ON THE POLITICS OF UNTRANSLATABILITY: A STUDY OF "THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST" AND ITS URDU TRANSLATION "BUNYAD PARAST"

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Abstract

It is a fact that Translatability and Untranslatability have been disputed by various scholars over a long period and the debate goes ahead to the present time. The translation is such a delicate and intricate undertaking, that it raises some major concerns to deal with, therefore, this paper examines numerous issues related to the translation of source text into the target text. As is known that the translation process is a difficult task, hence to deal with both the apparent and deep relationships of language, a translator should have some critical linguistics expertise to avoid ambiguity in the translated version of a source text. Translating one language into another language faces a bunch of problems including style, syntax, vocabulary, semantics, and grammar. The present paper focuses on the semantic problems between the source text and its translated version. Here those words which create ambiguity between the source text and its translation version are investigated. For this purpose, Apter and Catford's concept of untranslatability has been used for the analysis of data. The findings show that there are numerous issues related to semantics that create a tension of meaning in both texts. These include variations between the source and target texts at the lexical and syntactic levels.

Keywords: Untranslatability, the translation process, source text, target text, culture

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Introduction

The translation of poetry spoils much of its beauty, that's why the paper raises the problem of untranslatability. The issues of untranslatability are depicted by Sussan Bassnett.

"When such difficulties are encountered by the translator, the whole issue of the translatability of the text is raised. Catford distinguishes two types of untranslatability, which he terms linguistic and cultural. On the linguistic level, untranslatability occurs when there is no lexical or syntactical substitute in the TL for an SL item".(Bassnett,2013,p40)

Complete and perfect translations are often at fault~for they sometimes lead us to misconception. Emily Apter is also of the opinion of incomplete translation that's why she raises the problem of 'Untranslatables'. To further back up her statement, Apter uses Abdelfattah Kilito's work "Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language", which was initially designed in Arabic, as an argument, "through lessons and anecdotes of translational travesty, Kilito formulates something like the divine right of untranslatability". Apter (p. 254)

A translator is a reader as well as a writer, simultaneously. The answer to the question, "What is a Translation?", a definition is given by Francis Steel, saying 'translation should convey as much of the original text in a few words as possible, yet preserve the original atmosphere and emphasis. The translator should strive for the nearest approximation in words, concepts, and cadence. He should scrupulously avoid adding words or ideas not demanded by the text. His job is not to expand or explain, but to translate and preserve the spirit and force of the original…. Not just ideas, but words are important; so also is the emphasis indicated by word order in the sentence." The current essay is the qualitative analysis of the novel's translated version in the context of Untranslatability. It also points out and discusses those words which are hard to be translated, in the novel "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" by Mohsin Hamid, and focuses on the problems of Untranslatability, as demanded, between the English language and the Urdu language. The current paper is based on Emily Apter's approach to, incomplete translation, "Against world

literature: On the politics of Untranslatability". So, keeping her view, the following questions were focused on:

- How far the originality of the source text is maintained in the translation process?
- What issues and ambiguity arise as a result of mistranslation?
- What effect does untranslatability have on the translation quality?

Every language has some issues of untranslatability because fewer equivalent words can be found in languages. There are various factors, which contribute to untranslatability, i.e., cultural differences, and linguistic barriers. One of the greatest names in the school of translation studies, J.C Catford raised the problem of Untranslatability in 1965, as " translation fails – or untranslatability occurs – when it is impossible to build functionally relevant features of the situation into the contextual meaning of the TL text". According to him, untranslatability, as we face it, is for the linguistic differences between the source text language and target text language. And the cultural gap is also one of the basic factors of untranslatability, for a relevant feature is not found in the target language culture, "if the TL has no equivalent register, untranslatability may result." (Catford, 1965).

The question is, up to what extent does complete and perfect translation takes place. Keeping the view of Emily Apter, we would like to examine the tension between the Source Text and its Translated text. The Source Text is the Reluctant Fundamentalist (2007) by Mohsin Hamid in the English language and its Translated version (Translated Text), entitled Bunyad Parast (2010-2012) by Nadeem Akhtar is in the Urdu language. The story begins with a young Pakistani man called Changez who meets with a stranger, an American in Lahore, and shares with him his past which is related to those events when he was in America as an immigrant. The story is narrated in the form of a dramatic monologue. Changez tells the stranger about his entrance to Princeton University, his love for Erica, and his job in a well-known institute, Underwood Samson. Changez has a dream life but suddenly 9/11 happens and his dream takes a back turn. He is also caught by the dejection of his beloved Erica when she left him alone, he returns to Pakistan and becomes

a teacher, vocal against the terror war as well as the unwanted policies of America.

Keeping in view the mentioned texts, the study explores how much the originality of the source text is maintained in the target text and in the process of translation, what tension and ambiguity arise.

Literature Review

Translation opens up a way for the exchange and encounter of languages, as well as opens up a space for the exchange of culture. Generally, translation is the process of transferring the source language's message into translated language under the circumstances of culture (see Al-Dali, 2011). According to Nida, "definitions of proper translating are as numerous and various as the persons who have undertaken to discuss the subject" (1994, p.61). Let us see, as Burkhanov claims, literary translation is "a kind of aesthetically oriented mediated bilingual communication, which aims at producing a target text intended to communicate its own form, correspondent with the source text, and accordant with contemporary literary and translational norms of the receptor culture" (can be seen, in cited in Gibova, 2012). As Nord points out "translating means comparing cultures", (1997, 61. p). For him, in the process of translating, translation interprets foreign culture in the light of its own culture.

As, it is a matter of fact, in the field of translation, a general argument has taken place over translatability and untranslatability for a long period. It is known that translation is not impossible; it has a history of thousands of years, and it has played an active role with time. On the other hand, we should not neglect some basic facts that show that untranslatability can be seen and exist in intercultural communication, especially to translating any literary piece of work.

Scholars do their best to point out equivalence among various languages and their debates are continued on translatability and untranslatability. One of the famous Chinese scholars, Liu Miqing in his book, "Modern Translation Theory" said that there are *channels for message*

transferring", which shows the possibility of the translation process (1999, p. 99). Those scholars, who are in favor of the view of the ability of translation, think that people of different cultures and countries share to some extent commonalities in ideology, thought, perception, and expression, which can help people in intercultural communication and exchange. No one can reject the fact that there exist a lot of translation works, which have played a very key role in the process of intercultural communication, and international culture and contributed well to the exchange of civilization.

On the other hand, untranslatability can never be neglected and avoided. Peter Newmark, (2001, p. 7) said that in the process of translation practice verbal or written message is replaced from one language into another language, but sometimes with a loss of meaning, sounds, and rhythm, etc. So, in this situation more meaning is lost, less translation takes place, or to a little extent meaning is lost, much translation takes place. Many scholars believe that some unsubstitutable items exist in various languages, such as cultural, religious, social customs, feeling, and synthetical structures, whose equivalent can not be found in another language. Usually, these elements and factors result in problems of untranslatability, which can be roughly divided into cultural and linguistic hindrances.

As far as the linguistic level is concerned, there are various linguistic differences in the process of translation between the English language and Urdu language, as well as between the English language and Chinese language, which seems so difficult, or even impossible sometimes. It is known to all of us that English, Urdu, and Chinese Languages are different from each other, English belongs to the Endo-European language family, Urdu comes from the Indo-Aryan language family and the Chinese language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family. All of them are different in phonemes, syntax, and lexemes.

Urdu, Chinese and English languages have different sounds and intonation patterns. Especially, the Chinese language does not share its phonemes with the English language. Take an example of the phoneme "a", which has four different tones 'a,a,a,a', tones which make the Chinese

language quite different from other languages. Urdu is also far away in sounds from the English language. Let us take a few examples from translated versions.

寻寻觅觅，冷冷清清，凄凄惨惨戚戚。— 李清照（声声慢）

The above stanza has been taken from one of Li Qingzhao's poem, who is a female poetess of the Song dynasty. This poem is quite famous for its aesthetic and musical sounds. The poem has been translated by Lin Yutong as "so dim, so dark, so dense, so dull, so damp, so dank, so dead". The meaning is captured in the translated version but the beauty of sounds has been lost.

Urdu has its own way of sound and rhythm. Let us see a translation example.

آج رات ساز درد نہ چھیڑ

دکھ سے بھرپور دن تمام ہوے

The above lines are from the poem "Tonight" by Faiz Ahmad Faiz, a well-known Pakistani poet. The poem has been translated by Micheal R. Burch, an American poet, and translator. His translation is as,

"Don't strike the melancholy chord tonight!
Days smoldering with pain in end produce only listless ashes…"

The Urdu language words are more musical as compared to its translation but the translation is more soft and literary as evident from"Melancholy", a translated word for درد (pain).

Similarly English has its own sound, meter, and rhythm. Let us look at a few lines of an English dramatist and poet, William Shakespeare's sonnet 18.

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
Rough winds shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.

Translation of sonnet by "Liang Zongdai", which is given below.

我怎么能够把你比作夏天？

你不独比她可爱也比她温婉。

狂风把五月宠爱的嫩蕊作践，

夏天出赁的期限却未免太短。

The sonnet by Shakespeare is written in iambic pentameter which is the beauty of aesthetic sounds. The translator has done his best to achieve the original rhythm but failed to do it because the Chinese language has its own system of sounds, rhythm, and meter.

As far as the lexical problem of untranslatability is concerned, sometimes we grasp the meaning of other languages according to the context. As a well-known Chinese Zhou Fangzhu (2002, p. 121) said, "words do not have meanings: people have meanings for words." Urdu and Chinese words are not pliable like English words, and their meaning is fixed. We find it very difficult to find exact lexical words in the process of translation. Let us take a kinship word in English" Cousin" which refers to different words in Chinese such as, "表哥，表妹，堂哥，表弟，堂弟，表姐，堂姐". It also refers to " پھوپھی زاد، چچا زاد، خالو زاد " in Urdu. That's why Emily Apter is against complete and successful translation.

The culture gap is another big cause of untranslatability. As is known to us that every nation tries its best to enter globalization through intercultural communication, therefore, in the process of translation, language and culture are transferred into other cultures and languages. We face tension during translation in the context of culture, the differences between culture leads to the problem of untranslatability during the translation process. According to Nadia (1993, p. 37), classification of culture, i.e., social culture, language culture, geographical culture, religious culture, etc. untranslatability takes place. Let us take examples: the word الو "owl" stands for 'stupidity' in Pakistani culture, but on the other side, it represents 'wisdom' and 'good

fortune' in Western and Chinese culture, which creates tension in the process of translation.

With so many words relating to dogs, we typically consider 狗 (dog) to be a pejorative term in Chines, which means being a bully with the backing of a powerful person implying that you have been terribly abused. In Chinese, statements about dogs almost always have a negative connotation, whereas, in English, they almost always have a positive connotation. Westerners traditionally have a positive attitude toward dogs, and phrases like "working like a dog", "sleep like a dog", "a lucky dog," "an old dog," and so on exist in English. Even though "fortunate dog" signifies "fortunate," it can be difficult for the Chinese to accept the term. It is, therefore, preferable to avoid translating dog English-Chinese translation. Otherwise, literal translation may lead to misinterpretation.

Analysis and Discussion

In this part, a few segments from the source text and its translation text version which have some tension between them is criticized.

Source Text: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist by Mohsin Hamid*

Target Text: بنیادپرست *by Akhtar*

In the very beginning, the cultural differences are faced, as the translation text uses only one word " بنیاد پرست " for the title which is equivalent to " Fundamentalist", and the adjective " Reluctant" is not the part of translation text. The title بنیاد پرست "Fundamentalist" has a positive connotation, the one who is quite sincere to his/her own religion and a true follower of it is known fundamentalist, in Pakistani culture. But the adjective" Reluctant" literal meaning in the Urdu language is ناراض مند، نہ چاہنے والا (not willing). It is not used in translated text because of negative connotations. Up to what extent the term Fundamentalist is associated with a negative meaning in the western culture, Leah Renold describes very clearly: "We are at War", declares an

article in the New York Times published shortly after the attacks on the World Trade Center.1 The author, Andrew Sullivan, argues that we are in a religious war, a war that threatens our very existence. Not only our lives but also our souls are at stake. Who is the enemy? It is not Islam. It is a specific form of Islam called fundamentalism. Sullivan's essay in the New York Times is only one of many articles and broadcasts in the U.S. media since the attacks on the World Trade Center that use "fundamentalism" as a category to describe those groups targeted as enemies of the American people. The term has been applied to the political and religious positions of Osama bin Laden and the Taliban, as well as to a significant portion of the world's Muslims. "Islamic fundamentalism" has been used so frequently in the media since September 11 that publishers of history textbooks are now scrambling to revise their books to include discussions of the term." In the western culture, a fundamentalist is an extremist, the one who is enthusiastic about one's religion and becomes the part of terrorism for the sack of religion, which is not regarded as a fair and acceptable action in the western culture. The dropping of the word "reluctant" is a big contradiction and tension between the source text and its translated version.

There are examples where the originality of the source text is lost. For Example,

Extract 1:

Source Text: " Excuse me sir, but may I be of assistance?"(Hamid,2007,p.1)

Target Text: معاف کرنا، دوست، کیا میں تمہاری کچھ مدد کر سکتا ہوں؟

(Akhtar,2010,June,p.29)

The translated text loses its originality as it uses informal words compared to the words in the source text. In the translated version, دوست (friend) and مدد (help) are used respectively for "sir" and "assistance", which show informal conversation rather than formal and social in our culture. As we

know that جناب (sir) is more formal and equivalent rather than دوست (friend). It
also shows us cultural differences in that Pakistani people are friendly and
more informal with a foreigner.

Another example of semantic tension in translation is as follows:

Extract 2:

Source Text: " I am a lover of America" (Hamid,2007, p.1)

Target Text: میں تو امریکہ کے چاہنے والوں میں سے ہوں۔

(Akhtar, 2010, June, p.29)

This is also one of the tensions in the translated version; the use of the
adjective "lover" conveys a far more intense feeling of affection, and the
relationship of the narrator to America, as compared to the translated text چاہنا
(liking). The translated version just tells the common feeling everyone has for
a country. In Pakistani culture, محبت کرنے والا یا عاشق (lover) is concerned with the
intense feeling for a dear one; that's why the translated version has lost its
complete tone of the original.

Extract 3:

Source Text: I noticed that you were looking for something; more than
looking, in fact you seemed to be on a mission, and since I am both a native
of this city and a speaker of your language, I thought I might offer you my
services. (Hamid, 2007, p.2)

Target Text: مجھے ایسا لگا، جیسے تمھیں کسی چیز کی تلاش ہوں، بلکہ شاید تم کسی مہم پر ہوں۔ اور میرا تعلق اسی شہر سے
ہے، میں تمھاری زبان بھی جانتے ہوں، تو سوچا کیوں نہ اپنے خدمات تمھیں پیش کروں۔

(Akhtar, 2010, p.29, 30)

Again we face a few contradictory ideas between the source text and
its translated version. The translator uses the word (I noticed) مجھے ایسا لگا (it seems

to me). Here, the source text has a more serious and observing connotation than its translated version.

Another problem is created by the translator, by translating the word "mission", as مہم (traveling), which shows that the stranger is merely a tourist in Pakistan but on the other hand, the source text presents the narrator's view as something else, as the narrator believes and assumes that the stranger (white foreigner, American) is an agent, like a spy, secretly collecting information in his country. As far as textual analysis is concerned, the word (mission) is not translated in the contextual and literary sense but only word-for-word translation which spoils the beauty and attraction of the plot of a literary work.

Extract 4:

Source Text: I was telling you about the moment when I was forced to stare. We were lying on the beach, and many of the European women nearby were, as usual, sunbathing topless — a practice I wholeheartedly supported, but which the women among us Princetonians, unfortunately, had thus far failed to embrace — when I noticed Erica was untying the straps of her bikini. And then, as I watched, only an arm's length away, she bared her breasts to the sun. (Hamid, p.14)

Target Text: میں تھے کچھ اور بتا رہا تھا۔ یونان کے ساحلوں پر یورپین عورتیں جس عالم میں دو دھوپ سینکتی ہیں، پرنسٹن میں یہ رواج نہی تھا، لکن رہ ہوٹر کے ساحل پر ایک روز میں نے دو ہاتھ دور لیٹی اپر یکا اسی حالت میں دیکھا۔

(Akhtar,2010, August, p.31)

Source Text and its translated version again have some tussle. The text uses a clear description of the girl, whom the narrator loves, lying naked on the bank of the river. As her breasts are bare and uncovered to the rays of the sun. While the translated text is bound to religious, social norms, and culture, that's why the translated version does not convey a clear description of the girl, who lays naked on the beach of the river.

Extract 5:

Source Text: But not on that day. On that day, I did not think of myself as a Pakistani, but as an Underwood Samson trainee, and my firm's impressive offices made me proud.(Hamid, p.21)

Target Text: مگر اس دن میں یہ سب نہیں سوچ رہا تھا۔اس لیے کہ اس دن میں خود کو اک پاکستانی سے زیادہ اک انڈر ووڈ سیمسس کا اک ٹرینی محسوس کر رہا تھا،اور میرے فرم کے متاسر کن دفتر نے مجھے تفاخرسے بھر دیا تھا۔

(Akhtar,2010, October,p30)

As far as Newmark's (1988) view is concerned the way of transformation of the words in source text into translation text, is known as "transference" and the transferred words are called " loan words" (p. 81).To talk of untranslatability, as can be seen in the above-translated text, the text borrows the same word (firm and trainee) as used in the source text. Here the source text conveys genuine meaning and expresses strong feelings, that the protagonist is one of the main parts of Underwood Samson.

Extract 6:

Source Text: You guys have got some serious problems with fundamentalism. (Hamid, p.33)

Target Text: بنیاد پرستی بھی تمھارے ہاں کا انتہائی سنجیدہ مسلہ ہے۔ (Akhtar, 2010, December,p.12)

Here again, the translated version has a great contradiction with its source text. In the translated text "you guys" is translated as تمھارے ہاں (with you) which is away from the context of the source text. In the source text, the phrase " You guys" shows Arica's father's attitude toward Pakistani people and its culture, and presents the superiority of American culture to Pakistani culture. But on the other side, the translated text conveys a positive message, no gender inequality, or cultural discrimination is shown at all.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to highlight the tensions between the source and translated text and thus, show the differences in meaning which is conveyed differently in the source text and translated text. Analysis reveals linguistic

and cultural differences, such as religion, cultural perception, and other taboos, etc. between Pakistani and Western societies that lead to differences in the meaning that sometimes cause untranslatability. It is clear that during translation (to convey the same sense in the translated text as that of the source text), the translator has to be well aware of the target language's linguistic and cultural factors that commonly understand the nature of languages and subsequently of translation.

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