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RETRANSLATION AND INTERTEXTUALITY: A STUDY

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Abstract

Isabelle Collombat boldly termed the 21st century as the “Age of Retranslation.” Translators generally desire to make useful contribution to cultural history of their country. Retranslation is not a new phenomenon. As a text becomes historical, triggers for more retranslations are activated. Focus of investigation shifted from the product to process. Market dynamics and reception by Target Language (T. L.) audience in digital environment assume significance here. Quality of retranslated text determines its longevity. Venuti (2004) opines that retranslation is creation of values. According to him there are three approaches to the process viz “research on translator’s agency, intertextual studies and historical studies.” Intertextuality may be construed as an abstract or specific relationship between S. L. text and texts created in T. L. and study of translated texts in a specific language (T. L.). For my study, I chose descriptive translation mode with focus on translation process and translation products. I contacted practicing translators to seek their views on intertextuality and process of translation of literary texts. While 20% of them preferred providing footnotes and glossary, 60% felt that one should devise one’s own means to communicate through the text either by explication or by offering meaningful data and 20% informed that they are not aware of intricacies of these aspects. They all agreed that support of technology is vital. I shared a questionnaire encompassing retranslation, intertextuality and process of translation with more translators.

Keywords: Retranslation; intertextuality; process; glossary; context; meaning.

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1. Introduction

Isabelle Collombat boldly termed 21st century as “Age of Retranslation” (2004, 1-15). Translators generally desire to leave a mark on cultural history of their country. Retranslation is not a new phenomenon. As a text becomes historical, triggers for more retranslations are activated. Focus of investigation shifted from the product to process. Market dynamics and reception by T. L. audience in digital environment assume significance here. Quality of retranslated text determines its longevity.

Venuti (2004) opines that retranslation is creation of values. According to him there are three approaches to the process viz “research on translator’s agency, intertextual studies and historical studies.”

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2. Method

I conducted a brief survey on the desirability of or need for retranslation of texts. My work pertains to translation of literary texts only. Three questions were asked:

1. Are retranlations required?
2. How do they help a language or society?
3. What suggestions do you offer if a text has to be retranslated?

2.1. Response

There was an overwhelming support for retranslation of texts. Nearly 95% of those who responded certainly felt that retranlations are essential to keep track of or record of shifts in perceptions, interpretations and preferences of audience at different points of time. The respondents to my survey were mostly academics who were creative writers and/or translators. Only 5% of them were non-academics, but are creative writers and/ or translators. An honest opinion of the readers in source language language (of the original text), who enjoy reading, will definitely help. These sections of source language readers who read the translation/retranslation are better equipped to share their views.

Only 5% of those who responded to my questions felt strongly that there is absolutely no need for retranlations at all. One person went to the extent of finding fault with the very expression “retranslation.” He felt that “adaptation”, “relook,” “retold” appear to be more appropriate terms to refer to diverse genres into which a text is translated at different points of time. In the survey conducted by me some opinions deserve mention here.

“Retranlations are welcome always. One may get a more refined outcome/ output of a text when it is retranslated. Epics like *Maha Bharatha* have the potential to enable one interpret the epic in diverse manners at any time.” This was the opinion of a respondent. The re-translator should be well versed in Sanskrit language and the grammatical connotations.

Retranlations may open new vistas for academic researchers to comprehend the process of translation and the impact of translator’s personality, style, technique, talent to assess the quality of his work. Some scholars felt that quality of the text in S.L. may get diluted or distorted during process of retranslation. Overall impact may not be totally altered as new insights or perspectives emerge. Sometimes only the gist is understood, the finer emotions /messages are completely overlooked.

Perception and socio-economic-academic-cultural back ground of a translator do play a vital role in shaping a text during the process of translation. Texts retold in the same language in different eras reflect the way a word is used or understood. This naturally lends different shades of meaning to the same expression over a period of time. Ability and taste of the audience also acquire significance in extending meaning to a word, expression or text.

In a way, retranlations are treasure troves that preserve meaning potential of a text. One may come across the manner in which cultural shifts occurred in a speech community as regards use of their language. In a multilingual country like India it is said that a language acquires new shape for every forty kilometres one travels. Accent, meaning and usage constantly shift extending the language a new aura. In monolingual contexts probably this may not be possible or perceptible. Regular contact with diverse languages makes one multilingual that enhances one’s ability to become multicultural in his approach, expression and interaction with others. In India everyone knows at least two Indian languages.

One impressive view expressed was: “Retranlations are required where the source text had not been translated adequately. For example, *The Bible* in any language. The true spirit of the Hebrew version has not been meaningfully translated.” Just as there are many versions of *The Bible* in translation, there are many *Ramayanas*. In India, in every regional language at least two versions of the same text

exist. It is well known that in countries like Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and Myanmar among other countries, *Ramayana* is performed on the stage almost on a daily basis. Though the main content remains the same, additions, deletions and shifts in interpretations cannot be ruled out.

3. Illustration

Devarakonda Bala Gangadhara Tilak (1922—1966) published poetry in Telugu blending romantic poetic fervour in portraying nature and leftist oriented radicalism. His first volume of poems *Amrutham Kursina Rathri* was published posthumously in 1968, with a “Foreword” by Kundurthi Anjaneyulu. Tilak’s poems are as impressive and appealing as the poet himself. But he always deprecated the tendency to introduce political ideology in one’s creative work. His poem “Na Kavithvam” was translated by S. S. Prabhakar Rao with the caption “Manifesto” in his magnum opus *Post-Independence Telugu Poetry* (1993, 108). “Naa Kavithvam” is the first poem in his poetry anthology, *Amrutam Kurisina Rathri* published in 1968, Vijayawada: Visalandhra Publications. The translation/transcreation is par excellence, superb, and supremely sophisticated. V. Kondal Rao translated Tilak’s poetry text *Amrutham Kurisina Raathri* from Telugu into English (2006) with the title *The Night that Rained Ambrosia*. The Telugu text won Central Sahitya Akademi’s award in 1971. B. Indira² translated the same text with the title *The Night of Nectar* (2012). It was an assignment from Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi.

I aim to study the manner in which these three translators rendered the text from Telugu into English through a series of suggestive examples discussed below.

3.1. Example

*naa kavithvam kaadoka tatvam
kaadayaa ayoomayam, jaraamayam.* [Source Language (S. L.)]

- a) My poesy is no philosophy
It is undecipherable and immortal (Prabhakar Rao 1993, 108).

Here the poet declares his intentions without any ambiguity:

- b) My poesy is no ism
Certainly not the temperament
You guess as mine
Nor is it capitalism
Nor is it socialism
Listen, it’s neither obscure
Nor is it ephemeral” (B. Indira 2012, 15).

The translator tries to explicate and doesn’t stick to the scheme of the poem in Source Language i.e. Telugu. The translator has added her own connotations taking away the beauty of the subtler nuances of the original text.

- c) My poetry is not mere philosophy
Neither it is my psychology, nor ideology
Nor some confusion, age-bitten illusion. (V. Kondal Rao 2006, 1).

The translator adopts free translation technique and tries to convey essence of the Source Text.

² With this name only the Akademi book was published. Her poems and translations carry Indira Babbellapati these days (AN).

3.2. Example

*gaaju keraTaala vennela samudraaluujaaji puvvula attaru
diipaalu mantralookapu maNistambhaaluu
naa kavithaa candana saalalaa sundara citra vicitraaluu.* (S.L text)

- a) The oceans of moon light, scintillant with the waves of glass,
The lamps of attar spreading the fragrance of jaji flower
The pillars of diamond resplendent in the enchanted world:
These really are the wonders adorning
The summer – palace of my poesy (Prabhakar Rao 1993, 108).

In these lines, “attar” and “jaji” are retained, as the translator, perhaps, desires to retain the impact of the exotic world and images employed by the poet in Telugu. The translator’s innovative talent is reflected in the improvised expression “The summer – palace of my poesy” for *naa kavithaa chandanasaalaa*.

- b) Moonlit oceans
Of glassy waves
Lamps of jasmine perfume
Gem-studded pillars of an enchanting world are
The amazing pictures of my bower of poesy (B. Indira 2012, 15)

Here, the translator translates all the expressions in S. L. into T. L. Reference to an abode (palace) is rendered as “bower”.

- c) Oceans of moonshine of glassy waves
Lamps lit by jasmine scents
Pillars inlaid with emeralds in enchanting worlds
Are the strange, exotic, the exquisite objects
Of my aromatic, artistic, verse-abode. (Kondal Rao 2006, 1)

Absolute freedom exercised by the translator may be noticed in these lines. These lines also may be quoted as examples for “addition” and “approximation.” He translates as per his interpretation of the line in S. L. text.

The next stanza is remarkably translated by S. S. P. Rao, most flawlessly executing the task verging on improvement of the idea contained in the original text. The last three lines of the poem are often quoted for the sheer felicity with which Tilak conveys his views on poesy. These lines throw ample light on his personality, intellectual fecundity and his poetic competence.

3.3. Example

*naa aksaraalu kanniiti jadulaloo taDisee dayaapaaraavataalu
naa aksaraalu prajaasaktulavahincee vijaya airaavataalu
naa aksaraalu vennelaloo aaDukunee andamaina aaDapillalu.* (S.L.text)

- a) My words are doves of pity
Drenched in the downpour of human tears,
My words are celestial elephants
Carrying the forces of the Common Man,
My words are beautiful belles
Playing about under the moonlight (Prabhakar.Rao 1993, 108).

Prabhakar Rao pays due regard to the ideas communicated by the poet in Telugu. No attempt is made to retain culture specific references in S. L. text.

b) My letters are compassionate doves
 Drenched in incessant torrent of tears
 My letters are triumphant elephants
 Bearing people's power
 My letters are pretty girls
 Playing in moonlight (B. Indira 2012, 15).

B. Indira renders into T.L all aspects of the lines found in S.L text faithfully. She does not resort to either “addition” or “reduction.” The simplicity of expression in the target language tends to reduce the beauty of the original lines.

c) My words are the doves of compassion
 Drenched in a downpour of tears
 My words are “The Iravatas”
 (The mythical elephants of celestial realms)
 Mounted by the people's powers.
 My words are the beautiful belles
 Pirouetting picturesque under the moonlight (Kondal Rao, 2006, 15).

Kondal Rao retains the culture specific reference “Iravatas” in T.L, besides explaining the meaning in the next line.

Here, *dayaapaaraavataalu* (Compassionate doves), *vijaya airaavataalu* (victorious Iravatas) and *vennelaloo aaDukonee andamaina aaDapillalu* (Young beautiful girls prancing about in the moonlight) are highly culture-specific expressions.

As Kundurthi Anjaneyulu opines in his “Foreword” to the Telugu poetry anthology, the second line refers to the poetic content of Tilak's works and the last line to his poetic competence. *Dayaapaaravataalu* are doves symbolic of peace, docility, perhaps, representing Nehruvian philosophy of peaceful co-existence and *Panchasheel*. Here, one may recall, the trauma suffered by Nehru in the wake of Chinese aggression in 1962. It is pertinent to mention that Tilak wrote a poem on Nehru's demise. The dove also symbolizes the Buddha's doctrine of compassion and non-violence. We may recount Siddhartha's encounter before he became the Buddha with his cousin Devdutt over wounding a dove.

Vijaya airaavataalu is a very rich culture-specific expression. Everyone knows *airaavataa* is the mount of Indra, the ruler of celestial beings. *Airaavataa* suggests sanctity, purity, majesty, dignity, grandeur and victory. *Indra* itself is an honorific term. His mount *airaavata* too carries the same honour.

Vennelaloo aaDukonee andamaina aaDapillalu is a beautiful image one can only understand and appreciate if at all one knows how young beautiful girls play in gay abandon drenching in lovely moonlight. These girls are playful, cheerful, cherubic, and pure, devoid of responsibilities. Their unalloyed joy stems from their unfettered freedom from any of the social mores. Tilak came under the influence of many ideologies and issues, but remained, thankfully and blissfully, unattached to any of them.

Prabhakar Rao's translation is, doubtless, an exceedingly well attempted and excellently accomplished endeavour. But, one who knows the associated meaning of these culture-specific expressions may perceive inadequacy of English language to faithfully convey the meaning carried by S. L. text. One can notice that the translator has succeeded in integrating his bi-cultural awareness and structuration competence exquisitely with his poetic competence. His endeavour reflects how translated texts emerge if the work ensues from personal interest and passion for sharing gems of creative work in one's own language with audience in other languages through translation into a global language like English.

B. Indira has translated adequately all the culture specific references. She retains the caption of the poems in Telugu script and English title in the roman script. She provided foot notes where she felt the need to convey proper sense of a culture specific expression. Surprisingly she did not provide any foot notes for this poem. She wrote a brief “Translator’s Note” in addition to offering partially translated text of “Foreword” in Telugu. Since it was an assignment from the highest literary institution in India under the Union Government of India, she had to follow reviewer’s guidelines and norms as laid by the authorities.

Kondal Rao has not provided either a glossary or foot notes to explain culture specific terms. He tried to explain the meanings where possible in the T.L. text itself in parentheses. “Foreword” by an eminent linguistics scholar, “Translator’s Note” and erudite commendations from fourteen distinguished teachers at tertiary level who were creative writers or translators or both, extend grace and enable non-Telugu audience appreciate the nuances of S.L. writer’s creativity and the manner in which the Telugu poems were translated into English. It is an excellent method of target orientation.

Quite interestingly all the three translators were academics who taught in universities. Discharging their duties at the highest level, they composed poems in English and chose translation as a means of sharing literary and cultural values, exquisite practices and expressions in Telugu language with non-Telugu audience through a global language like English. They have not paid much attention to unravel beauty of intertextuality in their works. It is left to the audience to locate and relate the aspect based on their own competence.

4. Intertextuality

Intertextuality may be construed as an abstract or specific relationship between S.L. text and texts created in T.L. and study of translated texts in a specific language (T. L). For my study, I chose a descriptive translation mode with focus on translation process and translation products. I contacted practicing translators to seek their views on intertextuality and process of translation of literary texts.

1.20% of them preferred providing footnotes and glossary.

2.60% felt that one should devise one’s own means to communicate through the text either by explication or by offering meaningful data.

3.20% informed that they are not aware of intricacies of these aspects.

5. Conclusion

It was felt that if an assignment is offered by an institution, a translator has to necessarily follow stipulated guidelines. All those who shared their views agreed that support of technology is vital to preserve culture and shifts in use of a language through different points of time. Intertextuality has to be handled appropriately. Most of translators are oblivious of latest trends in research in translation and interpretation studies. They feel that as long as they enjoy what they are doing, there is no need to bother themselves with all the aspects related to their work. A researcher is supposed to be familiar with all trends, as the translators firmly feel that theory emerges from the text created during the process of translation. But everyone concurred that retranslations should be there and encouraged, as no translation is final and absolute.

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