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AI and Translations: The Prospects and Challenges for Literatures of India*Devangshree Saini*

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Abstract

This research paper analyzes the problem of translating the literary works of various languages to some other significant language, with the help of easily available knowledge sources and internet facilities in a diverse country like India; and how readers would face the problem of language barriers if the translated versions were not available as accurately as possible. However, in 21st century India with the development of Artificial Intelligence the knowledge to translate these works is easily available and it is simpler to learn various languages for translation purposes. The translating process of the writeups in different languages has become more effortless, straightforward and accurate. To facilitate this argument various works of Indian Literature in both prose and poetry were studied and researched. Poems of Gulzar from the book *Selected Poems* are explained along with their translated language. Furthermore, for prose translations, the example of Devdutt Pattanaik's books based on his TV series have also been discussed.

Keywords – Indian Literature, Translation, Languages, Development, Accuracy.

Introduction

Literature, a realm where the alchemy of words unveils the treasures of human emotion, is a sublime canvas that mirrors the depths of our psyche and sentiments. It is a sanctuary of creativity where language transcends mere expression, becoming a vessel that carries our thoughts and emotions to the hearts of others.

In the world of Literature, we embark on journeys through the landscapes of human experience, traversing realms of joy, sorrow, love, and longing. Each stroke of the pen is a brushstroke of emotions, painted in vibrant hues and delicate shades. Writers weave intricate tapestries of words, embellishing narratives with the intricacies of the human soul. Yet, the essence of Literature transcends the mere arrangement of words; it lies in the reader's ability to delve deep into the reservoirs of emotions evoked by the characters and the narrative. The true essence of studying literature and art lies not in superficial comprehension but in the profound exploration and understanding of the human condition. When readers immerse themselves in the world created by the writer, when they empathize with the joys and sorrows of the characters, when they feel the heartbeat of every word, then the true magic of literature unfolds. It is in this communion of hearts and minds, where the reader resonates with the emotions as deeply as the writer intended, that the essence of literature finds its fulfillment and purpose.

Indian Literature, a tapestry woven with threads of ancient epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, the timeless charm of “Malgudi Days”, the contemporary verses of Kamala Das, and the modern narratives such as “The Palace of Illusions” and “A Suitable Boy”, stands proudly alongside the literary treasures of the world. These literary gems, rich in human emotions, philosophical insights, and cultural nuances, resonate with readers across borders and generations, transcending the limitations of time and space. However, within the vast expanse of Indian literature lies a challenge that echoes the complexity of our diverse yet interconnected society – the barrier of language. India, with its myriad states and cultures, boasts a linguistic landscape as diverse as its people. Each language carries within it the history, traditions, and ethos of its native speakers, adding layers of complexity to the act of literary translation.

Translation, often heralded as a bridge between cultures and languages, plays a pivotal role in making Indian literature accessible to a wider audience. However, the task of translating the rich tapestry of Indian languages into other significant languages prevalent in the country is not without its challenges.

Translation theories such as the equivalence theory, dynamic equivalence theory, and cultural translation theory, among others, offer insights into the intricate process of transferring meaning and emotion from one language to another. These theories emphasize the importance of capturing the essence, tone, and cultural nuances of the original text while ensuring readability and authenticity in the target language. Yet, despite the advancements in translation theory and practice, the art of translation remains a laborious endeavor, requiring meticulous attention to detail, linguistic expertise, and a deep understanding of both the source and target

cultures. The endeavor to preserve the core vibrations and emotions of the original work while adapting it to a different linguistic and cultural context demands a delicate balancing act, often requiring extensive time and effort.

In the past, the challenges of language barriers made it daunting, and at times, near-impossible to translate the intricate beauty of Indian literary masterpieces into other languages. However, with the advent of new translation methodologies, technological tools, and a growing appreciation for cultural diversity, the boundaries of linguistic limitations are gradually being bridged, allowing Indian literature to traverse across linguistic borders and enchant readers worldwide.

Translation Theories

Paul Ricoeur rightly says in translation “advanced with some salvaging and some acceptance of loss.” Also, according to G.E. Wellworth, in a literary translation “what is required is the re-creation of a situation or cohesive setting of that language.” To understand the translations of literary works more accurately, let’s discuss the theories of translation.

Equivalence Theory: It’s the most basic theory of translation, also known as Formal Equivalence Theory. The theory aims to translate the Source Language (SL) into Target Language (TL) through a formal equivalence and literal translation where the translator aims to preserve the original text’s grammatical and sentence structure. The translator attempts to translate each and every word into the target language as closely as possible to the source language. However, the theory may result in a translation that is too literal and lacks cultural adaptation. It may struggle to convey subtle nuances such as humor, irony or some cultural reference, which can lead to a translation that is not as effective as the original text as well as less relatable to the target audience.

Dynamic Equivalence Theory: Dynamic equivalence, also known as functional equivalence, prioritizes the communication of the message and the response of the target audience, rather than the formal equivalence of the source text. This approach focuses on conveying the same impact, effect, or response as the original text, rather than its literal meaning. The translator focuses on communicating the message, rather than preserving the form or exact meaning of the source text. This may lead to over-interpretation of the text by the translator, reading between the lines or adding their own understanding of the author's intent. This can lead to an inaccurate representation of the original text.

Cultural Translation: Cultural translation theory, also known as cultural translatology, is a fascinating concept that explores the complexities of translating

cultural texts, including literature, art, and other forms of expression, from one language and culture to another. It focuses on the process of transferring cultural meaning from one language and culture to another, taking into account the cultural context, nuances, and power dynamics involved. It includes making the source text more familiar and accessible to the target audience, often by using cultural references and expressions that are specific to the target culture. However, critics argue that Cultural translation theory has been criticized for ignoring the power imbalances between cultures, this oversight can lead to the perpetuation of dominant cultural norms and the marginalization of minority cultures. Furthermore, it includes foreignization i.e. the process of preserving the cultural specificity of the original text, even if it means using unfamiliar cultural references or expressions that may be challenging for the target audience to understand. It is relying too heavily on Western theoretical frameworks, such as poststructuralism and postcolonialism, which may not be applicable or relevant to non-Western cultural contexts.

J. C. Catford's Translation theory: In the book 'A Linguistic theory of Translation', Catford assumes that translation may be performed between any two related or unrelated languages. He defines translation as, "the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)." Catford uses two important terms in his definition- textual material and equivalent. According to Catford it is the central problem of translation practice to find TL translation equivalence. He provides some broad types of translation in terms of extent, levels and ranks. Catford argues that "what is expressed by the original author in a single morpheme might require one full sentence for a translator."

Apart from theories there are seven phases of translation that are a widely accepted framework that outlines the steps involved in the translation process. Here they are:

Phase 1: Pre-Translation - Preparation and planning before starting the translation project reviewing the source text, understanding the context, and identifying any potential issues determining the translation requirements, such as the target audience's language, tone, and style.

Phase 2: Translation - Translating the source text into the target language using translation tools, such as CAT (Computer-Assisted Translation) software, to facilitate the process ensuring accuracy, consistency, and quality of the translation.

Phase 3: Editing - Reviewing the translated text to ensure it meets the required quality standards, checking for errors, inconsistencies, inaccuracies and making revisions to improve the clarity, coherence, and overall flow of the text.

Phase 4: Proofreading - Carefully reviewing the edited text to catch any remaining errors or typos, checking for formatting, punctuation, and grammar errors while ensuring that the text is polished and error-free.

Phase 5: Desktop Publishing (DTP) - Formatting the translated text to match the original layout and design Using DTP (Desktop Publishing) software to recreate the original document's layout, including images, tables, and fonts ensuring that the final product looks professional and visually appealing.

Phase 6: Quality Assurance (QA) - Conducting a final review of the translated text to ensure it meets the target language's requirements and finally, checking for consistency, accuracy, and quality or making any final revisions before delivery.

Phase 7: Submission - Submitting the final translated script to the publishers, providing any necessary support or maintenance and ensuring that the target audience is satisfied with the final product.

These seven phases of translation provide a structured approach to the translation process, ensuring that the final product is of high quality and meets the target audience's needs. Yet there are certain obstacles such as implication of the cultural nuances, cultural importance and emotions behind certain rituals and objects in the target language still needs to be covered by the Artificial Intelligence and other Software translators. To support this argument here are some examples given further in the research.

Analysis/Argument

Translating the texts with the help of today's AI technologies doesn't really change the core meaning of the character and the message or thought it wants to deliver to the readers but can affect the cultural emotions and essence associated with the source language (SL) and the targeted language (TL). We have immense facilities nowadays such as applications for learning and understanding various languages and easy availability of numerous books which are available both physically and in electronic versions, many highly efficient and accurate translating software and many other facilities. Thus, it would be wrong to say in 21st century India that the translated versions of the original writeups are not that worthy or correct.

To support this argument, we can look forward to poems of Gulzar – the renowned Urdu poet of India, in the book *Selected Poems* where the original poetry in Hindi and Urdu language has

been marvelously translated by Pavan K. Varma in English language. “पीछे, शाम के हल्दी रंग आकाश की चादर ...” the line is taken from the poem *Hawa Mahal, Jaipur* where Gulzar tries to represent the exceptional beauty of Jaipur’s dusk hours and of the monument Hawa Mahal. The lines have been accurately translated Pavan K. Varma as “Against the sheet of the turmeric-colored sky at dusk...” even the metaphorical representation of the evening sky as “turmeric-colored” by the writer goes perfectly well with the original expression of “हल्दी रंग आकाश”. Here not just the words but the various literary devices have also been taken care of while translating the poem, such as the imagery of evening formed by Pavan K. Verma in English is as similar as the original imagery expressed by Gulzar in Hindi. Despite such accuracy the essence and ritualistic importance of “turmeric” in Indian culture is not being felt in the translated version of the poem. One more poem from the same book, titled *Sketch* in Hindi could be seen as best translated in English –

“याद है इक दिन-

मेरी मेज़ पे बैठे - बैठे,

सिगरेट की डिबिया पर तुमने,

छोटे से इक पौधे का,

एक स्केच बनाया था –

आकर देखो,

उस पौधे पर फूल आया है!”

translated in English as -

“Remember, one day,

While sitting at my table

You sketched on a cigarette box

A tiny plant

Come and see,

That plant has bloomed!”

In this translation the writer Pavan K. Varma has given the exact literal meaning and resemblance to the “plant” and “cigarette box” as given by Gulzar in Hindi. Also, we can see the mindful selection of the word “bloomed” in translation for “फूल” to express well and accurately to the readers, the process of growing relationship between the speaker and his

beloved, as the writer has tried to express in his original Hindi poetry. Although, the emotion and symbolism of purity in their relationship is associated with the purity of flowers in most cultures and the delicate idea of fertility and new beginning of something associated with the saplings or we may say plant is visible in poor and negligible manner in the targeted language English.

Furthermore, if we talk about prose then the Indian television series named *Devlok with Devdutt Pattanaik*, was published as a book by Penguin Publishers both in Hindi and English languages under the same title for the first time in 2016. Also, there are now three parts of the book published comprising the three seasons of the series. However, the original series was shot in Hindi where Devdutt Pattanaik was interviewed regarding his knowledge in Hindu Mythology with facts and proves and the English version of the books containing all his interviews are written as accurately in their meanings and ideas as expressed by Devdutt in the interview. Anyways, it again loses the emotional beliefs and essence of certain things and ideas felt and experienced in Hindu culture and mythology. The interviewer asks him about the Upanishad, where Devdutt answers in Hindi (as published in the Hindi version of the book too) “उपनिषद् का सही मतलब है मेरे साथ बैठ के बात करो। तो किसी एक विषय के उपर परिचर्चा करना - मिमांसा जिसे हम कहते हैं। यहां खास फोकस है आत्मा पर - अन्तःमन, चेतना, मर्म, इत्यादि।” and it is accurately translated by the Penguin Publishers in English as “Upanishad technically means sit down and talk to me, like a discussion or a chat. It involves inquiry on any subject; what we call *mimansa*. Specifically, the focus is on the *atma* - the soul, consciousness, essence, and so on.” In the given texts, the way he explains the definition of Upanishad has been exactly transferred to its English version. The words “मेरे साथ बैठ के बात करो” which defines Upanishad as a normal person-to-person talk and is explained in English with literal accuracy through the words “sit down and talk to me”. Further when he goes on explaining in other words, such as “तो किसी एक विषय के उपर परिचर्चा करना - मिमांसा जिसे हम कहते हैं।” this too is completely clear in English with even more detail so that if something gets confusing while translation that too must be involved in “like a discussion or a chat. It involves inquiry on any subject; what we call *mimansa*.” Again, in the next lines the essential words such as “आत्मा पर - अन्तःमन” & “मर्म” are explained as “*atma*-the soul” & “essence”. If we observe here, the word “मर्म” sometimes in Hindi also refers to some medicine to heal wounds, but here according to the given context the word is logically translated to “essence” which is what it literally means here in context to Upanishad. Anyways, due the cultural difference of different languages the reader

might fail to perceive and detect the ideology or emotion behind the word “essence” (which also means some pleasant smell or perfume in English language) and the word “मर्म” in Hindi language.

Other than this in prose, one more example of the self - help books of a renown Indian author and poet Ashish Bagrecha. His book “Dear Stranger, I Know How You Feel” is originally written in English but its translated version in Hindi is also available in the market under the title “डियर अजनबी, मैं तुम्हारे साथ हूँ” which is translated by Dheeraj Kumar Agrawal. Let us take the very first chapter of the book “About Pain” or “दर्द” as it is titled in the Hindi version. Ashish writes “I see you trying hard to cover up your pain, to pretend it doesn't hurt to breathe. That, with every beat of your heart, your chest aches and tears burn deep down in your throat. It doesn't matter if you saw it coming or not; it hurts.” which Dheeraj Kumar Agrawal translates in Hindi as “मैं देख रहा हूँ कि तुम अपने दर्द को छिपाने की भरपूर कोशिश कर रहे हो, दिखाने की कोशिश कर रहे हो कि सांस लेने में तकलीफ़ नहीं हो रही। कि दिल की हर धड़कन के साथ तुम्हारी छाती दुखती है और तुम्हारे गले में भीतर तक आंसुओं की जलन उतर जाती है। इससे फर्क नहीं पड़ता कि तुमने इस तकलीफ़ को आते हुए देखा था या नहीं; दर्द तो होता है।” as we can observe in this chapter, the writer talks about the emotional pain a person feels in any kind of adversity, failure or heart break and expresses the exact internal experiences we go through and in order to hide that anxious sadness and melancholy from others, how it keeps burning more inside us. The feeling which we get when we want to cry but cannot, is excellently translated from “tears burn deep down in your throat” to “तुम्हारे गले में भीतर तक आंसुओं की जलन उतर जाती है।” However, The reader can feel some confusion in observing and experiencing the wait and the uncomfortable feeling of distress Ashish is talking about. The degree of sorrow or distress might differ in their vibes and experience by the people of different cultures because of difference in vibrations of the words “जलन” and “burn” also the vast difference in the degree of experience and essence behind the words “भीतर” and “deep”.

Conclusion

With the above argument and facts, we can conclude that with the available technology and other AI facilities such as e-books, language learning apps, translation software and the easy availability of relevant knowledge; the Language barrier in literary works of a diverse country like India is no more there to restrict our literature in the boundaries of some few languages. Even the translated versions of the original writeups are as accurate and effective, in their core

meanings, explanation and understanding but still fails to express the cultural essence and degree of emotions and experiences, as expressed in their original works by the writer. Also, this indicates to us that in the coming future language barrier and the loss of core meanings while translating Indian literature is not at all a problem but it still has to go a long way in understanding the emotion and the essence of the work as felt in the original or source language (SL).

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