

Power Dynamics and Ideology in V. G. Kiernan's Translation of Iqbal's Poetry

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Abstract

The paper investigates the translational transgressions of V. G. Kiernan against Muhammad Iqbal's Urdu poetry. The concept of translational transgressions can be conceptualized by appreciating the notions of language appropriation and domestication. It is postulated that while translating Iqbal, Kiernan has committed language appropriation and an extensive domestication of the source text. The present study demonstrates that a mixing of registers is also present in Kiernan's translation which effectively paves the way to the translational aggressions. More precisely, the researchers have identified two main registers operative in Kiernan's translation: Anglicization and Christianization. Another essential contention of the study is that the power differentials between Urdu and English also have their bearings upon these translational transgressions. The cumulative impact of these translational transgressions is what Robert Phillipson calls: "The dominance asserted by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural/cultural inequalities between English and other languages" (1992, p. 47). By way of the main finding, it can be said that in Kiernan's translation Iqbal is considerably deprived of his voice and is represented through a translation which is appropriating as well as domesticating. Thus, Kiernan's translation appears more of a re-writing of the source text than a translation. Lawrence Venuti's model of foreignization and domestication serves as the central theoretical framework for the present research and his assertion that translation changes everything constitutes the basic conceptual paradigm of this study (2013, p. 100).

Keywords: *Domestication, foreignization, appropriation, ideology, translational transgressions, source text, target text, register*

1. Translation, Power and Ideology

One of the most compelling indictments of translation is that it, more often than not, obliterates the cultural and linguistic distinctiveness of the source text. To some extent, it is the price the source text has to pay in order to get translated into another language. However, sometimes this price becomes unwarrantedly high and the source text is deprived of its identity and voice altogether. This usually happens when a translator commits what some of the translation theorists have called *translational transgressions* against the source text (Venuti, 2013, p. 78). The problem is all the more intensified when the target text is part of the contemporary dominant discourses.

By the end of the 20th century, a diverse range of scholars problematized these practices of translational transgressions and pleaded for the greater visibility. This was deemed essential to counter the power politics of translation which is usually sustained by such totalizing notions as ideology, control and hegemony (Niranjana, 1992, p. 67). It was argued that instead of being a drawback, it is one of the greatest merits of a translation to appear *foreign* and *unfamiliar* as that is the only way to recognize and communicate the linguistic and cultural distinctiveness of the source texts. This eventually results in the creation of space inter-cultural debates can take place. The notable French translation scholar Andre Lefevere somewhat illustrates this point when he maintains that whenever, in the course of translation, linguistic considerations come into conflict with ideological considerations, the latter usually tend to triumph (Lefevere, 1992, p. 187).

It is because of these power considerations and the politics of translation that people like Lawrence Venuti, Tejaswini Niranjana, Philip Lewis and Antoine Berman questioned the hegemonic norms which come into play to determine the overall trajectories of translations (Munday, 2009, p. 122). What is more, these scholars sought to envision translation in a more inclusive paradigm—a site of value-ridden conflicts and ideological clashes actuated by power considerations (Fairclough, 2001). Translation was seen as an act of violence geared towards reinforcing the centrality of the dominant discourses and perpetuating their cultural dominance (Niranjana, 1992, p. 107). This novel and unorthodox conceptualization of translation forms the backdrop of this study which seeks to problematize the translational transgressions of V. G. Kiernan against Muhammad Iqbal, the foremost 20th century Muslim poet.

It is also fruitful to bear in mind that translation is one of the most evident forms of communication which lies at the heart of our socio-cultural existence. It is largely due to communication that our shared existence becomes possible in all the vicissitudes of time and chance. However this very communication can at times degenerate into miscommunication and can give rise to serious misunderstandings and confusions. This danger becomes all the more real when we take into consideration the baffling range of languages and a power-driven translation practices. In addition, the intrinsically inter-subjective nature of translation renders the viability of inter-cultural communication a topic of heated controversies and charged debates. If George Orwell questioned the very capability of human speech to communicate, Friedrich Nietzsche presented a totalizing assertion that all language, at bottom, is metonymic and, hence, powerless to give us a truly realist account of things (Magnus & Higgins, 1996, p. 81). At the same time, it was Nietzsche who declared the translation to be a form of conquest.

2. Iqbal's Appropriation – Some Ideological Considerations

V. G. Kiernan's translation of Iqbal is also an instance of a translation which is complicit with the larger questions of hegemony, control, power and marginalization. The translation discourse of Iqbal structured by Kiernan is marked by language appropriation, domestication and the distribution of differential power relations. Such a practice of translation involves socio-cultural imperatives which are conciliatory as well as antagonizing (Tymoczko, 2010, p. 134). The semantics of Kiernan's translation of Iqbal is replete with significations and implications which dislocate Iqbal's poetics from its essential cultural and linguistic moorings and bring it in line with the norms and canons of the Anglo-Saxon literary tradition. This becomes possible only because Kiernan seems to domesticate the source text and consistently puts it into the service of the target text.

The researchers have taken into account various specimens from Kiernan's translation of Iqbal and demonstrated that a highly complex and structured form of domestication and language appropriation is present therein. Moreover, the fact that Iqbal's poetry has been translated by a British colonial scholar and that it is translated into an imperial language (English) immediately bring forth a complex range of political and cultural questions (Munday, 2009, p. 89). As a matter of historical fact, Urdu and English share problematic and unequal power relations. This is largely due to a prolonged colonial period which saw an across-the-board imposition of English during that period.

3. Kiernan's Mixing of Registers – A Instance of Inter-Discursivity

A critical analysis of Kiernan's translation brings forth the underlying tensions, imprecisions and fault lines in the target text. The researchers are of the view that there exists an awkward mix of registers in the target text. In this study, the researchers have identified two main registers which are operative in the target text in a parallel way: Christianization and Anglicization. This presence of registers in the target text points to a cultural context very distinct from the one which gave birth to the source text. It also dislocates the source text from its Islamico-Persian backdrop and recasts them into typical narratives of the bourgeoisie Protestant Londoners. Here some of the remarkable instances of these two registers (Christianization and Anglicization) will be discussed:

چھوڑ یورپ کے لیے رقصِ بدن کے خم و پیچ (1)
روح کے رقص میں بے ضربِ کلیم اللہی!

To Europe leave the dance of serpent limb:

The prophet's power is born of the spirit's dance.
(Kiernan 1955, 200)

Rendering the phrase *raqse badan ke kham-o-paich* as "the dance of serpent limb" is an overt example of the Anglicization of the source text. In the Christian theology, the serpent is perhaps one of the most well-known symbols associated with Satan. In the New Testament the serpent is associated with Satan (Genesis: 3:1ff.). Occasionally, the serpent is even identified with Satan. St. Paul, for example, has maintained that the serpent and Satan were one and the same (Romans: 16: 20). This is an interesting example of the register of Christianization which the translator has superimposed on a source text which is predominantly Islamic.

(2). غمِ رم نہ کر، سمِ غم نہ کھا کہ یہی ہے شانِ قلندری

*...do not bewail that terror, do not
Swallow the poison of that wailing: take
The road by which the saints came to their crown*
(Kiernan 1955, 42)

In this verse, the word *qalandar* has been rendered as *saint*. Saint is a familiar word in the Anglophone culture; however, it is an inexact and insufficient equivalent for the Urdu word *qalandar*. It must be kept in mind that the sense in which the word *saint* is used in the Christian context is unfamiliar to the Islamic context. As per the Christian tradition, saints are conventionally distributed into several categories such as martyrs, confessors, apostles, evangelists, etc. However, unlike a Christian saint, a Muslim *qalandar* is not exactly a religiously institutionalized category. Similarly a Muslim cannot become a *qalandar* by means of any formal canonization as it happens in Christianity. This is yet another example of the register of Christianization found in Kiernan's translation.

(3). اس میں کیا شک ہے کہ محکم ہے یہ ابلیسی نظام
پختہ تر اس سے ہوئے غلامی میں عوام

*Firm, beyond doubt, is the sovereignty of Hell
Through it the nations have grown rotten-ripe in slavishness.*
(Kiernan: 1955, 230)

Here it is the register of Anglicization which is at work. In the source text, Iqbal is using the expression *Ibleesi nizam* (literally, Satan's dominion) which has been rendered as "the sovereignty of Hell" by Kiernan. The translation of *Iblees* as "Hell" is foreign to the literary and theological tradition of Islam. On the other

hand, the identification of Satan with hell is considerably common in the Anglo-Saxon literary context. In English literature, there are numerous writers who made this identification. Consider, for instance, the case of Milton's *Paradise Lost* in which this identification has been made:

Me miserable! which way shall I fly
 Infinite wrath and infinite despair?
 Which way I fly is hell;
 Myself am hell;
 And in the lowest deep a lower deep,
 Still threat'ning to devour me, opens wide,
 To which the hell I suffer seems a heaven.
 (Paradise Lost IX: 73-78)

(4). خدا نصیب کرے بند کے اماموں کو
 وہ سجدہ جس میں ہے ملت کی زندگی کا پیام

--God teach His ministers in India
 A way of worship that shall be to all
 His people an evangel of new life!
 (Kiernan: 1955, 224)

This is an instance of the register of Christianization. The Urdu word *Imam* has been rendered as "minister". In fact, a minister is a member of the clergy, particularly a Protestant one. Moreover, the head of a Catholic order is also known as a minister. Another glaring example of this register of Christianization is the translation of *peyam* as "evangel". The word "evangel" is synonymous with the Christian Gospel. More exactly, it refers to any one of the first four books of the Christian Bible. In the purely ecclesiastical terms, the word also refers to a body of teachings in a discipline regarded as basic and central. To sum up, it makes the Christianization of the source text considerably more pronounced.

(5). عجم کے خیالات میں کھو گیا
 یہ سالک مقامات میں کھو گیا

Turned sophist roams his inner stage,
 Imaginary pilgrimage.
 (Kiernan: 1955, 130)

This is also an example of the register of Anglicization. Rendering the Urdu word *salik* as "sophist" is blatantly mistaken. In the Muslim spiritual discourse, the word *salik* refers to a wandering Sufi who relentlessly aspires to achieve a state of

oneness with God. An unmediated communion with God remains the most cherished aspiration of any wandering Sufi. On the other hand the word “sophist” has altogether different connotations. Besides it has a Hellenistic ring to it which adds to its Anglicizing orientation.

(6). وہ دنیا کی مٹی، یہ دوزخ کی مٹی.
وہ بت خانہ خاکی، یہ خاکستری ہے!

*That – earth’s soil: this – soil of Hades;
Dust, their temple; ashes, ours.*
(Kiernan: 1955, 158)

In this example, Kiernan is rendering the word *dozakh* (literally, hell) as “Hades”. This is yet another remarkable example of the register of Anglicization. Here the Anglicization of the source text takes place as a result of its Hellenization. The word “Hades” has been originally taken from the English literary tradition where it has come from the Greek mythology. It is in the Greek mythology that the word Hades is customarily used for the god of the underworld.

These are just some of the examples of the mixing of the two registers: Christianization and Anglicization. Given the constraints of space here it is not possible to make any exhaustive study of these two registers. However, the researchers have prepared a brief corpus of some of the equivalents pertaining to these two registers.

Urdu word	English Equivalent	Register	
		Anglicization	Christianization
عجم	The alien lands	✓	
پیر حرم	Reverend divine	✓	✓
ساحر	Shaman	✓	✓
گریبان	Seam	✓	
جہاد	Crusade		✓
فقہیہ	Pharisee	✓	
اہل نظر	Good men	✓	
امت مرحوم	Chosen people	✓	✓
ستارے	Planets	Mistranslation	
دریا	Ocean	Mistranslation	

لات و منات	Baals and Dagon	✓	
كفن	Coffin		Mistranslation
طواف	Sanctification	✓	
سجده	Genuflexion	✓	✓
مريخ	Mercury		Mistranslation

One can see that most of the above mentioned equivalents are culturally loaded. These equivalents are, in fact, the major tools through which the translational transgressions of Kiernan operate. At the same time, this mixing of registers also brings home the fact that the reader is reading a text which is characterized by a transcultural stress and strain. Besides, it is also due to the employment of these mixed registers that the translator has rigorously situated *the foreign* outside the domain of *the familiar*. That means *the foreign* is represented as *the familiar* and through this process of representation, *the foreign* is deprived of its foreignness i.e. its linguistic and cultural distinctiveness. Undoubtedly this kind of translation is a discursive schematization of an institutionalized concept of an 'inter-national' world in which nations are located at different geographical places, enclosed d by the territorial borders and invested with nationalist narratives (Sakai, 1997, p. 186).

One of the most domesticating features of Kiernan's translation is that not a single word or phrase is retained in its original from either for the emphasis or for the fidelity of expression. This, indeed, is very strange given the fact that the translator is dealing with a text which is coming from a very different literary tradition. It is not uncommon for the translators to preserve at least some of the words or expressions from the source text in their original form (Nida, 2002, p. 125). However, there is no such instance in Kiernan's translation of Iqbal. This itself is indicative of an overly presumptuous and patronizing attitude on the part of the translator.

Lastly it is also pertinent to mention here that the mixing of register discussed above brings forth an inter-discursivity which operates throughout Kiernan's translation. The notion of inter-discursivity is intimately connected with the idea of power inherent in language. This inter-discursivity found in Kiernan's translation serves as an enabling framework which makes the power politics of translation more efficient and also more dismissive of the actualities of the source text.

4. Kiernan's Transgressions and Foucault's Regimes of Power

With reference to the translational transgressions, it is noteworthy that an English-language reader will not be able to detect them as he/she has no direct

access to the source text and his/her entire understanding will be mediated by a translation which is already highly domesticated. There are no signs of some kind of interventionist approach by the translator which could successfully overthrow the superimposition of the target text on the source text. Such an interventionist approach on the part of the translator is vehemently advocated by scholars like Venuti, Niranjana and Spivak (Venuti, 2013, p. 67).

Moreover, when the syntactic and lexical choices made by the translator are taken into account, the collective impact of the domestication of the source text is fully appreciated. In the similar way, the fact that a poet from a minority language (Urdu) has been translated into a major international language (English) also adds to our understanding as to why the target text is so much domesticating of the source text. The expressions, dialogues and conversations, anecdotes given in the source text get mingled with the discourse of the colonizers and their identity is blurred. This helps us understand the power relations that operate in the process of translation and the mixing of registers makes it clear that a whole range of interlocked factors is at work in the target text.

As one of the major findings of this study, it can be said that Iqbal's poetic discourse and its translation by Kiernan are two distinct linguistic codes underwritten by two distinct cultural patterns. It is also pertinent to mention here that the target text plays an important role in the formation of what Foucault has called "the regimes of power" – institutionalized conventions, norms of conduct, canons of acceptability and notions of urbanity at a given period of time (See, Venuti, 2013, p. 147). As always, in Kiernan's translation, these *regimes of power* come into play and foreground those communicative events and speech acts which have appropriating and domesticating effects on the source text (Sakai, 1997, p. 100).

In the view of Kiernan's translational transgressions in tandem with Foucault's regimes of power, Venuti's indictment of translation looks all the more plausible. Describing the appropriating and scandalous nature of translation, he says:

"Translation is often regarded with suspicion because it inevitably domesticates foreign texts, inscribing them with linguistic and cultural values that are intelligible to specific domestic constituencies. This process of inscription operates at every stage in the production, circulation, and reception of the translation (Venuti, 2000, p. 67)".

5. Translation and the *Ethics of Difference*

In view of these considerations, it is proposed that, unlike Kiernan, a translator should stand for what Venuti has called "an ethics of difference" i.e. instead of

moving the author towards the reader, a translator should move the reader towards the author (Munday, 2009, p. 29). Moreover, instead of obliterating the linguistic and cultural features of Iqbal's poetics, Kiernan should have registered and communicated them with greater visibility and foregrounding. That is the only way to subvert the hegemonic power discourses which are responsible for the perpetuation of an Anglo-American textual hegemony in the contemporary world. If Kiernan had done that, he would have defied the Eurocentric and assimilationist tendencies in an ethnodeviant manner and the highly lopsided power equation between Urdu and English would have been somewhat addressed. That would have been one way to refrain from committing language appropriation and translational transgressions. The ideological subjugation of the source text can also be prevented and the source text can be accorded greater recognition and representation if the target text does not seek to replace it in an absolutist and *transgressive* way.

Besides, it is also important for translators to register and communicate the distinctiveness of the source text because this is the only way to stress the "translated" nature of target text (Fairclough, 2001). The translated nature of the target text strategically reinforces the resistance of the source text against the dominant target text. This resistance, in itself, brings a promise of liberation as the translator instead of domesticating the translation, foreignizes it:

"Whereas, a domesticated translation is usually deemed to be complicit with power, a foreignized translation is considered to be resistant and subversive to it. In the same way, unlike a domesticated translation, a foreignized translation does not devalue the source text by flattening out its linguistic and cultural uniqueness (Asghar, 2014, p. 6)".

In fact, Kiernan is following in the footsteps of the classical British literary tradition in which it is invariably considered to be a great merit of a translation *to read like the original*. It is this tenet of the classical British literary tradition which the postcolonial scholars like Venuti, Spivak and Niranjana painstakingly dispute and, in turn, they advocate a greater visibility of the source text and a more central role to be played by it. The argument given by these scholars is very persuasive:

"Domesticated translations are usually characterized by "fluency" which creates what Venuti calls "an illusion of originality". With this fluency, a translation can lay a pseudo claim to be an absolute substitute for the original text which, clearly, is not the case (Asghar, 2014, p. 6)".

The postcolonial scholars and the theorists of translation postulate that the translational transgressions (as those of Kiernan) deprive the non-European texts

of their linguistic and cultural identity and institutional autonomy. In this way, the non-European discourses are forced to conform to the dominant Anglophone linguistic and cultural patterns (styles, settings, genres, registers, norms, canons). In the Nietzschean vein alluded to above, Kiernan through committing translation transgressions has sought to *conquer* the source text. One of the direct results of this *conquest* is an endorsement of an Anglophone literary elitism in the world which is unipolar as well as polarized. At the broadest level, translations like those of Kiernan's prevent a dialogic engagement with the cultural others. Eventually this attitude leads to what some of the Postcolonial theorists have called a "cultural closure" (Venuti, 2013, p. 23).

6. Conclusion

In the present study, the researchers have sought to establish the translational transgressions and language appropriations committed by Kiernan in his translation of Iqbal. These translational transgressions and language appropriations are perpetuated by a mixing of registers. The researchers have identified two main registers in Kiernan's translation: Anglicization and Christianization. It has been demonstrated with the help of sufficient evidence that Kiernan has greatly Christianized and Anglicized Iqbal's poetic discourse. The introduction of the registers of Christianization and Anglicization brings about an extensive domestication of the source text. It is also significant to mention that our world is getting fragmented and polarized day by day and the question of intercultural and inter-lingual dialogue is all the more desirable. In such a world, it is extremely important to give a fair hearing to all the discourses, especially the less privileged, non-European discourses. This can largely be made possible if the translators play the role of inter-cultural mediators and not that of the agents of power and perpetrators of the Anglophone hegemony. All this has just added to the value of non-domesticated and non-appropriated translations. Furthermore, globalization with all its turbulent discontents together with widespread terrorism and genocidal wars necessitate a more nuanced appreciation of all the cultural *others*. This compounds the task and the ethical mandate of a translator exponentially.

Admittedly, it is a difficult task but certain difficulties are worth grappling with in order to rise to the challenges which tend to polarize humanity and bolster hegemony and dominance.

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