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RESHAPING AND RELOCATING “PRUFROCK” THROUGH TRANSLATION: CHALLENGES  
AND OUTCOMES

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ABSTRACT

Poetry translation is one of the highly discussed discourses in translation studies where the core debate lies regarding the challenges of maintaining semantic, aesthetic and cultural equivalence between the source text and target language. In this paper, we are concentrating on the ways T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”(1910) is treated in its three different Bengali translations by the contemporary Bangladeshi translators i.e. Subrata Augustine Gomes’ “*J. Alfred Prufrocker Premgeeti*”(1998), Khondokar Ashraf Hossain’s “*Alfu Sarderer Peeriter Lachadi*”(2013) and Suresh Ranjan Basak’s “*J. Alfred Prufrock Prem Sangeet*” (2017).The paper will examine how, through different approaches of translation, the modern western “Prufrock” has been unriddled and somewhat localized as a modern Bengali individual underlining a tension between high and low culture. Based on Eugene Nida’s translation theory about dynamic and formal equivalence, this paper also tries to look into the facts that while trying to keep the balance between originality and exercising liberty if the translators lost aesthetics in the process or if they could negotiate with the originality of the source text and finally what can be the outcomes when the cultural context of the target language intervenes or interfuses into the source text while relocating English “Prufrock” into Bengali language and culture.

Keywords: Equivalence, fidelity, locale, localization, negotiation, poetic aesthetics.

Within a couple of decades translation studies have evolved rapidly and translating is no longer seen as a mere process of transferring words from one language to another. Depending on text types, various dimensions of translation, both as a process and a product, have been discovered and been variedly discussed. One of the most discussed and debated topics among those discourses has been the challenges and approaches regarding translating poetry from one language into another. The few basic questions that arise during the process and regarding the final product of poetry translation are that, whether the aesthetic, the semantic and the cultural equivalence have been established between the two poems or not. T. S. Eliot’s “The love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” is “The first masterpiece of modernism in English” (britanica. no pagination). It is also one of the must read texts in the syllabus of modern English literature courses in most of the Universities of Bangladesh. Thus, for both its literary and academic values, this particular poem has been translated in Bangla by many translators from time to time. So a number of approaches has been followed by the translators of the poem and different versions of “Prufrock” translations are available in Bangla- literal and literary. Interestingly, one of

those translators has recreated the persona of "Prufrock" by giving the translation a local Bengali ambience and by subverting the notion of high culture with the use of postmodern parody. In this paper, we will study three different Bengali translations of "Love song of J. Alfred Prufrock", namely, "*J. Alfred Prufrocker Premgeeti*" (1998) by Subrata Augustine Gomes, "*Alfu Sarder er Peeriter Lachadi*" (2013) by Khondokar Ashraf Hossain and "*J. Alfred Prufrocker Prem Sangeet*" (2017) by Suresh Ranjan Basak, to examine and locate different approaches adopted by these three contemporary Bangladeshi translators and poets. The three Bengali translators have tried different approaches to balance between the fidelity to the source text and to assimilate it into the target language and culture. This paper will examine the approaches of interpreting the pathos of a modern man through translation, or to some extent transcreation, and how the modern western "Prufrock" has been recreated and somewhat localized as a modern Bengali individual.

Translation is basically- "a procedure where an original text, often called the 'source text', is replaced by another text in a different language, often called the 'target text'." (House 9)

The main issue related to discourses on translation has always been the notion of untranslatability and the concept of equivalence. The comparison and analysis of this paper has been based on Catford's concept of untranslatability, Eugene Nida's theory of equivalence and finally on the basis of Vinay and Darbelnet's seven procedures of translation.

Nida's concept of equivalence talks about formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence is when the translator goes for literal translation and remains faithful to the original text. (Bassnett 33) In this type of translation, translator cannot take much liberty, rather takes a "word for word" approach. (Bassnett 33)

Dynamic equivalence is when the translator retains the meaning and concept of the original by taking liberty and by going for "thought for thought" translation approach. Here the translator decodes the meaning and restructures it in TL culture. Untranslatability is another central issue in translation studies, as many linguists opine that complete translatability and equivalence is not possible.

Catford talks about linguistic and cultural untranslatability. Linguistic untranslatability is when there is no common linguistic expressions in source language and target language whereas cultural untranslatability occurs because of the situational and cultural barriers. (Bassnett 38)

To compensate for the problem of untranslatability Vinay and Darbelnet talk about seven techniques of translation (borrowing, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, equivalence and adaptation). They have named the first three procedures as literal translation and the last four as oblique translation. The last four methods are used to increase the comprehensibility of the text. However these four methods sacrifice the originality of the source text to a great extent. (Hatim & Munday 141)

After being published in 1915 in Poetry magazine, with the help of Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot's masterpiece "The Love song of J. Alfred Prufrock" has experienced the paramount of success until now. The poem is regarded as one of those literary pieces that marks the shift from romanticism to modernism and thus has been translated into many languages since its publication. The poem captures the complexity of the individual's life during the first world war. As translation itself is a kind of interpretation, it is an inevitable job for a translator to understand the form and content of that particular poem in relation with the source text's culture to recreate it in his target language. It is very evident that three of the translators have tried to provide the best interpretation of the original poem and tried to keep the soul of the poem intact. To analyze the translation approaches we are going to examine the translated versions, in terms of their equivalence to the original from the three perspectives- semantic, cultural and aesthetic.

According to Leech (1981), cited by Hatim and Munday, Semantics is "The study of meaning" (34). While translating, one of the major concerns lies in transferring message or the meaning from the source language to target language. However, meaning itself is a very complex idea and in poetry, meaning not only depends on the linguistic codes but also on its form and cultural background. Nida claims, "The content of a message can never be completely abstracted from the form. In translation, semantic equivalence is regarded as a deeper level of

equivalence to text. To analyze the semantic equivalence between the original poem and the translated poems, we are mainly focusing on the dominant formal components of those poems and on few of their grammatical aspects. Among the formal constituents of Eliot's poem, the extensive use of repetition and parallelism is very prominent which expresses the meaninglessness and circularity of the life of a modern man. Similar kind of sentence patterns or word orders have been used by Eliot to show the repetitive and confused ideas of the character "Prufrock", revealing the futility of the existence of a modern man. For example, the phrase "Let us go" (Eliot.13) has been used several times in this poem, to show the desperation and inability of Prufrock to move, as he is stuck and caught up in his consciousness and perhaps can't go to his desired place and bring himself out of the circle.

In "*Alfu Sarder er Peeriter Lachadi*" the translator has been able to evoke similar kind of desperation by translating "Let us go" as "লও যাইগা" [*Lou jaiga*] (Hossain 13) and by repeating this phrase three times like Eliot. In case of "*J. Alfred Prufrocker Premgeeti*" the translator translated the phrase "let us go then" (Eliot 13) first time as চল তবে যাই [*cholo tobe jai*] (Gomes. 19), second time as চল যাওয়া যাক [*Cholo jaoa jak*] (Gomes 19), and third time as only চল [*Cholo*] (Gomes 19).

Although the word "cholo" has been repeated in Gomes' version, the phrase "Let us go" has been translated differently so that the impact of the repetition goes down a bit. Again, Eliot repeats several lines to stress his point. For example, Eliot repeats the sentence, "Do I dare?" (14) several times to show his anxiety over conforming to the society in which he lives. In *Alfu Sardar*, the word dare has been translated as "himmat" [হিম্মাত] (Hossain 14) and is repeated similarly like the original one, retaining the similar meaning, but with a more sarcastic tone.

In "*J. Alfred Prufrocker Premgeeti*", first time "dare" has been translated as a confirmation rather than as confusion "করবো পরোয়া তবে?" [*Korbo poroya tobe*] (Gomes 21) and after that the word dare has been translated with other synonymous word of [সাহস].

Bosak has not maintained the repetition of this word "Dare". And translated rather used a number of bangle words to recreate the emotional enigma- "এ কাজ আমাকে দিয়ে হবে কি? এবং হবে কি আদৌ?" [*e kaj amake diye hobe ki? Ebong hobe ki adou?*](217). Though linguistically the meaning is not equivalent to the original but if we look into the sense for sense approach, the doubt and pathos of Prufrock is clearly visible here.

In line 31, Eliot again has wanted to show the frustration of time being running out, with expressions like- "time for you and time for me..." (14), by using similarly structured phrases.

In *Alfu Sarder er Peeriter Lachadi* the above quoted expression has been translated as "তোমার লাইগ্যা টাইম, আমার ভি টাইম লাগে" [*omar laiga time, amar bhi time lage*] (Hossain 14). So the similarity of syntactic structure has been maintained here. Here the translator has borrowed the word time and did not change it in Bengali. This borrowing word use somehow unriddles the English Prufrock as one of the representatives of commoners through his new Bengali avatar with *puran dhakaiya* dialect and locates him a Bengali atmosphere where code mixing is a regular phenomenon for common people.

Parallelism has extensively been used in the original poem while in translation we find Gomes has maintained it very well while Basak has given least effort to do so. For example, line no. 49, "For I have known them all already, known them all-" (Eliot 14) parallels with line no.55- "And I have known the eyes already, known them all-" (Eliot 14) and line no 62-: "And I have known the arms already, known them all-" (Eliot 15). Each time in the first clause the object phrase "them all" is replaced by "eyes" and "arms". In Hossain's translation, the parallel structure is completely broken. He has translated line no. 49 as "কিল্লাইগা-/আমি তো সব হালারে চিনছি" [*killlaiga-/ami to sob halare chinchi*](14) and line 55 as-"অণুর চিইন্না লইছি ছবগুলান চোখ"[*aur chinnya loici chobgulan chokh*] (15) and line 62 has been dropped. This may transfer the linguistic meaning and somehow stresses on some particular emotion, but the similar poetic effect is gone. Moreover, as line 62 is missing in the translation, the word for word information exchange has somehow faltered.

In Basak's case- "ওদের সবাইকে-সবাইকে আমার চেনা হয়ে গেছে" [Oder sobbaike- sobaike amar chena hoye gece](217), "ঐ চোখগুলো কবেই চেনা হয়ে গেছে [Oi chkhgulo kobei chena hoye gece] and "ওই যে দুই বাহুর আলিঙ্গন, পরিচয়ে জীর্ণ তাও"[ oi ze dui bahur alingon, porichoiee jirno tao](219), show the failure of securing the exact meaning of the source text created by the parallel sentence pattern although he has retrieved the word by word meaning following the formal equivalence approach of Nida. Gomes translated those lines as- "বস্তুত আমি ইতোমধ্যেই চিনে গেছি সব, চিনে গেছি সমুদায়\_" [ bostuto ami etomoddhyei chine geci sob, chine gecchi somudai-] (21), "আর আমি ইতোমধ্যেই চিনে গেছি চোখগুলি। চিনে গেছি সমুদায়-" [ ar ami etomoddhyei chine gecchi chkhgul, chine gecchi somudai-](21), "আর আমি ইতোমধ্যেই চিনে গেছি হাতগুলি, ছিনে গেছি সমুদায়-" [ar etomoddhyei chine gecchi hatgulo, chine gecchi somudai-](21), which reflect his complete fidelity not only to the form but also to the English SVO sentence pattern of those particular lines. He also has followed the use of punctuation of the original one. So both the form and content have been transported accurately into the target text to deliver the exact meaning and poetic effect.

A very interesting word in this poem is "My" which has been used multiple times by Eliot to express a futile attempt of Prufrock to establish his identity in the society where he fears rejection in every form.

"My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin, My necktie..." (Eliot 14). But that extensive repetition of "my" [আমি/আমার] is not seen in the Bengali translations.

Eliot has used run on lines several times to create the effects of restlessness and in some places stopped lines for creating the sense of stability. This pattern has been maintained almost similarly by the three translators.

In case of creating the semantic equivalence, Basak and Gomes, to a certain extent, has failed to have a complete autonomy. Although Basak has tried to experiment with different types of word orders and patterns, he has not deviated from the original meaning. On the other hand, Gomes' complete faithful approach, in some places, has lost its track and stumbled to recreate the equal amount of emotional aura. Hossain, in his poetic experiment, has completely been indifferent to the formal equivalence, but his approach of dynamic equivalence has apparated the soul of English Prufrock into dhakaya Alfu.

As stated beforehand, meaning hardly depends solely on form and content, rather meaning is constructed in reference with the culture of the target text. In a general sense, culture is the way of life that includes common customs and beliefs of a group of people of a particular time and place. Again, the concept of culture varies from discipline to discipline i.e. sociology, anthropology, literature etc. According to Julian House, there are actually two basic concepts of culture- one is anthropological concept another one is humanistic concept where the anthropological concept of culture refers to the overall way of life of a community- "Culture in anthropological sense captures a group's dominant and learned set of habits, as the totality of its non-biological inheritance involves presumptions, preferences and values- all of which are , neither easily accessible nor verifiable." (47). In this particular sense of culture, language is viewed as an interwoven part of culture and meaning of any text can only be provided through the understanding of that particular language's culture. Thus, in the act of translation, interpreting the culture into target language becomes a big challenge and the problem of untranslatability occurs. In the poem love song, Eliot has used a number of cultural references. One of them is the references of several food items and each has a particular type of connotative meaning to provide, to the readers who shares the same cultural context or schema. For instance, "oyster-shells" is a kind of aphrodisiac which has been translated by Gomes as " চিংড়ি খোল" (19) and by Hossein as "ইলিশ মাছের সালুন" ( 13) and Basak has omitted the word in his translation. But neither of the substitutes for "oyster-shell" could reproduce the sexual undertone rather become a regular food item from Bengali culture. In cultural properties of the poem we find the mention of the food, "tea, cakes and ice" which are been translated as "চা, কেক, কুলফি বরফ" [cha, kek, kulfi borof] (Gomes 20). Here the translator failed to completely stick to the original in case of translating "ice" as "kulfi borof."

In Khondokar Ashraf hossain's version, standard English language of Eliot's Prufrock has been translated into local dhakaiya language. He has subverted the notion of high culture by using somewhat informal language

and vulgar imageries like “হালা”[Hala], থুক [Thuk], “পাছা” [pacha] (13) etc. He has followed the dynamic equivalence approach and adaptation procedure most of the time where he replaced the socio cultural reality of source language with that of the target language. Again, he has basically tried to transform modern “Prufrock” into a modern dhakaiya man but at the same time he has retained the essence of Prufrock by giving Alfu sarder the sensibility of a self-divided middleclass modern man whose life has been nothing but a failure. In the preface of the poem, Hossein has confessed that he could not check the temptation of experimenting with the dialect of puran dhaka and to create *Alfu Sardar*, a new avatar of “J. Alfred Prufrock” in his transcreation. In “*Alfu Sardarer Piriter Lachadi*”, Hossein has said that, he was a great admirer of this particular dialect and thus attempted this experiment. He also has appealed to his readers to judge if this avatar of Prufrock could match with our own social atmosphere or not. (Hossein 12)

As Bangladesh is a Muslim majority country, Khondokar Ashraf Hossain has chosen to add a Muslim undertone in the translation. “Evening” becomes maghrib time, as this prayer is prayed by the Muslims just after the sunset. Similarly, morning becomes fajr, another obligatory prayer for Muslims which means dawn. “Coat” becomes “punjabi”, an attire that the Muslims wear, particularly on special occasions (in weddings, in religious festivals, on Fridays etc.) But while relocating Prufrock here the translator has not shown a complete adherence to religion, -

“মাগার যতই কিনা এবাদত বন্দেগী কইরা কপালের মইদে দাগ ফালাই  
 রুযা-নামায-কুরবানী দেই পরহেজগার আদমিরর মাফিক,  
 আর আমার টাউক্লা মাথাডা ভি হালিম পাকাইবার লিগা আইন্যা ধরি ছামনে  
 কিচ্ছু কাম আহে না, হলায় আমি তো পীর পয়গপস্বর না-  
 যাউকগা, হেইডা বড় বাত না।” (Hossein 15)

Whereas the original is -

“But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,  
 Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,  
 I am no prophet” ( Eliot 15)

Like Prufrock, Alfu Sardar is also skeptical about religion and both had shown a separation and detachment from religion.

Lawrence Venuti identifies two different methods of translation-1. “*Domesticating method which is an ethnographic reduction of foreign text to target cultural values, bringing the author back home*” another one is 2. “*foreignising method, an ethno evident pressure on those [target language cultural] values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad*” (Venuti 19-20, Cited by Sarker, 217)

Basak and and Gomes has adopted the somehow the foreignizing method. In their translation, “Prufrock ” remains the English man although within his known western cultural territory few of the aspects of Bengali culture intermingle. On the other hand Hossain applied the domesticating method and has relocated English “Prufrock ” in a pure *puran dhakia* Bangladeshi cultural atmosphere where the philosophy or the basic idea of the original poem is still visible.

For comparing the three translations, it is crucial to look at them from their aesthetic values, or to be precise to see if the translators could keep the aesthetics of the source text intact, or, have they lost it in between the complex stages of translation. “Aesthetics is the philosophical study of beauty and taste”. (Britanica.no pagination). Nida’s citation of Jackson Matthews describes the proper translation of poetry as -to translate a poem whole is to compose another poem. A whole translation will be faithful to the matter, and it will ‘approximate the form’ of the original; and it will have a life of its own, which is the voice of the translator.” (158) we are considering the poetic aesthetic as the life of a particular poetry that is going to be translated in



any target language. To what extent a translator can transfer the beauty of the original text is something a reader can evaluate. Aesthetic principle denotes that a translator needs to transfer the beauty in a sense that keeps the sound and form of the original works in translation. (Liu Kezhang 199). In a way, translators always wander from the target culture to source culture, and such a translator's effort to get away with the state of wandering and find shelter in the source culture and text can be seen in Basak's translation of- "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons"(Eliot 15) as "এইসব সন্ধ্যা, ভোর, অপরাহ্ন গুলো, কফির চামচে আমি মেপেছি জীবন" (217). In case of Gomes's translation, though the word choice is polished, the naturalness and smoothness are lost and can it be assumed that, in comparison to Eliot's original one, the readers might struggle to achieve the similar response:

"Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels  
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:  
Streets that follow like a tedious argument  
Of insidious intent." (Eliot 14)

"হোটেল, অপিচ, কাঠ গুড়ি আর চিংড়ি খোলায় কীর্ণ রেশোরার থেকে গুঞ্জন ফিরছে যখন  
নিশ্চুত রাতের শশব্যস্তরা" (Gomes 19).

If a reader can get the similar emotional response like the source text, that is when the aesthetic value is retained. In translation, the original text is somewhat deconstructed and creates a "Difference" in meaning, it can be assumed that there will be "Difference" in aesthetic value as well. Dr. Fakrul Alam in his "Translation viewed as the territory of unending differences" has said that "A translator is going to make him or her appear Sisyphian" (44). In case of "Alfu Sarder er Piriter Lachadi", while integrating the dhakaia Culture in some places the translator has experimented with such words, for which the aesthetic appeal could not be retained. There are also some vulgar and raw words, for example:

"হইলদ্যা কুয়াশা জিলানের লগে পাছা ঘষে' / "হইলদ্যা ধুমা ভি গল্পির মইধ্যা লটপটি খাইবার লাগছে",  
কেউ হুমুন্দির পোত কইলে ভি দিলে ছান্তি লাগে." (13)

The title of the poem is ironic and sarcastic, for the readers never get a love song in this poem. Instead the readers get a sense of rejection, alienation and isolation in the whole poem. It is nowhere a song or tale of love by any means. The title is the only a place where Prufrock's name is mentioned. And this name J.Alfred prufrock sounds too snobbish and formal and somewhat funny to have a love tale. Subrata Augustine Gomes' and "Suresh Ranjan Basak went for word for word translation while translating the title Subrata Augustine Gomes named it as *J Alfred Prufroker Premgeeti*" and Basak titled it as *J. Alfred Prufrocker Prem Sangeet*; while the sarcastic and ironic approach is maintained by the words "*prem sangeet*" and "*premgheeti*" but the sense of contrast between Love Song and J.Alfred Prufrock could not be maintained in these two translations of the title. However, the translators have wanted to remain faithful to the original with the naming of the title character.

On the other hand Khondokar Ashraf Hossain has translated the title as "*Alfu Sarder er Peeriter Lachadi*". Here the translator replaced J.Alfred Prufrock's name with a funny Bengali name to fulfill the original essence. The word "lachadi" [লাচাড়ি] that Hossein used has multiple meanings. It is an Indian originated word, as in old dhaka many hindi and urdu words are frequently used. In most cases in old Dhaka, it is used to refer helplessness ( because of the hindi word lachad, which means helpless) Here this meaning goes very well with the theme of the play, as it can be rightly said as Alfu Sardar er piriter lachadi ( helplessness of his love) because Prufrock and in this case Allfu both are caged in their own consciousness and are unable to express their emotions and give their love life a finality.

To determine aesthetic value it should be observed if the translator can the similar way like the original writer, which Hossein could and though he reconstructed the culture of European Prufrock with that of Dhakaia Alfu Shardar, the similar emotion and feeling is shared by both "Alfu Shardar" and "Prufrock".

To sum up, translated text develops within a perpetual conflict with the original text in order to reshape and relocate it in the target culture and language. In this paper, we have endeavored to explore how the

translators have struggled to find a balance between being faithful to the original and taking creative liberty and how the socio cultural reality of the target culture influences and at the same time assimilates and intermingles in source text while substituting English Prufrock with Bengali language and transporting him in Bengali culture. Khondokar Ashraf Hossain has applied domesticizing approach by remoulding Prufrock completely as a Dhakaiya man and presented it in a new form losing little amount of the essence of the original text. Other two translators, in their quest to show fidelity to the original text, have applied mostly foreignizing methods, however they remained in between to the source text and target text which have resulted rather in a lifeless “Prufrock” Who is neither a complete English man, nor a Bengali man in comparison to our local “Alfu Sarder”.

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