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Discussion of Edward Fitzgerald's *Ruba'iyat of Omar Khayyam:*

A Comparative Analysis of the Translations of the Colonial and Post-colonial Periods

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master of Arts in Translation Studies

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January, 2012

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In the name of God

To My Mom and Dad

Acknowledgement

I am indebted to a number of people who in one fashion or another have helped make this project a reality.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to my dear advisor, doctor Mansoor Fahim, for his encouragement with the project, his unfailing patience, valuable advice, enthusiastic support and good humor throughout my work on this project: you have made this project possible.

I am more than grateful to my dear reader, Dr. Masoud Motahari, for his positive suggestions, constructive advice and good grace in providing detailed comment on the work.

I would like to express my extreme gratitude to Dr. Noormohamadi who first initiated my interest in this kind of thing.

I would also like to acknowledge my debt to my dear parents for their generous, wholehearted support.

And thanks to Mitim for keeping me company.

Abstract

An offspring of the cultural turn of translation studies, *Post-colonial Translation Theory* suggests that translation was for long used as a tool employed by the West for the subjugation of the third world and as a way for the imposition of western ideological values on the East. This entails a great deal of distortion, from a post-colonialist perspective. A major work of the western literary canon, Edward Fitzgerald's translation of *Ruba'iyat of Omar Khayyam*, translated in the heyday of England's colonial dominance in the world (mid-1800s), has for long been debated regarding the changes it has undergone in the process of translation and the marked divergences it has from the original. The present study performed a comparative analysis of the strategies applied in the translation in question and four translations of the same work produced in the post-colonial period (mid-1900s). The theoretical framework for this analysis was that of Michael H. Jones (1997) according to which he regarded all poetry translation strategy as falling within four categories: Literal Translation, Approximation, Adaptation and Imitation. The present study intended to compare the translations in the colonial and the post-colonial periods to find out whether there are major differences between those produced in the former and those made during the latter. As regards the first thesis question, the translation strategy table revealed a significant degree of difference between Fitzgerald's translation and those produced in the post–colonial period. This along with the translator's colonial attitude discussed in the study might lead one to the conclusion that the marked discrepancies between Fitzgerald's version and the original can, to a great extent, be attributed to the colonial attitude of the translator toward the work and the poet.

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Background and Purpose

1. Introduction

That what approach to the translation of poetry can most effectively render the original poem in the target language has always been a major bone of contention among translators and translation scholars. It has often been argued that the translation of such texts which are generally regarded as 'sensitive' and 'form-focused' are more demanding than that of 'non-poetic' texts. "Poetic language is regarded as the most creative of discourse, original in its ideas and inventive in its form", contends Hanson (1992: 28). However, besides the linguistic features of a literary text and, poetry here in particular, which are, without a shadow of doubt, of great significance in translation, the cultural approach to translating such texts has become the vogue and a locus of inquiry over the past few decades.

Up until the 1980s translation had mostly been studied within certain linguistic-based frameworks with studies predominantly addressing the structural qualities of translation with respect to notions such as equivalence, faithfulness, fidelity, adequacy and naturalness. However with literary theory undergoing fundamental changes in the 1960s attention was drawn to the interaction between translation and culture, on the way in

which culture impacts and constraints translation and on "the larger issues of context, history and convention" rather than the study of translation in isolation (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990: 11). Hence, linguistic theories of translation faced with a great deal of criticism by Bassnett and Lefevere (ibid: 4), among others, for remaining static in the bounds of text in their studying translation, and not moving beyond, gave way to studying translation from a cultural studies angle. Venuti (1994), similarly, insists that the scope of translation studies needs to be broadened to take account of the value-driven nature of the socio-cultural framework. Thus, in order to acquire a proper understanding of the translation act, one must not only view translation from a textual-linguistic point of view, but also take into consideration the translator's socio-cultural milieu and their ideological aspects of thoughts.

Critical to the cultural approach to translation studies is post-colonial translation theory. An approach to translation studies from a post-colonial perspective provides new ways to see and understand the cultural and social forces at work in society, literature and the process and product of translation.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Cultural and ideological nuances of meaning have always been of great significance in translation. A major literary theory of the recent decades, Post-colonial translation and its theorists investigate what happens when two cultures clash and when one of them, with its accessory ideology, empowers and deems itself superior to the other.

Sherry Simon (1996: 145-7), on the importance of the cultural turn in translation, highlights Spivak's concern about the ideological consequences of the translation of 'Third World' literature into English and the distortion this entails. Post-colonial translation, in Spivak's view, is often expressed in 'translationese', which eliminates the identity of politically less powerful individuals and cultures leading to a rewritten image of the 'East'. Hence, according to Simon (1996) and Munday (2008), the translation from "third world" literature into English has been subjected to a great deal of distortion and imposition of Western ideological values. That, maintain Simon and Munday, is the major cause of discrepancies between the source and the target text from a Post-colonial translation perspective.

A fair amount of the world's literature comes under the heading of Post-colonialism. Moreover, Fitzgerald's translation of Ruba'iyat of Omar Khayyam has for long been debated regarding the discrepancies many contend exists between the translation and the original work. Extensive comparative analysis with respect to the translation and Ruba'iyat has been done (Heron-Allen: 1899, Dashti: 1971, Minavi: 1988, Emami: 1996 and Farahzad: 2004), and much theory has been produced and put forward apropos the ideological motive of the translator and the linguistic divergence of the translation in question from the original work; nonetheless, little exhaustive research has so far been done to, in an investigative fashion, analyze the translation strategies applied in the Fitzgerald's version and draw a detailed comparison between the translation and other major translated versions of the same work.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The aim of this study is to determine whether there are major differences between the translation strategies applied in Fitzgerald's version and those adopted by the translators in the post-colonial period. Also, critical to the analysis presented here is to ascertain whether one can attribute the much

debated Fitzgerald's version's discrepancies with the original to the colonial attitude of the translator to the work and the poet. Subsequently, the five translations of the original work (those quatrains firmly believed to be Khayyam's and common to all the translators), including that of the translator in question, were selected and a comparative analysis of the translation strategies adopted by the translators of the two periods was conducted to illustrate the argument.

1.3 Research questions

1. Are there major differences between Fitzgerald's translation and those produced in the post-colonial period?

2. Can discrepancies between Fitzgerald's translation and the original be attributed to the colonial attitude of the west; that is, the translator, according to the post-colonial theory of translation?

1.4 Research hypothesis

Since the research is corpus-based and at the same time of theoretical and empirical significance, no hypothesis is assumed by the researcher. The researcher, however, believes that the translation in question was under

the influence of the colonial climate of the era and therefore different from those produced in the post-colonial period. In this way, the oral and written discourses created by the West, the once colonizers of the East, with regard to the third world are under the direct influence of the ruling ideology of the west. Consequently, the researcher assumes that the English translation of *Ruba'iyat of Omar Khayyam* has been subjected to a great deal of distortion due to the translator's scornful attitude towards the writer and the East as referred to in the Post-colonial theory of translation.

1.5 Definition of the key terms

Here the key terms of the study are defined in alphabetical order:

Colonial period: late 15th century, asserts Tyson (2006: 418) marks the beginning of the colonial dominance of the Europe in the world. 19th century, however, is regarded as the height of England's colonial power in the world.

Distortion/Rewriting: in Post-colonial terms, the changes made to the text in the process of translation from third world literature into English due to The English's condescending attitude towards the East and their belief in the East's inability to create their own literature OR the application of

translation by the colonial power to construct a rewritten image of the East (Munday, 2008: 132)

Ideology: Eagleton (2008) describes this term as ideas and beliefs which help to legitimate the interest of a ruling group or class by distortion and dissimulation.

Other: a term used in post-colonialism to mean "different from" and unimportant, that which is dominated; that is, the colonized as defined by Bressler (2007: 353).

Othering: Tyson (2006) asserts that the practice of judging all who are different as (inferior) and less than fully human is called "Othering".

Post-colonialism: Post-colonialism seeks to understand the operations- politically, socially, culturally and psychologically- of colonialist and anti-colonialist ideology (Tyson; 2006: 416)

Post-colonial Period: the gradual disappearance of the England's political, social, economic and ideological dominance of its many colonies in the early 20th century marks the beginning of the Post-colonial period (Bressler, 2007: 237).

Post-colonial translation theory: from a Post-colonial perspective, Bassnett (2011: 103) contends, translation is used metaphorically as a device for understanding the plurality of identity issues that come out of a condition of migrancy. From within translation studies, (however), the idea of the cultural turn has been developed o include research into translation and global power relations. In other words, according to the Routledge Companion to Translation Studies (2009: 216), (this is an area) where translation is often employed as a metaphor to show how it functions as an instrument of colonial domination.

Translation studies: a general discipline by means of which the broad and multifaceted range of translation phenomena are investigated (Riccardi, 2008: 2)

1.6 The Limitations and delimitations

Since despite the thorough research by the scholars of the field over the past few decades, there is still a great deal of debate as to whether which collection of Ruba'is can be firmly attributed to Khayyam, the main limitation of this study was the unavailability of a single version of Ruba'iyat

agreed by all scholars in the field. Therefore, the researcher had to confine to the mostly agreed   version of the work in the analysis of the texts.

Being an extremely broad area of discussion, Post-colonialism encompasses issues of colonialism, racism and the literature pertaining to these notions, with its theorists and advocates each viewing the subject from a different perspective with different foci. Hence, for the sake of room and brevity, the analyses in this research are done with regard to only one major work of third world literature translated into English with an accent on ideology as proposed within the scope of Post-colonial theory of translation.

1.7 Significance of the study

The major questions frequently asked by most, if not all, readers of a specific translation is "why a text is translated in a certain way" or more meticulously "what the forces that influence and direct the translation towards a particular manner are". One of the most remarkable works of Persian literature, *"Ruba'iyat of Omar Khayyam"* has always been of significant literary and poetic value in the Persian literary canon. While the 19th century translation of Ruba'iyat gave further prominence to the work worldwide, it has since been a focus of literary debate respecting the

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acceptability of the work as a translation in the first place. That is, Fitzgerald's translation of "Ruba'iyat" in 1859 is believed to have diverged dramatically from the original in the process of translation, asserts Emami (1996). So, it is concerning to investigate the strategies applied in the translation of a text of such literary magnitude. Also, central to this study is an effort to ascertain whether Fitzgerald's much debated translation was influenced by the cultural and ideological forces of the era and the translator's attitude toward the work. The study is, in particular, of pedagogical value in that it presents a thorough comparative analysis of five translations of the work in question, and therefore of great use in developing an understanding of the principles and approaches to poetry translation. In addition, it can be of practical use to those interested in cultural approaches to the study of translation.