PROBLEMS OF CROSS-CULTURAL TRANSLATION AND THE TRANSLATOR'S ROLE

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Roman Jakobson divides translation activity into three categories: intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic. Intralingual translation is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs in the same language. Interlingual translation is translation proper in which an interpretation of verbal signs takes place by means of some other language. Intersemiotic translation is known as 'transmutation' in which an interpretation of verbal signs takes place by means of signs of non-verbal sign systems. For example, intersemiotic translation is from verbal art into music, dance, cinema or painting. Here we are concerned with interlingual translation. It involves transference of a text in Source Language (SL) into Target Language (TL). It is not just finding a synonym or an equivalent of a word used in the Source Language (SL) in the Target Language (TL).

Translating is a challenging task and the translator faces many problems while carrying over a text from one language into another language. First, the translator has to decide whether the translation should be 'free' or 'literal', faithful or beautiful, exact or natural translation. 'Literal' translation is word for word translation. In 'Free' translation, the translator does not follow the form and content of the Source Text closely. For instance, while transferring a law book or a science book or a book of information, the translator should transfer from one language into another literally. On the contrary, if the translator transfers a book of literature from one language to another literally, it would be misleading and confusing. The traditional dichotomy between 'literal' and 'free' translation has been replaced by different modern theories like Roman Jakobson's (1959) semiotic approach to translation in which the translator has to recode the ST (Source Text) message first and then he has to transfer it into an equivalent message for the TC (Target Culture) involving two 'equivalent messages' in two different language, Eugene Nida's (1964), 'formal
equivalence' versus 'dynamic equivalence', Cartford's (1965) 'formal correspondence' versus 'textual equivalence', Peter Newmark's (1977) 'semantics' versus 'communicative' translation, Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury's (1970s) emphasis on actual translation in the target culture. In 1980s Susan Bassnett's Translation Studies focuses on unique problems of cross-cultural communication in translation. No longer is translation regarded as linguistic phenomena, but as cultural phenomena. In the eighties, Jose Lambart and Clem Robyns viewed translation as an 'intracultural activity' rather than an 'interlinguistic' process (Gentzler 186). In 1990s Mary Snell-Hornby presented translation as an interaction between two cultures. Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere argued that translation study was taking ahistoric 'Cultural Turn' as it moved into the nineties (ibid. 185). In other words, at present translation is not linguistic, but a cultural transference.

Linguistic problems

Structurally English and Odia and other Indian languages are different. English is a SVO (subject, verb, and object) language but Odia is SOV (subject, object, and verb) language. Moreover the use of progressive tense form in English and Odia poses another challenge to the translator. For example, 'Mu sabu dekhuchi' (I am seeing everything), Mu sabu sunuchi (I am hearing everything) are ungrammatical in English, if these are translated literally. The Odia users of English are confused by tense and aspect, T have met him last week' is not grammatically correct in English; but it is grammatically perfect in Odia if translated literally. The order of sentences and phrases has sometimes to be changed for emphasis. So some nuances are lost in translation.

The translator should be competent both in the Source Language (SL) and the Target Language (TL). He should understand and interpret the ST correctly. The translator commits many mistakes if he does not understand the ST correctly. The translator should always take help of dictionaries in order to avoid mistakes in comprehending the layers of meaning of a particular word. He has to choose the exact
meaning of the word in the context.

As it is impossible to find two words exactly having the same meaning in one culture and language, similarly it is difficult to find exactly equivalent words in two different languages. There is interface between the language and culture of a place. Language grows out of the culture of a particular place. There cannot be situational, emotional, social or psychological correspondence between two cultures and hence no equivalent word can be found in two languages. The translator has to find out the closest equivalent word of the SL in the TL.

**Problems of cultural transference**

(i) **Kinship words**

Cultural transference is a challenge to the translator. These words have different meanings in different languages and cultures. The translator faces greatest challenge while transferring kinship words from one language to another. And the problem multiplies if there is great gap between the cultures of two languages like that of Odia and English. For instance, in English there are a few kinship words like uncle, aunt to express relationships. But in Odia there are many kinship words like 'maushi', 'khudi', 'mausha', 'mamu', 'da-

Besides, the kinship word 'dada' in Odia culture means 'father's brother' in eastern and northern Odisha; but in western Odisha 'dada' means 'brother'. So the translator should have the knowledge of the nature of word 'in order to reconstruct that which is or might be behind the words (Schulte 2).

As Rainer Schutle has rightly pointed out '...translation is not the translation of words, even though the final product of our translations appears in the form of words and sentences. Words in themselves are very fragile entities. Each
one of us develops different connotations in our encounter with every word’ (2). So the translator should 'acquire a sense for the magnetic field of words, their semantic fields both in the present as well as in the past' (2).

The meaning of a word is constantly changed or modified in course of time on account of social or cultural changes. Idioms and proverbs are also modified in course of time. So, the translator should be alert about the changing meaning of words or idioms. For example, in Odia the idiomatic express, 'Tankara bahi sahitadedhasura bhaibohu samparka' should be translated in the modern context. Earlier in Odia culture a 'bhaibohu' that is, 'younger brother's wife' did not see the face of her 'dedhasura' i.e., 'her husband's elder brother'. They maintained distance from one another. But in the modern age 'dedhasura' 'bhaibohu' do not maintain distance. So the above mentioned sentence should be translated like this to make the meaning clear: 'He was a stranger to studies'.

ii) Culture-Specific words

Culture-specific words like 'abhimany' have different connotations in different situations. 'Abhiman' means feeling of hurt towards a loved one from whom one expects love, affection and personal concern because of close and intimate, often familial relationship. Sometimes 'abhimany' also refers to pride or arrogance. The translator has to decide the exact implication of 'abhimany' in the context. Similarly other culture-specific words in Odia like 'habishya', 'ekadashi', 'patibrata' are difficult to translate and should be retained in Target Text (TT).

Besides, Odia words 'vidhata', 'karama', 'kapala', 'daiba', 'bhagya', 'adrustha/niyati' are similar in meaning with subtle differences. 'Vidhata' is the broadest concept in this series, meaning all powerful creator who decrees everything. English words 'providence', 'fate', 'luck', 'destiny' are equivalents of the aforesaid Odia words. The translator has to select the most appropriate word depending on their relevance in the context. For instance, in Kuntala Kumari Sabat's fiction Kalibohu, there is a sentence 'Lakshmira kapala phatila' (ch.l). It is translated as, 'But fate dealt a harsh blow to Lakshmi'. Again, Kuntala writes, 'Mo janama vidhata lekhithila brahmana kulare'. It is translated as 'Providence decreed my birth in a Brahmin family'. Here 'vidhata' is the broadest term signifying omnipotent creator. So 'vidhata' is translated as 'providence'.
iii) Idioms and proverbs

Translating idioms and proverbs is the most challenging work of the translator of fiction. In this matter he has to follow Eugene Nida. According to Nida, The correspondence involving semantically exocentric expressions, i.e., idioms and figures of speech, are best classified in terms of types of necessary adaptation, e.g., metaphors to metaphors, metaphors to similes, metaphors to nonmetaphors, and nonmetaphors to metaphors.' (219). In other words, while translating idioms and proverbs sometimes the translator has to give English equivalent of the SL. For example, in Odia, there is a saying, 'Jananijanmabhumischa swargadapi gariyashi' which is translated as 'Mother and the motherland are greater than heaven' to make the meaning explicit. The translator has to give the equivalent idiom or proverb available in TL. Sometimes an idiom may not only be meaningless, but also may convey quite the wrong meaning when carried over into another language. In such cases a simile may be substituted for the original metaphor (Nida, 171). The translator has to follow this method wherever it is possible to do so. For example, the Odia sentence, 'chheli godaredhana mala hele balada loda huanta? Tame naka na thile guha khaanta', should be carried over with the help of simile to make the meaning clear: 'You are incapable of taking decisions as goats can't do the work of treading on stalks of paddy, which is the job of bullocks. You have no sense of dignity. If you had no nose to smell, you would have eaten excreta.' Finally, where the literal meaning is completely different from the idiomatic meaning in the Target Language, the translator has to translate according to the sense of the idiom. In Odia there is a saying, 'Aa karnare taila pradanapurbaka sayanarabyabasta bhala dishila nanhi'. A literal translation of this would be, 'No longer did it seem a good idea to sleep, putting oil into their ears.' This translation does not convey the real meaning. So the translator should translate this according to its sense like this: 'No longer did it seem a good idea to sit idle, as if they had not a care in the world.'

iv) Words for technology, food items etc.

Because of great differences in the technologies of different nations, the corresponding terms for this area of human experience vary greatly. Besides, with a large range of vocabulary for technology, words used for weights and measures, produce the most acute problems for the
translator. Currencies pose special difficulties because of great differences in their purchasing power. Terms associated with a particular culture also create problems, 'not only because the basic systems are often so different, but also because the extensions of meaning appropriate to one system rarely work in another' (Ibid. 216). So the translator has to retain the names of months like Baishak, Jeyestha Ashada, food items like chudaghasa, podopitha, kakara, santula, currencies like anna, measuring units like bati, bharana. English words cakes, pastries etc. are no substitutes for Indian sweets.

v) Colloquial expressions

Colloquial expressions like 'chheeh' in Odia which sometimes implies disapproval, sometimes dislike is a challenge to the translator as these expressions cannot be carried over to another language. The translator has to retain such words. Even the translator has to drop certain colloquial expressions which carry no meaning in the TL. For example, in Odia there is a popular saying, Aleicha, mate dekhi kain paleicha'. Literally it means, 'My friend, why are you running away on seeing me', which is said to a friend jovially. While rendered into English it only confuses the English reader. So it should be better dropped.

vi) Slangs, onomatopoeic, humorous expressions etc.

Similarly, slangs, onomatopoeic expressions, nasalized expressions, humorous expressions, ironical expressions pose challenge to the translator. While rendered into another language, these expressions naturally lose something. Words expressing communal overtones pose great problem to the translator. While translating the translator needs to retain these words in order to impart cultural flavour to the translation and to make the meaning clear. For instance, Odia word 'dhoti' refers to a Hindu whereas 'lungi' refers to a Muslim.

The above-mentioned linguistic and cultural problems are common to translators of novels, poetry and dramas. However, the translator of fiction faces the problem of selecting the unit of translation. He has to decide whether a sentence or a paragraph should be the unit of translation. A paragraph should be the unit of translation and the translator should consider the text as a whole.

Translating poetry

The translator faces more difficult
problems while translating poetry. Translation of poetry involves not only rendering of similes, metaphors, irony, paradox etc. figures of speech like prose or fiction but also rendering of rhyme, rhythm and metre. Earlier poetry was written in metre and rhyme but most of the modern poetry is written in free verse. It is easier to transfer poems written in free verse than rhyming rhythmic poems into another language. The translator should 'feel' the pulse of the poem and transfer it to another language. That means the translator should possess poetic sensibility to feel and understand the poem. He should not 'rewrite' or 'produce an interpretation' of a poem.

Robert Frost said, 'Poetry is that which is lost in translation'. But poetry is not entirely lost in translation. Something of it is lost which also happens in case of translation of prose or fiction. However the loss is more in translation of poetry. A good translation of poetry is transcreation. In this context it would be relevant to quote views of Jayanta Mohapatra, a renowned bi-lingual Odia poet and translator who writes both in Odia and English:

Any poem will not move fluently into translation, my experience reveals the many hazards and difficulties encountered in the process. ...For example, it is almost impossible to translate poets like Upendra Bhanja or Gangadhar Meher. In Oriya literature the problem is of language, basically—and this fact is especially noticeable with these earlier poets, poets who used language with such powers of magic and devotion that resulted in instilling in readers' minds a divine and perhaps mystic presence. Neither Upendra Bhanja nor Gangadhar Meher used free verse, and their Poems literally sag with the weight of ornamentation and alliterative sounds,...To me, a good translation into English seems almost impossible. For the verse resembles a many-petalled flower, each petal having its own word-significance, its individual auditory echoes. To render gems like these into English would be futile exercise....(27-28)

Similarly, it is very difficult to translate the poetry of Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, John Donne, T.S. Eliot etc. into Indian languages.

Translating drama

The translator faces different types of challenges while translating dramatic
texts. It is difficult to transfer dialogues in dialects of one language into another language. Besides, cultural content of dramatic texts pose serious challenges to the translator. Further, a drama is completely comprehended only in its performance and dramatic techniques are changed and modified with time. For instance, how can the translator do justice to a Shakespearean drama or Samuel Beckett’s Waiting for Godot while rendering into Indian languages?

**Conclusion**

The world is fast approaching towards a globalised village. In this context, translation activity has a vital role to play in bridging the gap and bringing the people and nations closer. Besides, in a multilingual and multicultural country like India, translation plays an important role as a 'link' between various regional languages and cultures. The translator faces both linguistic and cultural problems while negotiating between two divergent cultures and languages. The translator plays a vital role as a mediator in this multilingual and multicultural globalised world. The translation should be readable while retaining cultural specificity of the ST. The translated text should be acceptable to the target language reader. The translator should strike a balance between maintaining close fidelity to the ST and complete freedom from it. If the translator frees himself completely from the ST, the Translated Text no longer remains a translation but becomes something else. As Walter Benjamin states in The Task of the Translator (1923), a translation participates in the 'afterlife' (Uberleben) of the foreign text, which means the original undergoes 'a transformation and a renewal' in its afterlife (17). In other words, a text survives in future through translation. The translator makes literary texts survive in future. He should translate what he likes and should not succumb to any imposition; because he would not be able to translate properly what he does not like. Finally, the translator would overcome the hurdles with efforts and sincerity. The proliferation of translations is ample proof that its popularity is growing.

**WORKS CITED**


[7] Schulte, Rainer. The Translator as Mediator between Two Cultures',