an uncertainty in his life, which causes fear and low spirit **till the bones**. Thus, we can say that, although the meaning of the phrase is conveyed, the target reader can not feel the same feeling and get the same emotions as the original phrase transmits to the source readers.

### Complete Losses

As the term suggests, ‘complete losses’ are the result of a complete ignorance of the linguistic codes of the source text. Complete losses are purely culture-bound and unique to the source text, and so have no equivalents what so ever in the target culture. To put it differently, complete losses are losses of figurative verbal signs that may only be of prime pertinence to the Albanians (cf. Farghal 1995a: 201).

<p>O Zot! – ia bënte herë pas here nëna e Mark-Alemit. <u>Ç'ne gjithë kjo gjëmë!</u> (P.Ë, f.198)</p>	<p>Mark-Alem's mother groaned from time to time. <u>“My God- what was that ghastly business?”</u></p>
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In the above example, the phrase “*Ç'ne gjithë kjo gjëmë!*”, is uttered by Mark-Alem's mother, after a grave situation created in Quprilis family. In source language, the word “*gjëmë*”, indicates a negative meaning, showing a disaster or a catastrophe that might have happened or is about to happen. In English version, the translator has chosen to translate the phrase as “My God- what was that ghastly business?” in order to convey the source author idea. However, we can say that in this case there is semantic and cultural loss at the same time, since the chosen word does not transmit the same cultural notion as in the source text. The phrase “ghastly business” refers to the business field and its usage can be proper to be used in this field rather than referring to the meaning of “*gjëmë*”. Therefore, in this case there is cultural loss while translating the sentence from the source text into target text.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this article has focused on cultural losses occurring in the translation from Albanian into English of the novel “*Pallati i Ëndrrave*”. These losses were losses of the cultural information that are inherent on the deep level of the source text. Even when linguistic equivalence is achieved, which means that the intended meaning of the source text is given, there is cultural loss in that the information and the transmission of these cultural items are not transmitted properly and with the same emotion and feeling to the target readers.

Moreover, the cases which seem to cause cultural losses are the idiomatic expressions, proverbs and cultural elements, which are specific to the source language and it is rather difficult to find the right one.

Then four strategies were mentioned to solve the problems that idiomatic expressions may cause: 1) using an idiom of similar meaning and form; 2) Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form; 3) Translation by paraphrase; and 4) Translation by omission

However, it was shown that there is no predefined way to cope with idiomatic expressions, but it is the situation which decides which strategy to be taken. The important roles of socio-linguistic and cultural aspects were illustrated by a number of examples proving the fact that the more two cultures and languages are identical to each other, the more easily the

process of translating idiomatic expressions becomes. Since Albanian and English culture do not share many of proverbs or idioms, there is a big gap while dealing with these expressions in the translation process. As a result, it is very important that translator must have a deep knowledge on both SL and TL so as to understand the connotative meanings of idioms and fixed expressions of the SL and then to find their exact equivalences in the TL.

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