

Translation: The Base and Superstructure

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Abstract

Sanyal begins by highlighting the different genres of translation since the Old English Period of Literature. He then goes on to focus on the Indian translators like Kashiram Das, Thiruvalluvar, Krittibas Ojha and the likes. He examines the importance of culture in translation and determines the equivalence in translation. Considering the idea that all languages are essentially one, just as the similarity persisting in human beings, he concludes by highlighting a connotative aspect of a more semantic character.

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"Translation... involves at least two languages, two traditions".¹ This may be a clichéd expression but it implies that translators are creative counterparts of the first author (I prefer not to use the word 'original creator') and that they are permanently faced with the problem of how to treat the cultural aspects implicit in a source text (ST), which the first author does not have to face. A translation's cultural implications may take several forms - from lexical content and syntax to ideologies and ways of life. One who is an apt translator has to decide on the importance given to certain cultural aspects and, if it is desirable, to translate them into the Target Language (TL). A translated text may have various cultural implications. It implies recognizing all of these problems, taking into account several possibilities, shunning the half-hearted convenient options, and then deciding on the solution which appears the most appropriate in each specific case.

In defense of my term 'first author', for what is hegemonic as 'original creator of the text', I would logically argue on established theoretical lines with the help of Aristotle and Roland Barthes. The text (source text) is not the actual source for anything accruing of it. It has been pre-extant in the so-called natural and real states. What we get as the source text is nothing better than 'mimesis'; which means that the text existed already in a different form, in a different plane. And with 'The Death of the Author', the question as to who created the first culturally conditioned text in script in a particular discourse becomes immaterial as there is 'nothing beyond the text' and the text becomes the be-all and end-all of every literary experience. With this, it can be rightfully argued that whether a text loses its 'original fervour' or not when translated becomes somewhat of a rhetorical question which loses much of its logical argumentative essence, since most translations are essentially transcreations and they abound in originality. For true academicians and worshippers of literature, the question 'who wrote that text first?' should not be anything more than a political tool to chronologically glorify-

1 Gideon Toury, "The Nature and Role of Norms in Translation" in John Benjamins, (eds.), *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*, Amsterdam-Philadelphia, 1995, 53-69, <http://spinoza.tau.ac.il/~toury/works>.

with a Nobel Prize or a Booker- an individual, a country or an ideology convenient for the already powerful nation states. There are ample instances where readers knowing the relevant languages have acknowledged that the translated texts have often surpassed the first texts in craftsmanship, culturally equivalent objective correlatives and transcreative genius. One such is Rubaiyyat, of which the first author is Umar Khaiyyam and the transcreator is Edward Fitzgerald.

This discussion hinges on culture in translation and strives to determine the equivalence in translation, on the basis of the idea that all languages are essentially one, just as the similarity persisting in human beings. Moreover, according to archaic linguistic beliefs, language structures and syntaxes change from the initial or parent language with the progression of every twelve miles and twelve years. Thus, at the base, all languages can be considered as having dialectically and semantically shifted from the initial one due to passage of time. No wonder the Nepali 'Ram-ro-chho' will be similar to the Bengali 'Kemon-Aachho' in spirit even if the translation is not true-to-the-original expression. We need to carefully peruse the standard Language-frequency and Classification Maps to discover certain truths. When Byelorussian speakers find Romani and Sinhalese co-passengers share similar words in their tongue with similar cadences and lilt at some airport, it might result in a simple surprised guffaw; when the fact is that a little more inflection or shift might link them to the Marathi, Bengali or Frisian co-passengers nodding their heads at each other in affirmation. Essentially, all languages are offsprings of the one parent language viz. Music.

Without stressing on tonality, but keeping it strictly to translation, it can be argued that Roland Barthes' Lectures at the Collège de France can be a green pasture for this seminar paper. Though explicit references to music are infrequent in Barthes' Collège de France lectures, Barthes' use of music in other work from the 1970s onwards makes it clear that music can act as a fruitful analogy in consideration of the text. A serialist or atonal analogy of translation can be presented, as set up by Barthes in 'From Work to Text' and elsewhere, to examine the structuring of *Comment vivre ensemble* and *The Neutral*. In viewing these courses as serial or open works we can, it is hoped, arrive at a fuller understanding of their methodology and the role they ascribe to the listener or reader, where the translator becomes yet another creator of original literature à la transcreator. The final conclusion can be made for a connotative aspect of a more semantic character.

Merits of translations are emphasized on the bases of paleography and the physical manuscripts but scholarly debates can uphold issues regarding their place of origin, authorship, and the connections between culture - Europe and the Indian subcontinent prior to the ascertained time. King Alfred's proposal that 'students be educated in Old English and the excellent ones be questioned in Latin too' has survived as the base of earliest translations. Is the creation of the poet/scop of Old English poetry (which, I remind you, is oral formulaic literature) incomplete, since s/he has been translated?

Accompanied by a harp, was s/he not aware of the collective unconscious of a so-called consensus of the 'learned' hegemony? Whatever the case may be, the rich tradition of orally (though translated) storytelling has surely survived but with academic taint.

Is credibility of translation ever put to question when it comes to Brecht in English, or when English embraces responses to all other literatures, including reception of classical texts-historical and contemporary translation of works in modern languages; history and theory of literary translation; adaptation and imitation-Surrey and Marot, Livy and Jacobean drama, Virgil in Paradise Lost, Pope's Horace, Browning's Agamemnon? No! For the academia would then consider it audacious. The art of translation is as old as written 'literature'. Parts of the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh, among the oldest known literary works, have been found in translations into several 'Southwest Asian' languages of the second millennium BCE. One even can set off from the perspective of Old English Literature-including genres such as epic poetry, hagiography, sermons, Bible translations, legal works, chronicles, riddles-which are largely translations. Yet they amass popular interest and may also become some form of diktat in some unthought of sphere as well. For example, Hammurabi's Code and Manusmriti have been largely translated by various states and have been initiated in their legal systems; what then is lost in such translations? I believe everything is intact, though in different cultural correlatives altogether. And then if we focus on Indian translators like Kashiram Das, Thiruvalluvar, Krittibas Ojha and the likes, can it ever be sanely argued in disfavour that their translated texts have created a literary lacuna? Had there been slips, lacunae or frivolity in their translations of the first texts (alternatively 'original texts'), the religious watchdogs would have burnt them much before they could be handed down for our scrutiny. The write-up for this seminar had stated that "there has been a debate on the fidelity of translations as critics have continuously questioned the faithfulness of a translated work...(which ought to render) the meaning of the source text, without adding or subtracting from it, without intensifying or weakening...the meaning." At this point I would, with all humility as a published poet, prefer to pose a critical question mark as to 'what is lost, if not enriched' on the aforesaid statement (syntactical and semantic) regarding my forthcoming publication of a translation of the Late. Shri Harivansh Rai Bachchan's Madhushaala too. In translation, it shall appear as 'The Nectar-Nook'. I would request the keen critic of translation (in this case, a Hindi-knowing critic) to show me the lacunae and also correct them when I quote an eight-liner Devnagri-Hindi (stanza 26) from the first text followed by my translation:

*"Ek baras mein ek baar hi
Jagtee Holi ki Jwaala,
Ek baar hi lagtee baazi,
Jaltee deeroon ki maala;
Duniyawaalon kintu kisi din
Aa madiralay mein dekho,
Din ko Holi, raat Diwaali,
Roz manaati Madhushaala!*

...

Once a year the fire looms...
Festive Holi's fiery heave,
Only once are bets a-flung
Garlanded by a lamp-lit eve;
O worldly lot, do come some day,
You'll find this pub in daily hue...
Of Holi, and nocturnal Diwali's
Festivities will engulf you!

In this case, I believe, the faithfulness of this translated work rests in the docile enriching of it by making it available in a different language.

It might seem far-fetched but interestingly enough, we find Kevin West of Austin State University 'Translating the Body: (thus taking us) Towards an Erotics of Translation'.

By seeking the impossible goal of full understanding, the translator as a maximally engaged reader seeks the plenitude of another's words as a surrogate of the elusive other. Translation as at once a physical, mental, and emotional attempt fully to understand another's utterances thus constitutes a process of complete engagement characterized by the desire for knowledge. Such desire can be deemed erotic in as much as it hopes to dissolve the customary separation of minds and attain oneness of understanding. A particular moment in the English translation of Umberto Eco's *Il nome della rosa* involving the translation of a description of an erotic body part introduces the erotics of translation more broadly. Evidence from the translation journals of Eco's translator William Weaver as well as Eco's own remarks on translation can be discussed broadly, but may be in a different seminar. In this context we can even refer to St. Augustine's account of language acquisition, and the matter of the bodily translation of the biblical Enoch.²

The greatest "trouble" in translation, I believe, is the 'gender indeterminacy', say, as in English novels coming from French versions or vice-versa (I have very little knowledge of French though). In English literature, characters of indeterminate sex created by novelists range from the ambi-gendered narrators in Victorian novels to the protagonists of Virginia Woolf's 'Orlando', Brigid Brophy's 'In Transit', Angela Carter's 'The Passion of New Eve', and Jeanette Winterson's 'Written on the Body'. A unique experiment in French is Anne Garréta's 'Sphinx'. Jibanananda Das's Bengali poem titled *shey* which literally means 'that person' could fetch nothing from me except 'S/He' when I translated it. Translating such texts from one language into the other is a challenge; different strategies of 'degendering' have to be used in Germanic and

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Romance languages respectively. But to successfully preserve gender indeterminacy, some translations may ignore authorial intentions and reintroduce gender markings. In such situations, typical strategies can be observed though, as well as imaginative solutions for special situations can be initiated by new coinages.