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TRANSLATION AND GENDER: AN IDEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE

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ABSTRACT

Translation has become an indispensable tool for the teachers of comparative literature as it is the gateway to enter the arena of the texts of the 'other'. However, with this shift of the discipline of translation studies from a purely linguistics-oriented approach to a more culture-oriented approach, the scholars have increasingly begun to trace the exercise of ideology in translation that had been hitherto a largely neglected area in linguistics-oriented approaches. The teachers and researchers of comparative literature should use the tool of translation with sensitivity to the ideology it embodies. Since one of major achievements of comparative studies has been enlarging the canvass of cross-cultural communication and understanding, ideology cannot but be a major area of evaluation. Though ideology permeates almost all institutions of society, one of the pertinent areas where the translator should be sensitive to the ideological impact is gender. My paper proposes to illustrate that the translation is not merely a cross-cultural transfer but also a cross-ideological transfer in a comparative perspective by studying different yet interrelated categories of gender like grammatical gender, social gender and connotative gender with respect to Hindi, Dogri and English languages.

Keywords: Translation; ideology; gender; social gender; Hindi; Dogri; English

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1. INTRODUCTION

Susan Bassnett maintains, "Once seen as a sub-branch of linguistics, translation today is perceived as an inter-disciplinary field of study and the indissoluble connection between language and way of life has become a focal point of scholarly attention" (Preface).

With the 'cultural turn' in Translation Studies, the scholars have increasingly begun to trace the exercise of ideology in translation that had been thitherto a largely neglected area in the linguistics- oriented approaches. The exercise of ideology in translation, they claim, is as old as the history of translation itself. According to Fawcett, "throughout the centuries, individuals and institutions applied their particular beliefs to the production of certain effects in translation" (qtd. in Perez 2). He further claims that "an ideological

approach to translation can be found in some of the earliest examples of translation known to us" (Fawcett 106). Critics have thus begun to study translation not only as a "Cross-cultural transfer" (Vermeer), but as a "Cross-ideological transfer" (Nissen). As Schaffner claims that all translations are ideological since "the choice of a source text and the use of which the subsequent target text is put are determined by the interests, aims and objectives of social agents" (23). She further explains, "Ideological aspect can be determined within a text itself, both at the lexical level, and the grammatical level... Ideological aspects can be more or less obvious in texts, depending on the topic of a text, its genre and communicative purposes" (23).

Ideology, however, is not an easy term to define. As noted by Van Dijk, it has been defined both as 'a system of wrong, false, distorted or otherwise misguided belief (based on Marx's false consciousness) and contrarily as 'a force that encourages revolutionary consciousness and fosters progress' (Lenin's definition of socialist ideology). There are definitions based on power relations as well. Many translation scholars believe that translating itself is a political act. As Tahir Gurcaglar argues, "Translation is political because, both as activity and product, it displays process of negotiation among different agents"(113). Most scholars, however, like to work within a politically neutralized conception of ideology, as can be seen in Calzada-Perez who defines ideology as 'a set of ideas, which organize our lives and help us understand the relation to our environment"(5). Another broad base definition is offered by Van Dijk who defines it as "a framework that is assumed specifically to organize and monitor one form of socially shared mental representations, in other words, the organized evaluative beliefs-traditionally called 'attitudes - shared by social groups"(7). The present paper works within this apolitical conception of ideology. Though ideology is pervasive in all aspects of translation, one pertinent aspect is gender. The connotations of gender and social gender vary, at times, considerably in the source and target languages respectively, which has a considerable influence on the translation process. Thus, the present paper highlights the indispensable role of the translator in analyzing gender aspects in the source text and determining the ideological impact gender connotations may have both the source and the target text. The languages that I use for illustrations are Dogri, Hindi and English.

English has developed over the course of more than 1,400 years. The earliest forms of English, a set of Anglo-Frisian dialectsbrought to Great Britain by Anglo-Saxon settlers in the fifth century, are called Old English. Middle English began in the late 11th century with the Norman conquest of England. Early Modern English began in the late 15th century with the introduction of the printing press to London and the King James Bible as well as the Great Vowel Shift. Through the worldwide influence of the British Empire, modern English spread around the world from the 17th to mid-20th centuries.Modern English has little inflection compared with many other languages, and relies on auxiliary verbs and word order for the expression of complex tenses, aspect and mood, as well as passive constructions, interrogatives and some negation. Despite noticeable variation among the accents and dialects of English used in different countries and regions – in terms of phonetics and phonology, and sometimes also vocabulary, grammar and spelling – English speakers from around the world are able to communicate with one another effectively. English is an Indo-European language, and belongs to the West Germanic group of the Germanic languages (*Wikipedia*).

Hindi is the fourth most natively spoken language in the world after Mandarin, Spanish and English.Hindi language is a member of the Indo-Aryan group within the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European language family. Hindi is a direct descendant of Sanskrit through Prakrit and Apabhramsha. It has been influenced and enriched by Dravidian, Turkish, Farsi, Arabic, Portugese and English over the years.

Sanskrit and the Prakrit and Apabhramsha languages—the precursors of Hindi—are nominally and verbally inflected. In the nominal realm, the adjective agrees in number and gender with the noun that it qualifies. This is less the case for Hindi because it was greatly influenced by Persian, in which the adjective does not change as a result of a number change in the noun. Instead, Hindi indicates number agreement via postpositions—small words that appear after nouns and function much like English prepositions. Hindi has also reduced the number of genders to two (masculine and feminine), whereas other Sanskrit-based

languages, such as Gujarati and Marathi, have retained the neuter gender as well. Persian influence also caused the Hindi system of case marking to become simpler, reducing it to a direct form and an oblique form. Postpositions are used to indicate the other case relations (*Britannica.com*).

2. DISCUSSION

English and Hindi as languages are markedly different when it comes to their structure with regards to gender. English shows pronominal gender which is to say that there is the control of anaphoric pronouns by their antecedent. For e.g. the wife...she. Hindi, unlike English does not possess 'pronominal gender systems' (Corbett). It, however, shows grammatical gender which is seen in the classes of nouns, which can be distinguished syntactically, according to the agreements they take. Another difference between the two languages is that Hindi has only two genders and lacks the neutral gender marked by 'It' in English. One can easily distinguish the linguistic difference in the two languages by the following examples.

He was a good boy.

वह एक अच्छा लड़का था।

She was a good girl.

वह एक अच्छी लड़की थी।

It was a good holiday.

वह एक अच्छी छुट्टी थी।

Hindi and Dogri are closely allied languages and have originated from Sanskrit. Hindi is the official language of India and is spoken and used by the people all over the country, the main regions being Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar and Chhattisgarh. On the other hand, Dogri is mainly spoken in the Jammu region of J&K State and adjoining areas of Punjab, Himanchal Pradesh and in the borders of Sialkot & Shakar Ghar tehsils in Pakistan. Both Hindi and Dogri use the same script i.e. Devanagiri, yet at places they have stark differences (Pathania). They both show grammatical gender and lack pronominal gender system. The gender agreement, however, varies. To illustrate

वह एक अच्छा लड़का है।

ओ बड़ी शैल कुड़ी ऐ।

वह बहुत, अच्छा लड़का है

ओ बड़ा शैल मुंडा ऐ।

Thus, whereas in Hindi it is the adjective that get modified according to the agreement, in Dogri it is the adverb. However, more than the linguistic structure, it is in the connotations and social gender that the distinction is marked forcing the translator to make choices, as will be seen subsequently.

As can be seen in the examples, above there is no pronominal variation in Hindi and Dogri but there are two classes of noun clearly marked in the agreement they take in the adverbs adjectives and verbs. Further, there is no corollary to 'it' in Hindi, which further presents a difficulty since with inanimate nouns gender assigning does not seem to have a logic based on biological distinction. Thus, though, nose is a neutral gender in English, in Hindi it is feminine (नाक होती है) whereas in Dogri, it may be Masculine (नक्क हौंदा ऐ). As this example reveals, that is not from a technical point of view of difference between the languages alone that a translator may face difficulties. The translation process may give rise to other problems as a result of the connotations gender as such conveys (Ervin) and also a result of the divergent ways in which speakers may perceive the world. The following quote from Roman Jakobson will suffice to exemplify this problem:

The Russian painter Repin was baffled as to why Sin had been depicted as a Woman by German artists, he did not realize that "sin" is feminine in German (die Siinde), but masculine in Russian (rpx). Likewise a Russian child, while reading a translation of German tales, was astounded to find that Death, obviously a woman (Russian, fem) was pictured as an old man (German, masc). *My Sister Life*, the title of a book of poems by Boris Pasternak, is quite natural in Russian, where 'Life is feminine', but was enough to

reduce to despair the Czech poet Josef Hora in his attempt to translate these poems, since in Czech this noun is masculine (qtd. in Jacobson 117).

Such difference in connotations of gender render the process of translation very difficult and complicated that has to take into account the fact that one word of one specific gender reflects one reality in one language, while the corresponding word that possesses the opposite gender may reflect another reality. This becomes even more difficult with languages like Dogri where the same class of noun may take different gender connotations. For example, in Dogri the river Chenab is spoken of in masculine terms whereas the river Devak is spoken of in feminine terms.

To illustrate, in the book *Duggar Sanskriti* the noted Dogri writer Jitender Udhamपुरi describes the local rivers Devak and Chenab in the following terms

1 देवक नदी डुग्गर दी गंगा ऐ।

2 चन्हा दरया डुग्गर दे सारें शा बड्हा दरया ऐ।

Though both are rivers flowing through Jammu region, Devak river is spoken of in feminine terms whereas river Chenab is spoken of in masculine terms. Furthermore, this gender distinction is replete with socio-cultural connotations of the region. So for a translator attempting to translate it in either in English or Hindi, it would be crucial to know the ideological implications of the distinction and preserve them in his translation.

To give yet another example, the festival of spring in Hindi is spoken of in feminine terms as Baisakhi. In Dogri, however, it is a masculine word *Basoa*. In such a scenario if the description of the spring in Hindi is given in the following terms,

दुल्हन सी सजी बैसाखी, पीले मे 'सजी-संवरी, अन्नपूर्णा की भांति हर घर में दाहिन 'पौव का' पडले
रखती अंदर आई।

This presents a challenging task for the translator to translate it in Dogri without losing its original connotations.

Another interesting example that I encountered was in the translation of technical documents in English, in the adaptation of the original words. Words like 'option' that were used in the translation without any synonyms in the native language were used both as feminine and masculine expressions depending on whether the translator was from the humanities or science background. Thus in two different translations, it could be read as

(feminine) कम्प्यूटर दी मती सारी ऑपरेशनों ऐन।

(masculine) कम्प्यूटर दे मते सारे ऑपरेशन ऐन।

This brings us to another area of concern for the translator that is the social gender. Hellinger defines the term 'social gender' by differentiating two semantic levels:

The features (male/female) refer to the natural gender of the person referred to; nouns with these features (E.g. woman, man, sister, brother) possess, therefore, a gender specifying function. Nouns like lawyer or secretary on contrary, have a gender specifying function. Nevertheless, often the features 'generally male', 'generally female', respectively, are assigned to these words as a reflection of normative societal conditions" (qtd. in Nissen).

Nissen further clarifies the concept in the following quote: "It may be worth pointing out that social gender assignment is not bound to any specific occupational title as such, but is dependent on pragmatic and societal considerations. One of these consideration is frequently based upon status. Thus, status explains why most English speakers today will associate the occupational title secretary with a female, whereas the denomination Foreign Secretary or Secretary of State, more often than not will evoke an image of a male" .

It is not only status that is a defining characteristic of social gender; time is another important feature as can be seen in the following example, noted by Lyons "At the turn of this century (1900 UKN) in Britain the

expression 'lady typist' was quite commonly employed in contexts (e.g. in advertisements) in which 'typist' would now be used" (311).

There are several occupational denominations which are either exclusively masculine or feminine. For example, occupations like **किसान, वकील, सिपाही, संगीतकार** have no feminine forms. Similarly, there are no masculine parallels to **जवआया, दाई** etc. Again though in English moneylender has no feminine counterpart, in Dogri the synonymous word **शाह** has the female form **शाहनी**.

So, if a sentence in Dogri is
शाहनी दकान सजा दी ही।

In English it would be translated

The Money lender's wife was decorating the shop. In the English translations, thus, the social status and economic independence associated with the word **शाहनी** are lost.

As we have seen in all the examples above, translators more often than not find themselves in a position where they have to decide on options while dealing with gender-specific words. According to Nord, "Almost any decision in translation is - consciously or unconsciously- guided by ideological criteria" (111). Toury explains this through his concept of norms which according to Behrouz Karoubi, "can be understood as ideological realization of the concept of appropriateness". Toury applies the concept of norms to translation studies presuming that translating involves playing a social role subject to several types of socio-cultural constraints of varying degree. The domain of gender, for example, involves quite a number of parameters, such as historical considerations, societal changes, connotations of gender, se-biased stereotypical ideas, and the socioeconomic status of the referent. Decision-making is a key concept in the discussion of norms. Norms exist "only in situations which allow for alternative kind of behavior, involving the need to select among these, with the additional condition that selection be non-random" (Toury 15). This selection, according to him could be posited between two constraining extremes of 'relatively absolute rules on one hand, and pure idiosyncrasies on the other' (Toury 16). This, however, places a greater responsibility on the role of the translator. As he further declares, "it is always the translator herself or himself, as an autonomous individual, who decides how to behave, be that decision fully conscious or not. Whatever the degree of awareness, it is s/he who will also have to bear the consequences" (Toury 19).

3. CONCLUSION

To a translator working in the domain of gender, there are certain readymade options. One might look for a synonym that belongs to the same gender as the source word. For example for the word Dariya, hindi word sarang might be used. One might select a word from a third language that correspondent with the gender of the word in the source text. In case of North Indian languages *Hindustani* comes in handy. One might also as a last resort provide the target text with a footnote indicating the divergent gender of the word in question in the source language. However, all these options have their specific conditions of applicability. Translators, thus mostly seek their own options supplemented by their own intuitions in terms of their own ideologically based knowledge. However, to speak in Rushdie's terms, this is how newness enters the world. When two different sets of ideologies meet through two different languages, a translator can enrich both.

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