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## **A Study of Nida's (1964) Types of Equivalence in Three English Translations of Letters 40 to 60 of Nahj-al-balagheh [In English]**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The main objective of this study is to probe into the issue of equivalency in three translations of Nahj-al-balagheh. More specifically, it is aimed to find out if there was any significant difference between dynamic and formal types of equivalence in three Persian to English translations of Nahj-al-balagheh by Jafari, Seyed Alireza and Mutahari and reveal whether three English translations of Nahj-al-balagheh could equally convey the same message or not. To accomplish this purpose, Nida's (1964) model of equivalence is used as the framework of the study. The results demonstrate that considering dynamic and formal types of equivalence, there are significant differences among three English translations. Besides, whereas Jafari's translation is dynamic, both Seyed Alireza and Mutahari's translations are more formal in tone. Findings can be of help to the interested readers who intend to do more on the translation of religious texts including Nahj-al-balagheh.

**Key words:** Nahj-al-balagheh, Equivalency, Nida's model, Religious Texts, Formal and Dynamic Equivalence.

### **Introduction**

These days so many muslim translators try to translate the Holy Quran as the most important religious scripture in the Islamic world to find the most appropriate interpretation by finding suitable equivalents to convey the meaning and message eloquently. However, it seems that fewer scholars have worked on the issue of equivalency, especially in the holy scripture of Nahj-al-balagheh. Closely related to the above issue, three English translations of Nahj-al-balagheh are considered. One translation by Seyed Alireza, has been published in Qum in 2008). Another one by Mutahari who was an Iranian cleric, philosopher, lecturer and politician and his translation of Nahj-al-

balagheh was published in Qum, and the other translator was Jafari who was a theorist and translator of both Nahj-al-balagheh and Quran.

The present study aims to investigate whether different English translations of Nahj-al-balagheh enjoy the same degree of equivalency and so convey the same message based on Nida's model (1964). It also aims to find out which one(s) of the three translation(s) is/are more dynamic and which one(s) is/are more formal. With regard to the above points, the research intended to find answer to the following questions:

1. Considering Nida's model (1964), which translation(s) is/are more dynamic and which one(s) is/are more formal?
2. Is there any significant difference in terms of types of equivalence among the three English translations of Nahj-al-balagheh?

### **Background**

Equivalence can be said to be a central issue in translation, and as Catford (1965) maintains, translation is the replacement of textual materials in one language by employing equivalent textual materials in another language, and hence the most important thing is equivalency of textual materials.

After centuries of circular debates around literal and free translation, theoreticians, in the 1950s and 1960s, began to attempt more systematic analysis of translation. The new debate revolved around key linguistic issues, especially meaning and equivalence. Over the following twenty years, many further attempts were made to define the nature of equivalence (Catford, 1965).

Many theorists and linguists have elaborated on the intimate relationship between language, equivalence, culture and translation. For instance, Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) view equivalence-oriented translation as a procedure which replicates the same situation as in the original, whilst using completely different wording. According to Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), equivalence is therefore the ideal method when the translator has to deal with proverbs and idioms. However, later they note that glossaries and collections of idiomatic expressions can never be exhaustive. They conclude by saying that "the need for creating equivalences arises from the situation and it is in

the situation of the source language text that translators have to look for a solution” (cited in Munday 2009, p.58).

Roman Jakobson's (1959) study of equivalence gave new perspective to the theoretical analysis of translation, since he introduced a different notion of equivalence. According to his theory, translation involves two equivalent messages in two different codes. Sometimes the translator may face the problem of not finding a translation equivalent or there is non-equivalence.

Catford's (1965) approach to translation equivalence clearly differs from that adopted by Nida, since Catford had a preference for a more linguistic-based approach to translation. His main contribution in the field of translation theory is the introduction of the concepts of types and shifts of translation, which are mostly used when there is a problem of equivalence or non-equivalence.

Nida (1964) argues that there are two different types of equivalence: formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence consists of a target language item which represents the closest equivalent of the source language word or phrase. Nida and Taber (1969) make it clear that formal equivalents are not always found between language pairs.

An extremely interesting discussion of the notion of equivalence is provided by Baker (1992), who offers a more detailed list of conditions upon which the concept of equivalence can be defined. She distinguishes between equivalence that can appear at word level and above word level: grammatical equivalence, textual equivalence, and pragmatic equivalence. Baker acknowledges that equivalence is the first element to be taken into consideration by the translator. The role of translator is to recreate the author's intention in another culture in such a way that enables the target language reader to understand it clearly.

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)

Dweik (2000) asserts that differences review of literature between two cultures certainly cause difficulties not only in translation but also in learning

foreign languages. He reported that interference problems result from either lack of knowledge of TL or SL.

Karimi (2000) defined the term equivalence by stating that finding equivalents in translation involves decoding the SL text and making an attempt to find an appropriate equivalent in the TL to encode whatever has been decoded in SL. Moreover, Karimi stated that sometimes, due to religious, cultural and literary factors, it is difficult to find a standard equivalent in one language for another and he explained that in order to render a satisfactory translation the translator needs to be acquainted with phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, idiomatic, religious, and cultural systems of both SL and TL.

Abdul-Fattah & Zughoul (2003) carried out their study on EFL university learners at both graduate and the undergraduate levels. The researchers aimed at finding out the proficiency of EFL learners in rendering collocations and the strategies used in producing Arabic collocations. They wanted to investigate the competence of those learners in rendering into English the Arabic verb "kasara" meaning "broke". The test was administered in two forms that contained 16 lexical sequences of the verb "broke". The study sample consisted of two groups of EFL university students, from the Department of English at Yarmouk University. Data analysis revealed that the overall performance of the subjects in the target collocations was far from satisfactory. It also identified twelve distinct communicative strategies that were characterized as, avoidance, literal translation, substitution, overgeneralization, quasi-metaphorical similarity, assumed synonymity, derivativeness, imitation of literary style, idiomaticalness, paraphrase and circumlocution, graphic ambiguity and finally, false TL assumption.

Bahumaid (2006) investigated the procedures employed by the translators in rendering equivalences and collocations whose TL equivalents are unknown to them. The result indicated that translators resort to several procedures. He conducted his study on four Arab university instructors who taught translation and did translation work for different periods. The two-part translation test consisted of thirty sentences on contextualized collocations and equivalence of different types. The sentences contained 15 English equivalence and 11 Arabic ones in addition to 4 Arabic phrases. Some of the

equivalence selected for the test were of the general type as "to make noise" while others were associated with specific register. The results showed that culture-bound and in register-specific posed the greatest challenge in translation whereas, equivalences that have literal meanings were relatively easier to render. Moreover, translators employ certain strategies such as giving the meaning of the equivalences, using synonyms or near-synonyms, attempting literal renditions and finally avoiding the renditions completely.

Al-Khanji & Hussein (1999) investigated the nature of difficulties students encounter in learning equivalences and collocations and the strategies used when students are unable to collocate lexical words correctly. The sample of the test consisted of 120-second year students majoring in English at the University of Jordan. The test consisted of 50 collocation and equivalent items based on their frequency of appearance in textbooks and English courses. The results showed that students' incorrect responses reflected three categories; one was based on their SL such as literal transliteration, which is considered as "negative transfer" (p. 140). The second was based on TL "semantic contiguity" whereby, the students replaced a lexical item by another one that shared certain semantic features with it and the third category was the "lexical reduction strategy" (p. 135).

## **Methodology**

### **Corpus**

Corpus for the study consisted of letters 40 to 60 of Nahj-al-balagheh in Persian and its three translations in English. English translations were selected based on availability from three translators, namely, Askari Jafari (whose translation was published in Tehran and Islamic seminary publication and the last publication was in 2010), Mutahari (who was an Iranian cleric, philosopher, lecturer and politician and his translation of Nahj-al-balagheh was published in 2013 in Qum) and Seyed Alireza (whose translation was published in Qum for the first time and the last publication was in 2008).

### **Procedures**

As a descriptive-comparative research design, data were collected from three English translations of the letters 40 to 60 of Nahj-al-balagheh. To identify types of equivalence, it was necessary to describe and classify them to build up a picture of the features of the target language in which to compare and contrast equivalents employed by translators. Accordingly, the Persian version of letters 40 to 60 was studied carefully. Then, three English translations of letters 40 to 60 were studied to compare and find their types of equivalence according to Nida's (1964) model. In the final phase, the three English translations were compared with each other to see if they were concerned with the formal equivalence or dynamic one.

### **Framework of the Study**

Nida's equivalence model (1964) was used as the framework of this study, which includes two different types of equivalence, namely formal and dynamic equivalence.

Formal equivalence tends to emphasize fidelity to the lexical details and grammatical structure of the original language, and tries to remain as close to the original text as possible, without adding the translator's ideas and thoughts into the translation; on the other hand, dynamic equivalence tends to employ a more natural rendering but with less literal accuracy. In other words, it is an approach to translation in which the original language is translated "thought for thought" rather than "word for word" as in formal equivalence. In addition, based on Nida (1964), in dynamic equivalence the message of the original text is transported into the receptor language so that the response of the receptor is essentially like that of the original receptors, and the desire is that the reader of both languages would understand the meanings of the text in a similar fashion.

### **Findings**

In the following, samples of types of equivalent within three translations of Nahj-al-balagheh by Jafari, Mutahari and Sayyed Alireza are presented. Types of equivalence used within three translations in letter 41 are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample one: Types of equivalence within three translations in letter 41 (D = dynamic, F = formal)

Original text	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 اداء امانتی که در تو یافتم.	Type of Equivalence
Jafari	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.	D
Mutahari	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.	F
Sayyedaireza	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.	F

As shown in Table 1, the first translator, Jafari, adopted dynamic equivalence but the two other ones, namely, Mutahari and Sayyed Alireza applied formal equivalence. Jafari's translation of letter 41 of Nahj-al-balagheh tends to be reader-oriented. This translation didn't have to do with details. It is in fact undertranslated. The phrase "sharik dar amanat" was transposed to a verb to be more smooth and the verb "sahktam" was replaced

by “appoint”. Literally translating, “sahktam” should be rendered as “make”. However, Jafari chose “appoint” to transfer the force of the verb. In the subsequent sentence, he also gave more attention to equivalent effect of the sentence since it is TT oriented and considered readership, whereas translations carried out by Mutahari and Sayyed Alireza are more detailed and author-oriented. In their attempts, Mutahari and Sayyed Alireza maintained both form and content. The phrase “sharik dar amanat” has been translated literally considering contextual meaning. Looking at the subsequent sentences, it can be seen that the translators both adopted formal equivalence; they overtranslated, paid more attention to details and the form of source text. In sum, this sample revealed that Jafari’s translation is reader-oriented, while Mutahari and Sayyed alireza’s showed tendency toward author and source text.

Table 2 represents types of equivalence used within three translations in letter 42.



Table 2. Types of equivalence within three translations in letter 42 (D = dynamic, F = formal)

Original text	بنابر این 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.	Type of Equivalence
Jafari	Come to me immediately. The fact is that I have resolved to face the Syrian tyrants and oppressors.	D
Mutahari	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].	F
Sayyedaireza	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.	F

In Table 2, translation accomplished by Jafari is based on dynamic equivalence, whereas two other translations are rendered considering formal equivalence. Jafari rendered “besuye ma harakat kon” communicatively as “come to....” in which he used deletion strategy to provide readers with a clear natural sentence which otherwise requires presupposition in terms of whyness of not being suspected... In this regards, Nida (2003) believes that the receptor needs adequate non-linguistic information to use the cues in the

text to create semantic contents. Indeed, “words only have meaning in terms of the culture of which they are a part” (p. 77). On the other hand, Mutahari and sayyedalireza whose translations are put in the second and third row of the table rendered almost literally. They paid attention to both syntactic - structure and semantic meaning simultaneously. The closest possible structure to source language sentence was adopted to transfer the contextual meanings. As for two lexicals “harakat kon” and “setamgaran”, it is worth saying that selection of the verb “come” by Jafari which is less formal as compared with “proceed” may be due to the interpersonal relationship existed between Imam Ali and the subordinate person. The other lexeme selected by three translators differently is “setamgaran” which was rendered as “tyrant”, “rebel” and “recalcitrant” by Jafari, Mutahari and Sayyed Alireza, respectively. There are different componential meanings among which tyrant is more close to its Persian counterpart. In other words, priority of Jafari is TT readers and those of the two others are source culture and author.

In Table 3, types of equivalence used within three translations in letter 43 are shown.

Table 3. Types of equivalence within three translations in letter 43 (D = dynamic, F = formal)

Original text	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 حلیتیش داری تناول کن.	Type of Equivalence
Jafari	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.	F
Mutahari	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.	D
Sayyed Alireza	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.	D

As shown above, three translators rendered the first sentence in the same way. However, Jafari used “carefully” as a compensation for “halal va haram”. Unlike the previous examples, Jafari used redundancy and overtranslation to transfer the meanings. He translated “halal budan” as “being obtained unlawfully”. Here the translator employed change of view strategy which was proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) and in the

subsequent sentence it (heliat) was transposed as “they are obtained by honest means”. By contrast, Mutahari and Sayyed Alireza undertranslated. Their translations are smooth, direct and easy to read and also show tendency to the TL culture and as they try to remain naturalness of the original message, they are dynamic equivalence. In this regard, Munday (2009) asserts that full naturalness of expression is achieved only by “dynamic equivalence”. Therefore, “the message has to be tailored to the receptor’s linguistic needs and cultural expectations” (p. 42).

Types of equivalence used within three translations in letter 44 are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Types of equivalence within three translations in letter 44 (D = dynamic, F = formal)

Original text	بنابراین تو در مورد آنچه برایت مهم است از خدا استعانت جوی و شدت و سختگیری را با کمی نرمش در هم 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.	Type of Equivalence
Jafari	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.	D
Mutahari	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.	F
SayyedAlireza	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.	F

As seen in Table 4, translation by Jafari shows tendency towards TL norms. It is semantic-oriented, and achieving equivalent effect is the focus of the translator. “anche 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 translation of subsequent sentences the

phrase” In your behavior with your subjects remember” has no equivalence in the original sentence. In other words, the translator, namely, Jafari used redundancy to make implicits more explicit. His priority is readership, and so follows his thought-process. This translation is clear, smooth, natural and comprehensible to the TL readers. On the other hand, Mutahari and Sayyed Alireza tried to remain the original form and content, which focus on the author, and so formal equivalence is involved. They also tried 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 did in the readers of the source language. Therefore, dynamic equivalence was realized in this translation. In the next sentence rendered by Jafari, the type of translation fulfilled is dynamic equivalence too. He goes beyond the surface structure and restructure the deep ones to make the unsaid and implicits more obvious and understandable for TL readers. Unlike Jafari, Mutahari and Sayyed Alireza tried to remain as close as possible to the source language text and the author and SL is of paramount importance for them. The rendered excerpt by them disclose the involved type of translation as formal one.

### Discussion

To find response to the first research question, data on the frequency and percentage were shown into tables, as shown in the following:

Table 5. Frequency and percentage of types of translations by Jafari

	Frequency	Percent
Formal EQ	6	10
Dynamic EQ	54	90
Total	60	100

Table 6. Frequency and percentage of types of translations by Mutahari

	Frequency	Percent
Formal E	51	85
Dynamic EQ	9	15
Total	60	100

Table 7. Frequency and percentage of types of translations by SayyedAlireza

	Frequency	Percent
Formal EQ	53	88
Dynamic EQ	7	11
Total	60	100

As indicated above, the frequency of formal equivalence adopted by Jafari is only six out of sixty examples. However, ninety percent of his translations are based on dynamic equivalence, whereas two other translators preferred formal equivalence over dynamic equivalence. That is, eighty five percent of rendered texts by Mutahari and eighty eight percent of the same rendered texts by Sayyed Alireza are based on formal equivalence. The dynamic equivalence percentages opted for by Mutahari and Sayyed Alireza are only fifteen percent and eleven percent, respectively. So the frequency number of dynamic equivalence-based translations accomplished by Jafari considerably outnumbered that of equivalence-based translations carried out by Mutahari and SayyedAlireza. By contrast, the frequency number of formal equivalence-based translations carried out by Mutahari and Sayyed Alireza overtook that

of the same equivalence-based translation done by Jafari. This indicates that TL readers and culture were the focus and priority of Jafari. 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). In his translation, Jaafari preferred TL items which were more culturally appropriate for obscure ST items, making linguistically implicit ST information explicit and building in a certain amount of redundancy to aid comprehension.

Also, based on the findings, some differences were seen between the translators in terms of either translating SL-orientedly or TL-orientedly, i.e., whether their translations tended to be formal or dynamic equivalence. Dynamic equivalence-based translations by Jafari overtook the same type of translations by Mutahari and SayyedAlireza. On the other hand, the frequencies of formal equivalence-based translations by Mutahari and SayyedAlireza are higher than that of the same type of translation by Jafari. To answer the second research question on the significant difference of types of equivalence among the three translations, chi-square was applied, the result of which is as shown below:

Table 8. Chi-square of types of equivalence among three English translations of Nahj-al-balagheh

Chi-square	degree of freedom	Sig.
86.490	1	.000

Based on Table 8, degree of significance of (0.00) at 0.05 level means there is a significant difference between the types of equivalence used by three translators.



## Conclusion

Finding equivalence, especially for religious texts, can cause difficulties for translators. Hence, conceptual strategies come into play when translating. The first category that translators must take into consideration is the type of text. Then, they should think about its relationship with the type of equivalence to be produced and consider if that translation convey the same message as it render in source language or not. The second category is that the type of strategies that translators should utilize in order to find the best equivalence to convey the same message as in the source text and also the translation should be direct, natural and comprehensible to see if the translations have formal approach or dynamic one.

Based on the findings, although the translation of religious texts in general and that of Nahj-al-balagheh in particular seems a far-fetched challenge and, in some cases, only possible with partial semantic and stylistic loss, it is by no means totally impossible. In this vein, while Jafari's translation is clear, smooth, natural and comprehensible to the TL readers, Mutahari and Sayyed Alireza tried to retain the original form and content. In other words, Jafari's translation being reader-oriented is dynamic, while Mutahari and Sayyed alireza's showed tendency toward author and source text, and hence more formal. In addition, it was shown that there was a significant difference between the types of equivalence used by three translators.

The present study could be interesting for teachers, students of translation, translators, syllabus designers, book compilers, and policy-makers. Teachers could expand their word knowledge of the religious texts and get familiar with different aspects of culture. Students of translation could comprehend better the different aspects of formal and dynamic types of equivalence. Policy makers could also come to know and probe into the most significant religious texts and work on their assessment using different schemes.

In this study, Nida's (1964) model was employed as the framework of the study; other researches could be conducted using different frameworks in the following studies. Also, data on the other religious scriptures such as the Holy Quran, The Old Testament or The New Testament can be collected, sorted and analyzed.

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