



ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN TRANSLATING LITERARY WORKS

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The aim of translators is to translate a literary text without distorting its contents. Literary translators are concerned with the techniques, beauty, form and essence of the original text and make every effort to faithfully adhere to the original. This poses a real challenge to the translator. Word-for-word translation is not preferable for literary texts, whereas meaning-for-meaning translation, which is generally opted results in a passable translation. The translator should take care not to tamper with the meaning and at the same time pay attention to the virtue, charm and structure of the text.

Literature is often defined as holding a mirror to the contemporary society. The language of communication in everyday life is different from the language used in literature. The emotions, desires, urges and objectives of human beings expressed in literature, any genre, be it, novels, poetry, drama differs from the ordinary language used for communication. In order to express it uniquely, a different language with distinctive features is required and that is literary language. From time to time every society experiences changes in dominant beliefs which inevitably bring about a change in the language too. This change in language is obviously reflected in literature.

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A clear perception of language is very important before one proceeds to the study of literature and language is a matrix of signs and symbols. Over a period of time, theories and principles undergo changes when old signs are replaced by new signs. New signs represent signs of truth that are prevalent during a particular period and place. A translator should understand and elucidate the figures and elements of both Target language and Source language. The translator should consider the text as an independent unit and be aware of the probable influences of the dominant ideologies of the time. Apart from being acquainted with the syntax and grammar of the two languages, a translator should have knowledge of the semantic

sense of the words and meanings of the words with respect to the time they are used. The translator should be meticulous in bringing out the exact meaning.

Language acumen plays an important role in the study of literature. Every language is a system of signs different from that of another. In literary translation one structure is to be transferred to another; an arrangement with many elements involved and signs that differ from signs and structures of another language. A literary text is open to interpretation at different levels since it deals with the experience of the writer or any subject of his/her choice. The style of the writer is determined by the



linguistic features of the book- the way words and phrases are arranged.

The translator should discern the genre of the text as it helps him/her remember the rules and conventions related to that particular genre which may result in the clear understanding of the text. A writer chooses the genre keeping the theme or subject in mind. The content and the way it is communicated- the form are crucial to any piece of literature. Literary translators deal with different genres-novel, poem, play etc. One of the major challenges confronted by a literary translator is the issue of style that varies from composition to composition and genre to genre. Each genre has its own literary style, rules, structure and a literary translator cannot choose any stylistic analysis. Bell comments that language as a code "possesses features –phonological.....syntactic, lexical and semantic-" and code features are selected to "act asvehicles for the communication of meaning." (8) Diction of a text reflects the perspective and tone towards the topic and readers. Besides diction, syntax, rhythm and figurative language are crucial. It is at this juncture, the translator drifts between the two levels and the intricate levels of semantic structure: the translator needs to transfer from SL to TL, the tone and the mood in which the theme is communicated with the minimum change in the final effect.

Knowledge of language is essential in order to analyze a literary style. The choice of a specific style is understood and recognized if the translator – a translator is a reader – knows the other probable linguistic structures the authors could have employed. An array of effects is to be seen in different literary texts as various styles and means are used to convey different purposes. Larson observes that style is a "a patterning of choices of grammatical structures and lexicon in order to create a certain effect to carry out the intent of the author."(423) This statement highlights how assiduous should a translator be in ascertaining the stylistic features of a work. At times, a translator preserves the mood but may not do justice in preserving the form. It is a herculean task for a translator to preserve the tone, mood and form in a text as he may not find equivalents to the original

since words are culture-bound and vary from culture to culture.

Semantic structure is closely related to style. A good translator should be aware of different layers of meanings of a word, their equivalents with different associations, and implications the interpretation of which is essential to making the semantic-grammatical links and the closest formats, to formats in SL, in the TL. These attributes together with the way words are arranged in a sentence – distinctive to each language – pave way to sentence-for-sentence translation a little tough leaving the translator reflecting on how to convey "the semantic structure of the narrative with the natural sentence length of the receptor language"(Ibid, 369) which is a requisite since handling literary works and discussing style, it is not only the form but a host of these possibilities that could have been employed should be considered.

A literary translator should be careful in maintaining the unity among all the elements of a literary work and this unity in a literary text is largely dependent on the selection of words and the way they are arranged. As a result, the translator of a literary text finds it challenging to find suitable equivalences so that the same impact is created in the TL. Equivalence as an important notion is a major issue in translation. Equivalence is used to match words and sentences to each other. Meanings of words and sentences should be perceived in the context of the SL and pertinent equivalence should be chosen with regard to the context of TL. All the complexity arises from the complication between members of the speech community about the usage of words. A word-for-word translation or a search for one word equivalent is always not successful as languages have different meanings and several words may not have exact word equivalent. So a translator should have a good knowledge of words and equivalents so that he can use suitable so as not to tamper the semantic structure of the work.

Denotation and connotation are two problems that are closely related to the issue of equivalence. Being acquainted with the dictionary meaning of words and their overtones, a translator should at times familiar with the suggestive meanings of a word that might oppose each other and great



attention is required to find and substitute the right one. Connotative implications are usually personal whereas denotative implications are impersonal. Connotation is subjective and differs from person to person, society to society, and period to period mostly when it is highly emotional. One cannot overlook the various suggestive meanings words carry in different cultures. A translator should have knowledge of connotative meanings of words in order to convey what the writer wishes to communicate. Despite its complexity, a translator is entailed to read the text several times to understand what suggestion of a word is aspired and in what probable manner it can be contributed or created in the TL.

Literature profuse in idioms and proverbs is culture bound. Idioms and proverbs have figurative meanings and do not relate to individual words in their meanings. They are culture-bound with varied roles and suggestions they have to provide. One finds idioms and proverbs in many languages with almost the same meaning; many idioms may be cynical, vague or disparaging in one whereas no such associations are drawn from another. The translator requires making changes in structure which is in no way inferior to meaning. While translating idioms, both meaning and form in SL should be rendered in TL with minimum change in the structures of grammar and lexicon used in the work.

The use of figures of has an overall impact on the style and tone of the work. A figure of comparison – a simile or metaphor may convey an image which is seen throughout the work and may determine the tone of the work. A translator should be thorough with the usage of these figures in the SL and should transfer the same without losing the implications of the original.

Each literary text has its own structure and semantic unity and becomes unique when it is open for interpretation. The translator of a literary text has to bear in mind semantic meaning of the words, the force, the context and other technical elements of the original text to interpret the text accurately and then create the meaning and impact in the TL, and come up with a reasonable, presentable and faithful translation. Firstly, a translator should be familiar with the various critical approaches so as to

understand the text in its right perspective. A clear understanding of the text would enable the translator to transfer the right meaning to the TL. Secondly, the translator should know the cultural backdrop of the literary text and the dominant beliefs of the age. Thirdly, writers employ different style and modes of expression to attain certain effects. This necessitates the translator to be acquainted with various styles and the intention of using each. Fourthly, the translator should find appropriate equivalences with the aim of achieving unity and pleasure concealed in literary texts. Every language has its own set of words with its implications that might not find place in the other languages. The translator should find the best equivalents, if needed, an explanation can also be furnished.

Fifthly, a translator needs to discreetly notice the connotative and denotative meanings and find suitable substitutions so as to communicate all a single word conveys in the SL. Sixthly, literature abounds with idioms and figures of speech. The translator should make every attempt to transfer the same into a different language and culture. Finally, there is no complete relationship between languages as structures, as words have different layers of meanings in different cultures and languages. Meaning is the chief concern and basis, but form too has its own importance. A faithful translation calls for the exact theme of the original text and the way the writer desires to communicate it to the reader and this requires the translator's complete perception of the writer's objective and the motive behind in writing the text. An accomplished translator equipped with imagination and inventiveness, knowledgeable both in SL and TL, can claim to succeed in realizing an acceptable translation of a literary text.

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