

Literary Translation as a Genre of Literature: A Roadmap for Serious Study

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Of Literary Criticism and Literature, the one that came first was literature. Literature has several functions and creative literature takes many forms called genres. Each genre has slightly different norms for criticism. Literary Translation has come to assume great importance in the context of translation being recognised as a genre. The need for expanding horizons of understanding between various language communities demands literary translation into and from many languages.

Literary translation evolved independent of formal training as an academic discipline. All renowned translators went to literary texts in all languages to import or export literary works in a different language. They did so without any formal training and without the basis of any theory of translation. The translators took the texts they adored and translated them. They forged ahead rendering unto their readers what they thought worthwhile in a language they thought best, to the best of their ability. A new genre “Literature in Translation” came into being.

Some theory or principles are becoming necessary to evaluate translated texts. Critiques and review articles on translation have come for individual works even without a theory as such.

Literary Translation is not often as formidable a task as it has often made to appear by a reading of the work of theoreticians and academics who are not always translators themselves. In the context of the much needed but unusual spurt in translation activity, it is essential for translators to have something like a set of guiding principles, if not a full-fledged theory in itself. In the absence of a universally valid and accepted theory, translators necessarily follow their own strategies in practice. Though there is nothing like a theory which is immediately applicable to policy, ever since literary translation came to be important in the 20th century context of promoting international understanding, literary translations have been getting reviewed. It would be possible to deduce some principles, which ultimately may yield a complete theory. But it should be borne in mind the theory has to envisage principles to suit each set of source language and target language texts. This project is to make a viable beginning of such an attempt.

SUGGESTED PLAN OF WORK

(Indicative and not thorough or exhaustive)

Nature of books to be consulted

Available books on translation theory in English

Books on Applied Linguistics helpful for translation

Collections of Essays on Translation

Our own treatises on aesthetics and literature

Norms of criticism prevalent for Literary Translation - A tentative list

a) Faithfulness to the Source Text

b) Degree of Freedom taken

c) Possible justification for deviation

Different genres of original works and their translation into the same or another genre

a) novel into novel

b) story into story

c) poem into poem

d) poem into prose or free verse

e) prose play into prose play

f) poetic drama into poetic drama etc

Listing different kinds of Translations

Itemisation of procedures, methods and Principles

Towards a terminology for assessing literary translation in the light of the general norms of Literary Criticism

Collection of some important translated works

Ultimate tests

Readability

Easy flow

Retaining the flavour of the Original

Does the translated text read like an original or a translation?

Study of the techniques and strategies followed in the translation

The basic questions before embarking on the practice are:

- a) Which is the text being translated genre-wise: prose, poetry, fiction or drama?
- b) What is the purpose of translation: transferring information. from one language to another or carrying a literary text from one language to another
- c) Is it translating instructions etc. from a manual in one language into another?
- d) What is the type of text in terms of its original composition, contemporary, classical medieval or ancient?
- e) Who is the target reader, the elite, neo-literate, the general public or students with a specific purpose?
- f) Is the translation in the same genre or into another?

Here is another table to show various categories of translation:

Nature of the Source Text	Target Reader	Intended use / utility
Informative	Ordinary reader	Passing on information
Instructional	Worker	Using a manual / Set of instructions
Language study	Student	Imparting language skills
Literary Text	Literature lover	Literary appreciation - joy

Here we are concerned with literary translation and it is our aim to take as much of the beauty and significance of the source text into the target text. After carefully considering the answers to the questions raised above we have to make a number of choices. In matters of style, diction, expression etc what is most important is appropriateness, aptness, ('naturalness') and felicity in the target language.

A study and an analysis of Social markers, markers of cultural levels, registers, and technical words, need to be carried into the target language with utmost caution. The translator could be faulted for taking too much for granted from his reader or, in the other extreme, underestimating the reader. Pedagogic translations may be an exception to this. Too many explanations and too many footnotes distract. And then the most important thing is the stance of the translator. The ideal thing is to be inviting, enthusing and encouraging the reader to get the feel of the original text. It is essential to be reader-friendly and the fidelity to the target reader is obviously a little more important than fidelity to the original text.

The validity of a translated text does not depend totally on one to one correspondences between the original and the translated texts. Some parts, fragments may be safely omitted, some may have be excised in extra-ordinary situations. It is useful to retain some words of the original, especially terms of kinship, items of dress, words of address, interjections, expletives, items of food, clothing etc. not only in unrelated but even in cognate receptor languages. The receptor language stands to gain some loans from the original, when they eventually become familiar and popular. Translated texts can contribute to the growth of the receptor language in terms of lexis.

Another table would be of practical value to decide specifically before undertaking translation:

a)Category of translation: Informative, Instructional or Literary

Target reader: Lay person, User of a Manual, Student/Learner, Literary enthusiast or general public.

b)Source language (Original text):

c)Genre: prose, short story, novel, poem etc.

d)Period of writing: ancient, medieval, modern or contemporary

e)Target language (language into which text is being translated)

: Having decided that we are interested in literary translation, we have to study the translated literary texts first to understand the strategy of the translator in terms of translating

various features like style, grammar, syntax, vocabulary, structure, idiom, expressive devices and so on. It took some more time for the public and more importantly scholars and educationalists to widely realise the need for translations of literary texts from one *bhasha* literature into another.

Different choices and ensuring coherence and harmony

Scrutiny of the selection of

- a) *style*
- b) *social level*
- c) *cultural variety*
- d) *register*
- e) *technical terms / jargon*
- f) *regional variety / dialect etc*

Degrees of Translation-validity

- a) over translation
- b) under translation
- c) mistranslation
- d) ability or inability to convey cultural nuances

Different Kinds of Translations

Translations vary according to the purpose and according to the target reader the translator has to have in mind. This point needs to be taken into consideration for evaluating a translated work. For example, a translated text is prescribed for study in an educational programme for learning a language or for understanding the literary beauty of a text. This translation demands extensive notes not only on lexical, semantic, syntactic items but also on tropes and other expressive devices. This needs a pedagogic translation, though the term has not gained any currency yet.

Evaluating an interactive translation

This is a kind of translation where a translator sits with the writer of the original and goes on with his task where the writer can suggest modifications etc. This ensures credibility and authenticity but this cannot always happen. Even here a critic may find places where there might be inadequacies, especially when the writer does not know the receptor language well enough.

Evaluating Collective Translation

Collective Translation is resorted to by institutions like Sahitya Akademi when on a priority basis a text needs to be translated. A number of translators are assembled at a place where the work before them is discussed first and later assigned to every one individually. The work of each is discussed in the group, commented upon and guided for fresh drafts. Fresh drafts are discussed again for finalisation and sent to press. Some kind of uniformity and adherence to rules is ensured. The object is to convey the beauty in the very best way into the receptor language. Even this needs critical evaluation and a basis for that which may be particularly relevant for that kind of work.

If putting an idea into language is one kind of 'translation' activity, translating that into another language is another, more difficult, process. In the first instance it is less complex but the second translator poses several problems. In creative writing there is a special significance intended in the use of vocabulary and expressive devices. Aesthetic considerations play a very important role. This leads to complex problems very frequently. There are so many ways in which a literary text, which is a piece of creative- writing, can be rendered into another language. This is not the case in factual, informative writing where the purpose is comparatively narrow and limited. Poetry, for example is imaginative writing, which, usually, lends itself to a wide variety of interpretations. The translator needs to be very clever trying to make his translation as variously suggestive and as variedly communicative as the writer of the original text.

Sahridaya is essential for the appreciation of a literary text and it is no less a prime requirement for that appreciation in the translator. . For the translator it is an essential prerequisite, for he or she has to put across the seen/imagined/felt beauty into the target language. The translator-transcreators who have rendered the texts, for example, into Telugu from Sanskrit centuries ago were great imaginative artists themselves. They have minds and hearts that could get into that creative frenzy to come up with a version that had been their own in many ways. Their capacity to envision and intuit has earned for them laurels, which they never thought would accrue to them at all. They must have felt their work a way of redeeming what they believed was *rishirina*.

Understanding remarks denigrating literary translation

Now there are certain remarks, which have to be understood in their right perspective. First the saying that poetry is something that is lost in translation. This may be taken as a caution to the practising translator. Then there is the saying that translation is like mistress: if beautiful she is not faithful and if faithful not beautiful. This at best could be a crude joke but even this could be explained as a caution to the translator who may take liberties with the original. Some say it is a sacred sin and a necessary evil. The words sacred and necessary

should be enough for the enthusiastic translator. Then there is the million-dollar question of 'faithfulness' to the original and the translator's limits for trans-creation. Regarding the Fidelity – Betrayal Syndrome, Susan Bassnet asked a question: "Should the translator be faithful to the author or be faithful to those who cannot read the original language?" It is quite significant that she did not wait for an answer. There is another angle to it: this settles the question of fidelity and makes the French statement (if it is meant to be serious at all) just half-witty. Then the question regarding the degree of liberty a translator could legitimately take. This is a question best answered by the individual translator himself if anybody poses this to him personally. The degree of freedom varies from practitioner to practitioner and from text to text. A little field-testing with objective assessors would do the final translated text a lot of good.

Judging Translated Texts

Assessing the fulfilling of the obligations of a literary translator is an important aspect of literary criticism.

It is the humble attempt of the translator to bring at least a part of the glory of the text before a reader who has no access to the original. For this he tries to accomplish a figurative *parakaya pravesa*, metaphorically getting into the original writer's body. Sometimes it is an adventure, sometimes more hazardous than rewarding, sometimes an expedition into uncharted waters, which may simply devour him or drive him away into the perilous seas in fairy lands forlorn. It is for this reason that we should go to translations with a measure of forgiveness for lapses.

The translator intends his work for the sufficiently interested general reader who does not know the language of the original text. He is a provider of lift facility to those at the door ready to embark. Translation in its Latin cognate, we are told, has the travel meaning. The translator assumes that a reader comes prepared to put some effort to gain something. The reader is assumed to be interested in getting exposure to a new language and culture. The reader approaches the translated text determined to hear the proxy voice of the original writer. He knows full well that he is reading a translation and is prepared to accept it as the next best. If the translation is satisfying, it is forgotten that it is the other's voice and there is willing suspension of disbelief in deeming it as the author's voice. The reader gets the joy of accessing the author. The translator, then, is successful. It may be possible that he has some prior knowledge or exposure, which perhaps would make things easier for him. The facilitator does work to the best of his satisfaction, to the best of his knowledge and judgement.

The reader is drawn to a translated work to read it avidly knowing that it is the next best to the original inaccessible to him, to get a fair measure of something of its tone, quality, for comparative study etc. He doesn't go there for serious evaluation of the quality of translation or critical judgement there on. In short, translations are not frequently read to pick holes. Even the

one who knows both languages has to have his heart in the right place before passing value judgements solely based on isolated slips. This doesn't imply that the translator could hash it out and make the thing shoddy. This only enhances his onus to give his best. Criticising translated texts should do some good trying to set things that have gone askew straight. A critic of translated text should resist the temptation of "fishing in a barrel", a phrase used by L.E.Sissman, the American reviewer.. To declare that more damage than good is done by any given translation would only reveal a rash judgement. If the original writer has not done any damage himself by his writing, the translator cannot do any fresh damage.

Criticism and Review

-The concept of nativism demands that we should refuse to receive standards other than those we have evolved ourselves. I think we Indians, being members of the oldest living civilisation in the world, are the most eligible to establish the native principle as an essential and fundamental requisite of human existence. (Bhalachandra Nemade)

Literary Criticism, broadly, is a matter of applying known and accepted criteria and principles to evaluate a piece of creative writing. Literary Translation being a comparatively new practice there are no definite standards, principles or strict methods.

We have to evolve our own theory, methods, procedures and concepts. Our accepted literary theories and principles of criticism can give us guidance in this matter. Coming to reviews, they are the personal assessments and opinions of the reviewer to give some idea of the book under review to the prospective buyer / reader.

The corpus of reviews would give us data to enable us to deductively formulate some principles. A set of postulates based on observation and analysis could lead to a tentative hypothesis, which could be tested before it becomes a theory.

Salient Features of Criticism

Criticism of Literary Translation is part of Literary Criticism. Literary Translation is a distinct literary genre. There are many theories of literary criticism but not even one regarding literary translation. A theory cannot be promulgated overnight.

This study can lead to an exploratory monograph, which could be step towards the formulation of theory. Itemisation and categorisation of methods, procedures and practices being followed by translators would be deduced from a corpus of translated texts comparing them with the originals also. Some oft translated texts like *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam, Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali*, to cite only two by way of a starting, and several individual poems would form the corpus. There are certain principles followed by different translators while translating

different kinds of texts. A detailed study makes it possible to draw certain conclusions, which would contribute to the formulation of some principles, guidelines and procedures. These would provide the basis for valid criticism of translated texts.

Literature enshrines values of the highest order. A country's ethos is reflected in the art it produces and the literature it produces and promotes. Our country has had the longest history on literary translation starting with the rendering of our *RAMAYANA* and **THE MAHABHARATA** into various *bhashas*. These translations have that kind of popularity where they came to be regarded as creations by the blessed ones.

Undertaking literary translation on a large scale has come to be imperative for many reasons. This is an age where international understanding and promotion of goodwill through importing and exporting literary artefacts from one language community to another both within the country and outside in the polity of nations. A practical theory ready for application to evaluate literary texts would be immensely useful for we have to get our texts translated for the foreigners and get their texts into our languages too.

Within the country more translations from one language to another in the various *bhashas* lead to promoting understanding and goodwill, thus enhancing the sense of national unity. From various foreign languages classics have to be rendered into our languages too. We need a battery of translators and a strong body of critical tools to evaluate translated texts in the interest of promoting aesthetic, literary, sociological and egalitarian values.

As of now there is no valid or tested tool for the evaluation of translated literary texts. Literary translation belongs to literature as a genre in and by itself. More importantly, in the context of the great demand for our modern and even contemporary literary classics into English as also into other *bhashas*, the projected work would have considerable value for application.

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