

The Art of Poetry Translation

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the etymology of the word translation and reasons out the meaning of its activity. While analyzing the various kinds of translation, it classifies translation into two broad categories of literary translation and non-literary translation. And it further classifies non-literary translation as technical translation, scientific translation, legal translation and financial translation. Literary translation is classified into prose translation and poetry translation. This paper broadly analyzes the various types of poetry translation. This paper says that poetry can be translated applying various means of text to text, stanzaic and emotional translations. And finally it asserts that emotional translation is the appropriate translation. It concludes its findings with listing of the characteristics of a good poetry translation.

Keywords: translatio, literary, prose, poetry, sense to sense, emotional, etc...

Translation

The word 'translation' in English is derived from the word 'translatio', a Latin word. Trans means 'across' and latio is 'to bring' which makes a complete meaning of 'carrying across or bringing across. This meaning was again given by the English word 'Transfer' which is also drawn from again a Latin word 'Transfere', here ferre is the root word for the past participle latus, which gives birth to 'latio'. This is the etymology of the English word 'translation'. The Ancient Greek had two terminologies for translation namely metaphrasis and paraphrasis. These terms denote two different actions of translation which are equalled with the terms metaphrase and paraphrase. Metaphrasis means 'a speaking across and paraphrase a saying in other words'. These two terms mark the two extremes possible in Translation.

Translation defined by Theorists

The entity translation is defined by famous theorists. Though they are poets they are called as theorists as they have propounded theories for translation.

Let's see some of their theories

John Dryden

He describes translation as the judicious blending of metaphrase and paraphrase when a translator brings a written text material from the source language to the Target Language. It concentrates on the selection of parallels, counterparts and equivalences in the Target Language for the expressions used in the Source Language.

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Cicero and Horace

They see translation as seeking equivalence for one text of Source Language in Target Language. They say translators employ flexibility in seeking equivalences in two modes as literal where ever it is possible and paraphratic where it is necessary.

Samuel Johnson

He talks about translation of syntax characteristics in a language. According to his view the translators have to bring out the original context by bringing the original word order. For example by shifting from direct to indirect speech and vice versa. These grammatical differences don't have any impediment between fixed word order languages and free word order languages. Some of the fixed word order languages are English, French and German and free word order languages are Greek, Latin, Russian and Polish.

Marin Luthen

He discusses about the untranslatables in languages when translation is taken place. When a particular target language does not have equivalents for a source language text the translator automatically tends to borrowing. He says that it is a kind of enriching Target Language. Untranslatability leads to borrowing words. Barrowing leads to enriching language and as a source lacking of equivalents leads to untranslatability. There is a problem in translation when we translate cultural concepts of Source Language into the Target Language in which there are no cultural equivalents.

Types of translation

Translation may be divided into two broad categories as Literary Translation and Non-Literary Translation. Non-Literary Translation may further be classified into so many varieties: Let's see one by one;

Technical Translation

It refers to the translation of technical documents such as engineering, mechanics, industrial texts, user manuals, instruction leaflets, minutes of proceedings. The translator should know the specialized terminology used in such texts. It has a limited audience who are related to the field concerned.

Scientific Translation

It refers to the translation of science materials. They may include science materials like books, articles, theses, papers, study reports etc. The findings which are experimentally proved are translated in this kind of translation and so no imagination is required. It is enough just to give meaning for each word of the original text. It is more of a word to word translation.

Legal Translation

This is the translation of legal documents. It includes summons, warrants, judgements, experts' opinions, minutes of interrogation etc. This is used between the court officials and the party concerned as a bridge to club them. There are specialized judicial translations for this purpose.

Financial Translation

This relates the translation of documents which are related to financial transactions. This include financial, banking, stock exchange activity and others such documents. This further includes company annual reports, financial dealings, sale deeds of assets and so forth.

Now we start to analyze literary translation.

Literary Translation

This is entirely a different process opposite to non-literary translation. Non-literary translation is considered a mechanical one. Here translator is just like a tool since he does not involve his mind in this kind of translation. There is no room for culture, choice of meaning. It is a process of replacing the words of the original text with the words of the Target Language. But literary translation brings out the mind of the original text writer by the translation. So, the translator involves his mind in this kind of translation. He should mind the culture, choice of words and meanings. It is not a replacement of words but a recreation of the original, text writer's mind. To do this, the translator should do the following things:

- a) he should understand the word play of the author of the original text.
- b) the style of the creator should be skillfully transmitted by the translator to keep up the literary quality of the original text.

- c) Literary quality of the text whether it is prose or poetry lies in rhythm, meter and the innate balance of phrases should be realized by the translator and then he should bring them forth into his translation and by that way he can render the music inherent to the text.

Prose Translation

Non-literary translation can be done by anyone who knows two languages i.e the Source Language and the Target Language. But literary translation can be done by creative writers only. In non-literary translation, the translator is a tool but in literary translation, he is a creator, prose translation, here refers to literary prose texts only, say for example Bacon's Essays. Bacon's essays, though it is prose, poetic in its quality. So, a translator should concentrate more on the literary quality. The literary taste which has been created by Bacon along with messages to this world should be aimed at by the translator. Literary text whether it is a prose or a poetry though they are different in forms, is nothing but the mind of the author. So, the translator of a literary text has a greater responsibility to bring out the mind of the author by recreating it from Source Language in the Target Language. Poetry translation requires a poet as a translator. Unless the translator is a poet, poetry translation can't be a true one.

Poetry Translation

Before getting into poetry translation let me define what poetry is so that we can have a better understanding of poetry translation. We should understand poetry in order to understand the difference between poetry translation and other translations.

What is Poetry?

When we analyze the word poem or poetry etymologically, we come to know that it is started, from the Greek term poieses which means 'making'. So poetry is making or creating. This form uses aesthetic and rhythmic qualities of language. Poetry is created using poetic elements such as meter, verse form, rhyme, repetition of words in order to create aesthetics which distinguish from more objectively informative prosaic forms of writing. Poetry creates multiple interpretations and achieve musical effects as it uses assonance, alliteration, onomatopoeia,

ambiguity, symbolism, irony and other stylistic devices. These are called practical elements. All these poetic elements are involved in the making of poem. These elements are not required for making of other genres of literature so, when a translator engages himself in poetry translation, he should remember all such poetic qualities and translate them lively. Poetry is unique from all others forms of literature.

Though there are varieties of poetry like narrative poetry, lyric poetry, epic poetry, satirical poetry, elegy, ballad, verse, dramatic poetry, speculative poetry, , light poetry, poetry is poetry and all poems are one with its poetic quality.

Threshold steps in Poetry Translation

1. Decide on whom to be translated: It includes various options; the language, the country, the genre since poetry is in various genres, from mother tongue to others or from other to mother, theme and the need of the hour and so on. A translator should use his translation activity as an opportunity to talk to the society of the Target Language as a creative work, the original work. So, a relevant form, context, theme must be chosen for a translation. The translator may choose either a poem or a novel which should have a cultural impact on the target language society. It is called relevance. An irrelevant text won't have any impact on the minds of the reader. The translator through his translation should bridge the reader of the Target Language and the writer of the Source Language Text. This may be possible only when the translator decides whom, and which to be translated. Relevance to the reader is the major cause to choose a particular poet and theme.

2. Background of the Poet: After choosing the poet, we should read about the poet. We must try to understand the contributions of the poet to his culture. The poet's other writings, style, themes should be analyzed. Then we will have a complete understanding of the poet and know what he stands for. The translator while translates a poet, should realize what he stands for and that should be translated. This can be achieved only when we study the background of the poet. He may be a feminist or a communist or a classicist or a modernist whatever the poet may be and that should be caught and the translator also should transform himself as the author

of the Source Language. If the poet is a modernist and the translator should also be a modernist while the translation takes place.

3. Close reading of the poem: Chosen the poet and studied about the poet. This is the base for a translator to take up a translation project. This is something like taking up an enterprise to an unknown land with enough stuff i.e information. Now start reading of the text. We know the likes of the poet, we should read the poem not with our tongue but with the tongue of the poet. While we read, we should concentrate on all aspects with the view of the poet; the poet's soul should replace the translator's soul. The mind of the poet should be recaptured in reading of the poem. We should feel the rhythm of the poem and the pace, the pauses, the beats of the poem should also be recognized. With doing all these, the poem would become friendly to the translator and it will speak to him about itself and the author.

4. Find out Parallels: A successful translation is not the direct translation which involves in word to word translation but the translating of the mind of the author with the same colour. To achieve this, the translator should use parallels. Human life is, after all, full of basic instincts only. We find such basic instincts in all human beings. So, parallels are very common in human life and in the languages used. Such parallels would easily transmit the ideas, moods, thoughts of the original text writer. The duty of the translator is nothing but to catch the mind of the writer or poet and present it to the readers in the target language. To translate a poetry, the translator need not engage word to word translation but sense to sense translation should be adopted. For this, the translator should undergo such mental process of finding out parallels for the text he translates. The translator should think about a cultural parallel, lingual parallel, stylistic parallel and the like. By employing parallels, the translation becomes a meaningful translation.

5. Making use of technological support: Living in an age of technology, there is nothing wrong in using technology to translate a poem. But this cannot be the ultimate process for a poem translation. There are some specially devised program for translation with excellent dictionaries and phrase books. These programs will guide a translator to understand the

text he has to translate. But it can't be the be all and end all of a translation. With these devices, the translator can fix the skeleton of the text and by that with his creativity the translator can supply flesh and blood and soul to the skeleton. The internet sources will provide the translators with the information required. It is not enough to do a live translation. The live translation is done by the translator using creativity mixing the internet information. This will save the translating time. And the mind of the translator is enriched with various information of the text to be translated. This information technology makes the translation more informative and that results in an enriched sense for sense translation.

Various kinds of Poetry Translation

i. Text to text Translation

This type of translation aims at the text alone. All texts of the original should be rendered into the target language. This kind of translation concentrates more on the form and content than on the context and its sense. It will give meaning of each word in the text without the poetic sense carried by the poem. It may or may not be possible to transfer the meaning with poetic sense. It may be otherwise called a paraphrase. To this kind of translation we need most is a good dictionary. The translator does not need to be a man with poetic sense. This may be a mechanical one without any emotional involvement.

Stanzaic Translation

This will be done on stanzas. Each stanza of the poem is considered as a unit and the message conveyed by that stanza will be transferred as a stanza in the translated version. This won't consider the lines and meter of the poem. The number of poetic lines in the stanza of the original may vary in the same stanza of the translated version in the Target Language. It will not think about the whole poem and its message also. The theme of any poem can't be broken; that would be running like a thread throughout the poem as a soul in a living body. By this kind of translation the soul may or may not be visible. The translator needs less energy. This can't be an emotional one as it doesn't warrant the emotional involvement of the translator. Stanzaic translation is somewhat better than the text to text

translation. It doesn't preserve the form of the poem. The translator may use a structure of his convenience to pack up the meaning of the stanzas. So a four line stanza may be translated into a six line stanza in the target language. The only concern here is the meaning of every stanza.

Emotional Translation

Poetry translation should be a poetic translation. A poem can be translated into various forms for various purposes. To teach students, to be read by public, for an academic purpose, to benefit the society, a poem may be translated. But as a theory says that art is for art sake, poetry is for poetry sake and poetry translation is also for poetry sake. The right kind of translation of poetry is the emotional translation. Emotional translation could be achieved by poets only. All poets of the world are one and the same as they have a tender heart. They are kind towards this world and the living creatures. In a poetry translation, the emotions of the poets of the Source Language should be transferred to the readers of the Target Language. The form, style, theme, content, and genre are to be transmitted from the source language to the target language using parallels and equivalences. If Thames of the London city is referred in an English poem, the reader should automatically think about Vaigai of Madurai. And by translation, Wordsworth should take a rebirth in Tamil Nadu while a translator translates a poem of Wordsworth. It is just like replacing the author by the translator and the source language by the target language. The translated poem should read like the original and the original author should come to the mind of the source language reader. If a sonnet of Shakespeare is translated into Tamil, the sonnet form is to be brought into Tamil. The style, the theme, equivalence of culture and language and everything should be taken into target language with the emotional mind of Shakespeare. The original writing in the target language is the target of the poetry translation.

The appropriate translation of poetry is emotional translation. So, let's analyze the characteristic features of a good poetry translation:

1. The Poetry translator should be a fluent speaker of both Source Language and Target Language.
2. The poetry translator should be a language analyst in both Source Language and Target Language.
3. He should be fully aware of both the cultures of Source Language and Target Language.
4. He should have the capacity to approach emotionally towards both Source Language and Target Language.
5. The poetry translator should know the long tradition of poetry of both Source Language and Target Language
6. Above all, a poetry translator should necessarily be a poet of heart.

With all these characteristics, Poetry translation may be a Poetic translation. This is the real translation of poetry.

Conclusion

Now, we may understand the difference between poetry translation and other translations. This is something two poets in one man with two identical minds. The translator of poetry is both question in Source Language and answer in Target Language. He is the question and he is the answer. Poetry translation is not an activity but it is a creativity. Emotions are recollected in poetry translation also. Translator, while he engages himself in translating a poem, becomes a poet. Unless the translator is a poet he cannot be successful in poetry translation.

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