

Translation as Interlingual and Intercultural Communication

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Translation is not only a fundamental act of cognition and creation but a way of transcending barriers, linguistic geographical and cultural. According to Roman Jacobson, there are three kinds of translation: intralingual, interlingual and inter-semiotic. In the first type, there is translation within one and same language example, paraphrasing, rewriting. The second type, there is translation between languages. In the third type, there is translation from one sign system to another. For example, painting can be translated into poetry and poetry into painting. That's why it is said painting is silent poetry and poetry is eloquent painting. But we would like to focus on translation as cross cultural communication as each language is rooted in a culture. According to Susan Bassnett "Language, then is the heart within the body of culture and it is the interaction between the two that results in the continuation of life energy." (23) We can say that culture is the larger system and language is the system within that system.

Earlier theories of translations focused on equivalences: syntagmatic, paradigmatic, formal and conceptual. If linguistic theory emphasizes formal and functional equivalence, literary theories insist that a good translation must achieve stylistic, emotional and cultural equivalence too.

Let us look at the translation of a well-known poem.

What could my mother be
To yours? What kin is my father
To yours anyway? And how
Did you and I meet ever?
But in love our hearts are as red earth and pouring rain:
Mingled beyond parting

If we compare the translation with the original poem (Kuruntokai 40), we can see how Ramanujan has almost trans-created, the original into English. The poem speaks of the union of two lovers, whose parents were unknown to each other, as the lovers themselves had not known each other. But in a sudden upsurge of love, they become one as inseparable as the rain pouring on the brown earth. The original uses simple rhyming words as Yay/nay, entai/nuntai, cempulam/aniputai nencam. The rhythms signify affinity with difference and in the last but one the rhyme un cempulam/aniputai nencam reinforces the union of the different selves into one. Of course, the translation does not maintain the rhyme, but the rhythm is close to original. But more important is the image. The Tamil phrase, Cempulappeyal nir (Cempulam + peyal nir) is a wonderful compound in which cempulam + peyal nir is richly ambiguous. It may mean the water poured on brown earth,

or the brown earth poured on water. The absence of particle of location after cempulam is significant because the emphasis is not on water pouring on brown may modify both water and earth. Ramanujan gets the idea oneness in twoness, and the meanings compressed in the original are analysed and recast in the translation, and the rhythm and the splitting of words in the second part recreate the idea:

But in love our hearts are as red earth and pouring rain: mingled beyond painting.

But whereas in the original Sangam poem what is more important is compression and synthesis, A. K Ramanujan creatively analyses and recreates the whole. Mukaravsky said that the function of literary forms is to “creatively deform” the usual, the normal (Hawkes 62). And in good translation, there is a creative decomposition and re-composition of the original, and recovery of the archetypal that underlies the original text.

G.U. Pope, a Christian missionary succeeds in translating *Tiruvacagam* a great, Tamil devotional classic of 8th century because of his spiritual awareness and kinship. The translator becomes a “Sahridaya” in order to co-create a text to be shared by a community of readers. The reader in this tradition is engaged in a common pursuit with kindred spirits, the “Sahridayas.” Abhinava Gupta defines Sahridayas as

The critics/readers, capable of ‘hriday samvada’, who are well versed in literature, trained, and whose hearts have the ability to empathize with the imaginative world of the poet (Ramachandran, 1986:74).

But Pope’s translation of *Thirukkural*, an ethical literary work of the early Christian era, is not as successful as his translation of the devotional poem. Even the first chapter, which is a hymn to God, poses a number of problems. The second couplet suffers from over-translation and elaboration. The first part of the original simply asks “Of what avail is learning”, which becomes in Pope “No fruit have men of all their studied lore”. And the second part, which is about not worshipping, the holy feet of the Pure Knower (which may mean a Hindu or Jain or any other god) is translated as “Save they who Purely Wise one’s feet adore.” In the original the rhyme and the assonance contribute to a deeper resonance, but such a togetherness, which is essential to capture the original “dhvani”, is missing in the translation.

What Pope achieves in translating *Tiruvacagam* is a poetic synthesis, a condensation and an enhancement, a new gestalt; whereas the *Thirukkural* translation is more “poetical” and elaborate, closer to the original in surface form and semantics, but the “dhavan” and the recovery of the inner form and the deep semantics is missing. In translating *Tiruvacagam* he achieves a genetic equivalence and a cultural appropriation by invading the text-and not simply possessing the text as Steiner would suggest, but by allowing himself to be possessed by it. It is here that the Western notions of intersubjectivity, text, and meaning need to be supplemented by the Indian notions of togetherness in describing the text as “Sahitya” and the reader as “Sahridaya”. (Chellappan 95)

While translating an English poem like T.S. Eliot's 'The waste land' into Tamil also there are similar linguistic and cultural problems. A translator has translated April in the first line of the poem as Thai because it is the month of renewal in Tamil, but Vasantham or ilavenir kalam will be better. More significant than that is the translation of 'who is the man with three staves?' into "Yar Antha Thusisulakkaran". Here there is not only recreation, but transplantation of the concept in new culture.

Such translations achieve an instantaneous flash of recognition in the phrase of Leon Burnett. The reformulation is creative synthesis. In linguistic terms, "Two spheres of languages move closer together through the medium of the translator to fuse at the moment of the contact into a new form, a new Gestalt" (Frenz,120). This means that a good translation recreates the original by fusing the two systems through transcoding. Back transformation need not always result in paraphrase-it should also combine and condense these components into new wholes obeying the rules of the new system. This is what possibly Steiner meant when he said,

At its best the peculiar synthesis of conflict and complicity between a poem and its translation into another poem creates the impression of a "third language" or a medium of communicative energy which somehow reconciles both languages in a tongue deeper, more comprehensive than either. (29)

The focus of translators like G.U. Pope is on transcending cultural differences by releasing a deeper universal language embodying a universal experience. But some theoreticians have emphasized the untranslatability of culturally embedded terms. As Bassnett McGuire points out, even an expression such as 'I am going home' can have different connotations in different cultures.

If the phrase is spoken by an American resident temporarily in London, it would either imply a return to the immediate 'home' or a return across the Atlantic depending on the context in which it is used, a distinction that would have to be spelled out in French. (40)

Similarly, the term¹ 'housewife' and the Tamil equivalent 'illakkizhatthi' or 'veettukkari' are structurally and semantically alike, but culturally their connotations are quite opposite. Bassnett-McGuire also refers to different connotations of 'democratic' in expressions such as,

- The American Democratic Party
- The German Democratic Republic
- The Democratic Wing of the British Conservative Party. (41)

But the very untranslatability can be a source of creativity. A semiotic approach to translation defines cultures as the functional correlation of different sign systems (Lotman et. al (1975) and inappropriateness of certain alternatives in translation has to do with culturally determined semiotic restraints. (Hatim and Mason, 1990)¹

If translation begins at the preverbal stage which we would call inter-semiotic space; the target text will emerge through ‘complicity in conflict’ with the source text, and there will be convergence and divergence both, linguistically and culturally. This will result in the extension of the creative potential of the translator as well as the target language. The transplantation of meaning will release bilingual creativity and contribute to cultural hybridity.

Poststructuralist paradigms of language and translation focus on differences based on Derrida’s view. Derrida formulates this view of translation based on Benjamin’s view of pure language which means a kinship of languages which rests in the intention underlying each language as a whole – an intention, however, which no single language can attain by itself but which is realized only by the totality of their intentions supplementing each other: pure language. (Benjamin, P.74)

According to Derrida,

Translation is a moment in the growth of original which will complete itself in enlarging itself... And if the original calls for a complement, it is because at the origin it was not there without fault, full, complete, total, identical to itself. (“Des tours de Babel”, p.188, quoted in Venuti)

Lawrence Venuti explains it thus,

The ‘mobility’ or ‘fault’ in the original is what Derrida has described as *difference*, the signifying movement in language whereby the signified is an effect of relations and differences along a potentially endless chain of signifiers and therefore is always differential and deferred, never present as a unity. (P.7)

Hence the emphasis is on plurality of meaning which is not a finished product, but continuous process and translators discover meaning as differential plurality along an endless chain of signifiers (Derrida, 1968).

According to Sherry Simon,

The poststructuralist paradigms of communication have made translation a figure of dramatic indeterminacy invested less with a confident mission of mediation than with the power to reveal the aporia of communication and the irremediable distance between language and the world of reference. At the same time, however, the inevitable displacements and non-equivalencies of translation have come to represent modes of creation, mechanisms for engendering new meanings and forms. (160)

According to Maria Tymoczko, translation is (now) seen not as a locus of equivalence but as locus of “difference”, (158) based on the poststructuralist view of language. Post-colonial theorists

like Homi Bhabha have developed the notion of hybridity and Third space in which the emphasis is on cultural encounter and difference. This concept of hybridization can be traced in Bakhtin to whom even a single sentence can be double voiced and a language can represent another language while still retaining the capacity to sound simultaneously both outside it and within it. Bakhtin says:

A “hybrid construction” is an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical and compositional markers, to a single speaker, one that actually contains within it two utterances, two manners of speech, two styles, two “languages”, two semantic and axiological systems. (Bakhtin, (1994, 304-5)

Bhabha extends this notion to study the representation in Post-colonial writing and makes Bakhtin’s notion “an active moment of challenge and resistance to the dominant cultural power its shifting forces and fixities” (1994, 112). To Bhabha,

Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other “denied” knowledge enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority – its rules of recognition. (114)

Commenting on this, Micheal Wolf says, Hybridity is thus not simply a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures in a dialectical play of “recognition” and cannot be discussed as an issue of cultural relativism. He further says

Bhabha’s concept of hybridity can thus be viewed as radically heterogeneous and discontinuous, a dialectical articulation that involves a new perspective of cultural representation. Cultural difference is no longer seen as the *source* of conflict, but as the *effect* of discriminatory practices; the production of cultural differentiation becomes a sign of authority. This changes the value of difference and its rules of recognition (1994, 114)

He then says that third space, neither self nor the other and meaning is produced beyond cultural borders and is principally located in the Third Space, a sort of “in-between space” located between existing referential systems and antagonisms. (135) This kind of hybridity seems to be a common feature of Post-colonial writing and translations.

Whereas translation with empathy achieves a creative synthesis of the two systems, hybridity prevents assimilation of a culture by a dominant culture. But such translations are more valuable in the case of novels as the novel itself is called a cultural hybrid and the child of clash of cultures. In both the cases translations are mediators between cultures: Whereas translations with empathy discover the deeper unity between cultures ignoring differences, translations focusing on differences contribute to cultural hybridity and recognition of differences. Probably the former type will be more

suitable for translating poetry and the latter for translating fiction because poetry is metaphoric and fiction is metonymic.

To conclude, in the context of globalization fluent translation is becoming popular but leads to acculturation by domesticating the foreign culture by making the reader recognize his own culture in the other culture. Though it makes the translation more consumable it results in commodification of culture. As Martin Cortazzi says, ‘Culture is not just a noun. It is neither static nor an object. It is also a verb, an active process of meaning making and contest over definition’ (Street,1993:25). Though languages in a way limit our perception of cultural diversity they are the only means to discover the diversity. Translations contribute to the growth of meaning in the languages as well as the translators and the learners. This we can illustrate with reference to Robert Frost’s lines “And miles to go before I sleep and miles to go before I sleep”. Here the emphasis is not on completion, but continuation.

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