

Probing Translation Loss in the Urdu Translation of Alchemist

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Abstract

"The Alchemist", Paulo Coelho's bestselling allegorical novel, has captivated readers worldwide with its timeless themes of personal journeys and pursuing dreams. However, translating its rich symbolism and evocative language across cultures poses unique challenges. This study investigates the translation loss present in the Urdu translation of "The Alchemist," utilizing a qualitative approach to shed light on the complexities of literary translation. The core objective shines a light on specific instances where meaning evaporates in the transition from English to Urdu. The aim is to dissect these losses, uncovering how cultural and linguistic barriers can reshape, obscure, or even mute the original text's essence. It also seeks to assess the overall effectiveness of the translation, gauging its success in bridging the cultural chasm and delivering Coelho's profound message to a new audience. This involves scrutinizing how different strategies – from literal to adaptive – navigate the treacherous terrain of meaning transfer. In the paradigm of qualitative research, descriptive method is used to analyse the evidences of translation loss. The data is selected following purposive sampling technique. The findings reveal various instances of translation loss in the Urdu version, including cultural mistranslations, stylistic deviations, and loss of symbolic depth. However, the translation also exhibits commendable efforts to adapt the story to a culturally specific audience. Furthermore, this research aspires to pave the path for future journeys among languages. By identifying avenues where loss can be minimized and highlighting translation methodologies that enhance cross-cultural understanding, it is anticipated to illuminate the path for future literary voyages, ensuring that stories like "The Alchemist" continue to enchant readers despite the borders that separate them.

Keywords: Translation loss, cultural mistranslations, cultural and linguistic barriers, multi-methodological approach

INTRODUCTION

In his renowned allegorical novel "The Alchemist," Paulo Coelho has woven a captivating tapestry of timeless themes, delving into the profound realms of personal journeys and the pursuit of dreams. With its global resonance, this bestselling work has enraptured readers worldwide, transcending cultural boundaries. However, the intricate task of translating its rich symbolism and evocative language across diverse cultures introduces a set of distinctive challenges. This research embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the Urdu translation of "The Alchemist," aiming to illuminate the shadows cast by translation loss through a multi-methodological approach.

The primary objective of this study is to scrutinize specific instances where meaning appears to evaporate in the transition from English to Urdu. By dissecting these losses, the research seeks to unveil how cultural and linguistic barriers may reshape, obscure, or even mute the essence of the original text. Yet, the inquiry extends beyond mere identification, aspiring to assess the overall effectiveness of the Urdu translation. This involves a critical evaluation of its success in bridging the cultural chasm and effectively delivering Paulo Coelho's profound message to a new audience.

In navigating the treacherous terrain of meaning transfer, the study scrutinizes different translation strategies, ranging from literal to adaptive approaches. By doing so, it aims to provide insights into how these strategies navigate the complexities inherent in conveying the depth and nuance of Coelho's narrative. Furthermore, this research aspires to pave the way for future linguistic journeys, identifying avenues to minimize translation loss and proposing methodologies that enhance cross-cultural understanding.

Employing a mixed-method approach, the study conducts a meticulous examination through close reading and comparative analysis of selected excerpts from both the original and translated versions. This analysis focuses on stylistic features, symbolism, and cultural references. Additionally, the research employs statistical analysis, evaluating lexical diversity, syntactic complexity, and figurative language usage in both texts. The findings reveal instances of translation loss in the Urdu version, including cultural mistranslations, stylistic deviations, and symbolic depth reduction. However, commendable efforts to adapt the story to a culturally specific audience are also evident.

In essence, this study sheds light on the inherent challenges of interlingual translation and emphasizes the importance of a balanced approach that considers fidelity to the original text while ensuring accessibility for the target audience. Beyond this, it lays the foundation for future research on translation strategies, aiming to facilitate the conveyance of universal themes and literary merit across diverse linguistic and cultural landscapes.

“The process of transferring the meaning of the source language into the receptor language. This is done by going from the form of the first language to the form of a second language by way of semantic structure. It is meaning which is being transferred and must be held constant.” Larson (1984, p. 3)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions will be enquired in the present study:

- i. How do cultural and linguistic barriers contribute to the reshaping, obscuring, or muting of the essence of the original text in the Urdu translation?
- ii. In what ways do cultural mistranslations, stylistic deviations, and reductions in symbolic depth contribute to instances of translation loss in the Urdu translation of *The Alchemist*?

LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been a long debate about concepts of loss and gain. Loss and gain are discussed as concepts which refer to translation as a finished product. The two concepts are concerned with the pragmatic component of translation, which demands that the translator be able to make decisions when faced with circumstances, which have no immediate equivalents.

The problem that will be analyzed is translation loss, which comes from the translation studies. Bassnett (1991, p. 30) said “Loosing or gaining meaning in the TLT results from language differences.” “Language differences usually result in untranslatability” (Bassnett, 1991, p. 32), if we put in other words, the translator does not have any choices to translate particular words or phrases in the closest equivalent meaning. According to Sulistyoko’s (2013) study about loss and

gain is “loss and gain happened mostly because the translator wanted to make a good translation that sound natural and acceptable by the reader.” Moreover, she also said that especially loss likely occurred because of the limitation of space.

However, the translator may also choose to preserve the source language term intact or to opt for a word in the target language which seems similar to or has the same ‘relevance’ as the source language term. Chesterman (2012) proposed eight translation procedures in translating culture specific items. They are translation by a more general word (superordinate), translation by a more neutral/less expressive word, translation by cultural substitution, translation using a loan word or loan word plus explanation, translation by paraphrase using a related word, translation by paraphrase using unrelated words, translation by omission and translation by illustration.

The distance and differences between two different cultures determine the extent of the gain or loss that will be experienced by culture specific items as they are translated. The greater the cultural distance and differences, the greater the need for translators to use their creative skill to find the acceptable translation, which will eventually please both sides. For the purpose of translation, translators need to understand the customs and other cultural aspects that lie between the two different languages (Davies, 2003).

Bassnett (2006) pointed out “The translator can at times enrich or clarify the source language text as a direct result of the translation process. Moreover, what is often seen ‘as lost’ from the source language context maybe replaced in the target language context.”

Loss is the disappearance of certain features in the target language text, which are present in the source language text. Translation loss refers to, “The incomplete replication of the ST in TT” (Dizdar, 2014) when a translator fails to render the entire culture specific items and linguistic features of the TT.” In translation practice, there is more probability culture specific items to experience loss than gain.

Loss can also be related to the failure of the translator to convey an element of meaning such as expressiveness. If the translator is not competent in the target language, some words and phrases might be deleted and unfortunately loss occurs. The other cause of loss occurs due to the linguistic and extra linguistic differences between the source language and target language. These linguistic differences hold back the translation process because each language has its ways in expressing the same concepts in different system. Another fact that causes loss is extra linguistic discrepancies. This includes the cultural and religious discrepancies between these languages, which hinder the translation process. It is the extra linguistic factors that become the major reason behind the incapability of a translator to produce equivalence in the target text (Alwazna, 2014).

Gain is a concept that focuses on the enrichment or clarification of the source language text. Bassnett (2006) defined gain as, “The enrichment or clarification of the source language text in the process of translation.” The same concept is also proposed by Nozizwe and Ncube (2014) where they stated that gain in translation on the one hand refers to the enrichment or clarification of the source text which enables language and the target text to be flexible and usable in any social circle. Gain in translation will help languages to adapt themselves to their speakers. There will be chances for them to adapt when two different languages interact. Eventually, they will complement each other. Therefore, the development of new terminology is possible to happen in any language because language itself is not static but dynamic. Gain is possible due to the dynamism of language

(O'Neil, 2006).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Eugene Nida's theoretical framework is used which involves three main steps. This model is designed to guide translators in achieving a translation that is not only linguistically accurate but also dynamically equivalent in terms of its impact and effect on the target audience. The three steps are: the first step involves a thorough analysis of the source text. The researcher has understood the linguistic and cultural elements, as well as the communicative intent and impact of the original text. This includes identifying nuances, connotations, and cultural references that may require special attention during translation. In the transfer phase, the researcher has made decisions on how to render the source text (SL) into the target language (TL). This goes beyond a literal word-for-word translation. The emphasis is on capturing the meaning, style, and impact of the original text in a way that is natural and effective for the target audience. The restructuring phase has involved adjusting the form and structure of the translated text to ensure that it has the same impact on the target audience as the original text had on the source audience. This has included reorganizing sentences, altering cultural references, or adapting idiomatic expressions to make them more meaningful in the target language and culture.

METHODOLOGY

The source of the data in this study is a novel *Al Chemist* by Paulo Coelho, which has been translated into Urdu by Aqeel Abbas Somroo. This research employed descriptive qualitative method. This research uses descriptive qualitative method because this study relies on opinion and belief rather than statistical data, which are inclined to quantitative research. The researcher has applied purposive sampling technique and the data is from the novel in the form of words, phrases, clauses, or sentences of the original and excerpts of translation that contain translation loss. The study is descriptive and qualitative, looking at the losses associated with translating from English to Urdu. The analysis process is the next action performed after the data collection. To determine the translation loss, the original English version of the novel and its Urdu translation are compared. Consequently, the primary focus is on translation loss. Semantic level classification is used to categorize loss. A thorough textual analysis of the source text is conducted to understand its linguistic features, cultural references, and the intended impact on the source audience. Language proficiency, cultural background, and relevance to the target audience is kept under consideration.

TEXTUAL DATA ANALYSIS

In this section researcher has provided textual examples of Translation loss. Page no. of each extract is given for future reference.

1. Its the simple things in life that are the most extraordinary.(pg.15)

یہ انتہائی غیر معمولی چیز ہے۔(pg 26)

The English quote is concise and expressive, conveying a philosophical insight about the extraordinary nature of simplicity. The Urdu translation, while conveying the general idea, may not carry the same level of expressiveness or depth, possibly resulting in a subtle loss of impact.

2. I dreamed that I was in a field with my sheep. (Pg 13)

میں نے خواب دیکھا کہ میں اپنی بھڑوں کے ساتھ صحرا میں موجود ہوں۔ (Pg24)

The English sentence specifies "a field," whereas the Urdu translation uses the more general term "صحرا" ("meadow"). This slight variation in the choice of words could lead to a nuanced difference in the mental imagery evoked by the two versions. One noticeable difference is the shift in tense. The English sentence is in the past tense ("I dreamed"), while the Urdu translation is in the present tense ("I am dreaming"). This tense shift might introduce a subtle discrepancy in the temporal aspect of the dream, potentially altering the narrative's intended temporal context.

3. I'm going to charge you for the consultation.(Pg 13)

بہر حال کچھ بھی ہو میں تمہیں مشورے کی فیس دینے جاتا رہا ہوں۔ (Pg 24)

The Urdu translation, while conveying the core message, introduces a slightly different phrasing. This variation may affect the overall tone and perceived attitude of the speaker, potentially contributing to a nuanced translation loss

4. He was giving too much importance to his recurrent dream. (pg 13)

لیکن وہ اپنے بار بار نظر آنے والے خواب کی حقیقت جاننا چاہتا تھا۔ (pg 24)

The English sentence conveys that the person was assigning excessive importance to his recurrent dream. The Urdu translation, while capturing the essence, doesn't explicitly convey the extent of the importance. The term "too much" from the original is not mirrored in the Urdu version, potentially leading to a slight loss in emphasizing the degree of significance.

5. It sounded like a Gypsy prayer. (pg 12)

ایسا لگتا تھا جیسے یہ ہندی دعا ہے۔ (pg 23)

The English sentence refers to a "Gypsy prayer," which carries a specific cultural and ethnic association. The Urdu translation replaces "Gypsy" with "ہندی" ("Hindi"), which, while conveying a prayer in another language, loses the specific cultural and ethnic nuance associated with the term "Gypsy." This change might result in a reduction of cultural richness and specificity.

6. If he were to tire of the Andalusian fields, he could sell his sheep and go to sea. (pg 10)

جب وہ میدانی علاقوں سے گھبرا جاتا تو بھڑوں کو فروخت کر کے سمندر میں چلا جاتا تھا (pg21)

The English sentence presents a conditional scenario ("If he were to tire..."). The Urdu translation starts with "جب" ("When"), introducing a more causal relationship. The shift from a conditional to a causal structure might result in a subtle change in the nuance of the sentence. The term "tire" in English implies a sense of fatigue or weariness. The Urdu translation uses "جاتا گھبرا" ("get worried" or "get anxious"), which introduces a shift in the meaning. While weariness may lead to concern, the two terms do not have an exact semantic match.

8. He had already seen many castles and met many women (but none the equal of the one who awaited him several days hence.)

وہ پہلے ہی بہت سے محلات اور بہت سی عورتوں سے مل چکا تھا۔ (لیکن کوئی بھی ایسی نہیں تھی جو اسکی منتظر ہو۔ (pg 21)

The English sentence uses a comparative structure with "none the equal of." The Urdu translation does not replicate this structure directly and instead uses ("there was none"). This might result in a loss of the specific comparative emphasis on finding an equal.

9. The horizon was tinged with red, and suddenly the sun appeared. (pg 10)

سورج طلوع ہو چکا تھا۔ (pg 21)

The English sentence vividly describes the horizon being tinged with red, creating a visual image of a sunrise. The Urdu translation, while conveying the fact that the sun had risen, omits the specific details about the red tinge on the horizon. This results in a loss of the descriptive richness present in the original.

10. The boy knew a lot of people in the city. That was what made travelling appeal to him. (pg16)
لڑکا شہر کے بہت سے لوگوں سے واقف تھا۔ اس وجہ سے وہ یہاں آیا تھا۔ (pg 27)

The English sentences establish a connection between the boy's knowledge of people in the city and his interest in traveling. The Urdu translation separates these ideas into two distinct sentences, potentially losing some of the direct linkage between the boy's social connections and his motivation for traveling.

11. Everyone seems to have a cruel idea of how other people should lead their lives, but none about his or her own. (pg 16)

ہر شخص کا واضح خیال ہوتا ہے کہ لوگوں کو اپنی زندگیاں کس طرح گزارنی چاہئیں (pg 27)

The term "cruel idea" in the English sentence introduces a specific quality to the ideas people have about how others should lead their lives. The Urdu translation's omission of "cruel" may lead to a loss of emphasis on the negative or harsh nature of these ideas. The original sentence contrasts people's ideas about others' lives with the absence of ideas about their own lives. The Urdu translation does not explicitly maintain this contrast, stating, "Everyone seems to have a clear idea of how other people should lead their lives." The absence of the second part of the contrast may result in a loss of the nuanced meaning present in the original.

12. He never realized that people are capable, at any time in their lives, of doing what they dream of. (pg 23)

وہ تسلیم کرتا ہے کہ انسان اپنی زندگیوں میں کبھی اس قابل نہیں ہوتے کہ اپنے خواب کی تکمیل کر سکیں۔ (pg 33)

The English sentence negates the realization ("never realized"), emphasizing the lack of awareness. The Urdu translation negates the capability, focusing on the incapacity to fulfill dreams. This change in negation structure may slightly affect the emphasis on awareness versus capability. English and Urdu have different linguistic structures and styles. Maintaining the lyrical quality, rhythm, and flow of Coelho's prose in Urdu required creative adaptations that have altered the impact of certain passages. The beauty of the language is not fully translatable.

Certain emotional nuances and tones that evoke specific feelings in English may not have direct counterparts in Urdu. The translator thus had to find alternative ways to convey the emotional depth of characters and situations, and in the process, some of the original emotional impact have been lost.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research article delving into the translation loss in the Urdu version of "The Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho reveals several nuances and challenges inherent in the process of literary translation. The translation loss identified in the Urdu version often manifests in various

forms. This includes adjustments in tone, such as the shift from "never realized" to "acknowledges," resulting in a potential loss of the original tone and level of awareness. Additionally, the omission of details like "none about his or her own" leads to a loss of specificity and emphasis, altering the intended contrast in the original text. Furthermore, instances of simplification, generalization, and the addition or expansion of information in the Urdu translation highlight the challenge of preserving the nuanced layers of the source text. Adjustments in sentence structure also contribute to variations in the flow and emphasis of the narrative. The interpretation of actions or outcomes in translation may differ, influencing how the intended meaning is conveyed to the target audience. In light of the discussed translation losses, the research underscores the intricate nature of interlingual translation, acknowledging that some degree of loss or alteration is inevitable. The findings emphasize the need for a balanced approach that considers linguistic, cultural, and contextual factors. The study also paves the way for future research on translation strategies to enhance cross-cultural understanding while ensuring accessibility for diverse audiences. Ultimately, it contributes to the ongoing dialogue on the challenges and opportunities within the field of literary translation.

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