

Translation into English: Problems and Prospects

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Abstract

Translation is a kind of extended product of creative exercise ignited by an already existing work. The art of translation lies not merely in translating the literal sense of one language into another but of translating also the feeling, thought and character of the works, so that the finished translation is equal in quality to the original. In the present study the researchers do not regard the issues of ascertaining the accuracy and authenticity of a translated text. The need for an evaluating body which may constitute of readers, critics or some organizations regulated by the publication houses can be required to be bilingual and bicultural for such judgmental works. But for the present study it will be assumed that the translation of a literary work is very close to creative writing. So the issues of evaluation will be regarded as irrelevant. It is almost impossible to state whether a novel is more or less good or bad than another novel. So, the art of transferring the meaning of a text from the source language to the target language is a difficult task because it is not easy for the translator to find full equivalence of a source language word in another word in the target language.

Key Words: Translation, Problems, Communication, Equivalence, Language.

Translation, the practice of rendering a text originally written in one language belonging to a certain culture into a different language belonging to another culture, is a human activity of inter-lingual communication to understand global relations. The practice of translation where transference of meaning of a text from the Source Language (SL) to the Target Language (TL) gets prime importance, aims at offering the equivalent elements in the Target Language Text (TLT) and bringing the intended elements of meaning of the Source Language Text (SLT) into the TLT. In this act of rendering the meaning from the source language into the target language, the translator plays a vital role, whose job to change an already existing text into another language is a difficult task as it is not easy for him to find full equivalence of a source language word in another word in the target language. While bringing the nearest possible equivalence between the two texts of different languages belonging to two different cultures, the translator not only has to do the job of a creative writer but he also has to undertake the job of a critic in trying to get in the target language text the meanings and the nearest possible sense inherent in the source language text. The present paper focuses on the problems that a translator faces in translating a text from the regional languages of India into English, the problems that s/he faces during the selection of the text to be translated, the policies of the government and the publication houses that affect the flow of these translation activities and the difficulties that a translated text faces in its journey from its selection to its marketization.

Translation is an activity which has to do with languages, cultures and nations. Literary translations are viewed as powerful sources helpful in bridging the gaps between different cultures and nations. Translation is both a linguistic and cultural activity. An inwardness into both the languages and cultures can only enable a translator to take up the job. The translator's mastery over both the languages makes the words obey his/her call with the feel of the language he or she translates from and translates into. The process of translation should avoid both transliteration and transcreation. The recent theories of literature influenced by the philosophy of language view

the text as being possessed more by the reader than by the author. The indeterminacy of language and the elusive nature of language have made the task of the translator difficult.

The fact that the translators have not been recognized as translators has become a common problem in the field of translation. The devoted readers of Bhabendra Nath Saikia for whom his writings are a kind of treasure cannot be expected to respect the translators of his works in the same manner. But the fact that the translators are completely ignored in the discourse of literature is unfortunately affecting the translation activities. The discussion of the translation of Saikia's book *The Cavern and Other Stories* (2012) may reveal a commonly experienced phenomenon in the world of translation of literary texts. The stories like *Gahbar* (The Cave), *Sendur* (Sindur), and *Srinkhal* (The Chain) showing the 'literary prowess' of the writer and at the same time explaining the love of the readers in Assam for the writer are the gems of Assamese literature. The kindle edition of the book was discussed and it was observed that the devoted readers of Saikia hope that the translator Dheerendra Nath Bezbaruah does justice to the stories. They also feel happiness for the fact that the international readership finds the writer worthy of being compared to the writers like O' Henry and R. K. Narayan. The article describes the narrative of all the fascinating stories of the book and observes the book as 'an impressive sampling' of Dr. Saikia's writing. The writer who received an offer from the publisher to write a review admits that he was not familiar with the name of Bhabendra Nath Saikia or his literary works. As a reader and reviewer of the stories from a culture which was very different from his own, he realizes the differences between the two cultures as 'fascinating' and also realizes that the feelings and the motivations of the characters are not very different from theirs (Chambers www.amazon.com). The reviewer J. Chambers also admits his difficulty with the Indian words which could not be completely solved by his kindle built in dictionary. The glossary provided at the back of the book explaining all the Indian words used in the stories is mentioned by the reviewer. But the name of the translator is not mentioned, neither any fact regarding the creative process of bringing the original text in Assamese into the translated text in English is discussed. Saikia is seen as the sole creator of the text in this discussion.

The role of the translator involves many challenges and little rewards. The journey of the text from one readership to another from one language context to another is made possible by the translator but s/he is often ignored as the creator/recreator of the text. His contribution in the creation of the text is marginalized when the literary text as a literary text is appreciated. But when the fact of translation is mentioned, the attention of the readers of the source language context is suddenly focused on the performance of the translator, especially when the writer is famous and loved one by the readers.

The translated texts are very often not presented as translated texts to the readers. The publisher's focus on the facts related to the SLT, such as its being a classic text or being a popular text for winning a wider readership sometimes appears to assure the TLT readership about the worth of the SLT. But the translators as translators can be focused by the publishers for such purposes only when the literary world celebrates the translated works as good and great works and as translated works.

There are many texts published by even national publication houses where the translators are not presented as translators. A book titled as *Vedanta* published by NCERT mentions the name of Dr. Karan Singh on the cover page. The cover page does not say that Dr. Karan Singh is the translator and the work is a translated work. The foreword of the book tells the reader that the book is a selection from translation work by Dr. Karan Singh and is published by NCERT with his permission. There are numerous examples of such omissions which are certainly at the cost of the identity of the translator as a translator. NCERT is presenting the book to the Indian readers who can be expected to have the knowledge regarding the language of creation/creator of the *Vedanta*. But the same book needs more information details regarding the SLT for the non-Indian readers.

The Hour before Dawn was published in 2009 by Penguin Books India. The note of appreciation on the cover page of the novel by the contemporary prominent Assamese writer Mamoni Raisom Goswami the acclaimed author of *The Moth- Eaten Howdah* of the *Tusker* and the winner of the

Jnanpith Award is for the writer Bhabendra Nath Saikia, not for the translator Maitreyee Siddhanta Chakravarty:

‘A rare glimpse of Assamese society, portrayed with deep understanding and love by a master craftsman.’

The back cover page blurb after making a casual mention of the fact of translation from the original Assamese novel *Antoreep* by a renowned writer and film maker Bhabendra Nath Saikia describes the time in which the story is set. The blurb on the back cover page of the novel *The Hour before Dawn* mentions the time in which the story is ‘set primarily in pre-independence India.’ The ‘vibrant life in a small village in Assam’ is depicted in a poignant prose. The blurb also describes the story as ‘haunting’ and observes it to be about ‘woman’s hidden strength in her darkest hour.’ But it does not say anything about the translator or about the translation of the text. In the first page of the book the translator is introduced as follows:

Maitreyee Siddhanta Chakravarty is a freelance writer and translator. She has held a gamut of jobs but prefers to work at her own pace and remain ‘a part-time freelancer and full-time homemaker.’

This short introduction of two sentences follows an interesting fact which is related to both her husband and Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia. In Saikia’s film *Anirbaan* the husband of the translator ‘featured.’ The translator’s being related to the author is perhaps to be supposed as her introduction as a translator. The personalized relationship with the creator of the SLT is certainly an advantage for the translator. But the translator’s performance, especially successful performance deserves more appreciation in explicit terms. The presentation of the translator by the publication houses is beneficial for the individual translator and important for the improvement of the literary culture, especially related to translation work.

The blurb on the cover page of the novel *The Hour before Dawn* highlights the two aspects of Saikia’s art that is universality and particularly for the marketing of the novel. Can we imagine of a blurb mentioning the masterly skill of the translator to marketize the book? The book’s presentation as a novel and its talking about the essential themes of human life can be stretched to include the facts of translation. The readers can be made aware of the particular skill of the translator through these carefully selected blurbs.

Regarding translation practices the questions on the issues that need to be addressed are many. The role of the government agencies is an important issue. The government agencies that are engaged with the noble task of translation of Indian language literary texts into English are functioning also as guiding factors for the readers. The institutions like Sahitya Akademi or Katha are non-profit organizations and these organizations do not keep an eye on the market from profit point of view. This affects the choice of the authors to be translated. And this also affects the kind and quality of the translators and also of their motive. In order to encourage the translators we need first to identify the translators of literary texts. And it can be easily observed that because of only the government agencies being the forces behind such activities, the practice is limited to a certain class of translators who can be and are approached by such agencies and it also affects the choice of the authors to be translated.

The use of the source language words in the target language text is a recent direction in the history of translation. In India there are so many translators who use in the TLT some words used in the SLT. Translators like Maitreyee Siddhanta Chakravarty, Ranjita Biswas, Pradipta Borgohain, Indira Goswami, etc. have developed this tendency frequently in their translated texts. In the novel *The Hour before Dawn* the translator Maitreyee Siddhanta Chakravarty has retained a bulk number of Assamese words like ‘sador’, ‘mekhela’, ‘Kokaiti’, ‘Deuta’, ‘naam’, ‘bhaona’ to give the English readers a taste of Assamese flavour. The words like ‘japi’ (P. 6), ‘Kokaideu’ (P.13), ‘Akonman’ (P.16), ‘sattrā’ (P.30), ‘chadha’ (P.35), ‘bhakats’ (P.61), ‘phagun’ (P.69) used in Pradipta Borgohain’s translation of Homen Borgohain’s *Halodhiya Charaye Baodhan Khay*; ‘saporī’ (P.7), ‘Pitadeu’ (P.43), ‘sari’ (P.54), ‘Aita’ (P.62), ‘Jetha’ (P.65), ‘jurun’ (P.90), ‘xorai’ (P.204), ‘laru’ (P.239) used in Maitreyee Siddhanta Chakravarty’s translated text on a *Wing and a Prayer* by Arun Sarma; ‘dhora’ (P.1), ‘garam’ (P.15), ‘aanchal’ (P.35), ‘bahi’ (P.43), ‘baideu’ (P. 128), ‘gadha’ (P.160) used in Ranjita Biswas’s translation of Bhabendra Nath Saikia’s collection of short stories titled *Srinkhal as Fetters* are some outstanding examples of foreignisation, not domestication in the

realm of translation in India. A much larger list of Assamese words are included in the novel on a Wing and a Prayer than in *The Hour Before Dawn* by the translator Maitreyee Siddhanta Chakravarty because of her increased confidence on translation work.

The rendering of a text from the source language into target language is regarded as more difficult than creative writing. The translator not only has to cope with the bilingual complexities but also with the background of the text and its different readings in different periods in the same language context. The tight-rope walking between the source language and the target language makes the task of the translator more difficult than that of a creative writer.

The role played by the publication houses in the field of translation is noticeable. The presentation of the translated texts as translated texts to the readers deserves to be appreciated. But very often translated texts are not presented as translated texts to the target language readership. The supposition in the world of book market seems to be against providing too many information on the cover page regarding the fact of translation. Spectrum Publications which has published a number of translation works from Assamese into English differentiates between the presentations of these translated texts. The texts which are regarded as classics provide the details of the facts of translation on the cover page such as *Miri Jiyori* by Rajani Kanta Bordoloi translated into English by P. Kotoky. All these pieces of information are provided on the cover page. In addition to this the jacket of the book introduces the translator. But the work supposed to be a work of popular fiction avoids such details on the cover page. *The Heart's a Showbiz* is presented as a work by Anuradha Sarma Pujari not as a translated work by Abha Bhattacharyya. The "Foreword" by P. Kotoky does not refer to the process of translation though it hopes to win the readership in the English language context as it did with the Assamese language context. There is no introduction of the translator. It may be concluded by such examples that in the publication and the distribution of the translated texts such details are supposed to affect the sale of the books with their specific readership.

It is generally assumed that unlike poetry, translation of prose is easier to translate. The specific problems of translating literary prose are not even discussed in detail as the problems of translating poetry are discussed. The widespread notion that 'a novel is somehow a simpler structure than a poem' is perhaps responsible for the comparatively less focus on the discussion of problems of translation of literary prose (Bassnett 110). Very often the concept of the imaginary distinction between form and content prevails when the text to be translated is a novel. Even though the translator adequately grasps the significance of the novel, there may happen mistranslation though such strong words should be avoided in the context of translation of literary texts in India mainly for two reasons: (a) Our tradition of translation culture has a very different concept of translation from that of the western concept. (b) The dearth of translation activities between the Indian languages requires encouragement of such activities and the mind boggling discussions of the rules of propriety of the translation performance are hardly rewarding. The translator of the Assamese novel *Antoreep* into English as *The Hour before Dawn* uses certain methods such as dropping of names which is used throughout the text. Such practices can be construed as mistranslation according to Susan Bassnett who does not regard the form of a literary text as separate from its content.

Translation is a linguistic and cultural activity. Total translation is unattainable. The translator's inwardness with the languages and cultures of the SLT and the TLT allows him to strive for finding the lexical equivalence. The socio-cultural matrix of the SLT and the words charged with memory, associations and literary allusions are not easy to be translated. The act of translation is described by Meenakshi Mukherjee as 'voluntary that is the material has been chosen by the translator himself and the prime mover is a compelling desire to recreate' (As quoted in Das 39). The choice of the text is made by the translator and the desire to recreate reflects her competence of both the languages and a creative capability in the target language.

The maintainance of the balance between the fidelity to the original text and freedom from it is the challenge of the translator. The translators are sometimes suggested to take liberties from the original text and may take the process of translation to the point of creating a new text. Great writers like Sri Aurobindo favoured this liberty of the translator and suggested making one's 'own

poem' out of the original while translating. But translation scholars of our time say that translation should be guarded against both transliteration and transcreation.

Even though the practice of translation bears a large number of problems that cause threats to the authenticity and position of the genre, the desire of the scholars and translators to render a text from one language into another has shown an upward trend in the present society. It is not only 'an act of journey from the source language to the target language, but an inter-communicative activity between creation and criticism. The translator is the builder who builds a new text, curved out of the original' (Das 111). The problems that the translator has long been facing in translating a text from one language into another are being felt with great care to make translation equally important as the original work in the present literary scenario of the world.

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