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TRANSLATION ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT OF POETIC DISCOURSE: EXTRA-TEXTUAL MEANING IN PERSIAN AND ENGLISH

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Abstract

Literary translation is one of the most decisive sub-fields of Translation Studies (TS) which has given rise to theoretical and practical debates among scholars. Translating literary works is actually so central to translation studies that without it much of the world's best literary works would be lost to us. According to Jackson (2003) "literary translation is a translational species in itself, but it differs in many important respects from the kind of translation practiced in a language class". Newmark (1988) reinforces this where he asserts that "literary translation is the most testing type of translation" (p.162). The present study is an attempt to investigate the poetic translation assessment at extra-textual level. Applying Vahid et al.'s Model (2008), the study compared a Persian piece of poetry by Moshiri (2003) and its English rendering by Vahid Dastjerdi (2006) to examine the closeness of the TT to the original text in terms of grammar and the poetics. The results of the study showed that such issues as literary expertise, background knowledge, and cultural knowledge are dominant features in the success of a translator when translating literature, poetry in particular, at a global (extra-textual) level.

Key Words: Extra-textual meaning, Persian, English.

1. Introduction

1.1. Literary Translation

Literary translation is one of the most decisive sub-fields of Translation Studies (TS) which has given rise to theoretical and practical debates among scholars. Translating literary works is actually so central to translation studies that without it much of the world's best literary works would be lost to us. According to Jackson (2003) "literary translation is a translational species in itself, but it differs in many important respects from the kind of translation practiced in a language class". Newmark (1988) reinforces this where he asserts that "literary translation is the most testing type of translation" (p.162).

1.2. Poetry Translation

Given the importance of a text's formal aspects, poetry presents special challenges to translators in addition to its content. According to Frost (1969), the main characteristic of poetic

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discourse that distinguishes it from common discourse is that in poetry form and content cannot be separated. Content is highly language-bound and this is what makes poetic translation of poetry more difficult than the other types of translations. Newmark (1988) believes "the translation of poetry is the field where most emphasis is normally put on the creation of a new independent poem, and where literal translation is usually condemned" (p.70).

Poetry, possessing components such as rhythm, rhyme, tone, deviation from the institutionalized linguistic code, musicality expressed through meters and cadence, etc., arouses pessimistic statements on the scope of its translatability that exceeds those affirmative ones. "Poetry is what is lost in translation", American poet Robert Frost famously remarked. Most of the scholars and translators like Jakobson (1959) believe that in the case of poetry though it is "by definition impossible ...only creative transposition is possible..." (p.151). For Dante, all poetry is untranslatable (cited in Brower, 1966, 271). Bonnefoy (1991) states "[y]ou can translate by simply declaring one poem is the translation of another" (pp.186-192).

The others like Nabokov believe "[t]he clumsiest of literal translation is a thousand times more useful than prettiest of paraphrase" (cited in Brower, 1966). Longfellow and Martindale seem to favor much more faithful translation or believe in foreignizing the native language (cited in Brower, 1966, 271). Other opponents of poetic translation such as Bateson and Turco propose their reasons: when poems, especially philosophical ones, satires, lyrics, etc, are translated into another language, they become not only flabby poems, but rather new ones in a new language (cited in Lazim, 2007). They stress that poetry in translation surely loses its basic elements. Such views go with the belief that poetry is wholly lost in translation. As the last example, Lazim (2007) in his article considers poetry translation and points that poetry reveals doubts and queries on the possibility of its translatability.

However, some other scholars take less extreme views. As pointed out by Vahid (2004), "contrary to some critics' argument that poetry 'loses' in translation or poetry is 'untranslatable', there are others with the opposite standpoint that it can be preserved, illustrated and illuminated if a good job is done, because poetry is in large part found again and re-painted by the translator" (para. 3) . For instance, Boase-Beir and De Beaugrand (cited in Connally, 1991) believe that translation of poetry can be successful only if both style and content are transferred. Holmes (1970) believes that while the translation of a poem is never equal to the original, any text including a poetic one has many interpretations and therefore many possible translations. Nida (1964) states, "[i]n poetry there is obviously a greater focus of attention upon formal elements than one normally finds in prose" (p. 157). In fact, not only content is necessarily sacrificed in translation of poetry, but it also is inevitably constricted into certain formal molds. This is expressed by Venuti (2004) as "[o]nly rarely can one reproduce both content and form in a translation, and hence in general the form is usually sacrificed for the sake of the content" (p. 154).

1.3. Extralinguistics

When analyzing a text and its translation extra linguistically, Extralinguistic knowledge, which is divided to textual knowledge and extra textual knowledge, should be taken into account. As Tirrkonen-Condit (1992) states, textual knowledge is the knowledge presented in the text, and extra textual knowledge is the translator's knowledge of the world, the subject matter, his/her expert knowledge, background knowledge, and etc (as cited in Kim, 2006).

On the importance of extra linguistic knowledge in the process of translation, Kim (2006) states, "[g]iven the fact that most translation work involves more or less specialized texts, it is likely that extra linguistic knowledge, rather than linguistic competence itself, plays a major role in the success of translation" (p. 285). She maintains that "extra linguistic knowledge seems to precede linguistic knowledge in its contribution to translation: it makes it possible for a

translator to infer meaning at cognitive levels, leading to in-depth comprehension and thus successful translation" (p. 286).

According to Dancette (1997), comprehension operates translation at three levels: linguistic level, textual level, and notional level. To him, conceptualizing 'contextual' meaning at the notional level based on linguistic and extra linguistic knowledge leads to a more successful and creative translation. On the other hand, remaining at the linguistic and textual levels with no extra linguistic knowledge leads at best to the 'literal' meaning and less successful translation.

The present study will focus on the analysis of a Persian piece of poetry by Moshiri (2003) and its translation by Vahid Dastjerdi (2006) extra-textually. The significance of the study lies in the ability of the translator in preserving the form and the beauty on the extra-textual factors including the cultural knowledge, the background knowledge, and the expertise.

2. Background of the study

As Nord (2005) states, when analyzing a text extra-textually, the following factors such as the sender, his/her intention, the audience, the medium, the place, the time, the motive, text function, should be taken into account. To him, all the mentioned factors are interdependent.

Discussing the influence of the sender in the analysis, he maintains that "[t]he name of a writer reveals their literary classification, artistic intentions, favorite subject matters, etc" (p. 51).

The sender's intention is another important factor. To Nord, "intention is defined from the point of view of the sender who wants to achieve certain purpose with the text" (p. 55). As he states, the translator should be very careful of the sender's intention as it structures the content and form of the text.

Regarding the audience, having had enough information about the TT receivers in the process of translation and regarding the subject matter and the linguistic features, the translator is able to recognize the characteristics of ST receivers like age, sex, education, social background, social status, etc (Nord, 2005).

The medium is defined as "the means or vehicle which conveys the text to the reader" (p. 62). According to him, medium includes the technical devices for information which are effective in production, reception, and comprehension of a text" (p. 62), the medium determines the receiver's expectations as to text function. A proper example is the leaflet distributed at the entrance of a fair with the purpose of advertising.

Then it comes to the motive of the sender "which applies not only to the reason why a text has been produced but also to the occasion for which a text has been produced" (p.75).

Time, another important factor, encompasses "not only the time of ST production, but also that of TT production and reception" (p. 72). As he believes, "every language is supposed to change in its use and its norms. So the time of text production as an important pre signal for the historical state of linguistic development the text represents" (p.70)

Place refers to the actual situation of sender and the text producer; the place of production provides a pre-signal for the variety used in the ST and the place of reception determines the variety the translator has to use in the translation" (p. 67).

As defined by him, "text function means the communicative function or the combination of communicative functions which a text fulfills in its concrete situation of production/ reception" (p.77). Thus, as he states, the function of text whatever it is should be preserved in the text so that the effect is not changed.

2.1. The related studies on the translation model

Vahid, Hakimshafaai and Jannesaari (2008) in their article "Translation of Poetry: Towards a practical model for Translation Analysis and Assessment of Poetic Discourse"

focused upon and descriptively analyzed a Persian piece of poetry by Musavi Garmaroodi at both linguistic and extra linguistic levels in order to identify the formative elements of versified discourse in the source and target texts (ST/TT) and to arrive at a tentative model of translation analysis which can serve as a measure for translation assessment of poetic genre.

Nobar and Navidpoor (2010) in their article titled " Translating poetry: based on textual and extra textual analysis" chose one of the Rumi's Ghazals and its translation by Shahriari (1998) as a case for applying the proposed model of Vahid et al.'s (2008) for translating poetry. They aimed to identify if textual and extra-textual analyses of a poem and its translation help the translators in creating both natural and faithful translation. Regarding the extra textual elements, which are the focus of our study, they found out that the cultural words have not been preserved properly. Besides, almost all the religious allusions have been deleted and this deletion impaired the meaning intended by the original to a large extent. Also, it was revealed that such deletions of the cultural ties of the original text destroyed very much the coherence of the target text; such a loss makes understanding of the message difficult for the TT readers.

Using the same model, Shafiee and Hatam (2009), esmaieli (2010), and Aghili (2010) have done different studies regarding the textual and extra textual analysis.

3. Methodology

3.1. Translation Model

Vahid et al.'s (2008) have proposed two models for assessing literary translation on textual and extra-textual level. The present study's focus is on the extra-textual level which is presented in the appendix.

In the present study, a Persian piece of poetry by the Iranian poet, Moshiri, (2003) and its English translation by Vahid Dastjerdi (2006) will be analyzed descriptively at extra-textual level ,i.e. the pragmatics of the text, based on Vahid et al.'s (2008) as the theoretical framework of the study .

3.1. Procedures

1. Reading the original text and its rendering carefully
2. Identifying the specified parts in each stanza
3. Comparing and contrasting the rendering with the original text at extra-textual level
4. Concluding from the data analysis on the closeness of the target text to the original poem.

4. Data analysis and Discussion

According to Vahid et al.'s Model (2008), the extra-textual level analysis examines the two texts in terms of coherence and implicature under the headings of grammar and poetics.

4.1. Grammar

4.1.1. First Stanza

هر چه در دنیا گنجشک و قناری هست،
با پرستوها، و کبوترها،
همه را باید یکجا به قفس انداخت!

All sparrows and canaries of the world
Be placed amidst swallows and doves
Caught and caged!

The modal 'should' in the fourth line of the first stanza indicates necessity and obligation in the ST. By using this modal, the poet helps the reader feel the obligation and its emphatic role clearly. Indeed, 'should' reinforces the sense of a gloomy atmosphere in the poem. Although the meaning is conveyed in the TT, the translator, not transferring 'should' in his translation, has deprived the TT readers of the sense felt by the ST readers. However, the ellipsis in the TT creates some prolonged perception in the TT readers to think which can be regarded as a compensatory strategy by the translator who both has transferred the idea and beautified the TT.

4.1.2. Second stanza

روزگاری است که پرواز کبوترها
در فضا ممنوع است.

Tis a time their flight is banned
For the space

What makes the job of the translator significant is his presentation of the ST poem in a story-like manner to the TT readers, i.e. stanzas of the ST poem outnumber those of the translation. The problem here lies upon the possessive adjective of 'their' in the TT; the prohibition refers just to the 'doves' in the ST, while 'their' implies all the birds mentioned, i.e. sparrows, canaries, swallows, and doves, in the previous lines in the TT. The continuity of the stanzas in the translated texts might have been the reason. Although this grammatical change has not made any distortion in the meaning of the ST textually, the TT readers would not perceive it at the extra linguistic level.

که چرا

What?!

The translator has translated a nominal case to a question word. In spite of being from the same families, the structural pattern of the Persian is very different from the English and so are their stylistic effects. The grammatical knowledge of the translator of the ST has led him to translate the embedded 'why' into an independent 'what' since the translator has sought for reproducing both meaning and beauty in the TT. Also, the literal translation of this structure made it weird and did not reproduce the same effect on the TT readers as the original on the ST readers. Translating from L1 to L2 might be the reason of this stylistic success.

به حریم حرم جت ها خصمانه تجاوز شده است!

For, they, the flying firmament of jets
Have opponently transgressed!

As Vahidi Kamyar (2003) explains, the passive voice in Persian is used as follows:

1. The writer does not know the agent or does not want to mention his/her name,
2. The writer is sure that the agent is known to the reader,
3. The writer providing the readers with some axioms (ex. The sky was created)

As seen, each of the above mentioned can be attributed to the structure of the ST sentence. The ST poet might have deliberately used an agentless passive structure to create a sense of ambiguity in the ST readers. On the other hand, having used an active structure, the translator has assured the TT readers that the reason of the flight prohibition lies upon the birds mentioned while the ST readers should understand this by going back to the previous lines. Although there is no distortion of meaning in the above case, changing the voice has caused some mistranslations in the third stanza.

وهیاهوی قناری ها،

خواب جت ها را آشفته است.

And the canaries' cries

The jets' dream's minimized!

By using the sentence the canaries' cries have minimized the jets' dream, the ST poet sarcastically and paradoxically is telling the readers that it is the jet's cries which have minimized the canaries' dream, and this purpose has been met by using an active voice or the passive voice with its agent. The translator has just referred to the minimization of the jets' dreams without mentioning the reason, i.e., the cry of canaries. Thus, the sarcastic and paradoxical effects are erased in the TT. The use of 'by' could have solved the problem.

4.1.3. Fifth stanza

دلم از نام مسیحا لرزید
Thrilled my heart, Messiah to hear,

A significant instance of displacement is in the fifth stanza 'thrilled my heart, Messiah to hear'. For the sake of beauty, the English translator has used the technique of displacement in his translation which, indeed, has been very effective in creating a beautiful rendering and this literary knowledge reveals his expertise in literary translation. Other instance of effective displacement can be as follows:

که چه سان پاک و مجرد! به فلک تاخته اند!
Who've trodden the heavens-"pure and refined"

But there is also one instance of displacement which translator has mainly done for the sake of beauty and rhyme in the TT:

دود در مزرعه سبز فلک جاری است.
'The green field " is, thus, clad in smog;

The displacement in this instance has changed the focus of the sentence used by the ST poet. In the ST, 'smog' is emphasized and the poet tries to depict the image of the smog in the mind of the ST readers. But, the translator, by replacing the smog with the green field, has shifted the focus and thus the image.

و پسرهایش را
که چه سان پاک و مجرد! به فلک تاخته اند!
و چه آتش ها هرگوشه به پا ساخته اند!
و برادرها را خانه بر انداخته اند!
And ...His sons!
Who've trodden the heavens-"pure and refined";
But inflamed the world...tis a fact,
Ruining the abode of human kind!

The structural patterns of the three lines of Persian poem in the sixth stanza are the same and the translator has tried to be faithful by using present perfect tense except for the last line which has been totally changed. Although the last line is also in present perfect tense in the ST, the translator has changed it into a phrase starting with a gerund.

/آتش به پا کردن/ is a phrasal verb in Persian which is very emphatic in the ST, but its English equivalent is just a simple verb, i.e., inflame. Therefore, it is considered as a shift of form at word level and doesn't reproduce the same effect as the original does.

و آنچه هنگام درو حاصل ماست،
لعنت و نفرت و بیزاری است!
And our share at the Time of the Harvest-
Damnation, hatred...disgust!

Translating some sentences to the phrases, the translator, in some cases, has added to the beauty and evoked the prolong perception in the TT readers. Other instances are:

که باز
به نکوکاری، پاکی، خوبی
عشق میورزید.

But still loving, virtue...purity...kindness.
خیره در مزرعه خشک فلک مینگریم
Staring at the arid skies,

In some instances, the translator has benefited from the technique of addition, aiming at preserving the rhythm and rhyme in the TT like the following one:

می بینم:
I see-who knows?-

4.2. Poetics

4.2.1. Third stanza

روز گاری است که خوبی خفته است
و بدی بیدار است
وهیاهوی قناری ها
خواب جت ها را آشفته است
Tis a time goodness is dead;
Evil....alive!
And the canaries' song
The jets' dream's minimized!

Personification and alliteration are the dominant literary devices used in the third stanza of ST. The translator has successfully transferred these two poetic devices in the translation. The expert knowledge of the translator and his background knowledge of the SL have played an important role in his stylistic success. Translating /خوبی خفته است/ into 'the goodness is dead', the translator has conveyed the personification but not the alliteration. Indeed, the cacophony of /خ/ in the ST has given the ST readers the clue to the violence meant by the poet. Translating the ST sentence to 'goodness... gone' might have been a better choice regarding both the meaning and the beauty. However, the sound /k/ in the 'canaries' cries' in the translation has reproduced the cacophony.

Another instance of personification along with alliteration is /بدی بیدار است/ which has been translated to 'evil...alive'. The translator has beautifully rendered the two literacy devices in the translation. Translating / خواب جت ها / to ' jets' dreams' is one other instance of personification in this stanza which is rendered successfully by the translator. Taking this instance into account, the extra-linguistic knowledge including the literary knowledge, the grammatical knowledge, the background knowledge, and the expert knowledge of the ST and TT play a significant role in the job of the translator.

4.2.2. Fourth stanza

مزرع سبز فلک دیدم و داس مه نو
The green field me saw and the crescent moon's scythe

Having used the 'Tazmin'(where the poet enters a line from another poet's poem into his own) in this stanza, the ST poet has revived his experience of reading in the mind of the ST readers. In fact, the metaphoric expressions of Hafiz poem have added to the beauty of ST. That is, the sky is likened to green field and the crescent to a scythe. Translating literally, the translator has translated these expressions at the linguistic level regardless of the metaphors and cultural knowledge which influence the TT readers so much. In the first instance, / مزرع سبز / فلک / is translated to ' the green field' without adding the referent which is the sky. Thus, when reading the translation, the TT readers do not realize that the 'green field' is a metaphoric expression used for 'the sky'.

The second metaphoric expression in this stanza is / داس مه نو / being translated to ' the crescent moon scythe'. Although the translator has completely conveyed the metaphoric expression to the TT, he has missed the cultural point in this instance. Indeed, the cultural knowledge has an important role here. The ST readers are influenced by the beautiful metaphor

for the crescent moon, but a question comes to mind immediately that "does the metaphor produce the same effect in the TT readers?" The answer lies in the connotation of 'scythe' in the English culture. It evokes the meaning of death in the TT readers and makes a negative imagery which would be completely different from the ST.

Other instances of metaphoric expressions are / پرده ی اشک / in the fifth stanza which is translated metaphorically to 'the veil of my tear' with both the beauty and content preserved, /مزرعه خشک فلک/ translated to arid skies translated neutrally, conveying only the content not the beauty, and /خوشه ی اشک/ translated to the pearls of orphan conveying both the intended beauty and the content in a different way. Indeed, the ST poet, being aware of the metaphoric use of 'Pleiades' for 'tears' in the Persian literature, has used the metaphor of /خوشه ی اشک/ and connected it to /خوشه پروین/. On the other hand, needless to convey this ST literary use, the translator has smartly used the same metaphor with different words, i.e., orphans' pearls in which 'the tears' are beautifully likened to 'the pearls'.

گر روی پاک و مجرد چون مسیحا به فلک
از فروغ تو به خورشید رسد صد پرتو
'should thou ascend the Heaven-pure and refined,
Thy Messiah –like radiance shalt illumine sunlight

Using another couplet of Hafiz, the ST poet has tried to present the knowledge in the best way to make the ST readers aware of his purpose. As seen, /چو مسیحا/ is an instance of simile in the ST which is mistranslated to 'Thy messiah-like radiance'. In fact, the simile is preserved in the TT but the image is shifted. That is, the focus in the English is the radiance of messiah while the Messiah himself is emphasized in the Persian poem.

4.2.3. Fifth and sixth stanzas

دلَم از نام مسیحا لرزید
از پس پرده اشک
من مسیحا را بالای صلیبش دیدم
با سر خم شده بر سینه، که باز
به نکوکاری، پاکی، خوبی
عشق میورزید.
Thrilled my heart, Messiah to hear,
And behind the veil of my tear,
I saw on His cross...Jesus
Head bent on the chest;
But still loving, virtue...purity...kindness

و پسرهایش را
که چه سان پاک و مجرد اِبه فلک تاخته اند!
و چه آتش ها هرگوشه به پا ساخته اند!
و برادرها را خانه بر انداخته اند!
And ...His sons1
Who've trodden the heavens-"pure and refined";
But inflamed the world...tis a fact,
Ruining the abode of human kind!

In the fifth stanza, the Persian poet is referring to a historical event of which the readers are aware. Having praised messiah's care for purity, kindness and virtue, the poet immediately, in the sixth stanza, starts complaining about Messiah's followers who have trodden the heavens, inflamed the world. The English translator prefers to translate the lines carrying the cultural knowledge literally not to deprive the TT reader of the beautiful Persian description. Besides, he is certain that English readers share the presupposed knowledge needed to understand the meaning.

Also, /پسرهایش/ is the metonymy for Messiah's followers which is rendered as a metonymy in the English piece.

'پاك و مجرد' is ironically used in the 6th stanza. The poet might be aiming at contrasting how Jesus went to the heavens and how his followers did, i.e., Jesus, pure and refined, but his followers, evil mannered. Jesus is the symbol of peace and his followers are disturbing this peace. The cultural knowledge of the translator is known in this stanza as he has used 'his' in the capital form. By doing this, the translator gives the cultural clue to the TT readers that the referent is Jesus.

4.2.4. Seventh stanza

و آنچه هنگام درو حاصل ماست،

And our share at the Time of the Harvest-

/هنگام درو/ is part of Hafez poem which refers to the Day of Judgment when you are the witness of your deeds. Therefore, again here the reader's background knowledge is of utmost importance in inferring the intended meaning. The English translator has translated literally but tried to compensate for this connotative meaning by capitalizing the first letters: Time of Harvest. This capitalization helps the reader to ponder about its pragmatic aspect.

Conclusion

The source and target texts were analyzed at extra linguistic level. Regarding extra linguistic level, the two texts were examined in terms of coherence and implicature under the headings of grammar and poetics. Grammatically, the translator has been faithful to the original version, but in some cases, he has shifted at different levels which are led to the change of effect in the TT. Regarding the poetics of the text, the figurative language of ST is as much as possible preserved in the TT being translated literally or pragmatically. The poet has keenly used several ironies and metaphors intending to show his dissatisfaction of the condition, and interestingly, the translator, following the ST poet, has successfully conveyed them to the TT. To sum up, all the translator's success arises his literary expertise, background knowledge, and the cultural knowledge which are dominant features in the extra textual analysis of literary works.

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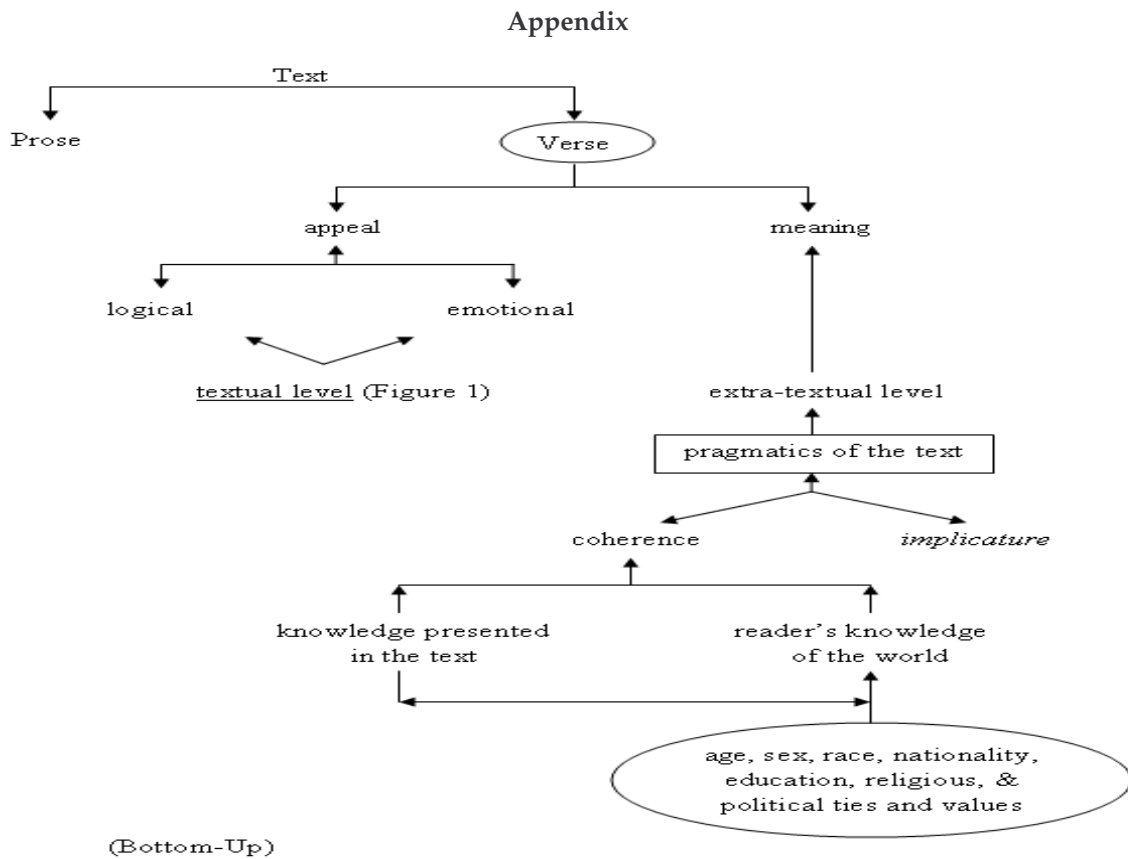


Figure 2. The Practical Model of Poetic Translation Analysis and Assessment by Vahid (2008): Extra-Textual Level