

Exploring the Fundamentals of Translation: A Case Study of Translating

Srinath Singh's Hindi Poem "*Seekho*"

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Abstract

Over the few decades, translation has become an emerging field for students, scholars and researchers. It has now evolved into a separate branch of study, taught both at the graduate and postgraduate level. The understanding of 'translation' has also started to take shape along its parent discipline of linguistics. In simple terms, translation is a process of communicating an idea from its source language to its target language. However, it is not simple as it sounds. When we engage in translation, there are other key factors that needs to be focused on while translating a work. It is to understand these fundamentals of translation that this paper will delve deep into the terrains of translation studies. In this context, a translation of a poem *Seekho* by renowned Hindi poet Srinath Singh's will also be carried out from Hindi to English to substantiate the argument. A case will be built up to understand the loss and gain in translating this poem.

Keywords- Translation, Languages, Communication, Loss and Gain, Srinath Singh.

Introduction

Translation is communication between two humans. However, unlike most human linguistics communication, it is tied to communication between two parties that do not understand one another without the mediation of a middle man – a translator. (2009)

Translation, as we all know, is not a new terrain anymore. The premise on which the idea of communication rests primarily thrives on diverse cultures and traditions. When we talk of history of translation in India, we basically refer to translation practices in India across cultures across time, across period and across language. This paper is an attempt to bring together a comprehensive account of fundamentals of translation. A lot of epics in the form of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* have reached to us through multiple translations as in the case of Bharata's *Natya Shastra*. The establishment of *Sahitya Akademi* in the year 1954 also contributed hugely in the availability of texts in various Indian languages and the translations of it as well.

We must acknowledge that due to the rich linguistic, literary and cultural background of India, translation in India has become complex creative and diverse. One of the major reasons as to why translation has survived till today is the fact that it has been able to sustain the plural nature of India. In all aspects we have often come across examples where a text has been known to us through its translated version more often than through the source language works as a double-edged sword. The author of the source text loses visibility, however, the text written by them gains maximum visibility. This shows translation as a medium of reaching out to another language and culture which is not just confined to India but also shows immense potential to make other forms of literature, say, World literature accessible to us. Thus, in

order to make world literature available for Indian readers and for Indian literature to be available to the global audience, translation, as a discipline as a field, as a research area, strengthens the situation and hence it would be incorrect to assume a literature written in any language can progress without having tasted the fruits of translation. Of course, due to the privileged position that English occupies in the global world today, translation activities in English has received higher patronage. Therefore, the works translated in English are or get more popular than the source language as already pointed out. But when it comes to archiving a work of art or a piece of writing or an aspect of culture and civilization, it is translation alone which has aided it with immortality. When we take up the study of translation, we not only focus on how to translate but we also focus on why something should be translated. This paper is divided into two parts. It is in the first part of the paper that a theoretical position discussing the fundamentals of the translation would be carried out. Translation has an emerging field has gone through a lot of debate especially with respect to the loss and gain in translation and therefore it is in the second part of the paper that Hindi poet Srinath Singh's poem *Seekho* will be translated in English and the loss and gain felt would be explained in the translator's note.

Exploring the Fundamentals of Translation

Among the various types of translation are semantic and literal translation, functional and communicative translation, administrative, technical and official translation. To discuss the first one, that is semantic translation, is to focus on the sense for sense translation. It is often referred to as free translation and the central focus of this form of translation is to rely on the meaning of the source text and to ensure that the same gets conveyed in the target language. The context of the sentence and linguistic features play a huge role in semantic translation.

Peter Newmark talks of semantic translation in *About Translation*, “Semantic translations attempt to render as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original.” (1981)

In the second type of translation which is literal translation, the translator goes for a word-to-word translation and as the name suggests the purpose of such translation is to locate the exact equivalent of words as in the target language as in the source language. It pays a certain degree of lesser importance to the context and the socio-cultural attributes and is often referred to as the inferior form of translation. Because it is a weaker form of translation, it also distorts the meaning at times and can run the risk of miscommunicating in certain occasions.

Functional translation, on the other hand, relies on the functional approach to translation valuing the context and treating language as a code in the larger domain of communication because language gets communicated through the process of codification and or decodification. The message must be conveyed with minimum distortion. So, in a commutative or functional translation, the purpose is to communicate the effect of the message on the reader as close as possible. This certainly will have a limited approach in the field of translation and cannot be extensively used because the entire focus of such kind of translation relies on its functional aspect of communication and it is a translator’s job to compensate for the loss that happens in a translation.

In another form of translation which is administrative, technical or official, we mainly rely on the scope of translations in situations which are more professional, scientific, legal or technical. For all such matters where we need to translate official documents like office orders, notices, letters, installation guides, user manuals, this form of translation is preferred

for its register, vocabulary etc. It is mostly uniform in nature and with this form of specialized vocabulary, a formula translation of source text is achieved with greater accuracy. Therefore, the role of a translator for any form of administrative official technical translation is extremely important as it is his responsibility to create and disseminate a coherent which should be close equivalent of the source language.

Apart from all these types of translations, we also have transcreation as an effective way of adapting text in another language. The idea of retelling, modifying, reworking a text even in the same language is significant as one is able to find different versions of the same story in the same language. Of course, one can question the limit of creativity in all these works. However, that also happens to be the beauty of such text and therefore, transcreation refers to the creative translation where the translator not just happens to be the one responsible for changing the message from source language to target language but also adds creative element as the author of a new text that gets worn out of him. One of the progressive writer's movement poet P. Lal has advocated this freedom for a translator. To trans create in the target language, in P Lal's observation is also to create a text and tap into the gap that lies between one culture and another or one language and another through multiple versions of the parent story.

Srinath Singh (1901-1996)

Born in Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh, Thakur Srinath Singh was a dedicated writer who took a lot of interest in Children's literature and poems. He has been a significant figure in giving a direction to the young minds through his poems and made children the centre of his poems. He addresses a serious issue in a very playful manner, talking about their dreams, their desire,

their mischiefs and ambition. His poems are often taught in the syllabus and is acknowledged as one of the greatest poets of Hindi literature. His anthology *Khelghar* (1954) is quite popular among both especially among the children as they find it to be extremely relatable. He also takes interest in writing short stories and intentionally moulds them in a way where they are more appealing and entertaining to the children rather than overtly preaching. A Hindi poet who has contributed so much during in the 20th century, we find that his poems have not been translated much and therefore one of major poem *Seekho* been translated in this paper to understand the nuances of translation from Hindi to English along with understanding the culture, the language the and the intricacies of such kinds of writing.

Gill and Guzman explain translation as a “a point of contact between peoples and since it is rare that two people have seen access to power, the translator is in a privileged position as a mediator to make explicit differences between cultures, expose injustices or contribute to the diversity of the world.” (2011)

As translator, it is imperative to have an excellent command over source and target language. But it is equally important to be linguistically, semantically, stylistically and culturally be conscious of both the languages. As mentioned above, the very issue of untranslatability becomes the cause of translation getting interrupted midway or translations getting compromised. One needs to be vigilant to not fall prey to such situation. The text and the context of the translation must be carefully understood in order to do justice the work. Let us now try to read the above translation and try to decipher the reasons behind the selection of words.

To begin with, the title of the poem given by Srinath Singh happens to be *Seekho* which immediately translates into “learn” but learn does not resonate most aptly as the English equivalent of Seekho. Hence, the translated term used as the title in the English poem is *Lessons*, keeping in mind the semantic relevance of it as a title.

In the first stanza of the poem, the first half of the line is translated literally as, *From the flowers learn to smile every day* whereas the second half of the same line is translated in keeping up with the rhyming pattern of the first half. It goes like:

From the flowers learn to smile every day from the humming bees regularly sing and play

As Srinath Singh himself has paid a lot of attention to maintain the playfulness and fun of the *seekh* that he wants to impart to young children, therefore, in order to do justice to the translation, the same spirit has been tried to maintain.

In the second stanza of the poem where the poet talks about learning from the gust of wind. His idea of *hilna jagat hilana* has been translated to blow gently on others. The poet’s advice is suggested with the use of the word ‘hilna and jagat hilana’ as the English translation has tried to semantically capture the essence of the idea and emote the same. The last part of the second couplet “milna aur Milana” is translated as to mix together harmoniously. The word ‘harmoniously’ is used with the intention of seamlessly merging with each other.

The third couplet is mostly translated through literal equivalence. The translation is literal in nature as it carries almost the same sentiments of the poem in English except for the part on *jagna aur jagana*. *Jagana* in Hindi means to wake somebody up but while translating, it has

been translated as to let others shine and rise like a sun. Hence, the symbolic meaning of the term *jagana* has taken precedence over its literal translation.

The fourth couplet in Hindi has a very specific use of the word ‘prem’ which is translated as love. This has been done to fulfil the closest English alternative for the same. However, the word *prem* is a weighty term which cannot be equated with *pyaar* or love. It carries a sense of specificity and a sense of purity and respect to it. Since, there was no better word available to denote this expression, *prem* has been translated as love.

The fifth couplet talks of the loyalty of a fish towards its habitat. The word *swadesh* is translated as homeland and *tadap* as suffering in woe. The other options available for the word *swadesh* could be my country land, my nation but instead, homeland has been used. Similarly, the word *dukh* in this couplet carries several implications and therefore, to keep the closest equivalent and to maintain the rhythmic pattern, *dukh* has been translated into sorrow.

The sixth couplet talks of learning from a lamp to erase darkness as much as possible. In this context, the word *andhera harnaa* is translated as to evade darkness and *sachchi seva* as selfless service. Similarly, *prani* refers to all living things, hence has been translated as living beings.

The seventh couplet focuses on the learnings from the stream of a river and from the rising smoke. Here the word *jeevan path* has been translated as pathway of life and the word *oonche hi par chadhnaa* is translated best as to climb higher only in the sky implying the progressive and positive teachings of the two metaphors- *jaldhaara* and smoke.

The last couplet is very impressive and equally significant. It is in this couplet that the poet culminates or binds his entire idea into one last couplet. So far, he has given us several imageries to think about how different aspects of nature symbolize different qualities and hence they must be noted and appreciated for these teachings that nature teaches us on everyday basis. However, in the last 2 lines he talks of poetry can serve as a medium of instruction for the younger generation by writing a nature poem to serve the purpose of mankind.

As his last preaching, he asks us- the readers, the young minds- to follow in the footsteps of ‘sadhguru’s translated as noble souls, one who gained wisdom of through penance to build an upright character for themselves. Lastly, he addresses the children directly and asks them to read, share and follow these couplets with purity of heart and soul. The word *padyon* is translated as verses keeping the nature of the writing that is a ‘poem’ in mind.

Conclusion

Whatever the limitations on the social and international status, in the given context in situations, where conflicting agendas arise or where proper exercise of human or legal rights may be in doubt, a translator’s ethical and political judgment becomes central to the task as cultural or linguistic competence. Translators cannot escape from their moral proximity to others. (2009)

With these words, Inghilleri, has stressed on the role, responsibility and competency of a translator. In the present world, the translators serve as a major linguistic and cultural mediator, facilitating communication and association. Their role extends beyond the simple use of words and helps to empower the marginalised and ignored voices through knowledge

sharing. In the case of the above poem *Seekho* by Srinath Singh, we observed how a poem dedicated to children carries a universal motif of learning life lessons from nature. The poem is a prescribed text in many Indian schools and its translation in English will certainly widen its reach, its audience and help it transcend the boundaries of time and language.

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