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## Politics and Translation

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To study the political forces behind the translation and its process has been one of the thrust areas in the field of Translation Studies. There is always a motivation behind a translation and its construction of meaning. This motivation may be sociocultural and political. From the very act of selecting a text to interpret it in translation is a conscious deliberate process which cannot resist sociocultural and political forces. This paper has studied some of the important motivating factors in translation, on translation and for translation. In other words, this paper will try to answer the following questions. How these forces act in translation? What happens in translation? What is the translation for?

**INTRODUCTION:** Politics and translation are two separate words but we find them in each other's domain when subjective forces are involved in translation, in its selection and production; when translation becomes an actant for a political agenda or a political gain. Whenever we speak something, the very act of speaking is political because we choose to speak and we speak chosen words. The same applies to writing. Choosing means sidelining much of others which is an inevitable political act. Translation thus is not simply an act of faithful reproduction but, rather, a deliberate and conscious act of selection, assemblage, structuration and fabrication – and even, in some cases of falsification, refusal of information, counterfeiting, and the creation of secret codes. (Tymoczko and Gentzler 2002). Tejaswini says, the act of translation is a political action (Tejaswini 1992). What is suppressed and why is the question that is dealt with in the politics and translation, what is to be translated and what not is the question that is the point in the politics and translation. Who will be prioritized and who will be marginalized and why is the basic question about which we ponder in the politics and translation. Sometimes a particular ideology, sometimes it is the power that plays a role. Besides ideology and power, economical factor is another causative for a good sale of the translations. All these factors contribute to one another so we cannot make one independent of other causes. There are plenty of examples which illustrate about the politics behind translation. Some of the early Biblical and Arabian translations predominantly tell us how power and ideology became influential for the cause of translations. Translation has been a weapon to enter into other's frontiers influencing them to take part in a competition either to choose the alluring foreign or to ignore it for self-identity.

Politics and translation can be looked at in the larger domain of human politics. When I am thinking about translation and Politics, let me put it clearly what we are thinking about. We are

thinking about the following phenomena where one can see the political acts happening in translation: one is with the translation book (the product in the target and its various implications), two is with the process behind the translation book (from the selection of the text, process of translating some materials or deleting some materials for some reasons etc). Second one is much more complex than that of the first one. Both contribute towards the act of translation and politics ideologically, economically and by some power-driven factors. The first one is towards a future where it may be asked, criticized or appreciated like an original text, whereas the second one is the answer for whatever happens to the first one. So we will be trying to arrive at certain translation behavior and at some generalization towards the phenomenon called, translation and politics.

### **Ideology, Translation, and Politics**

Among the three words mentioned here, one seems to be concrete and that is translation (here I don't refer to the abstract notion of translation but the book, the process). I couldn't see the other two concretely but I could see them in the linguistic codification of their working as forces with particular goals. Ideology is the larger abstract phenomena which can encompass all political discourses and the discourses related to translation. Ideology can be political, sociocultural and religious. All these types have their own power domain where they function as the forces to encourage something that supports and to discourage something that threatens. When something does not support a particular political system, the system disapproves it; when something doesn't go by the sociocultural ethos of a particular society or culture, the society or the culture disapproves it. Many of the translations were banned or have been banned in some community or in some country because the presented experiences are either immoral or obscene to the target readers. One can talk about something very comfortably in his/her society, whereas the same thing may be obscene for someone else's society. The translation of the Roman poet's *Ars Amatoria* (The Art of Love) by Christopher Marlow was banned in 1599 and another translation of the same was seized by U.S Customs in 1930, because of its erotic content. The publication of a full translation of D.H Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in Japanese took a famous obscenity trial in Japan for some years.

In his study of Orientalism, Said argues that the Orient is 'Orientalized', pictured as it ought to be, rather as it actually is (p.67). Some of the classical masterpieces have been translated, not as they are in their actuality. Translation seemed to be a weapon for the colonizers in colonizing India. Said saw the domestication process of the orient in colonial India by the colonizer as a political force. We could see a clear picture of the motives of the colonizers behind translating the classics of the natives into English. Translating *Shakuntala* into English by William Jones has its hidden political motives. We can't distinguish him as someone who is representing the characters without having any manipulation. A representation is always partial, it cannot represent the whole. But when has it been represented and how has been the identity constructed/interpreted sometimes direct us toward realizing the inner motivational function. As Figueira writes in her *Translating the Orient*, "One thing is, however, certain: Through the early

rudimentary translations from the Sanskrit, India was emplotted by the West. By this I mean that incomplete projections from a variety of sources were given a voice defined through narrative, and received the authority of signification." (Figueira, p 8). Richard Burton's annotated translation of *The Arabian Nights* (1885-8) stands as a masterpiece of Arabic literature in translation although the Arabic original work was not received with the same thrust of admiration before the introduction of the English translation. Ironically, the great Arabic classical poetry that contains thousands of words and phrases of great beauty has scarcely found its way into Western translation (Carbonell : *The Exotic Space of Cultural Translation* ).

From an analysis on the *Index Translationum* published by UNESCO, it is found that the no of translation of Western European titles had increased in the former communist countries after the fall of communism and it had decreased among communist countries. Communism had suppressed the translation of the texts related to Philosophy and Religion. Why had communism discouraged the flow of ideas because the flow of non-communist ideology was thought to be a threat to the regime? People under communist countries might have differences and preferences over communism, and what seemed to happen was an imposition on them politically. Otherwise, after the fall, why the demand of communist titles decreased in communist countries?

Sometimes, a translation is rejected, not because of the content, but of the translator. In Fascist Italy, translations by Thomas Mann and Andre Gide, were banned because they were believed to be Jewish(Fabre1998)<sup>1</sup>. Somewhere, it was not a text but the entire genre was also banned. In Nazi Germany, translations of detective stories were banned, as a genre as it was thought to import immoral examples of anti-social behavior.

### **Religious text, translation, politics**

Bible is the most translated religious text in the World. As the latest information from United Bible Society's Scripture Language Report Translations Project goes, it has been translated into 475 (the New Testament is into 1240 languages) languages of the World <sup>2</sup>. The spread of Christianity has been bringing out lot of translations of Bible, here translated Bibles act as a powerful tool. It is not that Christianity is only getting spread out and not the other religion. And when there is more than one religion, it is a fact that for spreading out, they have to compete with one another. Where competition exists, political motivation exists. Where a particular religion is the religion of a state, that state may prohibit the entrance of any other religion. And when a particular country or community colonizes a place and gradually it becomes the dominant political power there, it suppresses the native religion and its propagation, it starts preaching and propagating its own practiced religion. To achieve this end, it takes the help of translating the religious texts into native languages. This is what has happened more in Christianity and Islam. Why Bible is the most translated text in the World, because Christianity has the highest population compare to any other religion in the World.

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<sup>1</sup>. Baker, Mona and Saldanha, eds. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, 2008

<sup>2</sup>. [www.unitedbiblesocieties.org](http://www.unitedbiblesocieties.org)

There is another political reason for the religious text translation and its suppression. Recently, translation of Bhagabat Gita was banned in Russia. There has been a court case regarding the Russian edition of Bhagavad Gita As It Is (Russian version of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) founder A. C. Bhakti Vedanta Swami Prabhupada's translation and commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita) in June 2011 in Russia, on charges of religious extremism, based on an assessment of the book by scholars of Tomsk State University which concluded that Bhakti Vedanta Swami's translations and commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita incite religious, social, and racial intolerance. But this banning is also caused by the dominant political parties or religious groups. It is also known that there was an opposition to the establishment of ISKON temple in Moscow. The Russian Orthodox Church had also played a political role to ban the establishment by calling Krishna "an evil demon, the personified power of hell opposing God". In December, 2011, this plea of terming the book as one for religious extremism was rejected by a court. But the dispute is still on.

### **State, Power and Translation**

The fear of disclosure of private or personal information of a man in power may cause a ban on any media that communicates it. This fear might be driven by a political and authorial loss on the part of the party in power. Thai born American was jailed because he had translated some excerpts from a Thai book, title "*The King Never Smiles*" into English. It was a banned biography about the Thai king. In the USSR, Hitler's book "Mein Kampf", was banned on the ground of extremism promotion. A small number of copies were published for some senior officials in the USSR, for others it was prohibited. There is always a fear of becoming powerless, when you are powerful; this is why you don't want to communicate something which may threaten to your power. William Tyndale's English translation of the New Testament were printed in Germany and smuggled into England where they were burned by the English church as the church authorities were adamant on the view that the Bible would be available only in Latin in 1525. In 1624, Martin Luther's German translation of the Bible was burnt in Germany by order of the Pope. In 1927, a translation of The Arabian Nights by the French scholar Mardrus was banned by U.S. Customs, whereas, another translation, by Sir Richard Burton, was allowed into the country. Martin Luther, by getting the support of a German Duke, translated Bible into German. King James's role for the translation of Bible into English is another example of how a person in power can act as a patron. Without any such support, translators were burnt for falsifying of word of God or for any other reason.

### **Economic Factors**

Leo Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, the novel that was censored in Russia, as a critique on politics, was translated and appeared in a serial publication in The Cosmopolitan in America. Much of the source text gets deleted because of the interest of the publisher. It was altered by John Walker, the editor of the Cosmopolitan, the literary magazine in US. He reorganized the novel and reduced it to 50 pages from 200 pages in the original. Considering the sociocultural attitude of the target readers, the publisher made the large novel a thin one. There is also an economic factor which a publisher can't compromise with. Here the publisher seems to be driven by the

marketability; he is not at all worried about the style and the complete content of the original. What may be appealing to the target audience in a magazine that may increase its sale might be the factor of condensing Tolstoy's Resurrection in translation. The German publisher of the translation of Dickens novels gave specific instructions "to avoid long sentences or complicated syntax, and to make the text accessible to the German reader with average education". Here, the publisher is not concerned with the stylistic qualities of the ST but rather with what the public is capable of reading (Hewson 1997: 51). Lefevere argued that in the translation of Anne Frank Diaries into German after World War II, some specific decisions were made because of economical and ideological reason. Lefevere has given the example, "No greater enemy in the World than between Germans and Jews" had been modified in the translation as, "There is no greater enmity in the World than between these Germans and the Jews". (Lefevere, 1992)

### **Language Policy, Translation and Politics**

We could see translation working as a vital force in government policy towards promoting and empowering the languages. Translation in a govt policy of a country where more than one language exists has its own political connotation. When the question of empowering and developing a language comes, translation into that language gets emphasized. Govt education policy of 1967 has stressed on three language formula. But India as a country is so heterogeneous that we could hardly imagine of realizing the three language formula a success. People of many states use two languages-one the official and the other their own mother-tongue, as for example in Bihar (Hindi as the official language and Maithili is the mother-tongue of most of the people in Bihar). There has been a division of Indian states linguistically which has given power to the respective state government to promote and empower their languages for which they release funds for developing materials in the language-and translation is an easy way of getting this objective concretized. These Indian states have established government bodies to promote their languages. But India has approximately 1652 languages<sup>3</sup>, but unfortunately not 1652 states. These languages are becoming empowered whereas other languages are becoming marginalized. So we don't have any translation of textbook for a non-scheduled language speaker. We don't have any translation in Bonda or Saura. As Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari<sup>4</sup> says,

"How many people live today in a language that is not their own? Or else, no longer even know their tongue-or do not know it yet and know a major tongue which they are forced to use poorly? Problem of immigrants and especially of their children. Problem of minorities. Problem of a minor literature, but also the problem of us all: how to wrest a minor literature from our tongue, a literature that can hollow the language out and spin it along a sober, revolutionary line? How to become the nomad and the immigrant and the gypsy of our own language?"

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<sup>3</sup>. 1961 census, Government of India

<sup>4</sup> Deleuze, Giles and Guattari, Felix. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, tr by Dana Polan, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis: London, 1986, p-8

There are major languages because there are minor languages. A language becomes dominant by suppressing the other competitors, as it happens in the natural world. Translation can be seen as an encouraging device for a language to win over its other competitors. It gives a space to a language to stand somewhere as a distinctive one. It is instrumental to give recognition to a language. To boost up linguistic capital for a language, translation is necessary. Much of the dominating English's large corpus has translation more and more from other languages. If we see the materials available in the major languages of the World, we will find that much of them is through translation.

We could see some political forces working in the translation of news by Media. There is a vital connection between Politics, Media and translation. "Media reports about political events are always forms of recontextualisation, and any recontextualisation involves transformations. Recontextualisation and transformation are particularly complex where translation is involved, that is, when media reports cross language boundaries".( Schäffner and Bassnett, 2010). Translation as a form of interpretation in languages in a political discourse is a complex phenomenon. State, Public and media are the main actors in the political communication.

**Conclusion:** Translation and politics are mutually inclusive. Banning a translation and allowing a translation are the acts with political motivation. We have found from the examples discussed above that a translation is banned because of the following reasons: a) Because of the content in the translation: if there is a manipulation, if it is offensive or obscene, if it propagates a particular ideology that is not favored by an authority, society or culture, b) Because of the factors associated with the source texts: If the source text is banned because of its offensive/obscene/ideological reasons; c) Because of the translator who has translated it: If a translator is political or a party to something, d) Because of the interest of the group in power. Along with all these reasons, we have also found that the quality and the quantity of the content in the translation can be compromised for economic reasons.

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