

Cultural Displacement in Translation: A Study of the Impact of Language on the Meaning and Context of Punjabi Sufi Poetry

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Abstract

Language is inextricably linked to the cultural and social norms of a community, and translation from one language to another can significantly alter the context and meaning of the original text. This challenge is particularly pronounced when translating literary works, such as poetry, where nuances of language and cultural references can be lost in translation. This qualitative research study aims to investigate the loss of literal meanings and contexts of Punjabi poetry when translated into English. Specifically, this study examines the translation of Bulleh Shah's Punjabi poetry by Taufiq Rafat. Through a textual analysis of the original and translated texts, this study reveals that Punjabi poetry is characterized by distinct metaphors and meanings that are deeply rooted in Punjabi culture. However, the findings also indicate that the original meaning and cultural context of the poetry are compromised when translated into English. This study contributes to our understanding of the complexities of translation and the importance of preserving cultural nuances in literary works. The findings of this study have implications for translators, scholars, and readers of literary works, highlighting the need for a more nuanced approach to translation that takes into account the cultural and linguistic complexities of the original text.

Keywords: literal meaning, Translation, Punjabi Poetry, Shah, Context, loss of meaning

1. Introduction

Shah's poetry, deeply rooted in Sufism, is renowned for its rich tapestry of metaphor, symbolism, and cultural references that may not be able to be translated directly into English. While translations can convey the general essence of his work, they often lose some nuances and connotations (Khan, 2016). Punjabi and English, with their distinct linguistic and cultural contexts, present challenges in translating idioms, wordplays, and cultural allusions. Shah's poetry, known for its mysticism, spiritual themes, and symbolic language, further complicates its accurate translation (Gul, 2020). Skilled translators acquainted with cultural and linguistic contexts try to seize the essence in their paintings, however it's far vital to apprehend that a few subtleties necessarily wander off in translation (Ahmed, 2020). For instance, the verse "The Lord is one, however we've many names / For Him; we look for Him in unique ways" (Bulleh Shah, 1982, p. 25) keeps the original's essence however might not completely deliver its contextual depth. Shah's poetry is also notable for its scathing social critique, which challenges societal norms and religious hypocrisy while advocating for spiritual tolerance and personal growth (Qureshi, 2018; Rana, 2017). Shah's incorporation of Punjabi traditions and accessible language

renders his poetry both profound and approachable. However, the translation process can potentially dilute the original meaning due to discrepancies in contextual meanings between languages (Hussain, 2021). Notable translations, including those by Taufiq Rafat, characterize Shah's work as a reflection of his spiritual journey, conveyed with both simplicity and profundity (Rafat, 1982, p. 12). His poetry, enriched with literary devices such as metaphor and imagery, vividly describes spiritual concepts, as exemplified in the verse: "In the city of the heart, there is a tavern, where wine is poured, and the cup is never empty" (Bulleh Shah, 1986, p. 50). This rich metaphor highlights the challenges of translating such complex and culturally nuanced literary works. Despite these challenges, Shah continues to influence literature and culture in the Indian subcontinent, influencing poets, and guiding seekers of spirituality (Jalal, 2019).

1.1 Rationale of the Research

This study aims to address a significant gap in existing research by providing an in-depth examination of how literal meanings and contextual nuances are affected in the translation of Shah's poetry, with a specific focus on Taufiq Rafat's translations. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for several reasons:

- A. Enhancing Translation Accuracy: This study will investigate how literal meanings are altered or lost in translation, providing insights into the challenges faced by translators and suggesting strategies to improve translation accuracy.
- B. Preserving Cultural Context: By examining the impact of translation on cultural and contextual factors, this study will contribute to the preservation of the richness and complexity of Shah's poetry, ensuring that its spiritual and social messages are conveyed more faithfully.
- C. Improving Reception: This study will also analyze how translation influences the interpretation and reception of Shah's poetry, contributing to a deeper appreciation of his work and its impact on diverse audiences.

1.2 Research Objectives

- 1) To examine how Taufiq Rafat's translation alters or loses the literal meaning of Shah's poetry.
- 2) To investigate and understand the underlying reasons for the loss of meaning in Shah's poetry during translation, and to analyze how these losses impact the reception and interpretation of his poetry.

1.3 Research Questions

1. To what extent are the literal meanings of Shah's poetry altered or lost in Taufiq Rafat's translation?
2. What are the underlying reasons for the loss of meaning in Shah's poetry during translation, and how do these losses influence the overall interpretation and reception of his poetry?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study has significant value for translation research, offering insights into:

1. Investigating the interpretation of Shah's poetry and shedding light on theoretical challenges and implications of translation loss.
2. Exploring complexities of translating Sufi metaphors, cultural references, and religious themes through Taufiq Rafat's translation.
3. Highlighting the impact of translation on cultural context and meaning, emphasizing the importance of preserving cultural essence.
4. Offering practical recommendations for translators working with metaphor-rich and

culturally diverse texts.

2. Literature Review

A lack of correspondence between the source language (SL) and target language (TL) items creates a gap in translation and results in the loss of meaning. That is, the loss of meaning in translation is due to the gap that exists between two languages. Generally, the gap in translation is common and natural because there is no similarity between two given languages and cultures. Thus, it can be found in TL and SL. We find that two languages, cultures and contexts etc. are always different to some extent. Subsequently, while translating, we bridge the gap between two cultures and languages. This means that a text is a combination of language and culture in a particular context. Gaps are serious threats to translation. According to Crystal (1987), exact equivalence is, of course, impossible. No translator could provide a translation that was perfectly parallel to the source text; there is always some information loss (p. 346). Nevertheless, the translator's main concern in translation should be to bridge the gaps to make the translation meaningful and faithful to the original.

Rafat took it upon himself to ask a publisher friend to translate Shah into English. Rafat, in the translator's note, gave the reasons for translating Punjabi classic, which, besides the lyrical genius and friends' insistence, was Shah's "refreshingly forthright condemnation of priests and pedants". Translating the most rebellious and famous poet of Punjab could not have been a straightforward task, but Rafat was equal to the task, as is evident from the short span of only five weeks he took to render 71 kafis and dohrey into English. He says he could not have completed the task in any other way. He rejected the idea of translating Shah into free verse after the initial attempts because he was dissatisfied with the result, as Shah's "lyricism was absent" while reverting to the formal verse. Rafat explained in his note that he had "to make his own ground rules" to translate the Punjabi classic because no competent precedents existed before him.

Shaw's works include spiritual quests, love, social critique, and mysticism, with a focus on the search for truth and spiritual growth. He employs metaphors to elucidate the spiritual journey, and his poetry has inspired generations of poets. As an integral part of Punjabi culture, his works continue to guide spiritual seekers, influence song and film, and remain a source of inspiration for numerous artists and slogan writers in their campaigns.

Syed Abdullah Shah Qadri, commonly known by the name Shah, was renowned for his mystic, revolutionary poetry, and existentialism. He is considered the "Poet of People" and "Father of Punjabi Enlightenment". Shah followed and practiced the Sufi custom of Punjabi verse established by Sufi poets like Shah Hussain, Sultan Bahu, and Shah Sharaf and is also known as a well-known sufi mystic of Punjabi poetry (Motwani, 2021). Bulleh Shah's poetry explores universal themes of love, spirituality, and self-discovery. His works are deeply rooted in Sufi philosophy, emphasizing the importance of humility, purification of the soul, and the pursuit of divine love (Schimmel, 1975).

He is the most "celebrated and famous poet" who had a natural appeal and no other sufi poet enjoys the same reputation as he does (Ali, Ashraf and, Tahseen, 2022). His verses contain profound spiritual insights and social critiques. Through his eloquent writings, he explored themes of love, devotion, and human connection to the divine, making him a cherished poet whose works resonate with people seeking spiritual enrichment and personal growth. The attractiveness of his work lies in its ability to address complex themes of love, spirituality, and the human condition in a relatable and beautiful manner.

He is best known for his captivating and melodious style, and his poetry combines mysticism and

reality. His style is different in the way that he represents his culture and authenticates language in his works. The kind of verse practiced by him, for which he is famous, is the “Kafi”, derived from Arabic, meaning Group (Ali, Haq and Rashid, 2021)

Shah is considered one of the most well-known Punjabi poets, and his poem “Bullah I know not who I am” was analyzed by Mazhar et al. (2021) at different linguistic levels like graphological, phonological, semantic, morphological, pragmatic, and lexico-syntactic levels. The book also beautifully highlights the indispensable role of stylistic devices in the exquisite delivery of the hidden thoughts of poets. The study was conducted on the translated version of the poem. Shah’s grand style, portrayal of culture, and diction are evident in his poetry. He is known as ‘the acme of Sufi literature.’

Bulleh Shah's poetry is known for its unique blend of Punjabi and Siraiki languages, making it accessible to a wide range of audiences. His poems, known as Kafis, are characterized by their simple yet powerful language, which conveys complex spiritual concepts with ease (Duggal, 1988). Bulleh Shah's poetry has had a profound impact on Punjabi culture and literature. His works have inspired generations of poets, writers, and artists, and continue to be widely read and studied today (Singh, 2005). Scholars have analyzed Bulleh Shah's poetry from various perspectives, including stylistics, pragmatics, and critical discourse analysis. These studies have shed light on the poet's use of language, imagery, and symbolism to convey his spiritual and philosophical ideas (Rahman, 2011).

2.1 Research Gap

While significant work has been done on the poetry of Shah and his translations, several gaps remain in this area. Existing studies have frequently targeted on trendy analyses of Shah’s themes, metaphors, and stylistic elements (Siddiqui, 2021; Jalal, 2019). Studies have explored the cultural and non secular dimensions of his poetry, in addition to the wider implications of translating Sufi texts (Ahmed, 2020; Rana, 2017). However, an in-depth evaluation that specifically addresses the challenges of literal meaning and contextual complexities encountered during the interpretation and translation of Punjabi Sufi poetry into English is necessary. Existing research has primarily generalized the challenges of translating poetic texts, without providing an in-depth examination of the specific losses that occur during the interpretation process. For example, while Hussain (2021) discussed the general challenges in translating Punjabi Sufi poetry, limited research has isolated and analyzed the precise nature and extent of meaning loss in translations of Shah's poetry by specific translators, such as Taufiq Rafat. Furthermore, the impact of cultural and contextual differences on the accuracy and integrity of translated texts remains underexplored in the context of Shah's scholarship.

3. Methodology

This qualitative research study employed textual analysis as the primary method for data analysis. The study relied on a descriptive and critical analysis approach to examine the poems. Textual analysis, a comprehensive research methodology, involves a detailed examination of texts to uncover their literal and implicit meanings, symbolism, perceptions, and underlying beliefs (Caulfield, 2020).

The rationale for selecting textual analysis was to facilitate an in-depth examination of the poems, enabling a nuanced understanding of their intentional construction, including literary devices such as rhyme and meter. By analyzing these textual elements, this study aimed to elucidate their relationship to the overall meaning of the poems under investigation (Caulfield, 2020).

3.1 Theoretical Framework

Nord's model of text analysis in translation consists of extratextual and intertextual factors that should be analyzed in both the source and target texts and compared.

The technique proposed by Molina and Albir

Source text	Target text	Techniques	Notes
پہڑھیں توں نہداہاں میں پہڑھیں توں نہداہاں	From the semi-literate I run, oh, how do I run?	Modulation:	Lexical and structural changes occur by changing a point of view or intellectual thought surrounding the text.
عالم فاضل میرے بھائی پہڑھیں میری عقل گوائی	Because they're the biggest fools in the world.	Reduction:	This translation does not provide full details regarding suppressing ST information. Item in the TT.

4. Analysis

In translation research, "modulation" is a way translators use to bring, that means, via way of means of changing the shape or angle of the authentic text, as opposed to translating word-for-word. This approach is particularly useful whilst direct translation might sound awkward, misleading, or might now no longer, as it should, be brought to the authentic purpose because of linguistic or cultural differences.

Modulation changed into officially diagnosed and advanced as an idea in translation research via way of means of Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet, outstanding linguists. They characterized modulation as an indirect translation approach, wherein the translator adapts the semantics or form of the original text without compromising its meaning, taking into account idiomatic expressions in the target language.

In translation studies, the reduction approach is used while the translator deliberately simplifies or omits positive factors of the supply textual content inside the goal language. This approach facilitates make the interpretation clearer, extra concise, or extra suitable for the cultural and linguistic context of the audience.

Reduction is regularly implemented while the unique language includes redundant information, complicated expressions, or info that might not be important for the audience to recognize the middle message. Reduction becomes additionally described via way of means of Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet of their translation model.

It falls below oblique (or indirect) translation techniques, wherein the interpretation is customized as opposed to translated literally, improving clarity or relevance inside the target language. Reduction is typically utilized in instances wherein direct translation could be overly verbose, confusing, or could make the textual content experience unnatural.

Rafat's translation of Shah's poetry is done in free verse, a distinct style that differentiates it from other translations. Rafat's use of English to translate Punjabi poetry is noteworthy. His command of language and cap potential to deliver complicated thoughts and feelings in an easy but powerful way is laudable. His translation continues the vibrant imagery of the unique poetry. The imagery is strong and evocative, permitting readers to visualise and hook up with the issues and feelings expressed inside the poetry. The issues found in Shah's poetry, along with love, spirituality, and social commentary, are skillfully preserved in Rafat's translation. While a few nuances of cultural metaphors have been misplaced in translation, his paintings correctly convey the unique essence of Shah's poetry. It appears Rafat has confronted demanding situations in shooting the language, structure, symbolism, and lifestyle of various languages. His translation isn't an instantaneous transliteration however as an alternative a rendition of Shah's poetry, preserving its originality and authenticity. However, his translation of Shah has a few drawbacks also, such as:

Source Text

یا پڑھیاں توں نہد اہاں میں۔

توں نہد اہاں میں، یاڑھیال توں نہد اہاں! میرے بھائی، یاڑھیال میری عقل گواہی! پڑھیال نہد اہاں میں، یاڑھیال توں نہد اہاں! عالم فاضل پڑھیال توں

Target Text

THE SEMI-LITERATE

From the semi-literate I run, oh, how do I run?

Because they're the biggest fools in the world.

From the semi-literate I run, oh!

How do I run?

Notable features of this translation include its structural complexity, which preserves the original's nuanced syntax and phrasing; and, rhythm, which maintains the natural cadence and flow of the original text. It also seems that his translation is an interpretation rather than a literal translation, which may lead to a loss of original meaning and intent, which can be seen clearly in the 2nd verse of selected poetry i.e. عالم فاضل میرے بھائی پا پڑھی اُن میری عقل گواہی

Another issue or challenge while dealing with Symbolism and metaphor is that translating symbolism and metaphors can be difficult, and some nuances may be lost in translation, which has happened in this verse. The tone and essence of Shah's poetry may be difficult to fully capture in the translation, potentially resulting in a slightly different reader experience.

Conclusion

Punjabi has unique features, such as dialects, idioms, and wordplay that may not have direct English equivalents, potentially leading to a loss of original flavor. The historical context in which Shah wrote may not be fully conveyed in the translation, potentially reducing the poetry's impact. Rafat's personal perspective and biases may influence his translation, potentially introducing subtle changes to the original meaning. Some readers familiar with the original Punjabi version may find the translation inadequate for comparison. These drawbacks are not unique to Rafat's translation but are common challenges in translating poetry from one language to another.

This study used a single poem by Shah. In future, studies could be conducted on other poems by Shah to determine whether the literal meaning of the poems can be retained after translation. Toufiq Rafat has translated Shah's poetry into English. The translation can be compared to discover why literal meanings are lost during translation.

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