

ISSN: 0976-8165

The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Bi-monthly Refereed and Indexed Open Access eJournal

5th Year of Open Access

Vol. 5, Issue-6 December 2014

Editor-In-Chief- Dr. Vishwanath Bite

Managing Editor- Mrs. Madhuri Bite



www.the-criterion.com

About Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>

Translation: A Benediction with Constraints

Neeta Kumari

Assistant Professor in English
Guru Nanak College for Girls
Muktsar

Art, it is generally believed, transcends all barriers and has a universal appeal. While this holds true for the art forms like painting, music, or dance, literary art, due to the medium it employs, becomes an exception to the belief. Literature created in a particular language remains limited to the readers only of that specific linguistic group until translation comes forward to extend its range to the other language communities. However, this boon of translation has its limitations. Where the incongruity of the linguistic codes and differences in the cultural environments make translation transform the original text, it simply gives up in the face of poetry. Again, a translator does not merely ferry a text across languages, she reconstructs it according to her own analysis and interpretation. This article is an attempt to examine the problem of restricted translatability taking examples of some texts from the writers like Nissim Ezekiel, an Indian English poet; Ismat Chughtai, an Urdu fiction writer; and Girish Karnad, a Kannad playwright. The article also proposes to discuss transliteration as a way to overcome, though only to a limited extent, the weaknesses of translation with reference to Chughtai's stories and *Dastaavez*, the collection of Manto's Urdu stories in Devnagari script.

The practice of translation has contributed in making the world a global village by functioning not only as a language bridge builder but also as a connector between disparate cultures. Having risen to the status of an independent discipline in the contemporary scenario, translation has become the basis of the various other literary fields like World Literature and Comparative Literature. This shows the long way it has covered from the era when in England "it was illegal to translate the Scriptures into the common language from Latin. There was a time when it was illegal to read those illegal translations in public—or to own one. There were times when people were martyred for doing both. In England, William Tyndale, who became known as the Father of the English printed Bible, was forced to leave England in 1525 because of the widespread rumors about his project to prepare an English New Testament" (Born out of Persecution).

But some issues have travelled with translation as constant companions through all these centuries. These are the debates on the distinction between 'word for word' and 'sense for sense' translation. Since literary art achieves its aim by means of words and structures, diction and style of a writing play a significant role in determining its impression on the readers. However, vocabulary and syntax of every language differ resulting in the difference in the impact of the original and the translated text. For example Julius Caesar's famous words: "Veni, Vidi, Vici" are translated in English as, "I reached the country after long marches, I surveyed the position before taking military action, and in this I successfully subjugated the defenders" (Savory 156). This is the case of 'sense for sense' translation when the translator is unable to find equivalent words in the target language. Though the spirit of the statement, here, has been brought across,

the loss of lyricism and the pithiness of the original words is ascribed to the limitation of translation.

Transformation in translation makes itself more manifest in poetry as it is not possible to take the rhythm and rhyme present in the poetry of one language to another language. That is why when translation of any poetic work is attempted; only ideas get conveyed not the form, marring the musicality of the poem. The problem persists even when the poet himself is the translator, possessing the deep meanings of the poem and being an expert in both the languages – the source language and the target language. Here, it will be pertinent to quote Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* – a play written originally in Kannad and later translated in English by Karnad himself. In this play Karnad, experimenting with Karnataka's traditional folk theatre form *Yakshgana*, has assigned many songs to the male and female chorus. Most of the songs, though written in verse form in the English version, are the paraphrases of the original ones; there are some others with a categorical mentioning that these are the prose rendering of the songs in the Kannad text. Obviously, translation gives up in the face of poetry.

Again, in every language, words and expressions carry cultural connotations which defy the translation endeavours. Jasbir Jain comments in this regard:

It is always difficult to convey the cultural nuances to the non-cultural readers: non-familiarity is seen with suspicion. The rootedness of language in the belief of the people renders translation difficult and unsatisfactory, for translation, at times, goes for the meaning and not the poetic undertones. (236)

The difficulty of translating belief where a language is rooted can be shown by citing the example of a poem "Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S." by Nissim Ezekiel, a famous Indian English poet. The poem is in the form of a farewell speech which goes like:

Friends,
our dear sister
is departing for foreign
in two three days,
and
we are meeting today
to wish her bon voyage.

The poem, obviously, parodies the flawed usage of English by the Indian middle class. The erroneous use of the words and the structures, and the way these have been employed shows that the speaker is thinking in his native language and translating his thoughts into English resulting in a version of English in Indian idiom. Here, the use of the word 'sister' for a colleague has been presented with implicit irony by the poet. While this seems completely incongruous in English, in Indian languages the use of kinship terms even for strangers is taken as the reflection of the moral values of the speaker. But when translated literally into a foreign language, these terms become the examples of the inappropriate usage as in the above mentioned poem.

Thus, whereas apparently the problem of literal versus liberal translation concerns linguistic form, it actually touches the cultural norms of different language groups. In the

terminology of the modern translation theory, the two terms related specifically with the two cultures – of the source language and that of the target language – are domestication and foreignization. According to Lawrence Venuti, “the former refers to —an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, brings the author back home, while the latter is —an ethnodeviant pressure on those (cultural) values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad” (qtd. in Yang). In other words, in domestication the source culture is replaced with the target culture, and in foreignization the distinctness of the source culture is preserved.

To take an example of domestication from the English translation of Ismat Chughtai’s short story *Lihaf* – in the Urdu text, there occurs a phrase *ashique jama karna* transcribed in English as “securing admirers”. This expression has been domesticated in sync with the English culture to facilitate a fluent reading of the translation. An English reader would never imagine that a perfectly innocent phrase in his language had become the cause of a trial for obscenity for the writer as in the Urdu speaking cultural group *ashique jama karna* was regarded disgraceful for the girls from respectable families. So, where domestication in translation makes a text from a disparate culture easy to read, it reduces the opportunity of knowing the other culture and making a comparative study of the two – an opportunity which foreignization enhances.

However, while reading the original texts of Chughtai and Saadat Hasan Manto in Devnagari script with the glossary of some peculiar expression in Hindi, I realized that this is a fine way to overcome the constraints of translation provided that the readers are familiar with the spoken form of the source language. But this can happen simply with those languages which have existed or exist in the same social space, like Hindi and Urdu, as only then the readers would be able to understand the undertones and implied meanings in an unhindered manner.

Works Cited:

- “Born out of Persecution: History of the Early Printed English Bible.” <http://www.cedarville.edu/>
Chughtai, Ismat. “Lihaf.” Trans. Syed Sirajuddin. *Modern Indian Literature: Poems and Short Stories*. New Delhi: OUP, 2013. 117-128. Print.
- Jain, Jasbir. *Beyond Postcolonialism: Dreams and Realities of a Nation*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2006. Print.
- Karnad, Girish. *Hayavadan*. New Delhi: OUP, 2012. Print.
- Manto, Saadat Hasan. *Dastaavez*. New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan Private Limited, 2004. Print.
- Savory, Theodore. *The Art of Translation*. London: Cape, 1957. Web.
- Yang, Wenfen. “Brief Study on Domestication and foreignization in Translation.” *Journal of language Teaching and Research*. 1.1 (2010): 77-80. Web.