

Lexical Meanings and Mistranslation: an Analysis of English Translation of Munshi Premchand's Short Stories

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Abstract: This study is qualitative in nature and aims to highlight a genuine difficulty with the translation that many foreign translators have. Put another way, idiomatic expressions and cultural terms cannot be translated easily. They need to be translated very carefully, keeping in view the intercultural subtleties. In this study, Munshi Premchand's three short stories originally written in Urdu and translated into English have been selected for qualitative analysis. These short stories are *Eidgah*, *Qazaaqi*, and *Kafan* respectively translated into English by Khuswant Singh, Fatima Rizvi and Frances W. Pritchett. The study concludes that the translators, especially those whose own mother language is other than the source language, have a hard time translating idiomatic expressions and cultural terms embedded in the very culture of the source language because they are not fully aware of the intercultural translational intricacies and the intercultural pragmatics. This is what creates mistranslation and misleading meanings.

Key Words: Lexical Meanings, Mistranslation, English Translation, Analysis, Short Stories

Introduction

Mistranslation is the incorrect translation that misleads the actual meaning of the source text. This study aims to study the issues that occurred in translation while translating the Urdu text into English. This article addresses the issue of mistranslation at the lexical level. Sometimes mistranslation occurs because of a lack of equivalence between two languages, and sometimes it is intentionally caused by the translator to fulfil some purpose. Lack of equivalence between two languages, two cultures, and sometimes it is intentionally caused by the translator to

fulfil some purposes, in order to find out the phenomena of mistranslation at the lexical that how the meaning is changed when they are translation. Translators use the model of Newmark, which consists of the following strategies like descriptive equivalence, compensation, cultural equivalence, functional equivalence, paraphrasing and synonymy.

Actually, a great translator ought to be comfortable with the way of life, culture, and social settings of the source and target language speakers. He ought to likewise be acquainted with various styles of talking and

social standards of the two dialects. This awareness can improve the nature of the translations, all things considered. As indicated by Hatim and Mason (1990), the social setting in translating a book is most likely a more significant variable than its sort. The practice of translation happens in the socio-cultural setting. Thusly, it is significant to judge translational action just inside a social setting.

SugengHaryanto, in "The Implication of Culture on Interpretation Theory and Practice", states that having relevance with the translation, culture shows in two different ways. To begin with, the idea or reference of the vocabulary is, in one way or another, particular for the given culture. Second, the idea or reference is broad but communicated in a manner explicit to the source language culture. By and by, nonetheless, it is recommended that a translator should consider the reason for the translation in translating the socially and culturally bound words or expressions.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate how the lexical meanings can be the cause of mistranslation.
2. To inquire about the role of the translator's mistranslation of the source text in the target text at the lexical level.

Research Questions

1. How does the lexical meaning of a word in the Urdu language cause mistranslation in the English translation of Munshi Premchand's short stories?
2. How does the English translator of MunshiPremchand's short stories translate the lexical meanings of the source text into the target text?

Literature Review

Sungar, in his conference proceeding, quoted that translation is an act of understanding what is foreign and translating it into a language that is one's own. So it can be said that translation is a process of domestication. (Sungar, 2015). In his studies, Graham quoted that translation is an act of the "internalisation of the other so that it can be rewritten in the language of the familiar." Said (1997) gives four factors that may influence that translation; translator, the text being translated, the purpose of translating a text and the context of translation. In this way, one can say that the translation process is not simple. It involves many dimensions. Each of the translated texts involves these four factors that can affect it. Here the reason behind mistranslation may lie. The source text may require deep analysis and transcription on a deeper level but is translated at a minor level, which may cause mistranslation.

Mistranslation is studied in this article as a rising issue in the field of translation. However, mistranslation has led to some very drastic results in past years, as well as a few funny and embarrassing situations. Here are some instances that are part of recent history, the most famous of which is the bombing attack on Hiroshima. The US government issued the Potsdam Declaration in 1945 and demanded Japan's surrender. The prime minister of Japan responded with the word "mokusatsu", which is meant by: "No comment. We are still thinking about it." And unfortunately, which is interpreted incorrectly and is translated as "We ignore with contempt", which resulted in the atom bomb attack on Hiroshima after a few days. Another incident was when the prime minister of the US visited Poland, and his words were translated by a person who knew the two languages but did not know the art of translation and translated his words wrongly. He translated the words of the prime minister as he was happy to grasp private

parts of Poland when he actually meant that he is happy to visit Poland. There are many instances in history like this.

Lingwei Yin, in his article on "English Lexical Mistranslation of Vocabulary List and Plausible Translation and Teaching Strategies", quoted that vocabulary is an essential part of mastering the second language. Errors that are occurred at the vocabulary level; words, grammar and use of language cause mistranslation and hinder the actual meaning of a translated text. Geoffrey leech (1981) gives seven semantic meanings; conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, social meaning, affective meaning, reflected meaning, collocative meaning, and thematic meaning. These meanings contribute to conveying the actual sense and meaning in the translation process. Lack of the ability to use vocabulary can cause mistranslation in the meaning at these levels.

Ayadi Amina, in her dissertation submitted for the master's degree, mentioned that lexical problems are the essential part of the translation that results in mistranslation. ([Amina, 2009-2010](#)). [Nida \(2001\)](#) focuses on the message rather than the form and views translation dynamically, arguing that it is a communicative process. Nida&Waard (1986) discuss dynamic and functional equivalence, which advocates reproducing the source text message in the closest natural way in the target language. ([Alhibi, 2015](#)). Md. ZielHaque, in his article, mentions that this definition includes three essential terms; Equivalent, which refers to the source-language message, and Natural, which refers to the receptor language. And Closest, which "binds the two orientations together on the basis of the highest degree of speculation". These are some theoretical backgrounds on which the study is being constructed.

It is a fact that the notion of translation was mixed with that of culture. It is also the fact that culture is considered a crucial part of translation. The role of culture can be seen

from the point of view given by scholar Armstrong (2005), who states that it is only possible for bicultural or bilinguals to do that accurate translation. Nida (1964) states that problems that appear during the translation of culture occur due to the linguistic and cultural gap between two cultures. He is of the view for the sake of translation. We cannot give weightage to one thing. Rather the linguistics or cultural items of both SL and TL are of equal importance. [Venuti \(1995\)](#) describes that the process of translation looks for the similarities between the two cultures and languages. [Said \(1997\)](#) gives four factors that may influence that translation; translator, the text being translated, the purpose of translating a text and the context of translation. In this way, one can say that the translation process is not simple. It involves many dimensions. Each translated text involves four factors that can affect it. Here the reason behind mistranslation may lie.

The source text may require deep analysis and transcription on a deeper level but is translated at a minor level, which may cause mistranslation. Sungar, in his conference proceeding, quoted that translation is an act of understanding what is foreign and translating it into a language that is one's own. Therefore, it can be said that translation is a process of domestication ([Sungar, 2015](#)). In his studies, Graham quoted that translation is an act of the "internalisation of the other so that it can be rewritten in the language of the familiar."

This article examines mistranslation as a massive problem in the area of translation. However, mistranslation has resulted in some severe consequences in recent years, as well as a few amusing and humiliating instances. Here are a few examples from recent history, the most infamous of which is the bombing of Hiroshima. In 1945, the United States administration released the Potsdam Declaration, which demanded Japan's surrender. Japan's prime minister

replied with the phrase "mokusatsu," which translates as "No comment." We are still considering it." Additionally, which is erroneously translated as "We disregard with disdain," which culminated in the atomic bomb assault on Hiroshima a few days later. Another instance occurred when the US Prime Minister visited Poland, and a person who spoke both languages but was unfamiliar with the art of translation mistranslated his remarks. He interpreted the prime minister's remarks as if he were delighted to grasp private aspects of Poland when, in fact, he meant that he was delighted to visit Poland. This has occurred many times throughout history (2014) (Gentzler). When it comes to translation studies, there are many academics that have different opinions on the importance of cultural understanding when they begin their study in this field. For instance, James Holmes explains that analysing the qualities of poetry is not a matter of linguistics but rather of social culture and literature, as he considers diachronic aspects in poetry translation. Susan Bassnett discusses the four branches of translation studies in depth, one of which is the translation in the target culture.

According to Ling-Wei Yin's paper "English Lexical Mistranslation of Vocabulary List and Plausible Translation and Teaching Strategies," vocabulary is a critical component of second language acquisition. Errors at the vocabulary level, words, syntax, and language usage all contribute to mistranslation and obstruct the true meaning of a translated document. Geoffrey Leech (1981) defines seven semantic meanings: conceptual, connotative, social, emotional, reflected, collocative, and thematic. These meanings contribute to the process of translation by communicating the real sense and meaning. A lack of vocabulary skills may result in a mistranslation of meaning at these levels.

Culler (1976) states that if there was no difference between the cultures and

languages and if they share a common set pattern of cultural concepts, then it would have a very easygoing task for translators to translate the culture. However, some serious problems come their way. He was of the view that languages and cultural differences organise the world differently. Newmark (1995) once stated that it is not difficult to learn a language. Any old fool can learn a language, but to become a translator, there is a need to be intelligent.

According to Snel-Hornby (1988: 40), Wilhelm Von Humboldt was the first to explicitly describe the relationship between language and culture. Language, for this German rationalist, was dynamic: it was a state of motion (*energia*), as opposed to a static collection of objects as a consequence of movement (*ergon*). Simultaneously, language is a manifestation of culture and the speakers' individuality since they see the world via language. Identical to Godenough's view of culture as the sum of information, this current view may see language as the psyche's representation of information.

Ayadi Amina said in her dissertation that lexical issues are an important component of translation which leads to mistranslation. (Amina, 2014). [Nida \(2001\)](#) focuses dynamically on the message rather than the form and views of translation, saying it is a communication process. Nida & Waard (1986) discusses dynamic and functional equivalence, which promotes the natural reproduction of the source text message in the target language. [\(Alhihi, 2015\)](#). Md. ZielHaque, in his article, mentions that this definition includes three essential terms; Equivalent, which refers to the source-language message, Natural, which refers to the receptor language. And Closest, which "binds the two orientations together on the basis of the highest degree of speculation". Hornby is of the view that it is an element of universal and cultural overlap between languages. Krings (1986) is of the view that translation strategy is basically a potential

plan used by the translator in order to solve the difficult translation task of cultures. These are some theoretical backgrounds on which the study is being constructed.

Research Methodology

The study is descriptive in nature. It basically focuses on the data analysis and gives its theoretical explanation. The study explores and describes how some problems occur and who are the agents of these problems. Research questions are explored in the data analysis, and conclusions are drawn. The researcher is keen to address the problem of mistranslation in which the following data is being explored. The study is confined to Urdu to English translations. The researcher chooses three Urdu short stories of Munshi Premchand; Eidgah, Qazaaqi and Kafan that are translated into English by Khushwant Singh, Fatima Rizvi and Frances W. Pritchett, respectively.

The theory of equivalence by Nida is being applied as a theoretical framework to study the issue of mistranslation at the level of lexical meanings. According to Nida, there are two types of equivalence; Formal equivalence and Dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence involves equivalence at the content level, while Dynamic equivalence involves equivalence of the actual sense that is present in the source text and is translated into the target text. According to Nida, Dynamic equivalence is the closest natural equivalence between two texts; source text and target text.

Data involves short stories of Munshi Premchand's; Eidgah, Qazaaqi and Kafan that are translated into English by Khushwant Singh, Fatima Rizvi and Frances W. Pritchett.

Descriptive Analysis of Short Stories

Eidgah

سڑک کے دونوں طرف امیروں کے باغ ہیں۔

On both sides of the roads are mansions of the rich.

In the above example, the translator mistranslates the word باغ with **mansions**. The lexical meaning of the word باغ do exists in the English language, but the translator, on the basis of his incomplete knowledge, mistranslates the word. However, he tries to convey a similar meaning of richness through the word mansion. The purpose of the translator is to create dynamic equivalence.

دہقانوں نے بھی وضو کیا۔

Our villagers washed their hands and feet.

In the above example, the translator mistranslates two words وضو and دہقان. Which have literal meanings in the English language as farmers and ablution. The translator's intention is to convey the sense to the readers who belong to different ethnic groups, and that's why he intentionally mistranslates the Urdu words ignoring their actual lexical meanings.

یہ نہیں کہ ایک پیسے کی ریوڑیاں لیں تو چڑا پڑا کر کھانے لگا۔

I am not the sort who buys a piece worth of lollipops to tease others by sucking them.

In this particular translation, the translator translates a sweet culture name into the target culture, sweet. He again here intended to create dynamic equivalence. English culture and language do not possess the exact lexical meaning of this cultural sweet, so the translator tries to compensate the word ریوڑیاں with lollipops.

حامد ہے براہ شیار۔

This Hamid is a bit of a rascal.

The word ہشیار has a positive connotation, while the word rascal has a negative connotation. The translator tries to create a dynamic equivalence by using this word to show the negative feelings of Hamid's friends in the short story, but in this regard, he mistranslates the actual sense of the word ہشیار۔

امی جان اللہ میاں کے گھر مٹھائی لینے گئی ہیں۔

Mother has gone to Allah to get lovely gifts.

In this sentence, the word *مٹھائی* is translated as gifts. This word does not convey the actual lexical meaning of the source text word and thus is a mistranslation.

Kafan

جب دو ایک فاقے ہو جاتے۔

When they have fasted for a couple of days.

The word *فاقے* literally means starving, but the translator mistranslates it as fast. Fasting is a religious practice, and starvation is the result of financial problems and is not intentional at all. The translator here mistranslates on the basis of his lack of linguistic exposure.

مگر پروسنے والے ہیں کہ سامنے گول گول مہکتی پجوریاں ڈال دیتے ہیں۔

And there, the servers were setting hot, round, sweet-smelling pastries before you!

The pastry is an English culture dish that is sweet in its taste. *پجوریاں* is an Indian traditional fast-food and is spicy in taste. The translator mistranslates the two dishes on the basis of their resemblance, being a traditional item of on feast. He tries to create equivalence that results in mistranslation.

کریاکرم میں کھرچ مت کرو۔

Don't spend money on religious festivals.

In this sentence, the translator mistranslates the Hindu ritual of death as a religious festival. The translator's lack of linguistic knowledge here results in mistranslation. The lexical meaning of *کریاکرم* is a funeral ritual, but the translator mistranslates it with a religious festival, which is a wrong translation and misleads the actual sense of the word *کریاکرم*.

Qazaaqi

تھوڑی دیر میں قدرتی کندھے پر بلم رکھے اس کے گھونگرو بجاتا ہوا آجاتا۔

Soon he would appear, carrying a staff on his shoulder the bell on it ringing.

بلم is a steel-tipped wooden spear that is carried by knights. It has a sharp pointed head. It is translated as staff which means a stick without any pointed head. The translator, on the basis of his lack of knowledge, mistranslates the word. The second word in this sentence that is mistranslated is *گھونگرو* that is translated as bell. Bells does not convey the actual sense of *گھونگرو*.

ابھی دکھا دوں تو دوڑ کر گودی میں اٹھا لو گے۔

If I show it to you, you will surely grab it in your arms.

In this sentence word, *گودی* is mistranslated as grab in arms. *گودی* itself contains its lexical meaning as lap, but the translator mistranslates it with the above-mentioned phrase and misleads the actual sense of the word.

Conclusions and Discussions

The researcher in this article tries to find out how lexical meanings become the cause of mistranslation in these translated versions of short stories. Mistranslation is the wrong or incorrect translation that misleads the actual sense of the source text. Mistranslation occurs because of many reasons as the translator's immature knowledge of the two languages, the translator's intentional use of mistranslation, cultural barriers, language differences on the lexical level and ideological differences. The stories are translated from Urdu to English. Urdu and English languages are different on different basis. The Urdu language represents Indian culture that contains lexical items that differ semantically from the English language and does not convey proper meanings that are actually intended. Cultural differences create a barrier to translation. English culture is a much different linguistic expression to represent its cultural values, norms and religion. Indian culture lacks its equivalent in the English language and culture.

The translator's incomplete linguistic

knowledge and his intention are also another cause of mistranslation. Translators sometimes lack the linguistic knowledge of languages and are thus incapable of drawing equivalence resulting in the mistranslation of lexical items from the Urdu language to the English language. The translator tries to draw dynamic equivalence by translating a lexical

item into a phrase in the target language, which sometimes creates mistranslation and hinders the actual meaning of the source text in the target text. Lack of equivalence among the meanings of lexical items and the translator's role in the translation process are the main causes of mistranslation.

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