

Functions of Translation and Translator

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With the advancements in every sphere of life in multi-ethnic and plurilingual society of India, the need of translation has become more vital and crucial in our times. The “unity in diversity” concept refers not only to nationality but also to language, culture, social organizations and philosophy. Translation is the only means of providing us a fresh view of oneness, unity and commonality. Translation has become more of a literary necessity and has begun to cater to the demands and needs, not only of the intellectuals, but of the common man too. The interdependence at several levels—individual, societal and national, and growing need for cross-cultural transfers, have brought translation to the very centre of communication. The common ideal must, of course, be the source of that nebulous “unity” we talk of. Literary translations into and from Indian and foreign languages also help us to unravel, capture and preserve this ideal.

This paper tries to examine the areas of both necessities and possibilities of translation for our literary literacy and literary pursuits. The paper will also discuss the various methods of translation. The paper will discuss the qualities of a good translator also.

Thus, the paper is designed to focus on the need of translation, about good, skilled translators and the quest for literary pursuit.

Keywords: *Translatore, Traitore, Co-creation, Re-creation, Intra-lingual, Inter-lingual, Target Language, Source Language, Ubhaybhashapraveen.*

Translator Not a Traitor Now

“Translatoretraitore” is an Italian phrase which means “A translator (is a) traitor” (<https://www.altalang.com/beyond-words/traduttore-traditore/>)
One may have the idea that translation may be a second-hand display of literary merit. But this is a literary pursuit of rather another kind. This becomes the need of our times. These thoughts form the edifice of the arguments of this paper. In recent times, translation has become more of a social necessity and has begun to cater to the demands and needs not only of the cultivated elite but also of the common man. The interdependence at several levels - individual, societal, and national - and growing needs for cross-cultural transfer have brought translation to the very

centre of communication globally. In order to cope with the explosion of knowledge and to understand one another and to appreciate different modes of thought and different lifestyle, translation has become a vital, crucial literary activity. It is even more vital and crucial in the multi-ethnic and plurilingual society of India.

We are of the opinion that unity in diversity has always characterized the Indian society. This unity in diversity refers not only to national but also to language, culture, social organization, and philosophy. Translation has given rise to the immediate need to look afresh at the very source of Indian unity and Indian sensibility, and Indian ethos. It has also become imperative to see and understand how this sensibility and ethos is crafted into creative forms.

We think the job of a translator is in no way inferior to that of a writer. Rather his task is more difficult. A writer writes what he himself thinks. A writer usually projects what is stored in his own mind. Contrary to it, a translator has to first peep into the mind of the writer and then project it through his own medium. He has, therefore, to know very well the language of the writer as well as the language in which he is trying to transmit the ideas of the writer. He has also to know the culture and the tradition in which the writer has been brought up. He should also be well acquainted with the history of the region of which the original writer is a product, for every writer while writing, writes his own times knowingly or unknowingly. Furthermore, he has also to know the mood of the writer, because sometimes a writer does not use a word only in its ordinary meaning. A good translator should be as near to the original as possible. This makes the job of translator really very hard. But challenge is challenge and those who are interesting in doing translation have to accept the challenges, otherwise there is no compulsion on him to translate at all. Thus, literary translation may be considered as a co-creative activity. It is an autonomous literary genre. The translator should not care about criticism. He should interpret understanding. To catch the life pattern, he may prepare himself with a reading of available criticism of the work. He should ignore criticism of the translation. He could employ a knowledgeable reader for the accuracy of his interpretation, privately. A good translator should have the intellectual understanding and aesthetic involvement with the work he translates. A translation should have the pulsating life within it. Empathy with the writer and his characters is a primary requisite of fictional works. When the empathy is established, fidelity is the next thing to be obtained in a translation. It is also a fact that a rigid one hundred per cent faithfulness from the translator cannot be expected. Any kind of unflinching loyalty, loyalty to each and every word or the original may prove to be a shackle to the translator. Every translator worth his salt knows this. A translator should be granted a certain trimming right.

In Indian context, as we think, translation becomes an effective means of affording a fresh view, in addition to what one gains from his or her own language. Thematically, like any true international literature, Indian literature may be viewed as an integrated unity that finds

expression in different languages. But this unity has still to be demonstrated convincingly. And this can be done through translation only. This sameness can be captured by the translator of literature. Literary translation into and from Indian languages can help us to unravel our culture and preserve its ideal. New education policy has accepted that translation has crucial role to play in the development and progress of Indian languages. Some critics think even an indifferent and bad translation is better than no translation. So far India is concerned, there has been a long Indian tradition of bilingualism and multilingualism and the concept of “*ubhyabhashapraveen*” (a language expert who knows two languages).

Translation works have different levels of difficulties. In poetry, the physical dimension is the most different/difficult to translate. It is almost impossible to translate the rhythmic patterns, meter and onomatopoeic words. The experience of one poet is bound to be different from another’s. So, the translator should study and master to the poet and his mood as well as context. Poetry itself is a translation of one’s feelings. Then why should the translator be deprived of the liberty of translating the text in his own way? It is true the message-oriented poetry can be translated easily but not the music oriented ones. It is also true a poet can translate his own material, but a non-poet cannot translate poetry. After all, poets are poets, and translators are translators.

In our opinion, some other areas that challenge the translator in poetry are the culture specific items, historical and mythological references and other allusion, idioms, proverbs, colloquial and archaic words, pens, symbols, images metaphases, etc. Prose fiction, though considered to be comparatively easier, has some problems in common with poetry, especially the problems related to culture specific terms, e.g. how would Ishwar, Brahman, Mangala-sutra or the word Samskara be translated into English? Local dialects, whose rhythm, idioms, nuances, etc., are rooted in local tradition, pose a serious problem for the translator. Other problem areas concern words and expressions related to festivals, seasons, family relationship, social norms, idiomatic expressions, and dovetailing of tenses, merging the past tense with the present in the same story, but this is not possible in the case of languages like English.

The problems confronted in drama by the languages group are quite similar to the ones confronted in prose fiction. In addition to culturally loaded expressions, e.g. forms of address pose a major problem. How would one translate good morning, good afternoon, etc.? Also, the intimacy captured in the second person singular usage, equivalent to the Hindi tu (you), would pose a problem while translating into English, French, German, etc.

There are many problems of translation. It is not possible to retain all the nuances of the original in the translation. Another problem that a translator faces, lies in translating technical, literary, scientific and other terms. Term and terminology are also parts of the mainstream of the

language. While translating one must manipulate the terms and design them so that they are absorbed within the language. Further, a literary convention like the theatre of the Absurd would be difficult to translate into an Indian language.

We should consider the fact that a translation is not a re-creation of the original but a creation of one of its many possibilities. And for this a translator must know the basic disciplines related to translation theory, such as linguistics, semiotics and literature theories.

Taking the semiotic perspective, a three way distinction can be established between Intra-lingual translation, inter-lingual translation and inter-semiotic translation. Dealing with the structure and organization of literary text, different layers and levels of linguistic organization can be identified such as sounds, words, sentence structure and meaning. At the level of phonology, the questions of metrics, rhythm and principles of sonority, assonance and consonance can be discussed. Special attention should be paid to the distinction between stress-timed prosody and syllable-timed prosody. At the level of fiction, question of synonymy, antonymy and hyponymy should be discussed with examples drawn from some pre-selected text. With regard to syntax, the problem of grasping and translating complex structures should be discussed.

The process of translation has three stages- decoding, transform and encoding. There are three stages in the translation process. The role of a translator, the role of a reader, and the role of a bilingual literary craftsman. A competent translation comes into being only when the translator is able to perform all the three roles successfully. The process of translation involves two kinds of problem – problem of literary interpretation on the one hand, and on the other, problems of meaning or transfer through adherence to the principles of equivalence. Translation is not a monolithic activity, rather it is multifaceted and multi-dimensional enterprise. Translation may be of different types, depending on the type of text involved, the target readers the aim of the translator. Now-a-days, group translation is preferred to individual translation, as the collective effort could smooth out the problems better and lesson the confusion of the readers. There is a new method of back and forth translation, where a process of multiple translation is involved. It is from source Language (SL) to Target Language (TL) to Source language (SL) and again to target language (TL).

There are at least three requirements of a good literary translation. First, the translator should be faithful to the original and he should not make any addition or alteration in the original. Second, idioms used in the source language can be recreated in the target language to give the original colouring to the translation. Third, the translation should be as lively as the original. As translation is not a monistic composition but an interpretation and conglomeration of

two structures, so it needs bilingual competence. Thus, only the study of literary translations can become a valuable comparative critical exercise.

The primary consideration of a translator should not be to get his work absorbed within the native literature of the target language; but rather to present the work which can confront the target readers as an alien work. In this process the target language should change- and acquire newer shades – under the process of the source language. This will not only enhance the quality of translation but enrich the target language in a specialized way. In fact, language making or building up of new nuances is another purpose that a translation serves. A translator must weigh each word of the original and examine its connotations.

The idea of an absolutely faithful translation is non-scientific, as it is not simply a lexical business. Two similar words could have different or contradictory meanings in two languages. The more introvert the piece is, the more difficult it is to translate, irrespective of its being prose or poetry. The readers of the target language are the ultimate judge of the success of a translation. Since the translator is an interpreter, he should not be a blind hunter of words but a careful explorer into the realm of equivalence of meaning that is enlarged and elaborated by context. An interpreter is not really the one who distorts, but one who expounds, as scansion is the duty of an interpreter, and hence of a translator too.

The translators are also creative artists in their own terms. The literary critics and scholars usually have scant regard for translation, though its general usefulness as well as its importance in the creative activity of a writer are acknowledged. We can emphasize the amphibilingual status of a translated text. There is a need for translation as it is virtually impossible for the readers to know more than a few languages. In the USSR all the regional languages have a great importance. Since the regional languages of India share the same ethos and social norms, the problems arising of the difference in language structure are considerably lessened while translating. But while translating from western literature the problems are more due to the totally different social milieu. Translation has its own value.

Dwijendra Nath Tagore, the elder brother of Ravindra Nath Tagore, had once wondered why the latter was translating his own works. He was of the opinion that it was the responsibility of others to translate the poet's works. But he was proved wrong. Translations did have a great role to make Tagore an international literary figure. Nobody can deny this verdict now.

The translation of a literature work differs vastly from that of a non-literary work. A literal translation, transforming the factual meaning of sentences, could not be enough for the translation of creative literature. Though not fundamentally creative the translation of creative literature is also creative in a sense. One feels the need of translation while teaching comparative

literature. A translator is often called traitor. But through translation we have been acquainted with the variety of the literature of the world. We often judge the excellence of a foreign work through the English version. Translation are important for the third world countries, especially. If we want to reach out and build bridge amongst us, translation is the only effective method to help speed up integrating. For this a translator should have a fair amount of knowledge about the both languages. A good translator plays the role of a critic also. A passionate involvement with the original work helps a lot in doing the job nicely. He must have a knack to understand the attitude, temperament and philosophy of the author. Last but not least, translation helps reaching good literature to a wider audience across linguistic and geographical barriers. It carries emotions, feelings and fine nuances from one language to another language. Thus, it enriches the literary and cultural heritage of people. Hence translation is carried on as a baton of the relay race to the newcomers.

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