

# TRANSLATION: ADAPTIVE ARTICULATION OF CULTURE AND ELT

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## ABSTRACT

The 21st century has witnessed the transient periods of various ideologies from 'Cultural Turn' to 'Linguistic Turn' and finally the 'Technical Turn'. This knowledge century requires reconsideration of disciplinary domains and recommends the knowledge of translation studies, as it has an age-old process and has travelled through various kinds of these common sense ideologies. Its multifaceted history in a multilingual country like India deserves special attention. Language plays crucial role to exchange ideas and feelings in intercultural societies. To connect two different cultures, translation is the linking approach for crossing through various cultures and communication. Hence, translation is one of the imperative and fundamental ways in transferring culture. So, the issues and myths related to the process of translation necessitate a thorough study of it.

This paper analyses various myths associated with translation and role of it in transferring different cultural concepts. It also strives to discuss implications of new developments on perceptions and practices of translation studies in English Language Teaching in Indian context.

**KEYWORDS:** Translation, Myths of Translation, Translation and ELT

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has the distinction of being named as the 'Knowledge Century' at its initial days. But it does not mean that other centuries were not knowledge centuries. For that matter every century or society has been a knowledge century because no society can manage itself without knowledge.

However, the uniqueness in the current century is that the processing of knowledge has become quicker in comparison to the previous ones. The exponential changes, made about by science and technology in the form of the ICT and in computational abilities, have contributed enormously to discovery and study of new cultures and their alternative modes of knowledge(s). The result is that knowledge is plural now. These knowledge(s) are in different languages.

Hence, it is essential to translate at least their preeminent components to access knowledge(s), as they exist in as many languages as they exist in the world. Translation has, thus, come forth as one of the preconditions of survival in the obtaining world. The question often asked is: who would survive in this knowledge century? The answer is: only those individuals, communities and societies will survive that will learn from others, continuously.

The derivative to the question is: how to learn from others, since other knowledge(s) is/are so many languages? One word that answers the question is: Translation. It offers itself as a bridge across different cultures and their knowledge systems, and their five basic aspects: acquisition of knowledge, preservation of knowledge, creation of knowledge, dissemination of knowledge and application of knowledge.

In 21<sup>st</sup> century, Translation Studies is a rising subject area of research and profession. It has come out as a new discipline which has abundance of ideas coming from philosophy, linguistics, literature, computer sciences and may others. Both written and spoken translations have played a crucial role in the inter-human communication through out history.

The word translation itself has been taken from a Latin term meaning 'to bring or carry across'. Even though the term 'translation' cannot be defined precisely, scholars and theorists have attempted to describe it. Some of these definitions are presented below:

Dr Samuel Johnson defined translation as involving the process of *change into another language, retaining the sense* which is indeed a basic objective. The performance of translation work is an endeavor to mediate between different cultures, languages, texts and nationalities. Hence, *translation as an activity means moving from one language to another-which again means the replacement of textual material in one language by appropriate textual material from another language.*

## 2. THE NATURE OF TRANSLATION

The scope of translation is a bright and beautiful in the coming years because it is the only medium through different people come to know different works. It is generally assumed in the present world that a person who knows more than one languages can become a translator. But this fact is not fully true because a successful translator must have adequate knowledge of both languages, culture and social background of that subject. Further, s/he must be competent in communication skills.

Basudeb Chakraborty says that a good translation shows *a spontaneous and creative process of journey of a theme and a meta theme from one linguistic framework to another.* Translation is a process which conveys the information of source language into target language with suitable linguistic patterns and culture. The process of translation requires thorough knowledge and deep sense of source text and one who translates bound to make compact relationship between two separate domains of knowledge.

## 3. IMPORTANCE OF TRANSLATION IN INDIA

The multilingual and multicultural aspects of culture make India, a country of unity in diversity. To be familiarize with this vast and old history of different cultures, translation has always been in pivotal role for long time and still continues till today.

Discussion about Indian perspectives on translation of classic literature is quite relevant here. Indian translation had not in limelight till the 19th Century. It has been phenomenal process of translation of Sanskrit's classic in India and many epics have been paraphrased, adapted and translated without considering the proper formal equivalence. The example of Valmiki's Ramayana into Tamil version by Kambana by following the Dravidian epic structure witnesses the fact. These religious texts have always been in main role in the history of translation.

Translation of the Bible was and is debatable question which raised again and again and this sort of split in thoughts create a big gap among Christianity because of the inequality predominates in the versions of the Bible. The examples like translation of the Bible in Latin by Saint Jerome in 4<sup>th</sup> century and the Old Testament of the Bible into Greek in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

The role of translation is always grandeur in literature because it is the only medium which disseminates the real essence and importance of classic works to the common readers of intercultural society. Had Tagore's Gitanjali not been translated into English and W.B. Yeats written its preface, he could not have received Nobel Prize in 1913.

The discipline of translation can be a big offshoot for the job seekers and researchers because one who can translate well is in great demand in the present global world. It is demanded in every field like electronic media to print media, national to international, national to vernacular and vice-versa. Since one must know more than two languages for the advancement in science and technology, translation has become imperative part of everyone's life and career in this technical era. Still s/he has to depend on translation works because lot of great books or works are yet to be translated.

## 4. TYPES OF TRANSLATION

The enormity of time and energy wasted in discussing what is often categorized as central issues of Translation Studies (TS), like 'language and culture in translation', 'equivalence', 'loss or gain', 'untranslatability', 'translation as science or art', and status of translation is nothing but fatal in its proportion.

Translation has for long been labeled as secondary, derivative, parasitic and subordinate activity. It is believed that those who are not successful as poets turned to criticism, and those who could not become critics became translators. Hence, the types of translation would shift from language-centric to meaning centric.

**4.1 Literal Translation:** Paraphrase falls in this category. In this type of translation, dictionary as a tool of translation is considered as the truest friend of a translator, as it remains in case of science, social science texts or administrative translation.

**4.2 Metaphorical/Suggestive Translation:** Such translations in which *dhwani* (suggested meaning) is the focus of translation, and language is used metaphorically. This is often used successfully in poetic translation in particularly and in literary translation in general. In this category, dictionary becomes a living museum of lifeless words.

**4.3 Cultural Translation:** Culture attains central place in this category of translation, particularly in case of translation between culturally unrelated texts. For that matter, cultural transference remains a key component in all translational endeavours, but in this category, the receptor's culture attains centrality, and translational strategies are accordingly used. For instance, in Indian narratives in many languages animals like donkeys, owls and pigs are associated with negative attributes but that is not the case with Russian. So they have to be re-habilitated culturally.

**4.4 Discursive Translation:** Translation in this category focuses on discourse as a unit, rather than focusing on literal, phrasal translation. It considers the written part of the spoken and spoken part of the written as complimentary and indispensable parts of focus, as in case of a discourse which is language in motion. Mahadev Desai's translation of Gandhi's autobiographhy Satya na Prayogo (The Story of My Experiments with Truth) that might be a good case to study falls under this category.

## 5. MYTHS OF TRANSLATION

These categories would become the basis to examine and puncture a few myths or fallacies that have haunted the world of translation too long, and consumed enormous human resources.

**5.1 Loss in Translation:** Much energy has been wasted in the discussion of the issue of loss in translation. The loss in translation is a myth. The fact is that every act of translation is a thing of gain, not of loss. It may be the complaint of loss of either more or less gain in this case. It modifies the tradition by joining the tradition of which the source text has already become a part.

Let us suppose for a while that no translation, in case of Premchand, was even attempted, the world of non-Hindi and non-Urdu knowing people would have remained deprived of new experiences contained therein. Also, Premchand's literary fortune would have also remained restricted to his language(s) only with limited circulation of his writings.

The target language would have been deprived of his fictional art and world view manifested in his works. This loss would have been unimaginable to the author and also to the community of his non-Hindi readers who would have had no access to world in absence of translation. So, the issue of loss in translation matters only to those who do not need translation or those who are interested only academically in comparative study of two versions as a discipline. Similarly, the issue of translatability is often associated with translation whereas it is a problem of translator.

Whether it is a myth or reality or both or none at all depends on the translator's competence and his commitment. Let me reiterate it here that there is no loss in translation. The loss in translation is discussed by those who do not need translation. Let us consider an issue. Gurudev Tagore translated his poem from Bengali to English in Gitanjali. Those who know Bengali and English compare the poems in Bengali and their English versions.

No surprise that they find English version lacking in Bengali's musicality, suppleness and density. But they forget that there is only gain. Imagine the situation what would have happened if Gitanjali was not at all translated? Two situations were definite: Tagore would have been confined to Bengali only, and he, Bengali and India too, might have deprived of the Noble Prize.

**5.2 Untranslatability:** Is untranslatability a myth or reality? Untranslated words may be called as 'aporia' which Derrida termed for dead lock of meanings. Untranslatability is a question often posed in TS. Untranslatability is a myth. It has for long been used as an excuse for not attempting translation of a complex cultural text, for it had been suggested that poetry is what is lost in translation or what is untranslatable.

In other words, the statements like these are a critical conspiracy, for untranslatability emerges as a criterion for valuing literary merit of a work. If a poem may be translated, it cannot be termed poetry. The blame falls on the poet. If certain extract of a poem cannot be translated, the blame would rest with the translator. Untranslatability is a problem of translator but not of translation.

Moreover, what is untranslatable for one translator may be translatable for others. All texts that are composed are translatable. If there is a text which is untranslatable for a translator today, it may find a more proficient translator tomorrow. Moreover, no text is fully untranslatable, certain portions often are.

To negotiate these portions there are strategies at the disposal of a translator or to be devised by him or her. Translation is a complex activity. It is so because of the nature of its instrument i.e., language. Language is a technology. It is self reflexive and self-referential. It is the blue guitar of Wallace Stevens on which things, as they are, are changed upon. (Stevens: 165).

Gaps in translation are inevitable, as in case of all acts of writing. Gaps are no major issues, for they are prerogatives of creativity. Is it possible to be a text with more gaps than TS Eliot's *The Wasteland*? Notwithstanding the person responsible for them- blame Ezra Pound for creating them or T S Eliot for accepting the dismembering the text, or the purpose behind them there are certain issues that cannot be glossed over.

Eliot's poem, as it exists, would be incomprehensible without using mental acrobatics for connecting what appears unconnectable. These gaps have to be dealt with through reading strategies, and accept that Pound wanted to underscore disjunctions and orderlessness in modern society through structurelessness of the poem.

Moreover, hypothetically speaking, if Pound had not chopped off considerable portions of the poem, the poem would have still suffered from gaps, perhaps a little less but the poem might have suffered from surfeit of stuff. Hence there are may be some who think that gaps are unbridgeable by the receivers of the translation tend to undermine the capacity of translators to bridge the gaps on their own and thereby be creative recipients of translation.

**5.3 The Unit of Translation:** The issue of the basic unit of translation has concerned translators to a good extent. Is it word (*varna*), phrase (*pada*), sentence (*vakya*), chapter (*prakaran*) the unit of translation? It is possible to buttress arguments in the favour of one against the other.

The word and its association with other words leading to making of phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and chapters cannot be ignored but the fact is that discourse is the object of translation. One translates discourse from one language into another. One cannot wholly express one's feelings and ideas through words because words have no real connection to their meanings or the things they describe but they arbitrariness, according to Ferdinand De Saussure, where he states that words make sense to us only because they are relational. Discourse is language in action.

Language in action includes oral, written, printed and virtual forms. Therefore, apart from the way discourse as a body of statements is arranged in a regular and systematic manner depends on what is performed but not articulated through written language.

Thus, translation is an intra/interdiscursive activity. Let us take the case of Gandhi's *Satyana Prayogo*. No book of historiography of translation in India can be complete without the discussion of translations by Mahatma Gandhi and translation of some of his works by Mahadevbhai Desai who was more than his personal secretary and his soul in a different body. Gandhi, as we know, wrote his autobiography in Gujarati entitled as *Satyana Prayogo*. Mahadevbhai translated it in English.

Since Gandhi's life was too hectic he could not even go through it. But he did not express his dissatisfaction with the English version. It means that he did not disapprove of the translation. So who am I, if Bapu did not complain? However, those who know Gujarati would say that Mahadevbhai edited quite a bit in the process of translation.

Mahadevbhai added too, quite meaningfully, wherever he thought crucial. The case needs further study, for which I would focus only on the title of *Satyana Prayogo*.

Literally translated it would have meant: Satya= Truth, na= of, Prayogo= experiments i.e., 'Experiments of Truth'. The disarming simplicity of Gandhi in case of the title of his autobiography, like that of his life, would have inveigled upon a naïve translator to consider it an undemanding task. But Mahadevbhai did not opt for convenient option: 'Experiments of Truth' and changed 'of' with 'with'.

Rightly so because truth does not, and cannot, make experiments. The agents of experiments are human beings. The translator's change of preposition and choice was valid. He did not stop there. He added 'My' to the title which on the face of it was not needed. Why did Mahadevbhai then add it? The fact is that no one can make experiments with truth, if it is written with capital 'T'.

The monotheistic theological and philosophical traditions do not allow experiments. In Indian tradition, truth is born out of non-truth, and is always plural in reality. 'Ekam sat vipramvahudha vadanti'. (Truth is one but wise souls speak about it in multiple ways.) Moreover, truth is of two kinds: rit and sat which means truth as value and true as fact.

Truth as fact is valuable but more valuable is truth as value, for latter may save lives and serve human cause rather than slavish adherence to facts. Gandhi had contingent truth in his view. It was his privilege not to accept truths as given to him but experiment with them in the light of his personal observation and experience.

Mahadevbhai's translation of the title not only does justice to Gandhi's life and vision but also leaves many philosophical interpretations peeping out of it. Ultimately, Gandhi's autobiography or story of his experiments came out. Myth of Source Text (ST) The institutions of translation and translator have suffered much in the history of translation due to hierarchical order, verging on binary connotations, 'Source Text' (ST) and 'Target Text' (TT), with the author as the creator.

The terms like 'Source Text' (ST) and 'Target Text' (TT) also need to be reconsidered. The reality is that there is nothing like ST. How can there be 'Source Text', when there is nothing source? What was known as the source was, in fact, many texts go into the making of the so-called ST, and many texts are constructed with layers of newer meanings after the TT.

Hierarchical notions such as these have dented, and they still do so, confidence of translators, hence a translator rather than worrying so much about the superiority of the ST or inferiority of TT, should focus on the practice of translation like a soldier on the border who is concerned about his duty and least inflicted by notions of superiority or inferiority of his supporters or adversaries.

Translators should worry less about theoretical aspects whose knowledge may at times prove to be detrimental to translatorial enterprise. Translation has often been considered parasitic, derivative and subservient. It is parasitic, as it is dependent on the some other text for its life source or force. It is perceived to be subordinate to the text to be translated which is known as the Source Text (ST) because it would not have come into existence, had the ST not been there. It is considered inauthentic, for the ST is claimed to be authenticity. Moreover, the ST is privileged because of the false notion of originality.

The monotheistic cultures consider the word of the author sacred, and disturbing it through translation challenged the authority of the author and so was considered profane. On the surface, the above charges against translation may appear true.

However, if probed deeper philosophically or ontologically, they do not hold true. The Source Text is a parasite in a certain way because it is not the cause but the effect or consequence.

The cause of the ST lies with/in the experience or ideas and their organization or articulation through a medium that may be language, dance, painting, or sculpture. Translation is the Succeeding Text (ST), and what has been known as the Source Text is the Preceding Text (PT) which is preceded by PTs, causal text(s) in the form of actual experience(s) or idea(s) whose traces go into the making of tangible manifested text(s).

In this light the question of translation being derivative does not arise. However, people are privileged to have personal views, as the British Chinese author Guo dismissed translation as inauthentic in Jaipur Literary Festival 2014. ( in the 'Report Spotlight @The Fest', The Hindustan Times, January 19, 2014, p.12) In the same session on translation, Mengiste, an Ethiopian American, however, thought otherwise and stated that she relied on translation to understand her native culture since she did not read her native language.

Both may be extreme cases but Jhumpa Lahiri was more balanced her views when she called for more power to be put in the hands of readers:

*Readers should get to read what they want as widely as they want. This can happen only if publishers and translators give them access to books. (Ibid., 12)*

## 6. TRANSLATION AND ELT

In the 1980s, translation emerged as a buzzing term in language classes when the experts realised that they could also use translation as one of their communicative techniques and activities.

Gradually, translation again found a stable and consistent place in the foreign language class, where its use was recommended by specialists. Danchev lists some arguments in favour of translation, which would help 1) natural and easy comparison between the target and the native language, thus facilitating faster decoding of difficult target language structures and elements; 2) quick and effective comprehension control; 3) to overcome and neutralise native language transfer. From a local point of view, Shiyab and Abdullateef (2001) consider translation extremely important for foreign language teaching simply because it allows conscious learning and control of the foreign language, and as a result, it reduces native language interference.

Using translation can make learning meaningful because the learner is an active participant in the process. Translation has also been used to teach grammar. In this respect, teachers can show students equivalent and non-equivalent structures between L1 and L2. Many studies suggested a positive and facilitative role of translation (Newmark 1991; Husain 1994; Kern 1994; Omura 1996).

Recent research in pragmatics also suggests that greater awareness of L1 helps in the more effective communicative use of L2. Translation is a means by which both languages can be assessed. Rather than being seen as an obstacle to real language use, translation might more effectively be viewed as a way of fine-tuning the language to be used in given situations and conditions (Owen, 2003).

Liao (2006) summarizes the positive aspects of using translation: (1) it will be easy for the learners to understand the target language (2) it will help students to verify whether their comprehension is correct; (3) it comforts memory constraints in memorizing more words, idioms, grammar, and sentence structures; (4) it is helpful for students to develop and express ideas in another language; and (5) it reduces learning anxiety and enhance motivation to learn L2.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Therefore, Translation is very necessary for democratization of knowledge, social harmony and peace, and ensuring human happiness in the new world integrated by technology and economy. In nutshell, the arguments for using translation in the language classroom surpass the arguments against it.

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