Siting Translator: Perspectives, Issues and Possibilities

Murali Krishnan.T.R
Selection Grade Lecturer, Dept of English
M.E.S College Marampally (affiliated to M.G University)
Aluva , Ernakulam District
Kerala: 683107

ABSTRACT

The attempt of this paper is to project a conceptual development of translation theory over a period of time. The point of discussion is that the translation process throws open diverse prospects for a translator and it is up to the translator to choose from the options available. The domain of discussion is definitely limited, but the possibilities of interpretation are infinite. A translator can be a messenger or a carrier, an interpreter, an intruder or a source modifier, or he/she can be an invisible entity. The author proposes to say that the placement of the translator, into the various possible realms of translation process, problematizes the dynamics of SL and TL texts relations in the discourse of Translation Studies.
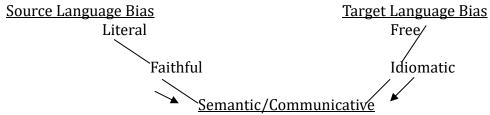
KEYWORDS

SLT (Source Language Text); TLT (Target Language Text); messenger; interpreter; source modifier; invisible entity.

The paper proposed for discussion pertains to the possible perspectives before a translator in the translation process, bringing in the conceptual development of translation theory over a period of time. The point of discussion is that the translation process throws open diverse prospects for a translator and it is up to the translator to choose from the options available. The domain of discussion is definitely limited, but the possibilities of interpretation are infinite. This is because of the dialectical relation maintained by SLT (Source Language Text) and TLT (Target Language Text) over the issue of *fidelity* and *freedom*. This binary, usually referred to in the discourse of translation, is text-specific and product-oriented. The attempt here is to reinstate the translator into the paradigm from alterity.

Different kinds of texts demand different translational processes. The translator has to judge the demand of the text and use the most effective approach. Peter Newmark in *Approaches to Translation,* suggests that there are two types of texts-one which would demand semantic translation and would remain as close as possible to the semantic and syntactic structures of the SL and the second set of texts would demand communicative translation and would aim to produce the same effect in the TL as was produced in the SL. He proposes a model to differentiate between Semantic translation and Communicative translation. (Newmark: 39)

Source Language Bias   Target Language Bias
          Literal   Free
                    Faithful   Idiomatic
                         Semantic/Communicative

Newmark further states that all translation must be in some degree, both communicative and semantic, social and individual. It is a matter of difference of emphasis.

In this regard it is the responsibility of the translator to identify the possibilities before him at the functional level.

1. A translator can be a messenger or a carrier
2. A translator can be an interpreter
3. A translator can be an intruder or a source modifier
4. A translator can be an invisible entity

These aspects are crucial in *fixing* the translator to the process. The strategy and position adopted by him will affect the dynamics of SLT-TLT relationship.

Translator as a messenger or a carrier

Significantly the history of translation process has by and large assigned the translator a role of messenger or carrier of the SLT to TLT. In an 1813 lecture on the different methods of translation, Friedrich Schleiermacher argued:

> there are only two. Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him. (Venuti: 19)

The translator is in the middle of two demands that seem almost impossible to reconcile. On one side, the author calls out to him: respect my property, don't take anything away from me, and don't attribute anything falsely on me. On the other side, the audience demands: respect our taste; give us only what we like and how we like it. (Schaffner: 5) Etienne Dolet, who was done to death in the first half of the sixteenth century for translating Plato, gave the fundamental principles regarding the duty of the translator:

1. The translator must fully understand the *sense and meaning* of the author, although he is at liberty to clarify the obscurities.
2. The translator should have a perfect knowledge of both the SL and the TL.
3. The translator should avoid word-for-word renderings.
4. The translator should use forms of speech in common use.
5. The translator should choose and order words appropriately to produce the correct tone. (Cited in Nair, Sreedevi. K.1996: 18)

These concepts are further elaborated by writers like George Chapman, John Dryden etc, who thought that the *genius of the original* should be carried as charmingly as possible to reader and there was a strict no-no to improving the original. Romantic writers generally distanced themselves from the "mechanical" process of translation and they upheld the creative genius of the original writer. Coleridge described it, as "painful copying that would produce masks only, and not forms breathing life" (ibid: 28) D.G. Rossetti, in 1861, published his translations from the early Italian poets and in the preface to his book expressed the view that translator should give the readers a sense of the *original writer's genius.*

From the late nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century translation was seen serious activity, with writers like Matthew Arnold, H.W.Longfellow advocating for curtailing translator's freedom and emphasizing that

translator's duty is only to report what the original has stated. I.A.Richards in his book *Toward a Theory of Translating* (1953) expressed that the translation process "may very probably be the most complex type of event yet produced in the evolution of the cosmos" (Nair: 32). He was of the view that translators can be adequately trained to perceive the means *to arrive at a proper understanding of the SL text*.

Eugene Nida defines translation as "a process which a person who knows both the source and the receptor language, decodes the message of the source language and encodes it into an appropriate *equivalent* from the receptor language" (1988:3) Similarly Catford states that "Translation as a process is always unidirectional: it is always performed in a given direction: from a Source Language (SL) into a Target Language (TL)...Translation may be defined as follows: the replacement of Textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language(TL)...The central problem of translation practice is that of finding TL *translation equivalents*" (1988:13)

Catford, while categorizing translation into types says, "By total translation we mean what is most usually meant by translation in which SL grammar and lexis are replaced by equivalent TL grammar and lexis" (ibid). Of the two, grammar and lexis, lexicon or the words play a major role in the process, as they are the *carriers of meaning*, which can be designative, referential and connotational. Here also the transfer of meaning from the original is emphasized.

Wolfram Wilss says that the concept of translation equivalence has produced many contradictory statements and has set off many attempts at an adequate definition. He identifies the following important variants in the current equivalence terminology:

> *functional equivalence* (Jager), *equivalence in difference* (Jakobson), *maintenance (retention) of translation invariance on the content level* (Kade), *equality of textual effect* (Koller), *illusionist or anti-illusionist translation* (Levy) *Closest natural equivalent* (Nida), *formal correspondence versus dynamic equivalence* (Nida), *stylistic equivalence* (Popvic), *functional invariance* (Roganova), *communicative equivalence* (Reiss), *pragmatic equivalence* (Wilss) (1988:22).

Despite the variety in terms, the semantic equivalence (i.e., the content) and the structural equivalence (i.e., the form) are two significant notions. Both of them are vital in the transfer from SLT to TLT. For example, in *Karamazov Brothers,* Fyodor Dostoyoyevsky uses passive sentences extensively. This novel portrays the picture of a society that has lost its face. The notional subject, which can be called the face of a sentence, is always denoted in a passive structure. Thus the use of passive sentences contributes to the semantic import of the text. This aspect should be recognized by the translator to make it structural equivalent just as the semantic equivalence. In his article, "Correlatives in Translatability", A.P.Andrewskutty has illustrated the problem of translation in providing equivalencies regarding Malayalam to English. He refers to two novels *Indulekha* and *Maantrikappuucha*, translated to English

1. (a) <u>n</u>inte vaakku *ku*R*e kavińńu pooyi* (IL: M)
   (b) Your tongue ran away with you (IL: E)
2. (a) *innaṭṭu varuu naan keṭṭitaraam* (IL: M)
   (b) Come here, I will tie it for you (IL: E)
3. (a) *naan oru takarppan aaṭṭu veccu koṭuttu phaa ereppee*! (MP: M)
   (b) Phaaa! I chased him. (MP: E)

4. (a) *naan ammacciyooʈu paRannu koʈukkum* (MP: M)
   (b) I shall tell mother. (MP: E)

> The equivalences are set up at whatever rank appropriate in these instances. The nuances expressed by the use of *pooyi, tar-, veccu kotuttu, paRannu kotukkum* are not mapped on to structures of similar rank in English...in fact attempt to set up equivalences is done generally in the level of discourse. (1988:10-11).

Moreover, faithfulness to the surface text (literal) as well as faithfulness to the sub-text (literary) assumes importance. Chandrika.B refers to the translation of Malayalam ballads done by people with different pursuits-history, literature and academics. She cites the example of the historian whose interest in it is purely historical does a literal translation; the academician gives it a tinge of westernization; the poet takes more freedom by giving more space to the subtext of the narrative. (Singh: 62-68). As de Beaugrande and Dressler say,

> the literal translator decomposes the text into single elements and replaces each into a corresponding element in the goal language, the free translator judges the function of the whole text in discourse and reaches for elements that could fulfil that function in a goal-language situation (1981:216).

Thus, over the years, the form as well as the content of the message is given due prominence. It is this role of the carrier, which the translator has played in the translation process. He has been involved in the transference of meaning from one set of patterned symbols into another, bridge building from one to the other.

Translator as an interpreter

When a part of text is important to the writer's intention, but insufficiently determined semantically, the translator has to interpret. In fact the cultural history of translation is replete with examples of such interpretation, misinterpretation and distortion, which may be due to the translator's incompetence as much as to the contemporary cultural climate.

Translation is normally written in modern language, which is in itself a form of interpretation, and lexically at least a reflection of the TL culture. One can even say that the use of language itself involves translation. Following Vygotsky's four-way classification-*thought without language, inner speech, social speech, and language without thought*-one can say that our inner speech is translated into social/outer speech. To scholars like Roman Jacobson, all translation is nothing less than an act of critical interpretation-"an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs in some other language" (Singh: 18) His three-way classification of translation viz., *intralingual* (interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs in the same language), *interlingual* (interpretation of the verbal signs of one language by means of the signs of another language), *intersemiotic* (interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of non-verbal sign systems) lays emphasis to the interpretative task of translation.(Krishnaswamy et al: 239).

It depends much on the translator who decides what strategies should he adopt to successfully convey the sense to target audience. As Sreedevi .K. Nair notes in her study on translatability of prose, the core issues relate to the *lexicon, varieties of language and culture*. Her study is centered on the translation of Vaikom Mohammed Basheer's novel *Ntuppuppakkoranendarnnu*, done by R.E Asher. She identifies the strategies employed by the translator to overcome the cultural and linguistic differences. The chief techniques used being, *borrowing, literal translation, transliteration, omission, addition, substitution, lexical creation and*

trancreation. These point to the fact that such interventionist strategies are only to enhance the credibility and acceptability of the recreated TLT.

Translator as an intruder or a source modifier

Further the translator can assume the role of *intruder* into the process, particularly with the theoretical framework provided by the structuralism and post-structuralism. Ronald Barthes, dislodging the author from his high pedestal of centrality, states that the moment writing commences the disjunction between the author as a person and text occurs and the author "enters into his death". In the text it is "the language which speaks not the author", for the author fails in mastering the language. In the process of mastering the language he surrenders himself to the language and becomes subservient. The meaning of the text exists in the system of rules and conventions-not in the text itself as believed for long (Singh: 2). Since the textual meaning got diffused and dissipated, the author was decentered and the translator gained, rather elusively, liberation from the periphery. Translator is a reader-critic who sees the work as he wants to see it and the work becomes what this reader-critic intends it be. The creation of meaning is often thrust upon the text and in this process he creates his text different from the one created creator/author whose organic living creation is creatively and constructively distorted, damaged and reconstructed. Thus originates a new text and the translator emerge as an originator of a new text in a new linguistic system.

For Paul De Man, translation 'disarticulates' the original. That is to say, the translation undoes all the tropes and rhetorical operations of the original, and so demonstrates that the original has always already been falling apart. De Man proposes that translations kill the original by discovering that the original was already dead. (De Man: 84)

Derrida says the source text is not an original at all; it is the elaboration of an idea, of a meaning, in short it is in itself a translation. Translation enables a text to continue life in another context, and the translated text becomes an original by virtue of its continued existence in that new context. Derrida suggests translation might better be viewed as one instance in which language can be seen as always in the process of modifying the original texts, of deferring and displacing for ever any possibility of grasping that which the original text desired to name. In a similar fashion, translation can be viewed as a lively operator of *différance*, as a necessary process that distorts original meaning while simultaneously revealing a network of texts both enabling and prohibiting interlingual communication.

Translation is a process by which the chain of signifier that constitutes the source language text is replaced by a chain of signifiers in the target language, which the translator provides on the strength of an interpretation. Because meaning is an effect of relations and differences among signifiers along a potentially endless chain (polysemous, intertextual, subject to infinite linkages), it is always differential and deferred, never present as an original unity. (Venuti: 17)

Feminist translation theory focuses on the interactive space between the two poles- Source text (male) and Target text (female) and notes that those poles have been interpreted in terms of masculine and feminine. Lori Chamberlain points out the sexualisation of this terminology, i.e. the notion of translation as a betrayal of the original. She says " it has captured a cultural complicity between the issues of fidelity in translation and marriage",

wherein "fidelity is defined as an implicit contract between translation (as woman) and original (as husband, father, or author)". (Bassnett: 140) Barbara Godard asserts her right to shape and manipulate the source text and she states "Woman handling the text in translation would involve the replacement of the modest, self-effacing translator" (Bassnett: 157).

Worth mentioning in this context is the cannibalistic translational philosophy of Brazil, where Haraldo and Augusto de Campos try to deliberately erase boundaries between source and target systems. For them "translation is no longer a one-way flow from the source to the target culture, but a two-way transcultural enterprise" (cited in Bassnett: 155). They attempt "to erase the origin, to obliterate the original" (ibid). It is to be understood, as Gentzler puts it, "as a liberating form, one eats, digests, and frees oneself from the original… as an empowering act, a nourishing act" (Gentzler: 192)

Polysystems theory encouraged engagement with a systematic assessment of the social functions of translation: what gets translated, why, by and for whom. Translation came to be considered a form of re-writing and acculturation. This has brought to the fore an interest in the power relations embedded in textual practice: at one level, the translator's power in representing the source culture, at the other, her power in influencing/manipulating the text's reception in a particular target culture. Translation reveals the power one culture can exert over another. As Bassnett says,

> We called this shift in emphasis 'the cultural turn' in translation studies…it was a way of understanding how complex manipulative textual processes take place: how a text is selected for translation, for example, what role the translator plays in that selection, what role an editor, a publisher or patron plays, what

criteria determine the strategies that will be employed by the translator, how a text might be received in the target system. For a translation always takes place in a continuum, never in a void, and there are all kinds of textual and extra textual constraints upon the translator. (Bassnett 1998: 123)

Translators have become increasingly aware of the power involved in the selection of texts and in the choice of textual strategies. There is greater public awareness about questions surrounding:

> What gets translated (what is valued and what is excluded)? Who does the translation (who controls the production of translation)? Who is the text translated for (who is given access to foreign materials and who is denied)? How is the material translated (what is omitted, added, altered, to control the message)? (Fawcett: 107)

Translators are never 'innocent'. They have the power to create an image of the original, which can be very different from the original's intention insofar as the original textual reality can be distorted and manipulated according to a series of constraints: the translators' own ideology, their feeling of superiority/inferiority towards the language into which they are translating; the prevailing 'poetical' rules of the target culture; the expectations of the dominant institutions and ideology; the public for whom the text is intended.

Tymoczko and Gentzler suggest a 'power turn' in translation theory and research.

> The key topic that has provided the impetus for the new directions that translation studies has taken since the cultural turn (of the early nineties) is power. In poststructuralist and postcolonial fields, discussions have increasingly focused on agency: given that we

are always already formed by the discourses of the age in which we live, how can anyone effect cultural change? How can we bridge cultural gaps so as to experience anything new or different? …What sort of impact does translation have on cultural change? And how does all this relate to cultural dominance, cultural assertion, and cultural resistance-in short to power? In a sense, such questions as these have meant that the 'cultural turn' in translation studies has become the 'power turn', with questions of power brought to the fore in discussions of both translation history and strategies for translation. (Tymoczko et al: xvi).

In an interview published by the 'The Hindu' in April 24, 2001 Professor Susan Bassnett says that the fundamental premise is 'translation is power relations'. "What translation studies mean to me is a power-relation the way translators use different strategies and established hierarchies". She also adds that, "there is no fixed notion of perfect translation and absolute text."

Translator as an invisible entity

Finally, the question of whether the translator should be visible at all. Ayyappa Paniker poses several questions regarding the status of a translator in his article,"The Anxiety of Authenticity". He asks:

> …But who cares for the translator? He should disappear in the work, shouldn't he? He should not stand between the reader and the original author, why should he? He should achieve the extinction of his personality. He is perhaps most successful when he is least visible, and hence most visible too (Singh: 45).

Translation is like the *parakayapravesa* (literally, entering another body), which entails its own challenges and ordeals.

This feeling is akin to what Venuti, as suggested by his friend, refers to as *simpatico:*

> the translator should not merely get along with the author, not merely find him likeable; there should also be an identity between them…the voice that the reader hears in any translation made on the basis of *simpatico* is always recognized as the author's, never as translator's, nor even as some hybrid of the two (Venuti: 274).

However, Venuti identified that this notion of *simpatico* can never be realized when he attempted to translate De Angeles's anthology. There he failed to participate vicariously in the reading process and the opacity of the poems through abrupt line breaks, syntactical peculiarities, obscure mixture of abstraction, metaphor and dialogue frustrated him to hear any "coherent speaking voice" (Venuti: 286). There is also an issue of *resistancy* since the translated text can never achieve fluency through transparency. The translator seeks to reproduce the discontinuity of the work, as in this case, De Angeles's poems. This also undermines the Anglo-American notion of individualistic conception of authorship. Thus, as Venuti says:

> the translation establishes an *abusive fidelity* to the Italian text: on the one hand, the translation resists the transparent aesthetic of Anglo-American culture which would try to domesticate De Angeles's difficult writing by demanding a fluent strategy; on the other hand, the translation simultaneously creates a resistance in relation to De Angeles's text, qualifying its meaning with additions and subtractions which constitute a "critical thrust" toward it. (Venuti: 291).

For him, *simpatico* is a form of "cultural narcissism", identifying only the same

culture in foreign writing, the same self in the cultural other.

Conclusion

The placement of the translator, into the various possible realms of translation process, problematizes the dynamics of SL and TL texts relations in the discourse of Translation Studies. What is being proposed here are only the possibilities before the translator and the shifting bases on which he try to reach out to the target culture. Any relocation of the translator can only add to the already existing confusion prevailing in the site. However, he can be rest assured that he is being liberated from historically determined categories of fidelity and freedom.

WORKS CITED

Andrewskutty.A.P. 1988. "Correlatives in Translatability" In Karunakaran.K & Jayakumar.M. (ed) *Translation as Synthesis: A Search for a New Gestalt.* New Delhi: Bahri Publications Pvt Ltd.

Bassnett, Susan. 1993. *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Bassnett, Susan. 1980. *Translation Studies*. London: Methuen.

Bassnett, S., and Andre Lefevere (eds). 1998. *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation*. Clarendon: Multilingual Matters.

Chandrika.B. 1996. "Yours (un) Faithfully: A Look at Literal *versus* Literary Translation" In Singh, Avadhesh. K. (ed) *Translation: Its Theory and Practice*. New Delhi: Creative Books.

de Beaugrande, R and W.Dressler.1981. *Introduction to Text Linguistics.* London: Longman.

De Man, Paul. 1986. *The Resistance to Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Fawcett, Peter. 2001. "Ideology and Translation" In Baker, Mons (ed) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies.* London: Routledge.

Gentzler, Edwin. 1993. *Contemporary Translation Theories*. London: Routledge.

Krishnaswamy.N et al. 1992. Modern Applied Linguistics: An Introduction. Madras: Macmillan India Limited.

Nair, Sreedevi. K. 1996. *Aspects of Translation*. New Delhi: Creative Books.

Newmark, Peter. 1981. *Approaches to Translation*. Oxford: Pergamon.P.

Niranjana, Tejaswini. 1992. *Siting Translation: History, Post-structuralism and the Colonial Context.* Hyderabad: Orient Longman.

Paniker, Ayyappa.K. 1996. "The Anxiety of Authenticity: Reflection on Literary Translation" In Singh, Avadhesh. K. (ed) *Translation: Its Theory and Practice*. New Delhi: Creative Books.

Schaffner, Christina. 1994. *Translation and Cultural Identity*. Philadelphia, New York: Benjamins.

Tymoczko, M. and Edwin Gentzler (eds). 2002. "Introduction" in *Translation and Power*. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press.

Venuti, Lawrence. 1995. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation.* London: Routledge.