

AN INVESTIGATION OF TRANSLATION SHIFTS IN *THE ALCHEMIST* FROM ENGLISH TO URDU USING CATFORD'S THEORY

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Abstract

This study investigates different types of shifts in *The Alchemist*, written by Paulo Coelho and translated into the Urdu version as a *Kemya Gari* by Omer al-Ghazali. This study is also identifying five types of shifts using Catford's theory of translation shifts. To identify the shifts, the research uses a qualitative method and specifically textual analysis. Further, this study uses systematic random sampling, through which the researchers select 12 pages from *The Alchemist* novel and then randomly select examples from those pages for data analysis. Moreover, in this study, the researchers identify level and categorical shifts that occur during the translation process.

1. INTRODUCTION

Translation is a creative process in which the words of one language, the source text, are replaced with those of another language, which is known as the target text. In this process, the meaning remains unchanged, but just changes occur in the text of the languages. Translation is important because it connects people culturally, emotionally, and socially with each other. During the translation process, the translators must have sufficient knowledge of both languages; otherwise, they may fail to preserve the original meaning and structure of the source text. Even with sufficient knowledge, translators cannot fully control shifts and changes due to structural, grammatical, and cultural differences between languages. When translators translate the text of one language into another language, various changes occur during translation because languages are different from each other on different levels. Further, translation is the unit of communication because with the help of translation, so many literary works are translated from one language into another, especially in English, so

many works are translated. During the process of translation, different shifts and changes occur, and different researchers observe those changes during their studies. Sometimes the readers are unable even to understand the work in the translated version because when the translators translate the work, they are always trying to bring the words that convey the correct meaning. But when the translators translate the novel or another work from one language into another, then they do not translate word by word, and when they do not translate word by word, then changes and shifts are occurring during translation (Syahputri & Wulan, 2025). In short, the process of translation is not easy because the translators always create and try to transfer the exact meaning from the source to the target text. Sometimes during the process of translation, the translators are unable to create the exact meaning due to linguistic and cultural differences. Whenever the translators translate the source text, then some structural changes occur in the text due to linguistic differences, but the translators are always trying to keep the meaning and effect of the text the same.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Translation is the process of transferring meaning from one language into another language that has different rules and cultural backgrounds, due to which shifts occur when going from the source text to the target text. This research specifically focuses on translation shifts that occur during the translation of The Alchemist novel, from the English version by Alan R. Clarke and its Urdu translation by Omer al-Ghazali. Keeping in view different kinds of shifts, we will identify the factors that contribute to these shifts, with particular attention to level and category shifts. Before this study, no research had applied Catford's theory to The Alchemist novel translated from English to Urdu.

1.2 Research Objectives

To identify the shifts that occur during the translation of The Alchemist novel.

1.3 Research Questions

What are the different shifts that occur during the translation of The Alchemist novel?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The importance of translation is present everywhere because the translation connects people across different cultures emotionally and socially. Without translation, people cannot understand each other because people around the world communicate in different languages; therefore, for mutual understanding, the field of translation plays a key role. Further, this study and investigation will be helpful in the field of translation and research because firstly, this study, will provide the basic information to future researchers for understanding different shifts and changes that occur during the translation. Secondly, our study is useful for those researchers and readers who are trying to apply Catford's theory of translation shift to different works that are translated from English to Urdu. Thirdly, with the help of this study the readers will understand how Omer al-Ghazali along with level and categorical shifts, conveys and transfers the correct meaning of the source text, and this also shows to the readers and researchers that the translator will always give focus to the meaning of the source text during translation. In short, this study and research contribute to the field of translation studies and Catford's theory of translation shifts, and this study will be providing the basic framework to future researchers and readers.

Review of Related Literature

The term “translation” has been derived from the Latin word “translation,” which means “to carry over” or “to carry across” (Munday, 2015). Translation is the process of transferring meaning from one language to another language that has different rules and a different cultural background. During the process of translation, the translator will not just change the words of the source text, but the translator will also consider the meaning and message behind the words. Additionally, the meaning should be accurate, natural, and communicative. In contemporary times, with the development of the economy and technology in the global era, translation is also developing, which not only focuses on books but also gives focus to different movie translations and other television programs (Kantiastuti, 2014). In addition, translation is an expression in the target language of what has been expressed in the source language. The translator will preserve the meaning of the original text, and the translator will also maintain the same style, tone, and linguistic features (Bell, 1991). Further, the history of translation is very vast and goes back thousands of years to ancient times. But different scholars believe that the history of translation studies as a discipline has gained its recognition and position in the humanities and science recently (D’hulst, 2018). Bermann stated that the history of translation has a very important role in human history, but the field of translation studies is surprisingly new. In the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, translation has developed as a field. But in the second half of the 20th century, translation studies became a new creative field in the academic area and handled a lot of challenges and transformed research (Bermann, 2014).

Further, during the process of research, different researchers apply Catford’s theory of translation shift to different languages. In the translation from English to the Chinese language, Xie applies Catford’s theory to identify different shifts that occur during the translation of English works into Chinese (Xie, 2023). Further, this theory was also applied to the Punjabi novel “Adhi Mott,” which is translated into English. In this research, researchers try to find out different types of translation shifts that occur frequently and impact the accuracy of the original text (Arif et al. 2023). In addition, Khan also applied Catford’s theory of translation shift to the Pashto work “Rekhtyia Rekhtyia Di,” which is translated into English as “Facts Are Facts.” In Khan’s research, he identified different types of category shifts that occur during the translation process (Khan et al. 2021). Similarly, Syahputri and Wulan apply Catford’s theory to identify category shifts in “The Alchemist” novel, which is translated from English to the Indonesian language. In this research, they also identified how shifts affect reader comprehension and which types of shifts occur during the translation of “The Alchemist” (Syahputri et al. 2025).

Different researchers apply Catford’s theory to different works in different languages. Syahputri and Wulan applied Catford’s theory in 2025 to identify category shifts in “The Alchemist” novel, which is translated from English to the Indonesian language. Although different theories and practices explore different work, there remains a noticeable gap in applying Catford’s theory to The Alchemist novel from English to Urdu translation. This study aims to fill that gap in academic knowledge and to identify different shifts that occur during the translation of novel “The Alchemist” from English to Urdu. Further, this study and research just identifies different shifts without including stylistic analysis or cultural adaptation.

Methodology

Research methodology is a set of techniques acting like a design of architecture by means of which a researcher forms a mental bent to identify a problem and come up with a solution to the problem (Jamshed, 2014).

3.1 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative design and approach, which means this study will focus on understanding and investigating text and its meaning. The qualitative method is useful for this research because this study focuses on shifts in “The Alchemist” translation. In this research, we take sentences, phrases, and words, then compare them and identify different shifts, which leads the research to a qualitative research design. This method is also used to provide in-depth insights into the translation process and to effectively address our research questions. Further, this research will use some comparative textual analysis techniques, which are sometimes known as a qualitative content analysis technique. In this research, we will step by step closely study the original text in English, and then we will compare it with the Urdu version of “The Alchemist” novel, and our goal will be to investigate and identify different shifts that occur with the help of Catford's theory. This technique is suitable and effective for this study because it helps in understanding the different types of shifts and changes that occur in translation. This technique allows us to interpret why different shifts occur in the translation of “The Alchemist.”

3.2 Sampling

Sampling is the process of selecting a subset from a larger work or population. The main purpose of sampling is to select a sample that is representative of the overall population and work that allows the research findings to be generalized to the overall population. Further sampling has two major types, which are known as probability and nonprobability sampling. For this research, we select probability sampling because in probability sampling, the researchers have no choice but to select a population or data randomly. In probability sampling, the population, materials, and data have an equal opportunity to be selected for research or analysis.

Further from probability sampling, we select systematic random sampling. Systematic random sampling is a sampling in which the researchers firstly select data through systematic sampling and then select randomly from that data for further analysis. Systematic sampling is a type of sampling in which the researchers select data on a specific interval or in a proper systematic way. In our research, we select 12 pages from the English version and select 12 according to those from the Urdu version for data analysis. Then we select examples from those pages randomly. We select systematic random sampling because this helps us in the generalization of data on the whole work. Further systematic sampling is also helpful in saving time, and we have limited time; that's why we select systematic random sampling for analysis.

3.3 Data collection Procedure

For this research we collect data from primary sources. In the first step of the data collection procedure, the source text or language will be selected for the research process. In this research, the source text will be the English text of the “The Alchemist” novel, and the data will be selected from the English version of “The Alchemist”, for analysis. From the English version of “The Alchemist” the specific text will be selected through systematic random sampling. Further, in the second step, the target text will be selected, which is Urdu. In this step, the Urdu version of “The Alchemist” will be selected for data collection and analysis. From the Urdu version, the specific text will be selected through systematic random sampling. After the selection of text through sampling from the source and target languages, in the next step, the different types of shifts will be identified in the Urdu language that occur during the process of translation. After identification of different shifts in the next step, the shifts will be analyzed.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

In this research the researchers use a qualitative method for data analysis. Further, in this research study the selected texts and data were analyzed through comparative textual analysis. The researchers select the data and then compare both texts for identification of different kinds of level and category shifts that occur during the process of translation. Further, in the final step, the researchers interpreted that different kinds of examples which are taken from both texts in light of Catford's theory of translation shift.

3.5 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this research was drawn upon the one proposed by Catford in 1965 in his book "A Linguistic Theory of Translation", and we will apply it to analyze the Urdu translations of the English novel "The Alchemist". According to Catford (1965), translation shifts mean departures from formal correspondence in the process of going from the source to the target language. During the process of translation, as it is, translation is not possible because both languages have different rules, sounds, and vocabularies, which cause departure from formal correspondence. Further, shifts are the different types of linguistic changes that occur during the process of translation from source to target text. Catford further categorizes those shifts into different types. According to Catford (1965), there are two major types of shifts that occur during the translation process. The following are two types of shifts:

3.5.1 Level Shifts

During the process of translation, sometimes both the source and target languages use different levels to convey meaning. Catford mentioned phonology, graphology, grammar, and lexis levels in his work.

3.5.2 Structure Shifts

Structure shift is the most common type of shift in which changes occur in the structures of both languages. In a structure shift, source and target languages use different orders and arrangements for grammatical elements.

3.5.3 Class Shifts

Class shifts occur when words of the source text use one type of category or class, and those same words are translated to different categories or classes in the target language.

3.5.4 Unit Shifts

Unit shifts mean when the rank of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences of the source language changes into a different rank in the target language.

3.5.5 Intra-System Shifts

Intra-system shifts are those shifts that occur in the same grammatical system during translation. In an intra-system shift, the source and target languages have the same system, like number or article, but the translator will pick the one to make a good translation.

Analysis and Interpretation

In this data analysis chapter, we apply Catford's theory to identify different types of shifts in The Alchemist novel, the Urdu version, which is translated by Omer al-Ghazali. This chapter consists of the identification

of five types of shifts, which are level, structure, unit, class, and intra-system shifts. This chapter also explores why and how different shifts occur in the translated version.

4.1 Level Shift:

A level shift is a type of shift in which both languages use different levels during the translation process. In a level shift, one language uses the grammatical level, and another uses the lexical or lexis level, or vice versa.

Example:

S.T:

It sounded like a Gypsy prayer

T.T:

جیسے وہ خانہ بدوشوں کی مخصوص دعا پڑھ رہی ہو

B.T:

یہ اسے لگ رہا تھا۔ جیسے کہ وہ خانہ بدوشوں کی دعا ہو۔

Explanation:

The above lines are from The Alchemist novel, in which a level shift occurs. In the source text, the author does not mention any specific lexis for (پڑھ رہی ہو) but uses grammatical level and expresses the concept and meaning in grammar. On the other hand, the translator mentions it in the target language (پڑھ رہی ہو) and replaces the grammatical level with the verb.

4.2 Structure Shift:

Structure shift is the type of category shift in which shifts occur in translation due to the differences between languages. Structure shift is the most common shift because mostly the grammatical structure that are used by languages are different from each other. In this translation, structure shifts are common because in this translation, the structure of the source text in English is different from the structure of the target text.

Example:

S.T:

The boy remembered his dream

T.T:

لڑکے کو یک دم اپنا خواب یاد آ گیا

Explanation: In the above second example, the structure shift occurs because in the source text, the author uses SVO structure, and in the target text, the translator uses SOV structure because the Urdu sentences follow this structure. In the source text line, the author uses the verb “remembered” after the subject and then uses “dream” as the subject but in the target text, the translator uses (خواب) as the object after the subject, and then uses (یاد آ گیا) verb after the object, which causes a structure shift in this example.

4.3 Unit Shift:

Unit shifts mean when the rank of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences of the source language changes into a different rank in the target language. For example, the range of source text words is changed to phrases or clauses.

Example:

S.T:

Fill his wine bottle, shave, and have a haircut.

T.T:

بوٹل تازہ پانی سے بھرے گا اور حجامت بھی بنوائے گا

B.T:

Explanation: اپنی شراب کی بوٹل بھرے، داڑھی بنوائے اور بال کٹوائے

In the above example from *The Alchemist*, a rank or unit shift occurs. Both the source and target languages use different units and ranks. In the source text, the author uses “shave and have a haircut,” which is a phrase, and in the target language, the translator uses one word (حجامت), which is not a phrase. So, actually, in this example, the translator replaces a phrase with a single word, which is considered a rank shift. The translator does this because of the easy understanding of the text in the target language, and also the translator tries to convey meaning in concise words.

4.4 Class Shift:

Class shifts occur when words of the source text use one type of category or class, and those same words are translated to different categories or classes in the target language.

Example:

S.T:

There was an old woman who interpreted dreams.

T.T:

ایک بوڑھی عورت رہتی تھی جو خوابوں کی تعبیر بتاتی تھی

B.T:

وہاں ایک بوڑھی عورت تھی۔ جو خوابوں کی تشریح کرتی تھی۔

Explanation:

In the above example, the class shift occurs. Both languages use different classes and categories. In the source language sentence, the author uses an interpreted word, which is a verb, but on the other hand, in the target text, the translator uses the word (تعبیر), which is a noun and not a verb. The translator shifts the verb into a noun because the translator wants to achieve fluency according to the context.

4.5 Intra-System Shift:

Intra-system shifts are those shifts that occur in the same grammatical system during translation. In an intra-system shift, the source and target languages have the same system, like number or article, but the translator will pick the one to make a good translation.

Example:

S.T:

I haven't thought of other women

T.T:

مجھے بھی کسی اور لڑکی کا خیال اچھا نہیں لگا

B.T:

میں نے دوسری عورتوں کے بارے میں نہیں سوچا۔

Explanation:

In the above example the translator uses the intra-system shift. While in both languages the system of singular and plural is present, in this example, the translator handles it differently. In the source sentence, the author uses the word “women,” which is a plural noun, but in the target language, the translator replaces it with

“(لڑکی),” which is a singular noun. In this sentence, the shift occurs due to context and differences in agreement.

Conclusion

In this study, researchers identified different types of shifts and changes in the English-to-Urdu translation of *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho, translated by Omer al-Ghazali. During the research process, we applied Catford's theory of translation shift and identified five types of shifts that occurred during the translation of *The Alchemist*. In this research, we also explored how level, structure, unit, class, and intra-system shifts occur in the translation of this novel.

During this research, we used a qualitative method and analyzed data that were collected through systematic random sampling from *The Alchemist*. In this research, we textually analyzed data and used an intensive reading technique through which we properly identified different shifts.

Furthermore, during this translation process, structure shifts occurred along with level, class, and intra-system shifts. In addition, in this translation process, the unit shifts also occurred, but less frequently than structure shifts.

5.1 Findings

During data analysis, we identified and found five different types of shifts, like level, structure, unit, class, and intra-system shifts, that occurred frequently during the translation process of the novel.

5.2 Recommendations

After analysis and investigation of *The Alchemist* novel with the help of Catford's theory, we have the following recommendations:

1. The publishers have published the translated versions of *The Alchemist* novel, but they do not provide any biographical information about the translators. Future publishers should need to provide and include the biographical information so it will help in obtaining authentic information.
2. The translators should try to stay close to the source text and avoid too many shifts, because when many shifts occur in the target text, then the translated version cannot create the same influence on readers as the source text.

5.3 Suggestions for Future Researchers

The following topics and suggestions may be helpful for future researchers:

1. This research is limited only to shift identification and does not focus on cultural shifts and changes that occur during the process of translation. So, on this translation of *The Alchemist*, the research is also possible in the light of sociolinguistics theories.
2. In this research, we applied the theoretical framework of Catford's theory, but in the future, researchers can also use Eugene Nida's theory of equivalence 1964 for equivalence identification.
3. In this research, we collected data through systematic random sampling, but if future researchers want to research this topic, they can also use convenience sampling for data collection.

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