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# Ambiguities of Thematic Meaning: A study of English Translation of Allama Iqbal's "Shikwa and Jawab -i- Shikwa

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#### ABSTRACT

This paper intends to analyse ambiguities in thematic meaning by studying the translation of Igbal's Shikwa and Jawab-i-Shikwa. A framework was created by considering basic variables of this study i.e., study of meaning, ambiguity, thematic loss and meaning in translation. The core theoretical framework lies in theory of meaning provided by Saussure and other variables were studied by adapting translation theories provided by Jacobson, Nida, and Baker. As the study is qualitative in nature, therefore, analytical framework used the technique of Content analysis. Categories were neither pre-conceived nor adapted from some previous research. After deeply studying the sample, researcher formulated the categories. Based on these categories, meaning was analysed, and ambiguities were pointed out. The findings of this study revealed that translation of those texts which are deep rooted in culture, history, and religion are different from other texts. Hence, they require deep knowledge and understanding of target language. The results of study showed that Iqbal's work needs to be included in National curriculum because it will help in revival of Muslim history.

#### INTRODUCTION

Languages differ from each other at multiple levels; morphologically, syntactically, semantically, and pragmatically. Therefore, when a text is translated from one language to another, these differences play an important role. The vital part of any written or verbal literature is the message

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behind it. This message serves as the essence of its meaning. Hence, it is necessary to consider the consistency in meaning when a text is being translated. The translation needs to provide the clarity of message and its meaning should not be vague or ambiguous. Translations are supposed to be a bridge between two languages, hence, if a translator only focuses on replacing words with synonyms, the level of equivalency, in terms of meaning, cannot be achieved. Therefore, the role of translator is the most important element in building this bridge and to provide the readers with the cultural, social, economic, and national diversities in the form translation. (Bernacka, 2012). This paper aims to analyse the translation of Allama Muhmmad Igbal's two revolutionary poems Shikwa and Jawab -i- Shikwa. For this purpose, a translation written by Khushwant Singh (Complaint and Answer: Iqbal's Dialogue with Allah, 2006) has been selected. The purpose of this paper is to explore the ambiguities in thematic meaning, in translation of selected text. To fulfill this purpose a theoretical framework has been developed by using Ferdinand De Saussure's philosophy of meaning as a core theory. Ferdinand de Saussure is considered the founder of linguistic structuralism. His work defined and created a new way for analysing and observing different processes in language. With the passage of time, this theory became interdisciplinary, hence, changing the course of modern linguistics and social sciences. This shift in the study of language and other social phenomenon, led towards the establishment of a system analysing linguistic and social processes with the help of sign (Fedtke, Wiedemann, 2021). Moreover, Saussure's ideas have been incorporated with translation theorists: Roman Jakobson (1995, 2004), Eugen Nida's scientific approach to meaning (1964) and Mona Baker's theory of Thematic Meaning (2011). To understand and analyze ambiguity, Drazen Pehar's concept of ambiguity (2001) has been used. Translation theories have been developed by using linguistic framework and translation theorists use linguistic theorist as a primary source of their work. In this way, research based on translation use such frameworks where the core theory belongs to a linguist. The translation theories are based on such linguistic theories which can be applied on literary texts, hence, providing a rich framework for analyzing literary texts (Ngozi, 2016). Therefore, the theoretical framework of this research also has one primary linguist, Saussure and three translation theorists, showing the off shots of linguistics. In this way, this framework is showing connection among language, translation, and its meaning.

## Aims and objectives:

- To explore the change in meaning of translation of *Shikwa* and *Jawab-i- Shikwa*.
- To analyse the ambiguities in meaning by using Saussure's concept.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Translations are helpful in the study of language, meaning and understanding message of a text. Moreover, translation of books from different languages helps readers to understand the social, cultural, and religious norms of language community. Contrary to that, when one language is translated into another language, it loses its meaning and actual essence. There are differences in vocabulary, structure, and associations. Cultural, social, and religious terms are usually bound to that speech community; therefore, these terms are unable to provide the actual meaning when translated (Rivera, 2021). This study is significant in knowing about the role of Saussure's concepts of meaning in a language. It will be helpful in knowing about the pertinence of using translation in language teaching. In Pakistan, language is mostly taught through translating the books. Therefore, this study will contribute to knowing about the effectiveness of this teaching technique as well. It will be helpful in finding the vocabulary items which are socially, culturally, and religiously bound, or the terms which lose their meaning during translation.

According to Saussure, language has duality in it which makes it a natural relational system. As duality makes every entity having two parts and two sides, therefore, every linguistic entity can be described with two factors: signifier + signified. Forming this relational network among linguistic entities helps to understand the meaning. There is a chain of signifiers which help to reach the signified and any loss in the connection among signifiers will result in loss of signified. This is called the Totality of Sign, it is linear in nature, and it shows the harmony among different signs in a language (Saussure, 1983 & Bauer, 2021). The versatility of this theory makes it wide and broad in analytical dimensions. Especially when it comes to language, it takes language as a relational system. Where all signs are in relation to each other. This concept makes language a system of signs and a continuous chain of signifiers is responsible for the development of meaning

in a language (Moghaddas, 2013).

Translations also contain the same relational system, and they can be analyzed with the help of this concept. The chain of signifiers needs to be formed carefully when a text is translated. Hence, loss in one connection can lead to the loss of whole meaning. This theory has several concepts and ideas which make it widely applicable but for the sake of this study following categories have been selected: synchrony vs. diachrony, linear nature of sign vs. arbitrariness, syntagmatic vs. paradigmatic relations, totality of a sign vs. variability of a sign (Pourciau, 2017).

Synchrony of a sign suggests that language has descriptive nature but diachrony suggests that language has perspective nature. In Saussure's philosophy both have equal importance in the study of language (Gasparov, 2013). Understanding language with these concepts help to achieve the level of totality. One can understand the different characteristics and variation in language with a passage of time only by studying it both synchronically and diachronically (Saussure, 1959). Therefore, this dualistic distinction is significant in analyzing meaning in translation in both descriptive and perspective level.

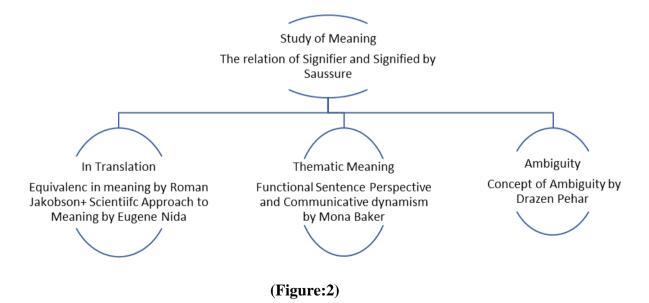
Linear nature of sign is described as; signifiers joined with each other to form a chain. It makes this process a close and compact one where loss of one link can lead to the loss of entire meaning (Richard, 2015). Linearity suggests that each signifier is crucial in attaining the totality of sign. Saussure suggests this relation is removed from the language it will only become a naming process. There will only be the list of words and there will not be any concept of meaning (Brain, 2015, Saussure 1974,p.67). Such concept is significant in analyzing a translated text because chief purpose of a translation is to reach the final point i.e., meaning. Therefore, for this study, it has been used to understand the language of translated text.

Arbitrariness is also one of the core concepts of Saussure's theory. This concept suggests that words are chosen in an arbitrary way; the object and the word which denoted that object has no logical connection or link with that word. Same is the case with sounds; a letter which denotes a sound has no connection with that sound rather they are named in an arbitrary fashion (Saussure, 1983 & Lifschitz, 2012). When it comes to language, the case is opposite, one cannot use word in an arbitrary way. In case of translation, words need to be selected by understanding connotations and their function. Hence, this concept has also been used for analyzing the selected translation.

As a part of dualistic distinctions, syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations are important too. Syntagmatic relations deal with fix rules and structures in language, like grammatical rules, spellings, syntactic structures etc. While paradigmatic relations are related to associative meanings or connotations in language. Syntagmatic relations are fixed and cannot be altered but paradigmatic relations are flexible and can be replaced when needed (Saussure, 1959). They both play equally important role in understanding different mechanisms in language. Thus, they can also be used in analyzing translated texts. Some words, phrases and structures in translation need fixity or rigidity but some can be replaced with suitable associative linguistic entities. This dual relation system is also the part of theoretical framework for this study.

Saussure describes the totality of sign as something which is unchangeable or immutability. When it comes to historical linguistics, it is applicable but when it comes to modern and historical linguistics; one can clearly see the differences which is known as variability. Language changes with the passage of time, hence, making it alive and flexible but historical facts and norms cannot be changed. In this way, language carries both features i.e., mutability and immutability (Margaret, 2011). This dualistic distinction can be used to analyze any translated text because it is helpful in knowing the use of totality and variability in the text. This relation is also the part of theoretical framework for this study.

As it has been mentioned above that the study links linguistic theories with translation theories, therefore, to fulfill this purpose a framework has been developed. This adaptative theoretical version is significant in connecting and relating this kind of research. The following figure is a brief demonstration of the theoretical framework of this study:



According to the figure the theoretical framework has been derived with the help of Linguistic approach and adaptation of this approach in Translation studies. Roman Jakobson's theory of Equivalence in meaning is a direct derivative of Saussure's theory of meaning. He took the idea of signifier and signified from Saussure's theory of meaning and called them *Code-units* (Munday, 2008). According to him, when a language is translated, words are not just replaced with synonyms. The most important thing is to transmit the message which is coming from another language. He emphasizes on the equivalency of code-units in both languages (Jakobson, 2004). Eugene Nida's work is also influenced by linguistic theories. His theoretical approach for the study of meaning is the offshoot of Noam Chomsky's work on Syntactic structures. Moreover, his work also has great influence of Semantics and Pragmatics which makes his theories more methodical and directly related to Linguistics. He calls it a *Scientific Approach to Meaning* (Munday, 2008).

Mona Baker has modified Halliday's model of Thematic Structures for translations. She calls it Functional Sentence Perspective or FSP. With the help of this approach, she emphasizes on the function of translation as a source of communication (Baker, 2011). She gives Halliday's model of thematic structure as central place for her ideologies because theme plays an important role in cultural and contextual communication. She calls it Communicative Dynamism or CD; this approach focuses on the importance of suitable choices made by the translator to make it a proper source of communication (Munday, 2008).

Danzer Pehar (2001), derives his views of ambiguity from Aristotelian philosophy. He says that reality is more intricate than the language, our thoughts are always higher than the words we use to express them. Therefore, ambiguity is a natural phenomenon, and it occurs in both intra-lingual and inter-lingual processing. He states that there is an ambiguity in a linguistic expression when it has more than one meaning. The most important factor which highlights the ambiguity is: both meanings are 'incompatible' and 'unrelated in nature'. He says that ambiguity is an actual and real challenge in a language. It does not only hinder the thought process but also makes it complicated to understand the theoretical facts in a language (Pehar,2001). Ambiguity limits the certain functions of a language and only identifying ambiguity can make language a source of communication. According to him there are three kinds of ambiguity:

- i) Referential ambiguity: it refers to the words with multiple meanings.
- ii) Syntactical ambiguity: relation between structures and different parts of a sentence

iii) Cross Textual ambiguity: relation among different sentences of a text (Pehar, 2001).

The above-mentioned theorists contribute in their unique way to analyse the issues in translation. In this research specific parts of their theories have been taken to analyse the translated text. The translated text has been examined at multiple levels to achieve the objective of study. For example, the idea of Equivalency presented by Jakobson is significant in knowing the choice of code-units and it helps to know the gap in translation which occurs due to lack of equivalency. In the same way, Nida's Scientific approach plays a substantial role by dividing the meaning into different categories which are:

- i. Linguistic Meaning: structures borrowed form Chomsky's model.
- ii. Referential Meaning: Denotative or dictionary meanings
- iii. Emotive Meaning: Connotative or associative meanings (Munday, 2008).

With the help of these categories' researcher can investigate the nature of meaning in both ways; the way in which it is supposed to be and a way in which it has been translated. Consequently, the present research aims to explore a meaning-based phenomenon and these categories are appropriate for it.

Baker derives her ideas from Halliday's functionalism. Most importantly the understanding of Theme and Rheme. As this study is based on exploring and investigating ambiguities in thematic meaning, therefore, this approach is suitable for it. Theme shows the basic concern or subject of the clause while Rheme provides additional information about the Theme (Halliday,1985). The understanding of thematic structures is not simple, it has levels or layers in it. Thematic analysis shows that there every clause has its own Theme and Rheme respectively (Baker, 2011). Moreover, the concept of CD and FSP have been used to deal with the issue of communication in translated text. FSP states that the task of communication in a text is performed by the structure or the syntax of it sentences. The problems in translation can be dealt with if this rule is applied during the translation. The structure of sentence is designed to fulfill a specific purpose of communication, if this structure is lost, communication is ultimately lost. To identify theme and rheme, it is important to identify such structures in a sentence. If these features are known by a translator, the process of translation becomes elucidative and smooth. This idea of viewing translation as a system of communication gives rise to the concept of Communicative Dynamism

or CD (Baker, 2011). Texts like *Shikwa* and *Jawab-i-Shikwa* have hidden messages and they are full of structures which determine these messages. Recognizing these structures can give translator a better way to communicate in translation. In addition to this, the essence of meaning will be secured by considering process of translation as a process of communication.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

The study is qualitative in nature and Content analysis has been used to analyze the text. Content Analysis is a systematic approach to make inferences form the text and other forms of qualitative information. It is used to categorize, compare a corpus of data. Moreover, it is also used to explore trends and themes in embedded data (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002). For the sake of this study, Inductive approach has been used. In this approach no pre-conceived categories are used rather categories are derived after close study of research sample. This approach allows the categories to flow from data of study (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002).

The sample for this study has been selected through Purposive sampling. The primary source of text is Iqbal's original work in Urdu while the secondary source is English Translation of "Shikwa" and "Jawab-i-Shikwa" by Khushwant Singh (Complaint and Answer: Iqbal's Dialogue with Allah,2006). The text is rich and full of words, phrases, and structures which are lost in translation; therefore, the above-mentioned approach is suitable for this study. Iqbal's poetry has universal themes and issues in it which make it an important part of World's literature (Hassan, 2012). Thus, the translation of his work requires attention and insight. On the other hand, translation done by Khushwant Singh has received appreciation by foreign scholars but also a lot of criticism by Urdu scholars. These reasons make it a suitable sample for present study.

#### ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In section 1.2, theoretical framework of study has been described in detail. It states one core Linguistic theory by Saussure and adaptation of theories by translation theorists. The analytical categories have been derived by using Saussure as a core theorist and Baker as a translation theorist. Other translation theorists are supporting the theoretical framework, rather these two are developing a profound and comprehensible analytical framework.

The analysis has been done by discussing each stanza of poem; brief introduction of stanza,

discussion, and analysis. Brief introduction deals with understanding of theme of that stanza and discussion and analysis contain issues investigated by the researcher. The issues have been discussed in the light of core theory and then on further level by using the translation theories. In the end, the type of ambiguity has been discussed by using Drazen Pehar's (2011) concept of ambiguity.

There are 31 stanzas in the first part of book i.e., *Shikwa*. *Shikwa* as the name indicates is the complaint of poet (as representative of entire Muslim nation) submitted to Allah Almighty and there are 36 stanzas in the second part of book i.e., *Jawab-i- Shikwa*. It is evident from the name that it is the answer to compliant. There are some examples given below: both from. *Shikwa* and the other from *Jawab-i- Shikwa*. These examples clarify the nature of analysis at different linguistic and translating level.

## **1.1.1.** Example 1 (*Shikwa*):

#### Stanza 1

- i. کیوں زیاں کار بنوں سود فراموش رہوں
- ii. فکر فردا نہ کروں محو غم و دوش ر ہوں
- iii. بلبل کے سنوں اور ہمہ تن گوش رہوں
- iv. ہمنوا! میں بھی کوئ گل ہوں کہ خاموش ر ہوں
- v. جر اءت آموز تاب سخن ہے مجھ کو
- vi. خاکم بدہن اہر مجھ کو
- i. Why must I forever lose, forever forgo profit that is my due,
- ii. Sunk in the gloom of evenings past, no plans for morrow pursue.
- iii. Why must I all attentive to the nightingale's lament,
- iv. Friend, am I as dumb as flower? Must I remain silent?
- v. My theme makes me bold, makes my tongue more eloquent.
- vi. Dust be in my mouth, against Allah I make complaint.

#### **Brief Introduction**

The opening lines of first stanza reveal poet's purpose of writing the poem. As the word choices, have been mentioned above it shows that the poet is really concerned about maintaining an atmosphere of helplessness and misery. He is building a background for making a compliant. Reasons and justification for calling Allah and drawing His attention towards Muslims have also been given in this stanza.

## **Discussion and Analysis**

The following words are important for thematic meaning of stanza:

These words give a very strong connotation related to the miserable conditions of Muslims. On the other hand, the translator is using the following words in English version: Forgo profit, morrow pursue, sunk in gloom of evenings past, nightingale's laments. By comparing words from both languages, it looks more like a word-to-word translation. The interpreted meaning here is not describing the dire need of writing this poem.

In Saussure's philosophy words give meaning when they are in relation, here in translation of these words, the relation is missing. When there is no relation, the meaning is not achieved, or the final product remains in process (Saussure, 1983). These words have used connotatively by Iqbal, so their literal translation is not required here. It needs equivalences, otherwise the readers never reach to the process of attaining meaning. As the linear nature of the sign suggest that language is not only a naming process it is the representation of social convention and ideas. In case of translation, such relation is missing which is not providing the meaning properly. The law of synchrony also applies here: as synchrony deals in maintaining equilibrium between two co-existing entities, therefore, synchronizing original ideas in the translated language is also very important (Saussure, 1983). Losing this equilibrium is creating ambiguities, hence, leading towards the loss of meaning. Moreover, it looks like that the translation is showing more of the syntagmatic relation (sequential) rather than showing a paradigmatic relation (associative) among the words and phrases.

According to Pehar (2011), if meanings are incompatible, they bring ambiguity. It is a cross-textual Ambiguity because the translation of whole stanza is ambiguous.

## **1.1.2.** Example 2 (*Shikwa*):

#### Stanza 4

- i. ہم سے پہلے تھا عجب تیرے جہاں کا منظر
- ii. کہیں مسجود تھے پتھر, کہیں معبود شجر
- خوگر پیکر محسوس تھی انسان کی نظر iii.
- مانتا پهر كوئ ان ديكهر خدا كو كيونكر?
- v. بنام تیرا ? تجه کو معلوم ہے ایتا تھا کوئ نام تیرا
- vi. کیا کام تیر vi.
- i. Before our time, a strange sight was the world You had made:
- ii. Some worshipped stone idols, other bowed to trees and prayed.
- iii. Accustomed to believing what they saw, the people's vision wasn't free,
- iv. How then could anyone believe in a God he couldn't see?
- v. Do you know of anyone, Lord, who then took, Your Name? I ask.
- vi. It was the muscle in the Muslim's arms that did Your task.

#### **Brief Introduction**

This stanza again, deals with the idea of Muslima's heroism. He continues the idea that Muslims played a significant role in flourishing Islam. He says that the whole world was prevailing in darkness and if it were not for Muslims, there were not any enlightenment for the rest of world. He uses religious conceptualization to describe the situation of world before Muslims conquered it. Muslims preached Islam all over the world and they are the biggest reason for the sustainability of Islam.

## **Discussion and Analysis**

The following words are important for thematic meaning of stanza:

The relation here among words should be paradigmatic instead of syntagmatic. Associative or substitutive meaning help in describing the contextual meaning. Words which are context bound need a careful selection in translation. Therefore, words with associative meanings are preferred. Moreover, for achieving the totality of sign is also very important. The linear nature of the sign suggests a chain of signifiers, where words are connected in a chain to achieve the signified. If

words are in a relation and there is a chain of signifiers, then in translation only such words must be selected which are supposed to be signified (Saussure, 1983). Words with complete internalization of concept and contextualization need to be the part of translation. This process is missing in the translation of this stanza and creating ambiguity at thematic level.

Translations are supposed to introduce one culture to another culture. Therefore, it is important to understand the context during translation. Theme and thematic meaning are also context dependent. Baker explains the part of sentence context dependent as Theme. Thematic status of a sentence shows its dependency on the context. Such sentences or phrases are responsible of making the text a source of communication. When there is less expression of context, it makes translation a poor example of communication. Hence, there is the lowest degree of Communicative Dynamism or CD (Baker, 2011). In the same way, this stanza lacks the process of communication which makes it ambiguous. The ambiguity in this stanza is pragmatic in nature because it is deficient in the knowledge of context.

## **1.1.3.** Example 3 (*Shikwa*):

#### Stanza no 9:

- i. کہہ دے کہ اکھاڑا در خیبر کس نے?
- ii. کس نے? شہر قیصر کا جو تھا اس کو کیا سر کس نے?
- توڑے مخلوق خداوندوں کے بیکر کس نے?
- iv. کاٹ کر رکھ دیئے کفار کے لشکر کس نے?
- v. کس نے ٹھندا کیا آتش کدہ ایراں کو ?
- vi. ? پهر زنده کيا تذکره ۽ يزدان کو
- i. You tell us who were they who pulled down the gates of Khyber?
- ii. Who were they that reduced the city that was the pride of Caesar?
- iii. Fake gods that men had made, who did break and shatter?
- iv. Who routed infidel armies and destroyed them with bloody slaughter?
- v. Who put out and made cold 'sacred' flame in Iran?
- vi. Who retold the story of the one God, Yazdan?

#### **Brief Introduction**

In stanza 9 Iqbal is giving several historical references to prove the worth and capability of Muslims. Their fearless nature and daring attitude have also been mentioned by Iqbal. Role of Muslim heroes in magnificent Islamic history is the main concern of poet in this stanza. (Full of historical references)

## **Discussion and Analysis**

The following words are important for thematic meaning of stanza:

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(line-i) دره خیبر (line-ii) شہر قیصر (line-v) آتش کده ایر ان (line-vi) تذکره یز دان
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The incidents mentioned in this stanza are historical in nature, and they need to be substituted properly in translation. Meaning can only be achieved if equilibrium is maintained among the coexisting entities. These phrases are based on the actual phenomenon and factual incidents, as a result, it is not simple to translate such words and phrases.

Here the idea of CD is very important, as it deals with the identification and function of theme. Theme is context-dependent, and it is conveying the ideas in the form of sequence. Hence, identifying the theme means, identifying the message of poet. Neglecting the importance of theme and thematic meaning is giving this stanza the lowest degree of CD (Baker,2011). Therefore, this translation is full of ambiguities and these ambiguities are pragmatic in nature.

## 1.1.4. Example 4 (Jawab-i- Shikwa):

#### Stanza no 1

- دل سے جو بات نکلتی ہے اثر رکھتی ہے i.
- ii. پر نہیں طاقت پرواز مگر رکھتی ہے
- iii. قدسی الاصل ہے رفعت یہ نظر رکھتی ہے
- iv. کاک سے اٹھتی ہے گردوں یہ گزر رکھتی ہے
- عشق تها فتنه گرد و سرکش و چالاک مرا
- vi. اسمال چير گيانالهء بيباک مرا
- i. Words spoken from the heart never fail to have effect;
- ii. Sacred and pure their origin, on lofty heights their sights are set.

- iii. They have no wings and yet they have power to fly;
- iv. They rise from the dust and pierce through the sky.
- v. So headstrong and insolent was my love, so much on mischief bent,
- vi. So outspoken my plaint, it tore through the firmament.

#### **Brief Introduction**

The poem starts when man's voice reaches straight to the Heaven, it reaches directly to Allah. It was the sigh of pain and misery hence, it flew without any obstacle and reached to the place where only heavenly creatures and divinity resides.

## **Discussion and Analysis**

The following words are important for thematic meaning of stanza:

(line-iii) قدسی الاصل (line-iv) خاک سے اٹھتی ہے نالہء بیباک

The translation of this stanza is denotative, it is unable to explain the message hidden in the metaphor. As it has been mentioned earlier those metaphors need to be handled differently. They are associative with culture, society, and history; hence, this association must be maintained. Synchrony proposes a balanced form of relation within the language. Here the balance is disturbed; it is demanding an associative relation but the relation here is literal in nature. This is causing the ambiguities and they can be removed by removing this problem.

In Baker's views, theme always carry contextual information, or it is context dependent. Metaphors help in understanding thematic meaning or theme of the text (Munday, 2008). Consequently, neglecting all these factors in translation of this stanza is making it ambiguous. The ambiguity present in this stanza is pragmatic in nature.

## **CONCLUSION**

The results of the study showed that translations are very important in today's world. Due to the availability of digital resources and e-books, they are approached by different speech communities. Translations help to understand the cultural, political, social, and religious norms of a society. They play a significant role in cross-cultural communication; therefore, translations are a great responsibility. Translation of a text especially, like *Shikwa* and *Jawab-i- Shikwa*, should be

considered a process. Its mechanics require a complete understanding and interpretation of message. Otherwise, the meaning is lost which eventually loses the communication.

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