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Lost in political translation.
(Mis)translation of an intertextual reference and its political consequences: the case of Iran
Mohammad Saleh Sanatifar, Tabaran Institute of Higher Education

ABSTRACT

One of the most challenging aspects of translation is dealing with intertextual references, the implicit or explicit relations a text/talk may establish with prior and sometimes contemporary works. The translation of intertextual references of either type needs to receive more attention in political translation, as any misinterpretations or mistranslations in this area may have negative social, ideological and/or diplomatic consequences among nations. This article makes an initial quest for a relationship between intertextuality and ideology and discusses some potential difficulties a translator may encounter in the translation of intertextual references in the context of political speech. Drawing on Hervey *et al.'s* (1995) framework for analysis and translation of such references and in the light of Yang's (2012) concept of Political Equivalence, the article studies a case of an intertextual reference delivered by the former President of Iran in an international conference which is assumed to be mistranslated by the media. The article will then discuss some possible causes of the so-called mistranslation, and suggest a number of concrete guidelines for a more efficient and effective translation of intertextual references in political speech.

KEYWORDS

Lost, mistranslation, intertextuality, political translation, Iran, equivalence.

1. Introduction

Intertextuality, a term first coined by Julia Kristeva (1967, cited in Szudrowicz-Garstka 2014), refers to the vital role that prior texts and talks play in shaping others. Rarely is any text or talk shaped in a vacuum; it relies on others (sacred texts such as the Holy Koran or the Bible are exceptions). As a standard for textuality, intertextuality concerns "the factors which make the utilisation of one text dependent upon knowledge of one or more previously encountered texts" (de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981: 10). As such, references should be sought either locally in other parts of the same (con)text, or globally out of the (con)text, for which the audience often has to travel back in time, to prior texts and talks. Intertextuality manifests through textual relationship, that is, the relationship between a text and an embedded quotation, explicit reference to another text, or an 'allusion' to a specific text (Chilton and Schäffner 2002: 17). Intertextuality is a distinctive feature of political discourse. Bakhtin (1981 in Wilson 2001: 404) points out that "utterances within the context of political output are rarely isolated grammatical cases; they operate within historical frameworks and are frequently associated with other related utterances or texts." Intertextuality

in political discourse and political speech in particular puts many genres in relationships of complementarity, inclusion/exclusion or opposition. These relations lead to other forms such as recontextualisation, i.e. the importation of one genre into another (instances of this might be the incorporation of a politician's phrase or a party slogan into an everyday conversation or news headline), and dialogism as the relationships between texts in a communicational environment (Chilton and Schäffner 2002; Schäffner 2012a).

Translation — a form of recontextualisation — is defined by a number of scholars as an intertextual activity because the target text is the absorption of and has references in the prior text; Schäffner (2010), for example, introduces translation as 'intercultural intertextuality.' Farahzad (2009) acknowledges translation as 'intertextual practice', an 'intertext' which bridges a 'prototext' (source text) and 'metatext' (the target text). Neubert and Shreve (1992) also define translation as 'mediated intertextuality' on the basis of their earlier definition of translation as 'text-induced text production' (see also Hatim and Mason 1990; Hatim and Munday 2004; Schäffner 2004, 2012a). Khanjan and Mirza (1386/2008) have also re-emphasised the important role of the theory of intertextuality in translation theory and practice, highlighting among others the "uncertainty of meaning and non-originality of the source text," "putting emphasis on the importance of contextual elements," "raising the translator's professional position," and "the demand for doing a typological analysis" prior to translation. Based on Hervey *et al's* (1995) framework, following Yang's (2012) principles of political equivalence and through a case analysis, this article intends to study potential problems translators may face in the translation of intertextual references in the context of political speeches and in what more efficient ways they can handle such problems. The study will also discuss possible reasons for difficulty in translating such references.

2. Background

2.1 Mistranslation

Mistranslations (translation mistakes) occur more often than not in translation, and are considered to be unwelcome shifts that should be avoided. Mistranslations are the transformation of certain source text values or properties which ought to remain unaltered (Bakker, Koster and Vanleuven-Zwart 2009: 270). They are the semantic changes in the target text which are totally irrelevant to the purpose of translation and are often the result of misinterpretation (Murtisari 2013: 341). Cases of mistranslation can be abundantly seen in everyday life (road signs, film subtitles, advertising billboards, etc.). The degree to which they need to be taken

seriously and how they need to be treated depends on the purpose and sensitivity of the original text/talk as well as the consequences they may bring about. Political text/talk is an advanced type of text/talk with high political sensitivity; it has a strong policy orientation focusing on imparting a country's political views to the world (Yang 2012). As a result, political translation has a very low tolerance towards mistakes, even minor ones, because the results could be catastrophic and affect international relationships if a political message were wrongly translated.

Mistranslation is a widely seen phenomenon in Iranian politics. More often, this has happened in the translation of top political authorities' texts and talks and has caused diplomatic disputes between nations[1]. For example, mistranslating a recent speech from Iran's president, Rouhani, raised a controversy. The controversy concerned both CNN and the Wall Street Journal whose translations of a recent political speech (which involved adding the word 'holocaust' when it was not stated by the President) led to different interpretations (Empowerlingua website 2013). As discussed by Holland (2013:333), in 2006, CNN was banned from reporting in Iran after broadcasting a news conference by the ex-president Ahmadinejad, in which his assertion (in Farsi) that Iran had "… a right to use nuclear technology" was translated into English as "… a right to use nuclear weapons." In another more critical case, which came to be known as the *Rumor of the Century* (Norouzi 2007), mistranslating part of the Iranian ex-president's speech in an international conference led the country to one of its most contentious problems of the last two decades. This is the case being studied in this article which will be analysed and discussed shortly.

2.2 Political equivalence

Political translation is a vital bridge in international relations and one of the most complicated, advanced, sensitive and highly demanding translation activities, as it concerns national interests and foreign relations. Yang (2012:2) remarks that political translation "plays an essential role in trans-language, cross-border, and inter-cultural international exchanges and cooperation." Yang (2012) has put forward the idea of "Political Equivalence" in translation as the vital principle for diplomatic translation. He explains that while in Nida's theory (1964), attention is on equivalence of meaning and style, in *his* concept of Political Equivalence there is an emphasis on the equivalence of political connotations (accuracy, faithfulness, acceptability and dynamicity) (Yang 2008:91 in Yang 2012:5). By being dynamic, he means the translator must keep a balanced relationship between the SL/speaker and the TL/audience in achieving political equivalence hence being a "wirewalker." In his theory of political equivalence, Yang (2012:6-11) formulates four principles to achieve political equivalence, and for each he

refers back to real cases where misquotes, misinterpretations and mistranslations have sparked political events. The four principles are as follows:

1) fully understanding the political context of the speaker and accurately communicating the connotation of time in the diplomatic source language. For this, he claims that the meanings of words and their connotations change with time and environment and explains that even the same idiom or literary illusions may have different meanings within different contexts or in a specific political environment.
2) conveying political meanings to the recipients in popular language form by highly integrating the policy information availability of the translation version with the effect of the original version.
3) working towards dynamic, rather than formal, political equivalence.
4) paying attention to balancing the SL and the TL, the context of the source language and the context of the audience, and the speaker and the audience, without bias to either side (what he calls "dual identification").

Yang (2012:12-15) also refers to some tactics and methods to achieve political equivalence in political translation as follows: First, he states that the translator should do discourse analysis in translation and analyse the political meanings by "reading between the lines." Second, political translation methods should not be confined to linguistic forms. Here, he refers to the translation of idioms, allusions, myths and fables in political contexts and states that the translator must distinguish between their cultural connotations and political orientations and adopt a "mixed translation method." Third, the translator must be familiar with disparities in historical cultures, national customs, feelings and ideologies between the languages he is translating. Fourth, the translator must have a good command of foreign policy and ensure "political correctness." Lastly, he refers to the special use of grammatical phenomena and rules. Yang (2012:11) advocates 'Approximate Equivalence' rather than 'Perfect Equivalence' as the latter is not easily achievable. Accordingly, he rejects 'Absolute Literal' (Foreignisation) and 'Absolute Free' (Domestication) methods in political translation as orientation toward each (speaker or audience) will raise problems.

Munday (2010, see also Munday 2012) has a more or less similar view of equivalence when he applies 'appraisal theory' in translation and particularly in political discourse translation. He believes that the ST and its translation do not necessarily have the same 'value' and require different 'evaluation' and different 'readings'. In other words, what is 'critical' in the ST is not necessarily so in its translation and vice versa.

Intertextual references are among the cases in translation which may potentially cause non-equivalence; they can be a recurring problematic area in translation (Hatim 1997). This difficulty becomes even more complicated in political translation. Intertextual references in political translation, in general and political speeches in particular, are an under-researched area within the field of translation studies (Schäffner 2012a, 2012b). In the next two sections, the author seeks to understand why intertextual references are so challenging in political text/talk and more debatable in translation.

2.3 Search for a relation

Duotextuality, following monotextuality (no references to any prior texts), was a dominant oratory tool according to classical political rhetoric (Schäffner 1997a: 3). It was recommended that orators, in an effort to improve their speech, proceed in accordance with models of previously successful orations; in other words, a *second text* was always presupposed *behind* the speech being delivered (ibid.). However, in modern political communication (speech) 'intertextuality' is widely used as a rhetorical tool - namely, a 'host of texts' are always behind the speech being delivered. Chilton and Schäffner (2002: 17) explain that intertextuality "is often used to refer to the process by which a dominant text assimilates, for some strategic purposes, elements of another genre."

Van Dijk (2002) believes that intertextuality forms an unavoidable part of any political discourse, more than any other genre or text type. He states that intertextuality transfers ideology (the assumptions, beliefs and value systems which are shared by social groups) from one context into another, arouses the audience's emotions, brings dynamism and openness to text/talk, and gives way to supposedly reliable voices in order to express their views more effectively. In this regard, Moreton (2010: 142) describes intertextuality as the carrier of ideology and as an overarching 'fact' about language in use, which determines the presence of intertextuality.

For example, President Obama usually subscribes to ideologies of the ex-presidents of the United States, such as Jefferson, Lincoln, Kennedy or Roosevelt, along with other outstanding American and non-American political figures, like King, Gandhi or Mandela. At times, he directs his audiences to scriptures of the Holy Koran, the Bible or the Talmud. In doing so, he intends to persuade his audience that his ideology matches that of their preferred faith and iconic figures.

Van Dijk (2002) further views intertextuality in political discourse from a cognitive perspective. Though implicitly, he maintains that things we or

specifically politicians understand or produce about politics — that is, 'various forms of text/talk' are built, processed and maintained in our political cognition. He believes that political cognition consists of three levels: the *base level*, which consists of individual political agents' beliefs, discourses and interactions within a political situation; the *intermediate level*, which consists of shared representations and collective discourses of political groups and institutions; and the *top level*, which consists of political systems, and their abstract representations, orders of discourse, and socio-political processes. This makes a direct relevance between political discourse and intertextuality. Al-Taher (2008) explains that

> A politician cannot produce any text out of the culture and society they come from, nor is it easy for them to produce a text without making use of their institutional background. Their individual contributions are expected to rely on these elements that have built up their distinct personality (p.12).

As an example, van Dijk (2002) illustrates that a member giving a speech in parliament is speaking not only to express his/her own political individual ideologies, but also the attitude or ideology of their party as a member of an ideological group, as well as using a system of parliamentary democracy (cultural knowledge, norms and values) shared by all other groups of the same culture. In fact, the base level is a case of importing the attitudes and ideologies of the second intermediate level, which in turn is a case of importing ideologies from the third top level. It is worth noting that even at the top level, as Schäffner (2012a) remarks, "there are references to documents of the other culture, to bilateral or multilateral treaties, and also to general or specific philosophies, ideologies, faiths, universal truths and common sense" (p.348). In sum, nothing is/must be solely based on individual convictions, rather any contribution is/must be based on collective and socially and politically shared attitudes and ideologies, which originate from and represent a wider, generic socially and politically shared knowledge (van Dijk 2012). In the words of van Dijk,

> … in the middle, group knowledge and attitudes organised by ideologies would affect the personal knowledge and attitudes, building their mental models which affect all their social practices, among which are their discourse production and reception (van Dijk 2002:224).

These relationships or 'orders of discourse' directly or indirectly refer to intertextuality and can be shown as three interrelated circles (Figure 1).
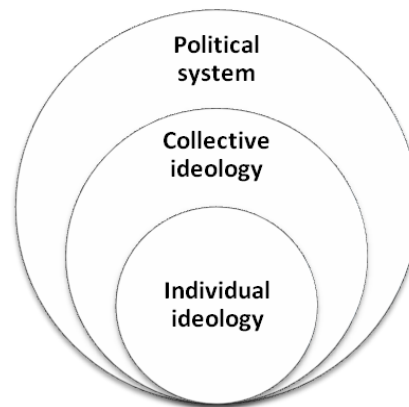
Figure 1
A relationship between intertextuality and ideology in political discourse

It is also noteworthy that intertextuality is not limited only to prior texts; Schäffner (1997a) takes into consideration not only the pre-history (prototexts), and history (intertext), but also the post-history of a speech (later media coverage and the wider audience pick up).

Intertextuality is used for several reasons, such as making critical reviews and parodies (Sohn 2008:188) or gaining the audience's approval through reference to *accredited* prior texts and talks (Schäffner 1997a:37-8), thus appearing more trustworthy and honest to them. It may also be used for the purpose of ideological assimilation and *legitimisation seeking* in both ideological and social terms.

Intertextuality may be either manifest or constitutive. Both types have special applications in political speeches. The manifest type (also horizontal, explicit or overt) appears with intertextual graphemic signals (for example, inverted commas, colons, italics or empty spaces in textual form), phonological (such as pauses before and after the quotation in oral form) and the reporting or performative verbs (e.g., tell, declare, quote, etc., of course, in oral forms); the intertextual reference used by the Iranian President (Rouhani) in his address at the UN in 2013 is a good example of manifest intertextuality, where he explicitly refers to the sources of his quote:

> "… As beautifully said by Ferdowsi, the renowned Iranian epic poet: be rentless in striving for the cause of good be the Spring, you must, Banish the Winter, you should"

> (Translated by Iran's Permanent Mission to the United Nations, September, 2013)

The constitutive type (also vertical, implicit or covert) comes with no intertextual signals. For example, Beard (2000) refers to the example of *Billygate* (when President Carter's brother Billy showed signs of alcoholism) and *Sexgate* (when President Clinton was accused of having sex with four different women during his presidency), both ending with the suffix *–gate*, as lexically implicit intertextual cases, the interpretation of which requires previous knowledge of the famous *Watergate* scandal.

2.4 Intertextual referencing in political translation

Intertextuality is believed to be the most challenging aspect of textuality for the translator (Al-Taher 2008: 161). Al-Taher explains the reason as follows,

> From the point of view of text linguistics, as the translator constitutes the author of the target text, they are expected to be aware of the original author's purpose in order to reconcile it with the target text audience's cultural needs in a comprehensible manner, making any necessary alterations to reduce to the minimum any form of gaps, and presenting the knowledge of the source text to the target audience in an appropriate, comprehensible way. Thus maintained, intertextuality enables the reader to reap the fruit of the text according to the mental effort they exert in processing it with any previous experience they have come across in their lifetime.

Hatim and Mason (1990) also claim, "[target] text receivers must travel the whole distance from the ideologically neutral denotation of language (i.e. usage) to the volume of signification which underlies use."

Assuming that in political discourse prior texts and talks are often culture-bound, the translator, in the first place, needs to *identify* the intertextual references correctly. This is because a reference easily known and understandable in the source culture might not be equally known and identifiable to the host culture. For Hatim and Mason (1990) and other scholars, among them Munday (2007) and Schäffner (2002), the reason for this subtlety relates to *ideology*.

It was concluded earlier that in political discourse, intertextuality is closely tied with ideology to the extent that Almazán García (2002) equates 'intertextuality' with ideology. It was also noted that for Hatim and Mason (1997) ideology is the implicit assumptions, beliefs and value systems shared by social groups (p.144). This creates problems for the translator's choice of words, as they need to make decisions about translating a text/talk which tends to carry a great deal of tacit ideology. One difficulty for the translator is to retain the same ideological force as in the original (Hatim and Mason 1990:161-2), something which Almazán García (2002) finds potentially risky for translators to manipulate, as they risk distorting the ideological force and giving birth to a translation blunder.

To retain the original author's ideology, a translator's initial task, besides other judgments of context, genre and intentionality, is to identify what ideologies inside the source text are active. However, identifying ideology is not always a straightforward task. This might be due to the fact that political ideology is a 'double faced' concept which seeks to maximise 'self-positiveness', while at the same time working to maximise 'other negativeness' (van Dijk 1998, 2002). Therefore, the two faces that emerge from conflicting interests need to be identified.

This is the aspect of intertextuality, which contrary to its enriching contributions, may act negatively in translation. As Hervey *et al*. (1995) put it, misidentifying any case of intertextuality (ideology) may lead to further problems of misinterpretation and as a result *mistranslation*. They claim,

> The translator's first problem is to recognise that the source text does contain an allusive suggestion. The second problem is to understand the allusive meaning by reference to the meaning of the saying or quotation evoked. The third problem is to convey the force of the allusion in the target text (p. 103).

To solve a problem, the first step is to recognise it. Sohn (2008:178), while analyzing intertextuality in translation from a pragmatic perspective, points out that "intertextuality constitutes a part of meanings of the translated text: it is the translator's recognition of it [intentionality of the author] [...]." Therefore, if the translator fails to identify intertextuality correctly, s/he may not be able to convey it adequately to the target audience. Identifying intertextual references is not an easy task. Many translators may be satisfied with only the denotative meanings and may not proceed to the deeper culture-specific levels of signification normally required of them; this is due to a lack of knowledge of the reference on the part of the translator.

It is noteworthy that correct identification of intertextual references by the translator does not guarantee the next stage – interpretation. Interpretation refers to the translator's reading between the lines for a more appropriate comprehension of connotative meanings involved in intertextual references. Almazán García (2002) believes that not recognising an intertextual reference is preferable to recognising, but misinterpreting, it. The reason, according to him, is that in the former case, if the translator "provides a literal rendition of the expression, then the audience might get its denotative meaning" (p.172). However, if the translator does not interpret it as intended in the prior text, the message will get lost in translation and mistranslation will be the result. A case in point is the intertextual reference used by the former president of Iran in his speech (below) which got lost in translation.

Generally, to prevent any such mistranslations, translation scholars have suggested a variety of guidelines and strategies. Hatim and Mason (1990) give priority to intentionality in translation and suggest that the translator leave the informational status (denotative meaning or form) to the last stage. Hatim (1997) also presents a scale of possible solutions running from static socio-cultural straightforward translation (source-text based rendering, author-invoked, rendered with minimal intervention) to dynamic socio-textual problematic translation (target-text oriented rendering, translator-offered, rendered with maximal intervention). Sohn (2008:189) refers to four strategies in translating intertextual references: explication (requiring translator's minimal and maximal mediation), literal translation (requiring no modification on the part of the translator), substitution (requiring replacement of the intertextual reference with a more familiar text type and/or cultural expressions in the target text) and finally, transliteration. In the case of political discourse, strategies suggested by Schäffner (1997b) include adaptation, compensation, adjustment or substitution, which she believes eliminate anomalies and bring the reference into accordance with target text sensibility. Elsewhere, Almazán García (2001), within a relevance-theoretic framework, suggests direct translation and resemblance to the original text for intertextual references in political speech that raise a strong layer of implicature and more indirect translations as the implicature get weaker. Yang (2012:12-15), following his four principles of political equivalence, offers a number of tactics, methods and skills to achieve political equivalence. The political translator's attention to (critical) discourse analysis, not confining translation methods to linguistic forms, translators familiarising themselves with disparities of historical cultures, national customs, feelings and ideology between the languages they translate, translators having a good command of diplomatic and foreign policies and international relations and attention to special grammatical phenomena and rules are highly suggested by Yang.

As Moreton (2010:136) puts it, these are all ad hoc and micro-level decisions, thus there is surely a need for an 'overall' strategy. In the next section, a particular case of intertextuality is analysed in an effort to illustrate how it may challenge the political translator's task.

3. Method

3.1 The intertextual reference

The intertextual case in question is taken from a political speech by the former President of Iran, Ahmadinejad, at an international anti-Zionist conference — *A World without Zionism* — in Tehran, in 2005. The speech was immediately translated and publicised by the official *Iranian Students' News*

Agency (ISNA) on the President's official website on 26 October 2005. The corresponding transcribed parts of the speech (originally in Farsi) and the translation in English (ISNA translation), retrieved from the President's official website, follow:

Farsi Text:

"...امام عزيز ام‌فـرموندك‌هلين ر‌ژيماش‌غاگو ق‌دس‌ب‌ليد ازصف‌ح‌ه روژ‌گار محوش‌ود..."

Transliteration: *emam-e áziz-e ma fármoodánd ke in rejim-e ešghalgár-e Ghods bayád áz sáfhey-e roozegar máhv šávád.* (The Iranian President's website, 2005)

Literally: our dear Imam said that this occupying regime of Quds must vanish from the page of time (translated by Arash Norouzi).

Translation: *"Our dear Imam said that the occupying regime must be wiped off the map and this was a very wise statement"* (ISNA translation, 2005).

3.2 The framework

The framework employed in the analysis and translation of the intertextual case is that of Hervey *et al.* (1995). They propose three stages for analysing and translating intertextual references: a) identification, b) interpretation and c) translation. The case analysis concentrates on the translation (text in English), but the original text (in Farsi), the ideology of the original speaker (Imam Khomeini, the ex-leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran), the reporter's (the former Iranian President, Ahmadinejad) intended ideology and audience (the Iranian readership) and the sociocultural and political context within which the reference has occurred are also taken into consideration.

3.3 Analysis

a) Identification: Based on the framework presented by Hervey *et al.* (1995), the reference under discussion is clearly identifiable hence a case of intertextuality. The President was quoting Imam Khomeini, the ex-leader of Iran, explicitly by using the reporting phrase 'امام عزيز مفـرموند' (*emam-e áziz-e ma fármoodánd*) translated as *our dear Imam said …* (translated by ISNA). Other pieces of graphemic evidence (double quotation marks) are also present if the translator uses a transcription of the speech. Therefore, it can be concluded that the translator(s) did not have any problems in identifying the reference and thus has easily moved to the next stage – interpreting the associative and connotative meanings in the host culture.

b) Interpretation: According to Hervey *et al*. (1995), a second potential problem is to envisage the original author's intention by reference to the meaning evoked by the quotation. At this stage, the translator has apparently misinterpreted the expression 'بٮاٮد از صفحه روزگار محوشود' (*bayád áz sáfhey-e roozegar máhv šávád*) (literally: must vanish from the page of time) as *wipe off the map*. The phrasal verb *wipe somebody/something off* in English refers to removing (the existence) of something from a surface so that it would not exist there anymore; an example is 'wiping the stain off the floor' (The online Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 8th edition, 2013). However, what the President quoted in Farsi (literally: 'vanish from the page of time' or history as it later got translated by others) is a more spiritual term in the source language and rhetoric than removing the existence of something. Having analysed the same reference from a metaphorical perspective, Sharifian (2009) points out that 'page of time/history' involves a temporal reference, as opposed to the spatial implications of 'map' or 'face of the earth' as used in the translation in question. As such, the translator has misinterpreted, and erroneously replaced a time-related expression with a location-related one. The reason for this failure could be attributed to the lack of awareness on the part of the translator regarding the proto-text or talk. The result of this misinterpretation (and then mistranslation) was taken as *a non-existence threat* (in the worst manner *declaring war*) to Israel from the Iranian side.

As confirmed by Noruzi (2007*)*, Ahmadinejad used the phrase 'occupying regime' which means he is talking about the political leadership (government) of Israel rather than the country of Israel as a whole. Sharifian (2009) in his analysis explains that Ahmadinejad has metaphorically conceptualised 'regime' as the 'country' and, in fact, has equated the two.

In the sentences which follow this statement, the President further refers to Palestinians as responsible for their own freedom when he says "the new wave that has started in Palestine, and we witness it in the Islamic world too, will eliminate this disgraceful stain from the Islamic world" (ISNA translation, 2005). Clearly, Ahmadinejad has not claimed that 'Iran' will remove the stain, contrary to what appears in the translation. Furthermore, the grammatical antecedent for the metaphorical phrase 'this stain of disgrace' in the latter translated statement is again Israeli 'regime' and not the country, contrary to what appears in translation (Sharifian 2009).

c) Translation: The third potential problem relates to *conveying* the reference and the envisaged intention behind it into the target language. According to Hervey *et al*. (1995:103), a successful translation of intertextual references calls for a sound pre-stage of interpretation. What does the President 'really' mean by this phrase? It was previously explained that the

translator has not been successful in interpreting the intention of the reference in the source culture and rhetoric. Without getting a true picture of the speaker's intended meaning, the translator has begun translating the phrase. To maintain the functional equivalence, the translator has idiomatically rendered the ‘بئاید ازصفحه روزگار محوشود’ (*bayád áz sáfhey-e roozegar máhv šávád*) (literally: must vanish from the page of time) into ‘must be wiped off the map’ (ISNA translation). In other words, the translator has used adaptation (cultural transposition) and has equated the literal ‘vanish from the page of time’ with the idiomatic ‘wipe off the map.’

Minutes after ISNA's translation, the quotation was translated by the New York Times (ISNA version with some square-bracketed interventions and additions) as well as by the Farsi section of the BBC Monitoring department and the pro-Israeli, US-based monitoring organisation *MEMRI* (Middle East Media Research Institute). Surprisingly, the stirring mistranslation into "wipe off the map" was immediately picked up and headlined by various international media; CNN and Al-Jazeera English were among those found by the author. Sooner or later, a number of media such as the New York Times (later the same day) modified and, in fact, corrected the so-called mistranslation, but it had a life of its own, and was assumed ‘true’ by the international community as the end user of the translation. Following Hickey (2003:70) in his lay-reader assessment of translation, the international community (as a type of lay reader) would not have taken action if they had understood the original phrase properly. More critically, rounds of accusations and sanctions were triggered by Israel and its allies against Iran and its ‘peaceful’ nuclear program – a program that they interpreted as preparing for the ‘wipe-off attack.’

4. Discussion

Based on Hervey *et al's* (1995) framework, the source of this mistranslation was rooted in an inappropriate interpretation of the President's phrase. Therefore, in light of the four principles found in Yang's theory of political equivalence, the author would claim confidently enough that the translator reached a status of non-equivalence in translation. In the following section, a few possible causes for the non-equivalence are discussed.

One possible reason is that the translator, as Yang (2012: 6-7) remarks, did not understand the contextual, intertextual and ideological meanings of the speaker fully enough to accurately communicate the connotation of the intertextual reference in the source language. As Sauer (in Schäffner 1997a: 3) puts it, the speaker's speech is part of a larger, more extensive communicative process and can therefore be interpreted properly only if that larger context is taken into account. In other words, to escape the potential

problem of misinterpretation and mistranslation, the speech translator should have seen the reference in a broader intertextual and ideological context where it fulfills its specific function. This reconfirms Hatim's (1997:200) claim that the intertextual context of a text/talk is all the other relevant prior texts/talks which need to be revisited to 'fully retrieve' the meanings intended by the speaker. Therefore, the translator's lack (or negligence) of contextual and ideological knowledge of the relevant prior text/talk — Imam Khomeini's ideological speech delivered years ago in aversion to Israel — is an obstacle to political equivalence, thus a source of misinterpretation and mistranslation.

Another possible source of political non-equivalence in the translation of the President's phrase, following Yang's (2012) principles of political equivalence, is that the translator did not convey the meaning of the expression to the recipients in a popular, immediately comprehensible language form. In other words, by culturally adapting and transposing the Farsi phrase (lit. 'vanish') to an English one ('wipe off'), the translator presumably sought to simplify and use an idiomatic (easily readable) translation of the phrase for the audience, ignorant that idiomatisation in translation, as Mossop (1990) believes, can decrease comprehensibility of the source text and is not always a good choice in institutional translation including political translation. It could lead to mistranslation — as it did in our case — especially when the presence of difficult language in the source text is significant. Induced by Yang's theory of political equivalence, the latter brings us to the old debate of translatability. Another potential reason worthy of discussion takes Munday's (2010) appraisal theory into consideration where he views 'equivalence' from a different perspective. It appears that the translator was less successful in recognising the true value (attitudinal meaning) of the critical 'wipe off' in English compared to its corresponding Farsi term.

A fourth possible reason for the non-equivalence in translation of the phrase in question relates to the difficulty or untranslatability of a difficult source text language (Farsi is such a language). One such potentially difficult or untranslatable feature is political rhetoric; the difficulty, as discussed earlier, relates to the integration of political discourse and rhetoric with ideology. Mike Putnam (2012), a specialist in political communication, in his weblog refers to two rhetorical styles in politics: conservative and liberal. The former is the rhetoric of those who seek to keep the good (protection) and to avoid the bad (prevention). It is the rhetoric of the establishment: justifying the way things are while defending the status quo. Generally, this is the rhetoric of whoever is in the White House. The latter is the rhetoric of those who seek to change the 'bad' and get the 'good'. This is the rhetoric of dissatisfaction, of discontent and anger over for 'not having' the good. It is also the rhetoric

of hopes, dreams, change, progress and improvement. It not only attacks existing evils, but also holds out hope for a better future.

While the president's rhetorical purpose of 'بﺎﯾد از صفحه روﮔﺎر محوشود' (*bayád áz sáfhey-e roozegar máhv šávád*, literally: "must remove from the page of time") seems to be of more liberal and spiritual type (dealing with *good behavior* and *morality*), it would seem exotic to the Western 'conservative' political rhetoric as well as politicians (of the White House specially). As such, literal translation would hardly make sense to the target audience in such a case. To prevent such an oddity in advance, the translator appealed to the idiomatic 'wipe off the map' translation, ignorant that s/he was moving towards non-equivalence or more precisely mistranslation in the target language. This is in line with Jonathan Steele (2006), an Iranian columnist who writes for The Guardian and who is a New York Times blogger, who reminds us "Persian rhetoric is not always easy to translate." Another piece of evidence is the BBC Monitoring Service team who, as a provider of 'standard' English translations, claims that no 'easy' translation of such rhetoric exists in English. Accordingly, such stylistic and rhetorical differences between English and Farsi writings normally make (idiomatic) translation difficult (Rashidi and Dastkhezr 2009; Rahimpour and Faghih, 2009; Baleghizadeh and Pashaii 2010; Shokouhi and Baghsiahi 2010 as cited in Ahmad Khan Beigi and Ahmadi 2011). In the context of this article and the case under investigation, as also confirmed by Steel (2006), the former Iranian President was quoting an ideological statement from Iran's ex-leader, the late Imam Khomeini, saying "this regime occupying Jerusalem must vanish from the page of time" just as the Pahlavi ex-regime of Iran did. As such, he was not making a military threat. The most likely interpretation of the expression is that he was calling for an end to the occupation of Jerusalem at some point in the future.

5. Suggestions

In this section, a number of suggestions are made to which the translator could have appealed to decrease the problem of non-equivalence that ensued because, as Yang (2012: 11) puts it, reaching the level of perfect equivalence is hard to attain — hence his approximate equivalence term. In this case when a translator has enough contextual and intertextual knowledge of the prior text/talk in order to identify and interpret the intertextual references, s/he is advised to adopt a free (or idiomatic to use Mossop's preference) translation approach. Free translation favours the reader rather than author and it is presupposed that the translator already 'knows' what the truth of the message is and tends to reduce the readers' interpretation responsibility and mental effort. In other words, intertextual references and in particular critical terms and phrases need not be

necessarily preserved as in the source text. This approach to translation differs from Yang's concept of 'Absolute Free Translation' or 'Absolute Domestication' because the translator, while in favour of the audience, is still faithful to the speaker's intended meaning. In the case of this study, had the translator interpreted the reference correctly, s/he could have partially adapted the reference with more sensible metaphorical expressions such as 'eliminated from time' or 'vanished from history,' or even replaced it with a totally non-metaphorical equivalent such as 'come to an end' or 'defeated.' However, in the context of diplomatic and political speech — where intentionality is at the heart of discourse and misinterpretation and mistranslation may easily slip in — literal (or unidiomatic to follow Mossop's preference) translation is a more confident (and perhaps the best) approach to translation (Newmark 1981:39) as the translator's (mis)interpretation of the source's intended meaning is not imposed on the audience. This, of course, is different from what Yang calls 'Absolute Literal Translation' or 'Absolute Foreignisation' because the translator tends to be faithful to both. The main reason is that literal (unidiomatic translation) is more faithful to the intention (message) as well as the form of the prior text/talk and the translator will cater to both as faithfully as possible. This reconfirms what Hatim (2009: 43) suggests as an 'overt' translation strategy for political speech translation. For this purpose, each individual word of a prior text/talk is rendered into its equivalent in the target text. As such, the translator is on the side of both the author and the reader. Thus, literal translation is more justifiable in the translation of intertextual references, especially in political discourse. The political translator is also advised to be flexible and adopt different strategies between the two extremes (literal and free translation).

6. Final remarks

Back in 2005, the Iranian ex-President spoke at "The World without Zionism" conference in Tehran and made a statement which was translated to suggest Israel should be "wiped off the map." As an English idiom, this could be interpreted to be a call for violence or destruction, but in this article, it has been argued with sufficient evidence that the President was not seeking violence, but was speaking about a 'map' in a different sense, saying that the Israeli state and borders were illegitimate.

Generally, what the author would like to make clear in this article is that intertextuality is an unavoidable figure of political discourse and particularly political speech, and since it is socio-culturally and socio-politically constructed, any difficulties in translation may have considerable risks for international diplomatic relations. Therefore, in this increasingly mediatised world of politics, being extremely cautious is a 'must' for any political

translator when dealing with intertextual references, especially in political speech.

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Biography

The author holds his MA in Applied Linguistics from Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran and is completing his PhD in Translation Studies at Universiti Sains, Malaysia. He works as a part-time lecturer in Translation Studies and TEFL at Tabaran Institute of Higher Education in Mashhad, Iran. He is also the author of three textbooks and several articles, the latest published in *International Journal of Interpretation and Translation* in 2014. His main research interests include pragmatic translation, discourse analysis, political/diplomatic discourse translation, and contrastive analysis. He can be reached at: s.sanatifar@yahoo.com

[1] Whether mistranslating Iranian politicians has political motivations or not is not within the scope of this article.