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Of world literature and challenges in translation: An intercultural perspective

ABSTRACT

Of world literature and challenges in translation: An intercultural perspective

The paper investigates the manner in which translation of intercultural patterns affect the association between Krishna Sobti's *Dilo Daanish*, the source text (Hindi) and *The Heart has its Reasons*, by Reema Anand and Meenakshi Swami, the translated text (English) within a Relevance Theoretic framework. Discussing this concept of fidelity with regards to cultural dimensions the paper will try to explore the significance of Intercultural Patterns and their applicability in the context of World Literature. Using Sperber and Wilson's (1995, 2002) Relevance Theory, a theory efficacious in the domain of translation, and Jens Allwood's (1985) Intercultural Patterns, the study attempts to establish how the percolation of a particular pattern during the translation process achieves and maintains the cultural system within a text. Thereby promoting the notion of an adequate translation.

Keywords: translation, relevance theory, cultural dimensions, good translation, world literature and intercultural patterns.

This paper brings together three thematic observations as a way to interpret language and culture interaction. The interaction gets revealed within a translated text, which ensues in this manner firstly, interpretation along with the presentation of different places to readers, secondly, the conceptual sense of relations, and finally the sense of culture for the reader to accept a translated text (i.e. literary text or narrative) as World Literature. The line of argument follows that research into interpretation effectiveness has not yet fully considered culture as a significant element to describe the said nature of reader's experience. Reed Way Dasenbrock points out,

To be understood, any text must be read in the light of prior knowledge, background information, expectations about genre and about sequence all the aspects often considered together as 'context' (Dasenbrock 1987: 10).

Considering this viewpoint about 'prior knowledge', the current investigation focuses on the potential role of cultural context. It suggests that interpretation is about the creation of a sense towards a particular place or relation. As such is linked in complex ways to the culture of the people being presented, which more often than not is portrayed through the help of multiple languages and thus, representation of varied cultures can best be captured within Intercultural Communication.

The study will seek to address these themes by outlining the cultural dimensions as represented in Intercultural Communication that a good translation must overcome challenges through the patterns enunciated by Jens Allwood (1985). Allwood distinguishes four primary cultural aspects (intercultural patterns) namely: Patterns of thought, Patterns of behaviour, Patterns of artefacts, and Imprints in nature (cf. Lahiri and Chakravarty 2013). It is posited here that these dimensions successfully illustrate the essential cultural characteristics of Universal Lifestyle, i.e. Patterns of artefacts / Imprints in nature and Universal Relations i.e. Patterns of thought / Patterns of behaviour (cf. Lahiri and Chakravarty 2013, Chakravarty 2017). Hence, the focus is turned towards the translators' ability to accentuate these intercultural patterns while translating linguistically and culturally diverse literary texts. This conceptually facilitates a comparative analysis of Krishna Sobti's Hindi novel *Dilo Daanish*, and its highly acclaimed English rendering, *The Heart has its Reasons*, by Reema Anand and Meenakshi Swami.

1. Background of the Study

The background of the study deliberates on intercultural patterns present in a novel and how vital these patterns are for a translated work to be accepted and appreciated by the reader. However, this is not an easy task as dissimilarity exists between the socio-cultural differences in the languages as well as the readers. Edward Sapir describes this as,

No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached. (Sapir 1956: 69)

Within the context of translation, this leads to the concept of evaluating 'equivalence'. Even though it is a well-documented area, it has become apparent that a serious discussion of cultural patterns. Add must consider all side of this challenge as Zhongde opines:

.....

The difficulty in translation just lies in the fact that both the content and the style are already existent in the original and as a result, you will have to do your best to reproduce them as they are in quite a different language. (Zhongde 1991: 7)

Therefore to identify and discuss the key parameters present during the process of translation with regards to a literary text written in Hindi (an Indo-Aryan language) and its translation in English, this study largely follows the analysis presented by Jens Allwood (1985: 1–2). Intercultural Communication as a theory can be traced to scholars such as Anna Wierzbicka, Cliff Goddard, Deborah Tannen, Deborah Schiffrin etc. (cf. Chakravarty and Khushu-Lahiri 2010/2011, Khushu-Lahiri and Chakravarty 2011). According to these scholars the basic tenet of intercultural communication is,

In different societies and different communities, people speak differently; these differences in the ways of speaking are profound and systematic, they reflect different cultural values, or at least different hierarchies of values; different ways of speaking, different communicative styles, can be explained and made sense of in terms of independently established different cultural values and cultural priorities (Wierzbicka 1991: 69).

To capture these values Allwood distinguished four primary cultural dimensions namely: Patterns of thought, Patterns of behaviour, Patterns of artefacts, and Imprints in nature, which he highlights as the foundational for expressing culture and may be correlated with human activities in the said manner of,

All human activities involve the first two dimensions. Most activities involve the third dimension and ecologically important activities also involve the fourth (Allwood 1985: 2).

The reason behind the analysis on the basis of the ‘patterns of communication’ by Allwood (1985, 1999) is that these capture the confluence of cultural interpretation and narrative structure. Through this a clear illustration of the nature of intercultural communication is made possible, which is a significant factor during translation of any literary text. Undoubtedly, this view of cultural dimensions can be inferred to overlapping areas of translation studies. Thus, it will not be an understatement to claim that a translator’s knowledge and thereby application of intercultural patterns will inevitably result in a well-rounded translation of the text.

Now Relevance Theory revolves around the notion of ‘relevance’ as it is defined based on processing effort and contextual effects (Sperber and Wilson 1995). Add correlation is further explained by Khushu-Lahiri and Chakravarty,

According to the theory, the discourse initiator (writer) wants the discourse recipient (reader) to consider what is being communicated as the most relevant,

which constitutes – cognitive effects and which may be applied for interpreting any communicative event. (Khushu-Lahiri/Chakravarty 2011: 38)

This notion could be interpreted in terms of ‘optimal relevance’ (cf. Sperber and Wilson 1995). Zhonggang describes the model in this way,

Contextual effects are obtained when the new information interacts with a context of existing assumptions in one of four ways: by strengthening an existing assumption, by contradicting and eliminating an existing assumption, by weakening the existing assumption, or by combining with an existing assumption to yield a contextual implication (Zhonggang 2006: 44).

Translators as a result, aim to achieve optimal relevance through the use of different strategies, which allows them to convey high ‘cognitive effects’ with low ‘processing effort’ on the part of the reader. The paper highlights the process of translating within Relevance Theory as applied by Ernst Gutt (1998, 2000) wherein he described the eight steps in translation process as,

Source language → Receptor language, Original Communicator → Translator,
Original text → Translated text, Original audience → Receptor language audience,
Meaning of original → Meaning of translated text (cf. Chakravarty 2017: 237)

Along with the use of above mentioned steps the study takes into account Gutt’s another observation on translation wherein he states that for translation process to occur successfully a source text and its translated form must take into account ‘interpretive resemblance’ of thoughts and utterances instead of their ‘equivalence’ (cf. Gutt 1998, 2000). Sperber and Wilson define, “Interpretive resemblance arises when two propositional representations share their analytic and contextual implication in a given context (cf. Xosé Rosales Sequeiros 2001: 197)”. Gutt (1998) elucidated the concept of ‘interpretive resemblance’ as,

In relevance theory, a language utterance is said to “be used descriptively when it is intended to be taken as true of a state of affairs in some possible world,” while an utterance is said to be “used interpretively when it is intended to represent what someone said or thought”. Therefore, translation is an instance of interpretive use of language, and from the relevance theory point of view, a scientific definition of “translation” would be “interpretive use of language across language boundaries” (cf. Zhonggang 2006: 46).

Based on the Relevance Theory assumptions on ‘interpretive resemblance’, the analysis plans to deal with the challenge faced in case of above discussed ‘equivalence’. One can, therefore, say that the translator’s strategy appropriation is determined by the need of Relevance Theory as a useful translating tool especially combining it with intercultural communication, which can be adopted from scholars like Samovar, Porter, and McDaniel when they discuss,

For us, intercultural communication occurs when a member of one culture produces a message for consumption by a member of another culture. More precisely, intercultural communication involves interaction between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct enough to alter the communication event (Samovar/Porter/McDaniel 2010: 12).

Resulting from the above quote, one can assume that translating a literary text from one language into another should consider the two models that can bridge the linguistic and contextual gap present during translation using intercultural communication.

2. Analysis of the Study

The analysis correlates this concept from Ernst Gutt and presumes that a well-translated text captures the essence of that one particular stimulus facilitated by the patterns (cf. Khushu-Lahiri and Chakravarty 2013) for transferring the meaning across to the reader.

1. Patterns of thought: This pattern deals with the standard ways of thinking and addressing where thinking includes factual beliefs and emotional attitudes.
2. Patterns of behaviour: The second pattern described by Allwood is Patterns of behaviour which encompasses common ways of behaving, ways of speaking, and ways of conducting commerce and industry, where the behaviour can be intentional/unintentional, aware/unaware or individual/interactive. In this section, the pattern is applied to common ways of behaving like speaking, to ways of preparing food, where the characters convey their cultural background with the help of language, and style of cooking, intentionally or unintentionally.
3. Patterns of artefacts: This pattern deals with regular ways of manufacturing and using material things, where artefacts range from clothes to dwellings.
4. Imprints in nature: The long-lasting imprints left by a group in the natural surroundings where such imprints include Indian culture, which is full of ideas such as work governing fate, music controlling senses etc.

Few examples are explored to show how the meaning of certain aspects of the story is kept intact with the help of these patterns. The following analysis of translation aided by the use of intercultural patterns assumes that this is a simultaneous process and during translation part of a source text is translated through multiple applications of patterns.

The pattern of thought deals with the common ways of thinking and addressing, where thinking includes factual beliefs and emotional attitudes of interactants in a text as well as the common knowledge created between the writer/translator and reader. In the context of this paper the primary purpose of patterns

of thought is to interest the reader through cues, to get involved emotionally or intellectually with reference to the ambience of the text. The translator also attempts to recapture the same ambience in the target language for authenticity.

1) **Source language:** Hindi

Original text: munshi ji ne baDi sanjidagi se sir hilaaya – maaf kijiye, yeh hum dono ki aapas ki baat hai. isse humare biich hi rahne diijiye (11)

Receptor language: English

Translated text: I'm sorry Begum sahiba, but that's between two of us. (11)

2) **Source language:** Hindi

Original text: aachanak miyaN-bibi meN koi kufiyaa paibistagi dekh mahak bano ne mukaishwale chunnati dupatte ko phwan ka wo jhoka diya ek sath do ruhe jhhoka kha gayi (62)

Receptor language: English

Translated text: Then, noticing the silent looks between husband and wife, Mehak jerked her sequinned dupatta with enough gusto jolt them out of their reverie. (62)

3) **Source language:** Hindi

Original text: jaane kyun vakil sahib otho-hi-otho meN hanse, phir chuhal se kahaa – beTe, jab tak rah sakti hai bachpan se dosti rakhe raho. haN yeh sara tamasha chawanni ke liye hi to. (64)

Receptor language: English

Translated text: Vakil sahab smiled. – Remain a child, Beta! All this drama is for a chavanni, right? (64)

In the examples falling under the patterns of thought, the study finds relations between an employee and the employer's son being that of a confidant. Badru, Vakil's illegitimate son confesses to Munshiji about his mother's quilt, which was not sent by the Vakil. Even though Mehak Bano asks about this, the Munshi refuses to answer her question saying this is between him and Badru. The camaraderie between the two characters is expressed in the receptor language to maintain author's depiction of social truth.

The second and third instances portray the combination of patterns of thought and behaviour which underlines how there is a poignant incident where Vakil and his wife Kutumb visits Mehak Bano's place to ask her to return a *kangan* given to her by Vakil sahib at the time of Badru's birth. On the one hand, the first of this example shows how there is a lack of security for Mehak as a dependent of Vakil when she sees the legal husband and wife interacting without words. This is also a marker of the future uncertainty in Mehak's life. Surprisingly, on the other hand in case of Badru when he enters the scene and acts like a child to make the atmosphere normal for his mother he gets a very positive response from his father, the Vakil in turn showing the reader how his future is full of hope and

care. Furthermore, the brother and sister relation is beautifully depicted with the pattern of thought wherein we find this conversation between Badru and Masuma, his elder sister,

4) **Source language:** Hindi:

Original text: “Badru munshiji ke kandhe par jhul gaye- humari kulfi to ban nahi sakti aapa gori-chtti hai, inhi ki barf jamegi masuma chiR gayi aisi mahin chutki katungi ki...mahak ne ankhon se tarera” (4)

Receptor language: English

Translated text: Badru swung onto Mushiji’s shoulders.

– Me a kulfi? Never! But Aapa is so fair she’ll turn into ice.

– I’ll pinch you so hard that...

Mehak looked sternly at them. (11)

The universal relation of familiarity and friendship between the couple is depicted well through a combination of pattern of thought and behaviour when Vakil sahib visits Mahak’s place and they share dinner together in her meagre kitchen,

5) **Source language:** Hindi

Original text: Vakil sahib ne bundo se gili hui sherwani utarkar khuTi par tang di mahak ne bah garam chaddar pakRa di- jaanam pahle maTkain me se puye nikaliye aaj shira kuch jyada hi dala lagta hai mahak kamre me koyle ki angithi utha laayi rumali roti sek tashtari me dali aur maTkain khol aage sarkaye-lijiye Vakil sahib burki bana mahak ki or baRaai-jaanam, chakhkar dekhiye sabhi pakbano ka maza ek sath mahak ne gasse ka zayeka utay aur muskurakar sir hilaya-maan gaye sahib! (13, 14)

Receptor language: English

Translated text: Vakil sahib took off his wet sherwani and hung it up. Mehak was ready with a warm shawl.

– Jaanam, take the gajrela out. There is too much syrup in it today, he said as she brought in the angithi. And sitting there, she warmed the muslin-soft rumali rotis and offered them gently to him.

Kripanarayan broke a piece of roti, rolled some mutton curry in it and gave it to Mehak.

– Taste it, my love. It tastes like heaven.

Mehak met his eyes across the glow of the angithi.

– Wah sahab! (14)

This is contrasted with the earlier example between Vakil sahib and his wife Kutumb where there is the backdrop of affluence and comfort. By a complicated process taking place inside the mind the translators understand the given impressions, and then bring together all these elements, creating what might be described as “universal relations”, mostly conditioned by the cognitive effects that the translator has been endowed with.

The emphasis is laid on deciphering the relationships between these two couples where the masculinity through the character of Vakil is expressed in different ways and it recognizes the dialectical relationship: where gendered ideologies stressed upon through portrayed settings where the meaning emerges for the reader.

6) **Source language:** Hindi

Original text: rajayiN, dulaiyoN aur nihaliyoN ke dher...rang-birangi rajayiyoN meN paRte Dor maano dilli ke bashindo par aaRii tirschhi khichne lage. (7)

Receptor language: English

Translated text: Outcome piles of warm blankets, thick quilts and duvets... Neat rows of stiches set on quilts blooming and blushing with colours mock Dilli's frantic quest for warmth. (7)

7) **Source language:** Hindi

Original text: chheeT ke joRe par goT lagi unabi oRni meN mahak bano kaangri-si khil rahi thi. (13)

Receptor language: English

Translated text: And there she was, Mehak Bano. Resplendent in a chintz salwar kameez and a dark red dupatta with a golden border thrown over her slim shoulders. (13)

The next instance is Patterns of Behaviour as it perfectly captures Universal Lifestyle, here it grants a great deal of attention to the way Sobti's protagonist as well as the other characters live and how they look to the outer world, which determines her novel's time and worldview. The novel for the reader has a clear setting through the normal device of metaphorical construction, looking at mundane things of life from a new perspective. Like the way Vakil sahib's tryst with his mistress is described in a poetic way,

8) "Vakil sahib ne shahjanpuri se roti-gosht rakhbaya, gajrail ka matkain badhwaya aur jaRe ki bharpur gili sham me apni manzil ki or baR chale." (13)

"From Shahjahanpuri Vakil sahab bought rotis, mutton, and some carrot halwa..." (13)

This based on Gutt's discussion is an important stimulus which the translators of Sobti recognises and mentions the tradition of 'quilts' in Delhi. Universal Lifestyle also includes the way the characters are dressing and this is apparent in the second example where Mehak Bano is shown to be a gorgeous lady in her special type of clothes. The cloth description adds to the character's personality, position in the story etc. For instance, in another interaction between Kutumb and the Vakil,

"Maharaj chaye ki tray mej par rakh gaye to Kutumb pyari ne chaye ka pyala banaya, chini hilayi aur vakil sahib ki or sarka diya Aamne saamne baithe maj par koi shor n ubhra to kripanarayan baRe ruaab se bole kyon khairiyat to hai Iss jaRe me koi dhang ka kapRa pahna hota aapki sari dekh kar to dahliiz par buRapa

khaRa nazar aata hai Kutumb pyari tunak gayi kya hardam gote kinari ke kapRe pahne rahe? Hume ghar-grahsthi ke dus kaam hai aap hai ki wakalat ke alawa bas ek hi kaam sujha karta hai” (12)

“Silence reigned as the cook left the tray on the table. Kutumb poured out a cup and pushed it towards him.

– Is everything all right? Vakil sahab asked condescendingly. Couldn't you find something more suitable to wear in this weather? You look like old age is knocking at your door.

– So you expect me to be decked up all the time? You have only one job other than your flourishing practice. I have a hundred things to do.” (12)

It is quite striking as to how Kutumb the protagonist's wife is described as wearing *wan saree* comparing this with the above example shows both language readers as to how the two women are being perceived. Even though poetic language style remains untouched by the translators, they are still able to recreate the difference of positions between the wife and the other women through the description of clothes.

To sum up, the picture that emerged due to the understanding of these patterns was that these patterns combined with the Communicative Principle of Relevance and the definition of optimal relevance provided a convenient method for understanding the translators meaning for the reader. Thus, this correlation provides strong evidence for the significance of cultural dimensions in case of translation which explicates intercultural communication as represented in translated literary texts.

Pertinently, Sobti is an interesting writer to translate since she is the celebrated *grande dame* of Hindi letters, a writer with individualistic, highly stylised expression which is hence difficult to replicate in another language. Nonetheless, Sobti's literary craftsmanship surges to the foreground in the English rendition by Reema Anand and Meenakshi Swami wherein the narrative captures the fluid intricacies and the well-wrought turns of phrase that distinguish Hindi, whether within the courtly idiom of the *haveli* families or the more colloquial bazaar exchanges of 1920s Delhi.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

Translation, as discussed in this paper, is about the creation of World Literature through the usage of Intercultural Patterns. The investigation attempted at drawing inferences regarding how Reema Anand and Meenakshi Swami strategised to be faithful translators in the way they express Sobti's work in English. Thereby the study attempted establishing that the vital stylistic and semantic initiatives can be faithfully transferred into another language when intercultural patterns are maintained from the source text.

The assessment of Sobti's translation recognised that emphasis has shifted from the linguistic structure to the basic universal characteristics of cultural dimensions; therefore, the encapsulating of the patterns in the translated text now plays an important role in determining 'interpretive resemblance' of the source text into the target text. The analysis of the text facilitated by cultural dimensions, namely Patterns of Thought and Patterns of Behaviour, provided the insight into how the translator manoeuvres the cultural angle with the help of language to capture the essence of the source text. The characteristics present in the original text are compared with the characteristics present in the translated text to confirm adequacy in the transfer. This implies that a good translation must then be explained in terms of universal characteristics whereby emphasis is placed on the fact that when the essence of the universal characteristics is maintained during translation then the reader reacts to the translated message just as the receptor reacts to the original text.

The above is not to say that there are no problems in this explanation of translation arising due to the nature of human communication as means of a socio-cultural tool. It was seen that translation of literary texts just like Sobti's text necessarily entails a process of acculturation to ensure readability and acceptability of the translated text in a different cultural milieu. It can, therefore, be asserted that Sobti's translation is successful by approaching the two ideals needed in literary translation, namely fidelity and authenticity. A rigorous development of the original text based on the concept of 'equivalence' would affect the required impact because in this case, the cultural differences would lack significance. For these reasons, the strategy of 'interpretive resemblance' as propagated by Gutt becomes important here, which helps the translator to create something new beyond the linguistic limitations. To put it simply, any cultural element present within a text can be interpreted in varied ways and according to the study the translator strategises the perspective that maintains the necessary cultural patterns present within a system. The acknowledged behaviour promoted and valued in a text is interpreted to follow and solidify consonance for the reader. This is also substantiated by the analysis of the examples as it reinstates that cultural patterns of shared but constantly recreated meanings is an important angle in understanding the quality of a translation. It brings into focus the fact that there exist universal characteristics reflecting intercultural patterns. In this regard, it can be concluded that the present analysis of translation revealed that narratives have more things in common than they have differences by virtue of being vehicles of human communication.

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