

Translation: Principles and Considerations

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Abstract

This paper examines the act of translation which is considered as a herculean task. Literary translation generally and poetry translation particularly poses challenges for the translator. A translator in rendering a poem has to be faithful and accurate to the original text. In literary translation, not only the typical features of the source text are to be taken into account, but also other influential elements from the target perspectives, such as linguistic and cultural differences and the target readers. There are slangs or colloquial expressions which have a local and temporary meaning. To find equivalent of them in the target text is very difficult. It is as challenging as to walk on a tight rope.

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In recent years modern world transport and communication technology has advanced so much that globe has shrunk into a village. Waters and jungles, mountains and valleys have lost their significance as barriers owing to the advanced means of transport. But languages are still barriers in communication and the solution still remains translation.

Translation is all about negotiating, negotiating the world of the original author and the world of the reader. No reader is going to compare the translated text with the original text and make sure that the translator has been faithful or unfaithful. What matters, whether the translated text is readable or not. There is always a possibility of deviating from the meaning of the original text, while translating it. Translation is not just the transference of linguistic design from one medium to another. Its preliminary aim is, or should be, the transference of a 'consciousness', and through that, a whole socio-cultural matrix.

Translation is a complex, painstaking, time-consuming and demanding process. The whole process of translating from source language to target language is difficult as, Richards correctly holds "is probably the most complex type of event in the history of cosmos". (Richards 247-62) The job of the translator gets further complicated by host of restrictions imposed upon him by both the matter (content) and the audience. If he is lucky to deal with a text in the case of which the potential for convergence of meaning is high, his task would not be so difficult. However, he will have to make some very difficult choices. Translation would become more and more indeterminate when it has to deal with language that is less referential. If a translator deviates far away from the source text his work would prove less effective.

Translating from one language to another language is essentially a problem of translating from one ethos to another, of drawing attention to difference in order to assert similarity and of realising the matter, the systems and social organisations of another culture. Translation is both an art and a craft, and the translator as a reader and interpreter is in danger of intervening in order to edit. The art of translation lies in the methods by which the translator negotiates with the target language without allowing the language to dictate the text.

The main problem which a translator faces is the balancing act of being faithful to the original text and at the same time making his translation look like an original to the target language readers. At some times he may be faithful to the original text and at some times he may not be. Many times a writer gets offended when he is told that his translator has not been faithful to his original text. For example we can take Omar Khayyam as rendered by Fitzgerald in English. In this respect Umashankar Joshi, notes that:

Fitzgerald has caught the tone of the original author, the atmosphere of the *Rubaiyyat* which is a difficult thing to do. Hardly a half of the quatrains might be adhering to the original. The one, you must all have come across, “a loaf of bread, a flask of wine and thou besides me”, is not Omar Khayyam. This is mainly from Hafiz. But how does this matter? For Fitzgerald, everything is Khayyam, all that is in the Orient, in the Persian language. The whole thing has such a unity of poetic tone that it has become one of the classics, not only of English, but of the world. (Joshi and Rao 10)

It is an old saying that translation is comparatively easier when compared to creative writing and that the source text is somehow sacred and unchangeable and any attempt at taking liberties with it is almost violation to the original text. But the truth is that the translator’s job is equally difficult and sometimes even more challenging than that of the writer.

Translation will never be exactly like the original work as it must prove itself to be a translation. Translation in literature is actually a retranslation or what might be treated transformation. It is a form of adaptation making new metaphors fit the original metaphors while in a bad translation the results are disastrous. It establishes the communication between the author and the reader, without which literature has no justification. Happy union of author and translator is a must in translation, apart from the audience. Translator becomes rewriter in the target language. Closeness of the original text with the translated text makes this journey better and pleasant. Lefevere explain that:

Translation of literature is therefore essentially retranslation: it becomes necessary when the expression of the interpretation of the theme, the summation of “variations” which were originally designed to establish communication between author and reader, no longer fulfils that task, but owing to changes in language, time, place and tradition achieves exactly the opposite effect. The translation becomes vital in that it restores the communication between author and reader without which literature does not exist. (Lefevere 19)

But it is also a fact that we cannot translate unless we do violence to the source literary text. We must destroy, change, destruct and follow the terminology of Jacques Derrida. There occurs a gulf between source and the target text while translating. Translators violate rules while translating a text. They deviate much from the original text that results in faults. During the course of translation important material of the original work gets lost in the translated work. In rare cases we see better communication between the source text and target text. Translator or interpreter must communicate a single textual content in a second text. Translator should try his

level best to say the same thing in both the languages. Translation is disjointed and displaced communication. In translation linguistic form and process should be incorporated which maximum translators fail to do.

Of all the translations literary translation has always proved to be more difficult than non-literary texts, such as business documents or instruction booklets for machinery or equipment. In literary translation poetry translation is considered a difficult task. It is not only difficult, but a challenging art. Many great men burnt their fingers trying to translate.

It is a well-known fact that literary translation contributes much to the cultural communication between speakers of different languages. Literary text is not merely a piece of information and would be considered unsuccessful if it supplies information from the original text.

There have been many studies on the theory and practice of literary translation, including comparative assessments of different methods of such translation and their results. Comments on approach and technique will apply to literary translation both from a native language into English and vice versa.

There has always been much dispute about methods that one has to follow to produce better results. It should be pointed out here that in some cases the translation of poems is done into prose, so as to concentrate on the meaning rather than retaining its poetical form. Poetical translation actually means translation from a native poem into some kind of matching or equivalent poetical form in the translated version: poem into a new poem. It is this aspect which, more than any other poses great challenge to the translator and causes the widest differences of opinion.

Literary translators who have gained much practice with different kinds of text, through experience, possess their own characteristic way of working. If they have been fortunate they will have received some criticisms and comments from their readers or from teachers or native-language experts, and so they will acquire some idea of the special relations between the translator and the native text, and between the translator and the reader of the translated work. But those who possess less experience in this way should learn by practice and experiment, to develop the appropriate skills and to make use of their own imagination. The new translator needs, if possible, to find a teacher or a guide or a skilled linguist to provide him practical advice and help, because personal face-to-face discussion is the best method to understand problems and to find ways of dealing with them.

The fundamental requirement for a successful translator is that one who translates should have thorough knowledge of both the languages involved in the process of translation. Not only reading and understanding of language is enough, but how to express himself in two languages—the language to be translated and the language into which he is translating. But generally only a few have equal hold over both the languages. This is the basic requirement without which translation is not possible. An ordinary translator cannot do justice to such a difficult and

challenging process. One who translates should know all the characteristics of both the languages. Without knowing all the characteristics translation proves to be unbalanced.

One who translates should play a subordinate role in translation despite being a powerful writer and a genius. He should try to replicate the source text, over doing it may finally result in over or under translation. Translator's aim is to resolve obstacles through various processes between languages.

One who translates should create the style of the original author, and not to create a style of his own. Baker asserts, "We may well want to question the feasibility of these assumptions, given that it is as impossible to produce a stretch of language in a totally impersonal way as it is to handle an object without leaving one's fingerprints on it". (Baker 4) To put it simply, the translator's individual experience and identity can lead to a different style of translation. A translated text should produce the same effect on the reader as the original text. In order to create the style of the author translator should exercise great diligence. He should work hard not to create different styles. It should read exactly like the original. Translator's style should be like a looking glass through which the target reader peeps and finds an original text belonging, content-wise, to a different language and culture, but formally entirely to his own language.

Translation should be potentially controlled. Translation is an approximation and only gives a hint of what the original text is. In translation process unnecessary additions or omission or alterations are better to be avoided. Over ornamentation may diminish the value of the translation. Translation should always be transparent like a pane of glass, so that one can see the real thing. It should please readers so that he becomes fond of reading and reading it. The taste of the original text should not get reduced because of translation. Readers should love to read the original text due to the taste created by the translator. Translations should be so simple that without the original text readers should be able to understand it otherwise the purpose is lost. Bad translations leave poor impressions about the author as well as about the translator. No translation is perfect in an absolute sense. The expectations of the readers of the original may be different from those of the readers of the translation. Hence judgments will always vary. Translation should not be so complex that only capable or sound readers could understand it. It should be easy and simple for the average readers to understand.

One has to encounter many problems in translating a literary text from one Indian language into English than in translating it into another Indian language because they are not genetically related and are culturally different.

In literary translation, not only the typical features of the source literary text are to be taken into account, but also the influential elements from the target perspective, such as the linguistic and cultural differences and the target readers.

Translated text should be faithful to the original. The original text is like a wife who happens to be very demanding, and translator tries hard to be faithful to her/it. It is a fact translating prose is fairly easy as compared to poetry. Robert Frost once said, "Poetry is what

gets lost in translation”. (Bassnett and Lefevere 57) He was perhaps of the opinion that poetry cannot be translated.

Translator should be faithful to both the languages i.e. the source language and target language. There are rules and cultural differences that he has to be taken into consideration in both the languages. It is difficult to express exactly the same meaning in another language at times. Translator should do it with a near best alternative word. There are some words in the source language whose meaning escape, not only the general public but also the dictionaries. There are slangs or colloquial expressions which have a local and temporary meaning. Translator should have enough common sense and intuition to come up with the closest possible word for it.

In a translational venture, faithful rendering of the original text is more often “an aspiration beyond reach”. It is generally agreed that mere technical skills is not enough for a good translation, because, besides correct conveying of linguistic detail, it has to mediate, for the benefit of readers as much as possible, of the author’s mind-set, his medium and his main narrative concerns. This is not to say that the conveying of linguistic detail is an easy task. Much depends on the closeness between the source language and the target language.

Faithfulness is the primary criterion of translation especially in poetry translation. Faithfulness standard applied to poetry translation shows great flexibility. That is to say we should not only take care of the sound and form issue; more importantly is to keep the contents and image of the original poem. Faithfulness means faithful to the original works. William Cowper, once said, “Total fidelity is also unfaithfulness”. Faithfulness is the most demanding guidelines of poetry translation. It is a complicated concept as Chandrika puts it:

A good translation, it is said, often demands a certain amount of “faithfulness”. Now the question is faithful to whom? Whether to the author, to the text, or to the reader? The translator himself becomes an author, when he translates a text; so if faithfulness is due to the author, which author should be faithful to—the author of the original text or to the translator himself as the new author? If faithfulness to the text is the criterion, to which text should be faithful to—the surface text or to the sub-text? Again, if the reader is the one to whom faithfulness is due, which reader is it—the reader familiar with the original text or the reader of only the translated text. (Chandrika 61)

An excellent poetry translation must reproduce the artistic beauty of the original one, and should be faithful to the original poem’s theme; it’s just faithful to the literal meaning of words, so absolute faithfulness is impossible. In normal practice it is believed that the translation is not faithful to the original, but Borges affirmed, in earnest, that an original can be unfaithful to a translation. Translation according to him enriches or surpasses the original. A good poem according to him is untranslatable as it involves not only transfer of meaning, but also the intonation and the rhythm of that language. Translations of poem should demand liberties. It is long experimental game of chance played with omissions, additions, interpretations etc. Translation is not inferior to original; it enhances the work of original. It is wrong to say that poem is not lost in translation, but it is deconstructed and transformed. Change and

transformation add grace to the beauty of poem and makes it tasty for the readers. Translation should be honoured in every respect.

Accuracy is another factor which adds grace to the translation. It is an essential criterion of poetry translation. To get accuracy in the target language it is not necessary to render word for word, but the sense and force of the language should meet. Accuracy can be found by correct transfer of information according to a specific context, and the translators accurately produce the same impression on the target language readers as the original would have done on the appropriate language readers. This indicates that matching of sense between languages can help us in getting accuracy.

Translator sometimes uses his own experiences and beliefs to translate a text. This could harm document's accuracy and effect. His focus must be on his basic needs. Although experience may prove fruitful in some instants, but to remain mainly dependent on experience is not good judgement on the part of translator. Experience as well as abiding rules of translation would make translation precise and accurate. Experience and constant improvement in language skills can help in tackling the problems faced in translation.

This brings us to the serious question of how much liberty a translator can really take. For evaluating literal translations and literary translations, different criteria have to be employed. If it is the literal translation of a legal document, parliamentary act or news report, verbal accuracy and authenticity are to be strictly adhered to; that gives only minimal freedom to the translator. But there is greater freedom and subjectivity in interpretation in the case of the translation of a literary text. A literal translation will be documentary in nature, never tolerating deviation, never indulging in sub-textual exploration. In other words such a translation has no independent existence. On the other hand, a literary translation, (aesthetic in nature), is an independent text because it tolerates, and encourages deviations, interpretations, additions and omissions. Hence the literal translation of a literary text will not be faithful to its spirit, for the life of the literary text is its subtext or "in speech". In a literary translation the sub-text comes to the surface and the surface text may go under, and in order to affect this process, the translator must have the freedom to transcreate at times. This does not amount to unfaithfulness, for the translator is being faithful to the spirit of the text.

Translator's job thus is accompanied by an enormous responsibility and has to pass through a lot of risk. In the process he falls, as Newmark points out, "a victim of a constant tension between the acts of over translation and under translation". (Newmark 28) If a translator fails in his responsibility he should become victim of both under translation as well as over translation.

Translator's task is like a tight-rope walking and involves a continuous balancing act. Prafulla Kumar Mohanty says, "If the presence of the translator is felt the original author dies. To save the original author in the target language, the translator must make himself invisible". (Rajeshwar 96-101)

The translator's task is much difficult than the poet's; the poet creates, the translator recreates. His choices are both limited and dictated by someone else whose priorities become self-imposed. The translator is not a writer. He is condemned (or permitted, depending on how you look at it) to re-write only.

The translator is an uncommon reader who is always bounded in a two-language-two texts situation. Due to these restrictions imposed on him, he has to make comparisons in both texts. In the process he might discover the different methods in which these languages use sound, syntax, vocabulary, phrases and idioms and so on. He has to check how one language has to be explicitly stated in another language. In addition, he may encounter innumerable socio-cultural differences that might refuse to be mediated.

It could be argued that the most important part of translator's task is first to read and understand fully in some way the source text to find and interpret its meaning. As each literary text is deeply ingrained within a certain cultural matrix and has powerful archetypes of tribe, race and community embedded in it, the effort of translator in such case has a strong and problematic trans-cultural aspect. The meaning skips and slips through the interstices of disparate cultures.

Another factor, that can create problems in literary translation in general and poetic translation in particular, is the degree of understanding between two cultures concerned, that is, between two social groups who speak two different languages. Their traditions, customs, beliefs, oral poetic traditions and their literary knowledge, lifestyle, geographical positions, and so on, may be completely different. It is generally agreed that an essential part of culture is language. Translation is thus rendering a text from one language and culture into another language and culture. The interaction between languages is an attempt to integrate cultures. J. B. Casagrande says, "In effect one does not translate LANGUAGES, one translates CULTURES. . . ." (Casagrande 335-340) This culture-bound issue can be more problematic for the translator than the syntactic difficulties of the text.

Every good translator is a creator, or at least a co-creator. It is not necessary that a poet may be translator himself or a translator may be a poet. Poet is above all a translator, the translator of an unknown world to which he gives distinct form, a good expression. But it is a fact that if we commit least mistakes while translating a poem for its secret order, our translation would become successful. Like an artist who is the co-creator of reality, a translator becomes the co-creator of the work of art.

At the end we can say that in spite of all the problems that a translator faces still he tries to translate with the sense of the original text. Problems make the art of translation challenging and really amazing. Problems arise every now and then and are solved, or not. Translations are going on and will go on in future as well despite the challenges faced by the translator. As a translator works with so many restrictions imposed on him, there is a need to appreciate his art of work in the right spirit. Assumptions regarding translations have to be changed by the readers as it is recreation. A translator needs encouragement; outright rejection of the work is not desirable. A sympathetic approach is need of the hour.

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