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Translating Shams Faqir: A Study in Lexical Translation

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Abstract

Translation has long been recognised as a difficult process at linguistic, paralinguistic and extra-linguistic levels. The process of translation is always characterised by some kind of translation adaptation mechanisms. This paper presents some of the issues in translation which are faced at the lexical level or what can be described as issues in lexical translation. This paper illustrates these issues with reference to the translation of an eminent Kashmiri Sufi Poet Shamas Faqir whose poetry provides rich insights about the semantics, pragmatics and lexical structure of Kashmiri language.

Key Words: Translation, Vocatives, Syntagm, Synonymy, Lexical translation, Linguistic Relativity

Introduction_ Section A: Translation process has been discussed by a number of scholars and has been discussed from different perspectives. Catford (1965) viewed translation in terms of grammatical equivalence while others focused on communicative or functional equivalence (Nida & Waard (1986)). Nida (2001) focused on the message rather than the form and view translation dynamically, arguing that it is a communicative process. Nida & Waard (1986) discuss dynamic and functional equivalence that focuses on dynamic equivalence between source and target languages. Dickens, Hervey and Higgins (2002) advocate the importance of purpose in translation. They emphasize the importance of understanding and assessing the salient features of the source text. The semantic properties of lexical items, their syntagmatic and paradigmatic positioning in the lexical structure of language as well as their semantic fields are some of the deciding factors in translation.

Translation process involves transfer of meaning and has to be carried at different linguistic and non-linguistic levels and a translator faces challenges at different levels of translation. Languages are different at the lexical level and the difference between lexical structure of two languages can result in many difficulties in translation.

The principal types of lexical correspondences between two languages are as follows:

- 1) Complete correspondences;
- 2) Partial correspondences;
- 3) The absence of correspondences

Each language has its own typical rules of combinability. A language has generally established traditional combinations which do not concur with corresponding ones in another language. A number of researchers have identified problems associated with the use of synonyms in translation. Bell (1991) argues that “synonymy” is problematic because of its overlapping nature and its underlying assumption that synonyms may be used interchangeably in any context (Bell, 1991, pp. 91-92). The problem of finding equivalence at word level in translation is noted by Catford (1965), Saraireh (2001) and Baker (1992) among others. Catford (1965) recognises that a gap can exist between languages at lexical level and causes problems in translation. He notes that sometimes a source language item may have “nil” equivalence in the target language and

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that a source language item may also have more than one target language equivalent in the course of one text. He suggests looking at the context in order to solve this problem (Catford, 1965, pp. 29-30). Collocations are important in translation because they place restrictions on how words can be placed together and add special meaning to groups of words. A number of writers like Catford (1965), Baker (1992) and Bahumaid (2006) have dealt with collocations and their implications on translation. Baker (1992) also focuses on a number of important issues such as collocation range which relates to the number of collocates for a term which can differ between languages. The various types of meanings attached to lexical items must be taken into consideration when translating between languages if accuracy is to be achieved. Baker (1992) recognized the semantic complexity constituting a problem in translation and rightly remarks that sometimes it is not possible to realize how semantically complex a lexical item is until one has to translate it (Baker, 1992, pp. 22). Baker (1992) identifies the differences in meanings attached to words as a cause of translation problems at word level when the source and target languages make different distinctions in meanings. Catford (1965) discusses linguistic untranslatability stemming from polysemy. A translator is engaged in the act of “creative transposition” and has to take into consideration a number of factors before translation.

The problems of translation at the lexical level result due to many factors including the lexical differences between languages. Lexical differences are the differences in the ways in which languages seem to classify the world, what concepts they choose to express by single words, and which they choose not to lexicalize. Other problems arise because different languages use different structures for the same purpose, and the same structure for different purposes.

These include occurrence of lexical holes which are the examples where one language has to use a phrase to express what another language expresses in a single word. Linguistic relativity is important in determining lexical structure of languages and is directly related with difficulties involved in lexical translation.

Introduction_ Section B : Shamas Faqir (AD 1839- 1916) is a well-known and popular Sufi poet of the nineteenth century. Shams Faqir's real name was Muhammad Sidiq Bhat and he was born in the spring of 1839. Shams Faqir died in 1916 (there is some confusion about this date). Shamas Faqir absorbed and accumulated the influence of a number of great spiritual masters of his time and his poetry speaks volumes of that spiritual experience. About 131 songs of this great mystic poet have been published till date. The spiritual poetry of Shamas provides very insightful ideas about the unique features of Kashmiri language and literature. This poetry can serve as a subject of innovative research field for Kashmiri linguistic and literary studies. The language used in Shamas Faqir’s poetry presents immense possibilities of linguistic research and is a rich subject for the discipline of translation, stylistics and historical linguistics.

Aims, Objectives and Methodology: The main aim of this paper is to present an introduction to the different problems which one encounters in translating Shamas Faqir’s poetry into English language. The methodology adapted in this paper is based on descriptive principles of linguistics and the scope of this paper has been restricted to the lexical. This paper does not claim a holistic analysis and intends to be a preliminary analysis of the translation of poetry of Shamas. This study can open many other areas of research about translation of Kashmiri poetry into English and many other languages.

Analysis:

Translation Issues at the Lexical Level due to Morphological Differences between Languages:

The Analysis in this paper starts where translation involves mapping between morphological and lexical level i.e. translation involves a mapping between morphological and lexical level. Consider the following example:

| | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| kha:bas manzay kha:b dyoushum | खाबस मंज़य खाब डयूछुम |
| kha:bas kus taebe:r kara:y | खाबस कुस तोबीर करे |

(“Kuliyaat Shamas Faqir”, Aziz 279)

I dreamed a dream within the deeps of another dream
Who shall comprehend the meaning of this dream?

Or

A dream dreamt into the arms of another dream
Who shall land me in the heart of this dream?

The first issue in translating lexical items can be clearly seen in the above example where the suffix “-ay” and “-a:y” in the words “manzay” and “kara:y” are added for conveying some connotative meaning in otherwise neutral words “manz” and “kari”. The above words using these suffixes have connotative meanings which are totally untranslatable as the translation fails to capture the difference between the words “manz” and “manzay” and “kari” and “kara:y” which are not synonymous but they are translated similarly hence giving rise to untranslatability of some of the lexical items in the poetry of Shamas. Although translation happens but the effect is lost due to untranslatability of the suffixes in the above example.

This can be related to the notion of synonyms causing untranslatability but here the synonyms are different due to the formal differences with emphatic suffixes which are not present in English language leading to the translation loss from Kashmiri to English. Thus synonymy, morphological structure and the pragmatic notion of empathy combine together to give rise to untranslatability or the loss in the translation.

Another issue that surrounds the translation of Shamas Faqir’s poetry at the lexical level is the untranslatability of some of the suffixes that carry grammatical meaning. Let us discuss this example:

| | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| zaero bum tami sha:yi gouv gumay | ज़ेरु बम तमि शायि गौव गुमय |
| yati su chumay tati su chumay | यति सु छुमय तति सु छुमय |

(“Kuliyaat Shamas Faqir”, Aziz 220)

The music and melody vanished at that place
He is here; He is there. (He is omnipresent)

The above verse uses the suffix “-ay” in word “chumay” (is) which is a pronominal suffix showing the intimacy between the first and third person which cannot be translated into English as English lacks morphological mechanisms, which in this case is a system of well developed pronominal suffixes to show the relationship of empathy between the speaker and the referent. Hence the translation is simple in English leading to loss of the real meaning in the original which is more expressive and melodious than its translation in English.

Translation Issues at the Lexical Level due to Different Case Forms in Languages:

Every language is characterized by its own case system and expression of different kinds of meanings is interlinked with different usage or the actual usage of the different case forms of a word. One of the style features that is consistently found in Shamas Faqirs verses is the repetition of a word with slight variation and use of different case forms of a lexical item. This style feature accounts for intensity of the poet as well as acts as a mnemonic device that enhances the understanding as well as memorizing of the verses of Shamas Faqir. Consider the following examples:

adl mouy chovum da:mI da:may अदे मोय चोवुम दामे दामय
az dramay tamna अज़ दरामय तमना

(“Kuliyaat Shamas Faqir”, Aziz 216)

Then I drank wine sip by sip

Today my wish was fulfilled

The repeated item in the above verse is “*da:m*”(sip) whose variant forms “*da:mI*”(sip) and “*da:may*”(sip) has been used in the above verse showing the manner of the act.

siyaehi manz chu aabi haya:t सियोही मंज़ छु आबि हयात
siyah nuras dapa:n nurl za:t सियाह नूरस दपान नूरि ज़ात

(“Kuliyaat Shamas Faqir”, Aziz 275)

The darkness contains the life giving waters

The black divine light is called the divine light of God

The above lines contain the use of the word form “*siyahi*” and the base form “*siyah*” of the base word “*siyah*”(black). Besides, the same verse contains the word forms “*nuras*” and “*nurl*” of the root word “*nu:r*”(divine light). However, the translation of these verses has to be carried out without these variant forms as English lacks such case forms of the root words and hence the effect achieved in the original verse cannot be carried to its translation in English. Thus non-availability of many variant case forms of the root word presents an issue in the lexical translation in the verses of Shamas contributing to the overall issues in lexical translation.

Translation Issues at the Lexical Level due to Synonymy: Use of synonyms is a very common practice in Kashmiri poetry and same is true for the verses of Shamas. Use of synonyms becomes very expressive in Shamas as synonymy fills the requirements of the poet at both formal and functional levels.

kru:th pyoum aeshqun manzilou करूठ पयौम अशकुन मंज़िलो
mouklun chu dushva:r mushkilou मोकलुन छु दुखवार मुशकिलो

(“Kuliyaat Shamas Faqir”, Aziz 167)

The destination of love was a tough one for me

To be free is far from possible.

The above verses conceptually express the mystic struggle of a mystic for reaching his beloved. In order to portray the difficulties, in order to show the intensity or extent of difficulty; synonymy has been used as a stylistic device. The used synonyms are “*dushva:r*” and “*mushkil*” both of which mean “*difficult*”. Repeating both synonyms one after another; the poet successfully renders meaning of “impossible” or “far from possible”. However, its translation has to be simple and the effect achieved with the repetition of synonyms in Kashmiri is lost in translation. Another example is

mekhanI andar gouvu:m nida *मेखाने अनदर गौवुम निदा*
changou:-raba:b sa:zou:-nava *चंगौ रबाब साजो नवा*
 (“Kuliyaat Shamas Faqir”, Aziz 146)

I was called from inside of the winehouse
 chang and rabaab; music and melody.

The above verse uses the similar words “chang” and “raba:b” which are both musical instruments and also the repetition of similar words “sa:z” and “nava” which mean music and melody. Here the repetition of both music and melody (“sa:z” and “nava”) and the musical instruments (“chang” and “raba:b”) intensify the appeal of the call from the winehouse. Use of synonymy and similar words enhance the meaning potential of mystic expression in Shamas and in a way increase readability and comprehensibility of these poems. However, translation of these verses is characterized by loss of meaning. English does not utilize the synonyms in an identical manner leading to loss of meaning and effectiveness in the verses of Shamas. The collocational patterns of synonyms and syntagms composed of synonyms are different in Kashmiri and English which leads to loss in translation at the lexical level.

Translation Issues at the Lexical Level due to Vocatives and Vacuous Syllables: The use of vocatives in a language is associated with a number of linguistic, semantic, pragmatic and sociolinguistic factors. The use of vocatives as well as vacuous syllables are unique to language and are used as per the overall semantic structure of a given language. One of the important style features in the poetry of Shamas Faqir is the use of vocative expressions and use of vacuous syllables. The use of vocative expressions adds a conversational style to these poems and acts as a binding tag between the speaker and the listener/reader. Vocative Words like *lati* (female friend), *baeli* (young girl), *vyesi* (female friend) etc are very common in the poems of Shamas Faqir and add many formal and functional dimensions to his poetry as indicated in the below mentioned examples:

kharI thouvnum ma:r matI *खारे थोवनम मारे मती*
myou:n van tasay lati yee *मयौन वन तसय लतीये*
 (“Kuliyaat Shamas Faqir”, Aziz 191)

A heart ache is what that lovable man gifted me
 Oh Lati! Tell him of my dismal state.

The above verse uses the vocative expression “*lati yee*” (Oh Lati! or Oh female friend!) as a stylistic device which helps in establishing the conversational style of these poems besides establishing a bond with the audience of these verses. However, its translation as Oh Lati essentially leads to the loss in translation as it fails to convince the target audience in an identical manner to the original text. Thus a loss in translation occurs due to different vocative system of English and Kashmiri.

myou:n vantasay baeliyae *मयौन वनतसोय बौलये*
su lall antane saeliyae *सु लाले अनतनि सौलये*
 (“Kuliyaat Shamas Faqir”, Aziz 281)

Oh maiden! Tell him of my dismal state
 Invite that diamond (darling) for my sake

Similarly, the above verse uses the vocative expression “*baeliyee*” (Oh bali! Or Oh maiden!) as a stylistic device which serves as an emphatic device to an innocent heart and establishes a

close connection between the speaker and hearer to whom the appeal of invitation is made. However, the loss of meaning takes place in translation of this vocative expression in English.

bI kus gousay bI chus baybahas *बे कुस गोसय बे छुस बेबहस*
ha:y vyaes ti vantam ba:vI kas *हाय वोस ति वनतम बावे कस*
(“Kuliyaat Shamas Faqir”, Aziz 168)

Who I am? I am beyond the discussion.

Oh female friend! Tell me to whom should I reveal the reality?

In the above verse “*ha:y vyes*” (Oh female friend!) as a vocative expression and stylistic feature fills the gap between speaker and hearer by adding a conversational style to the poem. Thus vocative expressions as stylistic devices in the poems of Shamas successfully address the formal and functional requirements in an effective manner. However, it’s translation fails to fulfill this function of adding conversational style to the audience leading to loss during translation.

Another stylistic feature which can be outlined in the poetry of Shamas is the use of certain vacuous syllables which ensure musicality in the poems by maintaining a proper rhyme and rhythm. Certain vacuous syllables (*-aay*, *-ay*, *-taey*, *-natay*, *-loulou*, *-houhou*) are added to the lexical items in a productive manner as in the following examples:

mashou:q denshih dra:v a:shaq lara:nI-taey *माशौक डींशिय दराव आशिक लारानेतय*
la:shak vIchtan kanh ti ma chu baeganI-taey *लाशक वोछतन कांह तो मा छु बेगानेतय*
ha mati shamsav vonuth aeshqun afsanI-taey *हा मति शमसव वोनुथ अशकुन अफसानेतय*
aashiq chu panay panI mashouq su panI-taey *आशिक छु पानय पाने माशौक सु पानेतय*
(“Kuliyaat Shamas Faqir”, Aziz 125)

The lover rushed upon having a glimpse of the beloved

Look! Indeed no one is a stranger in reality

Oh austere Shamas! You narrated the saga of this love

He is himself the lover, beloved indeed is He Himself.

The above verses form a section of a very popular song of Shamas which in itself is a cultural phenomenon. The whole poem is well known for its musical quality which is primarily maintained through the repetition of vacuous syllable “*taey*” which occurs at the end of almost every line giving this poem a unique music. The repetition of vacuous syllable “*taey*” at the end of each verse also enhances the readability of the poem and also acts as a mnemonic device. In addition such vacuous syllables can be linked to expressive function of language. However, it is impossible to translate such vacuous syllables in English and remain largely un-translated in English leading to a loss of meaning at different linguistic and non-linguistic levels.

zaero bam tami sha:yi gouv gum-ay *जेरो बम तमि शायि गोव गुमय*
yaeti su chum-ay tatI su chum-ay *येति सु छुमय तति सु छुमय*
(“Kuliyaat Shamas Faqir”, Aziz 220)

The music and melody vanished at that place

He is here; there He is!

The above verse uses vacuous syllable “*-ay*” at the end and in the middle for maintenance of rhyme at the end and maintenance of rhythm in the middle. In addition the use of this vacuous

syllable also adds a personal touch to the poem which is totally un-rendered in its English translation.

tsa:l a:shqou ashqI tab Ir tI loulou *चाल आशको अशके तबोर ते लोलो*
rindI sapdakh zindI panI mar tI loulou *रिन्दे सपदख ज़िन्दे पाने मर ते लोलो*
 (“Kuliyaat Shamas Faqir”, Aziz 139)

Oh lover! face the axe of love.

You shall become a rinda (spiritual guru) if you die in this life

The above verse uses the vacuous syllable “*loulou*” and is a musical rendition of the state of a mystic experiencing the bliss of a mystic life. As a vacuous syllable “*loulou*” has that musicality which is very often found in many other Kashmiri songs but offers an expression of mystic bliss in Shamas Faqir. The same mystic bliss as well as mystic trance is carried forward with the help of vacuous syllables which form the whole line “*lou lati lou*” in the following example:

gaenzravI kyah aenzrae:vmati *गोंज़राव क्याह एंज़रोवमतिय*
lou lati lou *लौ लती लौ*
 (“Kuliyaat Shamas Faqir”, Aziz 150)

How can I question the already solved?

lou lati lou

Thus vocative expressions and vacuous syllables form an important stylistic feature in the verses of Shamas and greatly enhance the musicality and conceptual value of his verses. However, the same vacuous syllables in the translated version seem out of place and are rendered totally untranslatable leading to serious translation loss at the formal as well as functional level.

Translation Issues at the Lexical Level due to Linguistic Relativity: Every language has a unique way of classifying its own lexicon. The semantic network of a language is arranged relative to a particular society or culture in question. The number of words falling in a semantic network is relative to the culture of that society. The world of experience shapes a particular language and its lexicon and the world of experience is mainly reflected in the meaning structure of lexical items in a language. Every culture has its own range of denotations and connotations of its lexical items. Translation loss does occur when such culturally bound or domain specific lexical items are to be translated. This can involve culture specific vocabulary, vocabulary associated with a particular time period or a particular school of thought. Shamas used a number of lexical items that are unique to Kashmiri culture as well as vocabulary that is associated with a particular religious or mystic thought. Translating such items in English either leads to mistranslation of some kind or total untranslatability of such lexical items. Consider the following examples:

bou:z aeshqun dou:d ya:r gou:m *बौज़ अशकुन दौद यार गौम*
mout ma:shou:q ya:d pyou:m *मौत माशौक याद पयौम*
 (“Kuliyaat Shamas Faqir”, Aziz 160)

Listen friend! The sickness of love afflicted me

The memories of my beloved haunt me .

The above verse employs the lexical item “*mout*” which in the given context remains essentially untranslatable. The collocation or syntagm of “*mout ma:shou:q*” employed by Shamas can be literally translated as “crazy beloved” or “lunatic beloved” which essentially would mistranslate the original verse and hence the loss of the meaning in translation; the only choice being to keep

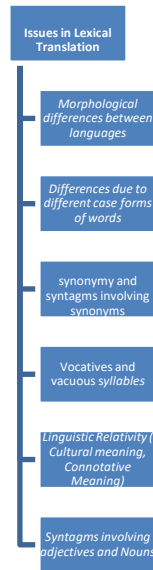


Fig: Issues in Lexical Translation

A number of issues have been outlined in this paper including issues ranging from linguistic nature like morphological differences between languages to those issues that involve cognition and lexicalization of sensory experiences in different cultures. It can be easily concluded that translation at lexical level is one of the most difficult levels in translation as lexicon of a language is the locus of a number of linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena that have direct implication on how meaning is transferred from one language to another language.

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