

## Writing as Translatability: The Intellectual Dynamics of Translatability

**Pius V. Thomas** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Philosophy, Assam (Central) University, Silchar. His areas of specialization are Critical Theories, Hermeneutics and Contemporary Western Thinking. His current research deals with Inter-culturality and Critique, Ethics and Reason, Democracy and Religion, Environmental Ethics and the Philosophy of Human Rights. At present he is engaged in two UGC-SAP research projects. One is on 'Contextualizing the Ethical Repertoire of Environmental and Developmental Rights' and 'Christianity and the Educational Rights in the North East'.

### Abstract

Highlighting intercultural translatability Pius V. Thomas makes an attempt to frame the common space where translation and 'interculturality' establish a significant mutual affirmation and contact. The earlier linguistic and text based theories of translation were dominated by the paradigm that translation is mainly the inter-lingual act of translating. He assumes that the current culture based theoretical approaches to translation should highlight a philosophically more important dimension of 'translatability' which invokes the necessity behind translation than the possibility attached to the act of translation.

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As Lawrence Venuti writes, 'The history of translation theory can in fact be imagined as a set of changing relationships between the relative autonomy of the translated text, or the translator's actions, and two other concepts: equivalence and function. Equivalence has been understood as 'accuracy,' 'adequacy,' 'correctness,' 'correspondence,' 'fidelity,' or 'identity'; it is a variable notion of how the translation is connected to the foreign text. Function has been understood as the potentiality of the translated text to release diverse effects, beginning with the communication of information and the production of a response comparable to the one produced by the foreign text in its own culture'.<sup>1</sup> The intended discussion in what follows is to highlight a trans-lingual/inter-lingual generative function of creating language to the translator's action which is writing as translatability from the point of view of intercultural hermeneutics.

The meaning of translation as 'the act of translation which has been defined as the replacement of textual material in one language (source language - SL) by equivalent material in another language' brings into play the idea of creative writing and creation in the contemporary discussions. The Poststructuralist and Hermeneutic 'textual-reader response' theories register a notion of translation as closer to writing/creation.

The discussion initiates the question that how translatability transgresses the meaning of translation ascribed to the act of translation from a different perspective.

1 Lawrence Venuti, "Introduction", in Lawrence Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*, London, Routledge, 2000, p.5.

Though many of us may think that there is both idealist strains as well as repetitiveness in seeing the doublets of 'writing-creativity-language' and 'translation-translatibility' as having a divergent hermeneutic environment to be explored into, particularly after the deconstructive endeavours, the discussion that follows intends to take a distinct route to explain the concept of translatability.

The attempt here is to frame the common space where translation and intercultural communication establish a significant mutual affirmation and contact. It highlights a philosophically more important dimension of 'translatibility' which invokes the necessity behind translation so as to centre the discussion on intercultural translatability.

### **Hermeneutic of Translatability**

Years ago George Steiner while writing about the hermeneutic motion of 'the radical generosity of the translator and his trust in the "Other", and the trust involved in translation mentioned that 'the trust can never be final' as it (the trust) can be 'betrayed trivially, by nonsense, by the discovery that "there is nothing there" to elicit and translate. Nonsense rhymes, poésie concrète, glossolalia are untranslatable because they are lexically noncommunicative or deliberately insignificant'.<sup>2</sup> The gist of what Walter Benjamin says about translation that it is a mode hints at the idea of translatability with the same question of trust. Benjamin means to build it up further, perhaps with a different thrust but aligns with the hermeneutic concern when he observes, 'To comprehend it (translation) as mode one must go back to the original, for that contains the law governing the translation: its translatability. The question of whether a work is translatable has a dual meaning. .... If translation is a mode, translatability must be an essential feature of certain works. Translatability is an essential quality of certain works, which is not to say that it is essential that they be translated; it means rather that a specific significance inherent in the original manifests itself in its translatability'.<sup>3</sup> Benjamin takes it to the interesting notion, as R.Radhakrishnan,<sup>4</sup> points out, of 'foreignness of all languages' and 'that there is no language that is not always already a translation'. Radhakrishnan expands this position of Benjamin further to show that how Derrida finds common cause with Benjamin to hold together the idea of 'de-authorization of the human being by the authority of language' or the de-authorization of the human being 'in the textualization or linguistification of human meaning'.<sup>5</sup> As he rightly points out, the search for a correct understanding of translatability strikes at the Derridean query that 'in what language is translatability posed and theorized?' or as Derrida would put it, 'the tongue in which the question of the tongue is raised'.<sup>6</sup>

2 George Steiner, "The Hermeneutic Notion", Lawrence Venuti, (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*, London, Routledge, 2000, p.186.

3 Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator", in Harry Zohn (trans.), Lawrence Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*, London, Routledge, 2000, p.16.

4 R. Radhakrishnana, "Is Translation a Mode?", in Kailash C Bral et al (eds.), *Theory after Derrida*, London, Routledge, 2009, p.290.

5 *Ibid.*, p.285

6 Jacques Derrida, "Des Tours de Babel", in Gil Anidjar, (trans.), Joseph H. Graham (ed.), *Acts of Religion*, London,

The radical question of the hermeneutical trust in the other as the generosity of the translator has its itinerary settling in the notion of a greater language to all languages as pure language or more recently in the notion of the de-authorization of human being and the textualization of human meaning/being. The paper here resorts to an alternative route to revisit the problematique of translatability through intercultural hermeneutics.

### **The Intercultural Hermeneutics of Translatability**

Ted Striphas in one of his interesting papers equates translation with depth communication. Possibly, such a tenor, I think, activates the distinctiveness of our discussion. Striphas tells us that '...translation is something that occurs not only between people who seem to speak different languages ... but between those who appear to share a common language as well'. He adds that '(Translation)...also suggests an ethics, or a way for you to live your life more responsibly and compassionately in relationship to those around you'.<sup>7</sup> Ted Striphas's insights about communication as translation indicates equally forcefully translation as communication that is centred on the ethics of a disposition and a way of life which is a spontaneous response to the intra-lingual demands of interpersonal and intersubjective lack of communication. It is from such a stance the justifiability of the divergent domain of intercultural hermeneutics of translatability hoists its momentum. Therefore, let us briefly discuss the conceptscape of intercultural hermeneutics.

### **Intercultural Hermeneutics: Different Insights**

Intercultural hermeneutics seeks to address the trajectory of the need to widen the scope of hermeneutics progressively moving towards concretizing the intercultural other. Hence, we have to transpose the field of inquiry of critical hermeneutics to intercultural hermeneutics.

Intercultural Hermeneutics is inspired by the reality called cultural difference and the need for a more visible constructive Hermeneutics. It aims to address a local-global 'complementarity'. Here we can feel the true edge of Hermeneutics' growth as an effort to describe more subtle and comprehensive patterns of comprehension and understanding. Intercultural hermeneutics as intercultural philosophy lays before us the critique of western concept of modernity which is insensitive to the cultural moulds that demand differentiating interpretative frameworks and their topology which demands the mapping of them as communicative/dialogical engagements. In the following section let us discuss briefly two competent models of intercultural heremenutics - Rudolph Bradner's and Raimon Panikkar's concepts of Intercultural Hermeneutics.

## Rudolph Bradner's Concept of Intercultural Hermeneutics

Rudolph Bradner who has developed an idea of interculturality on the basis of a new hermeneutics of the non-receptive is as follows: He says, as interculturality owes its origin to the political situation of modernity and a goodwill not to allow humanity into meaningless violence, it seeks to know "how to convert the existential brokenness of a differently experienced historical situation into the discipline of a spiritual / cognitive attitude capable of generating adequate objective insights and truths about the intentional objects".<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere he suggests that, 'As that what makes us think 'interculturality' is basically a profound change in human being itself the central purpose of an 'interstorical thinking'.

His line of understanding interculturality continues to suggest that an initial and provisional approach to the subject matter of interculturality may have to work with concepts that will change and transform their initial meaning and exclusive relevance as the hermeneutical experience of interculturally different ways of being-in-the-world, resolve them into a different awareness of human being which is neither ontologically related to being nor theoretically to truth.

He argues that interculturality means the relation between different ways of being-in-the-world and ultimately between different comprehensions of being.<sup>9</sup> The crux of his argument is that the relation between different comprehensions of being in general is qualified by a hermeneutical relation which hints at the relationship that operates between different comprehension of human reality. He eloquently tells us further:

The concept of interculturality, thus, still remains based on the presupposition that here really are different ways of being-in-the-world and consequently different comprehensions of being. In every other case the concept of interculturality will be a more provisional guide exploring the apparent differences of factual human being that ultimately dissipate in view of a fundamental all-embracing unity of human comprehensions of being. This possibility, of course, remains open to the concept of 'interculturality' which is nothing but a hypothesis serving as heuristic-methodological device to explore factual human being without anticipating any of its possible outcomes.<sup>10</sup>

Here, it is possible to read the notion of translatability being figured out as the willingness to encode the ever evolving languages in proximity with intercultural formations.

8 Rudolf Bradner, "The Situation of Philosophy Today and the Question of Interculturality", in *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research*, Vol. XIII (September-December, 1995), No.I, 23.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 9

10 *Ibid.* p. 10.

## Raimon Panikkar and Intercultural Hermeneutics

Raimon Panikkar's idea of intercultural hermeneutics challenges our consciousness of the other for cultural and religious hermeneutics as he touches upon the scope of intercultural hermeneutics in a subtle way. He points out that the western hermeneutical philosophy has focussed on mono-cultural understanding when some degree of pre-understanding can in fact be presumed. However, in an intercultural context such pre-understanding that gives rise to the hermeneutic circle may well not exist, argues Panikkar. Hence, Panikkar's question: "how can we understand something that does not belong to our circle?" Classical hermeneutical theory is unable to answer this question', says Panikkar.

Therefore Panikkar lauds the intercultural moment of hermeneutics as that which aims 'To cross the boundaries of one's culture without realizing that the other may have a radically different approach to reality is today no longer admissible. If still consciously done, it would be philosophically naïve, politically outrageous and religiously sinful'.<sup>11</sup> Panikkar like Bradner emphasizes that as philosophy engages reality and reality cannot be reduced to my specific culture, it should be intercultural in nature. But, the undialogical cultural self-centredness limits our philosophical engagements as pedagogical and dialectical. Panikkar argues that whether it is in understanding the complex plurality of cultural moulds or religious plurality, intercultural and interreligious schema of understanding determines any theorizing project/process.

His concept of dialogical dialogue celebrates the insight that 'the other is also an original source of human understanding' and there is some level at which 'persons who enter the dialogue have a capacity to communicate their unique experiences and understandings to each other'. For Panikkar "radical otherness" does not eradicate "radical relativity" or the primordial interconnection of all human traditions.<sup>12</sup> As Gerald says, 'dialogical dialogue takes the risk or adventure to establish intersubjective communication in which a common ground is sought on the basis of the primordial sense of human relatedness. In fact, Panikkar speaks of the need for allowing a "primordial language" to emerge from the dialogue itself. Such a language is not a "universal language"; nor can it be artificially created".<sup>13</sup> Panikkar says, 'The primordial language is hidden in our respective languages not as a language, of course, but as language. In the effort of communicating with one another - at the beginning without proper understanding, then slowly by dispelling false imaginations and misconceptions - we forge a common language, we reach a mutual comprehension, we cross boundaries'.<sup>14</sup>

11 Raimon Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, New York, Paulist Press, 1979, p. 9.

12 Raimon Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1993, p. 60.

13 Gerard Hall, *Intercultural and Inter-religious Hermeneutics*, Raimon Panikkar, <<http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/> 'research/theology/ghall\_panikkar.html\_edn37>

14 Raimon Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995, p.172.

In Panikkar's intercultural hermeneutics, the attempt at invoking deeper level understanding of the meaning structure that allows dialogical communion between different cultures is quite commendable as it carves out the concept of a primordial language. It is different as it approaches the translatability question from the different angle of intercultural dialogue though apparently it reminds us Benjamin's idea of pure language and the poststructural idea of textualization. However, as some thinkers have pointed out, we cannot be unaware of the idealist strain that is visible in Panikkar's ideal of primordial language.

Herein the present discussion goes for a language context which summons creative writing and translation at the same time and simultaneously beckons an ideal intercultural communicative situation. The intent of the paper here is to sketch out an altogether distinct route to concurrently occurring intercultural communicativeness and creative writing as intercultural translatability.

#### From the Text-context

The following language context is taken from Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things*.<sup>15</sup> Though several such similar contexts as examples can be cited I opted for the following one mainly because it is English from an Indo-Anglian, background, which means, intercultural by all means. The narrative in the novel goes as follows:

A man's voice floated out from inside and echoed around the clearing, making him sound lonely. The voice shouted the same thing, over and over again, and each time it climbed into a higher, more hysterical register. It was an appeal to an over ripe guava threatening to fall from its tree and make a mess on the ground:

Pa pera pera pera perakka,  
(Mister gugga gug gug guava,)  
Endeparambil thooralley  
(Don't shit here in my compound.)  
Chetendeparambil thoorikko.  
(You can shit next door in my brother's compound.)  
Pa pera pem pera perakka.  
(Mister gugga gug gug guava.)

The shouter was Kuttappen, Velutha's older brother. He was paralyzed from his chest downwards. The song-part is of two languages, Malayalam and its translation into contextual English at the same time and not any one of it in the normal sense, even when we recognize it as English - Indian English. I further presume that the translation aspect that takes place here on the part of the author is 'translingual construction of language', which is more of a spontaneous 'generativeness' than the conscious modification of both SL and TL. It corresponds to the idea of translatability.

15 Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*, New Delhi, Penguin Books, 2012, pp.162-163.

The discussion that has been carried out in the paper comes out clean on its purpose here: Interculturality as intercultural communicativeness and 'translingual construction of language' as translatability mutually affirms each other, which is not an ideal construction but mapping of the intercultural communication as that always already happening.

### **Dialogical-Communicative Willingness as the Tenor of Translatability**

As interculturality enlivens its major dimensions such as intercultural communication and intercultural dialogue to register a communicative and ethical commitment to interact with and understand the other cultures to dialogically modify one's own culture, it is to be primarily recognized ethical in import. The reason is dialogical/communicative willingness. As pointed out, Intercultural communication is Interpersonal communication and there should be dialogical willingness, which is an underlying-unexplained assumption in intercultural Hermeneutics, it is a contested notion in critical Hermeneutics. The movement of intercultural communication can be shown in the following manner, involving the following conceptual stages.



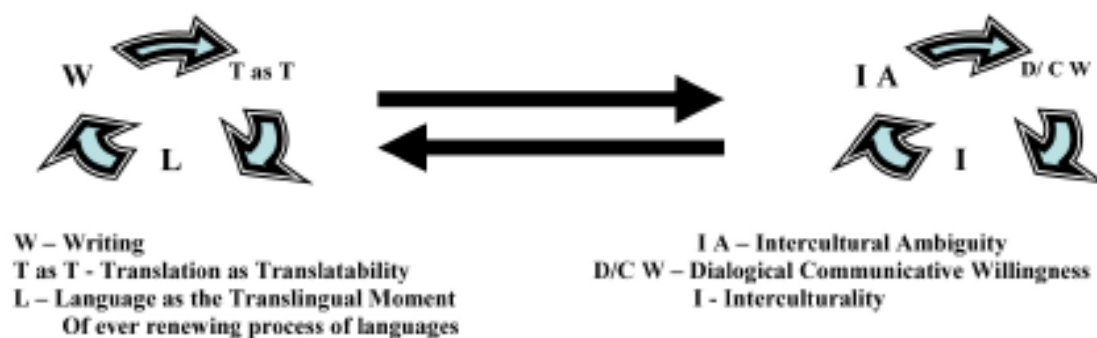
### **The Mapping of the Movement of Intercultural Communication**

How to register the process of dialogical/communicative willingness that is emerging out of the intercultural ambiguities where interculturality is spotted out as the ethical moment is the major difficulty here. It is ethical in import primarily because as interculturality enlivens its major dimensions such as intercultural communication and intercultural dialogue to register a communicative and ethical commitment to interact with and understand the other cultures to dialogically modify one's own culture it has to explain the dialogical/communicative willingness. In other words, it is to be recognized that Intercultural communication is Interpersonal communication which cannot be understood without a notion of dialogical willingness. Stated differently, the paper goes a step forward in identifying that the idea of communicative willingness/dialogical willingness remains an underlying-unexplained assumption in intercultural

Hermeneutics and it is a contested notion in critical Hermeneutics. The guiding insight at this point is the idea of Intercultural communication as communicative and dialogical willingness as continuum which is always already happening. Its happening, it is to be reflectively encoded.

From the continuum of intercultural communication the paper works out a frame of common space where translation and 'interculturality' establish a significant mutual affirmation and contact. Herein it is stressed along with the ideal of intercultural communication and dialogical/communicative willingness the concept that the act of translation is understood more as 'translatability' which invokes the necessity behind translation than the possibility attached to the act of translation. The act of mutual translatability in writing can be interestingly recorded as writing as translation. In short, it is further stressed that what we see in creative writing generally and particularly in the above kind of contexts where a transgression or transcending of language takes place by extending its horizon, it is to be understood as the intercultural hermeneutical idea that translatability brings about creative writing/creation. And if we ask the simple question again what is being translated, the answer would be language and its ever renewing modifying process.

The prime concern/question now is whether interculturality can be seen as the communicative /dialogical willingness as it encounters itself as intercultural ambiguity and the need for communication, translation etc. The positive hint from the point of view of the constructive dimension of the need of dialogical moment between Critical Hermeneutics and Intercultural Hermeneutics, the paper assumes, can be diagrammatically poised as follows:



## Conclusion

In situating the above moment of interculturality as the continuum of communication which informs communicative and dialogical willingness, it refers to the insight of 'writing as translation' which allows the question what it is to be translated with the answer that it is Language as the 'translingual moment of languages' and its ever renewing modifying process . Language as the 'translingual moment of ever



renewing process of languages is a deeper ground that refers or represents writing as translatability.

Finally, it is a query, which goes as follows: Does the concept of 'writing as translatability' with its constitutive notion of interculturally endorsed dialogical-communicative willingness add a new dimension of 'trans-authorization' which thickens the concept of de-authorization and textualization of writing?