

An Analysis of Language Appropriation Techniques used in Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron*

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Abstract

This research explores Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron* (2000) by analyzing the use of language techniques such as appropriation, glossing, borrowing, code switching and untranslated words etc. English has become a world language in the recent years being spread in almost all the countries. Writers from all the nations have appropriated the language according to their cultural convenience. Therefore, English has undergone many linguistic changes. The researcher observes the same in Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron*. There are many Urdu words used as per the writer's convenience, such as *Qaida*, *Dholki*, *Aray*, *Naans* etc. The researcher studies the selected novel by taking into account, the technical analysis of Kachru (1983) and Ascroft (2002). The current study not only analyzes the text to focus on the new techniques in language appropriation, but also attempts to find out the reasons behind using the mentioned language techniques.

Keywords: Borrowing, Cultural Convenience, Glossing, Untranslated words

Introduction and Literature Review

Salt and Saffron (2000) narrates the life story of the protagonist Aliys, a Pakistani national living in the US. She is unlike her family in looks but still is haunted by the family's inheritance in traditions since the days of Timur Lang. Her family, *Dard-e-Dil* is an aristocratic family of the sub-continent and has many hidden myths and secrets over the years. The title of the novel is also a symbolic representation of the delectable family stories, full of an amazing mix of salt and spice. Hers is a family with a long history, a family that has suffered the pain of partition and it's after effects. By relating the miseries suffered by the family, Shamsie tries to relate to the larger story of the Sub-continent's division, and the consequent alterations this partition brought with itself. In narrating the larger story, Shamsie uses the language techniques articulately according to her requirements.

Kamila Shamsie's novel is a blend of cultural identities and language appropriation techniques. Literature deals with culture, ethnicity and social backdrop. Literature also reveals the relation between culture and language(s). *Salt and Saffron* shows Pakistani culture and various constructs of identities through revealing the lives of different characters. Language is an important aspect that operates in the society, depicting a particular ethnicity.

According to Bloch and Trager (1942), language is a system of “arbitrary vocal symbols through which the society co-operates” (4). Similarly Hall terms language as an institution through which human beings communicate and interact with each other in a social group by using various oral and auditory symbols (158). Both the definitions consider language as an important tool of interaction in the society. It is with the help of language that humans interact and communicate among one another and perform their social functions an effective manner.

Since language is a cultural practice and the users of language have certain cultural conventions of language available, and therefore, the language conventions differ according to the cultural differences. Therefore, different language users may be unaware of the differences in conventions and may use language inappropriately. This can cause “miscommunication or misjudgment of intentions and abilities” (Tennan 343). Therefore, the main objectives of this study are: to search for the reasons behind using language techniques by the Post-colonial writers, to make an analysis of the language techniques used by Shamsie in *Salt and Saffron*, and to focus on the new techniques in language appropriation used by Shamsie in the novel under discussion? In order to do so, this paper probes into the following research questions: *What are the reasons behind the use of language techniques by the postcolonial writers? Which language appropriation techniques are used in Shamsie’s Salt and Saffron? and Are there new language techniques employed by Shamsie in Salt and Saffron?*

Essentially qualitative in nature, the present research study explores Kamila Shamsie’s *Salt and Saffron* for the use of new language appropriation techniques by taking into account the studies of Aschcroft (2002) and Kachru (1983). In their study, they have discussed many techniques like use of untranslated (Urdu) words, code switching, and borrowing.

Analysis and Discussion

Salt and Saffron narrates the events that occur to the aristocratic *Nawab* family, *Dard-e-Dil*. The protagonist Aliya is the narrator who belongs to the same family and believes that the art of storytelling runs in the family. She falls in love with Khaleel who is poor. It is here that she thinks about the history of her family and explores the history of her aristocratic family. She comes across many myths and concepts related to the family. She could understand the issues of her family ancestors only when she goes through the similar emotions and situations in her life. The novel shows the reason behind the rift between Muslim families after partition between Pakistan and India, though this is not the main subject of the novel.

This section deals with the thorough analysis of the novel subject to discussion by exploring the selected language techniques one by one.

Glossing

Glossing means an interlinear note or information placed in the original text, to provide the meaning of a word or words. It may be in the language of the text or otherwise. Many writers have used this technique to insert an explanation or meaning to the text so that the readers become aware. The words that are glossed at times convey a more clear contextual meaning than the words in the text’s language. For example, Shamsie in her novel uses a word “kathak”. Kathak is one of the eight forms of the Indian classical dance.

When I was very young she had taken me to a kathak performance. It was my first experience of classical dance and Which accompanied with table and bells- the ghungroo. (116)

In a similar manner she uses other words like “qaida”, “saleeqa”, (36) which is another example of glossing. Shamsie uses it in the text as, “Manners above all. *Qaida. Saleeqa*. Hadn’t anyone ever taught her that?”

Untranslated words

This is a technique where some words are left without translation to show that the post-colonial text is written in another language. This is a widely used technique and is used to indicate the cultural distinctiveness. It shows the differences between the two or more cultures as well as the importance of discourse needed to interpret cultural concepts. Hence there is an extensive use of this technique in the novel subject to discussion. Shamsie uses the word *Shaitan* (75), without changing it into its English equal devil. “Leave, leave, before you make me into an instrument of *shaitan* and I send you to hell” (75) Similarly, as the novel is based on the story of a Muslim family, so Shamsie uses many terms from religion, such as *Iftari* and *Ramzan* to provide the true essence.

Syntactic Fusion

This technique is a blend or a combination of two dissimilar linguistics structures. It takes syntax from the local language and blends it with the lexical forms of English. The use of this technique is also observed in *Salt and Saffron*. Shamsie has used the original words from Urdu and has made their plurals by adding “s” or “ing” at the end, e-g, *golguppas* (14), *desis* (7), *dholkis* (205), *girgits* (99), *ghararas* (12), *aadabs* (110), *sherwanis* (83), *bihari kebabs* (241), *Chaattwallahs* (212).

Code Switching

Code Switching has become a very effective tool of communication in cross-cultural communities. It bridges the gaps in communication among the bi-lingual speakers. Arrifin (2019) in his essay “Code-Switching as a Communication device in Conversation,” cites Tay (1989); Myers-Scotton (1995), and Adendorff (1996), who reflect that Code Switching “is actually used as a communicative tool that depends on the switcher’s communicative intents (36). Code switching requires two or more codes, for instance, a shift from English to any native or local language of a particular region. While in conversation, a speaker may switch between two or more languages, usually in a single utterance. According to Kachru (1983) the code switching points toward the different identities, as well as behaviour and emotions of the speakers (83).

In the novel under discussion, this code switching is seen very evidently at various places. For instance, when talking about her cousin Samia and the *desi* décor at her place, she says, “Samia it appeared, had become one of those *desis* who drink Pepsi in Pakistan and *lassi* in London” (7). This example shows the duality found in the nature of Pakistani nationals who pretend to be patriotic to their homeland when abroad, while when in their own country, the same people yearn to go abroad to get life.

According to the definition of culture quoted above, it is a way of life of a people, a group or a period, and this is exactly what has been presented in the above-cited example in which a particular habit of a particular group of a particular people has been presented beautifully through the use of code-mixing. The class presented here has its root in their homeland but live abroad, and they are rather confused about their identity as they keep switching their lifestyles as they switch countries. Aliya tells Samia: “Uff toba (10), You’re a historian, not a psychologist, Samo” one can see that the culture-related expression of bizarre feelings “uff toba” is used by Shamsie in order to give a sense that Aliya does not quite like the way Samia is asking about her telling the stories. This is a good example of code-switching, which is a tool for effective communication in cross-cultural context. One instance of code-switching in which terms such as *Phuphi* and *pultan* are used (27) where Shamsie switches between the two languages in the following way: ‘One of Zaheer’s relatives was over for tea.’ Zainab *Phuphi* explained to my mother later. ‘And as luck would have it a whole *pultan* of my relatives landed up as well...’ (27) The term *Phuphi* refers to an aunt, who is one’s father’s sister only. This term also carries within it all the love, care and fond association that an aunt has for her nephews and nieces. Likewise, in an eastern household, the idea of *pultan* is common which refers to a great number of people or the whole family arriving somewhere simultaneously. For example: He lay on a charpoy in a dusty courtyard (66).

There are few other examples of Code Switching in the novel, such as, ‘Dadi polished her solitaire ring with the *puloo* of her sari’ (111). Similarly, Dadi says, ‘my children as you all know have both, *Allah ka shukar*, been admitted to Karachi grammar school’ (126). In another instance, Aliya uses it as, ‘*Baji* didn’t respond to my *aadaab* with the traditional “*jeeti raho*” so I didn’t kiss her’ (36).

Tag switching

This is a language appropriation technique in which a tag is inserted in language as an utterance, however, the rest of whole argument is in another language. For example the Urdu words like *Arry*, *Acha*, *Uff*, used in English sentences by a non native speaker. Such tags may be inserted anywhere in the discourse and hence do not violate the rules of syntax in any language. In the novel under discussion, tags are used in a few places, such as, *Uf tobah!* You’re a historian not a psychologist. (10)

Lexical Innovation

Human societies keep on evolving and the native speakers use new words to represent the new and innovative ideas and concepts, products and practices (Gasparri 22). Lexical innovation means tracing back the new words in a language to the old colonial varieties of languages and the development of English language in that area. Words borrowed from the old languages are incorporated in the new ones. The examples used in the novel subject to discussion are; *Shami kababs*, *bijli failure* (85), *jangia-underpants* (83), *Bukhara rug* (7).

Contextual Redefinition

This technique is of vital importance as it introduces new words in vocabulary. These new words help in the use of various contextual hints to guess and confirm the meaning of the text. Shamsie uses such new additions to the vocabulary to hint upon the kinship terms in Muslim Urdu speaking families to differentiate the family members in familial system of Pakistan. For example, Shamsie uses the term ‘*aba*’ for father, ‘*ayah*’ for maid servant (53), ‘*phuphi*’ for paternal aunt, ‘*dadi*’ for paternal grandmother (12), and ‘*nawab*’ for males of an aristocratic family (11).

Borrowing

Borrowed words are the words adopted by the speakers of one language from any other language to suit their requirements. In the novel, when Samia dances on Aliya’s back, and leans on her back later, she says, “More

than anything else, more than mangoes, *gol gappas*, *nihari* and *naans*.....what I missed about Karachi was the intimacy of bodies” (14). She uses the English language’s inflection ‘s’ to make the plural form of *gol gappa*, *nihari* and *naan* which are the Urdu words in singular form. These food items are relished for their taste and the words used for these items are culture specific. Another instance in the text states, “before Ammi could answer, Maryam Apa said, “*Aaloo ka bhurra, achar gosht, pulao, masoor ki daal, kachoomer*” (15).

Indigenous Discourse Markers

There are markers specific to a particular society and its language. The use of these markers in a text to provide the flow of conversation without bringing any significant change in the meaning of the text is known as the technique of Indigenous Discourse Markers. Shamsie has also used many such markers in her novel, for example in the following sentences,

“Sorry, Aloo. Arre, hold on” (30).

“Not an option. Oh, eh muk, he is American (30).

Hai hai! Crisis at work (96).

Indigenous Phonetic Pronunciation

The postcolonial writers appropriate the pronunciation of the Standard English as well. The words are pronounced according to the regional dialect in their written discourse. For example in the selected novel, “Don’t ug me (26). It refers to hug here. Another example is Amreeks instead of America (30) and Cheeng-gum and chaaklait (212) are the regional pronunciation of chewing gum and chocolate.

To sum up, after conducting this research, the researcher has observed the use of a strategy known as ‘indigenous phonetic pronunciation’ by Shamsie in *Salt and Saffron*.

Conclusion

After a close textual stylistic analysis of Shamsie’s *Salt and Saffron*, the researcher concludes that Shamsie has used almost seven techniques of language appropriation out of those nine techniques mentioned by Kachru and Ashcroft. These techniques used in the novel are, glossing, un-translated words, syntactic fusion, code-switching, lexical innovation, and contextual redefinition. However, another technique of Indigenous discourse markers is also used by Shamsie which was originally devised by Awan and Ali (2012). Shamsie has also used the technique of using or appropriating the spellings of the words which she named as Indigenous phonetic pronunciation.

Hence it is observed that Shamsie like all the post-colonial writers has appropriated the language in her novel, in order to emphasize on the region, culture, and religion, of the place and people discussed in the novel.

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