



**International Conference on Indigenous Languages and Translation Studies**

held on Saturday, 3rd August 2019

Venue- Seminar Hall, **School of Humanities and Social Sciences**, Jain Deemed-to-be-University, Palace Road, Bengaluru, India

## **Translation and Scholarship**

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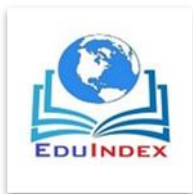
### ***Abstract***

Translation introduces one culture to another culture through language. A language is an interpretation of the culture of a place, where that language exists. In other words, a culture is expressed and lived through its language only. So, translation acts as a bridge between source culture and target culture. As a result, a translator needs to be a good scholar too, as he has to internalize the text first, before interpreting it in another language. In fact, it is a hard task, as no two languages are the same. So, translation is a transaction between two unequal cultures. In these circumstances, it is the duty of the translator to assimilate this new thought to another culture without any distortion of its intended meaning. When we debate on the various nuances of translation activity, we have to explore questions like, what exactly do we translate when we translate? Is it sound, sense, spirit, text, reader or context? What are the parameters for selecting a text for translation? Why do we translate a text? This paper explores these questions, along with other related issues of translation. In this world, where languages are dying a slow death without being used, translation infuses new life to a language, by drawing knowledge from other languages, and keeping it alive. However, in contrast, knowledge transferred through translation to a target culture might be misused to control the source culture as it happened in the British era. In spite of this, translation is the lifeline for a language to receive knowledge from other cultures, in order to strengthen it.

*Key words: Culture, Knowledge, Language, Source, Target, Translation*

The most basic question is, what is the role of a translator in a language? In simple terms, we can call him a bridge between languages. This bridge transfers new thoughts and knowledge from a source language to a target language and enriches its field. Nonetheless, a translator never gets the credit he deserves for this noble task of infusing newness to a discipline or a body of knowledge. Moreover, translation is not an easy task. A good translator is a scholar who understands the knowledge presented in the text first and then interprets it to the target language without any distortion of its intended meaning. In this context, let us try to understand the different nuances of translation.

To begin with, translation means introducing a culture to another, not just a transfer of information from one language to another. Because, a language is the sum total of a culture, and there is nothing beyond a language as means of interpretation of a culture. In this context, translation is a



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skill, which can be mastered only through practice. In simple words, it is a transaction between two unequal languages. Any two cultures are unlike in nature, and translation tries to assimilate these diverse cultures. In other words, translation widens the scope of a language by bringing knowledge from other languages. So, it has to respect these feeder languages and live in harmony. In this context, rivalry among different language speakers in the name of pride of a language is meaningless, as any for that matter, language can't survive being isolated. It grows only through constant interactions with other languages.

In short, a translator receives valuable knowledge from one language and introduces it to the readers of another language. This activity enriches languages and erases our pride of being a part of one great 'know all' literature. Moreover, new ideas, thoughts, literary forms and phenomenon should constantly flow into a language to keep it useful and alive. Due to this potential to translation activities, there are associations of translators in Europe and their safeties are well taken care of. However, a translator doesn't get the credit that he deserves in the Indian context.

If we revisit the history of translation in the western world, we discover a very interesting phenomenon that, after the fall of Greek civilization, it had lost all the philosophical works of great Greek philosophers. However, they remained intact in Arabic translation, due to the efforts of Abbasid of Arabia, as he persevered them through translation into Arabic in House of Wisdom in 9<sup>th</sup> century. Later, these texts were translated back to European languages in Renaissance period.

Similarly, when we take a look at the history of translation in post independent India, it all started with the establishment of National Knowledge Commission in 2006, with an ambition to improve the accessibility of knowledge from all regional languages to common people. So, it established National Translation Mission for the same purpose, at Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) of Mysore, which has taken up the task of translating works in 69 domains of knowledge. It also runs two journals to publish translation works in Kannada and English languages ('Anukrati' in Kannada and 'Translation Today' in English). It was intended to develop the institution as a store house of knowledge. In the context of Kannada language, Kuvempu Bhasha Bharathi established a Translation Academy in 2005.

From its historical trajectory to its present status, if we debate the different issues concerned with translation, the very first question we have to explore is, what is that we translate, when we translate a text?

### **The object of translation**

A language is a way of looking at the world. It is the last act of any culture. We see nothing beyond it, as, a language bounds its culture, which is expressed to its maximum potential only through its language. However, translated texts from other languages expands the boundary of our culture by bringing new concepts. While translating, we have to see, how we can apply this new concept to the target culture. There is a danger here, as some orthodox minds might object to the influx of new flow of thoughts. For example, there were objections when the Bible was translated to other regional languages, as church thought that, it would impure the words of God. However, translation started with the translation or interpretation of the Bible to other languages.

When we translate, we have to keep the following questions in mind like what is being translated? Is it sound, sense, spirit, text, reader or context? Or all of these? Why is a text translated?



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In other words, how do we choose certain texts for translation and leave out the rest? Who is being served through translation? These questions are important, because, in British era, translation of vernaculars was highly encouraged by the rulers to keep the native people in control. In addition to these questions, we have to explore, are we translating readers to a newly translated text or a mere text is being translated to whosoever readers might be? The next big question is, are we translating a text to a new culture or a language, as culture and language are inseparable?

So, the big question here is, what do we translate? In this context, we have to consider three components of translation; (a) the producer of the knowledge(author), what exactly does the author try to convey through the text, (b) the matter or what is being said and finally, (c) the receiver or reader of this translated text, how the reader receives this new knowledge. A translator has to concentrate on the second aspect, namely, the matter, where there is a tremendous scope for the translator to experiment to give an appropriate interpretation of the text.

An interesting observation from the recent studies on earlier translations has initiated new debates on the authenticity on what actually Aristotle meant in his *Poetics* and how it is misinterpreted in different translations. So, experts claim that, European translation of *Poetics* in 19<sup>th</sup> century was influenced by contemporary Theory of Evolution. So, the translation positioned the different genres in hierarchy, namely, comedy, epic, and novel respectively, but Aristotle didn't mean it. Thus, translation depends on the influences of the contemporary times and it is reflected in their interpretations. One more observation shows that Indians don't accept tragic ends. So, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Indian translations of English tragedies were turned into comedies. And, DV Gundappa was the first translator in Kannada to give true interpretation of English text without transforming it to suit the domestic readers.

### What can be translated?

What is available to our cognitive level of understanding, grasping, and awareness can be translated. However expressionist texts are difficult to translate. They don't have translatability. Language is a system of sound systems. So, a translator has to look for correspondence or equivalent words. Some argue that a translator is a thief as he is not loyal to original text. But it doesn't equate to be 'Makhi ka Makhi' (word by word translation).

Non referential elements or metaphors are untranslatable. When there are no equal grounds, translation becomes difficult. Some culturally unique experiences should be felt, but can't be translated in words. In fact, these kinds of metaphors are naturally present in all disciplines, not just in literature.

The concept of 'origin' came from Christianity, as the Bible translations were expected to truthful to the original text. Print technology demanded authorship for the texts printed. Earlier, they were called lipikaras and they didn't have any significance. But a translated text is also called cotext now. As Homi Baba says, translation is an independent activity and it is a hybrid between two cultures. It also means reimagination or rewriting. There are three components to be internalized while translating, and all the three are equally important for a translation activity. They are; when the original text was composed, how others have read the text so far and finally, our own interpretation of it.

### Guidelines for good translation



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While translating, it is better to take the help of subject specific glossary. It is necessary to use discipline specific technical terms and jargons while translating texts from all disciplines. If we find mistakes in the texts, we shouldn't correct it, but make a mention of it. Stylistic variations need to be taken care of. Similarly, the 'false friend syndrome' where we take words and concepts for granted owing to our assumption that similar sounding words in both languages mean the same. Wordiness and inconsistency in usage of terminology has to be avoided. Reference to technical terms and glossary would make the translation appropriate. Quotations should be worded correctly, not from memory. It is necessary to comprehend the text in advance before translating. A good translator is a good researcher too.

A noted kannada poet and translator, Jayant Kaikini would say that translation is like pouring perfume from one bottle to another, with fragrance lost in between. It is generally believed that something gets lost in translation. However, on a positive note, it is also called transfusion as it fills energy to anaemic target language and makes it healthy. It is also called diffusion as it spreads knowledge. The unit of a translation can be a word, a phrase, a sentence or a paragraph, depending on the discipline of the text. In social sciences and humanities, a concept becomes a unit. However, in natural sciences, factual translation is necessary.

To conclude, let me make a mention of some important milestones in Kannada literature on account of translation; B M Shree's *English Geethegalu* initiated Navodaya literary movement. Similarly, Paulo Nevuda's writing triggered Bandaya literary movement. So, translation creates space for alternative history. Translation is not a loss, rather a gain or adds life to the target language.

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