

Translations



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Is Translation Really a Rewriting of an Original Text?

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Abstract

This paper aims to reevaluate Lefevere's concept of 'translation as an act of rewriting' through examining a few excerpts originally written in Gujarati and translated in English and their analysis through the various constraints advocated by him namely ideology, poetics, patronage and Universe of Discourse. According to him translations are often produced under these constraints to serve certain purposes as they are a component of a complex literary, social or cultural system. Translation therefore takes the form of rewriting which makes the source text adaptable for the receiving system and to make a writer's work gain exposure beyond the boundaries of its culture of origin.

Key words: translation, rewriting, constraints, ideology, culture

Introduction

The inception and existence of translation worldwide is closely linked with the emergence and development of different languages and cultures. In India, translation activity is indispensable as a means to build cross-cultural bridges within the country. In the past few years the perception regarding translation has changed and it has achieved a status equivalent to the creation of art and literature. In 1990s Lefevere's theory of rewriting brought yet another perception of translation which focuses more on the differences between the source and the target texts, instead of the similarities and has shifted the focus from linguistic level to social, cultural context. To study translation process in isolation seems irrelevant now and

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a translated text should be regarded as part of a given situation against a particular socio-cultural background. Translation has repeatedly proved itself as a creative exercise where the translator carefully strives to interpret, criticize, and finally create a new text for those who have no access to the literature of an alien language system. According to Lefevere, “translation is produced on the basis of an original text with the intention of adapting the original to a certain ideology or poetics of a different audience, and it is an activity performed under constraints of patronage, poetics and ideology initiated by the target systems, as such it is an act of *rewriting* of an original text to conform to certain purposes instituted by the receiving system” (Lefevere, 1992: vii). In his opinion the goals of translation activity are set by certain forces, the source text is chosen for certain purpose and the translator is supposed to serve this purpose by carrying out translation activity.

Lefevere’s theory endeavours to liberate translation activity from the web of restricted approaches and celebrates the variations offered by this act of rewriting at linguistic and cultural levels by the translator who deserves her due credit for creating a new text which is although based on the original one, still retains its own flavour. Instead of accusing translators of unfaithfulness, Lefevere argues that deliberate distortions, incompetence on the part of the translator and linguistic incompatibility between the two languages can be accepted. His theory brings to light the effort, talent and hard work of the translator who performs the strenuous task of making choices at linguistic, stylistic and cultural levels to make a sensible reading of the original for the readers of a completely different culture and language system. According to Lefevere, rewriters create the images of a writer, work, period, genre, sometimes even a whole literature. He also stresses that “a writer's work gains

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exposure and achieves influence mainly through misunderstanding and misconceptions created by rewriters” (Lefevere, 1999: 234).

Lefevere’s Concept Of ‘Rewriting’

Traditional study of translation had considered the original texts as creative and authoritative while translations as derivative and servile. Standards such as “faithful vs. free”, “word vs. sense” and “source-oriented vs. target-oriented” had long been the main concerns of translators. In *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, Bassnett and Lefevere formally present their theory “translation is a rewriting of an original text”. According to them,

All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society. Rewriting can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices and the history of translation is the history also of literary innovation, of the shaping power of one culture upon another. But rewriting can also repress innovation, distort and contain, and in an age of ever increasing manipulation of all kinds, the study of the manipulation processes of literature are exemplified by translation can help us towards a greater awareness of the world in which we live. (Lefevere, 1992 : vii)

Thus it is clear that translation process takes place under various constrains like ideology, poetics, patronage, universe of discourse so the linguistic aspect is the least important. However, Lefevere emphasizes that constraints are conditioning factors, not absolute. It is

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ultimately the choice of the translator to work within the parameters or challenge them by going beyond them. Therefore Lefevere claims that translation should no longer be regarded as static but dynamic.

Examples and their Analysis through Various Constraints

The purpose of this paper is to examine Lefevere's concept of translation as rewriting of an original text through the analysis of a few excerpts from Gujarati fiction translated into English using systematic linguistic approach. The analysis will closely examine how the translator transports the source text messages into the target text. The communicative functions and meanings reflected in the structure and patterns of the ST and the TT will be examined for this purpose. By comparing the meanings and functions embedded in both texts, issues such as ideology, poetics and power embedded in the example text will be addressed. Furthermore, their influence on the target audience as well as on the projection of the original writer and his or her work will be discussed.

The first excerpt is taken from a Sahitya Academy Award winning writer Ila Arab Mehta's novel *Vaad* published in 2011 and has been recently translated by Rita Kothari as '*Fence*'. It is a story of a Muslim girl Fateema Lokhandwala who has to cut and cross the *vaad* (fence) of various social and cultural constraints, of poverty and illiteracy, of religion and communalism to find her identity. Due to her family's liberal perspectives despite poverty and illiteracy, she does not think in terms of religion or social hierarchy during childhood but as she grows up, she experiences and at times becomes victim of this social malice. One such incident is

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depicted in the novel where the innocent act of sharing lunch box between friends – Fateema, a Muslim girl and her close friend Chandan who is Jain by caste – is criticised by the teacher of her school.

In the original text it reads :

ફાતિમા અને ચંદન બપોરની રિસેસમાં સાથે નાસ્તો કરતાં હતાં. જાનીસર ત્યાંથી પસાર થયા. ઉભા રહ્યા હશે થોડી વાર. તે દરમિયાન ફાતિમાએ ચંદનના ડબ્બામાં હાથ નાખી લાડુ ભાંગ્યો ને બટકું પોતાના મોઢામાં મૂક્યું. ચંદને તેના વધારેલા મમરાનો ફાકડો ભર્યો.

“એય છોકરીઓ ! આ શું કરો છો ?” બેઉ જણી ગભરાઈને ઉભી થઈ ગઈ. “ચંદન, તારી માએ કંઈ શીખવ્યું નથી ? આમ એક-એકનાં એઠાં ખાવ છો તે ?”

ચંદન ધ્રુજવા મંડી.

“ને તું, ફાતિમા ! આના ડબ્બામાં હાથ નાખે છે ?”

ફાતિમા કંઈ બોલવા ગઈ. ચંદને પાછળથી ચુંટી ખાણી.

“ ચંદન, જાત-કજાત તો જુઓ ! આ ફાતિમા તો - જાવ, હવેથી આવું ન કરતાં.” (Mehta, 2011 : 18-19)

In English translation it reads :

Fateema and Chandan were busy eating snacks during break time. Jani sir walked past. He must have paused and watched for a while. Obliviously, Fateema put her hand in Chandan’s lunch box, took a piece of laddu and ate it. Chandan took some puffed rice from Fateema’s box.

“You girls there! What do you think you are doing?” Frightened, the girls stood up.

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“Chandan, hasn’t your mother taught you anything? You shouldn’t be eating each other’s jootha food like this.”

Chandan quailed.

“And as for you, Fateema! You are putting a hand in her box?”

Fateema was about to respond, but Chandan pinched her surreptitiously.

“Chandan, check caste and culture first before you...This Fateema is...never mind. Just be careful from now on.” (Kothari, 2014 : 17)

The above mentioned extract points out to the caste system in India which is familiar to an Indian reader but to a foreign reader who belongs to a different culture, where the concept of upper and lower caste does not exist, it is difficult to make sense of this incident. In the translation, the word *jaat-kjaat* has been translated as ‘caste and culture’. The translation makes a different reading, not due to lack of equivalence or linguistic or textual constrains, but it is translator’s deliberate attempt to rewrite the social hierarchy in India in a different way, replacing the expression by just mentioning caste, skipping the word *kjaat* altogether, while transforming it into a different language system which is completely unaware of such hierarchical social set up. The words *jaat-kjaat* which sounds quite strong in the ST but the same expression, when rewritten, seems subtle, less impactful in its English translation as the target culture does not have the concept of caste system. From this example, it is apparent that "rewritings are inspired by ideological motivations, or produced under ideological constraints" (Lefevere, 1992: 7). In the attempt to serve various ideological constraints, the translator inevitably leaves his or her marks in the translation. Through such manipulation of the original, the translator may be able to project a certain image of the original work and its writer.

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According to Lefevere, translation is closely linked with authority, legitimacy and power. It is noteworthy that the “ideology” concerning translation studies is also closely linked with power and politics as Lefevere understands ideology as the dominant concept of what society should be or can be allowed to be and it functions as a tremendous constraint in the act of translation. Ideology is "the grillwork of form, convention and belief which orders our actions" (Jameson as quoted in Lefevere, 1992: 16). As words are integral part of the language having cultural flavours, to find the exact equivalence is not possible in this case. To further this point Roger T. Bell says: “....the idea of total equivalence is a chimera. Languages are different from each other; they are different in form having distinct codes and rules regulating the construction of grammatical stretches of language and these forms have different meanings” (Bell, 1991 : 6).

The Universe of Discourse is another constraint influencing translation activity. Lefevere says, “During rewriting, translators’ attitudes toward the Universe of Discourse is heavily influenced by the status of the original, the self-image of the culture that text is translated into, the types of texts deemed acceptable in that culture, the levels of diction deemed acceptable in it, the intended audience, and the “cultural scripts” that audience is used to or willing to accept” (Lefevere, 1992 : 87). The issue of patronage is also closely linked with translation. According to Lefevere, patronage refers to “something like the powers (persons, institutions) that can further or hinder the reading, writing, and rewriting of literature” (Lefevere, 1992 : 15). If we look at the novel *Vaad* and its translation in the light of these constraints then the original and its translation make more sense. The voice of a Muslim girl has found a way out after centuries of suppression through this novel. The feminist concern,

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identity quest of a woman, struggle for individuality in society – such issues are addressed by many writers, especially women writers these days. The writer of this novel has gone a step further by selecting a girl from Muslim community for her central character. The novel not only depicts the story of the struggle of Fateema but it also addresses the burning issue of terrorism in recent times. In a way, the novel falls in line with the concept of ideology and patronage which sees to it that the literary system does not fall out of step with the rest of the society. Patrons try to harmonize the relationship between the literary system and the other system, which, together, make up a society, a culture. Patrons often count on professionals to bring the literary system in line with their ideology. The translator also must have chosen this work for translation as this text focuses on the current issues requiring urgent attention.

The second excerpt is taken from a famous Gujarati Dalit writer Joseph Macwan's novel *Angaliyat* (1986) which is skilfully translated by Rita Kothari (2004) as *'The Stepchild'*. It is a gripping tale of the struggle of Dalit community against its upper-caste oppressors of the Charotar district of central Gujarat. The central characters are Teeha and Valji, two inseparable friends from Vankar caste. Valji and his wife Kanku would like to see Teeha married, especially Kanku who tries to arrange his marriage with her sister. She says,

‘ટીહાનું ઘર માંડનારી પરભવની પૂજેલી હોવાની. ગાગરબેડિયાં પૂજ્યાં હોય ન પેંપરા સેંચ્યા હોય

તોય આવા ભરથાર કાજ્ય એ ઓછાં પડે!’ (Macwan, 2013 : 3)

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Its English translation reads :

‘Whoever runs Teeha’s house, has to be a very fortunate woman. It can only happen to someone who has observed fasts and worshipped the holy peepal.’ (Kothari, 2004 : 4)

In the above extract, Kanku is referring to the rituals performed by maidens in India to get good husband like observing fast by worshipping mud water containers put one on the other representing a deity, watering peepal tree which is considered sacred in Indian culture with reference to Teeha’s future wife. Such rituals are followed by Indian girls since young age and it is a part of Indian culture which gives much importance to the institute of marriage. Marriage is a very significant affair in India where a couple enters a sacred relationship which will connect them for seven incarnations. Now if we consider the western culture which looks at the system of marriage from a completely different point of view, to make full sense of such rituals is not possible. It’s also not possible to make things clear by giving footnotes as the entire point will be missed by a target reader having different cultural background. In this case, the translator does not need to carry the entire context into English by giving reference to Indian culture but has simply mentioned it as fasting and worship of the holy peepal. She has even skipped a few words from the original like *bharthar* which means husband. To carry this entire ritual and its cultural value into a completely different language, having a different cultural set up and values where such rituals will have no connection is meaningless. Thus the translator has taken the liberty to rewrite only up to the point which simply refers to the ritual without plunging deep into its cultural nuances.

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In case of this particular novel, the rewriting has been done to a greater degree at the linguistic level as the language of the novel is not the standard Gujarati but it is a Charotari dialect spoken by the people of the Charotar district and it is full of cultural expressions, idioms, rituals of that district. The dialect has been used to give a touch of reality to the work but in its translation, however hard the translator tries, the cultural connotations, impact of the language factor lose their effect and flavour.

The ideological constraint has been put into action here. Lefevere described ideology as “the conceptual grid that consists of opinions and attitudes deemed acceptable in a certain society at a certain time, and through which readers and translators approach text” (qtd. from Hermans, 2004 : 127). The rituals mentioned in the example are acceptable by one culture at one particular time has been transported in translation at a different time and in different culture. Translation process is quite complex as at every step the translator has to make choices, take decisions regarding the strategies she is going to implement during the process at linguistic, stylistic, pragmatic level. Along with these strategies, the greater issue a translator faces is that of finding equivalence as it is known that language is culture-oriented and each culture has separate and unique expressions for different situation and it is almost impossible to find the same expression in another culturally different language. Because of the uniqueness of each nation’s cultures, customs and beliefs, a regular translation, say word-for-word translation is impossible to conduct. In this case, translation involves a complex network of decisions to be made by translators on the level of ideology, poetics, and Universe of Discourse. In most cases, “translators have to strike a balance between the Universe of Discourse (i.e. the whole complex of concepts, ideologies, persons, and objects belonging to

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a particular culture) as acceptable to the author of the original, and that other Universe of Discourse which is acceptable and familiar to the translator and his or her audience” (Lefevere, 2004 : 35). Translators usually do not reject outright, but decide to rewrite on the level of both content and style.

Next example is taken from a well-known Gujarati writer, Himanshi Shelat’s short story titled “Kimat” translated by Nandini Bhadra and me as ‘Price’ and published in an e-journal. It is a story of a prostitute named Mohana who has been offered a role in a film. This incident creates quite a stir in the entire area and everyone is talking about what role she will be given and how her life will be transformed after the film. Many discussions take place regarding her role and the money that she will be offered.

The original reads:

- ફોટુ નિકાલા હતા ને અપની મુન્નીકી પાર્ટી પર. બસ તે ફોટુ ફિલમવાલાએ જોઈ લીધા. ગનીની પહેચાનમાં હતા તે ફિલમવાલા. મોહના ફિગર પર ફિદા. બોલા કે મોહનાની હાઈટ ને ઉસકી હિરોઈનકી હાઈટ એકદમ એક સરીખી, ઈચેઈચ.
- મોહના, આતા આમાલા પાર્ટી પાયજે.
- એ તેરેકુ ક્યા બનાયેગે યે લોગ ? શાયદ હિરોઈનકી સહેલી યા તો ફિર.... (Shelat, 1999 : 81-82)

The English translation is as following:

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Mohana's photo clicked in Munni's bash was seen by the film people close to Gani. They were bowled over by her curvaceous body and mentioned that Mohana and their leading lady's heights were similar.

Another inmate told Mohana, "Now you'll have to throw a party."

"What role will they assign you? Perhaps the heroine's friend or..." (Bhadra and Parekh, 2015 : 166-167).

The important point here is the use of language by these sex workers which is either Hindi or Marathi or sometimes a combination of Gujarati-Hindi-Marathi. Even the Hindi used by them is the one which is generally used by downtrodden people. Such language is used by the writer consciously to give her story a sense of realism. But in translation it is not possible to carry that variation of languages as it becomes just English. Although the rewriting is an exact translation of the original, yet there is a compromise at the impact level. The strategy used here is to simply go with the word-to-word translation as there are no other alternative ways available.

The constraint of poetics must be taken in account here which Lefevere describes, "poetics can be defined as what literature should (be allowed to) be" (Lefevere, 1992: 14). To explain it further he observes,

A poetics consists of two components: one is an inventory of literary devices, genres, motifs, prototypical characters and situations, and symbols; the other a concept of what the role of literature is, or should be, in the social system as a whole. The latter is influential in the selection of themes that must be relevant to the social system if the work of literature is to be noticed at all. (Lefevere, 1992: 26)

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In this regard, we can say that the theme of this story and its translation have been influenced by this constraint. A poetics, any poetics, is not absolute but always changing. In a literary system, the poetics dominant today is quite different from that at the beginning of the system. Like in case of Gujarati literature, the earlier literature dealt with the theme and characters based on history or mythology, later under the influence of Gandhian philosophy, the rural life of Gujarat was brought to the spectrum where the characters were ordinary villagers dealing with their everyday affairs and problems. With the emergence of Dalit writers and women writers more realistic themes were selected, representing the issues of the downtrodden and women. With the change in time and society more realistic characters were created giving voice to the suppressed emotions and thoughts of the ignored class of the society. The story “Kimat” is one such story through which the writer has opened up a world of until now neglected class of the society – the sex-workers and their issues. Although they are never quite considered worthy of respect by our society but they have always existed and the writer has just tried to remind us of their presence and appealed to us to have a more humane outlook towards them. Thus, the changing nature of poetics has affected the choice of this theme of the story and has probably inspired the translators to select this work of literature for rewriting.

Obviously each dominant poetics controls the dynamic of the system. Lefevere says in this respect,

Finally, a changeable and changing poetics, established mainly by means of rewritings, will also dictate which original works of literature and which rewritings are acceptable in a given system, or, rather, such a poetics will be the touchstone used by teachers, critics, and others to decide what is in and

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what is out. Moreover, different poetics dominant at different stages in the evolution of a literary system will judge both writings and rewritings in different ways (Lefevere, 1992: 36).

Wardhaugh (1986) states that the structure of a given language determines the way in which the speakers of that language view the world. Different languages reflect different values and cultures; therefore, in an attempt to reconcile different languages, values or cultures, translations in Lefevere's opinion, "nearly always contain attempts to naturalize the different culture to make it conform more to what the reader of the translation is used to" (Lefevere, 1999: 237). As a result, translation tends to differ from the original and becomes 'rewriting'. The above mentioned examples prove that at every level of the text – linguistic, grammatical, stylistic – the translation differs to lesser or greater degree from the original due to the various factors like culture, language set up, lack of equivalence, acceptability by the target audience and it makes a different reading for the target reader. The constraints mentioned by Lefevere play their part in the selection of the original text for the purpose of translation, the translation process and technique acquired by the translator, the cultural nuances and their transport into a completely different cultural set up and at last the reading and rewriting of a text under the constraint of ideology, power and patronage.

Conclusion

As has been illustrated in this paper, translation involves cultural and ideological transportation and translations are often produced under various constraints to serve certain purposes as they are a constituent of a complex literary, social or cultural system. Translation therefore takes the form of rewriting that is carried out within the framework of the target

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language, culture and ideology in the service of a control factor wielded by the patron or the receiving system. A translator manipulates the ST to accommodate it and get accepted into the TT and its culture. Also, they may be controversial because they can create different values and practices.

Venuti acknowledges that translators have the power to influence society and literature, since translation has "far-reaching social effects" (1998: 81). Indeed, translators have the power to contribute to the preservation or enrichment of the target literature and society, as well as to the enhancement of trust, understanding and respect between different languages, cultures, and ideologies. Furthermore, they may play an invaluable role in bringing the world closer and in enhancing the spirit of global citizenship.

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been published in journals like *Indian Literature* and *Sahitya*, an e-journal. I have attended many state, national and international level seminars and presented papers in them. This paper was presented at an International Conference on “Theorizing [a] translation: Texts and Contexts” organized by Department of English, Veer Narmad South Gujarat University, Surat in collaboration with Forum on Contemporary Theory, Baroda on 9-10 February, 2016.