

Revisiting (In)visibility: A Reflexive Study of Two English Translations of Iqbal’s “Shikwa” and “Jawab-i-Shikwa”

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Abstract

This research is a comparative analysis of two translated versions of Iqbal's Urdu poems: "Shikwa" and "Jawab-i-Shikwa" to determine the actual position of the two translators in the light of the concepts theorized by Venuti (2008). Venuti mainly focused on the visibility and invisibility of the translator. These theoretical aspects, conjoined with certain peripheral scholastic ideas, have been applied on both translated versions. Through the strategies of (in)visibility, the research also investigates how the boundaries between foreignization and domestication have been blurred, and how the ideologies are embedded in the translation process. The result displays a revised version of (in)visibility.

Keywords: domestication, foreignization, ideology, invisibility, translation/translator(s), visibility

Introduction

The field of translation was revolutionized with the publication of Lawrence Venuti's article "The Translator's Invisibility" (1986) followed by his book of the same title in 1995. These sources initiated an unending debate over the issues of (in)visibility, domestication and foreignization (Lapiedra & MacDonald, 2017), and the associated politics involved in translating and publishing. Both sources are related to the issue of invisibility. According to this concept, a translator succeeds in his task when he becomes an invisible figure and his work appears to be transparent and original (Venuti, 2008, p. 1).

This conception of originality has been criticized by many critics who declare it as constructed originality (Sheriff, 2008, p. 27). It is an ideological practice (Hatim & Mason, 1997, p. 146) that is propagated through multiple sources. In this regard, Sheriff (2008) points out, "if a certain review studies any part of the translations, it becomes a translation study, for which the periodicals are commissioned which ensures the acceptance of a translated work". Venuti's (2008) book is focused on invisibility that can be achieved through fluency and originality (p. 1). Fluency can be practiced through many linguistic and stylistic strategies (see Theoretical framework for details).

The concept of visibility, attached with foreignization, has been advocated by Venuti. Through foreignization, the translator deliberately disturbs the genre and linguistic "expectations of the target culture" (Kadiu, 2019, p. 24). Moqattash (2017) also endorses this viewpoint through his critique of the foreignization by the translator. Venuti has raised a voice of resistance against Anglo-American hegemonic power through domestication, which is in itself a strategy to eliminate the cultural values of a source text from the translated text (p. 4). In this regard, Coldiron (2018) is a key figure who expounded the relevance of Venuti's work beyond the boundaries of time and clime. To explain his ideas, Nascimento & Brisolara (n.d.) offered a relationship among invisibility, faithfulness, loyalty, and fidelity.

Translation, according to Sheriff (2008), is a work of collaboration (p. 28). The latter requires a set of ethical standards which may differ for each translator – visible or invisible, depending on what the translator strives to achieve, that is, foreignization or domestication. The preceding argument is supported by Pym (n.d.) who states that [Venuti's] translation theory is to "know what to look for". Most of the ideas given by Venuti or his critics are related to visibility or invisibility, but we rarely find any work taking the stance that the position of a translator can be visible and invisible at the same time within the same translated text. Due to the blurring of the distinguishing line between visibility and invisibility, the translators, ironically, may appear "invisibly visible" or "visibly invisible".

The present research focuses on the analysis of selected couplets from two different English translations of Iqbal's poems: *Shikwa and Jawab-i-Shikwa* by Khushwant Singh (1990) and Muhammad Ashraf Arif (2007). It aims to come at a deeper understanding of the translation process as well as how the strategies chosen by the translator lead to his/her (in)visibility.

The selected works were translated into English as *The Complaint* and *The Answer* by Arif (2007) and *Compliant and Answer* by Singh (1990). The former was published by a Pakistani publisher whereas the latter was published by Oxford University Press. The poems, complaining and presenting the pathetic case of Muslims before Allah, were warmly acclaimed and celebrated by the Muslims of the subcontinent in the times of colonialism "when the atrocities of the European countries had heightened to the peak" (Arif, 2007, p. 7). Allama Iqbal was concerned

to see the Muslims aping the West (Ansari & Abbas, 2018, p. 127) and losing their identity. He used his poetry to awaken them about their identity loss. Due to his resistive ideology, Iqbal could not enter the sphere of *world literature*. Certain political agendas of the West worked behind it, and it was [surely] colonialism, which created cultural arrogance among European critics and a corresponding sense of inferiority among the colonized (Pizer, 2000, p. 217). El-Haj Ahmed and Shabana (2017) highlighted the role of ideology in translation. They write “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” (p. 199). These forces can be the dominant worldviews of a particular time, the translators’ political, historical, and cultural ideologies, as well as the translators own understanding of particular phenomenon.

The analysis aims to explore how both translators cross (and at times blur) the boundaries of domestication and foreignization. It also explores how the translators move between the position of visibility and invisibility, investigating how the prevailing ideologies determine the utilization of words as well. In addition, this research sheds light on the politics of translation and reiterates the Iqbal’s ideology to the Eastern and Western literary circles.

Theoretical Framework

Translation, as an activity, is fraught with many complications that often remain unnoticed. The position of the translator has been one of the controversial issues in the field of *traductology* since 1986 when Venuti published “The Translator’s Invisibility” (Lapiedra & MacDonald, 2017, p. 441). He perpetuated the discussion on the same issue in his book *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation* (2008). In(visibility) refers to the position, situation and activity of a translator in the Anglo-American culture (Venuti, 2008, p. 1). According to his ideas, there are many factors like fluency (p. 1), naturalization (p. 16), and politics of publication that determine the position of a text and the author.

Fluency ensures the acceptance of a work by “most publishers, reviewers and readers” (p. 1), so the reviewers see through the apparent aesthetics, neglecting the other related issues (p. 2). Venuti has reproduced many strategies propagated by the exponents of *invisibility* and *domestication*. They can be summarized as: First, transparency is achieved through *fluent translation* easily readable by adhering to the current usage of vocabulary (p. 1) by avoiding the use of archaic expressions (p. 4). Secondly, translation should maintain the continuity of sentences (p. 1), by avoiding the use of idiomatic expressions (p. 4). Thirdly, the translation should fix a semantic precision (p. 1) by using a rhythmic definition (p. 5). These strategies entail *domestication* that minimizes the foreignness of the target text, and eclipses the personality of the translator to the extent of invisibility (Venuti, 2008, p. 6; Venuti, 1986, p. 181). In this regard, the readers in Europe and the USA, accustomed to fluent translations and bound in unified consciousness (Venuti, 1986, p. 187), recognize their own cultural values within the source text (Venuti, 2008, p. 12). Cohn cited by Venuti (2008) exposes the strategy of Anglo-centrism through homogeneity that is further gained through fluency that could transform all literature into simple prose. He also describes the strategy of *functional equivalence* introduced by Nida in 1964. This strategy also promotes the cultural assimilation of foreign and host cultures through “naturalness of expression” (p. 16). This process provides more vigor to the idea of *domestication*. It is meant for replacing the words and expressions from the source text, which are not recognizable by the readers of translated text.

The writer is more visible when the translator is invisible (p. 1) and the translator is visible when the author is invisible. The visibility of a translator is relevant to the concept of foreignization presented by Venuti in antagonism to domestication. It resists against the dominance of the target-language [English] (p. 16) and cultural strategies to preserve the foreign linguistic and cultural values. Foreignization avoids the strategies of fluency (discussed above). These strategies may use the *slangs, jargons, pidgins* (p. 4) and the archaic vocabulary, although it has not been described by Venuti directly. Kadiu (2019) has elaborated these unexplained strategies by using the term *discontinuities* which can be created by using *marginal and minority forms* “which may include the close adherence to the source text structure and syntax” (p. 24). [Kadiu] also brings in the term *abusive fidelity* given by Philips Lewis according to which “a translator should not adopt the norms of the target culture but try to follow the source text closely” (p. 24).

Analysis

Translation is a nuanced activity imbued with many issues that are often unnoticed by the translators (Venuti, 1986, p. 179). Similarly, in the case of the translations under study, both the translators seem to be constantly vacillating between the positions of visibility and invisibility. Venuti (1993) has asserted that the related terms *foreignization* and *domestication* depend upon the subjectivity or objectivity of the readers and the translators (p. 217). Fluency that resembles a prose style (Venuti, 2008) is prevalent in the translation of Singh (1990) whereas Arif’s (2007) translation shows loyalty to the source text because in Moqattash’s (2017) conception it preserves the values of the source language and exposes the readers to the indigenous Muslim cultural spaces (p. 2). For instance, the first four lines of the first sestet of the *Complaint* disclose the standing of the translator as visible or invisible on the basis of his/her translations:

کیوں زیاں کار بنوں، سود فراموش رہوں؟

Kiyun ziyaan kar banoo 'n, sood faramosh rahoo 'n?

فکر فردا نہ کروں، محو غم دوش رہوں

Fikr-e-farda na karoo 'n, mehv-e-gham-e-dosh rahoo 'n

نالے بلبِل کے سنوں اور ہمہ تن گوش

Naalay bul 'bul k sunoo 'n, aur hama tan gosh rahoo 'n

ہمنوا! میں بھی کوئی گل ہوں کہ خاموش رہوں؟

Ham 'nawa! Main bi koi gul hoo 'n k khaamosh rahoo 'n?

(Arif, 2007, p. 13; Singh, 1990, p. 28)

English Translation

Why perform a useless work/And be thoughtless of the gain?

Why not think of future plans?/Why bemoan the past in vain?

I am not a bud of rose/Silent with the nightingale.

Why should I remain engaged/Listening keenly to its wail? (Arif, 2007, p. 12)

Why must I forever lose, forever forgo profit that is my due?

Sunk in the gloom of evening past, no plans for the morrow pursue.
 Why must I all attentive be to the nightingale's lament,
 Friend! Am I as dumb as a flower? Must I remain silent? (Singh, 1990, p. 28)

In the translation by Arif (2007), we see that he is faithful to the original version of the text in terms of subject. He has employed *paratextual* technique which contextualizes, explains, and primes (Pellatt, 2013, p. 3) to bring the text to the level of interpretation which is an attempt to fix a particular meaning by taking into account the source text and translation culture (Venuti, 1993, p. 158). It is to showcase the Muslim religious values to the outer world, to challenge the Western hegemonies, and to promote the visibility of the translator. So, a foreignized text presents possibilities of resistance through challenging the canonical and dominant translation methods (Lapeidra & MacDonald, 2017, p. 441). In addition, there is no prose like fluency that is near to the heart of the West. The sentences are discontinuous adhering to the source text in regard of structure and syntax pattern. For example, in the first two lines, the translator is translating the message with appropriation. Despite the fluency, the other strategies like semantic precision (Venuti, 2008, p. 4) are absent. Singh's (1990) translation of the same lines reflects how the translator used comparatively easier (prose like fluency) diction to translate the lines. He used alternative words too. For instance, for the phrase (*mehv-e-gham-e-dosh*, محو غم دوش) Singh (1990) used the phrase: "sunk in the gloom of evening past" (p. 28). On the contrary, Arif (2007) used the phrase "bemoan the past in vain" (p. 12). The phrase with the words "gloom" and "evening" stereotype the Muslims as others. The activity of rewriting is affected by the dominant western culture, as a result of which *domestication* is produced which bestows the status of a conqueror to the West (Asghar, 2015). It produces a discursive originality, as a result of which the translator's spirit gets away from the ideologically constructed text (Delabastita, 2010, p. 126). The translation with the additional word "vain" describes the true philosophy of Iqbal – the concept of self-recognition. In the second couplet Arif (2007) eliminates the meaning of the Urdu word (*ham 'nawa!*, ہمنوا!) whereas Singh (1990) adds the word "Friend" (p. 28). By using the additional words "bud of" to the meaning of "rose" for the Urdu word (*gul*, گل), Arif (2007) seems to be striving for legitimizing his own authority and authorial position (Pym, 2011). Singh (1990), however, equalizes the same vocabulary item with the word "flower".

The strategies of *domestication* and *foreignization* seem to work *in tandem*. The following instances can be observed to prove this assumption:

آ گیا عین لڑائی میں اگر وقت نماز
Aa gaya ain larhaai main ag'er waqt-e-namaaz
 قبلہ رو ہو کے زمیں بوس ہوئی قوم حجاز
Qibla roo ho k zamee'n bos hooi qaum-e-Hijaaz
 (Arif, 2007, p. 33; Singh, 1990, p. 38)

English Translation

Even in the thick of fight,/The Muslims didn't fail in pray.
 Facing Ka'ba's Mosque, they stood/And prostrated in array. (Arif, 2007, p. 32)
 In the midst of raging battle if the time came to pray,

Hejazis turned to Mecca, kissed the earth and ceased from fray. (Singh, 1990, p. 38)

Singh (1990) translated the line with great fluency. To achieve the maximum level of fluency, he mistranslated the Urdu phrase (*zamee'n bos*, زمیں بوس). Arif (2007) equalizes it to prostration (p. 32) meaning humility before Allah or submission to Allah, but Singh (1990) has brought the semantic layers to the level of ambiguity through the idiomatic expression “kissed the earth” (p. 38). Earth is synonymous to *loam* or *dirt* (Spooner, 2012, p. 163). If it is used in this sense, then the phrase means defeat or humiliation that has been associated with prayer by Singh. According to Sheriff (2008, p. 27) and Asghar (2015), originality is a discursive construction to *domesticate* the text. This negative expression definitely suits the ideology of the western readers. He might have utilized the word “ground” instead of “earth” that could give the actual meanings. Instead he violates the strategy of avoiding idiomatic adaptations to diminish the status of the Muslim. In the same couplet, the Urdu phrase (*Qibla roo*, قبلہ رو) has been translated disparately by both, out of which “Ka’ba’s Mosque” (Arif, 2007, p. 32) is better rendering than “Mecca” (Singh, 1990, p. 38). The use of *Mecca* also facilitates the common understanding of the Western readers. In the same testet, another couplet is also very remarkable:

بندہ و صاحب و محتاج و غنی ایک ہوئے

Banda-o-saahib-o-mohtaaq-o-ghanni aik huay

تیری سرکار میں پہنچے تو سبھی ایک ہوئے

Teri Sarkaar main pohinchay to sabhi aik huay

(Arif, 2007, p. 33; Singh, 1990, p. 38)

English Translation

The servant and his boss as well;/The rich and pauper high and low;

All of them were equal, when/In Thy court they stood in a row. (Arif, 2007, p. 32)

Between serf and lord, needy and rich, difference there was none.

When they appeared in Your court, they came as equals and one. (Singh, 1990, p. 38)

This couplet also displays the prose type fluency with the rhyming words “none” and “one” (Singh, 1990, p. 38). On the contrary, Arif’s (2007) translation is showing a discontinuity at the end of the third line and in the beginning of the fourth line. This strategy, according to Venuti (2008), produces the sense of *foreignization* and the role of the translator is expanded to visibility. Another strategy of visibility, that is, the use of archaic words like “Thy” for “Allah” has been used in opposition to the current (modern) word “Your” (Singh, 1990, p. 38) where the first promotes *foreignization* and the second enhances the impact of *domestication*. In addition, the word “serf” and “lord” (p. 38) for Urdu words (*Banda*, بندہ) and (*saahib*, صاحب) seem inappropriate. This inappropriateness comes in the domains of Bassnett’s ideas of “approximately similar” and “as closely as possible” (Nascimento & Brisolar, n.d., p. 11). Arif (2007) used the additional phrase “high and low” to enhance the interpretive values. This impact of additional phrases has already been described as *paratext*. Venuti (1986) has mentioned them as *explicative* or *additive* practices (p. 183).

Functional equivalences also magnify the quality of fluency. It does not only magnify the fluency at the syntactic level but it also works at the ideological levels. The Urdu word (*hoor*, حور) in the following couplet is an example:

قہر تو یہ ہے کہ کافر کو ملے حور و قصور

Qe'her to yeh hay k kaaafir ko milay hoor-o-qasoor

اور ہے چارے مسلمان کو فقط وعدہ حور

Aur bay chaaray Musalmaa'n ko faqat wa'da-e-hoor

(Arif, 2007, p. 43; Singh, 1990, p. 43)

English Translation

The misery is that pagans have/Mansions and the Hoors today.

Upon the word of life to come,/A Muslim has to wait and pray. (Arif, 2007, p. 42)

What injustice! Here and now are *houris* and palaces to infidels given;

While the poor Muslim is promised *houris* only after he goes to heaven. (Singh, 1990, p. 43)

Singh (1990) has translated this couplet, keeping special attention to the syntactic flow. He has used the word “*houris*” (p. 43) which is causing a semantic ambiguity. The word (*Hoor*, حور) in the first line does not refer to “an extremely beautiful young woman... exists in Paradise as a divine companion for those believers who have died” (Dictionary: vocabulary.com). So, this is not the suitable equivalence in the given context. The word “*Hoor*” utilized by Arif (2007, p. 42) is purely a religious terminology. In the second line where the word is used in a religious context, Singh (1990) puts the same word *houris*, once again creating ambiguity through discursive construction. A web source defines this lexical item as “[in] European cultures... a *houri* is simply a ‘voluptuous woman’” (Dictionary: vocabulary.com). As a *functional equivalent* theorized by Nida (Venuti, 2008) and Bassnett’s ideas of “approximately similar” and “as closely as possible” (Nascimento & Brisolara, n.d., p. 11), this expression brings the western reader to the comfort zone of ideological understanding. In another couplet: “*Hum to jeetay hain k duniya main Tera naam rahay/ kahin mumkin hay k saaqi na rahay, jaam rahay?*” (Arif, 2007, p. 47; Singh, 1990, p. 47), Arif has translated the word (*saqi*, ساقی) as “bearer” (2007, p. 46) contrary to Singh’s transliteration as “*saqi*” (1990, p. 47). At this point, Singh could have given an interpretative note or *paratext* but he has not done so. Here, the translator seems invisible. Following the same pattern, in another couplet, Singh (1990) and Arif (2007) translated the Urdu phrase (*daana-e-ramooz-kum*, دانائے رموز کم) as “quantity and quality” (p. 64) and “taste and quality” (p. 82) respectively. Both translators avoided the idiomatic expressions in response to the Arabic expression. Both translators also avoided idiomatic ambiguity by translating another idiomatic expression (*naara-e-mastaana*, نعرہء مستانہ) as “moans of inward pains” (Arif, 2007, p. 84) and “cry of lament” (Singh, 2007, p. 65). Therefore, they became invisible, because the techniques utilized are related to the strategies of fluency. There is no doubt that the expressions are inappropriate but they have been incorporated to make the target-language more comprehensible by the readers.

Discontinuity can be produced through the use of marginal and minority forms (Kadiu, 2019, p. 24, Corbett, 2001, p. 159) which are borrowed from minority languages and are substandard too. There are many examples of such words in Arif’s (2007) translation whereas Singh (1990) avoids them. In this regard, we provide the following example:

ہم تو مانل بہ کرم ہیں، کوئی سائل ہی نہیں
Hum to maa'el baa karam hain koi saa'el hi nahi'n
 راہ دکھلائیں کسے؟ رہرو منزل ہی نہیں
Raah dikhlai 'en kisay? Raah 'r-oe-manzil hi nahin
 کوئی قابل ہو تو ہم شان کئی دیتے ہیں
Koi qaabil ho to hum shan ka'ee daitay hain
 ڈھونڈنے والوں کو دنیا بھی نئی دیتے ہیں
Dhoondhnaa waalo 'n ko duniya bi na'ee daitay hain
 (Arif, 2007, p. 87; Singh, 1990, p. 66)

English Translation

We are predisposed to grant;/But no man is mendicant.
 And to whom we guide the way?/There is no one itinerant.
 Someone who is fit for that, He is granted kingly show.
 Those who seek, they find at last;/A new world on them we bestow. (Arif, 2007, p. 86)
 Limitless is Our bounty, but none for it will pray.
 There's no one the seeker's path; to whom do We point the way?
 If there were one deserving, We'd raise him to regal splendor,
 To those who seek, we would unveil a new world of wonder. (Singh, 1990, p. 66)

In the first couplet, Arif (2007) has used marginal word forms which are also archaic and unfamiliar to the contemporary readers. In Arif's (2007) translation, the word "mendicant" for (*saa'el*, سائل) or "beggar" and "itinerant" for (رہرو منزل) or "traveler" fulfill the aim of discontinuity skillfully. They are also the best semantic choices which are equivalent to the source lexical items. The latter couplet has been translated in good fluency through good choice of syntactic items by both translators.

Conclusion

Both translated versions claim foreignization and domestication simultaneously. However, the extent of domestication and foreignization can be fully grasped if ideological, cultural, social and religious aspects are made a part of theoretical framework. Singh's sentence structure is plainer than that of Arif but it does not mean that Arif's translation is altogether away from natural flow. Singh has not used the technique of additives or *paratexts* because domesticated texts require semantic precision. His translation looks original and objective but Arif's translation exposes the subjective role of the translator when he adds or eliminates certain lexical items. During the whole process, he remains faithful to the cultural and religious message. Functional equivalences are the prerogative of the domesticized text but this is also quite observable in Arif's translation. So at this level, both translators are invisible. Domestication avoids the use of complex and prolonged idiomatic expressions but at certain situations Singh uses them, and wherever he uses the idiomatic expressions, he presents some sort of discursive and disgraced picture of the Muslim. It is also to be noted that no single strategy can declare a text's belongingness, or determine the translator's position. We must

have to see the proportional tendency, and proclaim to what extent the translator is visible or invisible, or the text is domesticized or foreignized. In the light of this assumption, Singh is more invisible than Arif, and the translation of Arif is more foreignized than that of Singh.

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