



The Concept of Translation in Indian and Western Traditions

Introduction

Translation in a larger sense is as old and as human communication. In fact, when humans did not have a language they used to communicate with gestures, actions and dance movements. Later on when language developed the range and methods of direct and indirect communication also grew. The **Tower of Babel** (as told in Genesis 11:1-9) is an origin myth that is meant to explain why peoples of the world speak different languages. According to the story, a united humanity in the generations following the Great Flood, speaking a single language and migrating eastward comes to the land of Shinar. There they agree to build a city and a tower tall enough to reach heaven. God, observing their city and tower, confounds their speech so that they can no longer understand each other, and scatters them around the world. Emphasis mine (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tower_of_Babel/05.05.2018)

The myth of the **Tower of Babel** explains the importance of translation as an unavoidable medium for effective communication. In effect, since the beginning each civilization, each culture has shown its own objective, pattern, practice and reception of translation. The reasons among others could be:

- (a) To keep one's knowledge alive through different modes of translations and artistic mediums.
- (b) Every sign and medium of translation is suggestive of the difference between communities.
- (c) To transfer knowledge between different cultures and civilizations.

For instance, the ancient Indian text Panchatantra was translated into Persian and from this translation the entire Europe came to know about this Indian text.

Definition of Translation:

Generally speaking, Translation is a set of activities carried out by the translator to covert a source language text into the text of the target language, wherein the source text is a text from which ideas are drawn, while the target text is a translated text in which the intended text is translated. E. Nida, a noted linguist and one of the most significant figures of modern translation theory of the west defines translation thus:

Translation consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style.

His most profound idea was on "equivalence". Equivalence is considered as the most crucial and complex strategy to adapt while translating a text of a distant culture. Nida talks about two kinds of equivalences, one is **formal** and the other is **dynamic**.

Susan Bassnett in her book Translation Studies begins with the "Central issues" concerning the discipline of Translation Studies and primarily focuses on language and semiotics. She begins with a quote from Hawkes (Structuralism and Semiotics. 1977) and states,

The first step towards an examination of the processes of translation must be to accept that although translation has a central core of linguistic activity, it belongs most properly to

semiotics, the science that studies sign-systems or structures, sign processes and sign functions.

Concept of Translation:

In the Indian context that offers a plurality of thought and diversity of culture, the concept of translation is received in its **multiplicity** while in the Western context translation is received in a very **specific and scientific** mode of literary communication. But, now with the dawn of decolonization, post-colonial studies have been insisting for a scientific approach to Indian translation for translation, in itself, carries a baggage of one's cultural history and civilization. Moreover, translation has also been used as a tool of colonial hegemony. Jeremy Mundy, in his book **Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications**, defines the nature of the discipline as,

Translation Studies is the new academic discipline related to the study of the theory and phenomena of translation. By its nature it is multilingual and also interdisciplinary, encompassing languages, linguistics, communication studies, philosophy and a range of types of cultural studies. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pjRmd3JLIYU>)

Quite appropriately, as suggested in the definition, the concept of Translation precludes:

1. Multilingual & Interdisciplinary approach
2. Covers a range of languages
3. Encompasses the disciplines of linguistics and Communication Studies.

Types of Translations:

The Western Context

John Dryden proposes **three types of translation** that can be useful to understand all kinds of translation. He talks first about **metaphrase**, or turning an author word by word, from line by line from one language into another. Ben Jonson's translation of Horace's *Ars Poetica* (Art of Poetry) falls into this category. The second is **paraphrase** or translation with latitude, where the author is kept in view by the translator, but is not strictly followed. And the third is **imitation**, where the translator assumes liberty on his own volition. Goethe, also while talking about translation and world literature, says in the context of the 'third epoch' of translation that

translation is not received 'instead of' the other text (the original) but rather 'in the other's stead'. He adds, when translating, one should go as far as the untranslatable; only then does one become aware of the foreign nation and the foreign language.

Roman Jakobson, a renowned formalist, divides translation in three ways:

1. **Intra-lingual** (when translation takes place in the same language: Susan Bassnett): Intra-lingual translation or rewording is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language. In other words, it is putting meaning in different words.
2. **Inter-lingual** (when translation happens between two languages): Inter-lingual translation or translation proper is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language. A fine example of this type would be the **Bible**. Assumed to have been written in Hebrew, the Bible also underwent numerous translations into Greek and Latin and then into English.
3. **Inter-semiotic** (when translation takes place between two sign-systems): Inter-semiotic translation is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems like novel to film or story to a play.

Translation can be typically divided into the following binary types:

1. Literal translation and non-literary translation or informative translation: Literary translation is a quest in itself. It includes poems, plays, songs, articles, novels, short-stories etc. However, the following important factors should be kept in mind while translating a text:
 - a. The type of text being translated
 - b. The purpose of the translation
 - c. The intended audience

Susan Bassnett-McGuire says:

The degree to which the translator reproduces the form, metre, rhythm, tone, register etc. of the SL text, will be as much determined by the TL system and will also depend on the function of the translation. One of the most difficult things to translate is poetry. It is essential to maintain the flavor of the original text.

Newmark also adds,

Translation of Poetry is an acid test showing the challenging nature of translating.

A.J.Arberry (1945) said that rhymed translation was comparable, in an acrobatic performance, to
 Setting an elephant to walk a tightrope

2. Oral translation and written translation: There are two main varieties of Oral translation:
 - a. **Consecutive**
 - b. **Simultaneous**

Both the types are actively used when communication occurs at various levels: from official speeches to interpersonal communication. Consecutive translation is applied during seminars or business meetings where the groups are **small** and have to interact, make presentations, or pay visits to public notary office or for reaching specific business agreements etc. while, Simultaneous translation is applied during conferences, seminars, workshops and business meetings which include a **large** number of participants. Again for simultaneous interpretation, microphones, earphones and a booth are necessary technical equipments.

Written translation is a reproduction of the content of the original document by means of the language of translation, in written form. The principal aim is to render written translation of texts and documents from SL text to TL text. However, in written translation, the translator should maintain the **integrity of translation**; attempt an **accurate** reproduction of content and terminology; comply with language standards – spelling and grammar.

3. Human-assisted translation and computer aided translation: Human translation (HT) is the best form of translating any written document – books, legal documents, manuals, product information, websites, personal documents, magazines, letters and advertisements. Implying thereby that human translators carry out all the processes involved in the translation of the written text. Here, the translator translates the original text into a version that captures the spirit and meaning of the original using the right tone and style suitable for the target reader of the translated text. On the other hand, machine translation (MT) is an automated translation. It is the process by which computer software is used to translate a text from one natural language (e.g. Gujarati) to another (e.g. English). However, to process any translation, human or automated, the meaning of a text in the original (source) language must be fully restored in the TF i.e., the translation. Apparently, this might appear to be simple, but machine translation requires extensive expertise in grammar, syntax, semantics in the source and TLs, as well as familiarity with each local region.

The Indian Context:

According to K. Satchidanandan, the original has never been specially privileged and the translator's position has never been secondary in India. A retelling of the classics or epics is a very creative norm of translation in the Indian context. During the pre-colonial period translation in India was very much Inter-textual. Vatsayan's phrase lokopichanuvada which means 'translatability' explains the historical length of existence of India's translating consciousness. The term for translation is anuvada i.e., repetition of what is enjoined by a Vedic text with a different wording. However repetition is not to be understood as a literal word-to-word rendering of the original from the source to target language. In the Indian context the reader is never a **passive** receiver of a text in which its truth is enshrined. Indranath Choudhary mentions that besides the notion of repetition (vidhivihita tasya nuvachanuvadah), Gopatha Brahmana reflects on the doctrine of purposefulness of translation (saprayerjanamanuvadah). Thereby suggesting that the problem of translation is not merely cultural or linguistic but aesthetic too. The word prayojanam is used to mention the aesthetic necessity of translation. Jaimini Nyaya says that the revelation of meaning is translation and Kayyat and Tolkapier talk about Pramanaantar, the contextual meaning which means, when transferred, translation becomes a reality. Ayappa Panikar has pieced together some very useful concepts of translation as,

1. Anukriti: Imitation of the original. (One can imitate what one is not. The product of imitation is not the same text but a similar text)
2. Arthakriya: Putting emphasis on the manifold ways in which meanings are enacted in different texts.
3. Vyaktivivekam: Rendering of the meaning inferred by the reader or invoking interpretation based on anumana or inferential potential of a given passage.
4. Ullurai: means inner speech. Not the heard melody or the speech within. In a literary text this is the vital layer.

In recent times, Ganesh Devy says,

Translation as a political weapon is not always and necessarily employed towards reducing the gap between the divine and the profane, the high and the low.

Aspects of translation:

1. Omission: Omission is one of the greatest problems in translation. Many a time, in translation a source text suffers from skipping of things that are mocking, ironical or satiric in tone.
2. Violence: According to Lawrence Venuti, an 'English' translator always perpetuates grave violence upon the source work, language and culture. This happens becomes the translated literature seeks to accommodate and fill the local subject matter culturally and linguistically into English. This can be seen as a tyranny of native English that tries to 'domesticate' a non-native content into English. As Spivak says translation is always encountered with 'two readerships' and 'two faced imaginings' (Spivak: 1995, XXII) In this process the local and the regional identities often get glossed over and consequently leads to a negative portrayal of culture and practices as the western readers like to see it. Thus one can say that translation is a culturally determined linguistic process. Mary Snell Hornby considers translation not just as an activity that takes place between two languages but as an interaction between different cultures (Gentzler: 1993, 190)
3. Imperialism: The colonial power plays between two or more unequal languages and cultures especially in the construction of colonial subject and their culture. This is the imperialist nature of translation. In fact, according to Niranjana,

Translation takes shape within the unequal relations of power that operates under colonialism and colonial translation always tries to anglicize the text. (1992, 2)

4. Not mechanical: Theo Hermans says,

Translation is of interest as a cultural phenomenon precisely because of its density, its specific weight and added value. If it were a merely mechanical exercise, it would be interesting as a photocopier. It is more interesting than a photocopier in that it presents us with a privileged index of cultural self-preference, or if you prefer self-definition...And because each translation offers its own, over determined, distinct construction of the 'otherness' of the imported text, we can learn a great deal from these cultural constructions – and from the construction of self which accompanies them. (Hermans: 2002, 17).

Conclusion:

Mark Newman rightly puts it,

Translation has its own excitement, its own interest. A satisfactory translation is always possible, but a good translator is never satisfied with it. It can usually be improved. There is no such thing as a perfect, ideal or 'correct' translation. A translator is always trying to extend his knowledge and improve his means of expression; he is always pursuing facts and words.

Thus, translation enlightens and broadens the mind and prompts one to be tolerant and at the same time to be fascinated about the unknown. So, translation, from this point of view is a necessary component of modern life dominated by a 'virtual' rather than a proximal existence.

References

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- II. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pjRmd3JLIYU/10.05.2018>

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