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Article : Translation as a device for decoding a text

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Abstract

The paper defines Translation from linguistic and literary points of view. It argues that given due importance and efforts translation can be an effective and creative device for decoding a text and reviews two translations in this context.

1.0 Introduction

The term 'Translation' as compared to 'Original' has acquired an inferior status in the study of literature. Conservative (and elite as well) readers think that much of the originality of a good piece of literature gets lost in the process of translation. This is similar to Francis Bacon's views on abridged versions of books.

'*Distilled books are like common distilled water-flashy thing*'.

The words translation and Tran creation are probably known only in academic circle. An ordinary reader does not know the difference between these two terms. It is true that originality has a close relation to the language of a text. However given our limitations in learning different languages the only way to read good literature in a foreign language is an authentic, good translation or transcreation. Is this paper I propose to explain these two terms vis-a-vis their approach to a text, the processes involved cannons of authenticity and their importance in the context of study of literature. I shall then review two translations viz. P. L. Deshpande's 'Ti Phoolarani' Marathi translation of G. B. Shaw's 'Pygmalian' and Rabindranath Tagore's 'Gitanjali'

1.2.1 Translation

According to Catford[1] translation is an activity of enormous importance in the modern world and it is a subject of interest not only to linguist's, professional and amateur translators and language teacher, but also to electronic engineers and mathematicians. Books and articles on translation have been written by specialists in those fields. Writers on the subject have approached it from different points of view, regarding translations as literary art or as a problem in

computer-programming, discussing the problem of 'faithfulness' of rendering of whether words or ideas are to be translated.

Translation is an operation performed on languages, a process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another. Relations between languages can generally be regarded as two directional. Translation as a process is always unidirectional, it is always performed in a given direction i. e. form a Source language into a Target language. It may be defined as the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent text material in another language (TL)

1.2.2 Types

A free translation is unbounded. Equivalents shunt up and down the rank scale but tend to be at the higher ranks sometimes between larger units than the sentence Word for word translation is essentially rank bounded at word rank. Literal translation lies between these two extremes. It may start from a word for word translation, but make changes in conformity with TL grammar for example.

Hindi : tks ns mldk Hkh Hkyk tks uk ns mldk dh Hkyk

(W. W.) English: Giver blessed, non-giver also blessed

(Literal): Giver be blessed non-giver also (be blessed)

(Free): Bless them all.

1.2.3 Translatability

SL language texts and TL texts are more or less translatable rather than absolutely translatable or untranslatable. However translation fails or untranslatibility occurs when it is impossible to build functional features of the situation into the contextual meaning of the TL text. Broadly speaking the cases where this happens falls in two categories. Those where the difficulty is linguistic and those where it is cultural. In linguistic untranslatibility the functionally revelent features include some which are in fact formal features of SL text. If the TL has no formally corresponding features, the text or the item is (relatively) untranslatable e. g. pun. Cultural untranslatibility occurs when situational features of functionally relevant for the SL text is completely absent form the TL cultures.

1.3 Transcreation

There cannot be textual equivalents at all levels such as phonological graph logical, lexical and semantic. Hence textual equivalents should be related to the contextual equivalents as far as possible keeping in view the lexical and grammatical equivalents. Both surface and deep structure should be taken care of. The cultural and contextual meaning should be given prominence. Thus the act of translation involves establishing a meaningful correspondence between any two languages.

According to Nida[2] translation is a complex procedure involving analysis, transfer and restructuring. The process of analysis involves three deferent sets features viz the grammatical relationships between constituent parts, the referential meaning of semantic units and the connotative values of the grammatical stnuotues and the semantic units. Our choice of modes of translation must be dictated essentially by their practical usefulness and their explanatory power. In transferring the referential content of the message we are not concerned primarily with the exact words but with the sets of components. We do not translate words but bundles of componential features. Thus translation is the reproduction in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the message of the source language first in terms of meaning and second in terms of style. This type of translation may be called transcription which involves reproduction of the sprit of the text, without hampering its meaning, from one language (SL) into another (TL)

1.4 Authenticity

The intuitive response and judgment of different speakers may differ with regard to the correctness of any translation. So it may not always be easy to decide whether a particular translation is good and faithful. It is also not easy to decide who is a competent bilingual speaker. There may be varying degrees of bilingualism and it may be difficult to fix a degree at which one may be acknowledged as a competent bilingual speaker. A passage may be effectively translated in more than one way. So it is not easy to decide which version is correct or better. Authenticity of a good translation will depend on the translator’s mastery over the stylistic and componential features of the source language as well as his understanding of the cultural aspects of both the SL and TL.

Translation is a difficult and complex process. The translator has to face problems at finding equivalents at linguistic level. It is impossible to find in the TL

an exact equivalent of a text in the SL. Another area of translation which poses problems is that of idioms and proverbs which are products of a particular culture. Here the translator has to give more importance to semantic as against phonological or morphological equivalents. As Dotest says, translation is the transference of meaning from one set of patterned symbols into another set of patterned symbols. It is the progressive selection among the categories in the target language that are recognized on contextual criteria as equivalent to categories and items in the SL each category and item having a set of potential equivalent range on scale of probability.

1.5 Illustrations

I shall take up P. L. Deshpande's translation titled 'Ti Phoolrani' Marathi translation of G. B. Shaw's 'Pygmalion' as an example of transcreation. According to Athley[3] it is not a translation but an excellent transcreation (vuqltZu). It is a mirror which reflects the so called elite society's prejudices towards ordinary man's language. It is a milestone in Marathi literature because it is neither word for word translation nor (as Deshpande has modestly called it) adaptation but transcreation. Every language has its own cultural varieties and language (oral as well as written) peculiarities. Sometimes a word has different meaning for people belonging to the same culture. For example the word lRdkj stands for felicitation in Marathi whereas for a Bengali attending a 'lRdkj' means joining a funeral procession. In adaptation a writer makes certain changes suitable from the point of presentation keeping as far as possible intact the original status of the character. Transcreation is a process which is parallel to creation. It involves an imaginative use of the infrastructure of the original work to create a locally appealing superstructure. In 'Ti Phoolarani' Deshpande's interpretation and presentation of 'Pygmalion' is almost original. Without deviating even slightly from Shaw's play he has recreated its Marathi equivalent as alive and appealing to Marathi knowing theatre lovers as 'Pygmalion' to the British. No wonder it ran to full houses for more than thousand shows and is still very popular among theatre lovers as well as students of literature.

1.5.2 Gitanjali

'Ti Phoolarani' is an example of transcreation of a text from English to Indian language (Marathi). Rabindranath Tagore's 'Gitanjali' is a translation in English from a text in an Indian language (Bengali). Yeats[4] observes that he had carried the manuscripts of those translations. (Gitanjali) about with him for days reading it in railway trains or on the top of the omnibuses and in restaurants. He

had often had to close it lest some stranger would see how much it moved him. 'These lyrics which are in the original..... display in their thought a would I have dreamed of all my life long. The work of a supreme culture, they yet appear as much the growth of the common soil as the grass and rushes. Tragore writes music for his words and one understands at every moment that he is so abundant, so spontaneous, so daring in his passion so full of surprises because he is doing something which has never seemed strange, unnatural or in need of defence'.

1.6 Conclusion

Translation is a means of bringing together the ideas sentiments and complexities, the points of view, of texts in different languages. It is basically a process of decoding a text from source language (SL) to Target Language (TL) However in case of a quality literary text a word for word approach is inadequate. The translator has to go beyond the literary meanings of words and bring out the spirit of the text. In this sense it is transcription. In some cases it might involve transplanting a foreign language text in a fertile local soil e. g. 'Ti Phoolarani'. In a masterpiece like Gitanjali it involves retaining and transferring skillfully original spirit and ideas in an indigenus (Bengali) text into a foreign languages.

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