

Archaism in Poetry Translation: A Case Study of the English Translation of a Poem of Shamlu*

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Abstract

According to Leech, what create poetry are the linguistic deviations a poet manipulates in his/her poetry. Linguistic deviations are related to the issues of form and style. Since the subject of style is very important in poetry, the translator of poetry should do his/her best to convey the style together with the content into his/her translation. Concerning linguistic deviations, the translator should also pay attention to these stylistic features and try to convey them as far as possible. As one of linguistic deviations, archaism plays an important part in Shamlu's poetry. In other words, archaism is one of the dominant and determining factors of Shamlu's poetic style. This study, thus, has investigated the English translation of a poem of Shamlu by Mahmud Kianush in this regard. It was found that although archaism is dominant in Shamlu's poetry, most of the instances of archaism are ignored in the translation. Stylistically, then, the examined translation is defective.

Keywords: Archaism, Linguistic deviations, Poetry translation, Style, Shamlu

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1. Introduction

Needless to say, poetic language differs from the everyday language used by ordinary people. In ordinary usage, language is mostly automatic, and words are used in a way that does not attract our attention, but in poetry the language is used in such a special way that the reader makes a distinction between the poetic language and the daily or usual one. But how is this differentiation made?

In principle, the language of poetry comes into existence when some norms are broken or deviated from. According to Shafii-Kadkani (1989), "Poetry is nothing but breaking the norms of ordinary and logical language" (p. 240). Shamisa (2004) also believes that there is almost no literary work that does not involve a sort of deviation from ordinary language and assumes that the subject of deviation should not be neglected because in some cases all of the importance and influence of a literary work depends on it (p. 158).

The concept of linguistic deviation has its roots in the works of Russian formalists. They considered literature as a special use of language which achieved its distinctness by deviating from and distorting ordinary language (in Selden, Widdowson, Brooker, 1997, p. 32). They held that literary language was deviation from the norms of ordinary language; therefore they investigated the style of a literary work on the basis of deviation from the norms and believed that this deviation could be measured and examined.

AsLeech (1969) argues, deviation, which is 'offending against the rules of the standard language', is a means of creating artistic beauty and can make the language of literature foregrounded (p. 56). He introduces eight types of linguistic deviations in poetry which are as follows:

1. Lexical deviation, 2. Grammatical deviation, 3. Phonological deviation, 4. Graphological deviation, 5. Semantic deviation, 6. Dialectical deviation, 7. Deviation of register, and 8. Archaism(or Deviation of historical period).

The poetry of the celebrated Persian poet, Ahmad Shamlu, is characterized by the special use of language which results in

poeticity of his expression. He composes poetry in the form of *Blank Verse*. In his poetry, linguistic deviations play an important role. One kind of deviations which is of great importance in recognizing his poetic style is archaism -or deviation of historical period. In other words, in Shamlu's poetry archaism is one of the dominant elements.

Since both form and content are inseparable in poetry, the translator of poetry should do his/her best to transfer these two. Concerning archaism, the translator should also try his/her best to convey this kind of deviation so that the same effect can be reproduced in the translation. So far little attention has been paid to the subject of archaismin Persian poetry in connection with translation hence this study has investigated a poem of Shamlu and its English translation by Mahmud Kianush to see whether the translator has been aware of this poetic feature and how successful he has been in conveying it.

2. Archaism

As Leech asserts, a poet has the 'freedom of the language', in the sense that he is not restricted to the language of his own particular period. It might be said, he continues, that "the medium of English poetry is the English language viewed as a historical whole, not just as a synchronous system shared by the writer and his contemporaries" (1969, p. 51). To support his view, Leech quotes T. S. Eliot's saying about this matter. Eliot stated that "no poet...has his complete meaning alone; His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to dead poets and artists" (1969, p. 51). From such statements quoted above it can be said that poets have shared the same language, the same communicative medium, as poets of earlier generations, whatever important change the language may have undergone in the meantime; "what a poet sees as his linguistic heritage may even include dead language such as Latin and Greek" (Leech, 1969, p. 52).

Leech defines 'archaism' as "the survival of the past into the language of present time" (1969, p. 52). He also suggests that we should distinguish between archaism and 'linguistic anachronism' which is "the conscious and calculated resurrection of language belonging to a

bygone age” (p. 52). Leech provides this example from T.S Eliot where the poet has made use of archaism in his diction:

*The association of man and woman
In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie-
A dignified and commodious sacrament,
Two and two, necessarye coniunction,
Holding eche other by the hand or the arm
Which betokeneth concorde.* (T.S. Eliot).

Archaism is not confined to vocabulary ('behold', 'betimes', 'burthen', 'damsel', 'eld', 'ere', 'hither', 'yonder', 'oft',...). Examples of obsolete grammatical features retained up to now are the second person pronouns 'ye' and 'thou'; the verbal endings 'e(st)' and 'e(th)'; and the negative and interrogative forms without an auxiliary, as in 'I know not' and 'saw you anything?'. In addition, there have survived grammatical variants such as 'tis, 'twas, 'gainst, 'ne'er, e'en, o'er, spake, holp, -e'd (the past tense or past participle ending pronounced as a separate syllable, as in clothe'd).

Kurosh Safavi's (an Iranian scholar who has written widely on linguistic deviations in Persian poetry and prose) account of archaism is similar to that of Leech. As he asserts (1994, p, 54), "a poet can use the forms which had been once common but now they are dead syntactic structures or words". He provides the following example from Shamlu in which the words in bold type are instances of archaism because in modern Persian they are not standard forms.

غبار آلوده، از جهان

/ghobaralude az jahan/
'from the world, tainted with dust'

تصویری باژگونه در آبگینه‌ی بیقرار...

/tasviri bajgune dar abgineye bigharar/

'a capsized image in the restless mirror'

3. Methodology

3.1. Materials and Procedure

The materials for this study include a poem of Shamlu entitled 'akhar-e bazi/drop of the curtain' and its English translation by Mahmud

Kianush (1996). Here, it should be noted that there exists no complete translation of Shamlu's allpoetry. All of the translations only include some of his selected poems and most of them are not well compiled. As such, the researcher has selected this translation as it is a part of the book 'Modern Persian Poetry' by a famous translator and poet, i.e. Mahmud Kianush.

In the light of Leech's account of archaism, the present study aims at analyzing the instances of archaism in this poem via comparing it with the English translation to see to what extent these archaisms are translatable and what has happened to them in the process of translation.

To do so, the instances of archaism in this Shamlu's poem are specified and compared with the translation to answer the following question:

To what extent has the English translation been successful in conveying the archaism of the original poem?

3.2. Ahmad Shamlu

Modern Persian poetry was an attempt made after Iran's Constitutional Revolution (1906) to meet the requirements of its current society. The classical type of poetry had nothing new to present and in fact after Hafez (14th century) the Persian poetry had begun to decline and despite the advent of some eminent poets, the need for a fundamental and underlying change in poetry was inevitable (Arianpur, 1976, 49).

Modern poets like Taqi Rafat, Jafer Khamenei, and Nima Yushij, as Arianpur (1976) asserts, revolted against traditional poetic customs and claimed that the magnificence of the classic works of poetry would not enforce them to be blind followers of them (p. 50). Nima Yushij, after publishing "Afsane/Legend" in 1926 combined the issue of poetry with social affairs and paved the way for other poets to enter in their poetry matters like realities of life, freedom, language of ordinary people, etc. In his prelude to "Afsane", Nima declared that for a poet there is no virtue more significant than he could "describe nature better and express the meaning in a simple way" (Azad, p. 38).

After Nima, poets like Akhavan-Sales, Forugh, Sepehri and Shamlu and others spoke of modern poetry and tried to illuminate it. Among them, Shamlu was a very influential figure. He was, as Dastgheib (1994, p. 5) observes, "One of the most distinguished initiators of modern Persian poetry, who after Nima had the most influence on the contemporary poets and poetry". He entered into the world of his poetry the real life with its ups and downs and spoke of deep realities. Though Nima was the pioneer of modern Persian poetry, by keeping a kind of meter and rhyme, he somehow preserved his dependence on the old literature. Nima believed in meter. As he argued himself, "it is meter that makes a poem structured and complete. Nima asserted, "In my opinion, a poem which does not have meter is like a person that is naked and unclothed" (in Akhavan-e Sales, 1978, p.105).

In his early works, Shamlu was under the influence of the poetry and the language of Nima, but little by little he found his own way and became released from Nima's impact and obtained his own poetic independence by composing the works of 'Bagh-e-Ayene' and 'Ayda in the Mirror', and ranked himself among the most prominent poets of Iran. He found it necessary to free the poetry from the traditional ties of prosodic meter and introduced his own style of poetry as 'blank verse' and accordingly a new period in Persian poetry came into existence. Blank verse is a kind of verse that can be free from both meter and rhyme "at the same time as it bears an unanticipated music of its own" (Papan-Matin, 2005, p. 27).

As Shamlu himself asserts, "I regard meter as an external and imposing element: something distracting to the poet, which hinders natural creation of a poem" (in Hariri, 1993, p. 50). He substituted meter with 'internal music' and paid attention to the 'change in the inner structure of the poem' which is, as Mojabi (1998) observes, "based on understanding the music and harmony of words and handling artistically with language, which finally accomplishes to the final composition of the poem" (p. 74). According to Hoghghi, "the music in Shamlu's poetry is not based upon any regular pattern, but it is achieved as a result of his selection of musical and ear-pleasing words and his dominance in placing such words near each other" (1997, p. 14).

4. Data analysis

Archaism is a kind of linguistic deviation in which the poet uses archaic words or structures no longer used in daily language to enhance the aesthetical or musical value of the poem. Leech defines 'archaism' as "the survival of the past into the language of present time" (1969, p, 52). In Shamlu's poetry, archaism plays an important part. It is the characteristic feature of his poetry. We will discuss the archaism of Shamlu's poetry into two subparts:

- Words or verbs which have been completely obsolete in the standard language, and
- Obsolete syntactic structures or phonetically or morphologically abolished ones.

The Poem and its English Translation:

آخر بازی / *akhare bazi*
عاشقان / *asheghan*
سرشکسته گذشتند / *sarshekaste gozashtand*
شرمسار ترانه های بی هنگام خویش / *sharmsare taranehayeh bihangame khish*
و کوچه ها / *va kucheha*
بی زمزمه ماند و صدای پا. / *bi zamzame mando sedaye pa.*
سربازان / *sarbazan*
شکسته گذشتند / *shekaste gozashtand*
خسته / *khaste*
بر اسبان تشریح، / *bar asbane tashrih*
و لته های بی رنگ غروری / *va lattehayeh birange ghoruri*
نگونسار / *negunsar*
/ *bar neyzehayeshan*
بر نیزه های شان.

تو را چه سود / *to ra che sud*
فخر به فلک بر / *fakhr be falak bar*
/ *forukhtan* / *hangami ke*
هنگامی که
هر غبار راه لعنت شده / *har ghobare rahe lanat shode nefrinat mikonad*
نفرینت میکند؟
تو را چه سود از باغ و درخت / *to ra che sud az bagho derakht*
که با یاس ها / *ke ba yasha*

/be das sokhan gofteii/ **به داس سخن گفته ای.** /anja ke **ghadam barnahade bashi**/ آنجا که قدم بر نهاده باشی/ **giah**/ گیاه
/az rostan tan mizand/ از رستن تن میزند
/taghvaye khako ab ra / چرا که تو/ **chera ke to**/ تفوی خاک و آب را
/hargez/ هرگز
/bavar nadashti/ باور نداشتی.
/faghan ke sargozashte ma/ **فغان** که سرگذشت ما / **sorude bieteghade sarbazane to bud**/ سرود بی اعتقاد سربازان تو بود
/ke az fathe ghaleye **rusbian**/ که از فتح قلعه ی روسبیان/ **baz miamadand**./ باز می آمدند.
/bush ta nefrine duzakh **az to che saza**/ **باش** تا نفرین دوزخ
از تو چه سازد
/ke madarane siahpush/ که مادران سیاه پوش
/daghdarane zibatarin farzandane aftabo bad/ داغداران زیباترین فرزندان آفتاب و باد
/hanuz az sajjadeha/ هنوز از سجاده ها
/sar bar nagrefteand/ **سر برنگرفته اند!**

Kianush's Translation:

Drop of the Curtain

Lovers went away in disgrace
Ashamed before Songs
Because they sang them
At an inappropriate time.
And the streets
Are left empty of the murmur
Of voices
And the sound of steps.
Soldiers went away stricken,
Exhausted,

Riding on skeletal horses,
Faded rags of an overthrown pride
Hanging from their spears!
What is the good of shouting your pride
 To stars,
When each particle of the dust
 In the accursed road curses you!
What is the good of garden and trees
 To you,
Who have spoken to jasmines
With the tongue of scythes!
Plants refuse to grow in earth
Where you have once trodden,
Because you cannot believe
In the piety of Soil and Water.
Alas! The history of our lives
Was nothing but the untruthful war songs
 Of your soldiers,
Whose triumph was the conquest
 Of the Harlot's Fortress.
Wait and see what the curse of the night
Will make you suffer,
Because the mothers in black,
Who mourn for the most beautiful sons
 Of the Sun and the Wind,
Have yet to raise their heads
From their prayer mats!

In the original poem, there are overall nine instances of archaism in the original poem which are shown in bold type face: The word 'faghan' is an obsolete archaic word and the word 'rusbi' is also phonetically obsolete. The verb phrases 'bar nahade bashi', 'sar bar nagereftan' and the verb 'saazad' in 'az to che sazad' represent archaism. Again, the structures 'to ra che sud', 'fakhr be falak bar forukhtan' and 'bash ta' are instances of archaism. Also, the preposition 'be' in 'ba yas ha be das sokhan goftei' indicates a case of archaism. These plentiful instances of archaism give this poem a flavor of the past.

In the translation, only two out of nine of the original deviations are conveyed: 'alas' for 'faghan' and 'harlot' for 'rusbi'; in other cases, the translator has failed to convey these artistic elements into his translation and has translated them by using common words and expressions which are not representative of special archaic features. However, the language used in the translation, though not obsolete, includes a sort of literary and solid structure which makes the language of the translation more similar to the archaic and solid language of the original poem. Although the patterns like 'what is the good of', 'was nothing but', 'wait and see', 'have yet to raise' and the word 'accursed' are not special cases of archaism, they make the language of the translation more solid and poetic.

5. Results and Concluding Remarks

As a matter of fact, Poetry is the most condensed and concentrated form of literature, saying most in the fewest number of words. Most theories of literary criticism are based upon the analysis of poetry. As Jakobson argues, poetry "is entitled to the leading place in literary studies as the main subject of poetics is the 'specific differences' of verbal art in relation to other arts and in relation to other kinds of verbal behavior" (in Lodge, 1988, p. 32).

On the other hand, translation of poetry as the most intense form of literature has always been a matter of debate. It is a generally accepted view that the translation of poetry is the most difficult, challenging and possibly rewarding form of translation. This famous saying by Robert Frost "poetry is what is lost in translation" is often quoted in the literature to highlight the difficulty of the task (in Manafi Anari, 2003, p. 10).

Since the style of poetry is more imaginative, concentrated, complex, and powerful than that of ordinary prose, it is very difficult, sometimes impossible, to transfer all the linguistic features of a poem from one language into another. Nevertheless, it is necessary for the translator of poetry to pay a close attention to the stylistic matters, for style makes the authorship of a poem and also distinguishes poetry translation from other kinds of translations.

In Shamlu's poetry, as presented above, archaism was a dominant and determining factor of his poetic style. However, as to the research question that was earlier posed, in the translation the majority of the instances of archaism were ignored.

Both form and content are important in poetry. The ideal translation of poetry is when both form and content be transferred into the translation. One can say that archaism is more or less connected to the formal aspects or stylistic features of poetry. However, since in this translation the majority of the cases of archaism were not transferred, one could say that the formal features of the original poem have not been conveyed to an acceptable degree.

The significance of Shamlu's poetry is in the artistic kind of language he uses—contrary to the language of, say, Forugh Farrokhzad or Sohrab Sepehri which is not so language-dependent. In other words, one could say that Shamlu's poetry is very language-dependent. In his poetry archaism is the characteristic feature. According to Shafii Kadkani (1989), “in Shamlu's successful works, the consideration of archaism is one of the most important elements of linguistic distinctness that can to some extent compensate for the lack of rhythm in his poetry” (p. 25, my translation). It gives his poetry a sort of epic coloring and also a flavor of the past. However, as the findings of the study showed, there are a lot of losses in the translation concerning this matter.

What we usually see in the case of translation of archaism is that the translator mostly takes the obsolete word or archaic structure and just elicits the surface meaning—without paying attention to the fact that the word is archaic and obsolete— and renders it with a word or structure which belongs to the modern and daily-used language. In many cases this can be inevitable, because it is possible that the target language does not contain a straightforward archaic equivalent for the source archaic word or expression, in which case one may say that we are faced with the notion of untranslatability—though un/translatability is a comparative concept and the translator, must try his/her best to convey all poetic features.

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Based on what was said, the reasonable conclusion to arrive at may be that a literal method of translation is generally useful in the case of linguistic deviations in general and archaism in particular, because exclusion or omission of these poetic devices may have drastic effects on the style of the text. The translator should try his/her best to make use of archaic words and combinations accessible in English to create the same effect in the translation just like that of original poems. However, the translator should be careful that using archaism may not mar the unity or naturalness of the translation.

Finally, it could be said that the more language-dependent the poetry is, the more difficult it would be to translate. The comparatively few translations of Shamlu's poetry probably have something to do with this.

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