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Translation as a Stylistic Equivalence: Relief to Whorfian Crisis of Linguistic Relativity

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Abstract:

Benjamin Lee Whorf and Edward Sapir in the middle of the last century put forth the theory of a specific theory of linguistic relativity which had long-lasting consequences over the activity of translation especially translation of poetry and literature. The stronger version of the theory makes translation impossible due to its culture specificity. It further claims that the thought processes of the speakers are defined by the languages they speak. Though the stronger version of this theory has proved ineffectual and become obsolete, there are numberless weaker versions that impinge over many Indian Scholars who often challenge the very status of Indian Writing in English. Bhalchandra Nemade's well-known objection over Indians writing in English and specific allegation on Kolatkar's Jejuri interrogating why the poet after all writes in English are the result of the impact of Whorfian hypothesis on Nemade's mind. Kolatkar not only continued to write in English but translated some of his poems from Marathi to English and vice versa. For each of his translation Kolatkar attempts different strategy. For certain poems he attempts to find out the stylistic equivalence rather than a literal or literary translation of the source language text. The poets own priorities regarding the translation and his expectations from the target language version compel him to make such choices. In the translation of a poem Three Cups of Tea he successfully handles the option of stylistic equivalence. The bilingual study of the said poem attempted in the present article makes one understand how this option helps the poet to find a way out through the Whorfian Crises of linguistic relativity and the impossibility of the act of translation due to the culture-specificity of the source language text.

Keywords: Translation, Linguistic relativity, culture specific, source and target language, stylistics.

Traditional translation theorists divided translation into two types: literary and non-literary. In literary translation (i.e. the translation of literature) the translators were concerned with both 'sense' and 'style'. But in non-literary translation the emphasis was on sense. In the later half of the twentieth century with the advent of structuralism, Deconstruction and Reader Response theories, translation studies took new turn. In recent years translators taking a cue from the linguistics and literary critics have extended the meaning and significance of

translation by attempting at different kinds of translation, such as ‘Phonological’, ‘graphological’, ‘total’, ‘restricted’, ‘full’, ‘partial’, ‘rank-bound’, ‘free’, ‘literal’, ‘transliteration’ and ‘transcription’ etc.

As Somshukla Banerjee, in her article ‘Beyond the Literary and the Literal: A Move towards Stylistic Equivalence’ rightly states, “It is a well-known fact that literary translation contributes a great deal to the cultural communication between speakers of different languages. However a literary text is not merely communication of information between speakers of different languages. However a literary text is not merely communication of information and therefore the translation of literary text, basically of a poem is unsuccessful if it solely aims at reproducing chunks of information from the original text. It is widely accepted that a style of a mature and distinguished author in a literary text manifests his consummate creativeness.”

It is important that the translation of a literary text should aspire to produce a certain impact on the reader by trying to reproduce the style of the original text. Translators and translation theorists have always been concerned with the evaluation of a translation. Present article attempts a to show how Kolatkar in some of his self translations is more concerned about finding the stylistic equivalence of the different dialects that he uses in his Marathi originals rather than literary or literal translations for like Walter Benjamin, Kolatkar seems to believe that a specific significance inherent in the original manifest itself in its translatability. The bilingual study of two versions of the poem Three Cups of Tea shows how Kolatkar confirms to the said hypothesis about translation and translatability.

Main Managerko bola, ‘Three Cups of Tea’, is a poem originally composed in Bombay Hindi, a code used by the street men, underworld criminals and vendors on the pavements of the city of Mumbai. It is included in Kolatkar’s first collection of poems in Marathi titled ‘Arun Kolatkarchya Kavita’. Hence, it is treated as a Marathi composition. It has been translated by the poet himself into American slang- a language used by tough guys (loafers) in America. The translated version appears in the posthumously published collection of Kolatkar’s poems titled ‘Boat Ride and Other Poems’ edited by Arvind Krishna Maharotra as per the poet’s guidelines. Like all other Marathi and English versions by Kolatkar, this book as well is published by Ashok Shahane’s Prass Publication. Bombay Hindi is an idiosyncratic identity of specific cultural group in Mumbai. Many of its cultural features can be identified with the lifestyle of tough guys as shown in the American movies of 60s to 80s (Kolatkar acquired English language basically through these movies).

The translation of the poem is more cultural (semantic) than structural (syntactic). Kolatkar aims at finding out a stylistic equivalent rather than to attempt the literal or literary translation of the poem in question. The medium ‘Bombay Hindi’ is not an independent language in itself. It is a social dialect of expression used by a highly specific group of people within the restricted cultural space of the metropolis of Mumbai. In order to translate such a poem it is necessary to find out equal stylistic equivalent used in the similar restricted space of the target language community. The English used by the highwaymen and the tough guys in

American movies of 1960^s which is full with slangs and colloquial expressions serves the purpose.

It has often been said that a good translation is one which successfully renders the rhythm, the connotations and the rhetorical devices used in the source text. If we apply literary stylistics to examine a literary translation it will be noted that the stylistic analysis of the original text in terms of aesthetically and\ or thematically motivated linguistic choice will enable the translator to be more sensitive to the artistic value of the original text and select functional equivalents in translating to achieve stylistic equivalence.

The poem depicts three different episodes in the life of a person who doesn't at all care for the middleclass bourgeoisie values. His being is characterized by recklessness, disrespect for culture, tradition and all established systems including legal system and frankness in use of linguistic code. He makes liberal use of abuses, makes blatant expression of everything avoiding euphemisms. It will be interesting to study each of these episodes in comparison with the other. The article attempts the stylistic-comparative study of the two versions of the poem in question with the view to find out:

- a. Kolatkar prefers the stylistic equivalents barring the literal and literary modes of translation.
- b. Stylistics as a method of investigation helps a bilingual scholar to make some value judgment regarding the success of translation.

Main Manager ko Bola (Three Cups of Tea)

Marathi version:

*Main managerko bola muze pagar mangata hai
Manager bpla company ke rule se pagar ek tarikh ko milega
Usaki ghadi table pe padi thi
Maine ghadi utha liya
Aur maneger ko police chauki ka rasta dikhaya
Bola agar complent karma hai to kar lo
Mere rule se pagar aajhi hoga*

*Mai bhabhi ko bola
Kya bhaisaabke duty pe main aa jaun?
Bhadak gai saali
Rahaman bola goli chalaunga
Main bola ek randi ke waste?*

Chalao goli gandu

Main Burma gaya udhar aag picture lag gaya tha

Picture dekhne gaya

Udhar ticket ke waste kuch passport wagara dikhana padata hai

Ticket walene pucha passport kidhar hai?

Main bola bhanchod

Muze ticket mangata hai

Un logone wapas Manipur bhej diya

Police commissioner ne pucha Burma kayko gaya tha?

Main bola abe laundi ke bachhe

India main rukkhahi kya hain!⁴

Three Cups of Tea (English Version)

i want my pay i said

to the manager

you'll get paid said

the manager

but not before the first

don't you know the rules?

Coolly i picked up his

Wristwatch

That lay on the table

Wanna bring in the cops

i said

'cordin to my rules

listen baby

i get paid when i say so

2.

allow me beautiful

i said to my sister in law
to step in my brother's booties
you had it coming said rahaman
a gun in his hand
shoot me punk
kill your brother i said
for a bloody cunt

3.

i went to Burma
where the film aag was running
i went to see the film
the guy behind the
booking office window
wants to see my passport
i said
all i wanna do
is see a fucking film man
I was arrested and send back
to Manipur
no passport
the police commissioner asked
why did you go to burma?
Prickface i said
What's there in India?⁵

Structure of the poem:

1. Both the versions depict three events in a life of the narrator who is an anti-bourgeoisie figure. Hindi version is untitled and English version is titled as 'Three Cups of Tea'. The stanzas of English version are numbered.
2. English version has three stanzas with fourteen, nine and eight lines respectively while Hindi version has four stanzas with eight, six, six and four lines each. The last episode takes

two stanzas (six+four) in Hindi but English version takes a single stanza for each of the episodes.

3. Both the versions make minimum use of punctuation marks. Hindi version has four question marks and an exclamatory while English version has only three question marks. English version makes distinction by zero use of capital letters.

Verse one:

1. In both the versions the first part of the poem depicts the narrator's encounter with a manager with whom he argues regarding get paid. English version makes use of fourteen unrhymed lines while as Hindi version takes only seven lines. The lines used in English are much shorter than those in Hindi. It is as if each line in Hindi is broken into two when it appears in English. Hindi version is characterized by a complete absence of punctuation marks. English version uses a bare question mark.

2 The narrator (first person I, speaker of the poem) is a character from the lower strata of the society, who doesn't have any respect for the middle-class ethical, moral values and principles. The first person pronoun as a rule is written in capital in English. The capital 'I' in English is regarded as a symbol of excess individualism, capitalistic and colonial-imperial tendencies of western individual. But Kolatkar's narrator seems to lack all these qualities. He is completely regardless of these bourgeoisie values. Hence Kolatkar makes a remarkable use of small (non-capital) 'i' through out. In Hindi, there is no such graphological distinction.

3. As a rule payment is given on the first date of the month. But the narrator, regardless of this rule is inclined to get it right at this point of time. According to the established code of conduct, the employee is supposed to request the employer to get payment. But the speaker in the poem threatens his manager. He picks up the wrist watch on the table and challenges him that he can go to police if he dares to. The whole passage, both in English and in Hindi is a deviation from the established code of conduct. Both make equally pungent use of satire and irony.

4. Because of the S+O+V pattern of Hindi version, all the lines end with verbs or verb phrases, for e. g. '*mangta hai*', '*milega*', '*padi thi*', '*uthake liya*', '*rasta dikhya*', '*karta hai to kar lo*', '*hoga*' etc. But because of the S+V+O pattern and lines being broken, English version doesn't show such syntactic regularity.

5. In Hindi version all the verbs are in active voice. But in English they occur in mixed manner and as a result activity shown by verbs has been slowed down as compared to Hindi.

6. Both the versions make effective use of colloquial prose conversational style with all its subtleties for giving poetic expression. By keeping usual poetic style at the background, he foregrounds the colloquial expressions like 'wanna', 'listen baby' etc. In English 'baby' is a typical vocative which is used in extremely informal situations by way- world people in America. It is indicative of disrespect and growing informality regarding the listener. Use of this term for manager, who is his boss is thus semantic deviation of linguistic code. Hindi version shows a typical tendency of layman's use of vernacular mixed with English words like, manager, company, rule, police, compliant etc.

Verse two:

The second part of the poem deals with narrator's attempt to break established moral and ethical framework of the cotemporary social behavior.

1. Hindi version very precisely expresses the whole story in six bare lines, while the English version takes eight lines to express the same content.
2. This poetic passage has a specific meaning in Indian socio-cultural framework. The Indians consider each other as brothers and sisters. Every friend of a person is like a brother and hence his wife a sister in law. The narrator in Hindi context tells of his own encounter with his friend and not necessarily with his real brother. The sister in law (*bhabhi*) referred in the passage is not the real one but she is Rahaman's his friend's wife. In English sister in law does not carry such a cultural connotation. Naturally, Rahaman is considered as a real brother and his wife a real sister in law. Hindi version thus keeps both the possibilities of meaning open and Rahaman may be treated both as the real brother or a friend and his wife as real or remote sister in law. The English version remains very specific in treating Rahaman as the narrator's real brother.
3. A narrator asks his friend's brother's wife if he can step in his brother's booties. She gets angry and even her husband Rahaman threatens the narrator of shooting. Recklessly, the narrator challenges by asking him to shoot if he dares to. He repents over a friend shooting him just for the sake of a lady. Hindi version makes use of reporting verb and an interrogative: '*Main bhabhiko bola\ kya bhaisaabke dutype main aan jaun?*' It gives a hilarious and conversational tone to the rhetoric. The English version begins with an assertive sentence and a reported verb which results in loss of activity and liveliness of the rhetoric.
4. The socially accepted norms of sexual behavior of people differ from a country to country and culture to culture, as they radically differ in Indian and American societies. The norms regarding female chastity and loyalty are rigorously observed in the Indian society. Kolatkar's narrator attempts to revolt his friend for breaking the established social code of conduct through his speech. An alien person asking friend's wife a blatant permission to enter in her husband's booties is a shock for the readers in Indian context. The American readers may treat the affair little more liberally and may not get a cultural shock out of the context.
5. The question asked in Hindi, '*Bhaisaab ki dutype aan jaun?*' is an indirect suggestion towards sexual intercourse. The English substitute for the expression, 'to step in my brother's booties' is a direct and blatant in its appeal. Hindi phrase, '*bhadak gayi saali*' shows the anger of the lady; the English version makes no reference of the lady's reaction whatever.
6. Abuses used in both the versions convey altogether different things, for e.g. '*rundi*', in Hindi means a woman with a bad character. Its substitute, 'bloody cunt' in English has relevance with sexual organs of a lady. The intensity of these abuses in respective cultures is variable. '*Gandu*' in Hindi is almost a taboo word, not to be used by a gentleman before a lady. Its substitute punk in English does not possess such a sharpness of abusiveness. The order of lines is completely changed as they occur in Hindi and English, for e. g. the challenge of shooting by a speaker in Hindi comes after '*randi ke waste*' i. e. just for a lady while in English it comes in reverse order.

Verse three: The third event is that of the narrator's encounter with the internal security agencies in Burma. It appears in completely different manners in Hindi and English.

1. In Hindi it is much elaborate and takes ten lines divides into two uneven stanzas of six and four lines respectively. English version has a single stanza consisting of eight lines.
2. An important part that has appeared in Hindi version has been deleted from English. The narrator in Hindi went to Burma. He came to know about the show of a movie called 'Aag'. He went to watch the movie. In order to get ticket at the theatre, he was supposed to show his passport. As he did not have any, he was arrested and sends back to Manipur. A police commissioner asked him why he went to Burma to which he responded, 'what's there in India?' The English version is not so elaborate. It avoids telling why and how he had been arrested, and directly glides over his sending back to Manipur.
3. The reference of 'Aag' movie in 'Hindi' version has a geo-cultural connotation. Though the Indian subcontinent is divided into many independent countries, they share many of the similar cultural features. India, being a cultural leader of the sub-continent, Hindi movies is widely popular all over the continent and can be viewed in any of these countries. As the English version avoids this mention of movie going of the narrator, it has missed the whole geo-cultural reference.
4. The narrator speaker of the poem has an utter disrespect for the establishment. The notion like patriotism and love for nation mean nothing for him. He is a typical representative of the frustrated young generation of the post- independence era, mainly of the sixties. This disrespect is made sharper in the concluding lines, when the commissioner asks him why he went to Burma. In Hindi he says: '*main bola abe laundike bacche\ indiam rakkhahi kya hai!*' Syntactically this is a rhetorical question. But instead of using a question mark, the poet uses an exclamation which shows a very light, frivolous and insincere attitude of the narrator towards his country. In English version the conclusion is: 'prick face i said\ what's there in india?' A question mark at the end maintains an air of seriousness of his discourse. As a result the deep shade of irony and satire which the Hindi reader experiences, the English reader remains deprived of it.

Equivalence has always been a kernel concept in literary translation. However it has also occupied a seat of controversy in translation research. Catford defines translation as the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another language. He holds that at the central problem of translation practice is that of finding TL translation equivalents. When discussing the nature of translating, Eugene Nida points out that translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of source language message, first in terms of meaning and second in terms of style. He emphasizes that the translator must strive for equivalence rather than identity. Roman Jakobson Points out that equivalence in difference is the cardinal problem of language and pivotal concern of linguistics. In short, it can be certain that equivalence has always been a relative notion. However, it is ultimate goal that every translator must strive to accomplish. The stylistic study of both the versions of the poem Three Cups of Tea by Arun Kolatkar shows that being the poet and translator himself Kolatkar succeeds in finding out the proper equivalence at larger level. Such a translation of the poem poses a further question of whether

to call the target language version as a translation of the original or should it be regarded as an independent version?

Translation or A new version?

Instead of going for a word to word translation of the poem, the poet uses an equivalent dialect of Bombay Hindi, i.e. an American slang, the language used by the tough guys of American movies. The essence of what the narrator says in source language is transferred tentatively in English. The phrases, idiomatic expressions and abuses used in English are not exact translation of Hindi. Instead, there is an attempt to find out suitable stylistic substitute in English version. The poet imagines an equivalent dialect with its stylistic subtleties for the narrator's speech in given context instead of translating a source text as it is. As a result, a common communicable message is transferred in the target language not exactly the way it comes in a source language, not with all syntactic structures on the contrary the success of this translation lies in the fact that the author succeeds in finding out a cultural parallel of Bombay Hindi which in itself is a deviation from standard Hindi with immense mixture of Marathi words. The English version expresses the overall cultural connotations which the poet wishes to underline along with the stylistic equivalences.

In case of this poem a rigorous translation i.e. use of an exact syntactic substitute does not fulfill pragmatic demands of the poem. The problems occur more prominently regarding idioms, slangs, and abuses which are the most idiosyncratic features of linguistic culture of the community. An attempt of exact translation in such cases often leads to ridiculous and out of place effect. Hence the writer makes use of expressions, slangs and abuses containing approximately same shades of meaning which English speaker will use for such a situation. A bilingual writer and a self-translator thus gets an opportunity to minimize the negative effect of a specific theory of linguistic relativity cited in Benjamin Lee Whorf.

To sum up, we should bear in mind the aim of reproducing the stylistic effects in the target text, and try to achieve functional equivalence between two literary texts at phonological, lexical, syntactical and rhetorical levels. Thereby stylistic equivalence might be attained in thematic and aesthetic aspects. To quote Walter Benjamin again, "In the same way a translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel".

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