



Comparing Dynamic and Formal Equivalence in Three English Translations of Nahj al-Balagha: A Study of Selected Letters

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ABSTRACT

The translation of religious texts plays a crucial role within the translators' community, prompting many translators to strive for the most appropriate equivalents in order to convey the themes and ideas as comprehensively as possible. The primary objective of the present study was to investigate the differences in equivalence among translators while translating twenty conveniently selected letters from Nahj al-Balagha from the original to the target text. Specifically, it aimed to determine whether the three English translations of Nahj al-Balagha by Mohammad Askari Jafari, Morteza Motahhari, and Sayed Ali Reza convey the same message. In this context, the research sought to identify any significant differences in equivalence among the three Persian-to-English translations by these translators. Nida's (1964) model of equivalence served as the framework for the study, allowing a comparison of the three English translations of letters 40 to 60. This analysis focused on identifying the types of equivalence used based on Nida's distinctions between dynamic and formal equivalence. The results indicated significant differences among the three translations: Sayed Ali Reza's and Motahhari's translations were notably more formal in tone, while Askari Jafari's translation was characterized as dynamic. These findings can be informative for readers interested in further research on the translation of religious texts, including Nahj al-Balagha.

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1. Introduction

To date, many theorists and linguists have explored the intricate relationship between language, equivalence, culture, and translation. Brown (1994) states that “Language is a part of a culture, and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture” (p. 165). Furthermore, Dweik (2000) argues that the differences between cultures can create challenges not only in translation but also in learning foreign languages. The task of translating religious texts from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL) is particularly challenging due to the specificity of certain lexical and cultural items rooted in the structure and culture of the SL. This complexity is heightened when interpreting religious terms and collocations, especially when transitioning from an Islamic culture to a Western one (e.g., translating Arabic or Persian into English). A significant issue arises in finding suitable equivalents when translating collocations that pertain to specific religious and technical concepts deeply embedded in Islamic culture. Equivalence is a central concern in translation; as Catford (1965) asserts, translation involves replacing textual materials in one language with equivalent materials in another.

Thus, the equivalence of textual materials is paramount. In this context, Farghal and Shunnaq (1999) conducted an investigation into culturally specific terms in religious texts. They suggest that terms and collocations in religious texts are often comprehensive and exclusive in meaning, carrying unique linguistic and semantic features that are culturally specific. Consequently, these terms may be untranslatable, with no direct equivalents in the TL. For example, Farghal and Shunnaq (1999) highlight “Jihad” and “tayammum” as instances where translators may encounter difficulties in conveying religious concepts that lack counterparts in English-speaking cultures.

Given this challenge, many Muslim translators have endeavored to translate significant religious scriptures in the Islamic world, seeking the most appropriate interpretations and suitable equivalents to convey meanings and messages effectively. However, it appears that fewer scholars have focused on the holy scripture of Nahj al-Balagha, particularly regarding the issue of equivalence. This study aims to investigate the challenges translators face concerning equivalence when rendering cultural collocations in the religious text of Nahj al-Balagha. To this end, the present study examines three English translations of Nahj al-Balagha. One translation is by Sayed Ali Reza, published in Qum in 2008. Another is by Morteza Motahhari, an Iranian cleric, philosopher, lecturer, and politician, whose translation has also been published in Qum. The third translation is by Mohammad Askari Jafari, a theorist and translator of both Nahj al-Balagha and the Holy Qur’ān.

2. Literature review

2.1 Theoretical considerations

The intimate relationship between language and culture and their impacts on translation have led to the development of various theories by theorists and linguists (Nida, 1964; Jakobson, 1965; Catford, 1965; Vinay and Darbelnet, 1995). Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) describe equivalence-oriented translation as a procedure that replicates the same situation as in the original text while using entirely different wording. They argue that equivalence is the ideal method when translating proverbs and idioms. However, they later acknowledge that glossaries and collections of idiomatic expressions can never be exhaustive. They conclude

that “the need for creating equivalences arises from the situation, and it is in the situation of the SL text that translators must look for a solution” (as cited in Munday, 2009, p. 58).

Jakobson’s (1959) study of equivalence introduced a new perspective to the theoretical analysis of translation by presenting a different notion of equivalence. According to his theory, translation involves two equivalent messages expressed in different codes. Occasionally, translators may encounter challenges in finding a translation equivalent, resulting in non-equivalence. Nida (1964) identifies two types of equivalence: formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence refers to a TL item that closely represents the SL word or phrase. Nida and Taber (1969) clarify that formal equivalents are not always found between language pairs. Catford’s (1965) approach to translation equivalence differs from Nida’s, as Catford favors a more linguistically based perspective. His main contribution to translation theory is the introduction of the concepts of types and shifts of translation, which are particularly useful when addressing issues of equivalence or non-equivalence.

Baker (1992) provides an intriguing discussion of equivalence, offering a detailed list of conditions that define the concept. She distinguishes between equivalence at the word level and above the word level, including grammatical equivalence, textual equivalence, and pragmatic equivalence. Baker emphasizes that equivalence is the foremost consideration for translators. The translator’s role is to recreate the author’s intention within another culture in a way that enables the TL reader to understand it clearly. In this regard, Brown (1994) states, “Language is a part of a culture, and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture” (p. 165).

2.2 Empirical background

Many scholars have examined the role of culture and the use of equivalence in translation. Al-Khanji and Hussein (1999) investigated the challenges students face in learning equivalences and collocations, as well as the strategies they employ when unable to correctly collocate lexical words. Their study involved a sample of 120 second-year English majors at the University of Jordan, who completed a test consisting of 50 collocation and equivalence items based on their frequency in textbooks and English courses. The results indicated that students’ incorrect responses fell into three categories: the first category, based on the SL, included literal transliteration, categorized as “negative transfer” (p. 140). The second category, based on the TL, involved “semantic contiguity,” where students replaced a lexical item with another that shared certain semantic features. The third category was identified as the “lexical reduction strategy” (p. 135).

Dweik (2000) asserts that differences between cultures inevitably lead to difficulties not only in translation but also in learning foreign languages. He reported that interference problems could arise from a lack of knowledge of either the TL or the SL. Karimi (2000) defined equivalence in translation as the process of decoding the SL text and then seeking an appropriate equivalent in the TL to encode the decoded meaning. He also noted that, due to religious, cultural, and literary factors, finding a standard equivalent from one language to another can be challenging. To achieve a satisfactory translation, he emphasized that translators must be familiar with the phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, idiomatic, religious, and cultural systems of both the SL and the TL.

Abdul-Fattah and Zughoul (2003) conducted a study on EFL university learners at both undergraduate and graduate levels, aiming to assess their proficiency in rendering collocations and the strategies used in producing Arabic collocations. They specifically investigated the competence of these learners in translating the Arabic verb “kasara,” meaning “broke,” into English. The test was administered in two forms, each containing 16 lexical sequences related to the verb. The study sample consisted of two groups of EFL university students from the Department of English at Yarmouk University. Data analysis revealed that the participants’ overall performance in producing target collocations was far from satisfactory. Additionally, twelve distinct communicative strategies were identified, including avoidance, literal translation, substitution, overgeneralization, quasi-metaphorical similarity, assumed synonymy, derivativeness, imitation of literary style, idiomatic usage, paraphrasing, circumlocution, graphic ambiguity, and false TL assumption.

Bahumaid (2006) explored the procedures employed by translators when rendering equivalences and collocations with unknown TL equivalents. His study involved four Arab university instructors who taught translation and had practical translation experience. The two-part translation test included thirty sentences featuring contextualized collocations and various types of equivalence. The sentences encompassed 15 English equivalences, 11 Arabic ones, and 4 Arabic phrases. Some selected equivalences were general, such as “to make noise,” while others were tied to specific registers. The results indicated that culture-bound and register-specific equivalences posed the greatest challenge in translation, whereas equivalences with literal meanings were relatively easier to translate. Furthermore, translators employed several strategies, including providing the meanings of equivalences, using synonyms or near-synonyms, attempting literal renditions, and sometimes avoiding translation altogether.

Dweik and Abu-Shaqra (2010) investigated the challenges translators face when rendering cultural collocations in three religious texts: the Holy Quran, the Hadith, and the Bible. To achieve the study’s objectives, the researchers selected a purposive sample of 35 students enrolled in M.A. translation programs at the Universities of Petra, Yarmouk, and Jordan. They also constructed a translation test consisting of 45 contextual short sentences, randomly selected from the three religious texts, with 15 sentences assigned to each text. The researchers found that: (i) translators encountered difficulties with lexical and semantic collocations, (ii) translators of religious texts must possess a deep understanding of the nature of both lexical and metaphoric collocations, recognize the disparities between Arabic and Western concepts and beliefs, and avoid literal translation by considering context.

Building on this background, the present study aims to investigate whether the different English translations of Nahj al-Balagha exhibit the same degree of equivalence and convey the same message according to Nida’s model (1964). Additionally, it seeks to identify which of the three translations demonstrates greater dynamism and which one is more formal. The study intends to address the following research questions:

- Considering Nida’s model (1964), which translator(s) employed more dynamic equivalence and which one(s) utilized more formal equivalence?
- Is there a significant difference in the types of equivalence used by the three English translators of Nahj al-Balagha?

This research is significant as very few studies have explored the challenges Muslim translators face in translating the religious text of Nahj al-Balagha. Furthermore, this study

differs in terms of the corpus used, potentially benefiting students of translation, practicing translators, and translation instructors, while helping to fill a gap in the existing literature.

3. Methodology

3.1 Materials and corpus

This study examined twenty letters of the Peak of Eloquence (Nahj al-Balagha) and their translations into English by three different translators. The corpus of the study comprised letters 40 to 60 of Nahj al-Balagha in Persian and their three translations in English which were selected based on convenient sampling. English translations were selected based on their availability from three translators, namely, Askari Jafari (whose translation was published in Tehran and Islamic seminary publication and the last publication was in 2010), Morteza Motahhari (who was an Iranian cleric, philosopher, lecturer and politician and his translation of Nahj al-Balagha was published in 2013 in Qum) and Sayed Ali Reza (whose translation was published in Qum for the first time and the last publication was in 2008). Over the study, the English renditions by three translators were represented as follows, respectively:

R1: Mohammad Askari Jafari

R2: Morteza Motahhari

R3: Sayed Ali Reza

3.2 Data collection and analysis

As a descriptive-comparative research design, data were collected from three English translations of the letters 40 to 60 of Nahj al-Balagha. To identify types of equivalence, it was necessary to describe and classify them to build up a picture of the features of the TL in which to compare and contrast equivalents employed by translators. Accordingly, the original Persian version of the letters 40 to 60 was studied carefully. Then, three English translations of the counterpart letters were studied to compare and find the types of equivalence used in them according to Nida's (1964) model. In this vein, the three English translations were compared to see if they were concerned with the formal or dynamic equivalence. In the final phase, a chi-square test was run to see if there is a significant difference between the types of equivalence used by the translators.

3.3 Framework of the study

In the present study, Nida's equivalence model (1964) serves as the framework for the research. This model consists of two distinct types of equivalence: formal and dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence emphasizes fidelity to the lexical details and grammatical structure of the original language, striving to remain as close as possible to the original text without incorporating the translator's personal ideas or interpretations. In contrast, dynamic equivalence adopts a more natural rendering, often sacrificing literal accuracy for a translation that resonates more effectively with the target audience. In other words, dynamic equivalence translates the original language "thought for thought" rather than "word for word," as is the case with formal equivalence. Additionally, according to Nida (1964), dynamic equivalence seeks to convey the message of the original text in such a way that the

response from the recipient in the TL closely mirrors that of the original audience. The goal is for readers of both languages to grasp the meaning of the text in a similar manner.

4. Findings

In the following, some examples of translators' renditions of Nahj-al-balagha by Askari Jafari, Motahhari and Sayed Ali Reza along with the types of equivalence used are presented and then the findings related to each example are discussed.

Example 1: Letter 41

من تو را شریک در امانتم [حکومت و زمامداری] قرار دادم و تو را صاحب اسرار خود ساختم. من از میان خاندان و خویشاوندانم مطمئن تر از تو نیافتم به خاطر مواسات یاری و ادای امانتی که در تو یافتم.

R1: I trusted you and appointed you on a very responsible post. I did this under the impression that from my own clan nobody will prove more sympathetic, more helpful and more trustworthy to me than you.

R2: I had made you a partner in my trust and my chief man. For me, no other person from my kinsmen was more trustworthy than you in the matter of sympathizing with me, assisting and respecting my trust.

R3: Now, I had made you a partner in my trust, and made you my chief man. And for me no other person from my kinsmen was more trustworthy than you in the matter of sympathizing with me, assisting and respecting my trusts.

Table 1. Types of Equivalence Used in the Translations of Letter 41 (D = dynamic, F = formal)

Rendition	Type of Equivalence Used
R1	D
R2	F
R3	F

As shown in Table 1, Askari Jafari employs dynamic equivalence, while the other two translators, Motahhari and Sayed Ali Reza, utilize formal equivalence. Askari Jafari's translation is more reader-oriented and focuses less on minute details, resulting in a somewhat under-translation. For example, the phrase "sharik dar amanat" is rendered as a verb to enhance fluidity, and the verb "saxtam" is replaced with "appoint," even though a more literal translation would be "make." By choosing "appoint," Askari Jafari aims to convey the intended force of the verb.

In contrast, in the subsequent sentence, he prioritizes the equivalent effect of the translation, as it is translation-oriented, placing emphasis on the readership. Conversely, the translations by Motahhari and Sayed Ali Reza are more detailed and author-oriented. They strive to retain both the form and content of the original text. For instance, the phrase "sharik dar amanat" is translated literally, considering its contextual meaning. Examining the following sentences reveals that both Motahhari and Sayed Ali Reza consistently employ formal equivalence; they tend to over-translate and pay greater attention to the details and structure of the source text.

In summary, this example illustrates that Askari Jafari's translation is primarily reader-oriented, while the translations by Motahhari and Sayed Ali Reza show a greater inclination toward the author and the source text.

Example 2: Letter 42

بنابراین بسوی ما حرکت کن بی آنکه مورد سوءظن یا ملامت یا متهم و یا گناهکار باشی زیرا من تصمیم گرفته ام به سوی ستمگران اهل شام حرکت کنم.

R1: Come to me immediately. The fact is that I have resolved to face the Syrian tyrants and oppressors.

R2: Therefore, proceed to me when you are neither suspected nor rebuked, neither blamed nor guilty. I have just intended to proceed towards the rebel of Syria [Mu'awiyah].

R3: Therefore, proceed to me while you are neither suspected nor rebuked, neither blamed nor guilty. I have just intended to proceed towards the recalcitrant of Syria.

Table 2. Types of Equivalence Used in the Translations of Letter 42 (D = dynamic, F = formal)

Rendition	Type of Equivalence Used
R1	D
R2	F
R3	F

In Table 2, the translation by Askari Jafari is based on dynamic equivalence, while the translations by Motahhari and Sayed Ali Reza adhere to formal equivalence. Askari Jafari renders "besuye ma harakat kon" communicatively as "come to...", employing deletion to provide readers with a clear and natural sentence that would otherwise require presupposition regarding the reasons for any suspicion. In this context, Nida (2003) argues that the receptor needs adequate non-linguistic information to use textual cues to create semantic content. He asserts that "words only have meaning in terms of the culture of which they are a part" (Nida, 2003, p. 77).

In contrast, Motahhari and Sayed Ali Reza provide a nearly literal translation, paying equal attention to both syntactic and semantic elements. They strive to adopt the closest possible structure to the SL in order to convey the contextual meanings accurately. Notably, the choice of the verb "come" by Askari Jafari, which is less formal than "proceed," may reflect the interpersonal relationship between Imam Ali and the subordinate individual.

Moreover, the term "setamgaran" is rendered differently by the three translators: as "tyrant" by Askari Jafari, "rebel" by Motahhari, and "recalcitrant" by Sayed Ali Reza. Among these options, "tyrant" appears to be the most closely aligned with its Persian counterpart. This indicates that Askari Jafari's translation is target-oriented, while Motahhari and Sayed Ali Reza prioritize the source culture and author.

Example 3: Letter 43

به آنچه میخوری بنگر [آیا حلال است یا حرام؟]. آنگاه آنچه حلال بودنش برای تو مشتبه بود از دهان بینداز و آنچه را یقین به پاکیزگی و حلیتش داری تناول کن.

R1: Look carefully into the things which you eat. If there is even a shade of their being obtained unlawfully then throw them away, only eat those things about which you are perfectly certain that they are obtained by honest means.

R2: Look at the morsels which you take. Leave out that about which you are in doubt and take that about which you are sure that it has been secured lawfully.

R3: Look at the morsels you take, leave out that about which you are in doubt and take that about which you are sure that it has been secured lawfully.

Table 3. Types of Equivalence Used in the Translations of Letter 43 (D = dynamic, F = formal)

Rendition	Type of Equivalence Used
R1	F
R2	D
R3	D

As shown in Table 3, Askari Jafari used “carefully” as a compensation for “halal va haram,” while the two other translators rendered the text similarly. Unlike in the previous example, Askari Jafari utilized redundancy and over-translation to convey the meanings, translating “halal budan” as “being obtained unlawfully.” Here, he employed a change of view strategy, as proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995). Additionally, in the following sentence, the term “heliat” was transposed to “they are obtained by honest means.”

In contrast, Motahhari and Sayed Ali Reza opted for under-translation, resulting in translations that are smooth, direct, and easy to read, reflecting a tendency toward the TL culture. They aim to maintain the naturalness of the original message through dynamic equivalence. In this regard, Munday (2009) asserts that full naturalness of expression is achieved only through “dynamic equivalence,” where “the message has to be tailored to the receptor’s linguistic needs and cultural expectations” (Munday, 2009, p. 42).

Example 4: Letter 4

بنابراین تو در مورد آنچه برایت مهم است از خدا استعانت جوی و شدت و سختگیری را با کمی نرمش درهم آمیز در آنجا که مدارا کردن بهتر است مدارا کن اما آنجائی که جز با شدت عمل کار از پیش نمی رود شدت را به کار بند.

R1: Seek the help of Allah in your difficulties and enterprises. In your behavior with your subjects remember that you should use leniency and tolerance alongside severity. Be kind, tolerant and lenient as far as and as long as possible but when you feel that your purpose cannot be achieved without severity only then can you adopt such an attitude.

R2: You should seek Allah’s help in whatever causes you anxiety. Add a little harshness to the mixture of leniency and remain lenient where leniency is more appropriate. Adopt harshness when you cannot do without harshness.

R3: You should seek Allah's help in whatever causes you anxiety. Add a little harshness to the mixture of leniency and remain lenient where leniency is more appropriate. Adopt harshness when you cannot do without harshness.

Table 4. Types of Equivalence Used in the Translations of Letter 44 (D = dynamic, F = formal)

Rendition	Type of Equivalence Used
R1	D
R2	F
R3	F

As seen in Table 4, translation by Askari Jafari shows tendency towards TL norms. It is semantic-oriented, and achieving equivalent effect is the focus of the translator. “*anče barayat mohem ast*” was translated as “difficulties and enterprises” which is the best possible equivalence, whereas the two other translators render it as “whatever causes you anxiety. Although it is close to the structure of the original phrase, no equivalent effect is obtained successfully in these translations. In the next translation, the phrase “in your behavior with your subjects remember” has no equivalence in the original sentence. In other words, the translator, namely, Askari Jafari with the priority of readership and following thought-process used redundancy to make implicit points more explicit. Thus, this translation is clear, smooth, natural and comprehensible to the TL readers.

On the other hand, Motahhari and Sayed Ali Reza try to keep the original form and content, and hence focus on the author, which involves formal equivalence. They also try to have the exact contextual meaning of the original. Comparing the clause “use leniency and tolerance alongside severity” and “add a little harshness to the mixture of leniency”, we can recognize that the first one is more natural and comprehensible as well as reader-oriented. It creates the same response in the receptors as it does in the readers of the SL, and hence, in this translation dynamic equivalence is realized. In the next sentence rendered by Askari Jafari, the type of translation fulfilled is dynamic equivalence as well. He goes beyond the surface structure and restructure the deep ones to make the unsaid and implicit points more obvious and understandable for TL readers. Unlike Askari Jafari, Motahhari and Sayed Ali Reza try to remain as close to the source text as possible and the author and SL are of paramount importance for them. In this vein, the rendered excerpt by them discloses the involved type of translation as the formal one.

Example 5: Letter 45

شما را به تقوا و پرهیزکاری و ترس از خداوند سفارش می کنم در پی دنیاپرستی نباشید گر چه به سراغ شما آید. بر آنچه از دنیا از دست می دهید تاسف مخورید.

R1: I advise you to fear Allah, do not go after this vicious world though it may try to entice you, do not seek it though it may seek you and do not grieve over and pine for things which this world refuses you.

R2: I admonish you (both) to fear Allah and not to hanker after the (pleasures of this) world even though it may run after you. Do not be sorry for anything of this world that you may have been denied.

R3: I advise you (both) to fear Allah and that you should not hanker after the (pleasures of this) world even though it may run after you. Do not be sorry for anything of this world that you have been denied.

Table 5. Types of Equivalence Used in the Translations of Letter 45 (D = dynamic, F = formal)

Rendition	Type of Equivalence Used
R1	F
R2	F
R3	F

Table 5 shows that the three translators generally approached the text in a similar manner, albeit with some slight differences. Overall, both form and content were focal points for the translators. Their main interests are oriented towards the author and the norms of the SL; however, some lexical variations are evident that warrant clarification. For instance, the terms “advise,” “admonish,” “go after,” and “hanker” illustrate these differences.

The term “admonish,” selected by Motahhari, is the most effective equivalence, as it conveys a stronger emphasis than “advise,” which was chosen by Sayed Ali Reza. Additionally, for the terms “go after” and “hanker,” Askari Jafari uses “go after,” which is less formal than “hanker.” This choice may reflect Askari Jafari's emphasis on the interpersonal relationship between Imam Ali (as) and the person addressed. Conversely, the term “hanker” is used to convey a more polite and formal tone.

In summary, despite the slight lexical differences among the translators, all produced translations that lean toward formal equivalence.

Example 6: Letter 46

[ای معاویه] از روزی بر حذر باش که هرکس سرانجام کارش را نیکو نموده شادمان می گردد و هر کس زمامش را به شیطان بسپارد و برای بازستاندن آن نکوشد سخت پشیمان می گردد.

R1: Therefore, you should also fear the Day of Judgement, the day when only those people who have done deeds deserving reward will be happy, and those, who have surrendered themselves to Satan and do not want to come out of its influence, will cut a sorry figure.

R2: Therefore, fear the Day when happy is whoever made his end happy (by good actions) while repentant is whoever allowed Satan to lead him and did not resist him.

R3: Therefore, fear the Day when happy is he who made his end happy (by good actions) while repentant is he who allowed Satan to lead him and did not resist him.

In Table 6, types of equivalence used in the three English translations are presented.

Table 6. Types of Equivalence Used in the Translations of Letter 46 (D = dynamic, F = formal)

Rendition	Type of Equivalence Used
R1	D
R2	F
R3	F

In this example, Askari Jafari once again presents a target-oriented translation. As shown in Table 6, he goes beyond the surface structure to uncover hidden concepts and enhance comprehension. For instance, the phrase “Day of Judgment” is not present in the original sentence but is added by the translator to aid readers' understanding. Similarly, the subsequent sentence clearly demonstrates that the focus of Askari Jafari's translation is on the target culture and readers. The phrase “cut a sorry figure” serves as the equivalent for “saxt pašiman migardand.” This idiomatic expression reflects the adaptation strategy proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1958), in which the equivalence-oriented translation replicates the same situation as the original while employing completely different wording.

In contrast, the other two translators maintain a balance between form and content; for example, they translate “harkas saranjamash ra niku nemud” as “whoever made his end happy.” This is a relatively literal translation that may not be sufficiently clear or comprehensible to TL readers. Furthermore, it may not evoke the same emotional response in TL readers as it does in SL readers. Alternatively, Askari Jafari renders the same clause as “those who have done deeds deserving reward will be happy,” which is clearer, smoother, and more reader-oriented.

In summary, Askari Jafari's translation can be characterized as dynamic, while the translations by Motahhari and Sayed Ali Reza lean toward formal equivalence.

Example 7: Letter 47

اما بعد نماز ظهر را تا هنگامی که خورشید به اندازه طول خوابگاه گوسفندی [از نصف النهار] گذشته باشد با مردم بخوانید. و نماز عصر را ایشان به جا آورید که خورشید هنوز کاملاً زنده و قسمتی از روز باقی است به گونه ای که می توان تا غروب دو فرسخ راه را طی کرد.

R1: Lead the Zuhr prayer till the shadow of a wall becomes equal to the height of the wall, the Asr prayers can be performed till the sun is still bright and enough time of the day is left for a person to cover a distance of six miles.

R2: Offer the zuhr (noon) prayers with the people when the shade of the wall of the goats' pen is equal to the wall. Offer the asr (afternoon) prayers with them when the sun is still shining in a portion of the day enough for covering the distance of two farasangs (about six miles).

R3: Offer the zuhr (noon) prayers with the people when the shade of the wall of the goats' pen is equal to the wall. Offer the asr (afternoon) prayers with them when the sun is still shining in a portion of the day enough for covering the distance of two farasangs (about six miles).

Table 7. Types of Equivalence Used in the Translations of Letter 47 (D = dynamic, F = formal)

Rendition	Type of Equivalence Used
R1	D
R2	F
R3	F

As illustrated in Table 7, Askari Jafari's translation employs dynamic equivalence, prioritizing meaning over form. For instance, the phrase "tule xabgaheh gusfandi" is rendered as "the shadow of a wall." This approach indicates that the nuances of the source culture are less emphasized in his translation; however, the result is a smooth, comprehensible, and natural text. By adopting this method, Jafari effectively reduces the foreignness of the source text, making it more accessible to TL readers.

In contrast, the other two translators provide a literal rendering of the same phrase, closely adhering to the syntactic structure of the SL. This suggests that their focus lies on maintaining form and contextual meaning. An additional example is the culture-specific term "farsang," which Jafari does not include in his translation. In contrast, Motahhari and Sayed Ali Reza incorporate this term, demonstrating their commitment to preserving the source culture.

In conclusion, Jafari's translation can be characterized as dynamic, while the translations by Motahhari and Sayed Ali Reza are more formal.

Example 8: Letter 48

اما بعد شما می دانید گر چه کتمان می کنید که من به دنبال مردم نرفتم آنها به سراغ من آمدند . من دست بیعت را به سوی آنان ننگشودم آنها با اصرار زیاد با من بیعت کردند.

R1: You may try as much as you like to hide the fact and to draw a curtain over it but both of you know very well that I did not approach the people to get their oath of allegiance but they came to me with their desire to make me their Amir (ruler). I did not extend my hands towards them so that they might swear the oath of allegiance to me but they themselves extended their hands towards me.

R2: You both know, though you conceal it, that I did not approach the people before they approached me, and I did not ask them to swear the oath of allegiance to me till they themselves swore the oath of allegiance to me.

R3: Now, both of you know, although you conceal it, that I did not approach the people till they approached me, and I did not ask them to swear allegiance to me till they themselves swore allegiance to me, and both of you were among those who approached me and swore me allegiance.

As indicated in Table 8, Askari Jafari once again favors the TL and its culture, demonstrating a lack of loyalty to the author and the source culture. He employs domestication to prioritize the needs of the readership. Signs of this approach include the use of redundancy and additional explanations, further emphasizing that TL readers are his primary concern. For example, the clause "garche ketman mikonid" is transformed into the

compound sentence: “You may try as much as you like to hide the fact and to draw a curtain over it,” thereby making implicit meanings more explicit.

Table 8. Types of Equivalence Used in the Translations of Letter 48 (D = dynamic, F = formal)

Rendition	Type of Equivalence Used
R1	D
R2	F
R3	F

Moreover, Jafari aims to elicit the same response from TL readers as that experienced by SL readers. Nida (1964) posits that a translation is successful when it achieves an equivalent response, suggesting that correspondence in meaning should take precedence over correspondence in style (cited in Munday, 2001).

In contrast, Motahhari and Sayed Ali Reza adhere closely to the structure of the source text, focusing on transferring contextual meanings. Their translation process places a higher priority on maintaining the syntactic structure and staying true to the author’s original intent.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to determine which Persian-to-English translations by Askari Jafari, Motahhari, and Sayed Ali Reza are more dynamic and which are more formal, based on Nida’s model (1964). It also sought to explore any significant differences among the translations produced by these three translators. To this end, twenty letters from Nahj al-Balagha were conveniently selected as the corpus for the study. The three English translations and their Persian counterparts were compiled, and Nida’s model of formal and dynamic equivalence was applied to identify the type of equivalence used in each translation. To address the first research question, data on the frequency and percentage of the types of equivalence utilized were presented, as shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Frequency and Percentage of the Types of Equivalence in the Renditions by Askari Jafari (R1), Motahhari (R2) and Sayed Ali Reza (R3)

Rendition	Formal Equivalence		Dynamic Equivalence	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
R1	6	10	54	90
R2	51	85	9	15
R3	53	88	7	11

Based on the findings, there are a total of sixty instances of formal and dynamic equivalences across the three translations. As indicated in Table 9, the frequency of formal equivalence used by Askari Jafari is only six out of the sixty cases, while ninety percent of his translations are grounded in dynamic equivalence. In contrast, Motahhari and Sayed Ali Reza show a preference for formal equivalence over dynamic equivalence. Specifically, eighty-five percent of the texts rendered by Motahhari and eighty-eight percent of those by Sayed Ali Reza rely on formal equivalence. The percentages of dynamic equivalence in their translations are only fifteen percent for Motahhari and eleven percent for Sayed Ali Reza. Consequently, the frequency of dynamic equivalence-based translations by Askari Jafari significantly surpasses that of Motahhari and Sayed Ali Reza. Conversely, the instances of

formal equivalence-based translations by Motahhari and Sayed Ali Reza exceed those produced by Askari Jafari.

This indicates that Askari Jafari prioritizes TL readers and culture in his translations. In this regard, Nida (1964) states that “a translation of dynamic equivalence aims at complete naturalness of expression, and tries to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture” (p. 159). Moreover, Askari Jafari tends to favor TL items that are more culturally appropriate for obscure original items, making linguistically implicit original information explicit and incorporating a degree of redundancy to facilitate comprehension.

Further analysis reveals differences between the translators concerning their use of formal versus dynamic equivalence, considering both SL-oriented and TL-oriented translation approaches. Dynamic equivalence-based translations by Askari Jafari surpass the same type of translations by Motahhari and Sayed Ali Reza. Conversely, the frequencies of formal equivalence-based translations by Motahhari and Sayed Ali Reza exceed those produced by Askari Jafari. To address the second research question regarding the significance of differences in the types of equivalence among the three translations, a chi-square test was conducted. The results of the chi-square test are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Results of chi-square test for the types of equivalence used in the three English translations of Nahj al-Balagha

Chi-square	Df	Sig.
86.49	1	0.00

As shown in Table 10, the significance level at 0.05 is 0.00, which means there is a significant difference between the types of equivalence used by the three translators in the study.

6. Conclusion

Finding equivalence, especially in religious texts, can pose significant challenges for translators. In this context, conceptual strategies become essential for effective translation. Several key points must be considered by translators. First, the type of text is crucial. Translators should then assess how the type of text relates to the type of equivalence they aim to produce. They must also evaluate whether the translation can convey the same message as the SL. Additionally, translators should determine the strategies they will utilize to find the best equivalence that accurately conveys the intended message of the source text. Furthermore, the translation should be faithful, direct, natural, and comprehensible, making it clear whether the approach taken is formal or dynamic.

Based on the findings, while translating religious texts in general—and Nahj al-Balagha in particular—presents considerable challenges, it is not entirely impossible. Although some semantic and stylistic loss may occur, effective translations can still be achieved. Askari Jafari’s translation is clear, smooth, natural, and comprehensible to TL readers, while Motahhari and Sayed Ali Reza strive to retain the original form and content. In other words, Askari Jafari’s reader-oriented approach is dynamic, whereas Motahhari and Sayed Ali Reza’s translations lean more toward the author and source text, making them more formal. Additionally, there was a significant difference in the types of equivalence employed by the three translators.

This study could be valuable for teachers, translation students, translators, syllabus designers, book compilers, and policymakers. Teachers can expand their understanding of religious texts and familiarize themselves with various cultural aspects. Translation students can gain insight into the different aspects of formal and dynamic equivalence. Policymakers can explore significant religious texts and assess them using various frameworks.

One major limitation of this study was the restricted size of the corpus. The results could have been more reliable if the research had included a broader selection of letters from Nahj al-Balagha. However, increasing the size and length of the study would have required more time, which posed another limitation in completing the research within a reasonable timeframe. A longer study could also incur additional expenses, further complicating timely completion. This study employed Nida's (1964) model as its framework; future research could utilize different frameworks. Additionally, data from other relevant scriptures, such as the Holy Qur'ān, the Old Testament, or the New Testament, could be collected, sorted, and analyzed. Furthermore, working on religious projects requires careful attention to avoid writing anything that may disturb followers of a particular religious group or provoke strong opposition. Researchers must maintain impartiality and refrain from favoring one side in any argument. In this context, some translators may choose to remain loyal to the SL content to avoid potential conflicts. It is advisable for researchers in this field to conduct further studies on other chapters of the Noble Qur'ān to complement the findings of this research and enhance the quality of future translations of religious texts.

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