

CULTURAL TRANSPORTATION THROUGH TRANSLATION A TRANSLATOR'S DILEMMA

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Abstract

The translated text has to pass on information and also elicit the same response as the original text. It is this latter expectation that has a ripple effect and thus the effect of a translated text is crucially social. These texts thus have been repeatedly utilised from the perspective of social, political and economic agendas. It is this social context which makes it culturally relevant. The premise of this paper is to critically analyse the strategies adopted to facilitate authentic interpretation of the cultural symbol in the original text and transport it to the foreign audience. The languages in this context will be the Indian languages (Bhasha). The literary genre as the referral point will be poetry. The hypothesis sought to be established is that cultural symbols in poetry are contextual, individual and community specific within a geographical boundary and yet they can be re-interpreted and expressed in the target language with a different cultural context because the ideas, feelings, emotions are always universal.

Keywords:- *Literary translation, Cultural context, symbols, interpretation, poetry, strategies.*

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The process of translation has been defined and discussed by various theorists and practitioners to try to comprehend and employ the best possible strategy with the desired result of perfect translation. And to be truthful this has still eluded us. As a translator it is this dilemma that has to be addressed and this is my attempt to develop a strategy that will help us to fulfil all the declared and accepted purposes of the act of translation. 'Translation is a dual act of communication' (Brisset343). Irrespective of the source language and target language the process of translation should be able to transport information, emotion, feeling and intention of the poet from one text to the other. It may sound simple but we all know that it is not so because a text, here I'm specifically considering poetry, is not only words but has a world of social, political and cultural dimension to it. Along with this content it has a form with metre, rhythm, rhyme and so on. It is these myriad factors which are to be transported with the added on burden of authenticity. The issues of translating literature and specifically poetry has been expressed by Roman Jakobson in his essay 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation'

'In poetry, verbal equations become a constructive principle of the text. Syntactic and morphological categories, roots, and affixes, phonemes and their components (distinctive features)—in short, any constituents of the verbal code—are confronted, juxtaposed, brought into contiguous relation according to the principle of similarity and contrast and carry their own autonomous signification. Phonemic similarity is sensed as semantic relationship. The pun, or to use a more erudite, and perhaps more precise term—paronomasia, reigns over poetic art, and whether its rule is absolute or limited, poetry by definition is untranslatable. Only creative transposition is possible: either intralingual transposition—from one poetic shape into another, or interlingual transposition—from one language into another, or finally intersemiotic transposition—from one system of signs into another, e.g., from verbal art into music, dance, cinema, or painting'. (118)

This research article is an attempt to come to terms with the actual dilemma's faced by a literary translator. This is not an attempt to find a solution to all such anxieties of a translator; rather this is an attempt to zero in on certain iconic hurdles faced by a translator. I'll try to be specific and limit my boundary by talking about Indian translators

translating for the Indian reader who is definitely bilingual and at times multi lingual and is also a global citizen. The said Indian is educated and for him/her English is the first language and the mother tongue or any other Bhasha is always the second language. Theoretically, it may be reasoned out that the mother tongue is always the first language but the ground reality is that for urban educated Indians, the products of the so-called English medium schools English is the first language by choice because of the elitist status of the language in post –colonial India and also because of the importance of English as an inter- language for the globalized Indian facing the West. One may raise the question that why have I chosen to limit my readership by mentioning the Global Indian Citizen. There are two reasons for this. The first is if we look at the tradition of translation of Indian texts (I'm referring to the Indian languages) the focus was always the West, that is, the western readers unaware of the Orient. Here were translators of Sanskrit texts translated into English for the western reader. Then during the nationalist movement Bibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyaya's novel Pather Panchali: Song of the road was translated in 1968 by T.W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherjee. Similarly, Premchand's Hindi novel Godan: The Gift of Cow was translated by Gordon Roadermal. This was definitely an attempt to understand the east through its literature. But all these translations tried to localize the source text so as to make it comprehensible for the target audience. Also, the undeniable fact is that here the Orient was made palatable to the West and the dominance of the West decided the strategy adopted by the translators. Post –independence this changed as Indians started writing in what is termed as Indian English but most of them like Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao were published in England. They were definitely catering to the English born English speakers and the idiom and stylistic developments were geared towards finding a medium (type of English) which was adequate enough to transport the Indian milieu. Raja Rao had specifically termed English "as the language of our intellectual make-upbut not of our emotional make-up".(Rao5).That was nearly eighty years back and now with the popularization of so called English education we have a sizeable body of literature written for English speaking Indians by urban English speaking Indians. To name a few we have Chetan Bhagat who reversing the earlier trend was first published in India ,same about the hugely successful Amish Tripathy who incidentally is urbanising ancient India with his Shiva Trilogy. One may argue that this is cultural transportation, namely bringing ancient India to modern Indian bridging a gap of hundreds of years. But in the true sense this is reinterpretation of certain myths and how and what of it is not in the purview of the topic at hand. In this market driven world this is sound business sense but in the process we have two distinct categories of Indian writers-one, Indian writers writing in English for the urban elite and the other majority of Indian writers writing in Indian languages or Bhasha, as if Indian English writers and Bhasha writers represent the wide gap between India and Bharat. This Indian-ness of our culture is not being given its due thus I find it imperative that we talk about Bhasha literature being translated into Indian English not for the western audience anymore rather for the Indian readership for whom their mother tongue

has become the second language. Secondly, there is a vast body of diasporic literature where culture is being transported by the so called *translated man* (Salman Rushdie's description). here also the audience is the west. My readership is the Indian born and brought up in India travelling all over the world but an Indian at heart as described famously by Nobel Laureate Dr. Amartya Sen that he still holds an Indian passport and considers himself a global citizen or as the government refers them as non-resident Indians or Persons of Indian origin. This vast audience may be prulilingual but is aware of the culture and tradition of this great land. I am targeting this reader because it is time we start looking inwards, along with the assimilation of the so called other the west. It is with this background that I'll try to find out a strategy for translation

Poet Subodh Sarkar who writes in Bengali in his editorial note in the magazine Indian literature has opined that 'Translators are not the language mechanics but they are the gate-keepers of aesthetics, they are not the looters of originality but they are the baskets of human emotions being transferred from one basin to another river bed.'(Sarkar7) This is then the crux that while translation happens then transportation begins. This act of transportation itself is a creative process. During this transportation what is the liberty that the translator has? Here again I quote poet Subodh Sarkar according to whom 'it is a creative work to be restricted within the boundary of a given text which has its agenda the task of decoding from one language to another. This is not too much to ask for one should bear in mind that a good translation should arrive at a level where it should do the same function in the TL, as the original did in the SL .But I must confess that is something which is hardly achievable. We can try to minimize the gap between TL and SL, but nobody knows how much of it remains and how much is negotiated'.(Sarkar8) In this context let us try to get two samples of a poem translated and make a close reading of the text to understand how linguistic items can be translated a greater impact.

The poem in context is a Bengali poem by the eminent Bengali poet Shankha Ghosh and the poem concerned is titled '**Khabar, 27 July**' (I'm using Roman script for the Bengali words for all to be able to read and understand). This poem deals with the general sense of chaos that prevails in our country and is a cryptic collage of such events. A translated version of the poem has been published in the prestigious journal of Sahitya Akademi 'India literature' and the other version is in a collection of translated poems published by a reputed Publisher in West Bengal. I'll take three examples from the two versions.

The Bengali original

Khabar, 27July (title of the poem)

Paricharika Nigraha-OC 'r stri dhrita (1st line of the poem)

Dhoom ta ta thei (This is a recurrent sentence used as chorus to return to the core.)

(Ghosh 43)

The first translated version:

The News, July 27

Servant girl tortured-police officer's wife arrested

Razzmatazz-tra la la tra la...

(Maitra 41-42)

The second translated version:

Newz, 27 July

Maid molested—OC's wife held

Rockn'roll -dhoom tak dhoom tak

(Chakraborty 44)

I'll try to analyse the two versions and develop a strategy of translating such poems which have a localized background but also anticipate global issues. The variations in the title show the difference in approach. The first version is the literal version while the second version is the poetic version. Again the first version is correct English (from the point of view of grammar) and the second version has definitely used poetic licence to change the spelling only to reinforce the fact that the poet's intention is the creative representation of the real news as we know it. If we move on to compare the two translated versions of the 1st line of the poem then the only apparent difference is in the use of British English and Indian English. For Indians using Indian English 'maid' is equivalent to servant girl but in British English maid means a young girl, thus the use of the word servant girl is according to me targeted at the audience who is unaware of words acceptable in Indian English. The same logic can be used in the use of the word 'police officer' and O.C. as in the original and also arrested" instead of held. It is to be noted that by using police officer instead of O.C.as in the SL the rhythm of the sentence in TL is not matching with the SL. Now in the case of the 3rd example we find that both razzmatazz and rock n'roll are English words and importantly no such equivalents are there in the SL. Quite interesting to note that both the translators felt the need to add one extra word along with the original onomatopoeic words used by the poet himself. Both these words are there to transport the fervent, trivial action and the onomatopoeic words are again there to mean the pop culture. Tra-la-la- refers to the Beatle age pop rhythm which is related to sweet, happy music while Dhoom -tak-tak is close to the SL in sound and style; it also refers to the somewhat crass Bollywood-ish pop culture. My submission is that the use of razzmatazz and tra-la-la here is not suitable because it is unable to produce the same effect. One may question does the expression mean anything else than the mere fact that people are dancing. I think that poetry being beautiful and brief expression the poet here is also trying to convey the gay abandon of the elite (stars and superstars) who are unaware of the other serious events like the molestation of the maid. Here it is imperative for a translator to understand the

essentials of sound, its effect both as a sound and the meaning that is being alluded to. The sound tra-la-la is unable to transport the basic feeling of the Indian word. Thus here the original Indian word should be used and any reader will be able to appreciate the strong rhythm. It is true that I am discussing translation of Bhasha into English for Indian readers but I think this will be comprehensible for any English speaking audience without the help of notes.

I'll like to go back to discuss a little bit of theory regarding the purpose of translation and put the above mentioned strategy adopted by two different translators using the same SL text into the context of such theories. If the primary purpose of translation is transportation then the first characteristic of good translation should be fidelity or authenticity, but then the puzzle is authentic to what? I'll quote Roman Jakobson to explain my point. Jakobson says that '... translation from one language into another substitutes messages in one language not for separate code-units, but for entire messages in some other language. Such a translation is a reported speech; the translator recodes and transmits a message received from another source. Thus translation involves two equivalent messages in two different codes'. (114) The search for this equivalent is the main strategy to be adopted in translation. In the context of bhasha (in poetry) being translated into English then the closest equivalent should transport the sound, rhythm and complete meaning. The expression 'Dhoom tak-ták' is a perfect example of a code which has only sound but this sound is pregnant with cultural allusions and also metaphoric allusions when this line is repeated in the poem. The formalist theorist Gideon Toury thinks that translation is communication and this communication 'happens in translated messages within a certain cultural-linguistic system'.(17) The translated examples used as referral text here are examples of such messages embedded with cultural context and tra-la-la or razzmatazz fail to become the cultural –linguistic equivalent in this case. I'll further use the ideas expressed by David Bellos (a translator and Faculty of Comparative literature) in his book *Is That a Fish in Your Ear?* to prove my point. According to him there is a wrong notion that translation in the target language is considered to be a substitute of the original. The new creation in a new language representing a new culture can never be identical to the source text. In many ways it is an extension and expansion of the original and yet it is very close to the original in the sense that the translated version will always be judged by its closeness to the source. Thus the translator is always anxious to find an acceptable match in the foreign tongue. The criteria for acceptability, the touchstone for good and bad translation are a continuous process. I quote David Bellos 'A translation is more like a portrait in oils. In a translation, as in any art, the search is for an equivalent. It is not about being right or wrong as in school quiz or a bank statement. In translation, as in any art form, the search is for an equivalent'.(secondary source-web) In what ways does one find an equivalent? How close can it be to the original? This question is being answered by the analysis of the two translated versions discussed earlier.

Like a true Bengali I'll conclude by bringing Rabindranath Tagore to prove my point. Tagore's auto translation of Gitanjali fetched him the Nobel in 1913. Over the last century many have attempted to translate his poems in Gitanjali and also other works. Famous among them are William Radice and Ketaki Kushari Dyson. Their translations have been appreciated and it is a general opinion that Tagore's auto-translation was not good. I beg to differ and quote W.B. Yeats in my defence. I quote the comment he had made after his first encounter with Tagore's manuscript '... we are not moved because of its strangeness but because we have met our own image. . .' (259) This is the ultimate success of translation where a philosophy, culture has been transported to great effect.

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