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PRACTICING LITERARY TRANSLATION
A SYMPOSIUM BY MAIL – ROUND NINE

Moderator : : V. V. B. Rama Rao, Ph.D.

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Literary Translation – Art or Science?

Before taking up again the thread of ‘Compensation’ in continuation of Round Eight, let me provide a quick recap at what I tried to put across in an essay in this journal -- ‘Literary Translation - Art or Science,’ in May 2005 issue, <http://www.languageinindia.com/may2005/raotranslation1.html>.

It was my attempt to state that applied linguistics could be a tool to assess literary translation. Examples were given of the English renderings of the great *Tirukkural*. The three samples were from the renderings of Manickavasagam (Richa 2004), Mahajan (Sahitya Akademi 1979 and Rev G.U.Pope (Oxford 1886).

Selected *kurals* were reproduced in a kind of broad transcription for those who know Tamil. Each rendering was marked with asterisks by way of marking, one to indicate ‘Communicative,’ two to indicate ‘Appealing, Artistic,’ and three to indicate ‘Impressive, Artistic, Memorable.’ These markings were based on a broad and quick linguistic analysis, while saying that these are no value judgements and all renderings did serve a valuable function.

Professor Suresh Kumar’s Hypothesis of the Law of Compensation

Now to Professor Suresh Kumar’s tentative hypothesis towards a ‘Law of Compensation.’ It is not a scientific law like the laws of Nature but more ‘probabilistic.’ Translation losses are ‘gaps,’ a concomitant feature of communication. But a practitioner succeeds in spite of gaps because there is compensation too found by perceptive readers who make use of literary analysis within their reach.

Of the three possibilities of the rendering being inferior, superior or at par with the source text, the third is usually attempted and achieved when the concept of compensation is applied. The meaning of the source text in its various modes within the text-world may vary from practitioner to practitioner and this is easily appreciated within the scope of Discourse Analysis, which talks about the ‘situatedness,’ ‘context’ of the literary text.

An Application

Here are reproduced the Source text of a Hindi poem by the renowned poet Sumitranandan Pant (in a kind of broad transliteration) and its English rendering by W. M. Murray, and Suresh Kumar’s analysis, observations and comments to drive home the validity of the concept of ‘Compensation’.

aah dhartee kitanaa deteehai

*maine chutpan me chipkar paise boyE the
 socha thaa
 paisonke pyaare peD ugenge
 rupiyon ki kaldar madhur fasle khankengee
 aur phool phool kar moTa seth banoonga
 par banjar dhartee mE ek na ankur phoota
 bandhyaa mittee nE na ek bhi paisa ugala
 sapne na jaane kahan mitE kab dhool hogayE
 mei hatash ho baat johtaa rahaa dino tak
 bala kalpanaake aplak paavaDe bichakar
 mei abodh thaa meine galat beej boyE the
 mamataa ko ropaa thaa trishnaa ko seenchaa thaa.*

Comparison and Contrast

Fruits of earth	<i>dhartee kitnaa dEtee hai</i>
Childhood	<i>chutpan</i>
?	<i>chipkar</i>
in the year	?
? penny trees	<i>paison ke pyaare pED</i>
I heard the air ... with the	?
Ah fantasy	<i>par</i>
?	<i>bandhyaa miTTee</i>
not one tree appeared	<i>na ek bhee paisa ugala</i>
on hand and knees	<i>baala kalpanaa ke aplak pavaDE bichakar</i>
I searched for a sign of growth	<i>baat johtaa rahaa dono tak</i>
Stared into darkness	<i>mei hataash ho</i>
What a fool I was	<i>mei abodh thaa</i>
I gathered the fruit I had sown	<i>meinE galat beej boyE the</i>
?	<i>mamataa kO rOpaa thaa</i>

I had watered coin

trishna ko seencaa thaa

Fruits of Earth

Observations

1. Loss without compensation is marked with ‘?’

(a) qualifying expressions with emotive effect – *chipkar, pyaare, madhur* Effect lost in the TT (Target Text)

(b) cases on intra-textual synonymy with stylistic import (synonymy in variation) marked with emphasis : *banjar dhartee, mamtaa ko ropaa thaa* Effect of emphasis lost in the TT

2. Loss compensated:

(a) Loss of plainness of referential expressions (I) *par ...* (ii) *mei abodh thaa* adequately compensated by emotive expressions (i) Ah fantasy (ii) ‘what a fool I was’

(b) Conversely, loss of emotivity of *aah dhartee kitnaa dEteehai* is less than adequately compensated by referential expression ‘fruits of the earth’.

Comments

1. TT, as a whole, enjoys translational equivalence with ST (Source Text), as is evident by the identical character of prepositional pattern of texts.
2. It is the dimension of expression system, which suffers losses.
3. It maybe argued that the losses do not materially effect the total literary effect in the TT when viewed in the context of literary culture of English. Further, uncompensated losses are overshadowed by the higher level of gains made in other cases (refer to the probability, Translation is better than the original).
4. It may be noted that the presence of ‘in the year’ in TT not corresponding to any expression in ST is non functional and is rather out of bounds for our purpose – the application of the concept or law. It is not a gain as nothing is lost.
5. On the positive side (regardless of reference to loss-gain principle), the TT had been able to preserve the literary effects created by metaphoric devices unusual collocations in the ST by going for the literal rendering of the specific expressions.
paison ke pyaare pED ugEnge Penny trees would grow
rupiyon ki kaldaar fasle silvery ringing of the clustered crop
sapnE na jaane kaha miTe kab dhool ho gaye swallowed in dust, blighted my dream
6. Conversely, the same objective has been achieved by going in for free translation of another set of specified expressions:
Mai hataash ho baat johata rahaa dino tak on hand and knees

Baala kalpana ke aplak paavDe bichaakar I scratched for a sign of growth, stared into darkness. In this case equivalent effect is preserved.

7. Conclusion: TT is as close to the ST as possible and as free as necessary. It makes a happy reading of a Hindi poem in English translation.
8. Our findings do not confirm Robert Frost's observation that poetry is that which is lost in translation.

Yet Another Example and Analysis

Here is the analysis of a Telugu poem rendered into English by three native speakers of Telugu who had "English" education. The following is the broad transliteration of a very recent poem in Telugu. The names of the translators, who rendered it into English, are not mentioned for obvious reasons while reiterating that the analysis refrains from implying any value judgement in this academic endeavour. Here my point is that there may be deviance but not loss since the target reader of the poem in English does not know Telugu.

For analysis, the poem is divided into units which are not there either in the Source Text or Translated Text.

oDDuna O khaaLee paDava

(Telugu Original) Raamaa Chandramouli

1.praashnE tappainappuDu

javaabu koodaa tappE avutundi

aatma shodhanantE tanuvantaa prashna gaayaalni dharinchadamE

2.prashna

eppuDoo oDduna kattesina khalee padava

gata jeevanayaana sanklishTatalanu vishleshishtoo

ceyalavalasina tappanisari prayaaNaanni nirdeshincedi

3.prayaaNam tappanapuDu

aDugulanu sandhinchukOdam anivaaryam

4.prati praatah sayam sandhyalalo akaashanni

oka tellani kongala danDu jayistoo povaDanni coostoonE unnaanu

5.deham nundi kOrika nishkramistE

manishi sendritamaina maTTi laa saaravantamautaaDaa

6.ceTTu okka aakunu kooda migulcukOkundaa tyagistEnE kaani

vasantam oka ritu raagamai varshincadu.

(15 lines)

The substance of the poem in English

1. When query/question itself is wrong, erroneous, the answer too would without fail/ invariably, be wrong. Soul-searching does only mean wearing the question wounds s all over the body.
2. Question/Query always/ ever a vacant/unoccupied boat that goes on analyzing the complexities of the life journey of the past.
3. When travel/journey/ voyage is unavoidable, it is inevitable to 'join' steps. The poetic suggestion is joining the arrow to the bowstring.
4. At every dawn and dusk, I have been noticing/observing/seeing a flock of white storks winning the sky.
5. If Desire exits from the Body, would Man become fertile like soil given organic fertilizer.
6. Unless the tree sacrifices without keeping for itself even a single leaf, Spring becoming a seasonal song/tune would not rain small tender leaves.

Translation A

AN EMPTY BOAT ON THE BANK

1. When the question itself is wrong,
The answer invariably would be wrong
The self-introspection is
Nothing but cladding wounds
On the entire body

2. The question is always
An anchored empty boat on the bank
Analyzing the complexities of
Determining the inevitable voyage to be undertaken.

3. When the journey is unavoidable,
Setting the feet is invariable.

4. I've been just gazing the white flock of cranes that
Conquer the sky every dusk and dawn

5. If desire extinguishes from the body
Does a man get fertilized like
Organic manure?

6. Unless the tree sacrifices,
Shedding each of its leaves,
The spring cannot rain
Sprouts of the seasonal tunes.

(20 lines)

Translation B

AN EMPTY BOAT ON AN UNKNOWN SHORE

1. When a wrong question is transplanted,
It sprouts invariably a wrong answer!
What is soul search?
Is it not the physical body oozing
From its umpteen open wounds?

2. A question is an empty boat
Anchored near an unknown shore!
On its time worn out face, the imprints and reflections
Of past tumultuous experiences
Prepares the path of tomorrow's odysseys

3. In a must journey, it is necessary to prepare your feet for farther onslaught

4. I keep seeing everyday, in dawn and dusk

A flock of flying white cranes

Crossing victoriously the infinite sky

5. Can the exit of desire from this earthen body

Transform this man like fertile soil?

6. Unless the tree shades all its leaves,

The song of spring cannot rain

Countless sprigs!

(19 lines)

Translation C

One vacant boat on the bank

1. When the query itself is incorrect

Answer too would be incorrect

Self-searching is only wearing query wounds all over the body

2. Query

Always an unoccupied boat secured on the shore

Analyzing the complexities of life past

Directs the travel to be undertaken when inevitable

3. When travel is inescapable

Stringing the bow of the steps is unavoidable

4. At every dawn and dusk I have been noticing

A flight of storks passing scoring victory over the sky

5. If desire exits from the body

Would Man, like soil with organic fertilizer, become fertile

6. Unless the tree sheds every leaf keeping none for itself

Spring, becoming one seasonal tune wouldn't rain tender sprouts.

(15 lines)

Observations

The length of the ST is 15 lines and only in TT- C the number is retained. In both A and B , the number is raised to twenty and nineteen respectively.

The title of the poem in the TTs A and B starts with an article ‘an’ before empty boat while in Telugu it is a numeral one boat *oka padava*.

The structure of the Source Text is

1. adverbial – assertion
2. assertion
3. adverbial _ assertion
4. statement
5. adverbial _ interrogation; could be rhetorical question or even an exclamation
6. adverbial _ emphatic assertion

It is worth noting that there are no marks of punctuation at the end of the lines except hyphens at the end of lines seven and fifteen. There are no divisions either, though for the sake of analysis they are given, though not without a little trepidation.

First the title of the poem:

Translation A calls it: An Empty Boat on the Bank. ‘An’ is a grammatical particle but in Telugu it is used as a numeral, one.

Translation B calls it: An Empty Boat on an Unknown Shore. “unknown’ is not in the original.

Translation C calls it: One Vacant Boat on the Bank a near, faithful rendering.

Coming to the rendering part, section wise,

Translation A first:

Section 1

This uses ‘invariably’ for ‘*tappakundaa*’ while ‘surely’, a shorter word.. But choice of words is personal. As such there is no loss. Self-introspection is redundancy. Cladding is archaic. Cladding does not mean wearing.

Section 2

“anchored’ is heavy. The original refers to its being ‘tied’.
gata jeevanayaana in the original is left out in the rendering.
Nirdecistundi is not determining. ‘directing’ would be a near equivalent.

Section 3

SandhinchukOvadam suggests joining arrow to the bow. Setting doesn't suggest that. The word used is *adugulu*, steps, not feet.

Section 4

Just gazing for seeing/observing. Gazing appears a loaded word in this context.

Section 5

NishkramistE is not extinguishing it simply meaning going away, leaving or exiting. There is also the difference of transitive –intransitive.

Sendritamaina matti laa – implies soil manured with organic fertilizer. Would man become fertile like soil given organic fertilizer when Desire leaves the Body? (!)

Section 6

Migulchkokunda implies keeping for none for one's self as a remainder. *TyagistE* verbalization of a noun – poetic *okka aakunu kooDa* is not found in the rendering.

Unless the tree makes such a sacrifice, Spring would not rain becoming a seasonal song or tune. *Ritu raaga* is a fine poetic expression *raaga* means tune/ love/affection etc. *ciguru* is a fresh, delicate, tender leaf. (Wouldn't put forth (bud), fresh leaves)

Translation B

Section 1

New ideas are brought in 'transplanted', 'sprout' Soul search is in the nature of headline construction.

Interrogatives not in the original introduced

'umpteen open wounds' for wounds all over the body, '*tanuvantaa*'.

'Transplanted' 'sprout' may be attempts at explication by enlargement of the statement.

Section 2

'Anchored' is heavy since the boat referred to is 'tied ' to the bank, not 'shore'

'Unknown' is not in the original

'A question' is not signified in the original. It says only '*prashna*', surely with a purpose.

The rest of the lines in the unit are totally transformed. 'time worn out' 'tumultuous', to cite a few, are not in the original.

Unit 3

'must' journey is too informal/colloquial

'further onslaught' is not in the original

Unit 4

'crossing' is not there in the original.

Unit 5

'earthen' is not there in the original

'transforms this man like fertile soil'

'the song of spring'

'countless'

All the above are not in the original.

The first two (Translation A and B) are in the nature of *bhaavaanuvaada*, where 'loss' or 'gain' is difficult, and perhaps irrelevant too, to assess. But we can safely say that B has taken more liberties with the original. Translation C tries to be near faithful to the original and attempts to project the original with precision without making the translation either 'literal' or 'free.'

Readers are free to draw inferences and conclusions.

Literary Translation -- From One Bhasha into Another Bhasha, From One Language into a Bhasha

Talking of Literary Translation from a *bhasha* into English or vice versa, the idea of 'loss' and 'compensation' may be relevant since one of the languages involved is not a *bhasha* (an Indian Language).

Murray's rendering of the original Hindi poem, Professor Suresh Kumar showed, did not suffer loss since there has been 'compensation' for the English reader, who may not have had enough exposure to any *bhasha*.

When the language of both the ST and the TT happen to be *bhashas* there may not be any losses as such and hence no compensation either.

But a statement like this is not valid till sufficient proof is adduced to justify this hypothesis.

In the forthcoming issue we propose to discuss Tagore's **Where the Mind is Without Fear**, a very famous rendering of Tagore's poem by Tagore himself, first written in Bengali. We will also deal with some translations of this great poem into Telugu both from English and original Bengali into Telugu.

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