A Study of Hybridity in Persian Translations of Mohsin Hamid's Novels

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Abstract

This study explores the complexities and variations in translating Mohsin Hamid's novels – *Exit West*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* – from English into Persian within a hybridized space. Using Mollanazar and Parham's (2009) analytical framework, the research examines the attributes of hybrid texts in translations by Hossein Hassani, Maryam Ahmadi, and Ahmad Al-Ahmad. Through micro- and macro-level analysis, the study addresses key questions: How do translations adhering to Mollanazar and Parham's model (2009) reflect the first level of hybridity? Are the findings consistent with existing hybrid perspectives in translation studies? The results indicate that contemporary translations, influenced by factors such as censorship and cultural invasion, alter the narrative's interpretation. This conclusion contributes to translation studies by highlighting the challenges of translating hybrid texts and their broader implications.

Keywords: Hybridity, migration literature, Homi Bhabha, Mohsin Hamid

1. Introduction

Homi Bhabha, a notable Indian-American postcolonial theorist whose work gained prominence in 1994, is renowned for his significant contributions to exploring hybridity in postcolonial studies. His scholarly discussions delve into the complexities and nuances of hybrid identities, cultures, and phenomena arising from colonial encounters and their aftermath. Bhabha's insights have greatly enriched our understanding of how hybridity shapes and influences various aspects of postcolonial societies and cultures. Bhabha refers to the existence of a space "between the designation of identity", suggesting that this intermediary realm allows for cultural hybridity to emerge. Within this space, there is the potential to embrace difference without assuming or imposing hierarchical structures (Bhabha, 1994, p. 4).

Bhabha (1994) argues that cultures are inherently hybrid and impure, emphasizing that cultural interactions inevitably lead to mixedness (p. 9). He posits that the true locus of culture exists at the boundary – a liminal space where identities are negotiated. For Bhabha, those situated at this boundary engage in acts of self-representation marked by ambivalence (p. 12). This ambivalence, he contends, destabilizes fixed oppositions and transforms the identity of the colonized into a hybrid position. As Bhabha asserts, hybridity "overcomes the given grounds of opposition and opens up a space of translation: a place of hybridity" (1994, p. 86). Thus, hybridity holds particular significance in translation, as it disrupts binary distinctions and fosters fluid, intercultural exchange.

In translation studies, hybridity has been widely examined across diverse contexts, particularly in relation to its manifestation in texts through genre conventions, linguistic norms, and structural features. Scholars such as Simon (2001), Snell-Hornby (2001), Neubert (2001), Schäffner and Adab (2001), and Pym (2001) have approached the concept from varying perspectives, yet it remains a subject of debate.

Simon and Snell-Hornby connect hybridity to the intercultural identity that defines the modern world (as cited in Snell-Hornby, 2001, p. 208). Neubert (2001), however, questions whether hybridity in translation studies should be tied to generic concepts, text types, or specific textual features. He cautions against labeling entire texts as hybrid, arguing that this risks devaluing the translator's work and framing the target text negatively. Instead, he proposes assessing hybridity through unconventional textual elements (p. 182).

Schäffner and Adab (2001) focus on defining hybrid texts and exploring their underlying causes, offering hypotheses that challenge conventional views (p. 279). Meanwhile, Pym (2001) contends that source texts and their authors are inherently hybrid, whereas translation reinforces perceived linguistic and cultural boundaries. This process, he argues, perpetuates an idealized notion of linguistic purity (p. 196).

Plentiful efforts have been devoted to exploring hybridity, however, it remains a contentious issue in certain respects. As a matter of fact, lately, Mollanazar and Parham (2009) conducted extensive research, offering a taxonomy for various manifestations of hybridity. However, some aspects of this concept still need to be explored. In particular, there has been limited exploration in postcolonial translation literature regarding linguistic hybridity in Persian immigration literature and texts translated in diaspora settings.

2. Literature Review

Homi K. Bhabha's work is foundational to the conceptualization of hybridity in cultural studies, marking him as the first scholar to systematically theorize the concept. While Bhabha draws upon Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of hybridity – originally used to analyze literary texts – he redefines it within

postcolonial discourse. As Easthope (1998) observes, "Bhabha's hybridity is Derridean *différance* applied to colonialist texts: the presence of a dominant meaning in a dominant culture can be destabilized by exposing the hybridity or difference from which it emerges" (p. 146). For Bhabha (1990), hybridity represents "the perplexity of the living as it interrupts the representation of the fullness of life" (p. 314). Furthermore, he argues that hybridity possesses a distinct rhetoricity – termed "hybrid talk" – which is central to postcolonial critiques of cultural imperialism (Bhabha, 1994, p. 28).

Hybridity has since been recognized as a fundamental feature of social interaction, shaped by globalization and intensified cross-cultural communication. As Schäffner and Adab (2001) note, it arises from "the contemporary globalization of communication and the effects of interaction in spaces of fuzzy or merging borders, which subsequently reshape cultural and linguistic identities" (p. 301). In this context, translation plays a vital role in mediating these hybridized exchanges. Many scholars now regard hybridity not only as an inevitable product of translation but also as a defining characteristic of contemporary intercultural communication.

Hybridity and Translation

The concept of hybridity has recently emerged as a significant focus of scholarly investigation, attracting considerable attention both within and beyond the field of translation studies. Numerous researchers have attempted to define this phenomenon, particularly highlighting its intrinsic relationship to translation processes and diasporic contexts – environments particularly conducive to the emergence and development of hybrid forms. Within descriptive translation studies, translation itself has been conceptualized as fundamentally hybrid. As Hermans notes, "translation is irreducible: it always leaves loose ends, is always hybrid, plural and different" (as cited in Schäffner & Adab, 2001, p. 170).

Schäffner and Adab (2001) made substantial contributions to this discourse by proposing two key hypotheses regarding the nature and definition of hybridity. Through critical examination from multiple perspectives, they refined their conceptual framework, ultimately defining a hybrid text as "a text that results from a translation process. It shows features that somehow seem out of place, strange and unusual for the receiving culture, i.e. the target culture" (p. 169). Their work, published in a special issue of a translation studies journal which they edited, focused particularly on translation rights. This publication featured their initial paper alongside responses from fellow researchers, culminating in a revised version that incorporated this scholarly feedback. The impact of their work has been considerable, stimulating numerous subsequent discussions about hybridity in translation studies.

While alternative definitions of hybrid texts exist, Gommlich and Erdim (2001) argue that "the hybrid text is not only a necessity for cultural transfer understood as shifting information from a source culture into a target culture, but rather for a transfer resulting in new cultures and subcultures" (p. 240). Simon's research on bilingual cultures demonstrates that such texts can achieve acceptance despite their initial strangeness, potentially serving as models for new original texts in the target culture. However, as Nouss counters, hybrid texts may equally face rejection by target cultures (Schäffner & Adab, 2001, p. 288).

The longstanding debate between domestication and foreignization strategies in translation remains unresolved. Nevertheless, in practical terms, any foreign text introduced into a domestic culture inevitably undergoes a process of hybridization, blending with target-language elements regardless of the chosen translation approach. This inherent process ensures that hybridity remains an essential characteristic of translated texts, embodying a synthesis of source and target cultural elements. The

extensive discourse surrounding hybridity and its role in translation continues to illuminate various trends and developments within the field.

The debate concerning hybridity in translation fundamentally originates from translators' practice of producing hybridized texts through the translation process. As Bond (2001) explains, "when trans-coding a text, i.e., a 'web' of intended meaning as expressed in and consequently shaped by one language, into another language, translators are confronted with morphologically and culturally differing assumptions" (p. 251). This inherent tension between linguistic systems and cultural frameworks inevitably leads to the creation of hybrid texts. Bond further develops this distinction by contrasting hybrid texts with mutant texts. Hybrid texts emerge when the translation intentionally preserves a sense of "strangeness" that reflects the source culture's linguistic and cultural conventions (Bond, 2001, p. 252). In contrast, mutant texts adapt the original content to feel more natural in the target culture, often through significant modifications to the source material. This crucial difference highlights how translation strategies can produce either texts that maintain foreign elements or texts that prioritize local assimilation.

Mollanazar and Parham (2010) conducted a comparative analysis of texts originating from diaspora communities alongside those composed and translated within Iran, revealing that all examined categories exhibited some level of hybridity irrespective of their publication location. In subsequent research, Parham (2011) specifically investigated hybrid texts emerging from diaspora contexts, making an important distinction between concrete and abstract manifestations of diaspora. The translation and interpretation of such hybrid texts necessitates particular theoretical frameworks, among which Fillmore's Scenes and Frames Semantics (SFS) has proven valuable for elucidating the mechanisms of hybridization, rehybridization, and dehybridization processes (Birjandi & Parham, 2015; Parham, 2010).

Parham's later work in *National Identity in Literary Translation* (2019) dedicates a section to examining *National Identity in Persian Translated Immigrant Literature*. Focusing on questions of identity, this research analyzes a work of Iranian immigrant literature in translation to see how these concerns with national identity and identification are reflected in translation (Parham, 2019, p. 193). The findings demonstrate that the migrant author's identity concerns are effectively rendered into Persian by translators, whether through deliberate choices or inherent linguistic requirements.

Homi Bhabha and Migration

Homi K. Bhabha, the prominent postcolonial theorist, has made seminal contributions to our understanding of identity formation, cultural negotiation, and power relations in contexts of migration and colonialism. His conceptual framework – particularly his theories of hybridity, mimicry, and the third space – offers critical insights into the transformative effects of migration on cultural identity, with significant implications for contemporary discourse on these matters.

Central to this discussion is Bhabha's notion of hybridity, which illuminates the complex identity negotiations of migrant subjects. As he observes, "in this transcultural world, a person has become a landless sojourner who wants to communicate with others while maintaining his or her identity in order to take root in the new land and become a member of it" (as cited in Khazaei & Karnova-Torabi, 1400, p. 80). This conceptualization finds particular resonance in migration literature, which explores the multifaceted experiences of border-crossing individuals through themes of displacement, belonging, and cultural adaptation.

The twentieth century witnessed unprecedented global migration flows precipitated by world wars, regional conflicts, decolonization movements, and authoritarian regimes (Grass et al., 2008, p. 2). These historical forces displaced millions, creating waves of refugees, migrants, and exiles navigating

increasingly fluid national boundaries. Today, migration continues to profoundly reshape societal structures across political, economic, geographic, and cultural dimensions, making its study ever more crucial.

Migration and Translation

Contemporary scholarship has increasingly examined the intrinsic relationship between translation and migration, reflecting their growing significance in globalized societies and the complex issues they engender. These interconnected phenomena manifest most visibly in migration literature, where the experience of crossing linguistic and cultural borders necessitates not only the translation of language but also the negotiation of identities, traditions, and worldviews.

As Gratman observes, "since immigrants migrate from one culture to another, their writing style is actually dual and bicultural. The combined use of two languages in literary texts creates problems for translators" (as cited in Afzali & Ashari, 1399, p. 183). This duality underscores how migration literature often resists monolingual frameworks, presenting unique challenges for translation while simultaneously enriching literary expression.

Conceptualizing migration through translation reveals a fundamental truth: it is not merely texts that traverse borders, but people. This perspective is pivotal for translation studies, as it expands conventional understandings of translation to encompass the cultural, social, and psychological dimensions of migratory experiences. The current scholarly focus on migration's cultural implications makes this investigation particularly urgent. This study engages with key questions regarding translation's indispensable role in mediating migratory narratives, thereby contributing to broader discussions about the nature of translation itself.

3. Method

This study adopts a comparative analytical approach to investigate hybridity in Persian translations of Mohsin Hamid's diasporic novels, employing Mollanazar and Parham's (2009) Hybridity Trends and Manifestations model as its theoretical framework. The research design incorporates a multi-layered textual analysis, examining both macro-level narrative structures and micro-level linguistic features to identify manifestations of hybridity across cultural, linguistic, and structural dimensions. The selected corpus consists of three of Hamid's English-language novels alongside their Persian translations published between 1397 and 1398:

Source Books:

1. Hamid, M. (2007). *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Penguin Books. (64224 words)

2. Hamid, M. (2013). *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. Riverhead Books. (55176 words)

3. Hamid, M. (2017). *Exit West*. Riverhead Books. (64294 words)

Persian Translations:

1. Hamid, M. (1398). *Bonyad Garay-e Narazi* (M. Ahmadi, Trans.). Manuchehri Publishing. (61295 words)

2. Hamid, M. (1398). *To-ye Kasif-e Daroun-e Man* (A. Al-Ahmad, Trans.). Tadaaie Books. (32000 words)

3. Hamid, M. (1397). *Khorouji-e Gharbi* (H. Hassani, Trans.). Sedeh Books. (50622 words)

These works were chosen due to Hamid's own immigrant background spanning Pakistan and the UK, which informs his literary exploration of hybrid identities, as well as the translators' status as native Persian speakers whose works have achieved significant commercial success in Iran's literary market.

The data collection process involved two primary phases of textual engagement. Initial readings focused on macro-level indicators of hybridity, including overarching narrative techniques, character development, and cultural themes that reflect the intersection of Eastern and Western worldviews. Subsequent close readings analyzed micro-level hybrid features, scrutinizing lexical choices, syntactic patterns, and discursive strategies such as code-switching, genre blending, and the juxtaposition of disparate cultural references. The unit of analysis remained intentionally flexible, ranging from individual words and phrases to entire paragraphs or texts, in order to fully capture the multifaceted nature of hybridity as it operates across different textual scales.

For data analysis, the study applied Mollanazar and Parham's (2009) framework – *Manifestations of Hybridity*. The framework comprises four distinct components or trends, with this research focusing primarily on the first trend. As Mollanazar and Parham (2009, p. 43) assert, "when hybridity is deemed a feature of contemporary intercultural communication (first trend), hybrid elements are expected to be seen in both translations and original writings". The first trend specifically addresses intentional hybridity, characterized by textual features that appear unusual or out of place. These elements result from deliberate choices by translators or writers rather than linguistic incompetence or translationese (Mollanazar & Parham, 2009, p. 43).

This intentional form of hybridity manifests through various linguistic and cultural markers, including code-switching, code-mixing, dialectal variations (diastratic and diatopic), idiolect, the juxtaposition of disparate culturemes, intentional textual and syntactic interference, as well as genre mixtures that combine Western and Eastern allusions. These elements collectively demonstrate how hybridity operates at multiple levels within translated and original texts (Mollanazar & Parham, 2009).

Data analysis procedure involved systematically categorizing these hybrid elements, comparing their treatment in source and target texts, and documenting their frequency to identify patterns in how translators negotiate cultural dissonance.

Table 1 presents the Integrated Model of Culture (Mollanazar & Parham, 2009), which serves as the foundation for analyzing these hybrid features in the selected corpus.

Table 1. Integrated Model of Culture (Mollanazar & Parham, 2009)

Outer Elements of Culture (Concrete)	– Semiotic signs – Gestures – Pictures – Objects – Music – Art and literature – Food and drink – Dress code and ornaments – Architecture – Names (people, places, brands) and dates – Heroes (cultural and pan-cultural)
Inner Elements of Culture (Abstract)	– Rituals (including communication strategies) – Customs and traditions (including marriage, funeral, festivals, vows, stories and the significance or symbolism behind them) – Ways and styles (of discourse, …) – Beliefs and feelings religious elements – Myths and legends – Geographical and environmental elements

4. Results

This section presents the findings of textual analysis across Hamid's three novels, examining how hybridity manifests through linguistic, cultural, and narrative strategies. Specific examples from each work demonstrate how translation mediates the intersection of Eastern and Western cultural paradigms.

Analysis of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

The novel chronicles the journey of Changez, a Pakistani man who pursues education and employment in America before his growing disillusionment – particularly following wartime events in Pakistan – prompts his return to his homeland. Changez serves as both protagonist and narrator, recounting his experiences to an unnamed American visitor in Lahore, a narrative frame that effectively highlights the novel's central cultural hybridity through its comparative examination of American and Pakistani societies.

The first example from this novel contains an instance of code-switching. The Persian translation has preserved this element by translating "jenaab" into جناب. However, the Persian equivalent is not out of place and strange in the target language and is thus dehybridized.

ST: "**Jenaab**", I replied, bowing my head, "do you never go home?"

"Not enough", he said.

TT: «من در حالی که سرم را به نشانه تعظیم فرود می‌آوردم پاسخ دادم: «**جناب**! اصلا به خانه نمی‌روید؟» پاسخ داد: «نه به قدر کافی.»

Manifestation of hybridity: Code-mixing

In the second example, the translator has preserved the semiotic sign which has resulted in hybridization.

ST: And then recomposed **thousands of miles away**?

TT: و سپس دوباره هزاران **مایل** دورتر دوباره به وجود بیایی؟

Manifestation of hybridity: Semiotic sign

Analysis of *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*

The novel follows the journey of a impoverished village boy striving for prosperity. His childhood sweetheart defies their community's traditions by moving to the city and becoming a model, which inspires his own urban migration. After achieving wealth and success in adulthood, he ultimately faces financial ruin and illness in old age. The story concludes with his reunion with the woman he had long admired, spending his final years with her. This narrative effectively portrays the transformative experience of rural-to-urban migration and the pursuit of a new life.

The first example from this novel presents an instance of code-switching in the translation process, resulting in the hybridization of the target text.

ST: Your brother-in-law is visibly excited, pleased to be seated in **business class** and to be booked into a fancy hotel.

TT: برادر زنت به وضوح هیجان‌زده است، از پرواز در بخش **بیزنس کلاس** و اقامت پیش رو در یک هتل مجلل بسیار خشنود است.

Manifestation of hybridity: Code-mixing

The second example contains another instance of hybridization since *heavy metal* is transliterated as هوی متال.

STT: He is a lanky fellow with sideburns and a soul patch, his T-shirt suggesting an affinity for **heavy metal**.

TT: جوان دیلاقی است با دم خط بلند و ریش مختصر زیر لب پایین. تی شرت به تن دارد که نشان می‌دهد به موسیقی **هوی متال** علاقمند است.

Manifestation of hybridity: Music

Analysis of *Exit West*

The narrative follows a young Pakistani couple deeply in love when war suddenly erupts in their homeland. Mysterious magical doors appear without warning, offering passage to foreign lands, compelling them to begin life as migrants in unfamiliar countries. Ultimately, the strains of existing between cultures prove too great – Saeed, the male protagonist, returns to his homeland, while Nadia, his partner, adapts to her adopted country and chooses to remain abroad. Their diverging paths poignantly illustrate the complex realities of displacement and cultural adaptation.

The first example presents an instance of code-mixing which has hybridized the translation.

ST: Nadia frequently explored the terrain of social media, though she left little trace of her passing, not **posting** much herself, and employing opaque usernames and **avatars**, the online equivalents of her black robes.

TT: نادیا به طور مرتب در قلمرو رسانه‌های اجتماعی کندو وکاو می‌کرد، گرچه ردپای کمی از خود بجا می‌گذاشت. زیاد **پست** نمی‌گذاشت و از نام‌های کاربری مبهم و **آواتار** استفاده می‌کرد، معادل آنلاین ردا های سیاه رنگش را.

Manifestation of hybridity: Code-mixing

In the second example, Saeed and Nadia in the English text are considered hybrid. But after translation, these name have lost their hybrid quality and are dehybridized.

ST: A young man met a young woman in a classroom and did not speak to him for many days. His name was **Saeed** and her name was **Nadia**.

TT: مردی جوان در کلاس دختر جوانی را دید، اما تا مدت ها با او حرف نزد. نامش **سعید** بود و نام آن دختر **نادیا**.

Manifestation of hybridity: Names

The study's findings reveal an absence of code-switching in the translations, with all texts being fully translated. Similarly, there is no evidence of dialect, idiolect, intentional textual and syntactic interference, or mixtures (of genres, Western and Eastern allusions, etc.). However, as demonstrated in Figure 1 below, instances of code-mixing and cultureme are present and observable across all three novels.
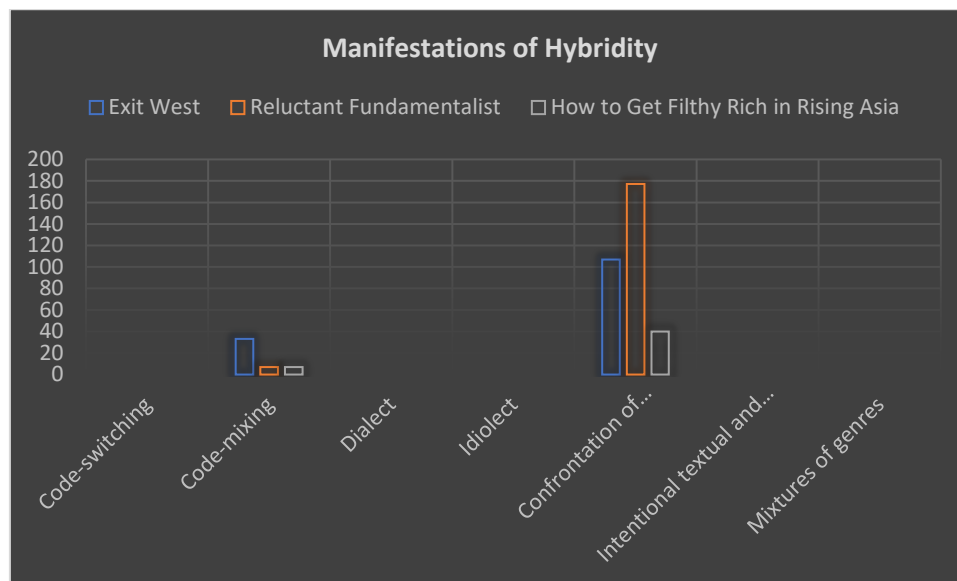
Figure 1. Manifestations of hybridity in the Corpus of the Study

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings presented in Figure 1 clearly illustrate the distribution of code-mixing and culturemes across the three novels. *Exit West* demonstrates significantly more code-mixing compared to the other works, while *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* contains the highest number of culturemes. These variations stem from both the translators' choice of strategies and the inherent demands of each narrative, where certain storylines naturally required more pronounced cultural representations. The translators' decisions regarding which elements to translate directly impacted the degree of hybridity in each text, effectively moving it closer to or further from a hybrid mode.

The comprehensive analysis identified 363 hybrid elements in total, consisting of 47 instances of code-mixing and 326 culturemes. *Exit West*'s prominence in code-mixing suggests the translator's intentional effort to preserve textual hybridity, while *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*'s abundance of cultureme confrontations effectively captures the protagonist's experience of cultural duality as a foreigner navigating between worlds. It is noteworthy that no other hybrid elements beyond these two categories appeared in the texts, and all translators maintained strict adherence to translation principles, successfully avoiding any instances of translationese.

The study revealed systematic omissions of content related to emotional and sexual relationships, reflecting the target culture's Islamic values where such topics remain culturally sensitive. Furthermore, the data indicates a gradual reduction in hybrid elements across different publication years, pointing to translators' growing tendency to culturally adapt texts for local readership. However, despite these adaptations, the fundamental hybrid nature of the source texts persists due to the original works' inherent duality, Mohsin Hamid's deliberate construction of bicultural narratives, and the unavoidable preservation of certain hybrid elements during the translation process.

Applying Mollanazar and Parham (2009) model demonstrates how contemporary writers and translators increasingly minimize textual hybridity for cultural adaptation purposes, while complete elimination remains impossible due to the texts' essential biculturalism. Translators emerge as crucial mediators in this process, carefully balancing cultural adaptation with hybrid preservation. Their

strategic decisions regarding which modern terms to leave untranslated contribute significantly to maintaining the texts' hybrid qualities.

The research ultimately confirms two major findings: the substantial omission of sensitive relationship content due to cultural norms, and the enduring appeal of hybrid texts that offer readers access to dual cultural spaces. This 'dual space' phenomenon – the coexistence of original and translated cultural elements – functions as both a literary device and a translation challenge. While current translation trends favor cultural adaptation, the fundamental hybridity of migrant literature persists through authorial intent, untranslated contemporary terminology, and the irreducible cultural duality inherent in displacement narratives. The study demonstrates how skilled translators successfully navigate these complexities, producing works that remain faithful to both the source material and target culture expectations.

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