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**Deforming Tendencies in the English Translation of** Preemchand's Kafan by Reeck and Ahmad: An Analytical Study





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#### **Abstract**

This study investigates the changes that occurred due to the translation of the original text (ST) of the short story Kafan, composed by Munshi Premchand in 1936. This story, originally composed in Urdu, focuses on the bleak realities of poverty and the struggles of the lower class in Indian society. The English version analyzed in this study is *The Shroud*, translated by Matt Reeck and Aftab Ahmad in 2004. Through a close reading technique and a qualitative approach, the study investigates selected passages from the English translation to identify deforming tendencies. The analysis reveals that certain deformities occurred in terms of syntax and semantics during the translation process. These shifts impact the stylistic and semantic unity of the source text. According to the theory of deforming tendencies by Antoine Berman (1985), translation often results in changes that reduce the beauty and spirit of the original text. The researchers found that the translator adopted many deforming tendencies to make the translation appear more admirable and clarified. In total, seven deforming tendencies were identified in this study including rationalization, clarification, ennoblement, expansion, the destruction of underlying networks of signification, quantitative impoverishment, and the destruction of linguistic patterning. The study analyzed these deforming tendencies and identified specific linguistic forms, including words, phrases, and sentences.

**Keywords**: Munshi Premchand, *Kafan*, Matt Reeck and Aftab Ahmad, Translation studies, Deforming tendencies.

#### Introduction

Several definitions exist for the term "translation." It generally refers to the field, product and process that are involved in producing the translation of the original text. According to Jakobson (1959), the translator modifies the source written expression in the target language as part of the process. The process of replacing text in the source language with that in the target language is known as translation.

These fall into the following categories:

1. The interpretation of phrases in which one sign of a language is rephrased in another sign of the same language is known as intra-lingual translation, or rewording.

- 2. Interpreting a text using a sign from one language to another is known as interlingual translation, or proper translation.
- 3. The explanation of verbal expressions by non-verbal expressions from one language to another is known as inter-semiotic translation, or transmutation.

According to Nida (1964:3), the transfer of a communication from one linguistic unit to another is a powerful theme for systematic representation. Catford (1965) defines translation as an action carried out on texts: a process of substituting a writing in one language with a writing in another, based on semantic supposition. It goes without saying that any translation hypothesis must be based on a linguistic realm theory, such as an overall etymological hypothesis. Newmark (1992) defined translation research as a series of steps that go from translation work to translation study. Therefore, Berman (2000) criticizes the general tendency to deny the external translation by using the naturalization translation process, which is comparable to Venuti's (2012) domestication model. According to Berman (2000:277), Venuti's model (2012) foreignization translation process was impacted by external influences, which is why translation is motivated by moral considerations.

Khan (2023) conducted a "Study of the Deforming Tendencies in the English Translation of Pashto book (زما ژوند او جدوجهد) Zama Jwand Ao Jidojehad which is translated to English as (My Life and Struggle) by Imtiaz Ahmad Sahibzada." Zama Jwand Ao Jidojehad is the source text for the study, whereas My Life and Struggle is the target text for the analysis. The organization of the study, in order to investigate this study, the researcher adopted a qualitative method and a close reading approach. Expansion, ennoblement, rationalization, clarification, qualitative impoverishment, breakdown of underlying networks of meaning were among the matters he attempted to investigate. Ultimately, he found that the translated text was in fact, deformed in all the ways he had already identified.

"Tracing Deforming Tendencies in the English Translation of Faiz' Selected Poem" by Javaid (2021). A primary qualitative research method employed by the investigator was content analysis. In trying to accumulate empirical evidence to see which of the nine deformations ("rationalization, clarification, expansion, and ennoblement, qualitative and quantitative impoverishment, destruction of underlying networks of significance, linguistic textures, and of the rhythm") were more common

than others.

Translation, as identified by Crystal (2003) is the process of carrying across meanings from one language to another. Hatim and Mason (2014) suggest that social environment is to be more involved in text translation than content field. Therefore, translation activity is mediated by the sociocultural context. A couple of thoughts on translation are actually fairly well illuminated by the following two ideas on the practice:

McGuire (2003) maintains that translation is the process of transforming a text from the source language (SL) into the target language (TL) where (1) the surface meaning of two languages is approximately equivalent and (2) the SL structure remains as closely as possible to the TL structure. Khan (2024) did an analytical study of the deforming tendencies in Khalid Hasan's English translation of Manto's *Toba Tek Singh*. Antonie Berman's Deforming Tendencies, is the main theoretical framework for the text analysis in this research, a qualitative research analysis.

Translation inherently carries issues like environment, culture, and punctuation. Because culture develops gradually, this requirement makes it challenging to grasp a wide range of languages (Rosman & Rubel, 2020). Mustafa and El-Masry (2008) discussed the concept of cultural translation in their paper. They highlight a cultural loss, a cultural equivalence which arises when literary Arabic is translated into English. They also discuss how translating metaphorical languages or tropes—such as proverb, metaphor, and figuration that are embedded in the source text—into another language leads to the reduction of cultural representations. Since many critics believe that the beauty of any literary work cannot be kept in any language other than the one in which it was originally written, Pym (2017) claimed that maintaining the beauty of the material's element during the translation process is the most difficult task. Since the process and practice of translating include a number of factors, including equivalency, deforming tendencies, domestication, and foreignization, to name a few, no translation is perfect. However, since all translations are approximations, it is important to note that an "absolute translation is also not desirable." Larson (1998) claimed that cultural context is just as important to translation as the text itself. Translation is a difficult process that takes into account both cultures and two distinct texts. Even while something can be expressed in one

language, it is usually challenging to recreate in the target language, making it a complex process. It is now acknowledged that multilingual people can serve as interpreters or translators, claims Sharma (2001). However, this is only partially true because translators must understand the structure of both the source and target languages in addition to being culturally sensitive.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- 1. To investigate the deforming tendencies in the English translation of *Kafan* into *The Shroud*.
- 2. To investigate how the target text is affected by these deforming tendencies.

### **Research Questions**

- 1. What deforming tendencies are adopted in the English translation of *Kafan* into *The Shroud?*
- 2. How does the target text get affected by these deforming tendencies?

### Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design. The study investigates and aims to explore the deforming tendencies in the English translations of *Kafan* (translated as *Shroud*), a short story by Premchand. The tendencies based on the alteration, exclusion, or deformation can occur during the course of the process of translating, often replacing the core of the original text (Berman, 2000). Close reading technique is the main tool we use for data collection. Close reading, Burke (2011) contends, allows scholars to critically engage a text through its language, form, and cultural background in addition to opening up important themes, deeper meanings, and points of entry. For data analysis we apply textual analysis and close reading as fundamental methods to investigate the deforming tendencies in the English translation of a selected Premchand short story translated by Reeck and Ahmad.

The researchers used Antoine Berman's (1985) model of twelve deforming tendencies as a theoretical framework. Berman, a French philosopher and translator, proposed this model to identify specific distortions that often occur in the translation process. This research followed the same theoretical foundation concerning form and content, as translated by Matt Reeck and Aftab Ahmad. Berman outlined the following deforming tendencies: 1. Rationalization 2. Clarification 3. Expansion 4.

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Ennoblement 5. Qualitative Impoverishment 6. Quantitative Impoverishment 7.

Destruction of rhythms 8. The destruction of underlying networks of significance 9.

The destruction of linguistic patterning 10. The destruction of vernacular networks or

their exoticization11. The destruction of idioms and expressions12. The effacement of

the superimposition of language

**Data Analysis and Discussion** 

This study investigated the deforming tendencies in the English translation of Munshi

Premchand's short story Kafan by Matt Reeck and Aftab Ahmad (2004). Drawing on

Berman (2000) theory, this section will be organized according to the research

questions. In the first part, we addressed the first research question: What deforming

tendencies are adopted in the English translation? In the following part, we answered

the second question: How does the target text get affected by these deforming

tendencies?

In the data analysis and discussion part, the Urdu texts are taken from

Premchand's short story Kafan, originally published in Jamia (Dec. 1935, pp. 988-

996), followed by Zaad-e-Rah (1936, Lucknow). Whereas the translated text in

English is taken from the translated version of this story under the title The Shroud by

Matt Reeck and Aftab Ahmad. Published in The Annual of Urdu Studies, Vol. 21

(2006), pp. 398–405.

First part

What deforming tendencies are adopted in the English translation?

Rationalization

Example 1

**Urdu Source:** 

''دونوں ایک دوسرے کے دل کا ماجرا معنوی طور پر سمجھ رہے تھے۔ بازار میں ادھر ادھر گھومتے

رہے۔ یہاں تک کہ شام ہو گئی۔'' (p.994)

**English Target:** Sometimes they went to one cloth-seller's shop, sometimes to another.

They looked at various kinds of fabric, they looked at silk and cotton, but nothing

suited them. (p. 403)

Example 2

**Urdu Source:** 

216

**English target:** Then Ghisu went to the counter and said, "Sir, please give us a bottle too." Ghisu bought one bottle of liquor, and some sesame sweets. (p. 403)

### Example 3:

### **Urdu Source:**

**English target:** Ghisu laughed. "We'll say the money slipped out of my waistband—we searched and searched for it, but it didn't turn up. People won't believe it, but they'll still give the same sum again." (p. 404)

### **Analysis**

in the Urdu text, this sentence is unclear and openended. It means that, it simply conveying useless wandering and leaving the task to the reader's imagination. Whereas the English translation reshapes this lack of certainty into a clear process: going to various shops, examining particular textiles, such as cotton and silk, and determining their suitability. Because the source lacked this additional logical, consecutive material, the reader will see the structure as being more "organized." Then in the second example in the original text, the actual interaction process is not described, but movement occurs quickly from hesitation to buying whiskey to drinking. On the other hand, in English, the translators make the target text more plain by adding location cues ("went to the counter") and invented direct speech ("Sir, please give us a bottle too"). The last example shows that in the source text, Ghisu simply gives his excuse, and the issue is solved there, with no point about whether people will agree with him. Whereas the English translation includes a follow-up thought—"People would not believe it, but they will still give the same amount of money again"—which is not mentioned in the original. This addition led an open-ended statement into a complete statement: first the excuse, followed by a prediction of others' reaction, and lastly the expected result. By this addition, the translator makes the scene clearer, straightforward, and orderly, which is exactly what Berman calls "rationalization."

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Example 1

**Urdu Source:** 

"ديكه كر كيا آؤں-"(p· 989)

English Target: "Why don't you go take look?" (p. 398)

Example 2

**Urdu Source:** 

**English Target:** Her entire body was sticky with dust and grime. (p. 401)

#### **Analysis**

First of all, in the above example, the source text is also extended in the target text, which means that the target text is extensive than the original one, and this is only done for clarification, which is also a deforming tendency. The translator did it to target readers to clearly understand the meanings, and the syntactic structure had been deformed in the aforementioned example, which is taken from both the source text and target text. Then in the next example The Urdu is simple and direct, giving only one image—a body covered in dust—and allowing the readers to imagine the rest. In the English version, translators add two additional details: the feeling of being "sticky" and the other word, "grime." These details tell the readers exactly how to picture the scene— "sticky" points to wetness and decay, while "grime" adds a stronger sense of dirt—which limits the different ways the scene could be understood. In the original, "dust" is a broad term in South Asian stories that stands for many things, like religious uncleanliness, poverty, neglect, or even the idea of death ("returning to dust"). By adding "sticky" and "grime," The original's flexibility to multiple interpretations is diminished by the translation, which not only clarifies the physical state but also shifts the tone toward something less agreeable. This demonstrates how clarification can manipulate the reader's response by substituting a single, highly described image for the brief, multifaceted image found in Urdu.

**Expansion** 

Example 1

**Urdu Source:** 

"گھیسو ایک دن کام کرتا تو تین دن آرام، مادھو اتنا کام چور تھا کہ گھنٹے بھر کام کرتا تو گھنٹے بھر چلم پیتا
$$(p \cdot 989)$$

**English target:** "For every day that he would work, Gheesu would take it easy for three. And Madho was so lazy that for every hour he worked, he would smoke his pipe for another ". (p. 398)

Example 2

**Urdu Source:** 

"لڑکی والوں نے سب کو پوڑیاں کھلائی تھیں، سب کو۔ چھوٹے بڑے سب نے پوڑیاں کھائیں اور اصلی گھی کی چٹنی،رائتہ، تین طرح کے سوکھے ساگ، ایک رسے دار ترکاری، دہی، چٹنی، مٹھائی" (*p· 991)* 

**English Target:** "The girl's family served puris to everyone, everyone. The poorest and the richest ate puris, satpanis made from pure ghee, three types of dry vegetable dishes, one creamy dal, yogurt, chutney, and sweets. How can I tell you how tasty that meal was! We could eat as much as we wanted." (p. 400)

#### **Analysis**

In the initial example, the translation, then, made TT longer than ST. The translator extended the length of the target sentence by simply adding a few words in the target text that are not present in the source. This step is undertaken to ensure the target text is comprehensible for the readers. For example short-worded unattractive and objectionable in Urdu like" گهسو ایک دن کام کرتا تو تین دن آرام" (Gheesu worked for one day, so Gheesu would rest for three) get stretched in English to "For every day he worked, Gheesu took it easy for three," adding unnecessary descriptive language. The text also extended through the use of articles, possessive pronouns such as "the" and "his" to fit the English grammar. Then in the following example The Urdu text presents a simple, culturally familiar description—a simple list of two food items—relying on the readers' background knowledge to imagine abundance and festivity. In the English text of the story, the translator lengthens the scene into a detailed catalogue, including social context ("the poorest and the richest"), more food items

("satpanis," "three types of dry vegetable dishes," "one creamy dal," "yogurt," "sweets"), and commentary on taste and quantity. For readers who are not familiar with the culture, this additional detail modifies the structure, but it also changes the tone and tempo, transforming a fleeting sentimental note into a lengthy, dissipated recollection. Due to both of the above examples the translation may become more approachable as a result of the expansion's change in style from concise and suggestive to detailed and descriptive, but it may also become less accurate in terms of the original's economy and rhythm.

#### **Ennoblement**

### Example 1

Urdu source:

English Target: "If at home they had two handfuls of grain, then they said to hell with work." (p. 398)

Example 2

**Urdu Source:** 

"گهر اجڑ گیا۔" (*p*· 993)

**English Target:** "Our house is desolate." (p. 402)

#### **Analysis**

Ennoblement is another deforming tendency present in this translation, as the translator translates the source text into the target text in a sophisticated language. As the first example shows in the source text, the word is is translated as "hell." This is not an accurate, equal translation. The accurate translation for the said word is "swear." Then in the second given example, the translator modifies the source language to a more formal or lyrical one. The direct and straightforward Urdu phrase "highlights the simplicity of everyday speech. The reader is left to infer the emotional significance from the fact that the house is in ruins. The English phrase "Our house is desolate," in contrast, uses a word that is more formal and literary. Further to displaying emptiness, "Desolate" also presents a sense of grief and tragic beauty that is absent in the original text. These changes in style of language in both given sentences lead to ennoblement, which is one of the deforming tendencies.

The Destruction of Underlying Networks of Signification

Example 1

**Urdu Source:** 

**English target:** "Then, when they ran out of food again, they would sell some more wood or look for day-labor jobs." (p. 398)

Example 2

**Urdu Source:** 

English target: "Everyone, everyone. The poorest and the richest ate puris", (page 403)

Analysis

The first example shows that changing the core meaning of the Urdu text in the translation represents the alienation of the underlying networks of significance. For example, the source word "فقے" (famine/starvation) represents intense suffering, yet it is alleviated to "ran out of food again" in the target word list, presenting the act of hunger in a compassionate form. The desire for wood is translated from the physical act of "נצלבוט יפליב" to "sell some more wood," thus being taken more towards an economic transaction than labor. Finally, "مزدورى" (labor) is translated as "day-labor jobs," which introduces an unnecessary level of specificity and changes the mood and the focus of the source text. Then in the following example, the word "" (everyone) is often used in Urdu text to denote comprehensiveness and unity. It enhances a sense of shared experience (whether of food, ceremony, or poverty) and is present in the feast scene as well as other situations. The belief that everyone is involved in some life moments, whether they are wealthy or not, is formed by this recurrence, which creates a subtle network of meaning. By rephrasing each occurrence differently ("everyone, everyone" in one place, "the poorest and the richest" in another), in both examples the target text breaks the lexical link and disturbs this network. The thematic resonance is weakened as a result of the translation's loss of the recurrent word that connected scenes in Urdu.

**Quantitative Impoverishment** 

Example 1

**Urdu Source:** 

English Target: "Everyone insulted them, but they did not care'. (p. 399)

Example 2

**Urdu Source:** 

English Target: "Ate so much, ate so much." (p. 400.)

**Analysis** 

There is quantitative impoverishment in this translation, as it omits important information contained in the Urdu text. In the first example, the Urdu sentence" گالبان بھی کھاتے اور مار بھی مگر کوئی فکر نہیں, this phrase shows us the combination of these two problems (here characters are suffering abuse and physically beat). However, in the English text ("Everyone insulted them, but they didn't beat"), the word " مار " (physically beat) is entirely omitted. Then in the next example, "ایسا کهایا، ایسا کهایا، ایسا کهایا the original Urdu text, the phrase "Ate like this, ate like this" is a rhythmically expressive, open-ended phrase that can be interpreted in a multitude of ways. It may indicate the manner, style, excitement, or even environment of eating, with some meaning being expressed through tone and imagined signals. The semantic openness in the translated version "Ate so much, ate so much" is restricted to one dimension: quantity. The translation smooths the original's interpretive depth and removes additional potential nuances by fixing "سال" to "so much." Both examples account for Berman's quantitative impoverishment, in which the English text loses its expressive and textural potential due to the reduction of the source's lexical and semantic variety, which is exemplified by this restriction of meaning to a single fixed sense.

### The Destruction of Linguistic Patterning

**Urdu Source:** 

مٹر یا الو کی فصل میں کھیتیوں سے متر یا الو اکھاڑ لاتے اور بھون بھون کر کھاتے یا دس پانچ اوکھ 
$$p \cdot (p \cdot 990) \cdot$$

English Target: "At harvest time they would surreptitiously pick peas or dig potatoes

to fry them up to eat. Or they would steal sugarcane and at night suck them down to their fibers. "(p. 399)

### **Analysis**

From Berman's perspective, the translator applies a variety of translating procedures including 'rationalization', expansion' and 'clarification' so that the structures and patterns of the original are eradicated even when the target language itself is cohesive. Meaning is not coherent because arrangement is gone and the source language has been disorderly. In this particular piece of translation the translator has done exactly that by applying the measures of quantitative impoverishment and quantitative expansion and the gains and losses of coherence can now be seen in his target text translation. For example, translator makes use of word not originally present in the source text "surreptitiously" — and phrases —" to their fibers " and" harvest time. The translator has been so happy with these words and expressions that he has found for expressing the opinion of the author that he did not leave the linguistic form of the model text.

#### **Second Part**

#### • How does the target text get affected by these deforming tendencies?

Deformation trends such as rationalization, clarification, ennoblement, expansion and quantitative impoverishment seems to have affected the translation of Munshi Premchand's *Kafan* at the level of type and token, changing the tone, cultural meaning and the interstitial syntactic and semantic layering of the source text. These changes include adding punctuation, replacing simple expressions with more complex ones, and leaving out important specifics, which all serve to dull its emotional immediacy and its initial intent. In this way, physical violence is taken away and replaced with only name calling and/or curse words, and famine equal to mild words. Though these choices make the translation more readable, they interfere with the organic rhythm and underlying variation of the Urdu text, taking away from its cultural reserves and its raw punch. Here are some examples of changing the tone, cultural meaning, and the interstitial syntactic and semantical changes.

#### 1. Tone

#### Urdu Source:

p· 991"سارا دن تڑپتے ہو جا دیکھ توآ۔"

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English Target: "It seems like she won't make it," Gheesu said. "She's been tossing

and turning all day. Why don't you go take a look." (p.400)

**Analysis** 

In contrast to the original language, the English sound is gentle and courteous, whereas the Urdu sound is abrupt and sharp, showing no concern for her. Further, the original text's tone is affected by the sound modification and the addition of one extra

in the target text.

2. Cultural Meaning

**Urdu Source:** 

"کیسا برا رواج ہے کہ جسے جیتے جی تن دھانکنے کو چیتھڑا نہ ملے اسے مرنے پر 993-منیا کیھن چاہئے۔"

**English Target:** "What a bad custom it is that someone who didn't even have a rag to cover her body, now, when she dies, has to have a new shroud." (p. 402)

**Analysis** 

In the original text, it directly highlights and criticizes the local funeral traditions and also shows their relation with poverty. On the other hand, the meaning is the same in the target text, whereas the sound is too general and less tied with local culture. Therefore, it leads to reducing the meaning associated with local culture.

3. Interstitial Syntax

**Urdu Source:** 

"گھر میں مٹھی بھر اناج بھی موجود ہو تو ان کے لئے کام کرنے کرنے کی قسم 1990ھی۔"

**English Target:** "If at home they had two handfuls of grain, then they said to hell with work." (p.399)

**Analysis** 

Premchand used broken and fragmented speech, which matches with the oral story telling style in the original story, while the sentences in the target text are smooth, which makes the target text clear and smoother. As a result of these changes, the target text appears simpler than the original text and also diminishes the interstitial syntactic meaning present in it.

224

#### 4. Semantics

**Urdu source:** 

991)٠٠٠

**English Target:** "Her entire body was sticky with dust and grime." (p.400)

### **Analysis**

The Urdu text illustrates poverty by describing her body condition as dry and dusty, whereas in English these words are changed into sticky and grimy, which affects the semantic meaning in the original text and also changes the semantic tone.

#### **Discussion**

The English translation of Premchand's "Kafan" as "The Shroud" by Matt Reeck and Aftab Ahmad leads to deformation resulting from linguistic and cultural imbalance between the source and target languages. To systematically examine these challenges, we employed Antoine Berman's theory of deforming tendencies, uncovering seven specific deformations, which are mentioned above. These deformations collectively affect the target text by modifying the original's tone, distorting cultural meanings, disrupting syntactic rhythms, and diluting key semantic networks, eventually producing hurdles and obstacles to delivering the full central and artistic force of Premchand's work in the translated text.

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, this research focuses to analyze seven deforming tendencies in the English translation of Kafan by Matt Reeck and Aftab Ahmad. The researchers used the qualitative method and close reading technique for data analysis. The analysis showed various deforming tendencies in the English translation which include: rationalization, expansion, ennoblement, quantitative impoverishment, the destruction of underlying networks of signification, the destruction of linguistic patterning, and clarification. These tendencies take place at different degree of the text, including lexical, grammatical, syntactic, and semantic levels. Deformation trends such as clarification. rationalization. ennoblement, expansion and quantitative impoverishment seems to have affected the translation of Munshi Premchand's Kafan at the level of type and token, changing the tone, cultural meaning and the interstitial syntactic and semantic layering of the source text. These changes include adding punctuation, replacing simple expressions with more complex ones, and leaving out

important specifics, which all serve to dull its emotional immediacy and its initial intent. In this way, physical violence is taken away and replaced with only name calling and/or curse words. Though these choices make the translation more readable, they interfere with the organic rhythm and underlying variation of the Urdu text, taking away from its cultural reserves and its raw punch. According to the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the English translation of Reeck and Ahmad undergoes from important deforming tendencies. These tendencies have resulted in a deformed version of the original text, which may lead to confusion and mistaking of the author's intended meaning. Therefore, it is very important to raise awareness of the importance of accurate translation and to encourage the use of capable and professional translators who possess the necessary linguistic and cultural knowledge to produce faithful translations.

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