



Double consciousness–oriented linguistics practices among diasporic writers in two novels: “To see and to see again” and “Funny in Farsi”

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Received:20/02/2021

Accepted: 30/01/2022

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the internal conflicts in diasporic writers, manifested in their textual and linguistic practices, is their experience of "double consciousness." This conflict which is parallel to their external dialectic in identifying with either motherland or the host country, gives form and content to their linguistic identity. To put it in other words, these diasporic subjects sometimes identify with their homeland, sometimes with the host land, and sometimes with both. This study shows how diasporic writers produce hybrid, and accented texts. Because these texts are two-layered, we term them as palimpsest texts, arguing that the multi-layered and hybrid nature of these texts implies the double consciousness of their producers. The study explored the linguistic mechanisms diasporic writers use to represent their double consciousness.

2. MATERIALS

Two English texts, "To see and see again" (2000) by Tara Bahrapour and “Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America”(2003) by Firoozeh Dumas were selected as the corpora of the study for they both belong to diasporic literature with a focus on identity politics of immigrant writers.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, as the example of an immigrant author translating the traditions and cultural elements of the (native) homeland into the language of the (other) host, the focus will be on some excerpts from two novels of “To see and see again,” and “Funny in Farsi:”

Examples from "To see and see again":

Example 1

Wait, wait! She cries. “Get out and kiss the Quran” Baba laughs and pulls up the brake again (Bahrapour 2000, p.47).

"Kissing the Qur'an", "passing the traveler under the Qur'an" and "starting the

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journey" by mentioning "In the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate" are among the cultural-specific elements of the immigrant motherland that have appeared in a foreign context.

Example 2

"Karej-jan, tell me" Baba's cousin asks. "kodom bacheh ra beeshtar doost daree? Which child do you like better? (Bahrapour 2000, p.51)

In this example, the immigrant author has hybridized the linguistic elements of the motherland and the host country, creating a hybrid text, and immediately de-hybridized them by bringing in their English translation.

Example 3

Baba points to Mama and Sufi, who are looking at shop windows. "We have to go" he says. "Khaste Nabashid." (Bahrapour 2000,p.141)

As can be seen in the above example, hybrid texts emerge from the coexistence of "self" and "other," and this coexistence is not possible except through the channel of translation. In fact, translation is inherently hybrid whether it is cultural or linguistic. In the following section, some examples from "Funny in Farsi" are discussed:

Example 1

My name, Firoozeh, means "Tourquoise" in Persian. In America, it means "Unpronounceable" or "I'm not going to talk to you, because I can't possibly learn your name". (Dumas 2004:63)

What matters here is the result of this interaction with the culture of the host country, which has led to the emergence of a double personality. Firoozeh and her family are immigrants who forge their identity in relation to another. This constructed identity is fully reflected in name selection and marriage rituals.

Example 2

In my next life, I'm applying to come back as a Swede. I assume that as a Swede, I will be a leggy blond. Should God get things confused and send me back as a Swede trapped in the body of a Middle Eastern woman, I'll just pretend I'm French. (Dumas 2004. p.47)

Here, Firoozeh suffers from personality fragmentation due to being named differently and constantly fluctuating between herself and the other. She no longer tolerates this fragmented situation and finally decides to get back to her original identity.

Example 3

The ceremony began with Francois and me sitting facing the mirror with everybody crowding around Sofreh-e-Agd. Uncle Abdullah began his speech in Persian, read passages from the Quran in Arabic then translated everything into English. (Dumas 2004, p.149)

The issue of hybridization is well illustrated in Firoozeh's marriage to François. François is a French-Greek citizen who marries an Iranian girl. At the wedding ceremony of these two immigrants from two different cultural backgrounds, American-Christian and Iranian-Islamic traditions and rituals are both practiced.

Example 4

Every Thanksgiving, my family and I gather at my cousin Morteza's house.[...] Aunt Fatimeh brings her baklava. All other relatives prepare their favorite Persian dishes [...].We give thanks for our lives here in America and for the good fortune of living close to one another.(Dumas2004, p.47)

Here, the diasporic family celebrate Thanksgiving following Native Americans; but they completely change its nature, by giving it an Iranian character, which signifies

another hybridization.

4. CONCLUSION

In this study, an attempt was made to explore two fictional works by Iranian diasporic writers in a bid to discuss their identity politics as reflected in their linguistic and textual practices. The findings discovered an inclination to hybridization, de-hybridization and re-hybridization in their linguistic practices through such mechanisms as code mixing, code switching, transliteration, cultural borrowing, and cultural translation. The central argument was that these contradictory inclinations can be interpreted as a signifier of their “double consciousness” and their internal conflict originating from their external identity indeterminacy. This indeterminacy gives their textual practices an accented character.

Keywords: Cultural palimpsest; Hybrid text; Constructed identity; Diaspora literature; Diaspora writers