

Historical Survey of Translation Studies in India and the West

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Abstract

The translation tradition in India and the West shows that Translation Studies in both cultures has experienced a great continuum of development. Indian translators and translation theorists have come to the realization that translation is not just a *Teeka* or paraphrase but an uphill task, that “it is probably much easier to rewrite the text in the other language than to translate it” (Woolsey 166). Western translators and translation theorists, following Noam Chomsky’s and M.A.K. Halliday’s theories, realize that translation is not impossible, nor is it a curse on humanity as depicted in the story of Babel; rather, it is just difficult. And since it is difficult, a translator should be given proper credit for his efforts and creativity. In this way, the wide gap of the old time between the TVTs and TS of India and the West has been decreased and TS in both cultures have come closer. This must be a good sign for Translation Studies.

Translation Studies (TS) has emerged as a much sought after discipline in the present time. Teachers, scholars and students from various disciplines have contributed to its growth. Most of the major universities and institutions around the world also have established TS departments/centers to promote research in the field. According to one study, in 1960 there were 49 university-level institutions that offered degrees in translation and/or interpreting; that number increased to 108 in 1980 and to at least 250 in 1994 (Caminade and Pym 283).

As a result of these developments and improved global communication, many national and international associations of translators have been formed. These associations bring their members together to facilitate dialogue about translation.

From antiquity to the present, most translation in India has been a kind of “new writing,” giving some creative liberties to the translator (Das 58). A translation may be considered fine if it preserves the sense of the Source Language (SL) text. Therefore, at times, adaptation, paraphrase and “transcreation” fall into the overall category of translation. From this standard, a translator should preserve linguistic features but primarily, he should go for the soul (content and form/structure) of the SL text. If translation is performed carefully on these parameters, translation will be creative and the translator will become “co-creator.”

Anuvaad (Anuvaada) is the accepted equivalent of the English word, “Translation,” in Hindi. It comes from the Sanskrit word *Anuvaadah* which literally means “Repetition in normal use; Repetition in order to support, exemplify or explain; Explanatory repetition or mentioning of already said talk (message)” (Apte 41-42, my literal rendition). Etymologically, the word *Anuvaad* is a combination of the root word “*Vaad*,” meaning a statement or argument, and the prefix “*Anu*,” meaning “After; following” (Apte 35).

There can be one more theory about the word, *Anuvaad*. In religious and philosophical tradition in India, scholars did intralingual and interlingual *Teekaa* [Hindi word meaning interpretation/explanation] of Sanskrit works in two ways: as a commentary and as

an interpretation or paraphrase. For the latter, they used the term *bhaashyaanuvaad* where *bhaashya* meant ‘linguistic.’ Perhaps it is from this word that scholars dropped the prefix ‘*bhaashya*’—maybe casually in the beginning and willingly later—since interpretation or paraphrase is itself a linguistic activity.

Indian scholar, Sujeet Mukherji, believes that translation in India began from the telling or writing of literary compositions from one language to another. Usually it was from the master language, Sanskrit, to *bhaashaas*—modern languages like Hindi, Asamiya, Bangala, and Gujrati. Unlike the Biblical translation tradition in the West [discussed later in the chapter], SL texts were not primarily religious scriptures like the Vedas or the Upnishads, but “*Kavya* [poetic] works such as the *Ramayana*, the *Purana* works such as the *Srimad-Bhagavat*, and *itihahasa-purana* works such as the *Mahabharata*” (Mukherji 25-26). The best example of this tradition can be seen in Tulasi Das’ *Ramcharitmaanasa* (1575-1577), which is a poetic retelling/adaptation/translation of Valmiki’s *Ramayana* in Hindi from Sanskrit.

Still this telling or writing “can only loosely be regarded as translation, because, while the basic story remained same, some of it was left out and a lot of new writing [was] done to fill it out again” (Mukherji 26). This view is also shared by K. Ayappa Panikar, another Indian scholar, in his article, “The Anxiety of Authenticity: Reflections on Literary Translation” (66-76).

During the Mughal period in India, translation practice shifted from Sanskrit-to-*bhaashaas* towards Sanskrit-and-*bhaashaas*-to-Persian as Persian was “the ruler’s language” (Mukherji 26). Akbar in the 16th century “set up a *maktab khana* or translation bureau in order to make available the classics of Indian thought in Persian” and got translated the *Mahabharata*, the *Yogavasistha*, the *Harivamsa*, the *Srimad-Bhagavat*, the *Singhasan Battisi*, the *Ramayana*, and many works on Indian music into Persian (Behl 92). Badauni translated the *Ramayana* into Persian in four years with much reluctance, but when the translation was

complete, it was so good that Akbar gave him, again against his will, another task of the “complete Persian translation of the *Atharvaveda*” (Behl 93).

After Akbar, his great grandson Dara Shikoh continued this tradition of translating Hindu works into Persian. Dara Shikoh got fifty *Upnishads* (entitled *Sirr-i-Akbar*), the *Bhagvad Gita*, and the *Yogavashishtha Ramayana* translated into Persian with the help of a team of translators. Aditya Behl notes that it is *Sirr-i-Akbar* that “became the basis of Europe’s idealist philosophers’ discovery of the East after Anquetil-Duperron translated it into Latin in 1801” (91).

But, it was with the coming of East India Company in India that translation from Indian languages (especially Sanskrit) to European languages (especially English) began. At first, Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of East India Company in India from 1773 to 1785, had Indian *Dharamashastraas*, which were originally written in Sanskrit and then translated into Persian, translated into English. It was also with Hastings’ encouragement that Charles Wilkins in 1785 translated the *Bhagavad Gita* first time into English; Hastings wrote the Preface to this translation (reprinted in Allen and Trivedi 170-74). Later, in 1789, William Jones translated *Shakuntala* directly from Sanskrit into English.

During the reign of the East India Company, this translation tradition also gave rise to Indology. In 1800, Fort William College in Kolkata (earlier Calcutta) was set up to teach Indian languages and culture to the East India Company writers. “The first round of language to be cultivated included Hindi and Urdu, Bangala and Marathi” (Mukherji 27). Though the purpose of this learning was not academic but business, it must have helped the *bhaashaas-to-English* translation tradition. However, up until the late 18th and the 19th centuries, SL for the translations of Indian literature into English still was mostly Sanskrit, and these translations were usually accomplished by British and American scholars (Mukherji 28).

But by the latter part of the 19th century, many Indians had started translating from Indian languages into English. Tagore's 1913 Nobel Prize for Literature winner translation of his own *Gitanjali* into English from Bengali is one example. In 1910, India's first book on translation theory, *The Art of Translation* by R. Raghunath Rao, also appeared (Sinha 256).

The 1980s was the first time that Sahitya Akademi, an Indian government organization devoted to the development/preservation of languages and literatures in India, felt a need to initiate a systematic dialogue among the various academic and non-academic translators and translation theorists from all parts of India. To accomplish this project, it organized four workshops from 1986 to 1988 on literary translation for Indian translators across India. The proceedings of these workshops were later published in 2007 (Panikar, *Making of Indian Literature*).

As translation theories developed in the West, especially in the last thirty years, they also affected TVT/TS in India. It is during this period that TVT/TS in India and the West came a little closer. Though no significant research on the linguistic level has been accomplished in India, interdisciplinary research focusing on theoretical frameworks and power relations in translation marks its presence. Two major figures that are known internationally as translators and/or translation theorists in this phase are Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Harish Trivedi.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has contributed to TS both as a translator and as a theorist. As a translator, she has translated Jacques Derrida from French, and Mahasweta Devi and some other writers from Bengali into English. Theoretically, she takes three stands on translation, one of a feminist and others of a poststructuralist and a postcolonialist.

Her 1992 essay “The Politics of Translation” is one essay in which her all these three stands appear. In the essay, she explicitly “outlines a poststructuralist conception of language use” and “argues that translators of Third World literatures need this linguistic model” (Venuti, “1990s” 338). In the essay, she also talks about her translation practices (187-88) and considers translation as “the most intimate act of reading” (Spivak 178).

Harish Trivedi’s position on translation, on the other hand, is that of a theorist. He judges translation primarily on the scale of postcolonial theory. For him, translation is a site for postcolonial experiment. His first such experiment is his 1999 book (co-edited with Susan Bassnett), *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, which contains nine essays by theorists and translators from around the world. Kate Sturge notes that in his 2005 study “Translating Culture vs. Cultural Translation,” he moves some more steps ahead in this experiment. Here, he not only accuses Homi Bhabha, another critic of postcolonial theory, “of marginalizing bilingualism and translation as specifically interlingual practices, the precondition for polylingual cultural diversity,” but also warns against the notion of cultural translation (Sturge 69).

While theorists hail the interdisciplinary development of TS, Harish Trivedi, in his 2007 article, sees this particular development as somewhat threatening to TS. He argues that

Given the usurpation that has taken place, it may be time for all good men and true, and of course women, who have ever practiced literary translation, or even read a translation with any awareness of it being translation, to unite and take out a patent on the word “translation”, if it is not already too late to do so (Trivedi 285; Baker and Saldanha xxi).

His warning is legitimate, especially when TS has entered a phase of a kind of “Indeterminism” where TS has no single direction (Pym 1).

¹ Sujeet Mukherji not only agrees with P. Lal in this matter, but he also goes a little further and says that “Indians are better equipped to translate their profane texts as well” (Mukherji 28).

The word “Translation” in English comes either from Old French, or from the Latin *translatio* (noun) meaning “transportation/transference; transfer to another; change of venue” (OED) and has been used interchangeably with the word “Interpretation” for a long time. Alexander F. Chamberlain says that the word “translation” also has some connection with English word—“talk.” Furthermore, he explains:

Our English word *talk* harks back to a translation-word. We borrowed it from the Icelandic *túlka* (Swedish *tolka*, Danish *tolke*), “to interpret, to explain, to plead one’s case.” This Icelandic word, in its substantial form *túlkr* (Swedish *tolk*), “an interpreter,” is of Slavonic origin, —Lithuanian *tulkas*, Lettic *tulks*, “interpreter;” Lithuanian *tulkoti*, Lettic *tulkot*, “to interpret.” To the same stock belong also Russian *tolkovat*, “to interpret, to explain, to talk, to speak of,” and *tolk*, “sense, meaning, doctrine.”

The English *interpret* comes, through the French *interpréter*, from the Latin *interpretari*, the source of which last word is *interpretes*, “an agent, broker, factor, go-between,” perhaps originally “a speaker between.” Besides *translation* and *interpretation* we speak of *rendering*, and we have yet another term, *version*. To *render* is properly “to give back, to restore,” and a *version* is “a change, a turning,” as the Latin original of the word shows. (166)

It is perhaps because of these meanings of this term, “translation,” that early in the 20th century Benedetto Croce, as if paraphrasing the old Italian saying *traduttori traditori* (“Translators are Traitors”), declared that falsification in translation is inevitable (Kelly 216).

Though the first traces of translation appear in the East “in 3000 BC, during the Egyptian Old Kingdom, in the area of the First Cataract, Elephantine” (Newmark, *Approaches to Translation* 3), TVT in the West have been more systematic than in the East (India) (Khubchandani 47). In the West, it began in ancient Rome where it appeared in “the academic discipline of rhetoric” (Venuti, “Foundational” 13).

Since Cicero, Pliny the Younger, and Quintilian were all orators, for rhetorical purposes they favored sense for sense (SS) or free and paraphrastic translations. Cicero, who himself translated “Plato’s *Protagoras* and Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus* and the two most beautiful orations that Aeschines and Demosthenes delivered against each other” (Jerome

23), wrote in *De optimo genere oratorum* (46 BC):

I did not translate them as an interpreter [*nec converti ut interpres*] but as an orator, keeping the same ideas and the forms, but in language which conforms to our usage. And in so doing I did not hold it necessary to render word for word, but I preserved the general style and force of the language. (Cicero 365, Venuti, “Foundational” 13)

But at the same time in Rome, there were also grammarians who favored word for word (WW) renderings. Horace was aware of this rivalry. Still, in his *Ars Poetica*, he advised a good translator (*interpretati*) not to “strive to render word for word like a faithful translator [*interpres*]” (Jerome 23-24).

Virgil, too, belonged to the tradition of SS translation, but he also permitted a translator’s creativity in it. He said that a “translator should be allowed to say what should be said, or what he wants to say than what the source author intends” (d’Ablancourt, “Preface to Lucian” 36).

Following the path set out by these Roman rhetoricians and grammarians, this debate between SS and WW translation continued down to the 4th century, and it was first in St. Jerome that a reaction to this rivalry in writing was found. Though Jerome advocated for SS translation in “Preface to *Chronical* of Eusebius of Caesarea,” “Preface to a life of St. Anthony,” “Preface to the book of Job,” and “Letter to Pammachius,” he also made an exception for WW renderings for “the ‘mysterious order of words’ (ver-borumordom ysterium) in the Bible” (Derrida, “What is” 180).

In the 16th century, two stands evolved—one in Britain and the other in France. In Britain, scholars started to see translation as a tool with which to build the national culture, and thus favored domesticating the foreign text. Works translated by Sir Thomas Wyatt, Henry Howard, Thomas Hoby and Philemon Holland were guided by this instinct. In France, on the other hand, scholars like Nicolas Perrot d’Ablancourt adopted a slightly better position. Nicolas Perrot d’Ablancourt focused on two things in translation; adequacy and a kind of bowdlerizing. In his “Preface to Tacitus,” he said that it was very hard to translate a

writer who committed mistakes, therefore one should add to make meaning clear. In the “Preface to Lucian,” he suggested to change what was obscene and lose, what was not pleasant or was boring.

During the 18th and early 19th centuries, many German commentators presented “a striking alternative to the French and English traditions” (Venuti, “Foundational” 19). These commentators—which include Johann Gottfried Herder, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Friedrich Nietzsche and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe—encouraged foreignness in translation. Friedrich Schleiermacher, in his 1813 lecture to the British Academy of Sciences, said that in translation, one could either make one’s language foreign or make the foreign language familiar. In a final note, he suggested picking up the first choice as it would enrich both the TL and TL readers with new concepts (61-62). Nietzsche, on the other hand, agreed with Schleiermacher’s choice because he believed this to be beneficial in inferring out “the historical sense of any age (67).

A little later in 1861, all these above Western approaches gave rise to an interesting but serious debate (1861-62) in Britain over choosing a domesticating or foreignizing method in translation. This debate was between Matthew Arnold and Francis Newman. Newman championed “the literal mode, the retention of all verbal singularities” in the translations of the works of Homer to preserve his foreignness while Arnold advocated for “the severe elimination of details that distract or detain” (Borges 36)³.

With all these theoretical developments in the West, TVT, now TS, finally entered in the 20th century⁴, a century that Jumpelt calls “the age of translation” (qtd. in Newmark, *Approaches to Translation* 3). In fact, it was the beginning of a systematic dialogue among translators and translation theorists. However, it did not just become systematic out of wish; there were some external forces which worked behind it.

In the 1960s-1970s, TS witnessed a new development as translation theorists and scholars started exploring specifically the problems in and methods/techniques to achieve the nearly exact transfer of SL into TL. This equivalence was studied in two ways: pragmatically and formally (Venuti, “1960s-1970s” 121). Eugene Nida, Peter Newmark, Julian House, J.C. Catford, Jiri Levy, Katharine Reiss, James S. Holmes, Jacques Derrida, George Steiner, Itamar Even-Zohar, and Gideon Toury were the major theorists of the period who talked about translation equivalence. Out of these, Nida, Newmark, House and Catford studied translation equivalence respectively in binaries: dynamic/functional and formal (1964, 1969); communicative and semantic (1977, 1988a, 1988b, 1991); overt and covert (1977a, 1977b, 1997), and level and category shifts (1965). Each of these binaries divided translation in folds and, depending on the type of fold, defined methods and techniques to achieve translation equivalence in each.

Levy, Reiss, Holmes, Even-Zohar and Toury, on the other hand, focused on translation processes. Most times, these processes connected themselves to the process of proper decision making in translation in order to obtain the desired results. Among these decisions, a translator might need to choose a level of meaning—general or specific—in order to translate properly (Levy), or might need to decide text type of the text first and then mode of translation accordingly to accomplish his task (Reiss). The decision might also involve making different choices in translation depending on the “polysystem” of interrelated meanings and forms found in the SL text (Even-Zohar; Toury).

Nevertheless, Jacques Derrida and George Steiner’s position on translation was a bit different from their contemporaries. Derrida, being the pioneer poststructuralist, applied poststructuralist parameters to TS and saw translation as being in a complex position, a dual position— translatable and untranslatable both (“Freud” 90; “Living On” 82). For him, translation took place in “the open-ended conversation between texts, beginning now,

extending indefinitely” (Hayes 454). And therefore, he considered a good translation to be “neither the life nor the death of the [SL] text, only or already its living *on*, its life after life, its life after death” (“Living On” 82). Steiner, on the other hand, believed that translation started with “an act of trust” but at the same time, this “trust can never be final. It is betrayed [...] by the discovery that ‘there is nothing there’ to elicit and translate” (312). However, like Derrida, he also believed that genuine and authentic translation was possible but only if a translator made “the autonomous virtues of the original more precisely visible” (Steiner 318). The 1980s is a major contributing period for TS. It is in this period that many new perspectives to TS are added rapidly. On the one hand, it comes under the influence of postmodern theories like semiotics, discourse analysis, and post-structuralism. On the other hand, other theories like feminism and postcolonial theory also dominate. All of these together give a new shape to TS, unprecedented in its history. Postmodern theories free translation from its dependence on the SL text while feminist and postcolonial theories strengthen and widen its scope as these use it as a medium to explore the voices of oppressed and discriminated persons.

These postmodern translation theories as a whole further span themselves mainly in two directions. One direction studies translation as a site of linguistic transfers. William Frawley (and also Shoshana Blum-Kulka⁶) is one theorist who may represent this direction. Frawley considers translation purely “a unique sign-producing act” and expounds the idea that when a source code is translated into a target code, it is not the source code translated into target code but a new third code which is independent of both matrix and target codes (261). Therefore, for him, no translation is good or bad; it is just “either a moderate innovation or a radical innovation” (ibid).

The second direction of these postmodern translation theories, however, sees translation mainly as a site involving effects of many externalities like political agendas, cultural influences, commissioning agencies and readership. Hans Vermeer, Andre Lefevere

and Antoine Berman may represent this direction in TS. Vermeer believes that a translation is not only a linguistic transfer of SL into TL, but it is also affected by external forces like the type of readership for which translation is being done and the agency which commissions a translation (222).

Lefevere agrees with Vermeer in this case. In one of his articles, he says that translation is not a pure linguistic act; rather it is affected by patronage and the poetics of the time (4-6). Similar is the position of Antoine Berman. He sees “translation as the trial of the foreign” (Berman 284). The phrase ‘trial of the foreign’ clearly resound cultural and political overtones involved in this act. In fact, he implies that since translation uproots both SL and TL before it gets accomplished, many factors in this process should affect it. He also posits that a translator cannot be free of them “merely by becoming aware of them” (ibid 286).

Postcolonial translation theorists like Vicente Rafael and Talat Asad, on the other hand, try to provide a “postcolonial reflection on translation in anthropology, area studies and literary theory and criticism” (Venuti, “1980s” 219). They, like Rafael (1988), either expose translation “to be the agent (or subverter) of empire” (ibid 220) or like Asad, try to find out “asymmetrical tendencies and pressures in the languages of dominated and dominant societies” (Asad 164).

As a result of all the above theoretical developments in the previous decades, TS in the 1990s becomes an autonomous field. It also deviates into two directions: academic and theoretical. Academically, major universities and institutions around the world show genuine interest in and need for the field and start having translation degree and translator training programs in their campuses on either regular basis or through correspondence. The press in these universities and institutions, like the commercial publishing houses, also publish works on TS, which include training manuals, encyclopedias, journals, conference proceedings,

collections of research articles, monographs, primers of theory, and readers to name some (Venuti, “1990s and Beyond” 325). Researchers in these universities and institutions also start exploring the possibilities of the use of machine in translation. They, relying on Noam Chomsky’s concept of Universal grammar, also believe that a universal machine program for translation between languages is possible. Thus, academically, TS becomes “an institution authority” (ibid).

As opposed to the linguistic approach, the culturally oriented approach under the influence of poststructuralism uses already existing norms but for a different outcome. It “suspects universals,” “emphasizes precisely the social and historical differences of translation,” and initiates “an incisive interrogation of cultural and political effects, the role played by translation in the creation and functioning of social movements and institutions” (Venuti, “1990s and Beyond” 328-329). Annie Brisset, Lawrence Venuti and Jacques Derrida are three major theorists who may be named to represent this stream in the period.

The reason that translator’s creative identity is being respected in recent academics brings a different approach to TS too. Perhaps it is because of this that recent research does not worry more about defining good or bad translations but about having better translation technique(s) to transfer maximum meaning from SL text to the translated text. In other words, TS in the present times is more concerned about either discussing those approaches, techniques and methods (traditional or innovative; old or new) through which a translator—experienced or amateur; literary or non-literary—can best perform his task and loose minimal meaning, or locating those problems or linguistic variances between SL and TL which can possibly cause loss of meaning. In turn, it is also trying to find a possible solution for them.

For example, Chantal Wright in his 2010 article takes the problem of Exophony in translation which can cause loss of meaning. He also provides possible solutions for the problem. Similarly, another theorist, Krisztina Karoly, in the same issue of the journal that publishes Wright's above quoted article takes the issue of repetition in translation. He discusses how repetition distorts stylistic effects in translation and how a careful translator can best handle the situation.

Apart from these theoretical developments in TS about human translation, another field, of TS, MT, which sprouted only in the 1990s, has also developed a lot and is still developing. In fact, today, theoretical developments in the field have made translation, especially day-to-day and conversational translation, so easy that one can translate, though not always accurately, most of the languages—even entire websites and documents—with just one click through machine programs. One such program changing the lives of people around the world is Google Translate. MT has also given rise to the 'crowd-sourcing' in translation.

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