

Translation: The Process of Success and Failure in the Transformation of the Target Language into the Source Language

Mukesh Kumar¹

Abstract:

Translation is acknowledged word in the gallery of literature. It is an expression in another language; it is a creative and meaningful rewriting and subsuming activities such as paraphrasing, reviewing, commenting etc. On the one hand the growing importance of research into the ethics of translation and on the other hand a much greater attention to the broader philosophical issues underpins translation. Texts are seen now as complex signifying system and the task of the translator is to decode or re-encode whichever of those systems is accessible. The cultural grids determine how reality is constructed in both source and target text and the skill of the translator in manipulating grids will determine the success of the outcome. This is a rejection of any linear notion of translation process and puts translation in a much broader cultural and historical framework. As has been stated above that all languages represent the social reality differently, it becomes clear that sameness cannot exist between two languages. Once this view is expected it becomes possible to approach the question of loss and gain in the translation process. Much time has been spent on discussing what is lost in the transfer of a text from source language to target language while ignoring what can also be gained, for the translator can at times enrich or clarify the source language text as a direct result of the translation process. Moreover what is often seen as 'lost' from the source language context may be replaced in the target language context. This paper is an attempt to underpin and clarify of this process of loss and gain in the process of translation in the light of the above discussed theoretical framework.

Keywords: Failure, Grammar, Interpretation, Language, Source Language, Translation, Translator, Target Language.

¹ Assistant Professor of English

University College Kurukshetra

mukesh.eng01@gmail.com

Translation, according to the 8th edition of Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, is the process of changing something that is written or spoken into another language. It is an expression in another language which is creative and meaningful rewriting and subsuming activities such as paraphrasing, reviewing, commenting etc. the process of translation is based on a central core of linguistic activity which belongs to semiotics, the science that studies sign, systems or structures, sign processes and sign functions. As Susan Bassnett says:

...that translation involves the transfer of 'meaning' contained in one set of language signs into another set of language signs through competent use of the dictionary and grammar, the process involves a whole set of extra-linguistic criteria also. (TS, 21)

Edward Sapir Claims that 'language is a guide to social reality' and it is true from above quoted phrase that human beings are at the mercy of the language that has becomes the medium of expression for their society. When a translator comes

ahead to translate any text it takes or represents its cultural identity and the cultural grids determine how reality is constructed in both source and target texts and the skills of the translator in manipulating grids will determine the success of the outcome. This is a rejection of any linear notion of translation process and puts translation in a much broader cultural and historical framework as has been stated above that all languages represent the social reality differently it becomes clear that sameness cannot exist between two languages. In this context Edward Sapir writes:

No two languages are ever are sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached. (CLP, 69)

In the process of transfer from source language to target language, Jacobson goes on to point to the main problems. He says that translation is only an adequate interpretation of an alien code unit and

equivalence is impossible. There is no full equivalence through translation. The same meaning or synonym is impossible to put it besides the meaning in a target language because apparent synonymy doesn't get equivalence. The complete equivalence cannot take place as Jakobson declare that all poetic art is therefore technically untranslatable:

Only creative transposition is possible: either interlingual transposition-from one poetic shape into another or intralingual transposition-from one language into another or finally intersemiotic transposition-from one system of signs into another, e.g. from verbal art into music, dance, cinema or painting. (OT, 232-9)

Translation can be perceived as a series of operations where the starting point and the ending product are *significations* and function within a given culture. If we translate the English word into any other target language without regard for its signification, it will become difficult to perform its function of meaning within a

sentence, there may be a equivalence but it will be a different associative field. This creates a failure of the author of a source language. On the other hand, the translator has to resolve to the combination of units in order to find an approximate equivalence. The translator operates criteria that transcend the purely linguistic, and a process of decoding and recoding takes place. Because texts are seen now as complex signifying system and the task of the translator is to decode and re-encode whichever of those systems is accessible.

Translation does constitute the "afterlife", as the familiar trope goes, of a text in more senses than Walter Benjamin would have us believe. It allows writer to cross boundaries of language and culture and enjoy readership larger and vastly different than text in the original would have assumed, and thus assures the survival and dissemination of the text across time and space. Indeed, the two tests of greatness for a writer and his work are timelessness and translation. This being so it is natural that every writer would like to be represented in other languages through translation, but as they may not read the languages in which they are translated, they are not always in a position to judge the quality of the work

and how well they have been represented. We often read translated literature in an unself-conscious way, assuming that the translated version is a true representation of the original, and often implicitly trusting in the authority of the translation. History is replete with examples of how a writer's reputation has been made or marred because of the quality of the translation.

The fear of being misrepresented and the urge to reach a wider audience drive writers translate their own works. They may also be driven by other motives, and these motives must be compelling enough to make them undertake the often painstaking exercise for rendering their own works into a language not of their own. However, a self-translator's success or failure will depend upon bilingual fluency-not mere competent –and the ability to inhabit two cultural worlds simultaneously. Writers often assume that they are the best translators of their works, but this assumption may not always be correct. We have example of both success and failure in this regard. The most pertinent and successful example, to my mind, is that of Samuel Beckett. Beckett translated most of his work between French and English. Sometimes he would begin to

translate even before the original was completed. Readers are often struck by his ability to recreate the effect of the original in his translation, “reinventing puns and compensating with new material for anything which resists resistance” (SB, 99). The original and translation are seen as mere identical twins “organically continuous with another”, existing in a relationship that characterises the entire body of his self-translated works.

On this same subject Tom Bishop remarked that the act of self-translation has given us the full texture of Beckett's oeuvre; each translation is not a superfluous addition but an expansion of the work itself. We may define Indian writing in English as original creative writing produced in English by Indian writers or writers of Indian origin, residents of expatriate, for whom English will normally be a second language but who have in all probability been educated, even within India, in English medium schools and universities, and are likely to write English more frequently than any native Indian language. This very particular set of condition, inherited from the British Raj but carried on beyond independence to the present day, in no way makes these writers

any less Indian: in most cases they are representing the lives, conversation and thoughts of Indian characters who more often than not are presumed to be speaking and thinking not in English at all, but in a plurality Indian languages. Susan Bassnett rightly says that the emphasis always in translation is on the reader or listener, and the translator must tackle the source language text in such a way that the target language version will correspond to the source language version. The nature of the correspondence may vary considerably but the principle remains constant.

Hence Albrecht Neubert's view that Shakespeare's sonnets "Shall I Compare thee to a Summer's Day" cannot be "semantically translated" (TT, 22) into a language where summers are unpleasant is perfectly proper, just as the concept of God the father cannot be translated into a language where the deity female. To attempt to impose the value system of the

source language culture on to the target language culture is dangerous ground, and the translator should not be tempted by the school that pretends to determine the original intentions of an author on the basis of a self-contained text. The translator cannot be the author of the source language text, but as the author of the target language text has a clear more responsibility to the target language readers.

Therefore, this can be concluded from the above discussion that the question of failure and success in the process of translation must be seen dynamically and not statically. Because when the bare idea of the source language text is sown in the climate of target language text it will take its form according to the intrinsic nature of that climate. This process of failure and success is inevitable and intra-relational between the two cultures through the mouth or pen of the translator.

Note: I have used some titles of the books/works in abbreviated form such as TT which stands for *Text and Translation*, TS stands for *Translation Studies*, SB stands for *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text*, CLP stands for *Culture, Language and Personality*.

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