



Translation of Poetry From a Hermeneutical Perspective: A Case Study of Rumi

Amin Karimnia* (*Corresponding author*)

Associate Professor in Applied Linguistics, Department of English, Fasa Branch,
Islamic Azad University, Fasa, Iran
Email: aminkarimnia@yahoo.com

Seyed Mohammad Hosseini Fard

MA in ELT, Marvdasht Branch, Islamic Azad University, Marvdasht, Iran
Email: hosseinifardd@yahoo.com

Abstract

Works of poetry are characterized by specific elements (e.g. symbols, images, concepts) that help interpret and thematize such works. The principle of “holism” in hermeneutics is concerned with analyzing how part-whole relationships are established in a text and how they may give rise to a particular reading of it. A problem, however, is analytical frameworks / models are rarely used for hermeneutic textual analysis and most studies are very subjective / abstract in this area. This study explores the English translations of Rumi’s prelude to his masterpiece *Masnavi* to analyze how they represent the “mystical” reading of the work. The study draws on a hermeneutical model of poetry translation, which is regulated by two sub-components: cultural-linguistic complexity rate and hermeneutical complexity rate. To identify the characterizing elements, the study considers the keywords in the original and tries to analyze how they are rendered into English by focusing on holistic relationships between the sub-components of the model. The study then compares the choices and suggests which ones could thematically contribute to the mystical reading. Besides confirming the practicality of the model, the findings show that the mystical reading is scattered across the translations and no single one tries to reflect the mystical interpretation.

Keywords: hermeneutics, *The Song of the Reed*, literary translation, poetry, holism

ARTICLE INFO

Research Article

Received: Thursday, April, 27, 2021

Accepted: Saturday, October, 23, 2021

Published: Monday, November, 15, 2021

Available Online: Saturday, October, 23, 2021

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.22049/jalda.2021.27231.1306>

Online ISSN: 2383-2460; Print ISSN: 2383-591x



© The Author(s)

Introduction

Translating poetry has been regarded as one of the most challenging tasks in the history of translation. Some scholars have even asserted that poetry translation might be even impossible, while some believe that only poets can practice poetry translation. These perceived difficulties associated with poetry translation make this sub-genre of literary translation very interesting, because it can help reveal a variety of underlying mechanisms and processes shaping understanding (O’Keeffe, 2018). There are some questions that can guide research into poetry translation: What are the factors that contribute to the difficulty of poetry translation? How can such discrete factors be analyzed as parts of the whole body of a poem?

Poetry translation, like many other modes of translation, must be viewed as a communication of both lingual signs and cultural symbols. Poetic form and a large set of devices structuring poetic articulation can render this linguistic mode very ambiguous and recondite. In some cases, the ideas are not presented through conventional signs and symbols, as there might be codes (e.g., keywords) peculiar to a poet. In such cases even an average native speaker will need extensive reading experience to be able to make an interpretation of the poem in question. Meanwhile, apart from these internal textual-aesthetic aspects, the impact of literary criticism and interpretive traditions cannot be ignored. Such sources establish “meta-textual” connections with the poem and even sometimes “appropriate” it (Kharmandar, 2018b).

A combination of all of these factors suggests that poetry translation is a highly “complex” lingual phenomenon. The translator, of course, can mitigate complexity by gaining knowledge about the factors in the original text, although such knowledge could only be helpful when it is relatively systematic and structured. The principle of holism in hermeneutics suggests that the meaning of a text is constructed through part-whole relationships that govern the elements in the text. Yet, which elements should be given priority in hermeneutic poetry analysis? A framework of poetic analysis is a holistic, interpretive system regulated by some (sub)dimensions. Such a framework has already been proposed by Kharmandar and Karimnia (2013), although it needs to be tested on many corpora to show how it contributes to poetry translation.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the English translations of Rumi’s prelude to *Masnavi*, *The Song of the Reed*, at both textual and meta-textual levels based on Kharmandar and Karimnia’s (2013) hermeneutic framework of poetry translation and its re-version. This framework relies on two complexity-related packages: cultural-linguistic complexity rate (CLCR) and hermeneutic complexity rate (HCR). The first eighteen verses of Rumi’s *Masnavi Manavi*, Book I, called *The Song of the Reed*, as the essence of the whole six-volume book, represents an extensively interpreted piece of literature. Guided by the framework, the study focuses on the central keywords as the parts in the poem that may shape the mystical reading (the whole) in the translations.

Theoretical Foundations

Poetry and Translation

A poem is a work of art, a composition, a work of verse, which may be in rhyme or may be blank verse or a combination of the two (Cudden, 1976). Nair (1991) believes that poetry provides a reflection of the poet's feelings and experiences, and King (1998) points out the rare or striking ways words are used in poetic language. King further explores the process through which word selection takes place in poetry, stating that in poems, we “choose words for their meanings, for the emotions they create, and for the sound they make” (King, 1998, p. 16).

Many scholars believe that poetry can never be adequately rendered into another language. For instance, Frost (1969) calls poetry a memorable speech which is lost in translation. Expressive and aesthetic values, for instance, are among the complexities that a translator cannot easily tackle. That is why some believe that poetry translation is not only a difficult task, but sometimes even an impossible one. Different aspects of a single poem cannot all be rendered in a single translation. Language structure and sound, the cultural and historical context behind the poem, its relation to specific words, references, sounds, or literary systems, differ so much from one language and cultural context to another.

Moreover, when we talk about poetry, we talk about emotions, feelings, thoughts, and ideas. These elements cannot be rendered into another culture as conveniently as it may seem. For instance, in cases where there is a lack of cultural symmetry between the texts, the translator has to try specific strategies to somehow overcome the complexity. Thus, when translators practice poetry translation, they must try to choose words meticulously to transfer aesthetic values as well as the effects crafted in the source text. These specifications make the impression that, after all, poets might have a better understanding of poetry translation (Raffel, 2010).

Considering these problems, one can simply conclude that deciding upon choices in poetry translation is a difficult job to fulfill. Even if it is possible and the concepts exist cross-culturally, no one can guarantee that the translation produces the same poetic values in the target text readers. To understand these issues more systematically, one can rely on models that help evaluate poetry translation. A line of related research can specifically focus on the source text's keywords and the output of its translation(s). For example, why did the poet use a specific word? What was his / her intention behind choosing a specific word? Answering questions like these can help the translator make conscious decisions about the interpretation of meaning and literary values in the process.

There is a plethora of scholarly views, theories, and models that have addressed the notion of poetry translation. Wilss (1982), for instance, argues that aesthetic reproductions, as opposed to informative ones, are more challenging to translate. Some scholars even believe translating poetry is impossible. For example, Landers (2001, p. 97) argues that “[t]ranslating poetry well is so difficult as to be called impossible by most experts If literary translation is itself a leap of faith,

poetic translation puts that faith to the severest of all tests.” Similarly, Burnshaw et al. (1995) assert that recreating the formal arrangement of words in one language may never have the same impact in another language.

Arberry (1964, p. 257), one of the most important practitioners of poetic translation, observes that, “[s]ometimes the images are so novel and so alien to our experience that the translator stands almost helpless before his model, at a loss how to depict so much exotic beauty upon so small a canvas.” Arberry is among the translators who have called poetry translation some sort of “failure” or “disaster.” Other practitioners of poetry translation, such as Nicholson (1950), Whinfield (1887) and Redhouse (1881), have all admitted that their renditions of Persian poetry into English were difficult tasks and could only be judged as “partially successful.”

Even from a theoretical perspective, Jakobson (1959) argues that poetry is untranslatable and some creative rendition may be possible. Newmark (1988) believes that translating a poem may lead to the formation of a whole new poetic expression in the target language. Frost (as cited in Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990) suggests that poetry is *lost* through translation. Venuti (2004, p. 154) argues that “only rarely can one reproduce both content and form in a translation, and hence in general the form is usually sacrificed for the sake of the content.”

In contrast to such not totally favorable views, there are some who do not simply acknowledge the impossibility of poetry translation. Dryden (as cited in Frost, 1969) emphasized that poetry is translatable but the one who should translate poetry must be a poet. Benjamin (1968) also highlighted potential “gains” in translation through a re-birth of a text in a second language. Nida (1984) argues that achieving a mode of total translation is possible across languages. Wittgenstein (as cited in Robinson, 2010) observes that poetry is translatable, like other textual genres. The conflict between these two sets of scholars could be mitigated by a method that rests on a strong philosophy and provides, as far as possible, a concrete instrument. This study rests on a hermeneutic framework that is not concerned with (im)possibility of poetry translation, but rather it focuses on how problematic elements have been translated and shaped the understanding of a poem over time.

Hermeneutics and Translation

Background

Some believe that translation, like any other mode of understanding, is an interpretive act (Kharmandar, 2018a; Stozle et al., 2015). Among the various sub-disciplines of philosophy, hermeneutics has been thus far the most versatile and active one, while hermeneutic theories of translation have been recently revisiting and reconstructing their foundations (Kharmandar, 2018b). Hermeneutics is broadly defined as the science and method of interpreting texts. The fundamental figures that have expanded and developed modern hermeneutics, besides Friedrich Schleiermacher, are Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, Jacques Derrida, and Jürgen Habermas.

Despite the historical convergence between translation and hermeneutics, modern translation theory has been so expanded that the former methods of hermeneutics have been challenged. There are some major criticisms against hermeneutics in translation, although they seem to be applicable to other philosophies of translation too. For instance, why are the theories so obsessed with abstraction? This problem could make it very difficult to conduct translation quality assessment on translation following hermeneutic, or philosophical, conceptions.

In this regard, House (2001) believes that neo-hermeneutic models of translation cannot contribute to translation assessment due to their subjectivity of meaning and their relativization of form (the lack of an analytic lingual model). New contributions to the hermeneutics of translation, however, have recently responded to the criticisms. Kharmandar (2018a) observes that there is a new line of expansive hermeneutic translation theory that has been taking shape in the second decade of the twenty-first century. This theoretical and practical stream, called *translational hermeneutics*, is open to empirical research and cognitive science. In the light of these developments, Kharmandar (2018a) believes that the history of translation and hermeneutics has undergone a major change in the twenty-first century.

If there is indeed a new line of hermeneutics and translation research, what are its contributions? Stolze et al. (2015) provide an important foundation for at least laying out the major concerns of translational hermeneutics. A hermeneutic theory of translation rests on several principles, which could be summarized as follows (see Cerel et al., 2015, pp. 21-35): (a) the translator is a subject whose perception is bound to the historical period in which s / he lives; (b) understanding represents a dialogical exchange with other people and traditions that have conventionalized meanings; (c) understanding is a holistic process which is accomplished through part-whole relations; a text is sphere in which every element gains its meaning through an interaction with all other elements; (d) translation is a critical enterprise which requires self-criticism and an attempt to break with the limitations of understanding; and (e) a text, depending on its potential, may be rendered in several ways which differ in terms of quality. "Holistic process" is particularly interesting in studies that focus on part-whole relationships in a text, such as the individual elements that constitute a poetic work.

A Hermeneutic Model of Poetry Translation

Kharmandar and Karimnia (2013) have proposed the sketch of a hermeneutic model that specifically addresses poetry translation. Although the work involves important notions and a seemingly coherent whole, it is in need of refinement and clarity. Kharmandar (2016), acknowledging the shortcomings, has tried to provide a better version of the model in an online article. The major proposition in the model is that works of poetry, especially canonized ones, are interpreted within literary traditions, such as literary criticism and commentaries, which value and make sense of such works. Translations, too, are very likely to construct or synthesize meaning and values based on such traditions, bringing about innovations in some cases.

The primary framework is regulated by the notion of “complexity”, which could be understood as any source of difficulty that perplexes the interpretation of meaning. Less challenging sources of meaning are conveniently determined when decision is made about complicated ones; meanwhile, smaller units of meaning (e.g., words) are more substantially perceived and better interpreted when the entirety of the text (e.g., a poem) is sufficiently read. This process is called “circularity” in hermeneutics. As a result, a keyword analysis (as used in this study) focuses on how single elements contribute to the whole and shape a particular reading (e.g. a mystical reading).

As O’Keeffe (2018, p. 40) explains, “[i]nterpretation deals with each part, and then culminates in an understanding of the meaning of the whole.” He argues that a poetic word is a “plurished word”, an entity with an abundance of meaning or function. The cross-referencing of every important word, or keyword, ultimately helps the translator to figure out how to create a particular reading. Concentrating on part-whole relationships, Kharmandar, (2018b) explains, “The meaning of an item (such as a sign, a symbol, a single word) is decided through a measure of interaction that the item has with the entirety of the items that are perceived to influence it” (p. 97).

The central analytic instruments that help the translator detect problematic pieces of text are CLCR and HCR. CLCR is further divided into three sub-components: culture-specific elements (CSE), rhetoric and figures of speech (RFS), and poet-specific terms (PST). The problem of culture, as assumed in CSE, is not new in TS. Literary scholars, such as Bassnett and Lefevere (1990), have significantly contributed to the cultural understanding of translation. Kharmandar and Karimnia (2013), however, rely on a hermeneutic understanding of culture based on Gadamer’s notion of “fusion of horizons.”

This notion implies that culture is sustained through history and explores how a people approach their history, values, rituals, and symbols. In other words, the notion of culture in the source language is not static and is normally subject to re-reading in translation. Dying traditions, the ever-changing sphere of cross-cultural communication, and the expansive exposure of societies to each other suggest that cultures are dynamically shaped and that the symbolic reservoirs of a community are constantly reproduced (Kharmandar, 2015). For instance, *jaras* (جرس), an image used in Persian poetry, was a small hollow object making a ringing sound and was usually attached to animals; in Hafez’s poetry it is used to symbolize *departure*, but interpreting this idea would be difficult even to a native Iranian speaker. Arberry (1964) reframed this image as “the bell doth cry” in his English translation of Hafez’s poetry (Kharmandar, 2018b). The horizon of cultural understanding, then, must be decided in the translation process, because even cultural objects may be represented differently in translation.

RFS is the element that deals with any difficulty that formal aesthetics or play on words can impose on interpretation. Needless to say, literature, especially poetry, heavily relies on rhetorical devices to achieve innovation and create unconventional modes of communication. Finally, PST is concerned with the

innovations characterizing the original poet’s work, as perceived by source language literary critics. Apparently, this “level of complexity carries the most difficult problems for the translator to tackle, mostly because the poet-specific words are semantically idiosyncratic, and can be even difficult for the average source language speakers to make sense of” (Kharmandar, 2016, p. 13).

Along with CLCR, there is also another system of interpretation, called HCR, which tries to answer another set of complicated questions that the translator usually encounters in poetry translation. The classic problem of “authorial intention”, as one of the mainstream topics of modern and philosophical hermeneutics, is addressed in HCR. What does the poet intend to communicate through his / her poem? In a study which could be regarded as a substantial exploration of HCR, Kharmandar (2018b) relies on critical readings (e.g. meta-textual and inter-textual relations) that could shape interpretive traditions representing a major literary work.

Investigating the works of Iranian literary critics, Kharmandar (2018b) observes that there are five traditions conceptualizing *The Divan* of Hafez: mystical, Khayyamian, historical-political, romantic, and anti-hypocritical. The study reveals how words in a poem shape a narrative, which may in turn thematize the poem. As he explains, “... in the English translations [...] a semiotic entity such as *saghi* (Saki, line 1) is rendered as ‘O beautiful wine-bearer’ [...] in one translation and ‘Boy’ [...] in another” (Kharmandar, 2018b, p. 14). HCR implies that the selection of words and their relations in a work of literature depend on the system (tradition) in which the work is interpreted. The idea of meta-textuality reveals how a translation, too, may be positioned in a specific mainstream reading, usually based on source language systems. Yet, the translator may follow a specific system entirely, construct a new reading, or synthesize mainstream readings in the target text. Figure 1 illustrates the general structure of the framework used.

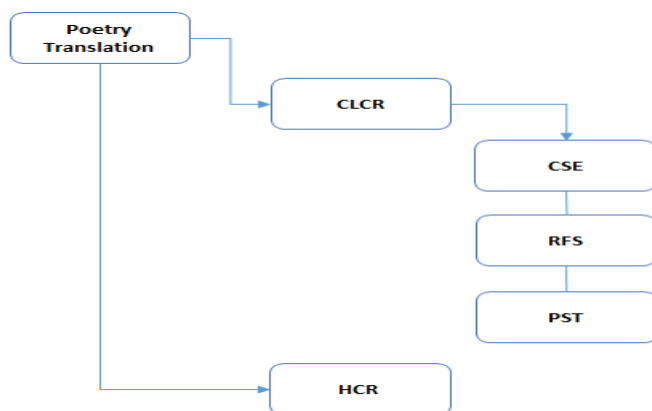


Figure 1

The Outline of the Hermeneutical Poetry Translation Framework Used (Kharmandar, 2018b)

The poem under study

This study analyzes the first 18 verses of Rumi's *Masnavi*, Book I, called *The Song of the Reed*, along with the work's twenty-three existing English translations from 1772 to 2015. In light of the notion of HCR, to decide about the history of the work and its mainstream interpretive system in the Persian literature, two different Persian *Masnavi* interpretations by Zamani (1993) and Forouzanfar (1982) are incorporated into the analysis, and any other useful source (e.g. dictionaries) are taken into account.

This study involves a keyword analysis that tries to investigate how, among others, the mainstream mystical reading of Rumi's *The Song of the Reed* might have taken shape in its English translations. The central keywords studied here were selected based on the works of renowned Persian literary scholars, Forouzanfar (1982) and Zamani (1993). As a result, 10 keywords are explored here: *beshno* (listen), *jodayee* (separation), *neyestaan* (bed of the flute), *asle khish* (his origin), *jamiat* (population), *ser* (secret), *naale* (lamentation), *nist baad* (no wind), *nist baad* (may it never exist) and *harif* (companion). Then, the keywords are used as input and inserted into Kharmandar and Karimnia's (2013) model to determine the types of their complexity. Then, the renditions of the keywords are extracted from the body of each translation.

Sample of textual analysis

In this section, a sample of the textual analysis is provided. This sample exemplifies both CLCR (and its sub-components) and HCR, totally covering four possible complexity factors found in the progression of the text.

Beshno (بشنو) or Listen

The poem starts with *beshno* (بشنو) or *listen to*. Why does Rumi begin his masterpiece with this invitation? The speaker in the poem, disappointed with the worldly life, tries to share his / her tales of separation with others, revealing mysteries of human divine creation. The idea of *beshno*, as simple as it may appear, requires the interpreter to position the idea within the Persian mystical interpretive system. As a result, decision about this ambiguity has to rely on HCR in the model. Below is an example of the translation of *beshno* (بشنو) or *hear* by Jones (1772):

Hear, how yon reed in sadly pleasing tales
Departed bliss and present woe be

As shown in Table 1, the word *listen* has been frequently used, although contrary to the above observation, a mystical reading can be best found in *hearken*. According to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary (2015) and Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary (Hornby, 2015), *hearken* means "to listen with your heart." Whinfield's (1887) and Nicholson's (1950) choice, then, represents the mystical interpretive system better than the other choices.

Table 1

The Word Choice Suggested by Different Translators for Beshno

Translator	Word choice	Translator	Word choice
Jones, 1772	Hear	Shahriari, 1998	Pay Heed
Redhouse, 1881	Hear	Nasr, 2000	Listen
Whinfield, 1887	Hearken	Gamard, 2000	Listen
Nicholson, 1926	Listen	Lewis, 2000	Listen
Nicholson, 1950	Hearken	Legenhausen, 2002	Listen
Arberry, 1964	Listen	Tamdgidi, 2003	Listen
Turkman, 1992	Listen	Tillinghast and Shafak, 2003	Listen
Barks, 2004	Listen	Mojaddedi, 2004	Listen
Türkman, 1996	Listen	Williams, 2006	Listen
Star, 1997	Listen	Holbrook, 2010	Listen
Gupta, 1997	Hear	Sadri, Sadri	Listen
Helminski, 1998	Listen		

Jodayee (جدایی) or *Separation*

What does *jodayee* (جدایی) or *separation* mean? In an interpretation by Zamani (1993), an alienation from the origin and *spiritual* world has been cited. The word *jodayee* (جدایی) or *separation* conveys a special meaning in Persian literature. It is not just a simple separation. The root of this word is in Persian culture and it is a mystical notion. Being detached from Divinity and the “return” to the source of creation are commonly expressed beliefs in Persian literature and culture. This understanding arises from CSE, as a sub-category of CLCR. Here is an example of *jodayee* (جدایی) or *absence* translated by Redhouse (1881) in poetic form:

From reed-flute hear what tale it tells
What plaint it makes of *absence* ill

Table 2 demonstrates that the word “separation” is the dominant word choice. Based on Merriam–Webster’s Dictionary (2015) and Oxford Advance Learner’s Dictionary (2015), the word *separation* can convey the interpretive expectations underlying the notion of *jodayee* (جدایی) in the Persian ST.

Table 2

The Word Choice Suggested by Different Translators for Jodayee

Translator	Word choice	Translator	Word choice
Jones, 1772	Departed	Shahriari, 1998	Separations
Redhouse, 1881	Absence	Nasr, 2000	The Separations
Whinfield, 1887	Banishment	Gamard, 2000	Separations
Nicholson, 1926	Separations	Lewis, 2000	Separations
Nicholson, 1950	Separations	Legenhausen, 2002	Separations
Arberry, 1964	Separation	Tamdgidi, 2003	Estrangement
Turkman, 1992	Separation	Tillinghast and Shafak, 2003	Being Apart
Barks, 2004	Being Separated	Mojaddedi, 2004	Separations
Türkman, 1996	The Story Of Separation	Williams, 2006	Separations
Star, 1997	Separation	Holbrook, 2010	Separations
Gupta, 1997	Being Separated	Sadri, Sadri	Separations
Helminski, 1998	Separation		

Naale (نالاه) or *lament*

Based on Zamani's (1993, p. 5) interpretation, *naale* (نالاه) is identified with Rumi's poem itself. Understanding this meaning entails a perception of its Persian interpretation which is highly difficult and challenging for the translator. This special instance is a case of PST; that is the keyword particularly characterized in Rumi's narrative, which is about a Reed detached from its origins. Therefore, there must be a musical quality and a sense that depicts resentment in the Reed's song. The following is a translation of the whole verse in which *naale* appears (Star, 1997):

My secret is found in my lament
But an eye or ear without light cannot know it

Table 3

The Word Choice Suggested by Different Translators for Naale

Translator	Word choice	Translator	Word choice
Jones, 1772	Strains and Sorrows	Shahriari, 1998	Grief
Redhouse, 1881	Throes and Moans	Nasr, 2000	Lament
Whinfield, 1887	Plaintive Notes	Gamard, 2000	Lament
Nicholson, 1926	Plaint	Lewis, 2000	Cry
Nicholson, 1950	Song	Legenhausen, 2002	This Lament You Hear
Arberry, 1964	Lament	Tamdgidi, 2003	Cry
Turkman, 1992	Cries	Tillinghast and Shafak, 2003	Cry
Barks, 2004	Notes	Mojaddedi, 2004	This Song
Türkman, 1996	Moaning Cries	Williams, 2006	Lament
Star, 1997	Lament	Holbrook, 2010	Cry
Gupta, 1997	Cries	Sadri, Sadri	Wailing Plight
Helminski, 1998	Lament		

Given the difficulty in interpreting this poet-specific word, most of the choices fail to fabricate the concept behind the idea. Most of the choices portray a depressive idea, while basically ignoring the musicality of the Reed's singing. *Plaintive notes* is the only choice that foregrounds an image of music and a sense of resentment.

Nist baad* (نیست باد) or *not wind

In line 9, there are two instances of *nist baad* and *nist baad*, which are homophonous, but convey very different meanings. The first one very simply means "it is no wind", referring to the song produced by the Reed. The second one, however, is an evil prayer for those who lack Fire (passion) in their existence. This play on words is an instance of RFS. The following is a full example by Gupta (1997):

The sound of the flute is the fire born of love; *it is not merely wind and vapor*

Anyone who is devoid of this fire is veritably dead to this sound and cannot figure it out

Table 4

The Word Choice Suggested by Different Translators for nist baad

Translator	Word choice	Translator	Word choice
Jones, 1772	-----	Shahriari, 1998	Extinct
Redhouse, 1881	Doom Him Death	Nasr, 2000	May He Be Naught
Whinfield, 1887	Accounted Dead	Gamard, 2000	May He Be Nothing
Nicholson, 1926	May He Be Naught	Lewis, 2000	Blown Away
Nicholson, 1950	May He Be Naught	Legenhausen, 2002	Let There Be No One
Arberry, 1964	Let Him Be Naught	Tamdgidi, 2003	Is Lost Entire
Turkman, 1992	May He Become Non-Existent	Tillinghast and Shafak, 2003	Let Him Disappear
Barks, 2004	Be That Empty	Mojaddedi, 2004	Should Die
Türkman, 1996	Let Him Die and Let Him Go	Williams, 2006	Be Gone
Star, 1997	-----	Holbrook, 2010	Won't Live on
Gupta, 1997	Is Veritably Dead	Sadri, 2015	May He Expire
Helminski, 1998	Would Not Exist		

In a way or another, all of the translators detected the pun. Yet, considering the existential grounds of this idea, *may he be naught* and *would not exist* seem to be closer readings.

Findings

Table 5 demonstrates the summary of the findings as a result of the keyword analysis on the original poem and the translations. The important point is that a column in Table 5 represents the factors of complexity for each of the keywords.

Table 5

Original Keywords, Select Choices, and Their Complexity Type

Original keyword	Translated choice	Translator(s)	Complexity type
<i>beshto</i>	hearken	Whinfield, 1887; Nicholson, 1950	HCR

<i>jodayee</i>	separation	<i>Marjory of translators</i>	CSE
<i>neyestaan</i>	native banks; original ground	Jones, 1772; Türkman, 1996	CSE
<i>asle khish</i>	His home; his source; his root;	<i>several translators</i>	CSE
<i>jamiat</i>	company; gathering		HCR
<i>ser</i>	secret	<i>all of the translators</i>	---
<i>naaleh</i>	plaintive Notes	Whinfield, 1887	PST
<i>nist baad - nist baad</i>	may he be naught; would not exist	Nicholson, 1926; Helminski, 1998	RFS
<i>harif</i>	companion; friend	<i>several translators</i>	HCR

As can be seen, the majority of the concepts emerged from a complexity factor that helped interpret meaning. The mystical reading is also scattered across the translations and no single one can be picked as being fundamentally aware of the importance of word choice in the formation of the mystical interpretation. Yet, generally speaking, the mystical reading heavily depends on Persian and Islamic cultural elements. There are, of course, some cases that at first look do not seem to pose any cross-cultural difficulty; *harif* (حريف) or “friend” and *jamiat* (جمعيت) or “crowd” are not complex notions but the problem is that their meanings have undergone changes since Rumi’s time. The instrument in the text analysis of the model that can explain such a historical change of meaning is HCR (through finding inter-textual relations between texts). Another issue, based on the findings, is that a keyword analysis may not necessarily include instances that pose a high degree of complexity on interpretation. For instance, the word *ser* (سر) meaning *secret*, represents an item that does not need in-depth investigation.

Discussion

This study relied on the factors identified in a hermeneutic framework of poetry translation to inspect how the elements in the English translations of Rumi’s *The Song of the Reed* reflect its mystical interpretation. The study traced the roots of a conflict between these two sets of scholars who defended the possibility or

impossibility of poetry translation. By focusing on a historical line of translations of *The Song of the Reed*, this study highlighted that meaning is a result of extensive re-reading over time through process called *traditionality* (Kharmandar, 2018b). This process helps to evaluate previous translations and even suggest more effective choices particularly for minima items.

As Aqili and Samakar (2008) observe, there may be some crucial factors in a poem that complicate the translation of specific words, and even a *small change* in one of the aspects may bring greater change in the shades of meaning of the word. In Kharmandar and Karimnia's (2013) model, emphasis has been put on complexity because complex elements finally influence the overall understanding (part-whole structure) of the text and can even decide the meaning of simpler items. As a result, in the case of *secret*, one can assume that this meaning is not ready-made but is decided as a consequence of rigorous understanding of complex elements.

In this section, a comparison is made between the findings of this study and those of some other similar studies. Different scholars have investigated poetry translation in the works of Hafez, Sadi, Khayyam, and Rumi. But they have only compared a poem with its English translations on the basis of proper translation without any specific framework. For example, in their study, Aqili and Samakar (2008) observed that the translator could not transfer the image of the original poem and failed to render cultural specific terms. They also observed that whenever the translator failed to consider the crucial factors in a poem, poor poetic style and misinterpretation were resulted. Anushiravani and Atashi (2012) observed that the translator failed to depict a thorough representation of the concept(s) behind the words in the original poem and consequently the reader in the source language inevitably recognizes the poet, Hafiz, as an under-evaluated, secular and sensuous person.

Moghaddam and Madani (2014) found that the translator was not able to convey the whole meaning behind culture-bound words of the poem. To put it in a nut shell, he failed to transfer the hidden connotative meanings and few elements were rendered correctly. Moreover, Dastjerdi (2004) mentions that translating poems of Sadi, Hafez, and Rumi, which are filled with ambiguities and mystical language, make translators face even more obstacles.

Contrary to these observations, this study employed a hermeneutic approach with a specific framework for determining and sources of ambiguities, where possible. The study emphasized the fact that readings and even assessments are only possible when works of poetry are positioned within an interpretive system and background. It should also be noted that complexity sub-systems were not discrete and seemed to be internally related. In fact, the function of the framework seems to be more strategic than categorical; when a source of complexity is identified, the translator can more readily look for a solution to overcome the problem, such as structured datasets (e.g. dictionaries or encyclopedias), literary reviews, resources on cultural symbolism, and literary books that provide knowledge about rhetoric and figures of speech.

The framework also suggests that the attempt to identify sources of difficulty and find the most representative word choices emphasize how newer hermeneutic approaches try to overcome relativism. House (2001) truly criticizes some former approaches, although what the data analysis unfolded in this study would not be simply solved with reference to discourse analysis or many linguistically based theories of translation. There are many choices and there is deep subjectivity in framing the renditions. For instance, in the case of *Naale* (نالہ) or *lament*, only literary criticism (HCR) could help the translator find or suggest a good representation (e.g. Whinfield's (1887) *Plaintive Notes*).

One of the most important contributions of the framework to the practice of literary translation is the emphasis that it puts on HCR and the meta-texts (e.g. literary reviews or commentaries) that explore an original work of literature. If translators tried to determine the interpretative tradition under which they would render the poem, they would be more likely to produce more holistically coherent poems in translation.

Conclusion

This study presented a comparative evaluation of twenty-three translations of the prelude to Rumi's *Masnavi*, using a hermeneutic framework. Based on one of the assumptions of the model, every reading of poetry, especially in the case of canonized works, is positioned within an interpretive tradition that decides the meaning of the parts against the whole of the text. Considering this assumption, this study tried to evaluate the translations in the light of the mainstream mystical reading of Rumi's work in the original language's system to find out how such a mystical reading had taken shape in the English translations. Broadly speaking, the results demonstrated the applicability of the model and its predictions of complexity. The textual analysis, too, revealed that there was no unified mystical reading specifically fabricated by any of the translations, but the word choice reflecting a mystical reading was mostly scattered across the translations. Relying on the model, as the findings showed, could considerably guide literary translators in their practice, although the model could be furthered strengthened and developed.

Reference

- Anushiravani, A., & Atashi, L. (2012). Cultural translation: A critical analysis of William Jones's translation of Hafiz. *Persian Literary Studies Journal*, 1(1), 41-58.
- Aqili, M., & Samakar, S. (2008). A comparative study of Molavi's "The Song of the Reed" And its English translation. Retrieved September 30, 2016 from the World Wide Web:
<http://www.translationdirectory.com/articles/article2104.php>
- Arberry, A. J. (1964). *Aspects of Islamic civilization: Depicted in the original texts*. London: Routledge.

- Barks, C. (2004). *The essential Rumi, new expanded edition*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Bassnett, S., & Lefevere, A. (1990). *Translation, history and culture*. London: Printer Publishers.
- Benjamin, W. (1968). *The task of the translator*. New York: Harcourt.
- Burnshaw, S., Fitts, D., & Peyre, H. (1995). *The poem itself*. Arkansas: University of Arkansas press.
- Cercel, L., Stozle, R., & Stanley, J. (2015). Hermeneutics as a research paradigm. In R. Stolze, J. Stanley, & L. Cercel (Eds.), *Translational hermeneutics: The first symposium* (pp. 17-40). Bucharest: Zeta Books.
- Cudden, J. A. (1976). *The penguin dictionary of literary terms and literary theory*. England: Penguin Reference.
- Dastjerdi, V. (2004). *Translation of poetry: Sa'di's oneness of mankind revisited*. Retrieved September 30, 2016 from the World Wide Web: <http://translationjournal.net/journal/30liter.htm>
- Forouzanfar, B. (1982). *Ahadithe Masnavi [Masnavi traditions]*. Amirkabir Publications.
- Frost, W. (1969). *Dryden and the art of translation*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Gamard, I. (2014, October 8). The *Ishraqi* philosophy of Jalal al-Din Rumi. Retrieved, from <http://www.Dar-al-Masnavi.org/Dar-al-Masnavi> of the Mevlevi order.
- Gupta, M.G., (1997). *Maulana Rumi's Masnawi*. India: M.G. Publishers & Book Distribution Agency.
- Helminski, E. (1998). *The Rumi collection: An anthology of translations of Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi*. Threshold Books.
- Hornby, A. S. (2015). *Oxford advanced learner's dictionary*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- House, J. (2001). Translation quality assessment: Linguistic description versus social evaluation. *Meta*, 46(2), 243-257.
- Jakobson, R. (1959). *On linguistic aspects of translation*. In R. A. Brower (Ed.), *On translation* (pp. 232–239). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Jones, W. (1772). *Poems consisting chiefly of translation from Asiatic languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kharmandar, M. A. (2015). Ricoeur's extended hermeneutic translation theory: Metaphysics, narrative, ethics, politics. *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricoeur Studies*, 6(1), 73-93. DOI: 10.5195/errs.2015.281

- Kharmandar, M. A. (2016). A re-version of 'the fundamentals of constructing a hermeneutical model for poetry translation.' Available at SSRN. Retrieved September 21, 2016 from <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2794477>
- Kharmandar, M. A. (2018a). A hermeneutic critique on George Steiner's hermeneutic motion in translation. In R. Stolze & B. Piecychna (Eds.), *Translational hermeneutics* (pp. 83-95). *CrossRoads: A Journal of English Studies*. DOI: 10.15290/cr.2018.20.1.05
- Kharmandar, M. A. (2018b). The interrelationship between literary translation and literary criticism: Reading in interpretive traditions. [Sic] - *A Journal of Literature, Culture and Literary Translation*, 2(8), 1-20. DOI: 10.15291/sic/2.8.lc.7
- Kharmandar, M. A., & Karimnia, A. (2013). The fundamentals of constructing a hermeneutical model for poetry translation. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 70, 580 – 591.
- King, J. (1998). *Take a lesson in poetry*. England: The publishing House.
- Landers, C. E. (2001). *Literacy translation*. Toronto: Multilingual Matters LTD.
- Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary (2015, October 8). Retrieved from www.Merriam-Webster.com.
- Moghaddam, A., & Madani, D. (2014). A comparative analysis of Hafiz's Diwan and its English translation by Dr. Allaeddin Pazargadi: Emphasis on gnostic words. *Enjoy Teaching Journal*, 2(1), 74-78.
- Nair, S. K. (1991). Translating poetry: Some basic problems. *International Journal of Translation*, 48(3), 1-7.
- Newmark, P. (1988). *A textbook of translation*. UK: Prentice Hall International (UK) Ltd.
- Nicholson, R.A. (1926). *Mathnawi* (English Translation). Cambridge University Press
- Nicholson, R.A. (1950). *The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi* (English Translation). Gibb Memorial Trust.
- Nida, E. (1984). *On translation*. Beijing: Translation Publishing Corp.
- O'Keeffe, B. (2018). Reading, writing, and translation in Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy. In J. Stanley, B. O'Keeffe, R. Stolze, & L. Cercel (Eds.), *Philosophy and practice in translational hermeneutics* (pp. 15-45). Bucharest: Zeta Books.
- Raffel, B. (2010). *The art of translating poetry*. Pennsylvania: State University Press.
- Redhouse, J. W. (1881). *Mesnevi of Mevlana (our Lord) Jelalu'd-Din, Muhammed, er-Rumi*. London: Trubner & Co.

- Robinson, P. (2010). *Poetry and translation: The art of the impossible*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Star, J. (1997). *Rumi: In the arms of the beloved*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher / Putnam.
- Stolze, R., Stanley, J., & Cercel, L. (2015). *Translational hermeneutics: The first symposium*. Bucharest: Zeta Books.
- Turkmen, E. (1996). *A bouquet of Rumi's versified poems*. Konya Ve Mulhakati.
- Turkmen, E. (1992). *The essence of Rumi's Masnevi*. Misket Ltd. S.
- Venuti, L. (2004). *The translation studies reader*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Whinfield, E. H. (1887). *Masnavi Manavi, the spiritual couplets of Maulana Jalalu-D'-Din Muhammad Rumi: Translated and abridged*. Cornell University Library.
- Wilss, W. (1982). *The science of translation: Problems and methods*. Tubingen: Narr.
- Zamani, K. (1993). *A commentary on Masnavi Manavi*. Tehran: Etelaat Press. [In Persian]

Author's Biography



Amin Karimnia is an associate professor in Applied Linguistics in the Department of English, Fasa Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran. His research interests are in the area of Discourse Analysis, Sociolinguistics, Pragmatics, and Translation Studies.

Seyed Mohammad Hosseini Fard is an M.A graduate of Translation Studies. His research interests include Discourse Analysis and Translation Studies
