

Translation: A challenge and an opening for a new horizon

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The meaning of the term translation in the dictionary is

“A written communication in a second language having the same meaning as the written communication in a first language.” (WW)

Translation is an art of reproducing a work of one language into another language and it is done in a manner that meaning, feelings, emotions, ideas, style, diction, drift are completely retained. Translation aims at reproducing text of one language into another along with the entire ethno-linguistic, socio-cultural and aesthetic elements. Translation of a literary text is expected to fulfil all these requirements that are, undoubtedly, of a very high order.

The most common misconception about Translation is that a text in one language can be translated into another language word by word but the fact is that this word by word correspondence is not at all possible because of the differences in languages. Almost all the languages of the world have different historically evolved systems. Languages differ on the basis of grammatical structure, etymologies and idioms. Thus, translation cannot be a straightforward mechanical process. The differences between languages dictate the difference of expressions in translation.

Translation has become a very important activity in the today's globalised world. Books written in one language are being translated into many different languages to make them available to the readers around the globe. Translation has become a very important cultural activity that establishes mutual dialogue between people of different regions and different cultures. It helps people across cultures in understanding each other. In the context of India also, translation plays a very vital role in bringing people of different cultures closer. India is a very diverse nation with over 22 different languages and hundreds of different dialects. It is said that in India the dialect changes every ten miles. India is home to a huge treasure of creative work spread widely across different regional languages. In the past, because of India's vastness and its regional insularity a work in any South Indian language remained incomprehensible for North Indian readers and a work in Hindi could not reach out to the South Indian readers.

There has always been a misconception in the minds of the people that translation is word to word interpretation. But this practice reduces the effect of the SL. This word by word translation may be, to some extent, possible in case of scientific and technical texts but as far as literary texts are concerned this literal translation is not at all possible.

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While translating a text, one should always consider the fact that a language is not just a system of words and sentences. It has evolved through a complex system of cultural and ethno-linguistic paraphernalia. A language is deeply rooted in the ethos of a community. It embodies the efforts of a language community to conceptualize and interpret the world, as well as human experience and relations. Therefore, a language can only be interpreted with reference to a specific cultural context. And there are various expressions and words that might not have their exact equivalents in other languages. Moreover, a translator is supposed to confine himself to the writer's perspective only. He is just a mediator between two languages and not a commentator. A translator, while translating a text, cannot include his own ideas in it. He just has to convey what the writer has said.

And conveying the exact information from the source language into the target language is one of the major problems of translation. The content and the means used to convey the information depend on the norms of the target language. Since translation is a very responsible practice, it is mandatory that the translator is familiar with the diction, idiom and nuances of both the source language and the target language. Literary translation aims to recreate the original as best as it can.

Translation is a very complex and responsible practice. There are a lot of problems that a translator has to face while translating a literary or any creative work. There are problems of ambiguity, problems that originate from structural and lexical differences between languages and multiword units like idioms and collocations. Another problem would be the grammar because there are several constructions of grammar poorly understood, in the sense that it isn't clear how they should be represented, or what rules should be used to describe them. The words that are really hard to translate are frequently the small, common words, whose precise meaning depends heavily on context. Besides, some words are untranslatable when one wishes to remain in the same grammatical category. The question of whether particular words are untranslatable is frequently debated.

A language carries its own cultural and ethno-linguistic connotations. It is deeply rooted in the culture and the words used are the symbols denoting meaning. Readers of that language decode those symbols and understand the meaning. Through this process of decoding, they enter the world of the author and try to understand the perspective of the author. When a text is translated into another language, it is mandatory that it is translated in such a manner that the readers of the target language feel the same way the readers of the source language felt while reading the original text. A translator has to retain that feel in the text

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when he translates it from one language into another language. He has to take the readers into the world of the writer through the target language and this is, unarguably, a very tough task. Thus, He has to employ every possible approach to do the job successfully. At some places, he may be able to do literal translation but at many places he would need a free translation. There may be some places where translation is not at all possible and there the translator has to put forth the main idea and the gist of the write up explaining the readers of the target language the meaning of the text.

Thus, a translator has to create by himself some communicative values in the target language that correspond to the meaning of the communicative values of the source language. Translation is actually an act of reproduction that operates in one direction only and it is desired that a translation is an exact copy of the original text. But it is not at all possible to produce an exact copy of the original text through translation and the translator should not stress it either. The reason is that it involves a change in the medium of expression which has its own grammar, vocabulary, idioms and cultural background. Moreover, the main focus of a translator must be to translate the text and not the language only. If he tries his hand on the literal translation by translating a text word by word into the target language, it is quite possible that he will fail miserably and at the same time destroy the original text in the process. Thus, the major problem that a translator faces is the problem of equivalence. The words in the languages have different shades and nuances which act as a hindrance in providing exact equivalents in translation.

No two languages in the world have same vocabulary, grammar and literary devices. Let's now talk about the problems that are faced by the translators while translating a Hindi text into English. English in today's world is, undoubtedly, one of the most important languages. So, translation of the works in Hindi or any

other Indian language into English would open a much wider window upon the world. By translating Indian works into English language, the Indian perspective can be sent over to the English knowing readers around the world. The readers of the world would be able to understand the character of India and its beautiful cultural matrix that's been recreated in the works of fiction in Hindi and other Indian languages. But translating a text in Hindi into English is a Herculean task since it is very challenging because of the fact that the two languages are very different on a number of grounds. The linguistic environments where these two languages have grown are entirely different. In Hindi-English translation, simple nouns and adjectives do not usually produce problems. Equivalence in grammatical representation relates to correspondence between verb and object in structural organization. It includes 'tense', 'voice', 'gender', 'case', 'word organization' and many other things.

There is a lot of variation in the tense sequence of the two languages and in such cases a translator has to follow the rules of the target language. For instance, in Hindi it is correct to say,

Mujhe laga ki who bahut nirmum hai. (Present tense)

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But in English the rule says that the dependent clause will change according to the principal clause. Thus, the possible English translation of the above sentence will be,

I felt that he was very cruel. (Past tense)

Therefore, during the process of translating a Hindi text into English, a translator comes across various problems. It is quite a fact that anybody would feel traumatized if his translation of a text reduces or enhances the real and essence of the original text. In the context of Hindi to English translation this problem arises because of the complete different ethno-linguistic backgrounds of the two languages. There is no one to one correspondence between the grammatical structure and lexical units of the two languages. Lexical units or the words of a language pose a very great challenge for the translator. The words of any language have different shades and nuances and play a vital role in the process of translation. Words in all languages have their own intensity and tradition of existence. There are some words in one language which have much deeper intensity as compared to their equivalents in another language. Same is the case between Hindi and English.

There are various words and expressions in Hindi language that do not have their exact equivalents in English language. Let me discuss one such example.

Main phatey hue ghare ki bhati sadak par khada tha.

This statement in the source language is emotionally very intense. We have many words in English that mean phatna like “burst”, “explode”, “flare up”, “blow up” but these words cannot convey the intensity of the statement in Hindi. The above expression can also be translated in the following manner.

I stood on the road like a broken pitcher.

Here again, we see that the translation is absolutely correct in terms of grammar and structure but the pathos that we find in the original expression are lost during this translation. So it means that literal word by word translation is not at all possible here if we want to retain the real essence of the original text. Thus, the above statement would be translated as follows.

I stood on the road utterly disappointed/thwarted/dejected.

This translation does very well convey the real essence of the original expression. Thus, we find that translating a literary text is not an easy job. There are so many difficulties that a translator has to overcome while translating a literary text. Translation of a literary text does not only mean transference of a text from one language to another. It is actually transference of one culture into the other. Therefore, while translating a literary text it is far more important to convey the real flavour of the text than giving only word to word translation. George P. Kahari in his essay “Cultural Identity and Problems of Cross-Cultural Communication” believes:

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In literature, language is used in a way that is aesthetically appealing but it also invokes our personal attention to its use, especially as a medium for the making of folk-tales, at oral level, and for making fiction at the literate level.¹

Apart from the problem of finding equivalents in English language, translators find many more difficult areas where they have to tread very carefully. These areas include Hindi idioms, culture-specific terms, similes, metaphors, slang words and abuses. The above stated areas make the translator’s job very challenging and thought-provoking. In the process of rendering a truthful

correspondence between the original text and the translated text, there is always a risk of reducing or enhancing the real meaning of the original text and thus, destroying the originality of the text.

Translating Hindi idioms into English is, undoubtedly, a very tough job. Idioms and proverbs convey a very special meaning and while translating these idioms, the translator has to be extra cautious lest the real essence should be lost. For example –

Ghar ka bhedi Lanka dhayey.

This Hindi proverb could pose a big problem for the translator. The proverb is deeply rooted in the culture of the place. Lanka is a place which is associated with Hindu mythology. And this proverb has a special meaning to convey. Now the challenge for the translator is to convey that real essence and basic meaning of the original expression. The literal translation of the expression could be:

A spy in the house can destroy Lanka.

Such word by word translation has completely destroyed the real meaning of the proverb. Moreover, a reader in the target language might not know the mythology related to the proverb and therefore, might fail to understand the use of the word Lanka in the proverb. The possible translation of the expression would be:

An insider leaks out secretive information to help out your enemies.

Another big problem that is faced by translators while translating a Hindi text into English is of the terminology in Hindi. Indian culture perhaps by virtue of being more reverent towards relationships than Western culture constructs a specific terminology for relationships (sometimes euphemizing them). When it comes to the translation of relationships terminology the nuances of the relationship as they exist in Hindi culture are definitely lost. For instance, the terms like bua, masi, chachi, mami are some terms in Hindi that carry weight and possibly considered endeared to the addresser. The English equivalent for all the above terms is only “aunty”. It is very clear that the use of the word “aunty” definitely destroys the endearment. Same is the case with chacha, mama, phupa that have only one equivalent in English and that is uncle. Therefore, many a times such terms are kept as they are even in the English translation to retain that feel and that endearment that the addresser wants to convey.

There are some other terms that are untranslatable at the conceptual level. Chhooa is a very important cultural term which has no corresponding word in English. At the best it could be translated as 'left over' or 'dirty' in the context of food. But in Indian cultural system, it has a very complex sense. It refers to the Indian caste system where the food touched by the member of a low caste is regarded as polluted and unfit to eat. In a broader context, it becomes unfit for eating if someone else has eaten from it. The concept of 'untouchability' is at the root of this term. The suffering people are also aware of this fact.

Names of the food items also pose great difficulty for translators. Some of them are almost untranslatable into English. For example, burfi, laddu, pera, sondh halwa, jalebi etc. are all referred to as sweets. In English we do not have particular names for different sweets but in Hindi we do. The Indian style of clothing also poses a problem like, kurta dhoti, pyjama, kurta, garara, lehanga, choli, odhni, sherwani, salwar kameez, ravika, dupatta are some of the Indian dresses that do not have their exact equivalents in the English language. A translator has to retain these terms as they are in his translation and explain them in the glossary.

Some of the abuses used in the colloquial Hindi language are sometimes very difficult to translate. The term harami definitely has its English equivalent i.e. "illegitimate" but a term haramkhori does not have any equivalent in the English language. Haramkhori is a very commonly used and well-known abuse in the Hindi language. It is generally used to humiliate somebody by calling him good for nothing. For example,

Tu apni haramkhori chhod aur kuchh kam kar.

The above statement can be translated into English as follows:

Leave your parasitic dependence on others and start doing some work.

Similarly, the abusive term manhoos or manhoosiyat is very difficult to translate and it's even more difficult to convey the frustration, gloominess and sadness associated with such words. Manhoos can be translated into English as "ominous" but manhoosiyat does not have any exact equivalent in the English language. It describes the severity of a gloomy situation. It gives meaning of sadness in the atmosphere. In English it can be translated as ominous ness but again the severity of frustration and gloominess is lost.

Besides the use of regional or rustic language, there is yet another problematic area where a translator has to tread very carefully. Metaphors and similes are the heart of Hindi language and they carry symbolic meanings. In the essay,

“Translation: Mode of Literary Communication,” N.K. Shastri justifies the problem of translating metaphors.

Metaphor is one of the indirect figures and like all other indirect figures, it communicates in an indirect way what might have been communicated directly in terms of the conventions of a language and for that reason it has an effect over and above what would accompany the direct accomplishment of the intended effect.²

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For example:

Who mera chand hai.

The above statement is a very common expression used in India to show love, affection and adoration for someone. The term chand does have its exact equivalent in the English language and the above statement can be translated into English as follows.

He is my moon.

But in English, such usage is not acceptable. Thus, translator has to retain the term

chand as it is and later has to explain its meaning in the glossary.

Code-switching and code-mixing are very problematic areas where a translator has to tread very cautiously. These are linguistics terms denoting the concurrent use of more than one language, or language variety, in conversation. Multilinguals, people who speak more than one language, sometimes use elements of multiple languages in conversing with each other. In India, the people of upper-middle class usually use this technique while conversing. In India where English is a prestige language, code-mixed varieties drawing upon English as the embedded language assume a degree of prestige. The amount of mixing corresponds with the level of education and is an indicator of membership in the elite group. For example:

Bolo kya haal chal hain?

The above conversation can be translated as follows:

What's up?

We can notice here that there are some expressions that have been translated differently as there are no equivalents in the English language for these

expressions. Kya haal chal hai can be translated as either “what’s up” because we do not have any exact equivalents for the terms haal, chal in the English language.

In conclusion, it can be said that a translator has to strike a balance between all these difficulties and should try his best to strike a balance between the two languages so as to enable the readers to participate in the traditions and style of the target language text. No doubt, translating a text from the Hindi language into the English language is a Herculean task but it is worth undertaking. There are definitely many grave losses in translation but they do not outnumber the gains of it. The undeniable truth of the activity of translation is that it enriches the target language and introduces the source language texts to a larger audience around the world. In the context of Hindi to English translation, gains are undeniably huge. There are ever increasing literary works in the Hindi language that incorporate the true culture of the country. And their translation into English would make them available to the English readers the world over helping them understand the true spirit and essence of this diverse nation. The translation of a Hindi literary work into English language will familiarize the readers of the target language with the socio-economic realities of Indian life.

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