



PARADIGMS OF TRANSLATION THEORY

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ABSTRACT

The theory of translation is quite old and the act of translation is considered as the other Babel. Previously, literary translation was considered as a secondary activity, mechanical rather than creative. It was dismissed as trivial work and did not receive serious critical attention. But during contemporary times, the literary translation has drawn considerably large public and academic interest.

INTRODUCTION

The word 'translation' is derived from the Latin term 'translatus'. The prefix 'tran' means passing something and the root 'slate' means 'cover'. The term 'translation' has many implications such as alteration, change, conversion, interpretation, paraphrase, rendering, rephrasing, rewording, transcription, transformation and transliteration. But the specific meanings of the words are translating, rephrasing, interpretation, decoding etc. Oxford English Dictionary defines translation as "an action or process of turning from one language to another".(260) The New Standard Encyclopedia states that "translation is rendering of meaning specially in writing, from one language to other".(360) Noss rightly points out that "translation plays on the uncertainty of meaning, navigating between two languages, between two cultures, and revealing the gap separating them".[JCT 15,2002:147]

History of Translation :

George Steiner has divided the history of translation into four periods. The first period is characterized by the imperial focus and extends from the Roman translators Cicero and Horace to Alexander Phraser Tytler. The second period extends upto Valery and focused on Hermeneutic methodology of approach. Structural linguistics and communication theory was



introduced into the study of translation in the third period. The fourth period which began in the early 1960's was a reversion to Hermeneutic enquiry into translation.

Translation was always considered as an inferior work. But some serious traces of translation could be seen right from 3000 B.C. The most ancient translated work is done by Rosetta Stone in 2nd century B.C. Then Livius Andronicus translated Homer's Odyssey into Latin in 240 B.C. Scholars like Quintilian, Cicero, Horace, Catullus and Younger Pliny gave serious attention to translation and created different theories. However, Cicero and Horace influenced many translators because they initiated the distinction between "word for word" and "sense for sense" translation.

Even the Christian religious text Bible was translated into Greek before the Christian era. The New Testament was translated into many languages. Saint Jerome provided sense for sense translation of the New Testament. John Wycliffe and William Tyndale also translated Bible in the 14th and 16th centuries respectively. It should be noted that translation was promoted greatly by the Arabs during the 8th, 9th and 10th centuries. Many books on Algebra, Geometry, Medicine, Music and logic were translated from Sanskrit into Arabic. The works of Aristotle, Plato and Galen and Hippocrates were translated into Arabic during this period.

English Literature was revived during the 15th century and some important translations took place then. William Caxton was a prolific translator of 15th century. In 16th century, Etienne Dolet first formulated a theory of translation which advocated sense for sense translation. He laid down five basic principles for the translator :

1. The translator must exactly comprehend the meaning of the original author. However, he can clarify obscurities.
2. The translator should possess good knowledge of both the source language and the target language.
3. The translator should avoid word for word meanings.
4. The translator should use forms of speech which are commonly used.
5. The translator should choose and order words appropriately.

Dolet's principles emphasize the importance of understanding the source language texts as a primary requisite. Bassnett-McGuire rightly points out that " the translator is a far more than a competent linguist and translation involves both a scholarly and sensitive appraisal of the

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source language text and an awareness of the place the translation is intended to occupy in the target language system".[Bassnett-McGuire 1991:54] George Chapman ,the great translator of Homer agreed with Dolet's views of translation and urged the translator to avoid word for word translation. Martin Luther laid the foundation for modern English usage in translation in the 16th century. The act of translation was no more considered as secondary activity during this century. It was aimed at nativizing European languages and so the Bible and the works of Homer received the attention of the translators.

In the 17th century, many French classics were translated into English. Sir John Denham emphasized that the translator and the original writer are equivalent but differentiated only by the social and temporal context. Abraham Cowley in his preface to Pindaric Ode argued for freedom in translation and proved imitation to be a branch of translation. John Dryden in his last twenty years mostly translated the ancient classics. Bassnett-McGuire points out that Dryden in his *Preface to Ovids Epistles* (1680) focused on the three basic types of translations:

- 1) **Metaphrase, or turning an author word by word and line by line, from one language into another;**
- 2) **Paraphrase, or translation with latitude, the Ciceronian 'sense-for-sense' view of translation;**
- 3) **Imitation, where the translator can abandon the text of the original as he sees fit. [Ibidem:60]**

In the 18th century, translated works were rewritten in accordance with the contemporary standards of language and taste. Samuel Johnson, George Campbell and Alexander Phraser Tytler were some of the prominent translators of the age. In 1791, Alexander Phraser Tytler published a book titled *The Principles of Translation*. As Bassnett-McGuire says, Tytler outlined three basic principles:

- 1) **The translation should give a complete transcript of the idea of the original work;**
- 2) **The style and manner of writing should be of the same character with that of the original;**
- 3) **The translation should have all the ease of the original composition. [Ibidem:63]**

In the Romantic age, there are two attitudes to translation. One believes that it is creative in nature and the other view holds that the translation is a mechanical process of making known



a text in another language. P.B.Shelley was indifferent towards translation. Frederich Schleiermacher advocated for a separate sublanguage for translation and Dante Gabriel Rossetti suggested that translation should show faithfulness to the forms and language of the original.

The Victorian translators emphasized literalness, archaicism and formalism. Matthew Arnold laid emphasis on the source language text and was criticized for neglecting the spirit of the original work. The revised and American standard versions of the Bible illustrate the harmful effects of a literalistic Victorian translation.

The main currents of translation typology from the earlier times to the first world war can loosely be described thus:

1. Translation as a scholar's activity, where the pre-eminence of the SL text is assumed de facto over any TL version.
2. Translation as a means of encouraging the intelligent reader to return to the SL original.
3. Translation as a means of helping the TL reader become the equal of what Schleiermacher called the better reader of the original, through a deliberately contrived foreignness in the TL text.
4. Translation as a means where the individual translator presents his own pragmatic choice to the TL reader.
5. Translation as a means through which the translator seeks to upgrade the status of the SL text since it is perceived as being on a lower cultural level.

The development of communication theory, structural linguistics and the applications of linguistics to the study of translation effected significant changes in the principles and theory of translation during the 20th century. Good literature written in any language of the world is now made available to the rest of the world through translation. Prominent contributions to the study and theory of translation were made by J.C. Catford, Eugene Nida and Peter Newmark.

Theories of Translation:

J. C. Catford is one of the major contributors to the theory of translation. In his book *Linguistic Theory of Translation*, he defines translation as the replacement of source language

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text material by equivalent target language material. He introduced the phenomenon of total translation and restricted translation. According to Catford, total translation is the replacement of source language phonology and graphology by non-equivalent target language phonology and graphology. Restricted translation is the replacement of source language textual material by equivalent target language material. Catford considers meaning as a property of a language i.e. a source language text has a source language meaning and a target language text has a target language meaning. He also points out the difference between translation and transference. In translation the source language meaning is substituted by target language meanings. But in transference, the implantation of source language meaning into target language text takes place. There are two transrelationships:

- 1) Level Shift
- 2) Category Shift

Shifts from one linguistic level to the other like from grammar to lexis and from lexis to grammar are called level shifts. Category Shift includes structure shifts, class shifts, structure and unit shifts. Catford emphasizes that source language text are not absolutely translatable or absolutely untranslatable. He also discusses about two types of untranslatability: Linguistic untranslatability and Cultural untranslatability. Lack of formal correspondence between the source language and the target language leads to linguistic untranslatability. It can occur because of oligosemy i.e. an item having a particularly restricted range of meanings. Similarly, Cultural untranslatability occurs when a situational feature relevant for the source language text is absent from the culture of the target language text. For instance, the Tamil word “valiakappu” is untranslatable in English as English has no corresponding lexical item and ritual as “valiakappu” does not exist in English culture. The limitations of Catford’s theory are the factors like translator, his social and cultural background, his audience and his aim in translating, being ignored.

Eugene A. Nida, another theorist provides descriptive approach to the translation process. His approach is socio-linguistic and receptor-oriented. Hence, he takes into consideration contextual features besides the textual or linguistic features. He regards the pragmatic or emotive meanings as the most important factor in translating the message from the source language to the target language. He also bring distinction between language and meta-language and emphasizes this distinction is extremely important for the translator. Nida’s approach to the translation involves three stages:

1. The original text gets reduced into its colonels.

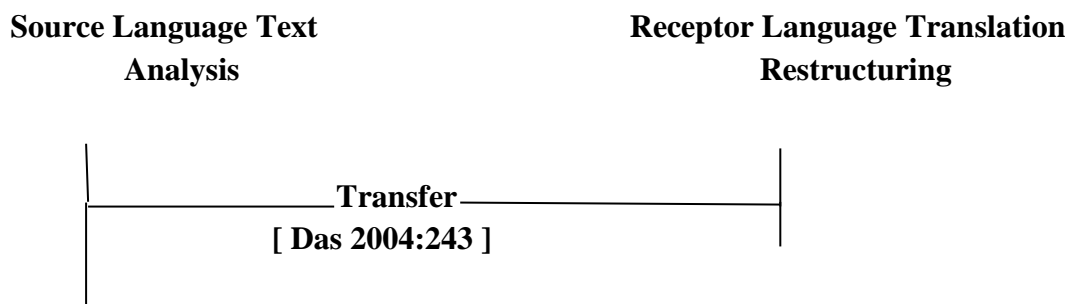


- 2.The meaning of the source language gets transferred to the receptor language on the structural level.
- 3.The generation of the stylistically and semantically equivalent expression in the receptor language takes place.

Nida believes that subjectivity cannot be avoided in translation because the translator becomes the part of cultural context in which he lives. The major focus of Nida’s theory of translation is the receptor and his reaction. He also defines two different systems for translating. One is the direct method in which the source language structure gets transferred to that of the receptor language through a universal linguistic structure. The second system consists of three stages:

- 1) Analysis, in which the surface structure is analysed in terms of the grammatical relationship and means of words and combination of words.
- 2) Transfer, in which the analysed material is transferred in the mind of translator from source language to receptor language.
- 3) Restructuring, in which the transferred material is restructured so as to make the final message fully acceptable in the receptor language.

The model of Nida’s translation process can be outlined as follows:



After the three stages, the translation has to be tested focusing on how the receptors or users react to it. A good translation also becomes lengthier than the original because whatever is implicit in the source language text is made explicit with more details in translation. However, the major limitation of Nida’s theory is its concern with the Bible translation. As the process of translation varies depending on the type of the text, his theory cannot be fully followed while translating other literature.



Peter Newmark's contribution to the translation theory is his detailed treatment of semantic versus communicative translation. The semantic translation focuses mainly on the semantic content of the source text and the thrust of communicative translation is on the comprehension and response of receptors. Newmark's translation theory provides a framework of principles, rules and hints for translating text and criticizing translations. He insists on treating the basic presumptions of translators in terms of a theory of communication. He also says that there are three functions of language: Expressive Function which is author-centric, Informative Function which gives the extra-linguistic information content of the text and Vocative Function which is reader-centered. Newmark refers to three levels of translations: Referential, Textual and Subjective Levels. In translating a literary text, the translation language is expressive and level is subjective. In translating a non-literary text, the language is informative and level is referential. Newmark also espouses two basic translation processes-comprehension and formulation. Comprehension is related with interpretation and formulation with recreation. Newmark further advocates two methods of translation: Communicative translation and the Semantic translation. In the Communicative translation, the translator attempts to produce the same effect on the receptor as was produced by the original on the source language reader. In the Semantic translation, the translator attempts to reproduce the precise contextual meanings of the author. But all translations are somewhat both communicative and semantic. This theory of translation is appropriate to translate any type of text. Thus Newmark's theory is an improvement of Nida's theory.

These theories prove that a translator needs much original genius necessary to recreate a text in the target language. The early principle "word for word" versus "sense for sense" advocated by Cicero can be seen emerging constantly but with different emphasis each time.

What is lost in a translation ?

Translation is a form of communication between the source language and the target language. It is an interpretation of the source language for the hearer in the target language at the spoken level. But at the writing level translation is regarded as the rewriting of the original text. Thus, translation is a text about a text and hence a meta-text. It reproduces what the author in the original language says and what he means. But the art of translation is quite complicated and the job of the translator is quite tricky.

Here are some of the pitfalls of translations:

1. Language is to some extent culture-oriented. So the translator faces the problem of translating certain culture-based words into another language with the different culture. For instance, Lord Krishna's " Raas Krida" is difficult to translate into English. Similarly the translation of " Love Play" for "Leela" seems to be inadequate and something is missing in

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such a translation. Further a word “ Abhimana” has no equivalent word in English and “pique” is a poor translation of that great word.

2. The words like *uncle, aunt, brother-in-law* have a lot of equivalent words in Indian languages. It is difficult to translate these culture-based words without taking the context into consideration.

3. The influence of mother tongue on the use of English by Indian readers creates sentences like “ I am feeling cold” instead of “I feel cold”, ”I am loving her” instead of “I love her” etc. Semantic compatibility along with grammaticality should be maintained while involved in translation.

4. Literal translation has its own advantages and limitations.” Block” in American English means a rectangular section of a city or town bounded on each side by consecutive streets. There is no exact word for “Block” in Hindi which can be helpful in translating the sentence like,” We used to live on the same block”.

5. Terms from Indian poetics like *Rasa, Vakroti* are just untranslatable in English. The phrase *Herculean task should be rendered as Bhagirat Prayatna* rather than *Hercules ka karya*.

6. A common Hindi expression *Tu Tu Mai Mai* in its translated version will be *You You Me Me*, which is very ridiculous.

7. Homonyms of Indian languages create the problem for the translators. For instance, *Upahar* in Marathi signifies Refreshment but in Hindi it means gift, while *Shiksha* in Hindi is Education but in Marathi it is punishment. *Rajinama* is used in Marathi for resignation but in Hindi it means agreement. Similarly the word *ashuddha* in Hindi means impure but in Kashmiri it means medicines. *Jal* in Hindi is water but *Zal* in Kashmiri is urine.

8. The Indian food items such as halwa, puri, kheer, jalebi doesn't have equivalent words in English.

Thus, translation is not an easy task. A lot of intricacies and complexities are involved in the process of translation. A translator needs to be a specialist both in the source language and target language in order to be effective. In spite of the difficulties involved in translation, a lot of scholars have engaged themselves in this process. As a result, Translation Studies have emerged as an area of academic interest. The significance of translation studies is that it encourages comparative study. It also facilitates the work of one foreign language to be



available to the people who don't know that language. In other words, translation studies enhances cultural transfer and promotes a feeling of brotherhood in the era of globalization.

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