



Loss of Meanings of Cultural Metaphors: An Analysis of Taufiq Rafat's Translation of Bulleh Shah's Punjabi Poetry

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Abstract

Language encompasses the whole native culture and social norms and traditions but the translation from one language to another changes the context and sometimes meanings as well. The translators feel difficulties in finding word equivalences. Sometimes the equivalence of the words of one culture does not exist in the other culture which creates difficulties in translation to convey the complete message. There are so many issues while translating the Punjabi language into English. There are so many metaphors in Punjabi which do not have words equivalence in the English language. The research project aimed to trace out the loss of the meanings and context while translating Punjabi poetry into English. Many Punjabi Sufi writers have projected the colors of Punjabi in different forms and contexts but Bulleh Shah has a very unique style. Two poems of Bulleh Shah translated by Taufiq Rafat were under examination. This was a purely qualitative research where data has been collected from books, libraries, and research journals. Textual analysis has been used as a research method to analyze the data. The findings revealed that Punjabi poetry has distinct metaphors that represent Punjabi culture, but when translated into English the original meaning is lost.

Keywords: Cultural Metaphors, Translation, Punjabi Bulleh Shah Poetry, Context

Introduction

A cultural metaphor is a significant phenomenon in a community with which most people identify cognitively or emotionally and through which the national culture can be represented in detail (Gannon, et al., 2005). St. Clair (2002) is of the view that metaphors are used for representing different cultures. Punjabi poetry is replete with cultural metaphors.

After India's partition, the Punjabi language was not given any government support that was necessary for the spread and development of a language (Riaz, 2011). Punjabis are the largest group in Pakistan. About 125 million people worldwide have Punjabi as their mother tongue. The provincial language of Punjab is Punjabi (Manan & David, 2014).

Abdullah Shah alias Bulleh Shah was born in 1680 in Uch, Punjab, and he died in Kasur, Punjab, in 1757. He is considered an esteemed Sufi poet of Punjab. A revered Sufi



saint, Bulleh Shah is known for his remarkable mystical poetry. He is still popular amongst those who like Punjabi poetry (Waqar, 2009). He followed the Sufi tradition produced by poets like Shah Hussain and Sultan Bahu of Punjabi poetry. Kafi is a popular genre of Punjabi poetry, and he makes use of this genre. Bulleh Shah's poetry is very rich in form and material. He has written poems both in Punjabi and Saraiki languages (Ahmed, 2017). His poetry condemns the orthodoxy Islamic ideology of his times. His poetry was a symbol of hope and harmony in times of tumult for the people of Punjab. His writing portrays him as a humanist, someone who proposes solutions to the world's sociological issues around him (Sharma, n.d.). His poetry highlights his spiritual, mystical journey through the four phases of Sufism (Sattar, 2016).

Brown (2016) proclaimed translating poetry into different languages to make it universal, proposing certain requirements to be maintained. Thus, through the means of translation, a poet may gain popularity. Likewise, the mystical poetry of Bulleh Shah is popular among all those seeking Divine love. The English translation of the poetry of Bulleh Shah helped the spiritual message reach all. Many translators have translated his poetry, but among the most famous are English translations written by Taufiq Rafat, Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, and Paul Smith. The question that occurs is whether the translation retains the original poem's meaning or not. When translated into some other language, the essence of the Punjabi poem needs to be preserved (Rahman & Sami, 2015). Translations of Bulleh Shah, however, are often criticized for being merely easy generalizations because the complexity of the linguistic expressions of Punjabi used by Bulleh Shah in the translated version of his poems may not be balanced (Kiran, 2018).

Poetry translation is a difficult task. To produce a good translation of a poem requires time, experience, and mental effort. Poetry is part of the cultural heritage of every nation, and the essence of the poem is often lost during translation (Translating Poetry. What are the main challenges? 2016). Cultural metaphors used in poetry are difficult to translate from one language to another. Sometimes while translating, the meaning is skewed in most instances when attempting to rhyme the verses. It is difficult to translate the poetic works of poets such as Bulleh Shah since the literal sense of mystical poetry is entirely different from the



symbolic meaning that is intended to be expressed. Punjabi verse, when translated into English, could lead to the loss of the beauty of the real message (Singh, 2017).

In Pakistan, Taufiq Rafat is considered a distinguished poet and is remembered for his excellent poetic work. He is known as Pakistan's Ezra Pound (Zubair, 2020). He was a writer of novels, a translator, and a poet. He was born in 1927 in Sialkot. He was the one who initially promoted the idea of our native identity, which must be expressed in the works of writers from Pakistan (Zubair, 2020). He is valued for portraying Pakistani culture in a distinctive way that is worth cherishing (Hayat, 2016). He has translated the poems of Bulleh Shah into English (Rafat, 2014).

Research Questions

1) How are the meanings of cultural metaphors lost during the translation of Bulleh Shah's poetry done by Taufiq Rafat?

2) What are the reasons for the loss of meanings of Bulleh Shah's poetry during translation and the result of translation?

Research Objectives

- to find out how the meanings of cultural metaphors are lost during the translation of Bulley Shah's poetry done by Taufiq Rafat.

- to find out the reasons for the loss of meanings of Bulleh Shah's poetry during translation and the result of translation.

Aims

This research project aims to highlight that during the translation of Bulleh Shah's poems into English, the cultural metaphors used in his poems lose their meanings when they are translated into English. It will also help to highlight the reasons for the loss of meanings in Bulleh Shah's poetry during translation.

Significance of the Study

This research work is substantial in the field of Translation Studies. It will help to trace out the loss of the meanings and context while translating Punjabi poetry into English. Researchers have done pragma-stylistic and meta-function analyses of some of Bulleh Shah's poems, but no research has been done on how cultural metaphors used in Bulleh Shah's poems lose their meaning when translated into English.



Literature Review

One of the most significant elements of the literary form that must be perfected is the use of metaphor in poetry. Metaphors are used in any language to express individuals' thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Metaphors used in poetry provide a figurative sense to the literal language. Cultural metaphors are used to represent individuals belonging to a specific culture. These individuals share the same views, customs, philosophies, morals, or values. An example of a cultural metaphor would be people belonging to the same culture, who engage in a specific event, activity, etc. that reflects their culture (Gannon, 2008). These are peculiar to a specific culture.

Poetry translation is thought of as one of the most complex kinds of translation. Poetry is hard to translate than other forms of translation due to its particularity (Tisgam, 2014). Jakobson (1966) is of the view that poetry cannot be translated. It is not easy to translate any form of poetry from one language to another. Poetry translation is not easy. Unless and until you have adequate knowledge of the cultures of both the source language and the target language, it is impossible to translate poetry. A translator might encounter problems in translating poems of languages that have entirely different cultures, such as translating from Punjabi into English. The challenge of translating metaphorical phrases to another language is one of the most daunting tasks a translator faces. One should emphasize that maintaining and reproducing the poetic effects is considered a major challenge for translators in translating poetry (Safarnejad, et al, 2014).

Poetry translation is more difficult than prose translation because poetry focuses more on its musical content and poetic nature, while prose focuses more on meaning. While translating poetry the hidden message and the emotions should be portrayed in the source language in the same manner as it has been in the target language (Tisgam, 2014). When translating a piece of poetry from a source language to a target language, it loses its essence because the language used in the poem is replete with cultural metaphors whose equivalent cannot be found in the target language. The concepts of poetry are heavily imbued with feelings and emotions expressed through a specific culture represented by the metaphorical language (Nayyar, 2018).



Bulleh Shah is an esteemed Punjabi Sufi poet. The people of his times considered him a light of hope and peace. He has written kafis that are poems on divine attributes and spiritual beliefs. In his poems, he has discussed the complex issues of life in his times. The core of his teachings was the search for self-discovery. The central theme that is reflected in Bulley Shah's poetry is not just restricted to love for God but he also portrays his love for humanity through his poetry, He was also a humanist and that is also reflected in his poems. Bulleh Shah refused to be affiliated with a specific cast, religious orthodoxy, or culture. Bulleh Shah, in his poetry, emphasized caring for God's creation and did not discriminate based on caste. His elevated spiritual attainments have made the poetry of Bulleh Shah very popular in every culture (Khan, 2013).

Bulleh Shah in the poem "*Bullah! ke Jaana Main Kon*" has depicted the relationship between God and Man. He is contemplating the origins of humanity by utilizing his self as a metaphor. In his search, he challenges the emergence of humans on earth by concluding that one can never comprehend the laws of nature and one's place in this world (Zafar, 2013).

Punjabi Sufi poets always compared their love for God with that of a woman because the devotion of a woman to her beloved is incomparable. This is the reason that Bulleh Shah wrote "*main ranjha ranjha kardi hun, main ape ranjha hoyi*". In this poem he implies the word 'heer' for God to whom he refers to as his beloved (in Sufism there is a woman, behind every voice, 2014).

"Bulleh Shah A Selection" written by Taufiq Rafat was first published in 1982. Rafat is considered one of the best Pakistani poets who wrote in English. He has translated seventy-one poems of Bulley Shah into English. In his book, the original Punjabi poems are given along with the translated version. He has tried to communicate the poem's spiritual essence but in some of the poems that he has translated of Bulley Shah, the meaning gets lost (Kaur, n.d.).

Bulleh Shah's kafis have been sung by contemporary singers which shows his popularity in modern times.

Safarnejad, Abdullah & Awal (2014) conducted a study to find out how cultural metaphors were translated. The two languages under investigation in this study were Persian



and English. This research studied the emotive metaphoric concepts and their prevailing styles in English and Persian. The emotions that were studied are metaphorical expressions of happiness and sadness. These have been taken from two source texts and their equivalent target texts. In the findings, it was found out that there are many cultural similarities and dissimilarities among the emotive metaphors in Persian and English.

Tisgam (2014) studied whether it is possible or not possible to translate poetry. In this study, the researcher has presented the view of numerous expertise in the domain of translation studies whether poetry can be easily translated into another language or not. This study has also highlighted the problems faced while translating poetry. In this study, an assessment model has been selected to show that it is not possible to translate poetry. The results of this study show that poetry translation poses a real challenge and it is difficult to translate poetry from a source text to a target text. The question asked in the title whether it is possible or not possible to translate poetry has not been answered by the researcher.

Avais et al. (2018) did a meta-function analysis on Bulleh Shah's kafi "*Ranjha Ranjha kardi Hun Mein Apey Ranjha Hoi*". In this research, a thematic analysis has been done of the poem. This study highlights that each clause of the poem contains multiple meanings for interpretation. This study has revealed the metafunctions of the kaafi.

Shafiq (2019) did a pragma-stylistic analysis of the translated version of Bulleh Shah's poem "*Illmon Bus Kren O-Yaar*". In this study, the researcher wanted to find out the differences between the two English translations of one of Bulleh Shah's poems. It was qualitative research. The pragma-stylistic approach has been utilized to find out the different stylistic devices used in the two English translated versions of the poem. The translations of Bulleh Shah's poem by R.A. Nicholson and Taufiq Rafat were selected and a comparison was drawn between the two poems using the pragma-stylistic approach. The findings reveal that Rafat has done a sense-for sense translation of the poem whereas Nicholson has done a word-for-word translation of the poem. A thorough analysis of the translated versions reveals that there was dissimilarity between the two translations.

An extensive literature survey suggests that no research has been done on how during the translation of Bulleh Shah's poems into English, the cultural metaphors used in his poems



lose their meanings when they are translated into English. Therefore, it is of relevance to research to trace out the loss of the meanings and context while translating Punjabi poetry into English.

Methodology

Research Design

It was purely qualitative research. Textual analysis has been used for analyzing the data. It was a descriptive and interpretative analysis. For different research methods used to define, analyze, and understand texts, textual analysis is a broad concept. From its literal sense to the subtext, symbolism, perceptions, and beliefs it reveals, all sorts of knowledge can be gleaned from a text (Caulfield, 2020).

The rationale for using textual analysis is that it helped in an in-depth analysis of the poems under consideration. The textual analysis emphasizes the intentionally constructed elements of a text, for example, rhyme and meter in a poem. The goal of researcher was to understand and clarify how these elements relate to the meaning of the texts being investigated (Caulfield, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Nord's (1991) model of text analysis in translation has been used as the theoretical framework for this study.

Data Collection

It was a text-based study. Two poems of Bulleh Shah "*Ranjha Ranjha Kar Di*" and "*Bullah ke Jaana Main Kon*" were selected along with the English translations of these poems by Taufiq Rafat and were analyzed to find out how the meanings of cultural metaphors are lost during translation.

Data Analysis

Textual analysis has been employed to find out how the cultural metaphors used in Bulleh Shah's poems lose their essence when they are translated into English.

The first poem that has been analyzed is Bulleh Shah's kafi "*Ranjha Ranjha Kar Di*". The title '*Ranjha Ranjha Kar Di*', has been translated as 'The Transformation' by Taufiq Rafat. In the title, Taufiq Rafat is implying that Bulleh Shah's love for the Divine Lord has



made his earthly love superfluous. While translating the title from the source language that is Punjabi, into the target language English, sense-for-sense translation has been used.

In the first verse of the original version, ‘*Ranjha*’ has been used metaphorically in portraying *Ranjha* as the stronger personality that has overtaken *Heer*. In the first line of the verse of the original poem, *Bulleh* has nowhere mentioned crying, whereas in the translated version *Taufiq Rafat* writes “I cried till only *Ranjha* is there”. *Rafat* has distorted the original essence of the first line. *Bulleh* has used the metaphor ‘*Dheedo Ranjha*’ in the first verse, whereas *Rafat* in the English translation of the stanza has completely omitted the metaphorical expression ‘*Dheedo Ranjha*’. It is not easy to find the exact linguistic equivalent for metaphors in a culturally different language from Punjabi. Punjabi and English are two culturally different languages.

In the second verse. *Bulleh* is talking about the spiritual oneness which he conveys through the line: “*Ranjha main wich, main ranjhe wich, gair khial na koi*” which means that “*Ranjha* lives in my heart and my heart lives in *Ranjha*”, whereas, *Rafat* translation of the line is ambiguous and the meaning of the spiritual oneness has lost its depth. In the second line of this verse, *Rafat* has completely changed the meaning of the line “*Mein nahin oh aap he, apni aap kare diljoi*”. He has used the word ‘expunged’ which has completely changed the meaning of the line as compared to the original poem. He has completely ignored the metaphor ‘*diljoi*’ in his translation.

In the first line of the third verse of the source text by *Bulleh Shah* the metaphorical phrase ‘*andar wasse*’ alludes to the inner self. Here, *Rafat* has also expressed the same meaning by translating it as “Since he is inside me, he is all that exists”. In the following line: “*Jis dey naal mein nunh lgaya, aoho jesi hoyi*” the term metaphor ‘*nunh*’ refers to the inner eye that links Godly love versus earthly love. This further reflects his devotion towards his beloved that is God. *Rafat* on the other hand has not used the metaphor ‘*nunh*’ and has not emphasized spiritual love.

In the fourth verse, of the source text, *Bulleh* has used the metaphors ‘*chitti chadar*’, ‘*kurye*’, and ‘*loyi*’. ‘*Chitti chadar*’ denotes white sheet, ‘*kuriye*’ stands for maiden and ‘*loyi*’ refers to the cape worn by a faqeer. These metaphors are used to transform a maiden in a



white sheet to wearing a faqeer cape. While Rafat has changed the meaning of the cultural metaphors by not including them in the translated English version of the poem. In the original version sin versus virtue has been shown using these metaphors. In the second line of the fourth verse “*Chitti chadar dagh lakesi, loyi dagh na koi*”, ‘*chitti chaddar*’ and ‘*loyi*’ have been used metaphorically, whereas Rafat has simply shown that white dress can be easily stained.

In the last verse “*Takht Hazara le chal Bulleya salein miley na koi*”, ‘*takht hazara*’ has been used metaphorically. Here Bulley is showing his desire to visit Takht Hazara where he has not been for ages, whereas, Rafat has lost the complete essence of the word ‘*salein*’ and has translated it as ‘*Sial*’. Here, ‘*Sial*’ has been translated as a place instead of time.

The above analysis of the poem reveals that Rafat has done a sense-for-translation of the poem. Rafat has tried to maintain the rhyme scheme of the poem but this has resulted in the poem losing its original essence and context.

The second poem that has been analyzed is Bulleh Shah’s kafi “*Bullah ke Jaana Main Kon*”. In this poem Bulleh Shah is talking about his spiritual desire. In his poem the central theme “*Bhulleya Ki jaana main kaon, ki jaana main koan*” is being repeated in each verse. This poem talks about the spiritual path towards self-enlightenment of the poet. The poet distances himself from all worldly desires during his journey leading towards God.

The poem starts with the verse:

*“Chal Bhulleya, chal oathay chaliay,
Jithay saray Annaiy
Na Koi saadi zaat pachaanay
Ten aa koi saanu Mannay”* (Severus, 2015).

The missing verse highlights Bulleh’s search for enlightenment.

Taufiq Rafat has omitted this verse in the source text as well as the target text.

The title “*Bullah! ke Jaana Main Kon*” emphasizes the metaphor ‘*Bullah*’ who is searching for his identity. Rafat, in the English translation of the poem, has omitted the metaphor ‘*Bullah*’. The title in his English translation ‘*Does Anyone Know?*’ is too vague and loses the context in which the Punjabi title has been written.



The line “*Bullah! ke Jaana Main Kon?*” is the main theme of the poem. The poem starts with the line “*Bullah! ke Jaana Main Kon*”, and each verse also begins with this line. Constant repetition of this line reflects Bulleh’s loss of identity.

In the first verse of the poem ‘*Bullah*’ has been used as a metaphor, it questions the identity of Bulleh, whereas Rafat in the English translation has omitted the metaphor ‘*Bullah*’ which has resulted in the essence of the first line being lost and the meaning is changed. In line 2 of the first verse of the source text, the metaphor ‘*momin*’ depicts a believer in a mosque. In line 3 the metaphor ‘*kufar*’ symbolizes idol worshippers. Rafat while translating the lines

*“Na maen momin vich maseet hain
Na maen vich kufar diya reet aan”*

has not mentioned the word ‘*maen*’. Bulleh’s quest for God is not seen in the translated lines. In the fourth line of the verse, the metaphors ‘*pakaan*’ symbolizes purity and ‘*paleetaan*’ symbolizes impure and in line five of the same verse, the metaphors ‘*moosa*’ depicts the good and ‘*pharaun*’ the bad. In these lines, the meaning depicted by Rafat is the same as the source text (Punjabi). Rafat has not emphasized the metaphor ‘*Bullah*’ and therefore losing the connectivity between Bulleh and his quest to identify himself.

In the second verse of the kafi, the metaphors ‘*paleeti*’ ‘*paaki*’ symbolize filthy and pure and in the third line the metaphors ‘*shadi*’ and ‘*ghamnaaki*’ are a symbol of happiness and sorrow. Rafat has done a sense-for-sense, free translation of the first two lines of the verse as;

*“What is good, what badness?
What is mirth, what sadness?” (Rafat, 2014)*

In lines 4 and 5 of the second verse, Bulleh uses the metaphors, ‘*aabi*’, ‘*khaki*’, ‘*aatish*’, and ‘*paun*’ to symbolize water, earth, fire, and winds. Here, Rafat has done a word-for-word translation of these lines.

In lines 2 and 3 of the third verse, the metaphor ‘*mazhab*’ represents religion, the metaphors ‘*aadam*’ and ‘*havva*’ symbolize the origin of mankind. Rafat on the other hand



while translating the metaphors into English has misinterpreted the context in which these have been used in Punjabi and changed the context of the lines as:

“I refuse to believe.

Who was Adam? Who Eve?” (Rafat, 2014).

In the last verse ‘*aap*’, ‘*dooja*’, ‘*maethon*’ and ‘*Bullah*’ have been used as metaphors. Here ‘*aap*’ refers to the Supreme Being, ‘*dooja*’ symbolizes the oneness of God. Rafat in the translated lines is indirectly conveying the same meaning regarding the oneness of God. In the source text, Bulleh is using the metaphors ‘*mathon*’ and ‘*Bullah*’ as self-praise for himself for being wise. The wisdom of Bulleh differentiates him from the rest of mankind. Rafat has distorted the meaning of lines 3 and 4 by translating them into a different context. Rafat has not mentioned the metaphor ‘*Bullah*’ at all in his translation of the poem. Therefore, losing the importance of the essence of the metaphor ‘*Bullah*’ in the kafi.

The analysis of the poems has shown that Punjabi has its metaphors that represent Punjabi culture but when translated into English they lose their original meaning and the context is changed.

Conclusion

This research analyzes two poems of Bulleh Shah “*Ranjha Ranjha Kar Di*” and “*Bullah Ke Jaana Main Kaun*” along with the English translation by Taufiq Rafat. The findings highlight that Punjabi has its cultural metaphors, but when translated into English these metaphors lose their meaning. The findings also reveal that the essence of the original poems is lost during the translation. The reason is that Rafat has done a sense-for-sense translation of the two poems, which has led to the loss of meanings of cultural metaphors in Bulleh Shah's poetry. This study has shown that Punjabi metaphors are culture-specific. Every culture has its distinct metaphors. The Punjabi language has its distinct cultural metaphors that portray Punjabi culture. Taufiq Rafat in his attempt to translate Bulleh Shah's poetry into English has not portrayed the intended meaning of the metaphors used in Bulleh Shah's poems which have resulted in the context being changed as well as the meaning being lost in these poems.

Future research should look into the following suggestions:



Only two poems of Bulleh Shah were included in this study. In the future, studies can be carried out on the other poems of Bulleh Shah to find out whether the cultural metaphors retain their original meaning after translation. Taufiq Rafat and R.A. Nicholson both translated Bulleh Shah's poems into English. Their translations can be compared to discover why cultural metaphors lose meaning during translation.

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