

## **Translation: History**

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### **Abstract**

This paper is an attempt to focus briefly the history of translation right from the time when writing was not introduced to the present day when translation has become an essential tool in every sphere of activity. No doubt translation is an old phenomenon in literature and has gained much importance with the passage of time. Translations were going in earlier periods and are still going on with zeal and zest. It is believed to be a Roman invention. The most ancient work in translation is considered to be that of Rosetta Stone of second century B. C. In the last century scholars took keen interest in translation which provided best results. Translation has its own history and possesses glorious past and a bright future. We are doing translations for centuries and will continue to do it till world exists. Translations are taking place in every corner of the world which helped in improving the ways of life which is a good sign for its bright future.

**Keywords:** Facilitated, Inherently, Unavoidable, Administrators, Intellectuals, Theoreticians.

### **Introduction**

Translation is a human activity of distant past with great importance. Long before the innovation of writing, whenever linguistically different groups of early people used to come in contact with one another, communication between them might have been facilitated by bilinguals who acted as interpreters. In the twenty-first century with thousands of languages spoken all over the world, and ever increasing international communication, the urge of translation has become an extremely important activity.

History of translation is in fact a history of a long chain of efforts in making comprehension possible through interpretation and translation among people speaking several languages. In the twenty-first century with the use of thousands of languages in the world, and ever need of international communication, translation has become an inevitable activity. During the last century, translations especially literary translation has gained much importance by drawing great public and academic interest. The history of translation is the history of prolonged chain of efforts for making understanding feasible by way of interpretation and translation for those who use divergent languages.

Translation, according to Eric Jacobson, is a Roman invention. The Romans, unlike the Greeks, were unable to create imaginative literature in their own capacity. The Romans were more practical minded and lacked imagination and originality. In order to enrich their language the Romans sought to translate Greek classics. For this purpose they formulated certain pragmatic and realistic views on translation. Their theories of translation sprung from their practice of translation. As they were keen to enrich their language, their stress was mainly on the aesthetic aspect of the target language translation and paid less attention on the faithfulness to source language translation. Hugo Friedrich clearly explains this point of view of translation in the European context in his essay “On the Art of Translation” as follows:

In Europe literary translation has been known since the age of Romans; translation shows how the literature and philosophy of the Rom/ans gained strength from their Greek models. Ennui’s attempts to transplant Greek texts into Latin were at time still acts of submission that caused awkward lexical Graceism to enter into the translations. Later, however, translation from the Greek came to mean something else for the Romans: The approximation of the original without any real concern for the stylistic and linguistic idiosyncrasies of the original; translation meant transformation in order to mould the foreign into the linguistic structures of one’s own culture. (Friedrich 11-17)

Earlier translation was considered as a secondary work, but the traces of translation could be seen from 3000 B.C. The most ancient translated work is considered to be that of Rosetta Stone of second century B.C. After that came Livius Andronicus of 240 B.C., who translated

Homer's *Odyssey* into Latin. Many scholars like Quintilian, Cicero, Horace, Longinus, Catallus and Younger Pliny laid down different theories regarding translation and also paid serious attention towards the problems of translation. Among these Horace and Cicero distinguish between 'word for word' and 'sense for sense' translation which is applicable till date and has its significance even now.

The process of translation gained form and order initially through the rendering of the *Bible*. Before the Christian era, Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek. Translation gained much importance during the emergence of Christian missionaries. The New Testament was translated in a number of languages.

In England also people gave much importance to translation and the first *Bible* translation was the rendering of *Caedmon* (seventh century). The Wycliffite *Bible* translated between 1380 and 1384 was the first rendering of the complete *Bible* into English. Layman as well as king showed equal interest in translation for example, Alfred the Great, ordered that important and valuable documents should be translated into Anglo-Saxon. Literal translation came into existence around tenth century—whether Latin or from other languages.

Arabs also participated in translation and promoted it in the first half of the second century A.D. Syrians were the first who participated in translation as they were influenced by Greek methods. Their translations were more literal and faithful to the original as compared to others.

Additionally, the time of Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) is significant so far as translation history is considered. The spread of Islam and the communication with non-Arabic speaking communities such as Jews, Romans and others prompted the Prophet to look for translators and to encourage learning of foreign languages. One of the most famous translators of the time is Zayd ibn Thabit, who played a crucial role in translating letters sent by the prophet to foreign kings of Persia, Syria, Rome and Jews, and also the letters sent by these kings to the prophet.

Another era that saw considerable changes in Arabic translation was related to the translation of the Holy Quran. Salman-i-Farisi, translated the meaning of "Surat Al Fatiha" for Persian Muslims who did not speak Arabic. Western libraries still preserve many translations of

the Quran. During the eighth and the tenth century many translators translated number of works covering almost all the fields like algebra, geometry, medicine, philosophy, science, music and logic from Sanskrit into Arabic. During this period, great works of great writers like Aristotle, Plato, Galen, Socrates and Hippocrates were translated into Arabic. The most prestigious and significant translation centres in this period were mainly in Baghdad, Seville, Toledo, Cairo, Kufa and Cordova, where Greek philosophy and science were translated into Arabic. From tenth century to the early twelfth century these centres played host to a number of Christian philosophers who translated Arab texts into Latin and brought back to the West the Greek texts that were either lost or were not discovered. Many religious translators translated different valuable documents into Latin, Arab and Greek.

During this period Indian work like *Panchatantra* was translated into many languages. Stories travel from culture to culture, and their transmission through translation takes innumerable forms. The classic case is said to be that of our own *Panchatantra*. In an evocative essay, Amitav Ghosh (1994) has the following to say about *Panchatantra*:

These stories too have no settings to speak of, except the notion of the forest. Yet the *Panchatantra* is reckoned by some to be second only to the Bible in the extent of its global diffusion. Compiled in India early in the first millennium, it passed into Arabic through a sixth century Persian translation, engendering some of the best known of Middle Eastern fables, including parts of the *Thousand and One Nights*. The stories were handed on to the Slavic languages through Greek, then from Hebrew to Latin, a version in the latter appearing in 1270. Through Latin they passed into German and Italian. . . . [T]hese stories left their mark on collections as different as those of La Fontaine and the Grimm brothers and today they are inseparably part of global heritage. (Advani, et al 35)

By the fourteenth century there existed a full corpus of medical works in Spanish and Catalan. In France, Charles V founded a cultural centre in his court and his translators included men of letters, administrators and scientists. London too was an important centre and gained importance with the efforts of William Caxton, who was a skilful translator and set up his own printing press.

Renaissance in Europe owes a great deal to translation. It was translation that ensured the “wisdom and profit of the past” to the present and future, and in this task, Rome played a vital role. As J. A. Symonds says it in his *Renaissance In Italy*, Rome was “a factory of translations from Greek into Latin”. (Steiner 246) Many philosophers, administrators, intellectuals and men of letters such as Plato, Ovid, Seneca and Homer were translated and these translations changed the whole scenario of Europe to a great extent. It was during this period many voyages of discovery around the world took place and these voyages and the discoveries of new lands opened new ways in literature. People who had voracious appetite for knowledge and learning resorted to translations of the literature. The volume of translation increased tremendously.

Renaissance took place in England through translation. In Elizabethan England, Wyatt and Surrey are considered important for their notable contributions. Their main focus in translation was on the sense and tone of the source language.

Translators became important for Reformation and Counter-Reformation in the sixteenth century. They were of the opinion that religious writing in no case is superior and more important than other writings. Many translators translated Bible in the Latin. Developing vernacular liturgies was essential for Reformation. The rise of vernaculars shifted the focus of translation towards literature. The standard languages of the political and cultural centres namely, English, French, Spanish and Italian moved in to replace those like Catalan and Provençal which were losing ground. Literary translation came into existence in the sixteenth century, as in France, many skilful translators as well as poets joined their hands in Italy.

The seventeenth century is known as the age of French classicism. Translation of French classics, increased greatly in France between 1625 and 1660 and French writers in turn enthusiastically translated works into English. During this period equal development of translation was found everywhere in Europe. A few of such important translators of this period were Denham, Cowley, Dryden, Pope and Johnson. Among them only Denham and Cowley chose the extreme path of re-creation. Denham laid stress on importance and the need to recreate a text, while Cowley put stress on the extreme transformation of the original.

The nineteenth century saw a number of theories that flooded the field of translation. Joshua Furrugh Faizan quoted Joshua:

Shelley was cynical towards translation, Friedrich Schleiermacher suggested a separate sub-language to be used for translation and D.G. Rossetti proposed that the translation should show faithfulness to the form and language of the original. The Victorian translators gave importance to literalness, archaism and formalism. Unlike Dryden and Pope, the Victorians wanted to convey the remoteness of the original in time and place.

The Victorian translators and the Pre-Raphaelites were following formal rules of translation. Thomas Carlyle was a great admirer of German literature and translations in German. He made nice translations of German classics. Victorian's aim was to convey things in a similar way that would be found in the original i.e., faithfulness to the form and language.

In the twentieth century translation is considered as a sort of profession. In the contemporary age governments had translation offices for administrative purposes. Apart from government private firms also began to follow the trend of government and created their own translation sections to translate everything for an easy access to public. Translation gained pace in 1960s with courses being established in universities and specialized schools.

### **Conclusion**

Translations and its theories abound through centuries. Almost every age from the early Roman to the present period has produced at least a couple of competent translators and theoreticians, not to speak of the many who are lesser known. Yet the range of the theories that are fundamental, new and distant from the abundance of pragmatic notation remains narrow. Every great theoretician adds a new philosophy in order to smooth the way of translation for translators. However basic problems and controversies remain same down the ages. Each translator finds his own ways, methods, and solutions within the limits of the socio-linguistic and cultural factors.

In the twentieth century also, as had happened during the Middle Ages, the languages and literatures that were considered inferior and unimportant gained worldwide recognition through translation. New areas of translation seem to be developing now including popular fiction for the mass market and film dubbing. It is only in the last century that scholars began to study it in

depth, which produced rewarding results. Though there will always remain problems associated with translation and its theories, but it will continue its journey.

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