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**Objectifying Beauty: A Multimodal Analysis of Female
Representation in Selected Punjabi Songs and Their English
Subtitles**



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Abstract

This research analyzes the representation of females in the selected Punjabi songs and their English subtitles. Representation of females in the media plays a significant role in shaping people's perceptions of gender representations and stereotypes. The objectification of females in multimodal elements (lyrics, imagery, and subtitles) emphasizes stereotypes, and translation techniques alter these representations. This study examines how female roles and identities are objectified in songs and their corresponding English subtitles. The theory of objectification is employed to analyze the objectification of females in multi-modal elements of Punjabi songs collected from YouTube. Research finds that most female representations are maintained in English subtitles, highlighting external beauty, with translation techniques such as omission and expansion used to make lyrics understandable, although some cultural expressions are lost. This research highlights the need for further studies on the influence of translation on the depiction of gender in popular culture.

Keywords: Representation, Stereotypes, In Multi-Modal, Objectification

Introduction

Representation of females through the media plays a vital role in the perception of people towards gender representations and stereotypes. The media represent gender through their content, like in music videos, movies, and dramas. These gender representations have a greater impact on audience perception. The ways females are represented in various media contents, especially in songs, has been an area of interest and academic research. Representation of female characters in media is linked with broader societal issues like stereotypes and objectification. The press represents how female characters are used as objects for people's pleasure by giving no value to their abilities. The media gives more importance to physical appearance rather than internal beauty. Media, especially Punjabi songs, also portray female characters as objects of desire or need for male pleasure through their lyrics and videos (Arora, 2016). Punjabi songs are very popular among South Asian countries, particularly in India and Pakistan. In the past few years, Punjabi songs have gained interest not only in South Asian countries but also worldwide. Their increasing interest sparks the idea of

adding English translations or subtitles to music videos to make them more accessible to an international audience.

The research aims to analyze the representation of females in multimodal elements (lyrics, imagery, and subtitles) of Punjabi songs. It analyzes the ways the camera captures the different angles of the female's external appearance. Visual imagery reveals how females are represented in front of the camera through their outfits and accessories. In these videos, female characters are often used for performative elements, such as dancing, to gain the attention of their opposite gender. It suggests that females are viewed as objects rather than agents. By doing this, the videos gain more popularity among the audience.

Punjabi songs, especially in the form of folk songs and modern music, represent a broad range of gendered characteristics, which include ideas of masculinity and femininity. These gender representations vary across different cultures and languages. Recently, English subtitles have been added to these Punjabi songs to make them more accessible to international audiences. Translation plays a crucial role in cultural transfer and the transmission of gender norms and stereotypes from one culture to another.

This research examines how female roles and identities are objectified in songs and their English subtitles. The research examines the portrayal of female characters on screen. It examines the ways female characters are represented as objects. The researcher also focuses on how original Punjabi songs, their visual imagery, and English subtitles represent female objectification through their melodies. This research examines how translators handle gender-specific language, expressions, and metaphors to convey the intended meaning and emotional tone of the song accurately.

Literature Review

The media plays a significant role in our society. It shapes our perception of society. It becomes a powerful tool that engages people worldwide. In the media, amusement is a crucial factor that captures the attention of viewers. Dramas, movies, films, songs, news, and comedy shows are different kinds that vary in media content. These are used to engage the audience (Qamar, 2018). This type of content amuses people. The media plays a vital role in representing gender compared to other sources. The media

shapes people's perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes towards society.

The media becomes a powerful tool that engages people worldwide. Social websites and apps engage people with what is happening in the world (Trombetta, 2023). The media increases awareness about gender stereotypes in different cultures. The media shapes individuals' perceptions of patriarchal society. The media represents men as the norm and women as submissive creatures. The media also represent harmful images of female characters that emphasize societal and conservative stereotypes about gender. (L, Walker & Diaz, B., 2024) Females experience body dissatisfaction, internalize social ideals about beauty, and develop self-objectification tendencies, which in turn are involved in psychological disorders (Cinaroglu, 2025).

The media also plays a crucial role in shaping the portrayal of gender in society. It represents how female and male roles are depicted in advertising or the workplace. In advertisements, women's roles are often portrayed through their perceived fairness, beauty, and external appearance. However, on the other hand, males are often portrayed as independent and as a support system for their opposite gender (T. Ottoson, 2012).

The media perpetuates stereotypes about gender, portraying males as dominant and females as inferior (T. Krijnen, 2017). The media represent male-biased values, norms, and traditions to the audience. The media maintains the patriarchal values in society. It has a greater effect on the audience.

Sexual Objectification occurs in every form, like TV programs, sports games, ads, newspapers, and music videos encountered by the media. The media represent women through their bodies and physical appearance. Media content sexually objectifies female roles by representing them through their body and external appearances. Their roles are designed to capture the attention of the male gaze.

Translation studies, especially as they relate to gender, describe how linguistic choices can emphasize or object to ideologies of gender. The concept of the invisibility of the translator and the ethical consideration of gender – neutral translation, which is especially appropriate in the subtitles of cultural music. These ideas suggest that the translator's decision to maintain or alter the gender portrayal in the target language influences how gender identities are understood by a global audience (Venuti, 1994).

For a good translation, translators must understand both cultures and languages. They should have background knowledge of both languages and cultures. By doing this, they recognize that what is acceptable in one culture may be unacceptable in another. According to him, the translator's role not only deals with the transfer of words, sentences, or texts, but it also acts as a cultural mediator between two cultures.

Maren Froemming (2019) focuses on examining the short-term effects of sexually objectifying music lyrics on individuals' attitudes and behaviours by extending objectification theory. She finds out that exposure to sexually objectifying lyrics led to increased self-objectification and negative body image, aligning with objectification theory.

Gender is constructed through music. Gender roles and identities are reflected and negotiated by Punjabi music. Lyrics of songs emphasize their value, which shapes society's perception of gender roles and norms. In recent years, Punjabi music has gained importance in the musical industry. Through their classical and traditional melodies, Punjabi music has captured the attention of audiences worldwide (M.Kumar, 2023).

Music plays an important role in the construction of gender. In music, women are depicted as submissive creatures, and they need men's appreciation, attention, and support. In music, the positions of women are represented as objects. They are often represented as physically beautiful and childlike (H. Banning, 2006). Arora (2016) focuses on the analysis of intricate dynamics of female representation within the context of modern Indian media, aiming to dissect whether such representation predominantly fosters empowerment or perpetuates objectification. The research analyzes the role of females in Punjabi songs, lyrics, visual images, and English subtitles. Multimodal elements play a crucial role in the representation of gender. Using female characters to play more prominent roles on screen captures the audience's attention.

Gender and translation are closely intertwined. Translation is an active process. In the process of translation, translators encounter cultural gender differences when translating a text with dominant gender values. According to Hu and Meng (2017), a relationship exists between gender and translation. According to them, this interplay has two conditions. Firstly, Gender studies affect translation. Secondly, translation has

a greater impact on the construction of gender identity.

According to Flotow (2018), a connection exists between translation studies and gender studies in this regard. Flotow describes that scholars should focus on the idea of cultural gender differences. “Gender is culturally constructed and translation deals with cultural transfer”.

In audio-visual translation, the audio content is transferred between the same or two different cultures in both oral and written texts. There are ideologies in subtitles that reflect the translator’s point of view about sociopolitical contexts, especially those related to gender. Audio-visual translation plays a crucial role in the translation of media elements, such as music, dramas, and films. Subtitles are used to bridge the communication gap between two cultures or countries. Through it, the audience becomes aware of others ‘cultural values and traditions.

Translators employed various translation strategies, including omission, adaptation, domestication, and foreignization, to create subtitles or dubbing that were effective and appropriate for the target audience (Martín-Castaño, 2017). The process of subtitling helps us to obtain knowledge about other literature and cultures through dramas, songs, and advertisements. We gain awareness of others’ norms and values through subtitling and dubbing. AVT helps translators overcome the challenges of translating gender stereotypes in another language (Alfano, 2020). Subtitles reflect the ideological choices made by the translator to make the text suitable and acceptable for the target audience. Translators often omit or replace gendered terms to make them accessible to a global audience.

The concept of objectification theory was given by Roberts and Fredrickson in 1997. Objectification is also a form of dehumanization (treating a person not as human but as an object and instrument). To objectify a person, people focus on their external features and neglect their abilities. Thus, this person becomes an instrument for pleasing others and cannot make decisions or achieve great things. To objectify someone means treating a person, particularly a female, through their external appearance and body, and they are manipulated and controlled by others.

Martha Nussbaum gives seven ways to treat a person as an object (S., Rahman, M.M., and Zannat, 2021), i.e., instrumentality, denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, ownership, and denial of subjectivity. Treating females as objects due to

their fairness is called sexual objectification. Women are sexually objectified through music (Aubrey, 2011). According to the philosopher Immanuel Kant, objectifying someone means degrading the person and considering them as an object rather than a human being. According to Fredrickson and Roberts, by objectifying the females, the men view them for pleasure and focus on their external beauty, not their abilities.

Research Methodology

A qualitative research design and objectification theory are employed to analyze female representation in multimodal elements (lyrics, images, and English subtitles) of selected Punjabi songs. By using objectification theory as a theoretical framework, the researcher analyzes the ways females are portrayed through their physical appearance and beauty. Punjabi songs are selected for data analysis. Songs are selected through the YouTube platform. Like "Gutt Ty Paranda" (by Shubh), "Laung Ty Laachi" (by Mannat Noor), and "Billiyan Billiyan Akhiyan" (by Guri). The English subtitles of these songs are taken from YouTube and the Gaana.com website. Visual images are captured through the song's official videos. Their screenshots are added as a visual representation of female characters. In this research, the researcher also analyzes the translation strategies employed in translating original Punjabi lyrics into the English language.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Example # 1

This song, "Gutt Ty Paranda," is sung by Shubh and is set for release in 2024. The medium of language of this song is Punjabi. Their visual scenes are captured from the official video of this song.

Original Lyrics	English Subtitles
<i>Gutt ty Paranda tera Karda kamaal ni,</i>	Your hairstyle and Paranda are both fantastic, girl.
<i>Billiyan Baloriyan Akhan kardiyaan sawal</i>	Your crystal-like eyes ping me with inquiries.
<i>Ture matak matak ni tu hirnidi chaal ni,</i>	Like a deer, you have beautiful walk.
<i>Galan di laali na taan kitty buray hall</i>	Your lovely red cheeks are taunting me,
<i>Jadon nikle gharon ni billo hoky tayaar</i>	When you walk out from home all dressed up

Teray pichay pichay ghumdi mundeya di qatar A crowd of boys follow you.

Tikhe nakh ch koka ni tera krda shikar Your gorgeous nose stud captures the hearts of the guys,

Jutti kattmi te fabbdaa suit salvaar Your embroidered traditional footwear complements your traditional Punjabi outfit well.

Visual Imagery

Image #1: The Female represents her physical features, like a smile and pink cheeks. Close up on her smile and cheeks.



Image #2: Shows Male Gaze



Image #3 shows female external beauty and style, while the male character shows as he appreciates her beauty



Analysis and Discussion

The theory of objectification is applied to the analysis of the song "Gutt Ty Paranda" and its subtitles and visual imagery. According to this theory, women are treated as objects and associated with animals. In this song, the lyrics represent females through their physical appearance and beauty. In this song, both the original and subtitles treat females as objects to please the male. Visual scenes are also focused on the physical appearance of females. As the first image shows, female external beauty is characterized by her pink cheeks and smiley face, which capture the attention of the receiver. In this image, the camera is closely focused on her beauty. The second and third images show that the male gaze means he admires her beauty and appreciates her walking style, calling her a beautiful creation of the universe. This associates both the original and translation with female animals through their lyrics, such as "*Hirni*" in Punjabi and "like a deer" in English. The lyrics focus on women's exterior appearance and beauty. By comparing the original and translated languages of this song, a difference is evident between the two versions. For example, in the original language, there is a line that describes the elaborate aspect of women's Jewellery. It indicates her heritage and beauty could lose some of their cultural richness when translated into English. This could impact how the representation of gender and cultural identity is perceived in the translated lyrics compared to the original Punjabi version. This song also reinforces the idea of femininity that prioritizes beauty and

attractiveness, while also positioning men as the pursuers and admirers of women. Overall, the analysis of "Gutt ty Paranda kry Kamal ni" reveals how gendered representations in songs can contribute to the objectification of women and the reinforcement of traditional gender roles.

In this song, a literal translation strategy is used. Like in a line, a crowd of boys follow you with lovely red cheeks. The meaning of these lines is literally and directly transferred from one Punjabi to English. By doing this, the original line maintains the objectification in the target language. In this example, both omission and expansion strategies are employed. Like the word " billo " is omitted in the target language, and a traditional word (Your embroidered traditional footwear complements your traditional Punjabi outfit well) adds to expand the target text and give clarity about the original language words' meaning. Dynamic equivalence is also used in this line translation, like 'your crystal-like eyes ping me with inquiries and your gorgeous nose stud captures the heart of the guys, these lines transfer the effect and attention of the original language lines in such a way that resonated with the English language audience.

Example # 2

Mannat Noor is the singer of the *laung ty laachi* song and the writer is Harmanjit. This song was released in 2018 in Punjabi language.

Original lyrics	English Subtitles
<i>Ve tu laung, ve main laachi</i>	Oh my beloved, you are like clove, and I'm a
<i>Tere pichay aa gawachi,</i>	cardamom and I'm lost after you.
<i>Tere ishq ne maari</i>	Your love taken the lovely single girl.
<i>Kudi kach di kanwari,</i>	I'm the shadow produced by the mountains
<i>Ve mai chambe de pahadaan wali</i>	of chamber (a district in Himachal Pradesh)
<i>shaam ve munde ya,</i>	
<i>Sandli-sandli main naina vich</i>	I hide your name in my eyes.
<i>Tera Naam ve munde ya</i>	
<i>Ho mere sunne-sunne pair tu</i>	Oh my feet are so empty, and you keep going
<i>ta Jana Rehna shehar</i>	to city.
<i>Bauta maingdi na thoda</i>	I don't ask for too much; just buy me a pair
<i>Laida jhanjra da joda.</i>	of anklets that don't cost a lot of bucks.

Jeda vikda bazaran vich am ve They are easily available for lower prices at
mundeya markets

Visual Imagery

Image #1: The Female represents her Traditional jewellery and beauty. Close-ups of her face and jewellery



Image #2: Male Gaze



Image #3: Females Represent Their Traditional Outfit, And Dance



Analysis and Discussion

This song, 'Laung and Laachi', has poetic expressions that metaphorically convey love and longing. In this song, both male and female compare themselves to spices (clove and cardamom) and objects like (shadow and anklets). In both versions of these lyrics, the roles of gender are seen as objects rather than acknowledging full humanity and complexity. In visual representation, females wear traditional dresses and Jewelry, which represent Punjabi tradition and culture. So, the camera and song lyrics focus on the female's external appearance. Visual images often represent women primarily through their beauty and style, rather than their agency or other abilities. She asked for an ankle and mentioned that it was not expensive and readily available, which shows her worth. In the music video, in image #3, the main female and the other girls are used for dancing that captures the receiver's attention. In mostly music videos, the course dancers are females. In videos, the camera focuses on female characters, and males stand to watch them.

In the original Punjabi lyrics of "Laung Laachi," the line "Tere ishq ne maari, kuri kach di kanwari" translates to "Your love taken the lovely sing girl" in English subtitles. The Punjabi line conveys an emotional and lovely relationship, but the English line does not capture the emotional depth and essence of love; it conveys the general meaning.

In the original, the metaphors are used, such as *ve tu laung* and *ty mai laachi*," which convey a poetic sense and symbolize love and affection. However, in English translation, (Clove and Cardamom), the poetic sense is not conveyed properly. The English lyrics fail to capture the cultural significance and the same depth of meaning as the original lines. The literal translation strategy is used to preserve the meaning of original lyrics, as seen in *ve tu laung, mai laachi*," translated as "Oh my beloved, you are like clove, and I am a cardamom," maintaining the metaphorical sense and representing them as spices, which showcases their cultural significance and lovely relationship. In other lyrics, *Tere ishq ne maari, Kudi kach di kanwari*, translated as 'your love has taken the lovely single girl,' preserves the gender meaning of the female character as a single and young lady. A paraphrasing strategy is also used in the translation of lyrics, such as "Bauta maingdi Na, thoda Laida jhanjra da joda." *Jeda vikda bazaran vich am ve mundeya* as I do not ask for too much; buy me a

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pair of anklets that do not cost many bucks. They are readily available for lower prices at markets. This line simplifies the playful tone of the original lyrics into a direct request for a gift from a female. Some words are also omitted in English subtitles, such as the word "Sandli" that Sandli omits in translation. Expansion strategy is also used as a reference to the Chambe area to make it understandable for the audience, who are not aware of Punjabi areas.

Example # 3

Billiyan Billiyan song is sung by Guri.

Original lyrics	English Subtitles
<i>Billiyan Billiyan akhan</i>	These catlike hot eyes,
<i>Jinha akhan nu main takan</i>	The eyes I look at
<i>Tu saa' the gaur ni kardi</i>	You don't notice me at all,
<i>main roz hi Nazran rakhaan</i>	And I keep close eye on you.
<i>Bul gulabi, nain sharabi,</i>	Pink lips and seductive eyes
<i>Dil ty maarde saatan</i>	Straight hit my eyes.
<i>Kanna vich walliyan ,</i>	Earrings in ears and black til on
<i>Thodi utte til ni Bhawein</i>	Your chin ,even make me beg
<i>Lakh kar alai tarle ik wari</i>	For it thousands of time but see me in
<i>sanu milni</i>	private at once.
<i>Suit bhawayn lakh-lakh</i>	Even though your suits worth
<i>Da billo, sab khel teri akh da billo</i>	Hundreds of thousands of rupees,,,,,

Visual Imagery

Image # 1: In this image, the female represents her looks, smile, and the camera focuses on her pink cheeks and lips.



Image # 2: Female characters are used to gain the attention of the receivers by showing girls dancing.



Image #3 and 4: male gaze and female represent her walking style, dress, and the male character looks like he appreciates her fashion sense and style.



Analysis and Discussion

In this song, the original lyrics, English subtitles, and visual imagery represent the female as an object by focusing on her physical appearance (lips, cheeks, and eyes, style, and outfits). English subtitles mostly retain the female objectification. Mostly, the lyrics are translated literally from Punjabi to English and convey their meanings

appropriately. However, in some lines, some words are added. Like, catlike hot eyes, a hot word is added. This word shows sexual objectification. Some words are omitted in English subtitles, like sb khel Teri akh da billo, as a game of your eyes that shifts the focus to material elements, like shifts her representation from a lovely figure to one defined by luxury. Visual imagery also shows objectification of the female character. As shown in image 1, focus on the female's smile, eyes, and lips. In image #2, females are used as the principal dancers, rather than males. It represents them as a means of gaining the receiver's attention. In this video, only one male character and five to six females, including the main lead, are featured. It also shows that female characters are used to capture the receiver's attention. In the following images, the camera focuses on the female style, attire, and look. Moreover, the male is just looking at her and appreciating her beauty. In these images, females are also used as objects rather than agents.

Direct translation: In this song, direct translation is used to convey the meaning directly and maintain the metaphorical objectification from Punjabi to the English Language. Like *Billiyan Billiyan akhan*, translated as "catlike hot eyes."

Amplification: In English subtitles, some interpretive words are added, like "catlike hot eyes," which increases objectification by focusing on sexual attraction which are not mentioned in the original lyrics.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research explains the intricate relationship between media, gender, and translation studies. It finds that the song lyrics reinforce gender roles, representing the female character as an object for male desires or an element of beauty and charm. Some songs maintain gender representation in English subtitles by faithfully translating the lyrics from the original language to the target language. In contrast, others employ translation techniques such as omission, deletion, and adaptation to convey the intended and understandable meaning of the original lyrics in English subtitles. In some lyrics, the poetic essence of the original language is also lost in English subtitles.

This research highlights the need for further studies on the impact of translation on the representation of gender in popular cultures, particularly in non-Western cultures, where traditional gender roles are deeply ingrained. Future research

could analyze the process by which translation can be used as a tool for feminist intervention, challenging female objectification through media, or examine how international audiences clarify and acknowledge the representation of gender through media or other forms of entertainment.

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