

The Lecture Contains:

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Introduction

We have looked at various aspects of translation and now let us look at the different types of translation practice. The most popular categorization in Translation Studies is perhaps Roman Jakobson's. Roman Jakobson divided translation into three categories, namely intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic. Although translation theory has travelled a long way since Jakobson, these categories still remain handy and useful. Of these categories, what is popularly understood as translation is interlingual, or the act of translation from one language to another. Intralingual translation or translation that occurs within a particular language system, was not thought of as 'proper' translation. At best, it was conceived to be rewriting or paraphrase. As Mona Baker points out in her introduction to the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, "One of the most fascinating things about exploring the history of translation is that it reveals how narrow and restrictive we have been in defining our object of study, even with the most flexible of definitions" (xvii). As she observes, despite the Jakobsonian categorization, not much attention has been paid to intralingual or intersemiotic translations, even by translation theorists.

Jakobson's three categories of translation:

- a) Intralingual – within the same language
- b) Interlingual – between two languages
- c) Intersemiotic – between two sign systems

Intersemiotic translations, or transference from one form to another, like novel to film, have also been very rarely studied by translation theorists. Baker argues that these are not subsidiary categories of translation, as is the popular perception. She cites the case of African interpreters who could translate the language of drums – those of you who are familiar with the comic strip of "Phantom: the Ghost who Walks" would remember the tribal drums that carried messages regarding intruders into the protected forests of the Phantom. That was intersemiotic translation at work. Baker also points out that most of the translation in the Greek language was intralingual rather than interlingual, for the major work was that of modernizing ancient Greek texts. In most of the ancient Sanskrit plays, there were at least three dialectical versions of pure Sanskrit in use, which required the viewer to translate as she watched the play. This was intralingual translation rather than interlingual.

Intralingual translation

What would prompt us to translate within one particular language system? The only situation in which we would do this is when our own language seems unintelligible to us. This happens when the text is an ancient one, and the language used is an archaic form of the one which we are currently using. In English, the text of Geoffrey Chaucer is a good example. Chaucer wrote in what is now called Middle English which is practically another language to the speaker of English today. The first lines of the Prologue to his famous *The Canterbury Tales* are:

Intralingual translation is generally used to modernize an archaic text.

“Whan that Aprill, with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote”

Now this is not as unintelligible as a foreign language, but is difficult to understand and needs to be explained / translated into modern English idiom for a contemporary reader. “When April with his sweet showers / Has pierced the drought of March to the roots” – this explanation is in the same language and so it cannot be really called translation in the way we would term the transference of an English text into French. What is done here is intralingual translation. Chaucer’s archaic language has been made contemporary.

This modernization of idiom is necessary for most languages, as they tend to evolve over time. Chaucer’s Middle English was different in spelling and grammar, and so technically can be described as a foreign language. Even if there are no major differences like these, the nature of idiomatic language changes so much that much of it will appear very unfamiliar at a later stage. This will require translation. For example, Shakespeare writes in basically the same English that is used nowadays, but there are obstacles to perfect comprehension because of differences in usage. The ‘thou’ and ‘thee’ of Shakespeare are the most obvious examples. Besides these, many of the words he used had meanings that were different from the ones that we have today. For example, when Portia remarks, “So shines a good deed in a naughty world” in *The Merchant of Venice*, the modern reader might be a bit puzzled. “Naughty” is an adjective that today we reserve for children and indicates a form of hyperactivity that we treat with indulgence. However, in Shakespeare’s time this word was used in the sense of evil or wicked. If this meaning is not known to the reader, Portia’s speech would not make much sense. For the meaning to be clear, we need something like a translation.

It is for precisely this reason that Charles Lamb, along with his sister, wrote *Tales from Shakespeare*.

Lamb rewrote the stories of Shakespeare's plays in contemporary idiomatic English so that children could follow the gist of the plays. This was not exactly termed translation, but an adaptation of Shakespeare. There have been countless versions like these of classics, epics etc which were meant for children. Shouldn't we be thinking of them as intralingual translations?

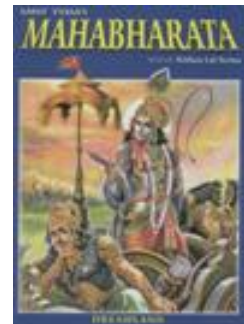
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Module 8: Categories of translation

Lecture 28: Translating within a Language System

Religious texts

Besides old literary texts, others that usually have modern language versions are religious texts. In India we have many versions of the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, both as adaptations for children as well as for adults. Here it must be stressed that there might be interlingual translations as well. For example, *Ramayana* of Valmiki was originally in Sanskrit, Tulsidas translated / retold it in Hindi, and there could be a modern Hindi language version of Tulsi's *Ramcharitmanas*. What we have here is a complex of inter and intralingual translations.



The Bible also has a similar trajectory. Assumed to be originally written in Hebrew, the Bible also underwent numerous translations into Greek and Latin and then into English. The King James Bible or the Authorized Version has primacy in English. But the language is antiquated and many people might find it difficult to follow. So today there is the Good News Bible, which is the modern English version of the Authorized Version. This sort of modernization is going on in every language.

Douglas Robinson terms this ‘intertemporal translation’ which he defines as “translation between two forms of the same language separated by the passing of time” (“Intertemporal Translation”, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, 114). He admits that modernization of an older text is often called revision, but the problem is of deciding where to draw the line between ancient and modern versions of the same language. In other words, when do we decide that a language is archaic enough to merit translation into a more accessible form? This would determine whether we should call it a revision or a translation – if the language is archaic enough like Chaucer’s Middle English, then it can be called translation whereas a contemporary edition of Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* would be revision.

Robinson points out that most interlingual translations are also intertemporal. The main example is that of the Bible. A modern English translation of the Greek or Hebrew Bible is an example of both forms. Here the translator is faced with another vexing problem – should she translate into archaic English to maintain the antiquated nature of the text? Some readers might not like the modern idiom for the words of God, for “a Bible translation . . . that sounds too much like a translation breaks the illusion, reminds the reader that what s/he is hearing is not the voice of the original author but of the translator, which in turn underscores the fact that the reader is reading ‘just’ a translation, not the Word of God, not the immortal words of a classic author” (115). To modernize or not is a dilemma that all intertemporal translators will have to face – provided, of course that they are translating from one language to another.

Paraphrase

If intralingual translation is from one form of the same language to the other, then what is the difference between this and paraphrase? Ordinarily we term it as paraphrase when we narrate somebody else's text in our own words – or we 'translate' it into our words. Douglas Robinson observes how the authors of *The Living Bible* state that theirs is a paraphrase rather than a translation. This is because their version of the Bible published in 1971, is a modern language version of another older English translation.

The distinction between paraphrase and intralingual translation is not very sharp.

Paraphrase as a term was originally coined by John Dryden by which he described one of the three translating techniques. The other two were metaphrase (word for word translation) and imitation (free translation that bears very little resemblance to the original). Dryden favoured the technique of paraphrase by which he meant a translation that allowed for the creativity of the translator without being too distant from the original. As Robinson points out, today this can also be termed a "variation" rather than a translation ("Paraphrase", *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, 167).

A closely aligned form of paraphrase is what Robinson calls "pseudotranslation" ("Pseudotranslation", *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, 183). He defines as pseudotranslation "a work, whose status as 'original' or 'derivative' is, for whatever textual or social reason, problematic" (183). Robinson argues that *The Living Bible*, despite its authors' disclaimer that it is just a paraphrase, is still read as a translation. The readers feel that there is an original lurking behind this modern Bible and to Robinson, this amounts to a pseudotranslation.

Far-fetched as Robinson's claim might be, it is true that many intralingual translations tread a thin line between translation, version / variation or pseudotranslation. For instance, how would you describe Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*? It is popularly known that Shakespeare wrote this play by borrowing facts from Plutarch's *Lives of the famous Romans and Greeks*. But Shakespeare did not read Plutarch in the original. He relied on Thomas North's English translation. North in turn had translated Plutarch from Amyot's French translation. If this is the case, then what is Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar*? A play that is based on the translation of a translation of a historical work originally written in Latin – what does this imply? Does this mean that *Julius Caesar* is an intersemiotic translation from a historical text into a play? Since the English play is about a Roman leader, the reader might believe that it is an interlingual translation from a Roman historical work. If that is so, can the play be described as a pseudotranslation –

even more so as it is based on a translation of another translation? Or is it an adaptation of a historical text? As you can see, the categories do not have clearly demarcated boundaries.

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Adaptation

This brings us to a grey area in translation studies, which is that of adaptations. According to Georges L. Bastin, an adaptation “may be understood as a set of translative operations which result in a text that is not accepted as a translation but is nevertheless recognized as representing a source text of about the same length” (“Adaptation”, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, 5). This is quite a useful operative definition of the term, but there are loopholes in this definition. For instance, an adaptation cannot be about the same length as the source text – what about movie adaptations of epics like *Ramayana*? It also does not take into consideration the other forms that can be brought under this broad rubric, like retellings or transcreations.

Adaptations can be intralingual, interlingual or intersemiotic. But the term is most commonly applied to intersemiotic translations.

Adaptations are usually thought of as intersemiotic, like fiction to film, prose narrative to music / dance etc. We are quite familiar with terms like dramatic adaptation of a text or a movie adaptation of a novel. Implicit in these statements is an admission that it is not a faithful rendering of the original text, but rather the translator’s interpretation / reading of the original text in an individualist way. This opens up a whole new area which has to fend with numerous questions regarding the ‘originality’ of translation / adaptation, and the meaning of the process we call translation. If we admit that the creator of an adaptation is not an original artist, then Shakespeare would have to be dethroned from his preeminence in English literature. It is quite a well-known fact that all of his plays except *The Merry Wives of Windsor* are adaptations of what were fairly famous texts of his time.

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Classification of adaptation


Georges Bastin observes that definitions of adaptation can be classified according to the various aspects of translation procedure, like translation technique, faithfulness, genre and metalanguage. The translation theorists Paul Vinay and Darbelenet had listed adaptation as one of seven translation techniques. Adaptation becomes a translation technique when the target language is unable to capture certain aspects of the cultural context of the source text. Then, the translator needs to modify the text which can also be in a certain sense re-creation or a “procedure employed to achieve an equivalence of situations wherever cultural mismatches are encountered” (6). A word-for-word translation is obviously not going to be successful here, because the translation is not just between languages but cultures. In the context of cross-genre translations or translation from one form to another, adaptation becomes “a form of ‘naturalizing’ the play for a new milieu, the aim being to achieve the same effect that the original had...” (6). Adaptations of this sort are usually studied in the context of drama. The text is transplanted to another context where certain elements will have to be foregrounded and others downplayed. For instance, the film version of an epic like Mahabharata cannot hope to encompass the entire story that is contained in the print form. The film version can only be an edited version. This is true of many forms of translation. This sort of editing and manipulation of text can also be seen in translation (dubbing or subtitling) of advertisements.

A translator will have to resort to adaptation when the culture that is represented by the source text is difficult to be reproduced in the target language.

When the original text is metalinguistic, or is about language itself, then translation becomes adaptation because the translator has to make the source language suitable for the target readership. Some theorists argue that metalanguage has to be translated if the effect of the original source text is to be recaptured, while there are others who maintain that translation of metalanguage is an unnecessary act of exoticism. Translation of texts like Joyce’s *Ulysses* or Eliot’s *The Wasteland* are examples of metalinguistic translation. Joyce plays with the English language, a literary device that is difficult to simulate in another language. Eliot uses many languages in untranslated form in his English poem. In this case, what would the Hindi translator of the poem do? How can she ‘translate’ the German, Latin, French and Sanskrit elements of the poem? If she wishes to retain the effect of the original, she will have to ‘translate’ these foreign language elements into languages other than Hindi, or retain the foreign language elements as they are. In either case, it will not be translation as it is usually understood.

The concept of faithfulness in translation determines the acceptability of adaptations. To those who believe that a translation has to be faithful in reproducing the same effect of the original, adaptations are

acceptable translation techniques. But to those who believe that the original text is sacrosanct and cannot be tampered with in any way, adaptations are not translations at all.

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Conclusion

Generally, adaptations are understood in the context of inter-genre or inter-semiotic translation. But it can also be perceived in the context of intralingual translation, like the case of retellings or rewritings. In countries like India where the oral story-telling tradition was very strong and is still prevalent, the concept of retellings is popular. The Indian tradition does not put much value on the concept of the sanctity of the original, and believe that all retellings are valid and original creations by themselves. This is a departure from the western obsession with originality and fidelity in translation.

Assignments

1. Which of the old texts in your language have been translated into modern idiom? Is there a pattern you can detect in these translations?
2. Think of examples of intralingual translations that have been passed off as adaptations or versions of a text.

Reference

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