Translating Indian Text into English: Some Problems and Challenges

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Abstract

Translation can be said to be a case of border crossing or nothing but transporting the perfume from one bottle into another. Many a scholars have defined the term translation in their own ways, but broadly speaking, translation is rendering the text from source language into target language. It is like changing the clothes of the same body. The translation of every genre of literature faces some problems and challenges. The present paper proposes to discuss these problems and challenges that bother every Indian translator while translating the Indian text into English. Some of the very general problems have dealt with here so as to show that whether it is prose or poetry, the translation of any work faces these translation problems. It will also help in finding solutions over these hurdles.

Keywords: Representation for the Translator, Proverbs and Maxims, Different Cultures, Works in Register, Domestication and Foreignization, Figures of Speech, Translating Poetry.

Translation is a case of border crossing according to Maya Pandit and nothing but transporting the perfume from one bottle into another. Many a scholars have defined the term translation in their own ways, but broadly speaking, translation is rendering the text from source language into target language. It is like changing the clothes of the same body. Translation has played a very significant part in the history of India. Both in pre and post independence India, translation has proved to be cement through which the bricks of diverse Indian cultures could have been cemented together. The importance of translation in the history of India can be told in the words of Jaspreet Kaur. She says, " For a country like India, it is a very delicate and challenging matter to deal with a national identity that derives its strength from its multiple layers of social, religious, cultural and linguistic diversity. Translators have always played a pivotal role in social and cultural change in society by expanding knowledge and information."

Translation also introduces and fuses different cultures that are widely dispersed and alienated from each other. It is the only medium through which multiculturalism with all its nuances takes place. As the above scholar says, "Translators have the power to act as connectors

between cultures and languages. Since English is the language of interaction and the most natural language for emotional and creative expression, in order to globalize and localize any literary work, it is mandatory to translate it into English." The Indian writers and scholars have understood this timely value of translation and hence have brought forth so widely written literature that portray life and culture of all the nooks and crannies of India. Since English is the only language which is acceptable without discrepancies and pervaded throughout the country, it was quite natural that the translators chose to translated the regional and national literature into it in order to acquaint and reveal the problems and sufferings of the so-far-neglected destitute by giving their literature a grand platform of English. Another reason behind translating the Dalit literature and the literature of the marginalized in India into English was to "Taking the life histories of the marginalized to an international scale in order to form bonds with similarly oppressed sections of various societies", which became a political form of action for a translator. This was done with an intention of "building bridges of understanding between the different manifestations of resistance, becomes significant"(Pandit, 154). The vogue of translating this literature of the regional Dalit writings that give expression to their inhuman suffering is going on since and after the independence. However, the translators also faced some very intricate and insoluble problems while rendering a particular regional work of literature into English. These problems have put forth hard challenges before the translators.

The present paper attempts to highlight these problems and challenges in the task of translating a regional and Indian work of literature into English that the Indian scholars and translators are facing today. So many studies have already been made regarding the problem of translating the poetry, fiction or drama, but here I have tried to explicate some very general but inevitable problems that hinder and affect translation. The very intricacy and complexity of the process of translation of various kinds of texts will be explored, revealed and analyzed here with an intention of bring out the solution to these problems.

There are many a problems that the translators face which pose difficult challenges before them. "The first problem faced by the prose-translator is finding terms in his or her own language that express the highest level of faithfulness possible to the meaning of certain words"(Haque). This is the problem of finding exact equivalences of the words and phrases of source language into the target language. Then there are some ambiguous puns, feelings, cultural nuances, humour and other delicate elements of a piece of work that create problems in the task

of translation. These hurdles obstruct and hinder the processes of translation and make it monotonous. Some of the most perturbing and harassing problems are as follows:

1) The Problem of Representation for the Translator:

This is one of the major problems that come in the way of translating the text of the Dalit and the marginalized. This problem arises, as Maya Pandit points out in her remarkable essay, as the translator tries to dig deep in the text of the oppressed in order to understand it thoroughly and for clearing some hidden or dormant obscurities that lie in the text. In her own words, "Words then become more complex signifiers which may hint at more than the realities represented. The problem for the translator is how to bring these dormant realities alive through the translation"(154). This hindrance is faced by all as the language of such literature is of the lower middle class section of the society which may mean something else than what the translator thinks. But if the translator belongs to the same culture, class and language, this problem can be sorted out with certain amount of understanding and efforts, as such a translator would have personal experiences of such things as have been described and narrated in the original text and hence he would possibly know the nuances of the obscure words and phrases.

2) Translating Proverbs and Maxims:

The second challenge before the translator is that of translating the proverbs and maxims in the source language into a target language like English. This becomes even more difficult when the language of the original writer is a typical dialect of one of the languages like Marathi which is spoken by his community and the class. This dialect may have special features of its own which may differ widely from the standard language, just like the differences we see in the Konkani or Vaidarbhi dialects of Marathi which nake them look different from pure Marathi. At such a time, "As each message (proverb) comprises both linguistic meaning and linguistic structure, the translator must attend to both in translating the message from the source language to the target language"(Wilson). The translator has to deal with both the linguistic structure as well as meaning of those words and it makes the task more difficult. However, the translations of such proverbs become imperative in that, "as they are heavily embedded in culture and reveal conceptual thinking, proverbs provide insight into a language group's way of thinking. This insight is reciprocal, in that it can provide a guide to the translation of texts not previously translated"(Wilson). The main problem while translating the proverbs is that of the plurality of

the meanings for a given signified. The translator has to take note of this and ensure that this plurality of the meanings is maintained throughout the translation. Freeda Wilson explains this problem with an example,

> Just as the translator attends to both linguistic meaning and linguistic structure, he or she must also ensure that the plurality of the meanings for a given signified is maintained. Examine the proverb *you can't be in two places at once*. Several meanings are evident: you have to make a choice. Being in one place means not being in another place, and you want both options, in addition to the linguistic meaning (you cannot be in two places at once). All of these meanings are relevant to the translation of this proverb**.**

3) The Problem of Different Cultures:

People of different regions or nations have different cultures and their respective cultural specific things which cannot be understood thoroughly by the person from the other localities, or even if he may understand the literal meaning of these culture specific words, metaphors, allusions, maxims or proverbs, he will definitely not be able to get through the always-evading connotations that underlie hidden behind them. Such an 'outsider' translator would also be unable to the purposes of using those expressions if he does not closely know the author and his surrounding culture. Arsheed Malik clarifies this problem in these words: "One of the most difficult problems in translating is found in the difference between cultures. The people of a given culture look at the things from their own perspectives. Many words look like equivalents but are not. They have special connotations, or have different focuses in different cultures"(216). For example, English word 'house' cannot be said to have same connotations a French word 'maison', as the cultural use of these terms in both the countries are different. Hence it is must for a translator to make research into the cultural specific things first before beginning his process of translation.

Moreover, the social relationships, Customs and Traditions are parts of a culture as well. Be it a marriage, funeral or festival, the story and the significance or hidden symbolism behind it becomes a stumbling block for the translator. Beliefs and feelings change from culture to culture, (Malik,216). Further, the religious elements, creeds, myths and superstitions of a particular culture also pose a difficult challenge before the translator. It is not very easy to get knowledge of these things from books or media in order to be able to translate these specific things. This

makes it very necessary and imperative that the translator must not be the 'outsider' or at least, must have thoroughly researched the personality, the environment and the culture of the original author**.**

4) **The Problem of Translating Works in Register:**

There is no problem in translating a poem in particular mainstream language which is commonly spoken by the people of the locality concerned. But, the fictional or dramatic works, especially poetry, written in one of the registers of that language generate problems for the translator. The register is a "variety of language corresponding to the variety of situation" (Essam's quotation from Halliday, 16). This variety of language varies from place to place and locality to locality having more than usual words and expressions specific to itself. The metaphors and the colloquial maxims specific to such registers cannot be explained easily without contacting to the specialist of the same locality. May it be poetry, drama or fictional work, the register-specific problems pose great challenge before the translator. Essam and Mustafa states this problem as, "The different Colloquial… registers are expressive to the ideology of the poet and cannot be insofar maintained in English translations. Mood loss in translation maims and distorts the original meaning for a great extent in spite of maintaining both the tenor and the field"(21).

5) **Domestication and Foreignization:**

No two languages are thoroughly identical and this is the reason that languages differ and also their respective cultures. Hence, there cannot be any exact translation whatsoever. When an attempt is made of translating an Indian text into English or vice versa, there arises the problem of either what is called by Venuti (Mariam, 25) as Domestication or Foreignization of the texts. The concepts of "foreignization" and "domestication" were first discussed by Schleiermacher in the early 19th century when he argued that there were only two possible applicable strategies for translation: "either the translator leaves the author in peace as much as possible and moves the reader toward him; or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer toward him"(quoted by Mariam, 25).

Thus, if the translator of the Indian text is foreigner, while rendering the Indian text into English, he will keep before his eyes the English readers in order to appeal them and thus he will less care for what the author says and deliberately describe the things as per the tastes of his

reader. The same will happen with an Indian translator if he attempts to translate an English text. Mariam says, "While domestication aims to reduce the impact of foreignness in the target text due to ethnocentric trends that stimulate the translator to elevate his own cultural references and keep them intact from other alien"(26), the foreignization of the Indian text also makes it less Indian and more Western. The translators of the present age have to deal with this challenge so that their work may not become affected by these both these drawbacks.

6) The Problem of Translating Figures of Speech:

As has been said above that the languages differ and their cultural backgrounds as well. Literary and cultural texts suggest rather than describe and hence cultural meanings are very specific and their connotations very with words in other languages. Such suggestive meanings are expressed through the use of figures of speech like, extended metaphors, idioms, simile, proverbs and allegories that pose a great challenge before the translator. It is mainly because, the meanings and connotations of the same words change in different languages. For instance, the 'dragon' is a sign of valor and strength in Chinese culture, whereas it is considered bad omen in English one. 'Owl' is the symbol of wisdom in English world, but it symbolizes 'ill-fortune' in Persian and arises superstitions in Indian culture. This change in the connotations and cultural suppositions in different languages create a big problem before the translator which is very to get away with. One needs to do a thorough research into the suggested meanings of these figures in order to be able to depict them in the exact equivalent words in the target language.

Another problem regarding this is that one has to translate the meaning expressed through these figures in the same figurative language in TL. Finding words equivalent to the metaphors and the proverbs, and then ordering them in the same figurative manner in the target language itself creates many other problems like, structural, aesthetic or far-fetched adjustments, etc. Only professional and well trained people can do this satisfactorily.

7) The Problem of Translating Poetry:

This is the last but not least problem dealt with in this study. There are many a problems that arise while translating a poem into English. General assumption is that translating prose is much easier than translating poetry, because the structure, meter, word order and rhyme are such things that are very difficult to deal with. The first problem in translating poetry is that of the aesthetic value or poetic truth which are conveyed through word order and sounds, as well as in cognitive sense.(Sugeng Hariyanto). Hariyanto opines that these aesthetic values have no

independent meaning, but they are correlative with the various types of meaning in the text. Hence, if the translator destroys the word choice, word order, and the sounds, he impairs and distorts the beauty of the original poem. The aesthetic value in the poem lies in the structure of the poem, metaphor and sound, etc., and if the translator fails to retain all these features same as the SL in the TL, his translation do not give the same aesthetic pleasure as the original one. We have already discussed how important it is to understand the cultural and other things while translating metaphors. So it is imperative for the translator of the poems that he should take note of it. Sound is another important factor that is anything connected with sound cultivation including rhyme, rhythm, assonance, onomatopoeia, etc. A translator must try to maintain them in the translation, because only then he will be able to produce aesthetic pleasure in his translation work.

Conclusion

In any translated work, only the semantic factor or truth (meaning or sense) is not significant, but the cultural-specific factors, register or dialect-specific factors, the figures of speech and the structure of the work also matters. Without having done with these problems that pose difficult challenge before the translator, we cannot say that the translated work gives full satisfaction and aesthetic pleasure as the original work produces. The real translator deals meticulously with these problems and takes care of every minute elements and details to bring the authenticity in his translation.

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