

**Syntactic Differences as a Challenge in Literary Translation:  
Rendering the Third Person Singular Pronoun in the English  
Translations of Hafiz's Lyrics**

Seyed Mohammad Hosseini-Maasoum<sup>4</sup>

Associate Professor, Department of Linguistics and Foreign Languages, Payame Noor  
University, Tehran, Iran

Elaheh Alizadeh

MA in Translation Studies, Department of English, Torbat Heydariyeh University,  
Torbat Heydariyeh, Iran

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**Extended abstract**

**1. Introduction**

The translation of Persian poems necessitates translator's fluency in the source and target languages as well as great knowledge about the delicacies of poetry and the intellectual, social, and cultural background of the poet. One of the problems in the process of translation is the incompatibility of the syntactic structures and morphological and grammatical features of the two languages.

In translation studies, there has been much discussion over the notion of equivalence. Naida (1964) first introduced the notion of equivalence and talked of formal and dynamic equivalences. He was in favour of equivalent effect on the reader in source and target texts. But there have been few discussions on the criteria for the recognition of the equivalence. In a reader-oriented approach, the meaning of a literary text is the product of the interaction between the reader and the text itself and is created through the reading process.

It is with such an approach that Khazaefar (2015, p. 15) makes a mention of aesthetic equivalence for the first time. He believes that "from an aesthetic point of view, we should see how the translator reacts to the gaps or interpretable structures in the source text and how he has participated in the filling of these gaps". In Khazaefar's (2015) view, aesthetic equivalence necessitates a balance in the degree of interpretability in the source text and the translation.

The source of many of the attractive ambiguities in Hafez is the different and contradictory interpretations concerning the addressee in his poems. Persian lacks grammatical gender, and the third person pronoun in Persian */?u/*, which refers to the beloved of Hafez, defies translation since in English, the translator has to use either masculine or feminine pronouns, each of which provokes a different interpretation.

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<sup>4</sup>. hosseinimasum@pnu.ac.ir

Hafez is a controversial poet who is both admired and criticized by many people from different literary, social, and religious backgrounds. The language he uses in his poems is by far the most complicated language among the poems. The complexity does not lie in the lexical or structural ambiguities in his lines but rather in the hidden intention of the poet. His poetry is full of allusions, ironies, and other figures of speech, all of which are differently interpreted by various scholars. He talks about wine, ecstasy, beloved, kiss, cuddle, union, sin, heaven, hell, faith, atheism, and many other concepts, but never clearly takes a clear position as to what he really means.

Most of these ambiguities are lexical, but sometimes the source of the ambiguity is the nature of Persian grammar. Persian as a language without grammatical gender well allows the speaker to hide the reference of the pronouns and leaves them open to different interpretations. In English, the sentences *I love him* and *I love her* have two clearly different interpretations. One cannot use *him* for female or *her* for male referents. In the first sentence the speaker loves a female person (or thing) and in the second a male one. In Persian, both sentences are expressed in the same way:

It is usually claimed that Hafez is a mystical poet. He is the lover of God and whatever he says, be it wine and ecstasy or kiss and cuddle, he means he is looking for the union with his Lord. But there is a good number of cons who believe that Hafez is just an ordinary man who cherishes hedonism and always craves for women, wine, and pure pleasure.

Persian lines leave this discussion open by means of their double-sense interpretations. But the problem is doubled when it comes to the translation of these lines into a gender-marking language such as English. The translator cannot render Hafez's lines without taking side on one of the several possible interpretations about the reference of the third person pronoun. Translating the Persian /?u/ as *she* leads to a hedonistic interpretation while translating it as *he* may raise some accusations of homosexuality, a phenomenon not rare in that era especially among many of his contemporary poets with clearly erotic poems in those days. Another option is to translate /?u/ as *He* with capital H to emphasize that God is meant.

The present study surveys samples of the translation of Hafez's lyrics by three translators, namely, Shahriar Shahriari, Behrooz Homayun far, and Henry Wilberforce Clarke. It analyzes and classifies the different methods in the translation of this pronoun. Twenty three lyric poems were selected from Hafez Collection (*Divan*) and the lines which had a kind of third person pronoun (subject, object, or possessive) were extracted. The translations by the three scholars were analyzed to detect the way they had rendered these pronouns.

The findings show that all the three translators used *he*, *He*, and *she* interchangeably and no unified strategy was discovered on the part of the translators. This shows that the notion of true and virtual love is still a controversial

issue in Hafez's poetry and the translators as readers share their confusion with their audience. This is in a sense a sample of the application of aesthetic equivalence proposed by Khazaefar (2015).

**Key words:** Pronominal system, Literary translation, Third person singular pronoun, Persian, English.

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