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Ideological Intervention of (In)Visible Translator: A Close Reading of the English Translation of Faiz's Poem



Urooj Waheed	PhD in Literature, Department of English Air University Islamabad arooj.rehman@gmail.com
Khan Sofiya	Graduated from National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Islamabad, Pakistan khansofiyaukraine@gmail.com

Abstract: *This paper relies on Venuti's concept of invisibility and domestication of translation to substantiate the idea that even an invisible translator is ideologically present. This presence owes a great deal to the translator's attitude towards culture of source and target languages, and this makes both foreignization and domestication susceptible to meaning loss. By comparing the translation of Faiz's poem by Rahim and Kumar, the article looks at the differences between two selected translated works to maintain a stance that both visible and invisible translators are ideologically present. The political tone of the poem Bol (speak) is a suitable one to study this change in ideological perspectives in two selected translations, as even a slight change in linguistic items is liable to bring visible ideological shifts.*

Keywords: Translation, Domestication, Ideology, Poetry, Power, South Asian Poetry, Faiz Ahmed Faiz

Introduction

According to Liu, invisible translators are those who "never or seldom have the opportunity to communicate with their clients or end-users" (2013, p. 28). They only focus on the replacement of linguistic expression of one language with the other without making any change in the name of the translator's ideology or to maintain the taste of source language culture by using hybrid language. If one takes the invisibility of the author, as Venuti has suggested, as an effort on translators' part to make a work look like an original piece of target language then the cultural shades have to be sacrificed during the process of translation. The originality of the work is forgone for making it a comfortable read for the readers is not only a technical practice but also an ideological one as the superiority of the target language dictates the process of translation in terms of power relation

between the source and the target text. And in contemporary times, translation is as much a politically loaded activity as it is a technical one. Venuti promotes the intervention of translators through the technique of foreignization by saying that this technique discloses a work's "translated status as well as the translator's intervention" (Venuti, p.xv). The current article makes a stance that this intervention is also there in the form of domestication as a translator intervenes to strip original text of its cultural specificities to fit in the target literary culture. Moreover, this intervention is ideologically loaded, especially if the original text has explicit political tendencies.

"Translation is always shaped by a certain force, power and so on, and the choice of the works to be translated and goals of the translation activity are also set by certain forces" (Ahmed & Shaban, p.199). The translator's nationality and

political tendency, not explicitly stated though, first affect the selection of the standard text and then the process of translation itself. According to Fawcett ‘throughout the centuries, individuals and institutions applied their particular beliefs to the production of certain effects in translation’ (1998, p. 107). Behrouz Karoubi alludes to Venuti in his article *Ideology and Translation* while saying that the linguistics-oriented approaches do not fully address the ideological force as they focus on empirical data and ignore the social values that enter the process of translation and its reading. The relation between translations and values is so inevitable and, thus translation and interpretation are inseparable and they take place within the nexus of ideology and culture (Elliot and Boer, 2012). . This intrusiveness of cultural background endangers the neutrality of a translator for good. Vazquez (2008) alludes to Bassnett and Lefevere and challenges this neutrality by adding that translators are no longer neutral; rather they have become active mediators with strong ideological stances.

For Venuti the study of translation cannot ignore the aspect of ideology and the dominance of dominant/hegemonic ideology is given extra importance through his concept of domestication. According to Moqattash: “Venuti thinks that Anglo-American culture imposes its own ‘hegemonic’ power upon other minor cultures by domestication” (p. 3). In a very ingenious manner, he related the production of fluent text with the demand of **Bourgeoisie** class for less ambiguous and easy to read text and thus the concept of consumability appears as an ideology behind the production of fluent target text which is the result of domestication (Venuti, 1986). He gives weightage to the factor of publication and considers “ideology of consumability an external determinant of the translation” which is “imposed by editors and publishers partly in response to sales figures” (1986, p. 187). Domestication of original text is politically motivated and Venuti has discussed in detail about this relationship when dealing with domestication of translation in his various texts. The invisibly visible translator and his/her

possible political motifs are discussed in detail by Venuti in his article *Translation as cultural politics, regimes of domestication in English*. He relates domestication with imperialist appropriation: The aim of translation is to bring back a cultural other as the same, the recognizable, even the familiar; and this aim always risks a wholesale domestication of the foreign text, often in highly self-conscious projects, where translation serves an imperialist appropriation of foreign cultures for domestic agendas, cultural, economic, political. (p. 209)

The domestic agendas are again implicit in minute linguistic changes, be it elimination or addition of words. And whatever changes are made, according to Venuti, they function to utilize the foreign text in the perpetuation or revision of literary canons in the target-language culture, and by doing so maintain the dominance of poetic and literary expression in target language touchstone works (2008).

By quoting Dryden’s remarks related to Aeneid’s translation in English , he highlights the nationalist agenda hidden in the process of domestication of original: “I have endeavored to make *Virgil* speak such English,’ wrote Dryden, ‘as he would himself have spoken, if he had been born in England, and in this present age” (Dryden as quoted by Venuti , 1993, p. 211). National differences are rooted in ideological differences just like national identity is rooted in certain ideology. Venuti finds domestication a process of vanishing the differences of foreign texts to make it digestible for English readers and compatible with English culture. Venuti condemns this practice which is performed in the name of fluency. He refers to John Hookham Frere for introducing a type of fluency which maintains the spirit (message) of original text and also deals with the peculiarities of source text so that content of source text can be adjusted within the lexical and syntactic culture of target language. He finds (rather concludes his understanding of Frere) that this type of fluency facilitates both authorial presence as well as easy readability of target text. In the later part of the article, Venuti rejects Frere’s concept of fluency for its affinity with liberal humanistic approach which funds human nature self-determination

free from the effects of cultural and social surroundings. Fluency is not acceptable for Venuti as it is related to cultural and meaning loss on the part of the source text. The technique of foreignization was introduced by him to treat this loss, and he gives this approach an ethical vigor as it strives against the dominance of hegemonic ideology (Kadiu, 2019). The current article maintains the stance that even a text lacking fluency of target language and with the originality of the source text, often goes an extra mile in terms of ideological voice. This move of the translator betrays the translator's own ideological tendencies and contributes to meaning loss.

Text produced before and after the Partition in Urdu or Hindi is ideologically loaded and looks at despotic rule and its aftershocks in terms of social and economic deterioration. These strong ideological shades of revolutionary poetry certainly give difficult time to translators who themselves are not free from ideological affiliations/burdens. While no translator explicitly accepts that the translated work lacks the ideology of original content, it is the task of a translation critic to find such compromises at the level of minute linguistic choices. For this purpose, the article has selected Bol by Faiz and its translation by Shiv.K. Kumar (2013) and Riz Rahim (2008).

بول، زباں اب تک تیری ہے
تیرا ستواں جسم ہے تیرا
بول، کہ جان اب تک تیری ہے
دیکھ کہ آہن گر کی دکان میں
تند ہیں شعلے سرخ ہے آہن
کھلنے لگے قفلوں کے دھانے
پھیلا ہر اک زنجیر کا دامن
بول، یہ تھوڑا وقت بہت ہے
جسم و زباں کی موت سے پہلے
بول، کہ سچ زندہ ہے اب تک
بول، جو کچھ کہنا ہے کہہ لے

(Faiz Ahmed Faiz)

The matter of invisibility of the author is entwined with the foreignization and

domestication of the original text. But in the case of the selected translation, invisible translators maintain their ideological visibility through domestication. When **Bol** poem was written in 1941, it was considered a revolutionary work against British Rule. This poem has been translated by various writers. Two of these translators are Riz Rahim and Shiv K. Kumar.

Speak Up!

Speak up, for your lips are not sealed

and your words are still your own.

This upright body is yours-

speak, while your soul is still your own.

Look there, in the smithy,

its red oven, fierce flames,

the padlocks are already opening their mouths

and each fetter is skirting around.

Speak up now, for time is running out.

Before your body and mind fade away,

tell us, for truth is not yet dead.

Speak

whatever you have to say!

(Shiv.K.Kumar)

Speak Up !

Speak up!

You are free to speak.

Speak up, your voice is still yours;

this strong body is your own.

Speak up, your life's still yours.

Look in the blacksmith's,

flames are raging

iron is red-hot,

locks melting,

links of chains now wide open.

Speak up,

*this limited time is long enough, before you and
your voice die.*

Speak up, the truth is still alive.

Speak up,

say what you want to say.

(Riz Rahim)

Translations by both poets seem similar except for a few minor differences. These differences tell that wherever the translator deviates from literal translation either for fluency or for idiosyncratic understanding of the words, the poem starts losing its revolutionary tone.

This shows that even foreignization is not free from ideology or politically innocent. An urge of keeping intact the peculiarities of the source text by being faithful with its content and historical situation, can also facilitate translators' own political agenda. Riz Rahim's dealing with the part where impending imprisonment of the addressee is foreseen, is different from Kumar's interpretation. While Kumar's translation has managed to retain messages conveyed by the original poem, Rahim seems more (even more than the poet himself) inclined to maintain an optimistic tone of the poem. The reference to **opening of padlock and chains** foreshadows the inevitable imprisonment of the addressee. The lines following are a direct reference to despotic machinery of British rule:

dekh ki āhan-gar kī dukāñ meñ

tund haiñ sho.ale surḡh hai aahan

khulne lage qufloñ ke dahāne

phailā har ik zanḡr kā dāman

Rahim interprets it as impending freedom while Kumar interprets it as an approaching death. Rahim's padlocks are melting and thus foresees expected freedom which does not sit fit with the upcoming lines which deal with death: **locks melting/ links of chains now wide open**. This can be seen as Rahim's ideological move to maintain the hope a poet is capable of imparting at the time of British rule. But Shiv K. Kumar's apparent fluent translation shows more fidelity with the meaning by maintaining the

melancholy of the lines: **The padlocks are already opening their mouths and each fetter is skirting around**. So, there is a visible difference in both poets' interpretations, and Rahim's alleged deviation from the pessimism of this stanza to maintain the vigour of the political message is also quite apparent in his translation of these lines.

The line **"bol ye thoḡā vaqt bahut hai"** is one example of crucial differences between two selected translations. As the poem is written during revolutionary times and betrays the poet's conviction to overthrow the despotic rule, anyone who shares Faiz's then sentiment would probably understand it as the importance of the moment when one is given a chance to speak truth despite impending doom. Riz Rahim tries to retain this conviction of the poet and its faith in speaking truth despite its brevity **"this limited time is long enough"**. On the other hand, Shiv K. Kumar let go of this oxymoron of **"ye thoḡā vaqt bahut"** and goes for simple expression and rather passive expression **"for the time is running out"**. The warning issued by Kumar's translation lacks the encouraging tone which has been preserved by Rahim's version. If we go with Venuti's idea that fluency of the translation makes the translator's presence invisible by making a work seem like an original creation within the target language, Kumar's **"time is running out"** speaks for the invisibility of the translator. Although his effort can be seen to ease the reading process of the target language reader, at the same time this apparent selfless move can be ideologically loaded. As oxymoron is not novel to English poetry and both the English and Urdu poets have used this technique, its removal can not only be seen as an effort to maintain fluency in the translated text. So, the translator is left behind with the ideological motivation for replacing this full of conviction expression with a simple construction. The translator's nationality and religion might become a cause for ignoring the conviction in the revolutionary poem written by a Muslim poet before partition.

But if we focus only on the linguistic fluency, in case of Rahim's translation which keeps oxymoronic expression intact, the reader feels

that the translated version is not fluent, both in terms of sentence structure and for conveying contradictory ideas *“this limited time is long enough”*. This can be seen as a way of avoiding transparent translation which “erases the foreignness of the foreign and the translator’s inscription in the translated text and the translator’s inscription in the translated text” (Kadiu, 2020). If we take domestication as bringing the author to the reader to ease the reading process then this ease is achieved at the cost of an invisible author. Venuti proclaims in clear words that “the more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator, and, presumably, the more visible the writer or meaning of the foreign text” (Venuti, 1986, p. 207). The use of phrasal verbs *“running out”* make Kumar’s involvement as a translator invisible for choosing more native expression from host language, yet his act of letting go of more emphatic expression shows that a linguistically invisible translator has ideological presence to an extent that he strips the revolutionary poem of its conviction. Here the triviality of the tone is also important, which is induced through the use of the phrasal verb *“Running Out”*. Venuti finds this trivialization as one of various attributes of the power of translation. For him translation can “(re)constitute and cheapen foreign texts, to trivialize and exclude foreign cultures”(Venuti, 2008, p. 208). Kumar cheapens the text by eliminating oxymoronic expression as literary language is dependent for its existence on the contrast between literary and ordinary language. In the last line of the poem *“bol jo kuchh kahnā hai kah le”*, the free hand that the poet is giving to his character is interpreted differently by Rahim and Kumar. The choice of action verb *“want”* by Rahim and Kumar’s use of *“have to say”* reflects the attitude towards the main theme of the poem which is all about the idea of freedom and conviction of free soul. Where *“want”* reflects the possibility of the execution of the free will, use of *“have to”* adds the shades of compulsion, and once again Kumar replaces conviction of free soul with compliance of a submissive person who is compelled to speak.

Conclusion and suggestion for future research

This paper agrees with Venuti that Domestication strips the foreign work of its cultural identity and makes Translator invisible by increasing the fluency to an extent that the process of translation has a diminishing effect; however, this invisible translator has ideological presence and his/her intervention with the original text is often politically loaded. By using two different translations of Bol poem by Faiz, the paper has tried to do a micro-level analysis of apparently minute differences between two versions of translation. It has been observed that the poem which is more fluent for a native English reader, is more away from the message of the poem which its Urdu version conveys. But it is not only domestication which is politically motivated but also foreignization as Rahim also deviates from original meaning to pursue his own ideological understanding. This micro level study clarifies that translation in current age can both be manipulative and political. From the selection to publication, the whole process of translation is far from being innocent.

The ones who are interested in conducting research about the interplay of translation and ideology, can go for those original texts which maintain an explicit political stance. The translation of such texts can be studied to investigate the criteria for the selection of work in contemporary times. The book *“Beloved City: Writings on Lahore”* can also be studied to study the politics behind the selection of the text for translation. As English is the dominant language in the west and the national language of the former colonizing country England, the selected works are those which might soothe the sensibilities of those who think that India should still be united under British rule. From Monto’s Toba Tek Singh (a work highlighting brutal aftermath of partition) to Habib Jalib (a poet who highlights restlessness in and failure of state which has come into existence as the result of partition) , the editor has ignored pro-partition sentiments. Somehow the selection of these works for translation facilitates writers’ need for recognition which can possibly be secured by denouncing nationalist agenda which caused

partition and by pampering the ideology of Eastern Leftists who are fluent in English and are against any such political decision which entertains religious and cultural differences.

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