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P.L. DESHPANDE'S *KHURCHYA (BHADYANE ANLELYA): EK N-NATYA*: A COMMENT
ON THE DOS AND DON'TS FOR A TRANSLATOR

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ABSTRACT

P.L. Deshpande, a well-known humorous author, playwright in Marathi had tried successful adaptations and translations of English literary texts into Marathi. But his article *Khurchya (Bhadyane Anlelya): Ek N-Natya* points to the difficulties a translator can face when it is necessary to take decisions relating to finding equivalence and to making the translated version suitable to the original work in the SL. This paper is an attempt to introduce this excellent hilarious piece of writing that at times criticises the translator's practice of blindly following the bilingual dictionary as well as it comments on the responsibilities a translator needs to keep in mind while in an attempt to suit the expressions in the SL to the target culture. The article by P.L.Deshpande reviewed here is a comment on how Eugene Ionesco's *The Chairs*, a completely foreign literary text in sensibility and presentation, should not be translated.

Key Words: Translator, P. L. Deshpande, *Khurchya (Bhadyane Anlelya): Ek N-Natya*, difficulties in translation, equivalence

Introduction

According to Elrud (2010 cited in Gui et al. :2022), Bassnett (2005) looks at translation as 'rewriting' and emphasizes the necessity on the part of translator to be able to renew/ renovate the literary aspects of the text. As Rosa (2016) examines, Bassnett also looks at the process of translation as a complex process which can never be 'unproblematic'.

The role of translator in the process of translation and the extent of equivalence in the process thus leading to the question of decision on the part of the translator have always remained the central issues for debate among the scholars and researchers in translation studies. The advent of globalization has brushed up the art of translation and has paved way for discussions across academic circles as translation has no more been restricted to the area of literature but has proved itself to be an important commercial skill and activity thus facilitating communication and activities in every field across the national boundaries.

P. L. Deshpande, the renowned and popular literary figure in the 20th century Marathi literature, however, had not only displayed his scholarly sense of the responsibilities a translator should be aware of, through his master pieces of translation from English into Marathi but his article *Khurchya (Bhadyane Anlelya): Ek N-Natya*

(Chairs (That were Hired): A Non-Play) that satirically highlights the problems a translator can face as s/he may get trapped between equivalence and renewal, also can be cited as a commentary on the decisions a translator needs to take, the responsibilities s/he carries throughout the process so as to transfer the essence of the original work in the source language through the target language and the likely risk of spoiling the impact on the reader if not taken the job seriously.

Pu. La. (as he was fondly known among the Marathi readership) has *Ti Fulrani*, an excellent piece of adaptation of Shaw's *Pygmalion* to his credit. Though rooted and blossomed in the Western land, he could successfully implant the theme in Marathi employing his incomparable sense of cultural appropriacy and mastery of nuances in Marathi language. His other translations like that of Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* as well as the adaptation of Brechtian *Three Penny Opera* also won accolades in the literary circles of Maharashtra.

ILR Skill Level Descriptions for Translation mention intercultural communicative competence as an essential ability to be a successful translator. Pu. La. displayed this ability as a translator of the texts mentioned above and also can be seen expressing his intuitive awareness coupled with scholarly readings of texts in both the languages through his article *Khurchya (Bhadyane Anlelya): Ek N-Natya*.

The well-known tragic farce by Eugene Ionesco belongs to the Absurdist movement of the mid – 20th century. The movement, as well known to English literary world, was a result of a specific socio-cultural and political happenings specifically in the West and around the world in general. Theatre of the Absurd, thus, presented a view of the world as meaningless and having no purpose. Influenced by existentialism and the philosophy of Albert Camus in his *The Myth of Sisyphus*, this theatre represented the 'absurdity of human existence in a meaningless universe by bizarre or fantastic means' (Merriam Webster Dictionary).

Ionesco was among the four major European playwrights who expressed this modern sensibility through their plays. The action of the play *The Chairs* revolves around the theme of meaninglessness and the question of existence. It is the loneliness and alienation that keeps haunting the characters throughout the play. The old man and the woman live far away from the world, stuck in a repetitive existence, nothing new happens in their life and it is represented that their real life doesn't exist and has no meaning. They are trapped in a repetitive and stagnant pool of life that doesn't move ahead as it is meaningless. In the end, they jump off a tower.

The theatrical movement was a reaction to the horrors of World War II that the world was experiencing. The beliefs and the values of traditional culture and literature were to be shattered and rebelled against according to this school of thought. The conventional belief in human beings as 'rational creatures' living in 'an at least partially-intelligible universe' and being 'a part of an ordered social structure' and as 'capable of heroism and dignity even in defeat' was shattered for the proponents of the modern movements like expressionism, surrealism and existentialism. For philosophers like Sartre and Camus, human being was to be better viewed as an isolated being 'cast into an alien universe'. Human life, thus, for them carried 'no inherent truth, value or meaning.' (Abrams: 1993). Ionesco, as one of the main practitioners of Theatre of the Absurd has mentioned his belief in man being lost, 'cut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots' (cited in Abrams: 1993) thus advocating the senselessness, absurdity, uselessness of all human actions and the distorted, grotesque behaviour led by the meaninglessness of human life.

The Western literary movements, thematic beliefs and concerns have certainly kept on influencing those across the world as, though not completely, the socio-political and economic realities of the West have always an impact on those in the rest of the world. Pu. La., who was well acquainted with the concerns governing the thematic essence of Western literature due to his scholarly readership, could very well comprehend the shades of meaning underlying the absurdity in which the theme was presented. Additionally, he also possessed the genius to transfer the thematic essence into a language (which he had mastered and could harness for an excellent and effective presentation in any genre) like Marathi that was rooted in a land situated far away from the West. However, one can observe the subtlety of his expression with which he successfully tries to prove how every piece of literature is rooted in its own culture and how certain linguistic expressions cannot be translated

into another language with all the connotations associated with it. As mentioned earlier, the article proves to be an expert comment on the limitations of a translation or an adaptation.

Analysis

The tone of parody is successfully introduced by the title of this article - *Khurchya (Bhadyane Anlelya): Ek N-Natya* (Chairs (That were Hired): A Non-Play) which not only translates the title of the original play *The Chairs* but the notation in brackets as a suffix - (*Bhadyane Anlelya*) connotes the lack of originality/ suitability of the thematic essence in the translated/ adapted version in Marathi. The author thus begins this humorous piece with an implication that the theatrical performance to be presented before Marathi audience doesn't belong to their culture or language but is a product of completely foreign context. The sub-title *Ek N-Natya* further implies the meaninglessness as the trend of the Absurd and simultaneously one can perceive the pun in the negative word which suggests that such a performance, for Marathi audience (which probably were used to the rich tradition of meaningful plays in Marathi), doesn't carry any meaning rather it doesn't exist.

In order to convey this sense of meaninglessness, Pu. La. uses the prefix 'न' meaning in negative, in many places in the article. For example, 'नज्ञान' (not being knowledge), 'न-नाट्यगृह' (non- theatre), 'नेकांकी' (negative of one act play) 'न - प्रेक्षक' (non- audience) etc. The difference between a regular, traditional theatrical performance and this specific experimental performance is highlighted by his narration of how this non-play was an uncommon, unique presentation that could be interpreted in its true sense only by so-called intellectual section of society as against those common people who were neither aware of such a theatrical and literary trend prevalent in the Western world of literature nor could have enjoyed watching the performance. In Maharashtra, theatre has remained a rich heritage and culture and the auditoriums specifically catering to theatrical needs in prominent cities of the state hold a unique cultural identity. A play in the absurd fashion was a misfit in such a culture. A sarcastic observation by the author in the beginning successfully underlines this fact. He mentions that other performances take place in the theatre whereas this performance was in a non-theatre which was a kind of an auditorium otherwise used for some other programmes like condolence meeting or the place was even being used as a family planning centre. He further states that all this was in support of not allowing anything to happen that was apt for न-नाट्य, (non-play).

The author, a successful translator himself, happens to question the authenticity of this whole exercise of adapting the foreign theme and attempting to suit to one's own literary culture and trend. The exercise of introducing the theatrical movement from the West through a pamphlet is mocked at when he says that it seemed to be a brochure advertising a medicine. The introduction of the movement was in Marathi however, the basic concepts like Theatre of the Absurd and dramatic antiplay were not translated or explained in Marathi and rather these and some more English words were simply scripted in Devanagari. Words like weird, abstraction, ultimate concretization, etc., according to the author, were adequate to add to the reader's confusion.

The height of sarcasm is naming the original playwright as Usnesco. The word 'उसने' ('usne' as it can be scripted in English) in Marathi means something borrowed or hired. The pun intended suggests how the original theme and presentation of one's own feelings towards socio-cultural and political ethos through a bizarre and grotesque performance by Ionesco was culturally misfit.

The author keeps using the negative prefix 'न' throughout the article thus underlining the meaninglessness of such borrowing from the West to Marathi and this is skilfully done in the style of the literary movement that he wants to present to Marathi audience. There is an attempt to present the originally Western theme and performance in Marathi through adaptation than translating the work. Instead of translating the play which could be performed on the stage (Pu. La. has such adaptations to his credit that have proved to be masterpieces), the author has attempted at renewal in the form of critical review of the translated play. This

seems to have supported him with adequate liberty to express his own observations of the difficulties a translator can face while taking decisions in the process of translation.

The characters in the original play are an old man and an old woman isolated from the world, however, those in the translated version referred to in this article are a couple who are all set to celebrate their first wedding anniversary. They have invited their friends and keep waiting for them. As the original play begins with meaningless repetitions, the author mentions that this translated version too wastes time in a meaningless debate over what the husband should call his wife. The limitation of a translator is pointed out when the author says that the translator can't be blamed if Usnesko has wasted long time originally in the play. The culture plays an important role in the language and its use in daily communication. But when a translator attempts to uproot some such expressions and to plant it in a language spoken in a faraway land, it can suck the whole essence and the beauty in the original especially when it is a part of a stage performance. It can make the experience pathetic for the audience if the translated version has equivalence as the major concern.

The following conversation between the husband and wife very well illustrates this limitation:

नरु : तू इतकी सौंदर्यपूर्ण आहेस आणि बलशाली आहेस की मनात आणशील तर इंग्लिश खाडी

पोहून जाशील नने.....

(Naru: Nane, you're so beautiful and strong that your determination will make you successfully swim across the English channel.)

(आता मला जरा जरा अनुवादकाच्या मूळ इंग्रजीला चिकटून राहण्याच्या प्रतिज्ञेतले धोके दिसू

लागले. सौंदर्यपूर्ण, बलशाली वगैरे खड्डे गचके देत होते.) *(I could now somehow foresee the risks involved in the translator's decision to be loyal to the original English language. Potholes like beautiful, strong were causing jolts.)*

Though the original play doesn't include these sentences, the author deliberately seems to have used these to show how a translation, in an attempt to achieve equivalence, can call for a danger.

The funny attempt at searching for equivalent in the TL as shown in the following example makes the reader understand how it can lead to a humour:

ननु: पण मला नऱ्याच आवडतं. गोड गोड नाव - मोझार्टच्या चिमण्या व मधल्या भैरवीसारखं...

(ऑ! मोझार्टच्या चिमण्या व मधली भैरवी? हां हां. अनुवादकर्त्यांनी इथे उसनेस्कोच्या न -नाट्याचा

जरासा नानुवाद केला होता. मोझार्ट हा पश्चिमी संगीतवाला. त्याच्या बी मायनर मधल्या सिम्फनीची

चिमण्या व मधली भैरवी झाली.....बापरे ! म्हणजे हे न -नाट्य असे आता गाळून प्यावे लागणार.)

(Nanu: But I like Narya.....sweet name – like the sparrows and middle Bhairavi by Mozart)

(Oh.....Mozart's sparrows and middle Bhairavi? Oh...yes...the translator had non-translated Usnesko's non-play a little here. Mozart is a Western musician. The symphony in his Be Minor became sparrows and middle Bhairavi here.... oh my God! This is now going to make it a tedious job for me as I will need a strainer to understand the layers of meaning hidden in this non-play)

Pu. La. explains how the translator tried his best to suit the cultural concept into the target culture and how it becomes a Herculean task for the reader/ audience to understand the original concept. A well-read

person like him who was also a connoisseur of music, thus well acquainted with the Western literature and music could very well anticipate such problematic moments a translator may face.

One more such sample of translation can serve as the limitation of a translator. While in an attempt to search for equivalents in the TL, the translator happens to merely describe the meaning of the word Cardinal as the officer belonging to the status below Pope. The author reveals the humour intended as he exclaims,

(नरु नावाचा इसम पोपच्या खालोखालच्या दर्जाचा अधिकारी म्हणजे, भगवंता...कार्डिनल!

मुळातला उसनेस्कोचा कार्डिनलख्रिस्तदेवा.....त्यांना ते काय करीत आहेत ते कळत नाही

तेव्हा त्वां क्षमा करावीस त्या अनुवादकाला)

(A person named Naru being the officer at a lower level than Pope means.....oh my

God.... Cardinal! The original Cardinal of Usnesco.....Jesus, they are not aware of

their deeds so please pardon that translator)

The concepts like Cardinal and Pope, very much rooted in Christianity are completely alien to Marathi and thus the author, with the help of his own wit and knowledge of the cultural gap, comments on and makes the readers aware of a translator's limitations that may unknowingly lead him/ her to a poor performance.

The context of the translated version is specifically Maharashtrian but there comes a reference to pork fritters available at an inn owned by Nimkar, a Maharashtrian. The author comments that it became unbearable for him to listen further to what the characters were about to speak. He even questions why the translator must have felt like being loyal to the original Usnesco. He points out the habit of translators to refer to the dictionaries whenever they face difficulty in translating from the SL. He says it was not necessary for the translator to refer to Virkar's dictionary (a popular English to Marathi dictionary) but he could simply have called it sausages than trying hard to suit the original to the target culture. He even suggests that it could even have been the wafers made of elephant's foot (to suit the target culture).

Pu. La. says that many of them in the auditorium were unable to sustain this cultural shock but there was a so-called intellectual person highly under the spell of Western literature and of the high intellectual uniqueness of theatre of the absurd who consistently kept calling it boldness.

There is a reference to the ritual of मंगलाष्टक, reciting holy lines in Sanskrit which is a kind of prayer for the wedding couple to live a long, happy married life while the people present on the occasion shower blessings on them. Here, the translated version mentions the Father in the church reciting मंगलाष्टक. Pu. La., in his heightened sense of humour, comments that the translator had once again been unaware of his mistake. He calls it a 'क्रांतिकारक डुलकी' (revolutionary nap) to suggest the height of carelessness on the translator's part. He ironically questions the difference and the gap between the East and the West.

The article is full of such examples of how the translator can, in an attempt to suit the original to the target culture, experiment some fusion that leads to humour. For example,

नरु: तेच. त्यांचा खिसा फक्त लग्न, बाप्तिस्मा, नाताळचा सण, अशा वेळीच कापला जातो. नाताळात

त्यांची बायको ओवाळते तेव्हादेखील खिशात हात घालून ते 'खिसा कापला ...' म्हणून

ओरडतात.

(इथे भाषांतरवाल्याने नाताळ आणि दिवाळी यांचा मनोहर सणसंकर केला होता.)

Naru: Exactly. He falls a prey to pickpocketing only on the occasions like wedding,

baptism or Christmas. When his wife prays for him during Christmas, he puts his

hand in the pocket and shouts 'pocket picked'.

(The translator had attempted an amazing blend of festivals of Christmas and Diwali here.)

The custom in Maharashtrian culture is that the wife moves a lamp in clockwise circular motion in front of her husband on the occasion of Diwali Padwa (the day is considered to be the festival of husband and wife) which symbolizes wishing him long life and welfare. In return, the husband gifts her something. The humour here is twofold- the husband referred to in the sentence declares having nothing to gift his wife when the wife wishes him with light and secondly, the translator has tried a unique blend of Eastern and Western festivals by making the Eastern ritual take place on the occasion of a Western festival.

Similar such humorous blend of the East and the West is visible in the following extract where the translator tries to find an equivalent to Charing cross in the form of Chira Bazaar but in doing so, wipes out the geographical realities in the two different continents:

नरु: कंटाळून कसं चालेल? लाडके, आज आपल्या लग्नाची पहिली वर्षतिथी आहे. काळ कसा उडत

जातो. तुला आठवतंय का? चिरा बाजारातल्या क्रुसाजवळून आपण जात होतो. बर्फ पडत

होतं....

(बर्फ? चिराबाजारात? वरच्या मजल्यावरून कोणी तरी कुणाचा तरी ताप उतरला म्हणून आईस बॅग

रिकामी केली असेल. लंडनच्या चेअरिंग क्रॉसचा चिराबाजारातला क्रूस केला होता.)

Naru: How can you get bored? Dear, today is our first wedding anniversary. See how time flies. Do you remember? ... We were passing by the cross in Chira Bazaar. During the snow fall...

(Snow? In Chirabazaar? Someone must have emptied an ice bag from the upper floor and dropped it down after the fever must have subsided. The Charing cross in London was made the cross in Chira Bazaar here.)

According to him, this non-play made it possible for the opposite directions mingle with each other which is illustrated by a reference to pudding made of *Satyanarayan Prasad* and red wine being distributed. The combination of Western and Eastern cultures makes it impossible for the reader to hold laughing. The pudding and the red wine represent the Western culinary tradition whereas the *Satyanarayan Prasad* carries a cultural significance in Hindu, especially Maharashtrian, culture. A Maharashtrian wedding is always followed by a *Satyanarayan* pooja, a ritual conducted to seek blessings from the God. *Shira*, a popular sweet dish made of suji, sugar and clarified butter, is offered to Lord Satyanarayana at the end and the same is distributed among all those present and who visit the house to seek blessings of Lord Satyanarayana. One can very well understand the humour created by the translator when he mingles the two cultures in an attempt to suit the translated version to the target culture.

Though bilingual dictionary is used as one of the guiding tools in the process of translation, Pu. La. warns those involved in the process to be careful while using it as such dictionaries have limitations and may not be able to provide exact equivalents as words have more than one connotative meanings. He mocks at the way the translator depends on the bilingual dictionary in the following extract from the article:

ननु: पण गुळवणीच्या दहा रुपयातून आपण कोणाकोणाचे काय काय देणार? मला माझ्या लग्नातल्या

झबल्याचं बिल द्यायचंय.

(.... का.....य? हिच्या लग्नात हिने झबलं घातलं होतं? हां हां. अनुवादकर्त्याने पुन्हा माशी खाल्ली. वेडिंग गाऊनचे लग्नातले झबले झाले. हिने झबलं घातलं होतं तर नवरदेवाने काय फिर्याद घातली होती? कारण वीरकरांच्या कोशात सूट म्हणजे फिर्याद असाही अर्थ आहे.)

Nanu: But how are we going to pay to how many of them as we have only ten rupees. I am supposed to pay the bill towards the frock that I wore in wedding. (The word used in Marathi is zabale which was the translated version of wedding gown)

(Wh....at? Did she wear a frock in her wedding? Oh...yes.... the translator had once again failed here. If she wore a frock, did the bridegroom wear a complaint? Because the dictionary by Veerkar includes complaint as one of the meanings of suit.)

The author takes the translator to task for this carelessness and sarcastically asks whether the bridegroom wore a complaint. This is because, he says, the dictionary that was being referred to by the translator gives more than one meaning of the word 'suit' and one of those mentioned is complaint.

He is critical of translating the expressions verbatim from the SL to TL and advises the translator to be in search of apt equivalents in the TL. The following extract from the article adequately illustrates his stand on this:

ननूच्या मराठी शिव्यांनी हे शब्दनिष्ठ वळण उघड्या इंग्रजी-मराठी कोषातून घेतलं होतं. एरवी मराठीत 'कसाई मेला' वगैरे अपौरुषेय वाङ्मय काय कमी आहे?

The abusive language Nanu used was specifically an exact translation of the English words that was borrowed from an open English-Marathi dictionary. Else Marathi literature is replete with abusive words like 'kasai mela'.

Considering the difference in the syntactical orders of two different languages, the translator needs to be extremely careful while transferring the message from the SL to TL failing which the syntax in the TL falls a prey to the original and as a result the grammatical structure can go haywire. Pu. La. refers to such a sentence where in an attempt to be loyal to the original, the syntax of the TL is sacrificed.

The article is full of such instances of humour resulting from either the translator's incapacity to find the correct equivalent in the TL or dependence on the bilingual dictionary. For example, the word 'jam' having two meanings in English, the one translator referred here depends on one of the dictionary meanings and thus translates 'traffic jam' as 'वाहतूक मुरंबा' in Marathi instead of 'वाहतूक खोळंबा' (while the former means a preserved delicacy of fruits, the latter refers to congestion of traffic on the road)

Conclusion

It is necessary to note that all this is Pu. La.'s imagination and his own sensibility as a translator and a voracious reader of literature in English and his excellent sense of humour that have contributed to this beautiful piece of humorous comment on the responsibilities of and the carelessness on the part of the translator. A translator himself, Pu. La. thus, brings to the fore the essential bilingual calibre and skills a translator should possess failing which it can lead the reader/ audience to nothing else but to get bored or to laugh at the attempt by the translator.

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