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RESEARCH PAPER

Translating Humor: Cross-Cultural Challenges in Ramona Quimby Series

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to identify and analyze potential difficulties in humor translation in children's books, specifically, Beverly Cleary's *Ramona Quimby* series, translated by Parvin Alipour into Persian. This paper looks at the influence of culture and language in the translation of humor using Newmark's cultural translation frameworks and Attardo's General Theory of Verbal Humor(GTVH). The socio-cultural context of the *Ramona Quimby* series, framed in the mid-twentieth-century American middle class, can be viewed as problematic regarding translation with special reference to Cultural-Specific Items and idiomatic expressions. The paper's research entails the comparison of both the English and Persian versions, along with identifying certain translation techniques, which include functional transferral, word-for-word translation, and condensation/expansion. Results indicate that the humorsome cannot be translated because it may contain cultural incongruity, but a majority of the humor can indeed be translated. Future studies should be directed toward a better understanding of the research methodology of humortranslation and the ways of employing humor in children's books to facilitate intercultural understanding while preserving the educational and recreational goals of the books.

| **KEYWORDS** | Children's Literature, Cross-Cultural Translation, Cultural Specific Items (CSIs), HumorTranslation, *Ramona Quimby* Series |

Introduction

The translation implies the turning of words from one language to another, but it is an intricate process of transferring meanings and contexts. This is particularly the case when it comes to the translation of humor, a form of speech heavily conditioned by cultural and linguistic factors. According to Al-Sofi (2020), translation is a cultural affair, so paying attention to culture may result in a loss of meaning or effectiveness when translated. This challenge manifests even more in children's literature, where humor frequently becomes the main protagonist. Translators are required, on the one hand, to convey the plot, while, on the other hand, they should make sure the joke will be understandable in the target culture. The puns in children's literature may be situational, but many are based on cultural, language, and social references that are not easily translatable across the border.

This research is based on the Ramona Quimby series by Beverly Cleary, comprised of children's novels with humorous and realistic themes. Initially, it was published as a novel in English, and later, its Persian translation by Parvin Alipour made one wonder how well humor, especially humor peculiar to a specific culture, is translated. To apply Newmark's (1988) cultural translation strategies and Attardo's (2002) General Theory of Ver Verbal Humor(GTVH), this research seeks to investigate humor translation in the Ramona Quimby series and the cultural implications of translation of humor. Sketchley

(2021) clearly states that the translation of cultural-specific items (CSIs) can be problematic as long as there are no same-name equivalents in the second language. Similarly, Attardo's theory emphasizes how it might be contextually embedded and, therefore, how the culturally salient aspects of humor may be challenging to translate (Chaudhary, 2020).

This research aims to define the techniques Alipour has used for translating humor from English to Persian and define efficiency. This research shall incorporate the Newmark-Attardo model to establish the extra parameters of culture and language necessary for translating humor for a distinct audience. The research results of the present study will help enrich the knowledge of humor translation for children's literature, thus benefiting the translator, scholars, and educators. Furthermore, it aims to offer a plan for how subsequent research on translating humor across cultures can be done, especially in light of children's literature.

Literature Review

Researching humor translation and humor translation in children's books, in particular, is somewhat problematic since many factors are involved in effectively translating cultural and language jokes. This section focuses on the socio-cultural aspect of humor in the *Ramona Quimby* series, the various theories of humor translation, and the structure of children's literature. The theoretical framework based on Newmark/Attardo's model also forms the theoretical background for analyzing the humor translation strategies obtained from the Persian version of the *Ramona Quimby* series translated by Parvin Alipour.

Socio-Cultural Context

The *Ramona Quimby* series gives an insight into America's middle-class lifestyle during the mid-twentieth century. Created between 1955 and 1990 by Beverly Cleary, the series depicts the socio-cultural setting of a post-war, economically prosperous America. It was possible to watch American society in transformation and attempts to regain itself after the Vietnam War, the oil crisis of 1973, and the Watergate scandals of the earlier 1970s (Timko, 2021). Such events guided the humor of that generation, which was informed by hope and despair. Cleary's whimsical depiction of family dynamics, school, and ignorance of children was also a hit among American readers. Still, at the same time, it had more than a tint of socio-cultural reality, which might not always be equivalent to another culture.

As for translating the *Ramona Quimby* series from English to Persian, some cultural issues exist, and that is the problem. As Geoghegan (2022) further notes, the practice of translation is culturally specific, and when the culture in which the translated material has been produced is not considered, what is being translated may lose humor or its entire meaning. This is especially the case in humor translation because cultural references, idiomatic expressions, and social norms go a long way in making jokes. In Iran, for example, while the cultural and language background is much different than in mid-twentieth-century America, a translator has challenges finding a similar slot while translating for the work's humor.

Cross-linguistically particular elements are special features of a studied culture that do not have direct counterparts in another language culture – Cultural Specific Items (CSIs) (Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen, 2021). These can be local peculiarities, social or other traditions, or other events and tendencies that are the key to the joke within the text. In translating the humor, the translator has two options: look for the equivalent of the humor in the target language (TL) or try to look for how to explain or qualify the humor for the target language

creatively. Thus, this research will endeavour to identify how these CSIs are managed in the Persian translation of the *Ramona Quimby* series in terms of humor.

In Tardo's General Theory of Verbal Humor

Some of the most intact theories giving comprehensive information regarding humor translation include Salvatore. Attardo's General Theory of Verbal Humor(GTVH) is a theory that extended Victor. Raskin Semantic Script Theory of Humor. Is Attardo (2002) proposes six Knowledge Resources (KRs) in-jokes and humorous expressions. These are Language (LA), Narrative Strategy (NS), Target (TA), Situation (SI), Logical Mechanism (LM) and Script Opposition (SO) (Rehman et al., 2024). It will also be important for humor translation to understand these KRs in that they help explain the structure and meaning of humor in the SL.

The first of these Knowledge Resources is Language, abbreviated by LA, which deals with the literal interpretation of the joke. In translation, the task lies in the choice of phrases of the target language that will replicate the humor of the source language. So, such techniques as puns are based on language tricks where the main idea is difficult to convey through text translation (Winegarner, 2020). As for the series *Ramona Quimby* by Beverly Cleary, it seems quite important to stress that she often relies on her sense of humor to bring laughter to the characters' communication with their relatives and peers. As for some other linguistic features of English, it can be translated into Persian only with a certain creative approach because the phonetic and grammatical features of the English language have no direct equivalents in Persian. The second form of KR tested is called Narrative Strategy (NS). NS aims to outline the joke, whether spoken in dialogues, a riddle, or a direct story. The *Ramona Quimby* series does not use wordplay as a strategy of humor. Still, it plays a lot on situational humor, where Ramona's misunderstanding or acting up creates comedy out of the situation. Also necessary is the Target (TA), which stands for the subject of the joke. Sometimes, it may even require stereotypes or prejudice related to a certain group or individual. In translating such humor, the translator is left with the dilemma of either retaining the target culture or making it more suitable for the target culture (Ghassemiazghandi et al., 2020).

SI stands for Situation and indicates the context of humor expression, while LM stands for Logical Mechanism and concerns resolving the discrepancy that forms the basis of humor. Many of these works convey comicality through situations in which a child character does not fully understand causing a discrepancy, as is the case of Kimmel's *Ramona Quimby* series. As for translating situational dynamics of children and adults in Persian, little defers from care for differences in the interaction. Finally, Script Opposition (SO) has to do with the presentation of two contrasting scripts that make up the joke's body. Sustaining this opposition is crucial for translation because it is responsible for humor; however, adjustments can be made where culture interferes with the correct execution of the joke within the target language (Jahangirli, 2023).

Newmark's (1988) Theory of Translation

Peter Newmark's (1988) translation theory applies especially to the translation of cultural features, including the ones encountered in humor (Luhulima, 2024). Newmark presents fourteen methods of translating the CSIs: borrowing, naturalization, culture, and descriptive culture equivalents. All these strategies offer a workable tactic in dealing with the issues arising from the concept of humor particularly when the source text employs cultural implications which may not be transferred to the target culture.

The author also cares about the fact that in the process of translation, it is necessary to achieve proper doses of both communicative and semantic translation: Newmark, 1988. The first, communicative translation, urges the translator to relay the message of the target reader as much as possible by preserving the total sense and feel of the source text; the second is the semantic translation, which demands the translator to retain the original layout and meaning of the words. In humor translation, both strategies may be required. The behaviours strategies

Children's Literature

Translating children's literature is even more challenging than translating it for adults, as children's literature has two main missions: to entertain and educate children. It should be noted that children's books, as a rule, contain a certain set of values and norms that define culture, as the British scholar Peter Hunt underlines, and thus translating humor inevitably turns into a challenge (Morta, 2023). Humoris is often used in children's literature and can be of both child and adult type, making it necessary for the translator to think of how the children, the parents, or the readers will be receiving the humor.

Thus, most of the comedy of the *Ramona Quimby* series lies in the situations depicted and the child character's misunderstanding of them. Children can understand and relate to what Ramona interprets incorrectly in translating children's to adults' language and vice versa. The latter has jokes that will be understood by adults only. Translating this kind of humor, which lies at two different levels translating the humor into Persian calls for cultural and language interpreter skills between the two cultures (Alnusairat, 2022). In some cases, the message can be most effective when the humor is modified to what will be more understood by the target public, while in other cases, the message may require less of this strategy.

Types of Children's Literature

Children's literature comprises all kinds of publications, which makes translating them difficult in various ways. Many novels that are appropriate for early childhood readers begin in hilarity and help the kids identify newfound ramifications of societal relations; the Ramona Quimby series is a vivid example. It is often subtle and situational, like a character dealing with a family or friends, as demonstrated in the case of Ramona. While the overall narrative and depiction of characters are longer in the case of the novel, short stories and poetry use more concise forms of humor, which sometimes cannot be translated without a sense of losing the main context and personality (Holmes, 2021).

The second type of literature normally recommended for children is Folk tales and myths; these stories are normally full of cultural humor, which are normally underpinned by the cultural beliefs and practices of any given society (Nel et al., 2021). Extreme care has to be taken while translating the actual joke to maintain the cultural framework that is based on comedy and, in the process of translation, make the joke understandable for the second culture. In the case of the *Ramona Quimby* series, the humor relates to the cultural and social lifestyles of middle America in the mid-20th century. It hence cannot be easily located in Iran. This becomes a dilemma for the translator; ways of translating the humor without altering the meaning or impact must be seen.

Ramona Quimby Series Summary

The *Ramona Quimby* series is eight funny novels written by Beverly Cleary: Ramona Quimby, Age 8; Ramona to the Rescue; Ramona the Brave; Ramona the Pest; Ramona

Rebels; Ramona Sells Beauty; Ramona's Flag; and Jessica the Baby-sitter (Jackson, 2022). The first book of the series was published in 1955 and has continued to appeal to readers because it portrays the themes of family and school life as well as the process of self-development. Ramona is depicted as a lively and rather naughty little girl who does not always understand her surroundings, and thus, the comic situations familiar to both children and grown-ups are used to promote the book.

Still, with *Ramona Quimby's* series, two angles of humor are adopted: the childlike innocence of Ramona and the situational comedy in Ramona's family and school. Cleary was famous for using the main character in her books to make the readers laugh by presenting comic interpretations of the real adult's words. These moments of comedy are not only amusing but also help to illustrate the spaces between childhood and adulthood in the series and most people, thus making it interactively informative. Translating this humor into Persian challenges is different since some aspects of Ramona's life may not align with the Iranian's (Brashi, 2024).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study shall attempt to draw from Newmark's (1988) theorization of translation strategies and Attardo's (2002) General Theory of Verbal Humor(GTVH). Thus, this mixed framework offers a holistic and contextual view to account for the translation of humor, based on humor's cultural and linguistic parameters. This model will be applied to the Persian translation of the *Ramona Quimby* series to examine which strategies proved successful in retaining the text's humor and where cultural/linguistic translation was deemed necessary (Geoghegan, 2022).

The six Knowledge Resources (KRs) formulated by Attardo include language, narrative strategy, target, situation, logical mechanism, and script opposition in the definition of the components of humor. These KRs are necessary to recognize the workings of humor in the source text and explore the problems that arise in the translation process. Notably, Newmark's strategies mainly involve cultural equivalent, descriptive equivalent, and functional equivalent, which help sort out the cultural barriers that may influence humor translation (Alaa et al., 2023).

This is why the present study intends to incorporate both of these models to identify and compare the chosen translation strategies in the context of the Ramona Quimby series and then evaluate their fitness for passing the humor to Persian readers.

Attardo-Newmark's Model of CHTS

Cultural HumorTranslation Strategies, or CHTS is a model that combines Attardo's General Theory of Verbal Humor and Newmark's cultural translation procedures. This model can be helpful when studying humor in children's literature since it considers humor's linguistic and cultural factors. The CHTS model categorizes humor into six codes: Language, narrative approach, aim, context, rationality, and script antagonism, which are some of the terminologies that have been described (Benharoun, 2022).

The CHTS model is adopted in this study to analyze the source text (ST) and the target text (TT) of the *Ramona Quimby* books. Thus, by analyzing how the Persian translation dealt with the movie's CSIs and humorous aspects, the research can determine the frequency of application of particular strategies and the degree of success in translating the jokes. For instance, one of the strategies, such as the functional equivalent strategy of selecting a culturally acceptable paraphrase of the reference in the source text, may be

useful in translating jokes related to cultural phenomena. Directly translating words or transferring them from the source may result in a loss of the humor intended in the text where the target audience cannot decode the special reference (Xia, 2023).

Material and Methods

This work employs corpus analysis with a qualitative approach to examine the humor translation strategies used in the *Ramona Quimby* series' Original English version and Persian Edition. Based on Newk mark – Attard cultural humor translation strategies (CHTS), cases of humor and culturally specific items (CSIs) were detected and classified. This research aims to identify the way humor is transformed from English to Persian. In particular, the study considered which strategies were applied for translating the English text into Persian, considering the humor's cultural and linguistic translation features. The data are drawn from the ten original English *Ramona Quimby* books and their Persian translations. The comparison is developed systematically by identifying humor occurrences in the source and target texts. Therefore, the study aims to determine the success rate of specific humor translation styles in the context of the original humor intention and the cultural context exhibited in the two novels.

Procedure

- The initial process involved reading through the original text, namely the Ramona Quimby series, to identify CSIs and humor-related notions. Newmark's (1988) classification of CSIs like ecology, material culture, social culture, organizations, customs, and gesture was used to analyze it, and Attardo's (2002) six KRs categorization of humor including script opposition, logical mechanism, target, situation, narrative strategy, and language as argued by Mulyadi and colleagues (2021).

- The second procedure was about exploring the Target Text (TT), Which means the researcher reviewed the Persian-translated works of the *Ramona Quimby* series written by Parvin Alipour. At this stage, attention was paid to how the CSIs and observed humorous aspects in the source text were translated into the target text (Štelemėkaitė, 2021). Precautions to where students may have cultural or linguistic barriers because of the difference between America and Iran were emphasized.

- Third, the source text and target text comparison In an attempt to compare how humor and CSIs were translated, a detailed comparison of the source and target texts was made. This kind of comparison was meant to find out which specific translation technique, functional equivalent, descriptive equivalent, or cultural equivalent, was used and to what extent the particular technique was efficient in conserving the humor's original meaning (Sketchley, 2021).

- The strategies employed in the Persian translations were further classified into the Cultural HumorTranslation Strategies model forwarded by Newmark and Attardo. Regarding the eleven strategies named in the study, each of the humorous expressions and each of the features associated with CSI, were evaluated to find out what approaches, namely borrowing, naturalization, or compensation, were employed.

- The results of the comparisons were tabulated to indicate the frequency and efficiency of each translation strategy used to preserve humor in the translated texts. Thus, the analysis helped to answer the research questions: which strategies were more and less successful in the cultural translation of humor (Heydon & Kianbakht, 2020)?

- In light of the above analysis, a conclusion was made relating to the approach of humor in children's literature, and a recommendation was given to the translators. It also has

information about how translation practices can be optimized for enhancing the translation of cultural features and humor appropriateness in translation (Tee et al., 2022).

Results and Discussion

The following section aims to identify the types of strategies employed by the translator in the translation of the humorous expressions in the *Ramona Quimby* series by the filtration of a limited number of samples from English source text (ST) and Persian target text (TT). Self-promoting humor is used as the basis for analyzing the receiving culture, and the Newmark-Attardo model of Cultural HumorTranslation Strategies (CHTS) is used to categorize the translator's strategies. In each case of humor, there is a look at the adopted translation strategies, such as borrowing, naturalization, cultural equivalent, and functional equivalent, among others. The data are grouped in Excel sheets containing source and target text, humor elements and strategies where applicable.

Example 1: Literal Translation and Cultural Adjustment

ST	Whoever heard of an Easter bunny in September?
TT	آخر تا حالا کی شنیده که سر و کله ی خرگوش عید پاک توی سپتامبر پیدا شود؟

This example is based on the juxtaposition of the mention of an Easter bunny during September, which is odd since the bunny is associated with Easter. The humor here is related to the expectations and customs linked to the time of the Easter holiday. While translating the Persian phrase, the translator decided to use "خرگوش عید پاک" (Easter bunny) while modifying the rest of the sentence and added "سر و کله" which means literally 'out of the blue' to make the whole phrase sound more natural and funny in Persian. The term "Easter bunny" was kept as is because this concept is familiar in Iranian even though the two cultures are of different religions.

Recognized Strategies

- **Cultural Equivalent**: The translator had kept the term "Easter bunny" but changed the sentence structure to suit the Persian language.

- **Expansion**: The words "سر و کله" help in giving more meaning to the expression as well as make it more understandable and funny to the targeted audience.

  Example 2: Humorthrough Wordplay

  ST: Then the librarian asked Ramona what her father's occupation was. When Ramona didn't understand, she asked, "What kind of work does your father do?"

  "He mows the lawn," said Ramona promptly.
  TT: کتابدار شغل پدر رامونا را از او پرسید و چون رامونا متوجه نشد، توضیح داد: "پدرت چه کاری می‌کند؟"
  رامونا فوراً جواب داد: "او چمن‌ها را می‌زند."

This example shows the phonetic humor coming from a misunderstanding of Ramona's part concerning the librarian's question. Interestingly, in English, the word 'occupation' may mean a job, and yet Ramona understands it as a question about her father's duties. In the Persian language, the translator uses a more straightforward, childlike phrase, "پدرت چه کاری می‌کند؟" which translates to "What does your father do?". The humor is maintained by translating Ramona's response literally, leaving her as a childlike character.

Recognized Strategies

- **Literal Translation:** In Persian, the literal meaning of the English phrase is maintained since the joke's meaning has to do with a similar misunderstanding in both cultures.

- **Naturalization:** To keep the character innocent and to create humor, the formal term' occupation' is translated a less formal and more suitable for a child in Persian.

Example 3: Use of Functional Equivalent

ST: Gave Ramona two graham crackers to make up for the indignity of having her hair washed.

TT: دو تا بیسکوییت به رامونا داد تا او را از دلخوری بیرون بیاورد.

Here the original humor comes from the fact that a trivial event, the washing of her hair, is called an 'indignity'; the translator weakens the humor by stressing the result of the snack (the graham crackers). The particular name "graham crackers", an ethnocentric item, is translated as 'bis couches' which means biscuits, and is more easily recognized in the Persian culture.

Recognized Strategies

- **Functional Equivalent:** The particular American snack, graham crackers is translated as a biscuit "بیسکوییت" but the humor of The Hanx's idea of giving a biscuit to a child is preserved, thus reaching the audience.

- **Reduction:** The descriptive phrase "for the indignity of having her hair washed" is omitted in the Persian translation and instead the sentence is quite short but still conveys the same idea.

Example 4: Descriptive Equivalent and Compensation

ST: Powdered sugar flew all over her face. "These are my powder puffs," she explained.

TT: خاک قند پاشید روی صورتش. رامونا توضیح داد: "این‌ها پودر پف‌های من هستند."

Here the humor stems from Ramona's ignorance of the term' powder puffs' (cosmetic). In this case, the comedy stems from Ramona's ignorance of what a 'powder puff' is and her naive belief that powdered sugar has the same purpose. The translated phrase for phrase..., 'powder puffs' has been translated by the translator as "پودر پف‌های من" where the confusion is maintained with the use of the term "my powder puffs". The concept of 'powder puffs' is not so well understood in the cultural context of Iran. Thus, the translator keeps the humor by translating the phrase literally and preserving the reference to sugar.

Recognized Strategies

- **Descriptive Equivalent:** The translator does not attempt to find an equivalent for "powder puffs' in Persian, and to overcome the cultural difference, the translator uses the latter term and the audience's knowledge of powdered sugar.

- **Compensation:** Ramona's naive reasoning maintains this aspect of humor even though the term "powder puffs" may not be easily understood in contemporary society.

Summary of Translational Strategies

The study reveals that the translator has often used functional equivalents, literal translations and cultural equivalents to maintain the humor element in the Persian translation of the *Ramona Quimby* series. The translator employed the strategies of expansion and reduction to translate cultural references and control the humor level to fit the receivers' expectations in the Persian-speaking area.

Table 1
The frequency of the strategies applied throughout the text.

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Functional Equivalent	51	41.46%
Cultural Equivalent	9	7.32%
Descriptive Equivalent	6	4.88%
Literal Translation	23	18.70%
Reduction/Expansion	24	19.51%
Borrowing	3	2.44%
Compensation	3	2.44%

The study of the Persian translation of the *Ramona Quimby* series shows that the translator mostly used functional equivalents (41.46%) and reduction/expansion (19.51%) to translate the humor and cultural aspects of the original text. These strategies enabled the translator to address culturally specific items and humorous expressions that formed part of the original humor and present them in a way that the Persian-speaking audience would understand. Another strategy used quite often (18.70%) was the literal translation when there was no need to rephrase the joke for the English-speaking audience. The least frequent methods, including cultural equivalent (7.32%) and descriptive equivalent (4.88%), were used only for terms that did not have parallels in Persian. Borrowing and compensation were also applied rarely (both 2.44%); it can be stated that the translator aimed at choosing more adaptive solutions to convey humoristic aspects of the text in translation. In conclusion, it can be noted that the use of humor in the source text was well-managed by the translator when it comes to translating it into the target language and culture, and the translator was able to find the right balance between the both to make the humor understandable to the target audience.

Conclusion

The analysis of the Persian translation of the *Ramona Quimby* series shows that functional equivalent and reduction/expansion were the two most often used strategies. This suggests that the translator worked on translating humor and cultural-specific items (CSIs) to be easily understandable to the Persian-speaking audience. Using Newmark-Attardo's Cultural HumorTranslation Strategies (CHTS), the research also shows that the translator was able to sustain the humor of the original text by using literal and cultural adaptation strategies. The first strategy, literal translation, was frequently used where the humor was not culturally bound or needed little adaptation, such as using functional equivalents. The translator can creatively develop ways of handling cultural differences, such as when the American culture may not be similar to the Iranian culture.

The current study reveals that the humor translation in the *Ramona Quimby* series was controlled well so that the humor quality of the original text was not lost on Persian

readers. Some minor problems, like cultural references, needed some adjustments, and the translator has well-used strategies such as compensation in the form of expansion and the use of cultural equivalents to handle such problems. The research shows that flexibility is a valuable concept when translating humor. It should be particularly useful for translators who deal with children's literature and must ensure that the original cultural specificity of the text is preserved while adapting it to a different culture.

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