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JOURNEY OF TRANSLATION FROM SOURCE LANGUAGE TEXT TO TARGET LANGUAGE  
TEXT: A CRITICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is an attempt to trace the history of translation right from the time when writing was not introduced to the present day century where translation has become an inevitable activity. The paper further critically teases out the process of translation, establishing it as a critical, creative and cultural activity and not merely as a mechanical activity concerned with finding just lexical equivalents. Further, endeavour is made to bring out thoroughly the various difficulties faced while making translation in general and in particular while being in the domain of creative literature, especially poetry. In wake of the difficulties faced, theories and solutions that have surfaced to counter them are discussed and consequently the essential qualities of a good translator are established.

**Key words:** translation, creativity, transference, word-for-word translation, sense-for-sense translation, SL, TL.

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DISCUSSION

Translation is a human endeavour of distant past. Long before the innovation of writing, whenever linguistically different groups of people happened to come in touch with one another, communication between them must have been made possible by bilinguals who acted as interpreters. In the twenty-first century with thousands of languages in the world, and ever surging international communication, translation has become an immensely crucial activity. The history of translation is the history of a prolonged chain of attempts for making complimentary understanding feasible by way of interpretation and translation for those using divergent languages. Leaving aside the oral interpretations, literary translation has, with the progress of time, assumed more and more significance. There was a point when literary translation was looked up as a marginal and mechanical activity, rather than being creative or worthy of any grave critical contemplation. But since the past century, literary translation drew great public and scholastic attention. There have been great writers who hold the opinion that translation of creative literature is inherently impossible but unavoidable—impossible because of various hurdles involved in translation and unavoidable because as a human beings one needs to perceive and appreciate the cognitive as well as the emotional life of races speaking languages other than their own.

Joshua (2002) states that no translation centres or associations of literary translators could be found as late as ninety sixties, but as time progressed, efforts of translators began to be recognized and appreciated

leading to the growth of literary translations. Of these, Cicero and Horace considerably affected the later generations of translators. It is they who ushered in the contrast between 'word for word' and 'sense for sense' translation, which maintains its significance till date. Asher and Simpson (1994) state that the process of translation acquired form and order initially through the rendering of the *Bible*. Translation however was also appreciably elevated by the Arabs during 8-10 centuries. They translated innumerable books on geometry, algebra, medicine, music and logic into Arabic from Sanskrit. In the fourteenth century with the increasing might of Turks in Byzantine, Greek scholars began to move west. There they brought up very vital translation centres at Florence and Venice. However, literary translations appeared late in the sixteenth century Europe, though some earlier efforts were by people like Gavin Douglas (1474-1522) and Bishop of Dunkeld, whose Scots version of Virgil's *Aeneid* was quite engaging. In France, important translators consisted of the group of poets who centred around Pierre Ronsard (1524-85), known as the Pleiade, whose curiosity laid in whatever was current from Italian, Greek and Latin literature. The seventeenth century is generally known as the exceptional era of the French classicism. According to *The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics* (1994), in France the translation of French classics increased greatly into English and other languages between 1625 and 1660. The ubiquitous drive of the eighteenth century was to capture the spirit or sense of the text to the readers. As a result, many translated works were re-written to fit the contemporary standards of language and taste. The prominent figures of this period were Samuel Johnson, George Campbell and Alexander Fraser Tyler. Countless theories however flooded the field of translation in the nineteenth century. Joshua (2002: 4) says:

Shelley was cynical towards translation, Friedrich Schleiermacher suggested a separate sub-language to be used for translation and D.G. Rossetti proposed that the translation should show faithfulness to the form and language of the original. The Victorian translators gave importance to literalness, archaism and formalism. Unlike Dryden and Pope, the Victorians wanted to convey the remoteness of the original in time and place.

With the onset of twentieth century began the rise of the professional translation. The stimulus seems to be the formation of the League of Nations in 1918. During that period many governments put up formal translation offices for administrative ends. After World War II, these expanded quickly, following the post-war political and trade patterns. Private firms began to follow the lead of governments and created their own translation sections to translate everything from technical reports and instructions manuals to publicity. It was only a matter of time before freelance translators began organizing themselves as commercial operations and into societies like FIT (la Fe`deration Internationale des Traducteurs). In the twenty first century, as had happened during the middle ages, the languages and literatures that were looked down as inferior and unimportant gained worldwide recognition through translation.

Having presented a brief overview of the position of translation, we come to the fundamental question, what is translation? Translation is something that operates with language; it is an activity of replacing a text in one language with a text in another. It is a unidirectional undertaking beginning from one language, the source language (SL) and gets transferred to the second or target language (TL).

As Chakraborty states, "The purpose of translation is primarily to carry the theme and the meta-theme of a SL text into a text written in another language i.e. TL" (2002: 41). Now translation is no longer considered to be a mechanistic activity. Of course there are texts like scientific and technical texts that demand relatively mechanical substitution for facts and figures because of their requirement to adhere absolutely to the idea of the authors. However, in case of a creative literary text which embodies within it the ideas and emotions of its author, such a translation will not do justice. Translation of creative literature in fact is a creative act. "It is not, say, transplantation of a tree, grown up steadily on a particular soil into an alien soil and atmosphere" (Chakraborty 2000: 41).

Quality translation is an artistic creation. In such a case it rises above translation and gets on to become a wholly new creation. This point brings immediately to mind Fitzgerald's rendering of Omar Khayyam's (1048-1131) quatrains. The translation is so efficacious and powerful that one hardly harbour the desire to read the original. Translation of such sort is considered to be a creative exercise. Here the translator becomes the creative reader-critic. He reads, interprets, criticizes and in the very process recreates a new text

for those who don't have access or knowledge of the source language. Thus such a translation of creative literature entails on the part of the translator an intricate exercise of comprehending and examining the message in the SL, decodifying the codified message and then recodifying it again in the target language.

Another issue of translation is regarding the faithfulness of a good translation to its original text but even this is a complicated concept as Chandrika (2002: 61) puts it:

A good translation, it is often conceded, demands a certain amount of "faithfulness". Now the question is, faithful to whom? To the author, to the text, or to the reader? The translator himself becomes an author, when he translates a text; so if faithfulness is due to the author, which author should he be faithful to-the author of the original text or to the translator himself as the new author? If faithfulness to the text is the criteria, to which text should he be faithful to-the surface text or to the sub-text? Again, if the reader is the one to whom faithfulness is due, which reader is it-the reader familiar with the original text or the reader of only the translated text.

Having talked about what translation is, there have surfaced divergent opinions about possibility or otherwise of translation among theoreticians. Chakraborty (2002) says that people like Roger Bacon (12<sup>th</sup> C) and Shelly (18<sup>th</sup> C) thought translation from one text to another as impossible because every language was indivisible, unitary and single. Human societies with divergent cultures and modes of life have been developing independently from time immemorial. One of the expressions of these heterogeneous cultures is the peculiar form of each relevant language. The varieties of cultures existing through the history of human society resulted in different forms of language. This view is termed 'Monadistic' (It comes from Greek 'monos' meaning sole, lone, single, indestructible, and impenetrable). Edward Sapir, an American linguist in his article *Selected Writing in Language Culture and Personality* (1949) strongly supports this Monadist approach as under:

No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality.

The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds not merely the same world with different labels attached.

Thus, Monodist view labels any attempt at translation as worthless. Opposing this view we have Noam Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* (1957) which believes that every child is born with a blue print of language called Universal Grammar and it are these structural commonalities underlying all human languages that make translation realizable and productive. It is Chomsky's deep structure model and transformational rules that give solid ground to the theory of translation.

In spite of the two divergent options about the possibility of translation, the fact remains that mankind has since times unknown been communicating across linguistic barriers and this is the very axis of universalism. One gets often tempted to conclude that translation is quiet simple involving just a substitution of one text by another. However, as one proceeds one finds that in fact, it is intricate, artificial, and sometimes even fraudulent--fraudulent in the sense that by using language other than one's own one pretends to be somebody that one is not.

Translation is a linguistic as well as a cultural activity and deals not merely with finding lexical equivalents of words of one language into another, but with the overall communication of meaning. Since each word vibrates with memory, feelings, associations and literary echoes, it is hard to find an exact equivalence of a SL word in the TL. That is the reason why absolute or complete translation is considered to be a myth. Since languages are to a considerable degree culture-orientated, translators face the complication of translating culture-based words into another language, especially those languages whose culture is entirely different. It is because of the absence of this one-to-one correspondence between the two languages and their respective cultures that the translation of colloquial utterances, culture words, slangs and proverbs becomes quite difficult. In Kashmiri for instance, if we have to praise the graceful gait of a female, her charming manners or her fluency of speech we refer her symbolically as *katij* literally meaning a swallow, but the above mentioned senses can barely be put forth by means of any exact English word. Similarly, *lole* is a word in Kashmiri which comprises two senses simultaneously: (a) love and (b) the sense of missing and longing. Clearly, *lole* is hard to find an exact English equivalent. Similarly, we don't find exact equivalents in any language for such Kashmiri words as *kanzun* and *aamun* which refer respectively, to two different smells arising from burning of wool and

burning of cotton. Some food preparations and words of everyday use based on culture cannot be translated perfectly into a foreign tongue. For instance, there are two meat preparations in Kashmir called *goshtabe* and *riste*. It is almost impossible to translate the two with a view to differentiating between the two. What is more, Urdu like many other oriental languages has specific and separate names for various relations referred to by a single lexical substitute. For instance, relationships like *maamu* (mother's brother), *chachu* (father's brother), *pupha ji* (father's sister's husband), *khalu* (mother's sister's husband), are all however called 'uncle' in English. Similarly, *khala* (mother's sister), *puphee* (father's sister) *taaye* ,(father's brother's wife) are all called 'aunt' in English. Also, relations like *saalaa* (wife's brother), *jeeju* (sister's husband) are all called as 'brother-in-law' in English. In the same way, translation of Sanskrit *Lila* as 'love play' seems to be poor. The problems however doesn't end there, rendering of a text into another may poses grammatical hitch as well. For example, the influence of L1 (mother tongue) on the use of English by, say, an Urdu speaking Indian may create sentences like. 'I am feeling cold', instead of 'I feel cold'. 'I am loving her' instead of 'I love her' 'I am liking you', instead of 'I like you' etc which are un-English in trait. Das quotes Smith saying that "to translate is to change into another language, retaining as much of the sense as one can" (2002: 22). But, that is not all one has to sustain the semantic compatibility along with the grammaticality.

So far as literal translation is concerned, it has its advantages as well as drawbacks. If, for example, we translate a Urdu word like *pechkash* as 'screwdriver' in English, it would somehow do justice, but if one comes across a word like 'block' which in American English means 'a rectangular section of a city or town bounded on each side by consecutive streets' or 'a segment of a street bounded by successive cross streets', a language like Kashmiri or Urdu would find it difficult to translate a sentence like 'we used to live on the same block'. Similarly the Urdu sentence *woh chuha ban gaya*, meaning he felt helpless and belittled would be a mockery of translation if translated literally as 'he became a rat'. On the other hand, the literal translation of an English phrase like 'heat and cold' would be accepted if translated as *garme tai sarde* in Punjabi or *garme aur sarde* in Urdu.

The issue of translation turns out to be all the more challenging in the territory of creative literature. Translation of creative literature which finds its most authentic expression in poetry is even more problematic than other genres like novel, prose and short-story. It is because the language of creative literature, especially, that of poetry, has the quality of concretion, vividness and exuberance as opposed to the language of abstraction, generally found in various kinds of informative literature. Poetry incorporates emotional, psychological and imaginative experiences and not simply knowledge and information, and such experiences find voice in figures of speech such as metaphor, simile, images, symbols, etc. On top of that, poetry uses language dialectically not referentially as expressed in features like irony, paradox, conceit, etc. Together, these two things lead to infinite suggestiveness. Then, there is the quintessential quality of music in poetry that finds utterance in the phonetic sounds and matrix of poetry.

The translator of poetry thus does not have to translate just the word but the import of the word in a certain milieu. He does not have to simply give a line of a poem but the sense that emerges from the organization of all the words and the lines of a poem. As Malik (2001: 4) quotes Coleridge saying that "the words of a poem are irreplaceable like the stones of a pyramid so that if one stone is removed the whole edifice will crumble down". Mirza Ghalib in *Deewa-e-Ghalib* (1829) sets out the word in poetry as "an open sesame leading to unforeseen meaning".

Since musical qualities spring from sound and speech rhythms peculiar to a language they are difficult almost impossible to translate. To make the point clear, we may mention the music found in the following verse of Blake (1794: 8):

Tiger! Tiger! Burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

By the same token, to arrest the music of some of the verses of poets like Mahmud Gami, Rasul Mir proves to be immensely laborious.

Rasul Mir (1977: 18):

rinde poshe maal gindney draai lolo  
shube shabaash chaane pote chaaye lolo  
O the clever, joyful garland of flowers you have come out to play;  
Your lovely gait seen from behind you deserves all praise.

Mahmmud Gami (1997: 27):

karsaa meon niyaaai andai  
mari mande madanwaro

When shall my imbroglio end  
O my graceful beloved?

In Rasul Mir's verse the word-music is created by rhymes like, *rinde* and *ginde* and the repetition of (s) sound is hard to recapture in English. Likewise, in the verse by Mahmmud Gami the music created by the repetition of the initial (m) sound found in the words *mari*, *mande* and *madanwaro* is tough to maintain while rendering the verse into English. It is in wake of the above mentioned difficulties faced by the translators that we find different theories put forward to tackle them. There are three major names in the theory of translation namely, J.C. Catford, Eugene A. Nida and Peter Newmark. Catford (b. 1917) in his *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* (1965), defines translation as the substitution of source language text material by an comparable target language material. He defines translation as an equivalence relation. He (1965: 21) states that "the central problem of translation practice is that of finding TL translation equivalents. The core of translation theory is that of defining the nature and conditions of translation equivalence". Catford's theory of translation is a theory of meaning. He thinks of meaning as the property of language, that is to say, a source language text has a source language meaning and a target language text has a target language meaning. His theory also brings out the distinction between translation and transference. He clearly states that source language texts are neither absolutely translatable nor absolutely untranslatable. Detailing the point, he mentions two kinds of untranslatabilities: a) linguistic untranslatability and b) cultural untranslatability. Linguistic untranslatability occurs when there is no formal correspondence between the source language and the target language. This occurs due to oligosemy i.e., an item having a restricted sense, for example the word *rouf* in Kashmiri refers to a peculiar dance activity executed by female folk on special social occasions, and it has no lexical parallel in English. Similarly, cultural untranslatability arises when a situational trait peculiar to the source language text is missing from the culture of the target language text, for example, the expression *desh garden* that is to tie a piece of cloth or thread to the window of a shrine aspiring fulfillment of wish is absent from the culturally different language like English. Second significant theorist is Eugene A. Nida (b. 1914), who talks about the descriptive approach of translation process. His theory focuses on the receptor. He considers the pragmatic or emotive meaning as the most important facet in transferring the message from one language to another. His theory also brings out two sets of equivalence, formal and dynamic equivalences. Formal equivalence concentrates on the message, while dynamic equivalence is receptor oriented. He is of the view that the eventual purpose of translation should be to make it as original as possible. The third important theorist is Peter Newmark (b.1916). His contribution is his detailed categorization in his *Approaches to Translation* (1981) between semantic vs. communicative translation. Semantic translation according to him focuses primarily on the semantic context of the source text and the communicative translation makes the comprehension and response of receptors as its focal point.

Newmark's translation theory provides a frame of principles, rules and hints for translating and criticizing translations. He (1988: 20) talks about three functions of language:

- 1) Expressive function, which is author centered.
- 2) Vocative function, which is reader centered.
- 3) Informative function, which gives the extra linguistic information, context of the text.

Since all translators are to some level both communicative and semantic, Newmark's theory suits the translation of any sort of text.

#### Conclusion

In the light of the above discussion it can be concluded that translation is not merely a mechanical activity but a creative and cultural one. As such it is fraught with many challenges especially while dealing with poetry. All the theories of translation discussed above prove that a translator has to be an original genius in order to re-create a text. In fact, he should possess certain innate qualities: Firstly, an inwardness with the language of Source text as well as the language of Target text. Secondly, he should possess proficiency as well as feel of both the languages. Thirdly, the translator requires not mere competence but creative capability as well. He should be able to maintain a delicate balance between close faithfulness to the original and absolute freedom from it. An ideal translation should neither be transliteration nor a transcreation but a fine middle path between the two. The task of the translator is thus more arduous than that of a creative writer for the latter has to think and write in one language while the former has to deal with two different languages. The principle thing to be kept in mind is that no matter which method of translation a translator uses, his translation in the end should be as natural as possible. Natural usage does not mean ordinary usage of language. Natural usage incorporates a variety of idioms, styles or registers determined by the setting of the text, the author, the topic and the readership. Likewise, an emotive translation would be natural for, say, a lyrical text and word for word translation would be natural for a scientific text. It may be concluded that the very early principle, 'word for word' vs. 'sense for sense' advocated by scholars many centuries ago can be seen emerging again and again with different grade of importance in different times according to different concept of language communication.

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