

Pro-colonial Impetus versus L1 Interference in Translating the West: A Study

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Abstract: *Translation involves the interpretation of inner meanings incorporated by the writer. A good translation gives more emphasis on its secondary meaning. If the translation is efficacious in imparting intended meaning, it justifies the translator to be a competent one. For good translation, a translator needs to study both source text, and the culture, norms and values of the source language. Unfortunately, nowadays, translation is more commercial than its social and moral responsibility. A book which wins an international prize, or a regional one recognized by the west, becomes a lucrative target for the commerce. Generally, the publishing houses hire translators. Hence, the translated works lose transparency leaving fidelity on the pages. Since translation is not professionally developed still today, most translations have the direct influence of the native language. Because of syntagmatic and emotional differences between two languages, appropriate meanings are not always ensured in the target language. Individual shift takes place inevitably and the translator willingly or unwillingly inserts his own understanding. This study will show how a translation work faces dual pressures: the selection of the text where pro-colonial thought lurks in the minds of the non-English countries, and the localization of, or L1 interference on, its translation.*

Keywords: *translation, language, interference, meaning, colonial*

For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live. -Adorno

Introduction

Translation is as old as language itself. With the spread of power, languages of the powerful began to travel and came across the sister and/or distant languages of the occupied countries. The power wanted to know the languages of the colonized in order to implement the rule easily and sustainably. They also wanted the colonized people to learn their language only to ensure the easy access to the culture, norms and behaviour of the colonized. At the same time, the missionaries spread over the world to preach religion. Along with the oral motivation, the preachers felt the necessity of creating some scope for the local people so that the colonized could understand in their own language what the colonizers wanted to say. Ultimately their intention was to ensure that the people had comfortable access to the religious books. Since the medium of both parties matched, the British colonial administrators were ‘provoked by missionaries’ and “discovered an ally in English literature to support them in maintaining control of the natives under the guise of a liberal education.” (Viswanathan, 1987)

Taoufik is of the same opinion. According to him, mainly “missionaries, colonial administrators, ethnographers and Orientalists” formed the European translators whose outmost objective was, “to serve the western imperial and colonial enterprise.”

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The urge to know each other being universal, the interaction was inevitable. And since the languages were the gateway to the unknown faces and the unacquainted cultures, both parties were enthusiastic to learn the others' languages. Meanings of words began to cross the linguistic borders. Translation began though some domination works underneath. And for centuries translation was "a one-way process, with texts being translated into European languages for European consumption" and it was not considered "a reciprocal process of exchange". (Bassnett, 1999)

When Translation Matters

What is translation? It is "a rewriting of an original text." (Lefevere, 1992) As the translators do not write anything new and they are dependable on the works of others, it was thought earlier that the translators, by nature, are inferior to the original writers. Even Alexander Pope thought that translating a text is a thing that is "neither rich nor rare". (Pope, 2008) But recent work in translation studies had challenged this long-standing notion of the translation as inferior to the original. It is now strongly believed that translation studies research has followed a similar path to other radical movements within literary and cultural studies, calling into question the politics of canonization and moving resolutely away from ideas of universal literary greatness. This is not to deny that some texts are valued more highly than others, but simply to affirm that systems of evaluation vary from time to time and from culture to culture and are not consistent. (Bassnett and Trivedi, 1999)

The phenomenon of looking at translation as something inferior to the original also seems immature. Though this debate challenges the acceptability of translation as something literature, people working with translation are strongly in favour of the inseparable relationship of language and translation since translation does not mean the transfer of meaning from one language to the other. It can also take place in the territory of the same language. Even the world which is presented to us is seen through heaps of texts, which are slightly different from the one that came before it: translations of translations of translations. Each text is unique, yet at the same time it is the translation of another text. No text can be completely original because language itself, in its very essence, is already a translation – first from the nonverbal world, and then, because each sign and each phrase is a translation of another sign, another phrase. (Paz, 1992)

Apart from the traditional belief that translation is something inter-lingual, it represents more acceptable literary presence that makes meaningful our relationships with things that were not known to us before. Furthermore, it is translation which helps us to see things from a different angle (Grossman, 2010).

When Paz (1992) evaluates translation as the principal means of understanding the world we are in, translation becomes inevitable. "The alternative is unthinkable," said Grossman (2010).

Pro-colonial Impetus

Postcolonialism was basically introduced in 1960s and 1970s with many important implications for cultural, political, and literary values. It was a kind of self-discovering movement of the colonized (presently third world) countries. The movement had a significant effect on translation as one of the most important and dynamic sources of transmitting values cross-culturally. This

introduces a new line of studies in translation theory. According to Kharmandar, there is always the assumption that the norms and standards of the superior cultures tend to dominate and suppress the aspects of difference in the less technologically advanced societies. This tendency to control or eliminate cross-cultural difference characterizes by and large the very mechanism of colonialism. Comparable to transferring technology, cultural and literary values, too, are used as a tool by the colonizer to expand and consolidate its presence and integrity within the infrastructures of the colonized territories.

This is true that postcolonial translation studies, as both a theory and practice, is reconsidering translation away from the Eurocentric approaches to it. So, cross-cultural translations are controlled by the power relations between the cultures of the dominated and the dominating. This in most of the times leads to the construction of the “inferior” culture which preserves and expands the hegemony of the “superior” culture. Niranjana (1993) appropriately criticizes the asymmetrical power relations and the inequalities of languages. According to her, the history and the historicity of translation should properly be evaluated because they answer many basic questions: who did the translation, how and why? According to Niranjana (1993) as well as to her contemporary postcolonial critics, translation has been instrumental in establishing hegemonic cultural representations of the colonial as well as the postcolonial issues.

Translation also produces enormous power in fashioning the representations of foreign cultures. According to Taoufik, the intercultural exchange “is conceived as the prime domain whereby the tensions of differing groups are manifested through the different modes of representation and different discourses.”

Venuti (1998) asserts that the power of translation is “to constitute and cheapen foreign texts, to trivialize and exclude foreign texts, and thus potentially to figure in racial discrimination and ethnic violence.”

Today, the traditional view of translation as an issue of linguistic comparison has changed to social, cultural and historical aspects. The recent development of the cultural studies has, according to Taoufik, “reoriented translation studies towards a more understanding of the relationship between literary texts and the cultural system within which they are produced.”

L1 Interference and Translation

It is visible that the English texts through their powerful language attempt to rule over the TL. Due to linguistic differences it is almost impossible to find out all equivalences of SL. Hence, the translators try to cope with the meanings by adopting the means of dynamic equivalence. The ‘untranslatability’ of a text leads the translator to find out similar, or close to, other expressions in the target language. In this case, the translator being of the TL origin, tries to implement their own creations and/or the available close meanings of the TL. This, sometimes, may implore the translator to coin or create new words or expression. For example, in translating *Capital* in the Chinese language, Qu (Qu Qiubai, the early translators of Marx) wanted to create a new ‘common’ Chinese language so that he can give idiomatic meanings of *Capital* in Chinese. (Barlow, 2016). Again, the Turkish translator Kıvılcımlı strongly insisted on the ‘idiomatic use’ of Marx’s concepts in his own work. After going through the translation of Marx’s *Wage Labor and Capital* by Kıvılcımlı, Özge Serin shows how he ‘created a new kind of literary

communism' by opening up the concept-metaphors of Marx in a manner that could be used by everyone and which traced these concept-metaphors back to their sensuous origins'. There is also a possibility that the translation of some translators, may instill reaffirmation of the stereotypes of the "Third World" peoples.

Again, the translation process is always affected by the individual propensity of a translator. Since the Individual Shift is inevitable, the translator's own personal diction, thought, belief etc. are unconsciously incorporated in the process of translation. This is how translation can manipulate the meaning of an original text. "Translators," according to Cavagnoli, "bring into play their own personal story made of feelings, affections, traumas, slips, memories related to a given situation described in the novel they are working on, or to a given word."

As a result of L1 interference, sometimes, blending occurs. For example, the structure of Yoruba (one of the main languages of Nigeria) is preserved in translation while it leaves the feel of the English patterns when read. This happens because, according to Cavagnoli, L1 interference gives "rise to new and unexpected usages of the English language, where the creative popular spirit of the subordinates contaminates the dominant language." In this regard Taoufik can be quoted:

...postcolonial translation studies tackle western translations of the native texts as rich sites for the exploration of cultural hegemonic representations of the other. The deconstructive analysis of literary translations which emerged during colonialism and has continued to emerge in the postcolonial era reveal a violently depicted and stereotyped representations of the culturally different Other.

The Tension

There is always a kind of tension between the Fidelity, and the diction in TL. In one hand there is the authoritative demand of the ST, there is the emotional and linguistic expectation from the TL, on the other. These dual pressures create a kind of tension in the psyche of the translators. If we go for an example, Rushdie is there. He seemed to be in a dilemma regarding aspects of his native culture that he needs to include in *Midnight's Children* (1981). And it was Rushdie who picked the elements that were culturally specific, and, instead of leaving in Hindi, should be translated into English (Prasad, 1999). In *Midnight's Children* Rushdie (1981) chose "mango pickles, lime *chutneys* and cucumber *kasaundies*". Though he chose both *Chutney* and *Kasundie* to translate *Pickle*, and used "pickles of history" and not "chutney of history" or "kasaundie of history", he chose these words in order to "take himself to the reader, to domesticate an aspect of his country's material life. *Pickle* is the word he chooses to translate into English *chutney* or *kasaundie*, and he occasionally enjoys catching the reader off guard with."

Thus, postcolonial translation is contaminated with the local words along with the foreign vocabularies (Primarily English words) acculturated in the native language of the third worlds. As a result, the language of the postcolonial translation is often "the outcome of the suffering inflicted by history... to cancel out the center's English, as a normative code, and the will of the local populations to appropriate that very same English." (Cavagnoli)

In *Imaginary Homelands* Rushdie (1991) states "I, too, am a translated man". This statement becomes a firebrand on postcolonial writing as well as postcolonial translation. Bhabha (1994)

also states that for the migrants who are homeless without a fixed abode, the adjective 'transnational' is almost synonymous with 'translational'. They cross the national borders and live in many countries, which can be a kind of living in 'perpetual translation'. The postcolonial writers, according to Cavagnoli, is a 'translated subject' because "he willingly chose to translate himself from one geographical area to another, or because he was translated by his own life. Along with him, his words were also translated from one cultural territory to another." If this is taken into consideration, postcolonial writings are 'already translated to begin with'. (Cavagnoli) Sometimes the chance of L1 interference becomes so unavoidable that the translators become confused. Still there lies the possibility of the victory of the cultural imperialism: "systematic penetration and domination of the cultural life of the popular classes by the ruling classes of the West in order to *reorder* the values, behavior, institutions, and identity" (Petras, 1993) of the subaltern so that they can see themselves with the mainstream.

The main concern, then, is not lexical or syntactical ambiguity. Rather it is the concern of the translation itself. Lefevere (1992) aptly says:

When translating the text of the Other into one's own language, instead of receiving the foreign elements of the other culture and the possible deviations from the standard language, the text's distinctive marks, the stylistic peculiarities, one tends to manipulate the text, repressing innovation and making the Other similar to the self.

Conclusion

According to Bhabha (1990), translation is "a process of alienation and of secondariness in relation to itself" so that one can "objectify cultural meaning". Objectification is possible only when a translator will know not only the languages of both ST and TT, but also the cultures of both because a good translator is not only a bilingual, but also bicultural. Lack of any sort of knowledge, then, leads the translator to misunderstanding and *Les faux amis* is the possible outcome. Poor knowledge has the same threat, and can result in mistranslations and this is a kind of psychological interference which is "responsible for a part of what does not get conveyed in translation" (Cavagnoli). According to Osimo, contemporary psychology postulates the existence of an inner language we are unaware of (2002).

There might be deviation from the SL (dominant language, of course!) because the culture and language of SL and those of TL are not same. So, in order to translate the postcolonial authors, "one should find language variation strategies that lead the language further and further away from the norms of the written language." (Cavagnoli)

The main thing is that the translator must depend on the text's intention in order to interpret and make conjectures on "what the text says or suggests in relation to the language in which it is expressed and to the cultural context in which it was born" (Eco, 2002). And finally, yes, compensation which is thought to be the most popular translation strategy should be authorized because "the cultural heritages are different and it is therefore difficult to preserve the implicit connotations of a given phrase, there is nothing to do but to accept it." (Cavagnoli)

We can conclude with Paul Ricoeur who wisely suggests that we abandon the thought of the perfect translation and accept the 'insurmountable difference' between the self and the Other.

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