



ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL

Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>

Vol. 04 No. 02. Oct-Dec 2025. Page#. 4659-4669

Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)

Dictation and Appropriation: Translation, the National Language, and the Anglophone Subject in Postcolonial Pakistan

Dr. Muhammad Mahboob Ahmad

Assistant Professor, Institute of English Language and Literature, GC University Lahore.

mahboobahmad@gcu.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the linguistic condition of the postcolonial world is best understood as a condition of dictation: language received from above, through a hierarchical structure of address in which the addressee concedes authority to the addresser before meaning is exchanged. Taking as its central case the imposition of Urdu as the national language of Pakistan (a language belonging originally to none of the country's ethnicities, enforced upon a multilingual population while the former colonial language retained its hold on law and prestige), the study reads the linguistic history of the Pakistani nation-state through the translation theory of Lisa Lowe, Naoki Sakai, Lydia Liu, Talal Asad, and Padma Rangarajan. It contends that the national-language project fails for the same structural reason that dictation fails: there is no perfect subject of dictation, and the difference the imperfect subject introduces into the transcription is where the possibility of appropriation begins. The anglophone writer, I argue, is precisely this imperfect student, the subject formed by a dictated language who converts the hierarchy of dictation into the agency of appropriation, and who therefore emerges not as a residue of empire but as its most sophisticated translator.

Keywords: Translation Studies; Postcolonial Anglophone Literature; National Language; Biopolitics of Language; Mimicry and Appropriation.

1. Introduction

What does translation have to do with dictation? The question first presented itself to me while reading Lisa Lowe's (1994) discussion of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée*, where the act of dictation is akin to translation in its assumed equivalence, while really it is a system of differences at work. The question has stayed with me because it appropriately describes the linguistic condition of the postcolonial subject. Language, in the postcolonial nation-state, is not inherited so much as it is received: passed down from above, first by the colonial master, then by the state that replaces him, and always through the hierarchical structure of an address in which the addressee concedes authority to the addresser before a word has been spoken. To learn a language under these conditions is to take dictation.

This paper argues that the postcolonial condition of language is best understood as a condition of dictation, and that the case of Pakistan (where a national language that belongs originally to a minority of the country's ethnicities was imposed upon a multilingual population, while the former colonial language retained its hold on law, administration, and prestige) demonstrates both the coercive force of that condition and the impossibility of its completion. Reading the linguistic history of the Pakistani nation-state through the translation theory of Talal Asad (1986), Naoki Sakai (1997), Lydia Liu (1995), and Padma Rangarajan (2014), and through Lowe's (1994) argument on dictation, I contend that the national-language project fails for the same reason that dictation fails: there is no perfect subject of dictation. The student who takes down

the dictated text always introduces difference into the transcription, and this difference (fragmentary, unauthorized, ineradicable) is where the possibility of appropriation begins. The anglophone writer of the postcolonial world, I posit, is precisely this imperfect student: the subject formed by a dictated language who converts the hierarchy of dictation into the agency of appropriation, and who thereby emerges not as a residue of empire but as its most sophisticated translator.

2. Methodology

The method of this study is that of a theoretically informed close reading rather than an empirical survey, and its assumptions are worth stating at the outset. The paper treats the linguistic history of the Pakistani nation-state as a text, a historiographic artifact to be read through the categories of contemporary translation theory rather than a background to be summarized. In doing so it follows my larger academic goal: to ground the study of anglophone literature in a historiography informed by the ethnographic study of translation that Asad (1986) discusses, so that the question of whether translation must be context-based becomes internal to the analysis rather than external to it. Context-based translation is perhaps not the most prevalent mode in literary studies, but the state of anglophone poetry in a postcolonial nation-state cannot be understood without the historiographic contextualization of that nation-state, and it is that contextualization which I attempt here.

The analysis is also, unavoidably, positioned. The multilingual postcolonial subject who writes it (schooled in English, praying in Arabic which he can read and recite but does not understand, translating between Punjabi and Urdu, holding a passport ranked among the least powerful in the world) is himself a specimen of the condition the paper describes. I therefore treat my own linguistic autobiography as evidence alongside the theoretical and historical materials, on the principle that the researcher of translation is never outside the medium he studies but is, in Sakai's (1997) terms, a subject constituted within it. This positioning is a methodological choice rather than a lapse into the anecdotal: the acts of communication of a multiple-language speaker are always already acts of translation, and the analyst who inhabits several languages is a site where the object of study is directly legible.

The corpus assembled for this reading is deliberately heterogeneous. It comprises, first, the translation theory through which the argument is built: Lowe (1994) on dictation, Sakai (1997) and Solomon (Sakai & Solomon, 2006) on the biopolitics of the address, Liu (1995) on host and guest languages, Asad (1986) on cultural translation and charity, and Rangarajan (2014) on translation's malleability. Secondly, it comprises the history of the imposition of Urdu and the 1971 secession of Bangladesh, taken as the limit case of the national-language project. Finally, a small set of anglophone poetic practices forms this corpus: Taufiq Rafat's translation of a long Punjabi poem, and the ghazals rendered into English by Agha Shahid Ali and Adrienne Rich, in which the movement from dictation to appropriation can be observed at work. The heterogeneity is deliberate, because the claim of the paper is precisely that theory, history, and poetry are, in the postcolonial linguistic economy, versions of a single translative predicament.

3. Literature Review

The scholarship on which this study draws organizes itself around a long-standing opposition in translation theory between equivalence and difference, and around the more recent effort to reconceive that opposition in terms of power. The assumption of equivalence, that words in one language have equal synonyms in another, is the premise the bilingual dictionary is built upon, and it is the premise Lydia Liu (1995) sets out to dismantle. For Liu (1995), cross-cultural comparison relies on a conceptual model derived from the dictionary, in which a word in language A must equal a word or phrase in language B, or else one of the languages is found

lacking. Against this, she argues that trans-cultural movement is always an act of translation that must pretend to maintain fidelity even as it expresses one language in terms of another, so that fidelity in the strictest sense cannot be maintained at all. Her substitution of "host language" and "guest language" for the traditional "source" and "target" reconceives translation as a process by which new words and meanings arise and acquire legitimacy within the host language, in spite of, or because of, its collision with the guest, a reconception that returns agency to the receiving language and that will prove central to my account of appropriation. The opposing pole, the emphasis on difference, runs from Benjamin's meditation on the untranslatable through Jakobson's account of the par onomastic residue that cannot cross languages; but as Liu's (1995) critique implies, and as the debate between Aijaz Ahmad (1992) and Fredric Jameson (1986) demonstrates, the assumption of radical difference can be as reductive as the assumption of equivalence. Both fix the terms on which the peripheral text may be read before it has been read.

A second body of scholarship theorizes language as an instrument of power, and it is here that the biopolitical strand relevant to the national-language question is developed. Naoki Sakai (1997), and Sakai together with Jon Solomon (2006), extend the Foucauldian account of biopolitics to the domain of the address, arguing that language has a constitutive power over the subject and that the nationalized language is a language mediated through the disciplinary and regulatory apparatuses of the state. Sakai's (1997) distinction between homolingual and heterolingual address, between communication that presumes a homogeneous medium and communication that presumes heterogeneity as its normal condition, provides the vocabulary in which the failure of the national-language project can be described. To this strand belongs also Lawrence Venuti's (1995) account of the translator's invisibility, which names the erasure of the translator's labor as itself an operation of power, and Talal Asad's (1986) influential critique of the concept of cultural translation, which locates the whole enterprise of rendering one culture into another within the inequality of languages: because the languages of the Third World are weaker in relation to Western languages, they are more likely to submit to forcible transformation in the process of translation than the other way around. Asad's (1986) diagnosis of "excessive charity", the interpretive over-generosity by which the ethnographer renders the native coherent in the ethnographer's own terms, remains a live mechanism in the contemporary reception of postcolonial literature.

A third strand rethinks translation specifically within the colonial and postcolonial history of South Asia, and it is the strand closest to my own work. Padma Rangarajan's (2014) *Imperial Babel* contends that translation possesses an inherent, always-already power to liberate and to usurp, that it is unpredictable, and that its "malleability" lends it an essentially non-pliant power of intercultural transaction; against the Said-led scholarship that reads colonial translation primarily as a tool of oppression, she emphasizes how the traffic between English and the Indian languages changed both colonizer and colonized. Her work stands alongside that of Tejaswini Niranjana, Vicente Rafael (1988), and Shaden Tageldin in treating the colonial translative encounter as a mutual, if profoundly unequal, transformation rather than a one-directional imposition. The question of how the resulting literatures are valued belongs to the scholarship on world literature: Pascale Casanova's (2004) identification of a world literary space, and her crucial observation that linguistic dependence does not necessarily imply political subordination; Dipesh Chakrabarty's call to provincialize Europe; Aamir Mufti's (2016) account, in *Forget English!*, of world literature as an enterprise inhabiting multiple linguistic spaces where translation is always immanent; and Shu-mei Shih's (2007) warning that the

postcolonial critique of orientalism may itself slip into an unreflective nationalism whose flip side is a new imperialism.

Finally, the theory of mimicry and appropriation Homi Bhabha's (1994) account of the colonial subject as almost the same but not quite, and the account of appropriation in Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, in which the colonized writer seizes the master's language and makes it bear the burden of a different experience supplies the terms in which the anglophone writer's conversion of dictation into agency can be named. The present study stands at the intersection of these strands: it applies the biopolitics of the address and the critique of equivalence to the national-language question, and it reads the resulting anglophone literature through the lens of translation's malleability and mimicry's menace.

4. Analysis

4.1 Dictation as Translation

Lowe's (1994) reading of *Dictée* proposes that dictation and translation share a structure: both assume equivalence, between the spoken word and its transcription, between the source and its rendering, and both in practice produce a system of differences. The assumption of equivalence is what gives each practice its authority; the production of difference is what that authority must disavow. This structure describes not only the classroom scene of the colonial school but the entire linguistic economy of the colonized world.

Consider first the position of the one who dictates. The translator, in most cases but especially in the colonial context, dictates the language to a recipient audience. Like Sakai's (1997) privileging of the notion of address, the conception of translation in this model assumes a hierarchical structure, where language is being dictated, that is, passed down from above. This hierarchical dissemination of knowledge through dictation acknowledges that cultural contact is interdependent, but in conflict. The duality of conflict and interdependence is immanent in the claim of the translator to be a superior interlocutor between apparently incommensurate languages and ideas. If I am translating from my native Punjabi into English, the English-reading audience is always-already assuming my supposedly natural knowledge of both languages. In the colonial context, any Sanskrit scholar translating an ancient Indian text into English was already laying an immanent claim to sufficient knowledge of both languages; since his audience was an English readership unfamiliar with the source, he could assert his apparent expertise without challenge. In dictation, therefore, as in translation, the real contradiction comes from the addressee's a priori concession of authority to the addresser.

The notion of fidelity, so central to the discourse of translation, dissolves under this analysis. Knowing the "real nature of the original" seems like a noble claim, one that colonial translations and interpretations always idealize, but if one follows the Platonic mimetic schema of writing, does even the writer who originally writes something know the true nature of things? Plato would have us believe that the philosopher is trained to recognize transcendent reality as it exists in the world of Forms. The very conception of a colonially dictated language contradicts the knowability of that reality. Fidelity, in the scene of dictation, is not a relation between the transcription and the truth; it is a relation between the student and the master's voice, and it is enforced rather than achieved.

Consider next the position of the one who receives. The student receiving dictation is the site where translation is produced. The student is the subject who is constructed through language, and as he receives it, his sociality determines how he receives it. The subject is divided, because the very act of translation is an act that acknowledges plurality; fragmentation is an integral part of the translative process. The hybrid translator, if not ethnically, then always linguistically, is a construct of the multiple influences shaping him. Even in the simple case of two

syntactically similar but incommensurate languages, Urdu and Punjabi, some essence is lost in translation but lingers as a fragment, a ghost of a gap in the newly created text.

This fragmentation is to be desired, because it resists the kind of symmetry that aesthetics imposes on the world. A postcolonial writer like Derek Walcott was trained as a child, by his mother, to take dictation and to copy the style of the canonical poets; yet his hybridity as a translator and representative of multilingual cultures is always present in the form of a fragmentary quality. The fragment is often not structural but exists somewhere in an unarticulated space, so that no poem is ever entirely Western or entirely non-Western. The translator, adaptor, mediator, always exists in the liminal and fragmented space between languages.

The binary of equivalence and difference raises the question: is translation the exact reproduction of the original, or is it always incommensurate in some way? The answer may lie in dictation. Does every student take down dictation in exactly the same way? Do all students get the spellings right every time? Is there such a thing as the perfect subject of dictation? The case of a student taking dictation in shorthand, a transcription not universally legible, indicates that there is no equivalence. And if there is no perfect subject of dictation, there is no perfect subject of the dictated language: no colonial school, and, as I will argue, no national-language policy can produce the homogeneous linguistic subject it requires. The failure is not accidental but structural. It is inscribed in the scene of dictation itself.

The idea of dictation resonates, finally, with the idea that the colonial subject mimics the language and attitudes of the master. Mimicry, or dictation, given its fragmentary nature, becomes both a tool for equivalence (which translates as complicit subjectivity, as in the figure of the Anglo-Indian) and a tool for difference (which translates as mimicry's potential to be subversive through its appropriation of the master's language). I will return to this double valence; before that, it is necessary to examine what happens when the one who dictates is no longer the colonial master but the postcolonial state itself.

4.2 The Dictating State: National Language, Biopower, and the Heterolingual Condition

The Foucauldian idea of a biopolitics of power informs the discourse of lingual power that Sakai (1997), and Sakai and Solomon (2006), explore. Language has a constitutive power over the subject, which, for Sakai (1997), is the subject created in the person of the translator himself. Sakai's (1997) notion of a nationalized language implies a language mediated through the biopolitical apparatuses of the state, both disciplinary and regulatory. The nation, to sustain the fiction of what Benedict Anderson calls an imagined community, requires what Sakai (1997) calls homolingual address: the assumption that communication normally occurs in a homogeneous medium, and that translation is only required when the inside communicates with an exterior. The national language is the institutional form of this assumption. One language, one people, one address.

The case of Urdu in Pakistan demonstrates both the force and the failure of this schema, and it is a case with the highest political stakes: the state's enforcement of a linguistic identity upon its population led eventually to the immanently political act of one part of Pakistan breaking away to form the new country of Bangladesh in 1971. The imposition of a national language is not a symbolic gesture that failed; it is a biopolitical instrument that broke the state it was meant to consolidate.

In a postcolonial society like Pakistan, the conception of biopower in conjunction with the supposed homolinguality of a national discourse is further complicated by the presence of the former colonial master's language, English, as the lingua franca of official discourse. A national language that has failed to be accepted as the official language of the state comes into direct

heterolingual conflict with the official language, which takes socio-economic and historico-philosophic precedence over it. At this interstice, not only does Sakai's (1997) putative binary of homolingual and heterolingual address fail, but so, in a subtle and important way, does the Foucauldian conception of biopower. The binary Sakai (1997) assumes is never operational in the multilingual context of a postcolonial state; and yet Foucault's conception of biopower as the mechanism of state control over the communal body is, at the first level, entirely realized in the very conception and imaginary of a state with a national language. The paradox is that the instrument works, it disciplines, it regulates, it produces subjects, even as the homogeneity it is supposed to produce never arrives.

In the case of Urdu, this biopower is exercised with a peculiar historical irony: the language asserted as the national language of Pakistan does not originally belong to any of the ethnicities that make up the area now named Pakistan. The region of united India where Urdu was really forged remained in India after the partition of 1947. Many of these arrangements are rooted in colonial modernity. Colonial modernity did not sufficiently acknowledge that translation is a social relationship; it imposed a Eurocentric ideal of translated cultures and governmentality on colonial India, whereby Urdu, itself derived from the languages of another empire, the Turkic-Persian-Arabic complex, was deployed by the British as a biopolitical tool to suppress the indigenous languages, which had their own histories of resistance literature and revolutionary thought. The postcolonial state, in nominating Urdu as the national language, did not reverse this colonial operation; it repeated it, dictating to its own population a language from above, in precisely the same hierarchical structure of address. The national language is dictation continued by other means.

Two further observations highlight the significance of this point. The first is that, as Sakai (1997) identifies, the critique of Eurocentrism is a rhetoric of the elite, and the very elite who imposed the national and nationalized language never really adopted that language for their own discourse. The children of the policy-making class were educated in English; the national language was for others to learn. Dictation, here as in the classroom, is something done to those positioned below. The second observation concerns the translator. As Sakai and Solomon (2006) recognize, the positionality of the translator as the marginalized subject of this activity is crucial. The erasure of the translator's presence, his invisibility, to use Venuti's (1995) term, is the exercise of the biopolitics of translation; but at a more fundamental level it is the exercise of the biopolitics inherent in language itself. Yet the translator's position is not, in the end, a subjected one. The translator creates meaning and dictates the parameters of the address. The position of the translator is not stable; he is split and multiple, because lingual discourse is itself multiple. In a state whose linguistic schema is fractured, subjectivity itself is frayed, and it is out of this fraying that the anglophone writer emerges.

It is worth pausing over the question that this analysis raises but that postcolonial criticism tends to answer too quickly: why does nationalism seem so undesirable an entity? A national language is also an imagined community, but should a sense of community not be allowed to grow among peoples who have been brought together by historical forces? I do not resolve this question here; I note only that in Pakistan the community imagined by the national language was contradicted by the communities already in existence, and that assumptions of linguistic homogeneity enforced upon heterogeneous populations are precisely what forced the creation of Bangladesh. Shih's (2007) warning is apposite: postcolonial theory's critiques of orientalism may prove irrelevant or even complicit when the positions of intellectuals critical of Western imperialism easily slip into an unreflective nationalism, whose flip side may be a new imperialism. The postcolonial state's concern with victimhood is at odds with its nationalist

practice. The dictated become dictators; the grammar of the address does not change, only the addresser.

The metaphor of translation, indeed, extends to the nation-state itself. The imagination of the nation works in two seemingly opposite directions: on one hand, the conception of national boundaries in an increasingly globalized world is challenged by the ideas of universalism dear, for instance, to Tagore; on the other, the rise of militant religious nationalisms and the reification of borders indicate that several nations are working toward more isolation and less porous frontiers, even at a time when international pluralism is visibly practiced. Some states, like my own, are labeled failed states for their inability to translate into fruition the Western notion of the nation-state as secular democracy, though these are standards by which several Western states, practicing their own non-secular and non-democratic exclusions, would also be judged failures. The European idea of the nation-state is still held out in non-European settings as the ideal to attain, at the very moment when Brexit and the rise of a conservative Right in the United States suggest that the West itself is revising its globalized nationhood. It would help, perhaps, to think of the "West" as itself a homogeneously imagined community, which in turn imagines a unified Orient; the simplification explains why Western national compositions were so unsuccessfully translated in postcolonial settings. Inter-lingual translation, the simple form of translation we appear to have moved beyond, must have played a central role in disseminating these concepts of nationhood across cultures and geographies. If translation helped form imperial regimes, how does one use translation to provincialize Europe in a post-imperial world? And does de-centering from Europe not create other problematic centers? If Pan-Islamism was one way in which the Orient decentered, provincialized, and decolonized, it can be argued that Pan-Islamism centered itself upon the holy sites of Islam, so how does one now provincialize the new center? The national language of Pakistan sits at the intersection of exactly these questions: a failed translation of a European form, enforced through a decentering that produced its own center.

4.3 Mutual Transformation: Rangarajan, Mimicry, and the Idiom

The analysis so far has emphasized the coercion in the postcolonial linguistic condition: dictation, biopower, unequal charity, withheld equivalence. Padma Rangarajan's (2014) *Imperial Babel* provides the necessary correction, and it is a correction on which my larger argument depends. Rangarajan (2014) contends that translation has an inherent, always-already power to liberate and to usurp; it is unpredictable, and it is a marker for the cultural, ideological, and technical battles of past, present, and future. Against the Edward Said-led postcolonial scholarship that has viewed colonial translation primarily as a tool of oppression, an instrument for undermining native languages and producing perfectly subjectivized collaborators, Rangarajan (2014) argues that the traffic between English and the Indian languages in the colonial period was symbiotic and dialogic, and that translation's malleability lends it an essentially non-pliant power of intercultural transaction. She does not view colonial translation as simply oppressive; she emphasizes, rather, how it changed both the colonizer and the colonized.

Her history is instructive for the present argument at three points. Firstly, for William Jones and his generation, when the Orient was still exotic and administrative attitudes still accommodating, translation established a dialogic relationship of understanding between source and target cultures, even as Jones's translations propounded the advantages of colonial administration. The seduction ran in both directions. Secondly, in her account of pseudo translation, the oriental tale annotated to the point where the footnotes overwhelm the text, Rangarajan (2014) identifies the paratextual apparatus as a limiting force on the translatable

project. Here I would press back: translation works at several levels, and one of these is the transference of culturally and socially specific historical thought, for which the provision of contextual information is crucial. Footnoting that overtakes the text is not necessarily to be viewed negatively; the pretext is where the guest language leaves its residue in the host, and its excess is the visible record of incommensurability being negotiated rather than suppressed. Thirdly, and most importantly, there is the final movement of her study: the age of high empire, when Victorian triumphalism had hardened, when the figure of the anglicized babu became at once collaborator and object of ridicule, and when the hybrid spaces, characters, and languages produced by a century of translation were disowned by both source and target cultures. Like Bhabha (1994), Rangarajan (2014) identifies in the native's mimicry a menace that threatened the colonial administrator, who came increasingly to distrust translation itself as a process that polluted language, race, and culture. This is the point at which her history joins the theory of dictation developed above. The mimic is the student of empire's dictation; the idiom is the shorthand transcription that the master can no longer read. Mimicry, in Bhabha's (1994) famous formulation, produces a subject that is almost the same but not quite, and the "not quite" is exactly the fragment, the ghost of a gap, that inhabits every act of dictation. What colonial pedagogy could not eliminate, colonial authority learned to fear. The disowned idiom, however, has a future that neither parent culture controls. The figure of the anglicized native imitator, more loyal than the master, is a comic figure; mimicry of syntax, language, and style falls short; and the air of assumed inferiority in postcolonial anglophone literatures is still read as an extension of exoticism. In post-9/11 Pakistani anglophone fiction, for example, the anglophone writer is severely criticized for exotic and wrongful mimetic representations of Pakistan, aimed teleologically at a Western audience's pleasure. The criticism repeats, in a nationalist key, the colonial administrator's distrust of the hybrid. But the work I pursue looks at anglophone literature as a liberating space for intercultural movement, which is what Rangarajan's (2014) history implies without quite extending the argument into the postcolonial period. That extension is the concern of what follows: if translation changed both colonizer and colonized, then the movement between languages in the postcolonial context is mutually transformative for the postcolonial subject as well as the former master, and the anglophone text is the record of that transformation rather than the evidence of a surrender.

4.4 From Dictation to Appropriation: The Anglophone Subject

I return now to the imperfect student with whom this paper began, in order to name what his imperfection makes possible. The anglophone writer of the postcolonial world stands in the position of the dictated subject twice over: dictated to by the colonial school in English, and dictated to by the postcolonial state in the national language. His formation is heterolingual through and through. And it is precisely this doubled dictation that equips him for the work Shih's (2007) model of the Sinophone suggests: the anglophone, understood on the analogy of Shih's (2007) Sinophone, is already provincialized and foreignized in its incorporation of literatures from across the English-speaking world and of literatures translated into English. The anglophone writer is simultaneously translating several cultures back and forth, as well as decolonizing, something not always apparent in the mere fact of his use of the English language. Where a nationalist common sense treats the anglophone as a leftover of the British colonial period, anglophone writers are in fact engaged in destabilizing the colonial language by appropriating it.

Appropriation, here, must be understood in its full postcolonial-linguistic sense: not borrowing but seizure and remaking, the re-tooling of a foreign instrument into a native one. The

evidence is in the poetry. Taufiq Rafat, the major poet with whose work I engage, translated a long Punjabi poem into English while trying to capture the rhythm and meter of the original's heavily Persianized form; Agha Shahid Ali and Adrienne Rich carried the formal and linguistic architecture of the ghazal into English with real success. Jahan Ramazani (2009) would consider these exercises instances of hybridity and transnational poetics; Ignacio Infante's (2013) critique of Ramazani (2009), that his transnational poetics excludes translation from its account of transfer and circulation, points to what such examples actually demonstrate: that poetic transfer is translation, of both idea and form, and that the anglophone poem is a translated text even when it was composed in English. The direction of the making has reversed. The language once dictated to the subject is now dictated to by him: made to carry Punjabi meter, ghazal form, the untranslated residue of other tongues.

The reversal reaches even the scene of reading. If I am not a native English speaker but look for a foreignizing translation in English, am I looking for a translation that foreignizes English for me, or for an English reader? When I choose an English passage that sounds less English and more Urdu to me, is that not, from my point of view, a domesticated translation? The Venutian binary (Venuti, 1995) of foreignizing and domesticating translation, formulated from the position of the metropolitan reader, comes apart in the hands of the postcolonial one; the host and the guest change places depending on who is reading. My own most intimate literacy enacts the same structure: the language of my religion is Arabic, which I can read but do not know how to speak or understand, so that I always encounter the Quranic text in translation, and prayer itself is recitation from memory in a foreign language. Religion, for me, is an act of translation; so is reading Gabriel Garcia Márquez; so, indeed, is the profession of scholarship. The postcolonial subject does not merely use translation. He lives in it.

One further site of dictation deserves notice, because it governs the very genre in which this argument is written. The standardization of academic prose the enforced formats, the topic sentence, the house styles of journals is a translative process that presupposes monolingualism within the academy: it translates heterogeneous, heterolingual ideas into a homogeneously recognizable style. Why do we write standardized academic prose when we can write variously creative prose? The politics of circulation determine what gets published, just as they determined what got translated under empire. And the postcolonial academy, in trying to catch up with Western standards, mimics an assumed homogeneity whose metropolitan model keeps evolving, so that the postcolonial academic remains perpetually one revision behind, engaging in dictation without end. The diagnosis matters because it shows that the condition described in this paper is not confined to the colonial past or to the nation-state's language policy: it structures the present institutions of knowledge in which the postcolonial scholar, like the anglophone poet, must practice his appropriations.

5. Findings

This reading yields five related findings. First, dictation names the linguistic condition of the postcolonial world with a precision that the more familiar vocabulary of imposition or imperialism does not. What distinguishes dictation as a category is that it locates the coercion in the structure of the address itself, in the addressee's a priori concession of authority, rather than in the content of what is transmitted. This is why the same structure can be identified across sites as different as the colonial classroom, the national-language policy, and the academic journal: in each, language is received from above through a hierarchy that precedes and conditions meaning.

Second, the condition of dictation is structurally incapable of completion. Because there is no perfect subject of dictation, because the student's transcription always differs, and the

fragment always survives, the homogeneous linguistic subject that both the colonial school and the national-language policy require can never be produced. The failure is not a contingent shortcoming of a particular policy but a property of the translative act itself.

Third, the Pakistani national-language project is best understood not as a departure from colonial language politics but as their repetition. In nominating Urdu, a language belonging to a minority of the country's constituent ethnicities, forged in a region that remained in India after 1947, the postcolonial state reproduced the hierarchical address of colonial dictation, and it did so with sufficient force to break the state in 1971. The imposition of homogeneity upon a heterogeneous population is, on the evidence of Bangladesh, not merely unjust but politically self-defeating.

Fourth, the terms on which postcolonial language and literature are received remain governed by the twinned mechanisms of charity and equivalence. The excessive charity Asad (1986) diagnoses persists in the metropolitan celebration of anglophone literature, where praise is a function of the crossing rather than of the work; and the regime of equivalence, by excluding literatures that lack synonyms for the theory that would canonize them, operates as a mechanism of exclusion with institutional effects, of which the thinness of an indigenous critical-theoretical vocabulary in Urdu is a direct symptom.

Fifth, and most consequentially for literary study, the anglophone writer converts the condition of dictation into the practice of appropriation. The doubled dictation that forms him, colonial and national, is precisely what equips him to make English bear Punjabi meter and Urdu cadence, to foreignize and domesticate at once, and to unsettle the distinction between host and guest language depending on who reads. Anglophone literature in the postcolonial world is therefore not a residue of empire but a liberating space of intercultural movement: the record of a mutual transformation of colonizer and colonized those Rangarajan (2014) documents for the colonial period and that this study extends into the postcolonial one.

6. Conclusion

This paper has argued that dictation names the linguistic condition of the postcolonial world: the reception of language from above, through a hierarchical address in which authority is conceded before meaning is exchanged. The colonial school dictated English; the postcolonial state, repeating the colonial operation upon its own population, dictated a national language that belonged to none of its peoples, and enforced it with the instruments of biopower, with consequences that included the breaking of the state itself in 1971. The world republic of letters still receives the postcolonial text with too much charity or too little; the regime of equivalence still excludes the literatures that lack synonyms for the theory that would canonize them. Nevertheless, the scene of dictation contains, in its very structure, the ground of its own subversion.

There is no perfect subject of dictation. The student's transcription always differs; the fragment always survives; the ghost of the gap lingers in every text that the crossing-over produces. Mimicry, the pedagogical ideal of empire, matures into menace; the hybrid idiom disowned by both cultures becomes, in the anglophone poem, a deliberate instrument; the dictated subject becomes the appropriating writer, making English bear Punjabi meter and Urdu cadence, foreignizing and domesticating at once, until one can no longer say with confidence which language is the host and which the guest. Translation, which empire used to form its subjects and the nation-state used to discipline its citizens, turns out to be the same power by which the subject remakes the language that made him.

Language, alive with aporia, must at all times be translated, into other languages and within itself; it requires constant metalingual interpretation, and the end of translation would be the

end of language itself. The postcolonial condition renders this general truth inescapable, and the anglophone writer is its most self-conscious inhabitant: not the leftover of an empire of dictation, but the imperfect student in whose errant transcription the dictated language becomes, at last, his own.

References

- Ahmad, A. (1992). Jameson's rhetoric of otherness and the "national allegory." In *In theory: Classes, nations, literatures* (pp. 95-122). Verso.
- Asad, T. (1986). The concept of cultural translation in British social anthropology. In J. Clifford & G. E. Marcus (Eds.), *Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography* (pp. 141-164). University of California Press.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). Of mimicry and man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse. In *The location of culture* (pp. 85-92). Routledge.
- Casanova, P. (2004). *The world republic of letters* (M. B. DeBevoise, Trans.). Harvard University Press. (Original work published 1999)
- Infante, I. (2013). *After translation: The transfer and circulation of modern poetics across the Atlantic*. Fordham University Press.
- Jameson, F. (1986). Third-world literature in the era of multinational capitalism. *Social Text*, (15), 65-88.
- Liu, L. H. (1995). *Translingual practice: Literature, national culture, and translated modernity—China, 1900–1937*. Stanford University Press.
- Lowe, L. (1994). Unfaithful to the original: The subject of *Dictée*. In E. H. Kim & N. Alarcón (Eds.), *Writing self, writing nation: A collection of essays on Dictée by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha* (pp. 35-69). Third Woman Press.
- Mufti, A. R. (2016). *Forget English! Orientalism and world literatures*. Harvard University Press.
- Rafael, V. L. (1988). *Contracting colonialism: Translation and Christian conversion in Tagalog society under early Spanish rule*. Cornell University Press.
- Ramazani, J. (2009). *A transnational poetics*. University of Chicago Press.
- Rangarajan, P. (2014). *Imperial Babel: Translation, exoticism, and the long nineteenth century*. Fordham University Press.
- Sakai, N. (1997). *Translation and subjectivity: On "Japan" and cultural nationalism*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Sakai, N., & Solomon, J. (2006). Introduction: Addressing the multitude of foreigners, echoing Foucault. In N. Sakai & J. Solomon (Eds.), *Translation, biopolitics, colonial difference* (pp. 1-35). Hong Kong University Press.
- Shih, S.-m. (2007). *Visuality and identity: Sinophone articulations across the Pacific*. University of California Press.
- Venuti, L. (1995). *The translator's invisibility: A history of translation*. Routledge.