

Critique of Text and Review of Beig's "Literary Translations in Urdu Language"

Abstract

Translation is an important means of transporting the culture of one language to another. This article critiques a paper titled "Urdu Adab mein Tarjamon ka Jaiza [An analysis of Translations in Urdu Literature]" written by Mirza Hamid Beig and the review on the paper by Dr. Sohail Ahmad Khan written in Urdu. The review analyses the opinion of the writer of the article and the comments of the reviewer, Dr. Khan on various aspects of the article. The students of Urdu literature, writers and readers will be interested in reading the opinion presented by Mirza Hamid Beig and the review by Dr. Sohail Khan.

Keywords: *transporting, critique, dimensions*

INTRODUCTION

Translation has always been used as a vehicle to transfer ideas, thoughts and message present in one language to another language to enrich minds of the users of the target language with ideas foreign to it. This interaction of human languages has played a vital role in development as well as advancement of human civilization. The German word for "to translate" is "über-setzen" which means "to carry something from one side of the river to the other side of the river" (Schulte, n.d.: 01) and translation works as a bridge to transport knowledge, message or meaning from the land of one language to the foreign land of another language. Almost all languages use literary translations to enrich themselves, to gain awareness of the external world and approach the minds and thoughts that writers of a foreign language present in their own language. More recently, Translation Studies has become an academic discipline and scholars have started the process of translations scientifically. Debates have started taking place on its importance, the place of translations in indigenous literature and its impact on the thoughts of readers of the recipient literature.

This article highlights the importance of translation in the context of today's Urdu literature. It sums up various dimensions of translations of Western and European literatures into Urdu and the history of such translations by various translators over a period of almost two centuries. The main discussion is based on a paper titled "Urdu Adab mein Tarjamon ka Jaiza" ["An Analysis of Literary Translations in Urdu Language]" written by Mirza Hamid

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Beig and the review of the paper by Dr. Sohail Ahmad Khan. This paper was presented in the seminar organized by *Muqtadira Qaumi Zubaan*, Islamabad (1985). The intended audience of the paper and the review are writers and readers of literature in general, and translators and students of translation studies in particular.

Objectives

The following objectives guide the discussion in the article:

- i. To highlight the importance of translations in literature.
- ii. To evaluate the arguments presented in the paper to establish their rationality.
- iii. To present recommendations for promotion of translation as a skill and Translation Studies as a subject

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Definitions of Translation

Baker and Malmkjær (2001) while describing the process of translation, explain that it is “a process of intercultural communication whose end-product is a text which is capable of functioning appropriately in specific situations and context of use” (p. 03). This means that translation can be understood as two cultures interacting and communicating with each other, and the text, which is a product of this interaction, functions in the same way in a new context or culture as the source text did in its original context.

In the words of Bassnett (1980), translation is “rendering of the source language (SL) text into the target language (TL) text so as to ensure that the surface meaning of the two will be approximately similar and the structure of source language will be as closely preserved as possible but not so closely that the TL structure will be seriously distorted” (p. 11). This definition explains translation as a transmission of message from one language to another in a way that the meaning retains its form, and the structure of the source text is also retained to the maximum possible extent. However, in doing so, the structure of target text should not be distorted.

In yet another definition of translation, Munday (2001: 05) states:

...translation itself has several meanings: it refers to the general subject field, the product, or the process. The process of translation between the two different languages involves the translator changing the original written text in the original verbal language into a written text in a different verbal language.

In translation, the text of a language is converted into the text of another language, but it is not only conversion of a text into another language but also the transmission of culture, values and ways of thinking from the source culture in which the text was produced to the target culture in which the text will be read.

Theories of Translation

Different theories of translation have been presented for example, Nida (1914) developed the theory of dynamic equivalence or functional equivalence, stressing the importance of

transferring meaning rather than grammatical form. He emphasized that a word does not have a fixed meaning, as was earlier thought, but it acquires its meaning from the context in which it is used and is able to produce varying responses according to the culture (as cited in Munday, 2001, p.38). Another important theory on translation is that of Vinay and Darbelnet (2000). According to their theory, there are two strategies involved in translation, which are *direct translation* and *free translation*. While describing these two strategies, they claim that "the two strategies cover seven procedures, of which direct translation covers three":

1. *Borrowing* in which "the SL word is transferred directly to the TL",
2. *Calque*, in which "the SL expression or structure is transferred in a literal translation", and
3. *Literal translation*, is word for word translation (p. 56).

In cases where literal translation is not possible, the strategy of *oblique translation* must be used. This strategy involves four procedures. The first one is *transposition*, which means change of one part of speech to another without changing the sense. The next one is *modulation*, which means change of semantics and point of view of the SL; this is followed by *equivalence* which is the convention of describing the same situation by different stylistic or structural means. The last procedure in free translation is *adaptation* which means the change of cultural reference when a situation in the source culture does not exist in the target culture.

In the light of these translation theories, the translator assumes a pivotal role because s/he is the one who has to translate the text and has to keep in mind the technicalities that would keep the meaning of the text intact so that the real sense of it doesn't disappear during the process of translation.

Role of a Translator

While talking about translations of literature, it is also important not to ignore the role of translators who serve as "conduits by which scientific, cultural, and intellectual exchange takes place when the participants have no common language" (Malmkjær & Windle 2012: 01). A translator's major responsibility is to translate the text as accurately as possible. In other words, they are expected to keep the translated work as close to the original text as possible. There are different approaches advocating how this end can be best met. This requires the translator to decide between adopting the *verbum verbo* (word to word) approach or *fidus interpres* (faithful interpreter), a dichotomy associated with Cicero (46 BC) and disfavored by Horace (c.10 BC) (Cicero, in Weissbort and Eysteinsson (2006), as cited by Windle & Pym (2012: 01). The concept of "fidelity" means taking a 'word to word' approach in order to keep the translation 'faithful' to the source text (ST), although Horace advocated avoiding this approach. (Weissbort and Eysteinsson, 2006 cited in Malmkjær & Windle, 2012: 10)

These considerations suggest, as pointed out by Lathey (2011) in Malmkjær & Windle 2012: 10) that a translator is not merely a "faceless conduit", and his / her role is that of someone who bridges the gap between two cultures and civilizations and makes the meaning of one text clear to the reader of a different language.

Importance of Translation in Literature

Today, translation is no longer a ‘homeless hybrid’ or an interdisciplinary area approached through the fields of linguistics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis and literary studies. It is now considered a full-fledged academic discipline in its own right, and the students of languages, who, by virtue of their study of the respective languages, previously were considered eligible to be called translators, are now required to equip themselves with the knowledge of this field, the various theories of translations, as well as practical utility of the discipline in today’s global world. Activities of translation and interpretation have a central role, and as Malmkjær and Windle (2011: 01) opine, “without these activities, linguistic communities would be condemned to a degree of cultural isolation which is nowadays difficult to imagine”. Moreover, the importance of translation cannot be ignored in literary studies as all literatures of the world have benefitted from this practice and have enriched themselves with the thoughts of other cultures and *vice versa* through translations. This way, translation, whether from or into a language, becomes a carrier of cultural representations, traditions, thoughts and ways of thinking. Without translations, it would not be easy to keep a language alive, as translation feeds languages new technological and social information, new cultural trends and new thought patterns etc. Amjad (1985) mentions two types of translation in his review: the first one is creative translations and the second, non-creative translations. He calls translations of literary and creative writing ‘creative translation’ because the translator has the monumental task of not only transferring the exact idea of the work into another language, but also transferring the “taste” the work originally carries. By non-creative translations he probably means scientific and other non-literary translations that offer functional utility such as translations of medical or legal literature rather than ‘literature’ of a language. Rahi (1985: 116) discusses the importance of translations from a different dimension and opines that it is necessary to transfer the knowledge of science into our own language because no other language can play as effective a role in understanding a subject as a national language can. He further states, “it is a national duty to transfer and present the subjects of science into Urdu at a sound speed so that our national language becomes an effective medium of education”.

This review of the literature brings to light a few important points; first, translations not only provide us a worldview, but with the help of translation we can also participate in literary activities at the international level. Second, it is important to transfer scientific knowledge into the national language, because it is the latter through which the subject can be best understood.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article is a literary critique of the article by Mirza Hamid Beig and a review of it by Dr. Sohail Ahmed. The ideas of the writer of the original article and the reviewer’s comments on it are evaluated, compared and contrasted with the theories of scholars mentioned in the Literature Review. The discussion of Beig in his article and the review are also evaluated with reference to other scholars and writers who have commented on the art of translation and its relevance and importance in indigenous literature.

Data Collection

The main source of the data used in this article is a critique by Dr. Sohail Ahmed of the paper by Mirza Hamid Baig presented in a seminar titled *Urdu Zuban mein tarjume ke Masail [Issues of Translation in Urdu Language]* (1985, p. 95). The main issues raised by the writer have been identified and selected for critical discussion, and presented in the following section.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Trends in Urdu Translation

In his paper, Mirza Hamid Beig has analyzed various trends of translation that have been prevalent in Urdu literature over the last two centuries. In his essay, he has presented a long list of works translated into Urdu over a long period of history of translations, and has summed up their impact on Urdu literature. As rightly pointed out by Khan (1985), painstaking efforts have been made in this research article to present lists, although incomplete, of translated works, and an analysis of various aspects of translation of different literary genres. Their impact on Urdu literature has also been examined (Khan, p. 95).

Beig (1985) starts with a comment on the nature of translations done in Urdu literature and states that the literary scholars of the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the 20th century were confused and kept groping as to what course to take in writing and translating literature and which trend/s to follow. He criticizes the trend of following the West and argues that at the time when the East was looking towards the West with a sense of curiosity, the West itself seemed fascinated by the Eastern style and tried to copy it. According to him, this is the reason Ezra Pound (1885-1972) emphasized the need of translating Eastern philosophy and poetry into English. His main focus of discussion is the trend and style of 'free translation' that was followed by most translators while translating Western literature into Urdu. Beig opines that those pursuing freestyle translation not only lost the essence of the work in the process and conveyed a message that was remote from the original text, but more importantly, over the period of time these translations have replaced the national colour from Urdu with the colour of the West. Consequently, the local, political, economic and social references have altogether evaporated from the literary works.

Westernization of Urdu through translations seems to be Beig's most basic concern and he seems to be ignoring the fact that free translation infuses newness in literature as literary trends emerge in the target language as a result of translations. An example of this is free verse, which has emerged in Urdu literature in the form of *azaad nazm* (literally translated as *free poem*). Although it is still struggling to gain acceptance among the hardcore followers of *ghazal*, innumerable poets have tried their hand at this new genre and it is fast gaining acceptability among literary circles. This view is endorsed by Dr. Sohail in his review of the paper, and Dr. Amjad seems to be endorsing the same point when he says that translation "opens the window through which we can see the other nations" (p. 31).

Lack of Originality and Creativity

Advocating for the need of originality and creativity in works of literature, Beig (1985) points out that whereas the translations from Western languages into Urdu brought uniqueness, innovation of style, new feeling and new ways of expressions in addition to introducing new

genres to Urdu literature, they damaged the originality of the translated works because most of the works in Urdu were Anglicized and instead of being indigenized, carry an undeniable mark of Western source genres. Beig highlights the negative impact that unthinking imitation of the West has had on Urdu literature. In his view, although such translations liberated modern literature from the clutches of traditionalism and conservatism, many of the original Urdu genres were replaced with the genres of Western literature as a result of these translations. In this regard he cites examples of *dastaan* [folklore and *tamseel* [representation by exemplification] having been replaced by novel, *tazkara* [commentary] with criticism, *kahani* [tale] with short story and *notanki* [pleasant antics] with drama.

Lack of Attention to Linguistic Enrichment

In the paper we find Beig (1985) opining about the inability of translators to bring new style/s to Urdu language itself and upgrade it linguistically in order to enable it to keep pace with trends emerging on the horizon of world literature. He suggests that most translations were for the common reader and could be called nothing more than journalese since they neglected creativity in their translations. Instead of enriching the language and increasing its linguistic capabilities, these translations focused merely on continuity and fluency. If taken at face value, Beig's comment does not hold much water, because linguistic enrichment is not the aspect of translation that is most important. The role of translations is far more than that. They enrich the overall canvas of the literature of a language by giving freshness and vivacity to style, and in the process, make an attempt to bring the literature of the target language at par with global literature. This is critical because in literature; linguistics and overall style go hand in hand. If a literature starts absorbing new stylistic features from foreign literatures, enrichment of the target language is bound to follow.

Translation of Different Works and their Impact

Talking about translations in various genres, Beig points out translations of novels by Nazeer Ahmad, Ratan Nath Sarshar and Abdul Haleem Sharar. Whereas these translations gave rise to the trend of novels in Urdu, they also absorbed *tamseel* and *dastaan* in the novel itself, which were Urdu genres. *Tamseel* is Urdu word for "allegory" which is a symbolic narrative, normally in the form of a drama performed in a theater, with dual meaning related to issues such as morality, beauty and love, etc. (Tamseel, 2020) whereas *dastaan* refers to the tradition of narrative storytelling, the construction of which was not necessarily that of a novel, and there was no limit for it; it could be very short, or very long. Previously, it was epic, and discussed heroic deeds, or moral, mythical and supernatural themes (Tamseel, 2020). This, in view of Beig, is evident in the *tamseel* written by Nazeer Ahmad carries a marked influence of Anne Stevenson's novels, which are free of any kind of immorality and do not even contain the elements of love and beauty. Other influences that are prominently visible in the Urdu novels as pointed out by Beig, are those of George Elliot, who carries out a psychoanalysis of characters, and of the style of Sir Walter Scott. Stylistically, Sharar has done a great job by translating the free verse of Scott who is known for writing coherent lines in free verse. Beig also provides a long list of the translations along with the names of translators. As Dr. Sohail points out, these lists cannot be called complete lists of the works, but at least provide a starting point for studying the directions translations take in various phases of history and provide a direction for researchers aiming only to list translated works over a longer period of history, which, of course was not Mirza Hamid Beig's main focus.

Also discussed in the essay are various translations and trends in translation of drama, travelogs, poetry and other genres. Although various translators have tried their hand at translating the dramas of Shakespeare and many other writers, only a few of the translations are scholarly editions and most of them are commercial publications, a factor that prompted translators to go as far as making changes in the plots.. Regarding travelogs, Beig opines that no concrete effort has been made to follow the conventions of travel narratives and they lag behind in the exhibition of the civilizational touch as found in Geoffrey Chaucer and Margery Kemp, and hence follow the incomplete Western style. Beig feels that Urdu has a very old tradition of travelogue, but due to this half-copy of the western style, which lacks a civilizational touch, the modern Urdu travelogues, such as the ones written by Mustansar Hussain Tarar, have become more of a "waive card" rather than a travelogue. This is so because their focus is on becoming a 'best seller' rather than originality or creativity.

Beig mentions Nazm Tabatibai who first translated poetry, and mentions how his promotion of the English style of poetry catalyzed a movement that encouraged translations and writing poems in English. Iqbal's "The Himalayas" is a good example of works produced under this movement. The article subsequently ends on the question whether Urdu literature has suffered enough from Western literary trends? Beig answers his own question by calling on Urdu writers to create original works and enrich Urdu literature with innovative works of their own that do not reproduce Western literature.

Discussion of Beig's Paper

Dr. Khan characterizes Beig's paper as research-based as well as critical in that it aims to establish a list of translations of different genres made in the different phases of history while also trying to calculate the impact these translations have had on Urdu literature. He says that although the given lists are the center of discussion in the paper, they do not cover the whole range of translated works in the area, nor were they Beig's main purpose in writing the article. However, they serve the purpose of revealing various dimensions the art of translations has seen in the past. The reviewer draws attention to the fact that Beig has failed to discuss a newer wave of translations that includes the works of Pablo Neruda, Herman, and Sadeq Hedayat. Similarly, Dr. Khan points out that there seems to be a problem with evaluating and categorizing writers. For example Dante is in the list of dramatists and B. M. Kol is in the list of novelists. Also, there is no mention of works translated from Russian and many recent translations of poetry. During the course of discussion, Beig has raised two important issues: the first one is the difference between the East and the West and the second, which is of practical value, is that the local environment has been mixed up by our translators with the foreign/alien environment. Due to their translations which have a lesser focus on originality, Urdu literature has started to receive genres which are neither local nor western in their full sense, as highlighted by Tarar's example of travelogues. According to Dr. Khan, the positive aspect of the freedom in translation is that it gives birth to immense possibilities of creativity which are, doubtless, of undeniable value. The writer (Beig) should not have ignored this aspect. The freedom in translation may not be the only harbinger of various possibilities in terms of creation and innovation, it may also add to the eloquence of expression in the target language. In Dr Khan's views, the translators should not be disallowed delving into free translation as this might lead to creativity, while rigidly following the style of the writers whose works are being translated, just as rigidly following

the characteristics of the genre being translated might limit the scope of creativity in the receiving language and its literature (in this case Urdu).

Advantages versus Disadvantages

Beig's admission that "translations have added to the diversity in style, have given rise to a newer feeling, have introduced new ways of expressions and presentation of argument in our literature" (Rahi, 1985: 23), seems to be in stark contrast with his main point, in which he has advocated the need of relying less on the translations from the West and focusing on originality and creativity in the works of Urdu literature. He is reluctant to give due credit to the translations for bringing fresh air and beauty in Urdu language. He seems to be oblivious to the fact that literatures of all civilizations, not just Urdu, have been beneficiary of translations from foreign languages as the latter widen the scope and spectrum of indigenous literature. According to Amjad's (1985) interpretation of Goethe's view on translations, translations have been used not only to increase human knowledge, but also to increase the horizons of the human mind, and this fact is solely responsible for bringing revolutionary changes in the basic attitudes and ways of living in the recipient societies (p. 31). In other words, emphasizing faithfulness to the source literature in general, and the stylistic characteristic of the genres therein in particular might mean that the recipient literature is only going to be benefitting less from the creativity of the translators and new writers, who, if allowed to be creative, might lead us to new genres, which are dynamic in style and add to the beauty of the recipient literature.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this critical study was to critique Beig's point of view about the influence of translations from Western literature to Urdu language and their influence on Urdu literature. Drawing on Nida and Vinay and Darbelnet's theories of translation, the researcher discussed various arguments regarding the place of translation in literature by Dr. Rasheed Amjad and Dr. Zafar Iqbal. The discussion in the original paper by Beig and in Dr. Khan's critique is of immense value as it brought to light a very critical question in the study of translation, which is the importance of translations of foreign works of literature for the literature of the receiving language. The case of Westernization of Urdu literature by Pakistani translators of Western literature has been thoroughly examined and an effort has been made to establish the point that the importance of translations, although immeasurable, is undeniable because translations transfer knowledge and transformations through the ideas that foreign literature brings to the recipient language and culture and the same will continue as long as the thirst for knowledge lasts in the hearts of human beings.

Recommendations

After a thorough discussion of the subject of translation and its significance in modern studies, it is imperative to state recommendations to those who have the authority to implement them. These recommendations are as follows:

- a) There is a need to teach Translation Studies as a subject at the graduate / masters level in order to equip students with an effective tool to absorb the knowledge offered by the literatures of the world.

- b) Translation should be introduced as a language skill and training in translation as an art should be incorporated into language courses being currently taught at the university level.
- c) The government bodies in Pakistan such as The National Language Authority that are working for the cause of translation may be encouraged to translate a wide variety of works of literature and science and technology from foreign languages so as to enrich the knowledge available in Urdu.
- d) Urdu must be promoted as a medium of instruction at all levels so that students can use their national language as a medium of learning. This is not only going to make education and instruction more accessible to students but also promote Urdu itself.
- e) More institutions such as the Academy of Letters and *Muqtadira Qaumi Zubaan* / (National language Authority) should be opened at provincial and divisional level so that translations can be done at a greater speed.

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