









The Lecture Contains:

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Introduction

We have already seen how translation can be between two forms of the same language, between two different languages or between two different art forms. We have also seen how difficult it is to demarcate translation from rewriting especially when this occurs within the same language.

However, even interlingual translation can be seen as rewriting, a paradigm that was popularized by

Andre Lefevere. He argued that translation can be perceived as a form of rewriting. In a seminal essay “Beyond Interpretation” or the Business of (Re)Writing” published in 1987, Lefevere states: “Rewritings, in the most catholic sense of the term, are designed to adapt works of literature to a given audience and/or to influence the way in which readers read a work of literature” (30), and that “The most obvious example of rewriting is probably translation, which either tends to represent a compromise between two sets of ideologies/poetics, or else tends to be used as a weapon in the struggle between competing ideologies/poetics within the same literary system” (31).

Translation can be thought of as a rewriting by which a literary work is adapted for the target language and culture.

Lefevere’s concept of translation as a rewrite of the source text became an accepted concept in the field of Translation Studies eventually. He conceptualized translation as part of a larger literary system, as a process which could be understood fully only when placed against its socio-cultural context. Another term that was coined by Lefevere and gained currency in the field was “refraction”, or “the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads the work” (*Translation Studies Reader*, 234 – 235). This is obviously how he also defines rewriting. Translation was a ‘refraction’ of a writer’s work through a certain spectrum, where the prism that refracts could be the translator’s ideology or other socio-cultural factors of the target language.

Rewritings

Rewritings, or modified versions of a work to suit the tastes of a particular audience, are quite common in the field of literature or any other art form. The most common are stories that are retold for children. As Lefevere states, “Rewritings are based on certain guidelines, in this case [when stories are retold for children] of a predominantly ethical nature” (30). References to violence, sexuality or unpleasant incidents like death and war are kept to a minimum for a child reader. Of

It is quite common, and acceptable to adapt or rewrite a story to make it suitable for reading by children.

course it becomes extremely difficult to do this when the story intrinsically contains these elements. The example that Lefevere gives is that of *Gulliver's Travels*. In the original novel, Gulliver urinates on the palace of the Queen in Lilliput, to put out the fire. This is effective in putting out the fire, but causes the place to stink and therefore the Queen becomes angry with Gulliver. However, in the version retold for children, Gulliver puts out the fire by filling his hat with water and pouring it on the fire. This explains the fire going out, but cannot explain why the Queen is angry with him. This can of course be thought of as a loss in translation, a problem that you encounter while adapting stories to children's tastes.

A more popular example is that of *Arabian Nights*. Originally written in Persian as *Alif Laila*, this story was originally not intended for children. The story of Scheherazade who tells a story every night to escape death at the hands of her husband King Shahryar, was toned down considerably for children. There is no mention of why Shahryar comes to distrust women and wives (it is actually because his former wife cuckolded him). Other than a few stories like that of *Sindbad the Sailor*, *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* and *Aladdin and the Magic Lamp*, most of the stories have not been adapted for children, as they are unfit for children's tastes.

The epics are also difficult texts to rewrite for children. The hostility between the Kauravas and Pandavas, the story of Karna and his birth, the violence of the Kurukshetra war etc are not really children's stories. However, this is underplayed while it is being told to children.

Graphic representations

Amar Chitra Katha, the once popular publishing house for children, retold in graphic narrative the classics and stories from the epics. The series they had on Indian history as well as culture served as good introductory pieces for children. They also had rewritings of early regional Indian novels like *Anandamath* and *Indulekha*.

The series called Classics Illustrated performed the same task at the global level. They had graphic adaptations of almost all major literary works in different languages. Titles like *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Under Two Flags*, *Ivanhoe*, *Crime and Punishment* etc were published in a form that was accessible to children or adolescents. While doing so, care was taken not to omit crucial details in the interests of young readers.

Stories/novels to comic
book/graphic novel
format is inter-genre
translation.

Comic books like these can be seen as the precursors of the graphic novels of today. They were telling a story in pictorial format where the image was as important, if not more important, than the script. These can also be considered as inter-genre translations, as the story was translated from print to comic book format. In the case of Amar Chitra Katha or Classics Illustrated, translation was occurring at two levels – one, at the level of genre and the other as rewriting, or a carrying of a story across the same language or different languages, with a specific aim to cater to a specialized readership. Although it looks simple and perhaps simplistic, this is actually a complex translation process at work. The right balance has to be struck between word and image, and the message has to be clear and apt for the reader that it has in mind. Narrating from within the constraints of the pictorial format, the translator/narrator also has to face the challenge of conveying culturally alien nuances of the story, if any.

Other forms of rewriting

Rewriting can take place outside the language system also. It is most prevalent in the popular art form of cinema, where the concept of remakes is widely accepted. A remake is usually the ‘translation’ of a film from one language/culture to another. This means that it is not only the language that is changed, but all the cultural nuances associated with it. For example, the Hindi film *Sholay* is the remake of a Hollywood western called *Magnificent Seven*, which in turn was adapted from Akira Kurosawa’s Japanese film *Seven Samurai*. However, the Hindi film does not bear much resemblance to the ‘original’ Japanese except for the basic idea of a village defending itself against cruel dacoits. This is more of adaptation than translation.

The ‘rewrite’ of a film in another language is called a remake. This is a common technique in the film world.

There are other rewrites or remakes which change in language but retain the cinematic narrative style. By cinematic language what is meant is the way in which the story is told which means the sequence of shots, the songs etc. A good example of this is the Hindi film *Saathiya* which is the copy of the Tamil film *Alaipayuthe*. The language differs and so do the actors, but the Hindi film is an exact replica in terms of the screen play and dialogue. The songs too are the same, except that they are modified to suit the changed locale and culture. This should not be confused with dubbing of a film. A film made in one language can be dubbed in another language. This means that the film retains its original cultural context, and only the language of the dialogue changes. So Spiderman can speak in Hindi or Tamil without moving out from New York city.

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Cinematic Rewrite—An Example

Cinematic rewriting or remakes is a very common aspect of the Indian film industry. A recent example is that of *Bhool Bhulaiya* in Hindi which was a remake of the Tamil *Chandramukhi* which in turn was remade from the Malayalam *Manichitrathazhu*. An interesting aspect of these movies is that all of them were huge box office hits in the languages they were made. However, they vary in terms of the cultural connotations of each region. There are cosmetic as well as intrinsic changes in the narrative as you pass from one language to the other. The traditional house with a joint family set-up which is the backdrop of the film, is not difficult to depict even in this day in any part of India. But difficulties crop up in the depiction of familial relationships. In the Malayalam original, the ‘rival’ to the heroine is her husband’s cousin or uncle’s daughter. According to the matrilineal system peculiar to Kerala alone, one can marry your maternal uncle’s son/daughter. This could not be replicated in Tamil or the other language versions, as this is a forbidden relationship according to those customs. So this character becomes the granddaughter of the gardener in the Tamil version. The (ghost)woman who is a Tamilian in Malayalam, becomes a Telugu in Tamil and a Bengali in Hindi. This is quite in keeping with the demands of the story, where the (ghost) woman is a beautiful dancer from another state, speaking a different language.

A cinematic rewrite changes according to the linguistic and cultural contexts.

Besides such cosmetic changes, there are differences in characterization and narrative style also. The characters in Malayalam are subtle and understated, keeping with the Malayali taste for sober realism. The major such change is in the central character of the psychiatrist. He is slightly eccentric in Malayalam but becomes almost a superman in Tamil, bashing up his rivals and dazzling the others with his mental powers. One of the reasons for this transformation could be that this role was played by superstar Rajnikanth who is expected to perform such miraculous deeds on screen. However, the major reason is the regional/cultural taste for larger than life characters. Differences of this sort can be seen across the various languages that the film was made and can be attributed to differences in cultural tastes of various regions. Since cinema is heavily dependent upon viewer satisfaction, such differences would obviously influence the reception of a popular art form like cinema. Naturally we can expect these differences in cinematic rewrites.

Module 8: Categories of translation

Lecture 29: Rewriting, Remake and Transcreation

Rewriting/Adaptation

While discussing *Sholay* and *Seven Samurai*, it is mentioned that the Hindi film is more of an adaptation than a remake of the original. This brings us to the question—what distinguishes an adaptation from a remake/rewrite? Is there any demarcation between the two, especially when it functions within the same language system?

Closely related
storyline and
narrative style –
remake rather
than adaptation?

When the original is changed drastically to suit the target language and culture, we may say that it has been adapted. But the various regional versions of the film *Manichithrathazhu* are remakes/rewrites and not adaptations, because the storyline remains the same and there are closely identical elements with the original. This is of course a highly contentious definition, especially when you take the case of this film. Madhu Muttam, who wrote the story, screenplay and dialogues for the original Malayalam was not given credit for the story in Tamil and Telugu. P. Vasu, the director of these movies argued that the story had been modified by him and so the credit for original story should come to him. Interestingly the court also stood by Vasu. If we accept this argument, then does that make the tamil film *Chandramukhi* an adaptation rather than a remake? Perhaps this can be made clearer through the other example we had looked at, which is of *Saathiya*, a frame-by-frame reproduction of the Tamil original. Although the locale, language, culture and even the actors have changed and the Hindi screenplay is written by Gulzar, it is by no means an adaptation but a remake. If Shaad Ali the director of *Saathiya* claimed copyright over the Hindi film, would it have been justifiable on the grounds that he had modified it accordingly?

The fuzzy boundaries between translations/rewrites/remakes are further vexed by issues of copyright, especially in money-making industries like cinema. It is interesting to note that in the case of literature, the copyright of the original author is sacrosanct and the translator is secondary, if not invisible. This situation is reversed in the case of cinema – here the author relinquishes his copyright to the producer of the film, while the ‘translator’ or director of the remake does not even have to acknowledge the author.

Transcreation

The concepts of rewriting and adaptation actually lead us to the question of how creative and original the translator can be. This has been the perennial dilemma that translators have faced since this activity began, and the solutions offered had also been many – word-for-word, sense-for-sense or completely free translations. In this context we have to examine another concept called ‘transcreation’ propounded by the famous writer, translator and publisher P. Lal. It might be wrong to attribute the coinage of this term to Lal, as the definition given by Wiktionary for this term is “an adaptation of a creative work into another language or culture” (<http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/transcreation>). The concept is clear from the given definition – it means that the translator is free to recreate in her own terms the original work of art.

The translator will have to transcreate or adapt a literary work or film, to make it suitable for the target audience.

Lal explains why he would call a translation an act of transcreation. In the Preface to his translation of *Shakuntala*, he discusses the challenges that the modern translator of an ancient text like Kalidasa’s *Abhijnanasakuntalam*. would face. While readers who are familiar with Sanskrit would find “a clean, bracing ethics” in the text, “to English readers the scenes and incidents which best embody the ethics can appear incongruous and even farcical if a translator goes about his job ignorantly or condescendingly” (4). He argues that the translator has no choice but to “edit, reconcile and transmute” if he has to convey the text in the best manner possible to a contemporary reader (5). In this act of transcreation, he might wander away from the text but this will be a true translation as it captures the essence of the original. In fact, Lal is known for his transcreations not only of ancient Sanskrit drama but also of the epic *Mahabharata*.

Module 8: Categories of translation

Lecture 29: Rewriting, Remake and Transcreation

Conclusion

It is clear from this discussion that it is difficult to pin down the nature of translations by nomenclature. For instance, Lal's transcreations could very well be termed adaptations. These difficulties in differentiating between various processes point to the fact that translation is not a simple interlingual transfer of meaning. If we accept the idea that translation is a form of rewriting, then the nature of originality and creativity of authors and translators would have to be interrogated. We also perceive that translation need not be a linguistic affair, but could be within one single sign system. Cultural rewrites of texts that occur across genres and art forms are today considered to be translations by translation theorists, but not studied in great depth or detail within the translation framework.

Assignments

1. What are the various ways in which a story can be retold?
2. Think of an example of how a retold text, like the Amar Chitra Katha version of Kalidasa's Sakuntalam is modified to suit its contemporary readers.

References

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