

An Analytical Comparison of English Novels Translated into Urdu

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Abstract

This research investigates the linguistic, cultural, and stylistic transformations that occur when English novels are translated into Urdu. It examines how translators negotiate meaning between two literary and cultural systems that differ in idioms, metaphors, and worldviews. Grounded in Nida's theory of Dynamic Equivalence and informed by the perspectives of Bassnett, Lefevere, Venuti, and prominent Urdu scholars such as Jameel Jalibi, Gopi Chand Narang, and Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, the study employs a mixed-methods approach combining textual, thematic, and discourse analyses with reader surveys and translator interviews. The findings reveal that Urdu translations frequently employ adaptive strategies such as domestication, cultural substitution, and idiomatic modification to preserve the emotional and contextual impact of the original text. These transformations enhance readability and cultural relevance while maintaining narrative integrity. The research concludes that English-Urdu translation is a creative and interpretive act that fosters cross-cultural dialogue, expands Urdu's literary scope, and enriches both linguistic traditions.

Keywords: English, Urdu Translation, Dynamic Equivalence, Cultural Adaptation, Domestication, Linguistic Transformation, Cross-Cultural Communication, Translation Strategies, Urdu Literature, Literary Mediation, Translation Studies

1. Introduction

Language is not only a tool of communication but also a mirror of culture and thought. When ideas travel across linguistic borders, translation becomes the bridge that connects different societies. English and Urdu, though linguistically distant, share a long history of cultural contact through colonial, post-colonial, and global literary exchange. Translating English novels into Urdu enables millions of Urdu readers to experience world classics and modern fiction originally written in English. At the same time, it challenges translators to find an appropriate balance between fidelity to the source text and sensitivity to Urdu literary aesthetics.

The Urdu language, celebrated for its poetic and emotional expressiveness, offers translators a rich palette of idioms and metaphors. However, this richness can both assist and complicate translation. For instance, the English idiom break the ice is commonly rendered as rukāwat tornā, literally "to break the barrier" to preserve its pragmatic meaning. Such examples demonstrate how translators adapt linguistic and cultural expressions while maintaining the tone and intent of the original author.

This study aims to conduct an analytical comparison of selected English novels translated into Urdu, such as *Pride and Prejudice* (Guroor aur Pasheman), *Jane Eyre* (Jane Eyre ka Urdu Tarjumā), *The Old Man and the Sea* (Buzurg aur Samundar), and *Animal Farm* (Janwaron ki

Basti). Through these examples, the paper explores how meaning, tone, and culture are transferred or transformed in Urdu translation.

It involves negotiating between two different worldviews. English, a Western language, reflects individualism, linear narrative progression, and rational description, while Urdu carries the legacy of Persian, Arabic, and Indo-Islamic aesthetics that emphasize emotional depth (jazbaat), metaphor, and moral reflection. When English fiction is translated into Urdu, translators must reconcile these contrasting linguistic and cultural traditions. For instance, expressions of personal freedom or romance in English literature often require delicate reformulation in Urdu to maintain cultural acceptability while preserving the writer's artistic intent. This tension between linguistic fidelity and cultural adaptation lies at the heart of translation studies and forms a central concern of this research.

Furthermore, this study draws on translation theories by Nida (1964) and Venuti (2008) to explore how meaning travels across cultures. Nida's concept of Dynamic Equivalence stresses that the translator must achieve the same communicative effect rather than mere word-for-word accuracy, whereas Venuti highlights the translator's role in shaping cultural perception through domestication and foreignization strategies. Applying these frameworks to English-Urdu translation helps explain why some translations read naturally to Urdu audiences while others feel distant or foreign. By critically examining these theoretical models in practical Urdu translations, the research not only evaluates linguistic transformation but also contributes to understanding how translation serves as a bridge for intercultural dialogue and literary appreciation.

1.1. Problem Statement

Despite the long tradition of translating English novels into Urdu, there remains a lack of systematic analysis on how linguistic, cultural, and stylistic transformations occur during this process. Most research in South Asian translation studies focuses on English-Hindi translation, leaving English-Urdu translation comparatively underexplored. Urdu's poetic nature, cultural sensitivity, and idiomatic richness pose distinct challenges for translators attempting to maintain fidelity to the source text while ensuring accessibility and emotional resonance for Urdu readers. Consequently, there is a need to examine how translators negotiate between literal accuracy and cultural adaptation, and how these strategies influence Urdu readers' comprehension, engagement, and interpretation of the translated works.

1.2. Research Objectives

The major objectives of this research are:

- ❖ To analyze how linguistic, cultural, and stylistic transformations occur when English novels are translated into Urdu.
- ❖ To identify the translation strategies (literal vs. adaptive) used by translators in English-Urdu literary translation.
- ❖ To explore how cultural equivalence and idiomatic adaptation affect Urdu readers' comprehension and emotional engagement.
- ❖ To examine the role of translators as cultural mediators who balance fidelity to the source text with the expectations of Urdu-speaking audiences.
- ❖ To evaluate how English-Urdu translation contributes to cross-cultural understanding and the enrichment of Urdu literary discourse.

1.3. Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- ❖ What are the main **linguistic and cultural differences** between English novels and their Urdu translations?
- ❖ How do Urdu translators handle **idiomatic expressions, metaphors, and culturally specific references** from English novels?
- ❖ What translation strategies are most commonly used to achieve **dynamic equivalence and cultural adaptation**?
- ❖ How do Urdu readers perceive the **faithfulness and emotional resonance** of translated English novels?
- ❖ In what ways does the translation of English novels into Urdu enhance **literary exchange and cultural communication** between the two traditions?

1.4. Significance of Study

This study is significant because it enhances understanding of how English novels are linguistically and culturally adapted into Urdu, highlighting the translator's role as a mediator between two literary and cultural systems. It contributes to Translation Studies by identifying strategies that maintain both accuracy and cultural relevance, thereby improving translation quality. The research also benefits students, educators, and translators by offering insights into how literary translation fosters cross-cultural communication and enriches Urdu literary discourse.

2. Literature Review

Translation Studies has developed into a major interdisciplinary field, combining linguistics, literary criticism, and cultural studies. Various scholars have theorized how meaning travels across languages and cultures. Nida (1964) proposed the concept of Dynamic Equivalence, emphasizing that a translation should evoke the same response in the target audience as the original does for its readers. This theory is particularly relevant for English, Urdu translation, where cultural and emotional resonance often outweigh literal accuracy.

Catford (1965) defined translation as the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another. However, his structuralist view was later expanded by theorists such as Newmark (1988), who distinguished between semantic translation (focused on meaning) and communicative translation (focused on reader impact). In the context of Urdu, communicative translation often prevails, as translators aim to produce emotional and aesthetic effects familiar to Urdu audiences.

House (1977) introduced the concept of overt and covert translation, suggesting that literary translation often operates overtly, preserving the cultural identity of the source text while still making it comprehensible. Venuti (2008), in his influential work *The Translator's Invisibility*, further discussed the strategies of domestication **and** foreignization. Domestication makes the text accessible to the target readers by aligning it with their cultural expectations, while foreignization retains the original's cultural uniqueness. Urdu translators frequently blend both approaches retaining English cultural elements where necessary but domesticating expressions to ensure natural readability.

In South Asian scholarship, several Urdu critics have made valuable contributions to translation theory. Jameel Jalibi (1984) viewed translation as a creative act that requires deep understanding of both languages' cultural history. Gopi Chand Narang (1994) argued that Urdu translation must preserve not just linguistic equivalence but also *tehzeebi mafhoom* (cultural meaning). Tariq Rahman (2011), in *From Hindi to Urdu: A Social and Political History*, explored how translation shaped Urdu's evolution as a literary and political language. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi (2006) added that Urdu's metaphoric richness allows translators to achieve stylistic beauty that sometimes surpasses the original.

Studies comparing English and Urdu translations reveal how idiomatic adaptation plays a central role. For example, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet's sharp wit is softened in Urdu translation, using more polite forms of disagreement to align with South Asian norms of feminine modesty (*haya aur sharafat*). Similarly, in *The Old Man and the Sea*, Hemingway's minimalist style is expanded in Urdu translation to include poetic imagery, reflecting Urdu's rhetorical tradition. In *Animal Farm*, politically charged satire is domesticated to avoid overt political criticism, illustrating how translators navigate sociopolitical sensitivities.

Moreover, Jakobson (1959) highlighted three types of translation intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic. English-Urdu translation falls under the interlingual category but often crosses into intersemiotic dimensions when cultural gestures or metaphors are reinterpreted. For instance, the English phrase *heart of stone* becomes *pathar dil*, an idiom equally powerful in Urdu, showing near-perfect cultural symmetry.

Finally, scholars such as Susan Bassnett (2002) and André Lefevere (1992) emphasized that all translations are forms of rewriting influenced by cultural and ideological contexts. Translators are not passive mediators but active re-creators who reshape meaning for new audiences. In the English, Urdu context, translation thus becomes an act of cultural diplomacy bringing global literature into dialogue with Eastern values, Islamic ethics, and South Asian aesthetics.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative research techniques to ensure both interpretive depth and empirical reliability. The qualitative part focuses on textual, thematic, and stylistic analysis, while the quantitative part includes surveys and interviews that assess readers' and translators' perspectives. The central goal of the methodology is to understand how linguistic, cultural, and emotional equivalence is achieved when English novels are translated into Urdu.

3.1. Research Design

The research follows an interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes understanding human experiences and meanings rather than testing numerical hypotheses. Because translation is inherently interpretive and context-bound, the interpretivist approach allows the researcher to explore how translators negotiate meaning between two distinct linguistic systems—English and Urdu. It also helps uncover subjective perspectives about the challenges and strategies involved in rendering English literary works into Urdu.

3.2. Population and Sampling

The study focuses on two main populations:

- **Primary Texts:** Selected English novels and their Urdu translations, including *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway, and *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. These works were chosen for their stylistic diversity, cultural significance, and availability in multiple Urdu translations.
- **Participants:** Professional translators, Urdu literary scholars, and bilingual readers who have read both English and Urdu versions of these novels.
- **Purposive sampling technique** was used to select the novels and participants. This method ensures that only those texts and individuals relevant to the research objectives are included.
- **Stratified sampling** was applied to include diverse readers across age, gender, education, and linguistic background, ensuring a representative set of responses.

3.3. Research Instruments

To collect comprehensive data, multiple tools were used:

- **Textual Analysis Sheets:** Used to identify key lexical, syntactic, and stylistic differences between English and Urdu versions. Passages were compared for idiomatic translation (*rukāwat toṛnā*, *jazbaati asar*, *izzat ka mamla*) and cultural adaptation.
- **Questionnaires:** Distributed to 50 bilingual Urdu readers to measure perceptions of readability, emotional impact, and cultural resonance of translated texts.
- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Conducted with 10 Urdu translators who shared insights into their decision-making processes—such as when to retain foreign expressions and when to domesticate them for Urdu readers.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected in three stages:

- **Textual Comparison:** Selected passages from English novels and their Urdu translations were closely analyzed to identify differences in tone, idiomatic expression, and cultural representation.
- **Reader Surveys:** Responses were gathered using Likert-scale and open-ended questions about translation quality, faithfulness, and emotional engagement.
- **Translator Interviews:** Conducted in Urdu and English through virtual meetings to document translators' reflections on cultural adaptation and linguistic creativity.

3.5. Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using a triangulated approach:

- **Thematic Analysis** identified recurring motifs and cultural adjustments in Urdu translations.
- **Discourse Analysis** examined how character dialogue and narrative voice were transformed to align with Urdu literary norms.
- **Comparative Statistical Analysis** summarized quantitative survey results, highlighting patterns such as the preference of 80% of readers for culturally adapted translations over literal ones.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

All participants were informed about the purpose of the research, and consent was obtained prior to interviews and surveys. The study ensured anonymity and confidentiality, especially when quoting translators' comments or referring to specific publishing houses. The research adheres to academic integrity by properly acknowledging all cited works and translations.

3.7. Research Limitations

While comprehensive, the study faces certain limitations. It focuses primarily on prose fiction and does not extend to poetry or drama. Moreover, the sample size of readers and translators, though diverse, is limited to academic and literary circles in Pakistan. Future studies could expand to include regional variations of Urdu translation, such as those found in India, to gain a more nuanced comparative perspective.

4. Discussion

The findings of this research highlight that translation between English and Urdu is not merely linguistic transfer but a dialogue between two cultural and aesthetic systems. Urdu translators act as interpreters who reshape meaning according to social, emotional, and literary expectations of the target audience. This process supports Nida's (1964) theory of Dynamic Equivalence, which emphasizes the reproduction of meaning and effect rather than structure. Translators often

prioritize readability and *jazbaati asar* (emotional impact) over literal correspondence, ensuring that the translated text sounds natural and culturally relatable to Urdu readers. At the same time, the study demonstrates that Urdu's poetic expressiveness allows translators to achieve depth and rhythm that sometimes enhances the original work's beauty.

Moreover, the research confirms Venuti's (2008) argument that translators operate between domestication and foreignization. While domestication helps Urdu readers connect emotionally and culturally with the story, selective foreignization retains the author's unique worldview and context. The balance between these two strategies determines the success of the translation. Hence, English-Urdu translation emerges as a creative, interpretive act that preserves meaning while reshaping linguistic form and cultural perspective. This dynamic exchange enriches both English and Urdu literatures, promoting cross-cultural understanding and literary diversity.

5. Results

The results of this study indicate that Urdu translators consistently prioritize cultural and emotional equivalence over literal translation. Analysis of the selected novels shows that Urdu translations employ expressive idioms, metaphors, and rhythmic sentence structures to maintain readability and emotional resonance. For instance, English idioms such as *break the ice* or *heart of stone* are translated as *rukāwat tornā* and *pathar dil* respectively, showing how translators adapt expressions to align with Urdu linguistic norms. Similarly, social themes in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Jane Eyre* are localized through polite, culturally sensitive dialogue, reflecting Urdu's emphasis on decorum (*adab aur lihaz*). Quantitative feedback from readers further supports these observations: most participants reported higher engagement and comprehension when reading culturally adapted translations compared to literal ones.

In addition, translators acknowledged several recurring challenges, including handling culturally specific humor, maintaining authorial tone, and balancing length between concise English prose and more descriptive Urdu style. Despite these challenges, the study found that dynamic equivalence was effectively achieved through adaptive strategies such as paraphrasing, restructuring, and cultural substitution. The data collectively affirm that successful English-Urdu translation depends on the translator's ability to mediate between two linguistic worlds while preserving narrative integrity and emotional impact. These results reinforce the view that translation is not a mechanical act of substitution but a creative, interpretive process that contributes to intercultural understanding and literary enrichment.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that translating English novels into Urdu is a complex process that extends beyond linguistic accuracy to include cultural adaptation and emotional resonance. Urdu translators act as cultural mediators who balance fidelity to the original text with the expectations of Urdu readers. The findings confirm that effective translation requires achieving **dynamic equivalence**, ensuring that meaning and impact are preserved even when words and structures differ. Ultimately, English, Urdu translation strengthens cross-cultural understanding and enriches Urdu literature by introducing new themes, styles, and worldviews while maintaining the language's poetic and cultural identity.

7. Potential Areas for Future Research

Although this study provides valuable insights into the translation of English novels into Urdu, several areas remain open for further exploration. Future researchers could conduct **comparative analyses** across different genres, such as poetry, drama, and short stories, to examine whether translation strategies vary by literary form. Studies might also explore the **impact of regional Urdu dialects** and linguistic variations on translation choices and reader comprehension.

Moreover, a diachronic study tracing how English, Urdu translation practices have evolved from the colonial to the digital age could reveal how globalization and technology influence linguistic adaptation. Researchers may also focus on the role of machine translation and artificial intelligence in literary translation, assessing whether digital tools can replicate the subtle emotional and cultural nuances conveyed by human translators. Finally, audience-centered research investigating how different generations of Urdu readers perceive and interpret translated literature could further enrich understanding of translation's role in shaping literary identity and cross-cultural exchange.

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