Translation as Transmission: Knowledge, Culture and Ideology

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Abstract

Literature is translated often with a purpose to transmit knowledge to the other social group which could not understand the original language in which it is written. However, it does not stop with transmitting only the knowledge but, it goes a step further and transmits ideas and ideologies of the actual readers to the readers of the 'other' society. Most of the translated texts are not written for the particular audience but are written to make the audience to get an aesthetic experience of the original texts and it is translated after getting good reception in the actual readers' society. This study attempts to trace the translated literary texts as well as literary studies and find how much they have transmitted their ideas and ideologies into the 'other' society which in turn affects the culture of the target society. The study also considers translated texts as a form of Ideological State Apparatuses, a concept propounded by Louis Althusser. The hypothesis of the research study is – often the culture of the target society is affected by the translated literary texts and literary studies in a way that the 'other' society readers could not find the imposed cultural hegemony.

Keywords: Translation, Culture, Ideology, Althusser, Consciousness.

Translation evolved during the first century BC when many collections of Jewish scriptures were translated into Greek demanded by the dispersed Jews who then were in need of their ancestral history. Their effort to study their own history marks the beginning of translation in the world. The ultimate purpose of the first translation is to discover and seek knowledge. "The aim of translation differs from that of a literary work – it intends language as a whole, taking an individual work in an alien language as a point of departure – but it is a different effort altogether. The intention of the poet is spontaneous, primary, graphics; that of the translator is derivative, ultimate, ideational" (Benjamin, 76). However, during the progress of the world, translation does not stop with transmitting only the knowledge, but it also started to transmit ideologies of a particular society or a given culture into the other society or culture. When Latin served as a lingua franca in the western world during the middle ages, the texts which are attempted to translate are only in Latin. For instance, translators under the reign of King Alfred,

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the Great, attempted a translation of Venerable Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, and Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. The purpose of these translations is to know the history of England in order to know how it was conquered before ages, and in an attempt to understand the people and boundaries of England in order to conquer. Other important translations took place during the middle ages are the translation of *The Bible* with a purpose to spread religion in England. This is also expressed by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig as:

> The "Old Testament" has never before been translated by writers seeking to return to the concrete fundamental meaning of each individual word; previous translators have been contented to put down something "appropriate," something "corresponding."… We take seriously not only the text's semantic characteristics but also its acoustic ones. It became clear to us, accordingly, that the text's abundant alliterations and assonances could not be understood in aesthetic terms alone; often if not always it is passages of religious importance in which assonance and alliteration occur, and both assonance and alliteration thus help make this importance emerge more vividly. (Buber and Rosenzweig, 168)

Chaucer, whom we hail as the father of English literature has also translated works of Italian works of Boccaccio. These translations shape and change the society in a way that it induces the ideologies of a particular culture or society into the 'other' who, at first show resistance but later consciously or unconsciously adapts to them. This is a demerit of Translations which are done across the world. With respect to English literature, the great literary figures as we claim are the ones who have translated texts written in a foreign language into English. For instance, Shakespeare's works are translations from various chronicles written previously. Either Shakespeare translates them, or he adopts the story from the translations of such chronicles. Most of the contemporary literary figures in English literature are also the ones who translate works from other literature. This is a practice particularly in English literature, where all of the great literary figures are mere translators, or their works are studied only in translation. Much of English literature or literature studied in English are shaped by various ideologies in the form of various texts of the world. There is nothing to look for uniqueness in English literature.

The foremost figures of the twentieth century who have contributed to the literature and literary studies are not English men. For instance, the literary studies take a different turn from the publication of *Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx, who was not an English man. Literary studies which followed and critics who are in the history of literary studies are also not English but foreign authors or critics whose works or concepts have been translated into English. The major shift in the literary studies is taken from the later emerged theoretical concepts of Russian Formalism and the new criticism. Theorists who belong to these two significant movements in the twentieth century either belong to Russia or America. Structuralism and post Structuralism

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are also not an exception to that since Saussure belongs to French and Derrida is an Algerian French critic and philosopher. Contemporary translation theorists have also pointed out this in their observations as "Translation used to be regarded primarily in terms of relations between texts, or between language systems. Today it is increasingly seen as a complex transaction taking place in a communicative, socio-cultural context. This requires that we bring the translator as a social being fully into the picture" (Hermans, 26).

The postmodern thinkers and philosophers are also not directly English as Foucault, Nietzsche, and other postmodernists are foreign. These critics have acclaimed fame widely across the globe only through translation. These translated texts do not stop only with transmitting the knowledge found in the other society but also try to inculcate the same in the target society. If we analyze the literary studies of the past century and the progress of the world in parallel, it is evident that the human evolution of the past century and their consciousness is much influenced by the critical thinkers stated above. The countries which do not have a rich literary tradition and the countries which have a rich literary history, both are subjected to the western metaphysics, especially the ideas and ideologies of the above social thinkers. Foucault is studied in a society, where his ideas can never have impact as it had in the western world. It is good to transmit knowledge, but it is not encouraged to transmit the culture and ideology of the one society into the other. This may create tension in the target society, and it will lead to havoc in the particular society. The society and its culture will experience conflict or clash in the progress of human society.

These translated texts and ideas of the western people are like Ideological State Apparatuses which Louis Althusser mentions in his writings. Ideological State Apparatus, according to Althusser means, any kind of social institution through which ideologies are imposed upon a particular society or a group of people. ISA which he defines as:

I shall call Ideological State Apparatuses a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions. I propose an empirical list of these which will obviously have to be examined in detail, tested, corrected and re-organized. With all the reservations implied by this requirement, we can for the moment regard the following institutions as Ideological State Apparatuses (the order in which I have listed them has no particular significance): the religious ISA (the system of the different churches), the educational ISA (the system of the different public and private 'schools'), the family ISA, the legal ISA, the political ISA (the political system, including the different parties), the trade-union ISA, the communications ISA (press, radio and television, etc.), the cultural ISA (literature, the arts, sports, etc.). (Althusser)

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Translations over a long period of time have tried to transmit the culture and ideologies of a particular group of people to another group. This has been done consciously or unconsciously which we have not been aware of. Contemporary translators should always take into account this mistake committed by their predecessors and should be conscious in a way that it should never occur again in history. In doing so, the culture of the targeted society may not get affected because of the translated works.

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