Translation as Theory: A Translator's Perspective

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Abstract

This paper begins with a brief discussion of the development of Translation Theory, its pioneers and major contributors. Majorly the paper has re-explored certain theoretical concepts proposed by Marisa Press and Andrew Chesterman with reference to the translation of Shanta Kumar's *Lajjo*. The researcher in his role as a translator of this novel had tried to bring home the point that by explaining and describing the problems of translation and their solution, the translator is generating new data and hence contributing to the field of translation study. In addition, the researcher also tried to demonstrate that the documentation of the influence of academic theories on translation in this particular case had also resulted in the development of implicit theories of translation.

Keywords: Implicit Theory, Praxis, Dilemmas, Solutions, Strategies, Creativity.

Theories of Translation

Romans led by Cicero are often considered the founders of the Western translation theory. In this period, the main debate was between 'word-for-word' translation and 'sense-for-sense' translation; the dispute that was going to have a long-lasting effect on translation studies in the later ages. According to Hugo Friedrich, Romans viewed translation as a "transformation in order to mould the foreign into the linguistic structures of one's own culture" (Kundu 4). Cicero divided the practice of translation into two extremes: One being "Man of Interpreter" (Literal) and another "Man of Orator" (Free). Further, he makes clear distinctions between 'word-for-word' and 'sense-for-sense' translation (Kundu 4-5).

In the 16th, century the British scholars Henry Howard, Thomas Hoby and Philemon Holland began to see translation as a tool to domesticate foreign text. In addition, other scholars like Nicolas Perrot d'Ablancourt suggested replacing the obscene and boring in the translated text (11). The three most influential translators of the seventeenth century have been Sir John Denham

(1615-69), Abraham Cowley (1618-67), and John Dryden (1631-1744). Denham is known for, "Idiomatic translation and advocated the principle of compensation by which addition was allowed". Cowley was in favour of free translation and opposed "word for word" translation. Dryden, the most important of these three, classified translation into three categories; Paraphrase, Metaphrase and Imitation. He denounced Metaphrase, terming it as "Dancing on the ropes with tattered legs" (Hopkin 57). He viewed Paraphrasing as an ideal translation and termed it as a "golden mean" (Maimom 72). However, he, later on, asserted that the choice again stems from the individual translator.

The linguistic theories of translation deal with the language during the process of translation. Language and translation are thus, closely related as translation deals with multiple languages and hence, linguistic theories have an important role in translation studies. Roman Jakobson, (1896-1982) a Russian linguist, in his seminal essay, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," states "that meaning lies with the signifier and not in the signified." Jakobson distinguished three different types of translation phenomena: Intralingual (between the same language), Inter-lingual (between two different languages), and Inter-semiotic (from verbal to non-verbal sign system). The Jakobsonian concept that meaning lies in the signifier rather than the signified makes the language an important variable in translation. Eugene Nida developed the theory of dynamic equivalence. He gave the concept of "formal" and "dynamic Equivalence" in translations. While "formal equivalence" focuses on the constancy of the lexical and grammatical details of the source language, dynamic equivalence is more natural and does not aim at attaining literal precision. In other words, formal equivalence is based on fidelity to the source text while dynamic equivalence is for taking liberties with it and giving the licence to creation.

In practice, linguistic theories of translation focus on searching for exact equivalents and the absence of exact equivalents results in untranslatability. This stress on equivalences mostly results in impediments to translation, and unless the cultural environment in which the text is produced is taken into consideration, no justice can be done in translation studies. This necessity results in cultural theories of translations. According to cultural theory, translation is an act of cultural transformation and not just an operation on languages.

Hence, the purpose of translation is of utmost importance. Eugene Nida has elaborated upon this issue in detail. He notes, "…words only have meaning in terms of the corresponding culture. But while a language can usually be acquired within a period of ten years, it takes a lifetime to understand and become an integral part of a culture" (13).

Translation Studies in the 1940s-50s are known for two diverse opinions of translation scholars because translation can bridge cultural and linguistic differences in translation. In the sixties, translation theorists began studying the methods to undertake the exact transfer in translation. Scholars like, Levy, Reiss, Holmes, Even-Zohar and Toury, studied the translation as a decision-making process (15). Even Zohar developed the "polysystem theory" and assigned a primary role to the translation. He also believed that external factors play a vital role in the selection of a text for translation. Gideon Toury prosed target-oriented theories of translation and proposed that reason for the choice of a text for a translation is largely non-literary and depends on the personal or ideological preference of the translator (NPTEL "Lecture 11"). As Jacques Derrida's, theory of deconstruction did not acknowledge the immutability of meaning, hence the very process of carrying over the meaning was rendered empty. As this theory rejected the "Binary Oppositions", hence, "Derrida's perspective blurred the boundaries between the original and the translation" (NPTEL "Module 4").

It was James S. Holmes (1924-1986), who coined the term "Translation Studies" in his key paper in 1972. He defines translation studies as "the complex of problems clustered around the phenomenon of translating and translations" (12). He classified the field of Translation Studies into two main parts: Applied and Pure. These two parts have further been divided into different subparts. Susan Bassnett provided much valuable insight into the field. In her book *Translation Studies*, Bassnett "explores translation as a semiotic and a cultural act which adheres itself strictly to the linguistic process" (18). She also explores the links between "Translation Studies" and the, "the discipline of comparative literature, postcolonial studies and globalization" (Adhikari 5).

In the 1980s, the area of TS was influenced by the postmodern, feminist and postcolonial theories. One direction of this postmodern theory studies translation as a place of transportation of linguistic signs. One of the followers

of this direction, William Frawley, held that in translation, source code is not translated into the target code, but into an independent "new third code". Another direction of the postmodern theories views the translation from external consideration of politics, culture, market, sales and audiences. Scholars like Vermeer too believed that a translation is not only a process of linguistic transfer, but also depends upon other factors like audiences and the agency that commissions a translational work (Gautam 17).

The Concept of Theories

There are several ways in which the concept of theories can be explained. Kenneth Pike, a linguist suggested three main ways of understanding any phenomena: In isolation, in waves (where phenomena merge with another phenomenon.) and as a field in its context. In addition, a phenomenon can also be explained concerning its use (Pike 4). Theories are live works and keep on evolving and better theories keep on replacing the bad ones. They are like "conceptual structures" that are developing constantly. In a wider sense, "theory is a helpful point of view." According to Chesterman: "The etymology of the word "theory" goes back to the Greek èåùñßá 'theoria', meaning 'a way of looking at something' to contemplate it and understand it better" (3). So, theories can be thought of as ways of reaching a goal or understanding a concept.

Translation as Tactic Theory with Reference to Translation of Shanta Kumar's *Lajjo*

Every translator had a particular belief and opinion about the art of translation, based on their translational experience. In cognitive psychology, these and other such beliefs are classified as "implicit theories, or subjective theories" (Presas 519). This explication of a translation phenomenon is termed by Chesterman as a "tactic theory." Expounding this theory in detail, he writes:

> A second channel of potential influence from theory to practice centres on the notion of what we could call tacit or implicit theory (compare the concept of tacit knowledge, i.e. knowledge that is difficult to put explicitly into words). Whether we are translators or not, we are all exposed to translations, everyone has some notion of what a translation is. In this sense, everyone has a view of

translation—i.e. some kind of implicit theory. (85)

There are five main notions that Chesterman describes as constituting theory. These five notions according to him are myths, metaphors, models, hypotheses and structured research programmes. Based on these notions, Chesterman makes an interesting observation, "that a translation itself can be seen as a theory of how the source text can be translated, in all the five senses outlined above" (16). He reasons that a translation is a theory, as it is modelled on the source text. Metaphorically too, the translation is like an "isomorph" of the source text. Translation makes a hypothesis about the possible interpretation of the source text and that the very act of translation is "structured scientific research" as the translator has to solve a "clearly defined problem" (16). The praxis of translation offers a kind of tactic theory which though "difficult to put explicitly into words", nevertheless, seeks to "fill the gaps" which exist in the translation studies continuum (85). Literary translation contributes to the field of translation studies in three ways; first by answering and expounding such questions as to why a particular text and author was chosen for translation, second by explaining the strategies and techniques adopted to negotiate the challenges of translation and third by evaluating the translated text. The theories which are added consequentially to the existing patterns in the translation process have all the criteria of scientific theories. In addition to adding to already existing knowledge about translation, these mini-theories supplement the understanding of the translation phenomena. Such new knowledge can then be converted into expert knowledge through structuring and restructuring. So, by explaining and describing the creative and strategic process by which a particular text is translated, the translator acts as a theoretician of the translation. Other than the "structured research program" the translator contributes towards the theory of the translation by "providing new data" and by showing another path through which the translation can be approached (15). Moreover, by continuous practice, a translator may reflect and build upon their own "conceptual knowledge" about translation (Presas 520). Hence, the practice of translation is a way to construct new theories of translation.

The author of this research paper translated Shanta Kumar's Hindi novel *Lajjo* into English as a part of his doctoral thesis. In the course of his journey as a translator, he encountered many problems of translation. The researcher/

translator also built certain strategies for successfully negotiating these problems. In addition, the translator was also influenced by the various theories of translation. These problems, their resolutions and also the theoretical influences were recorded by the translator in his doctoral thesis. Moreover, this translation explains the entire process that led to the final translation. Hence the extant translation acted as a "theory" of translation. One of his papers, titled "To be or not to be? Dilemmas and their Resolution in Literary Translation of Shanta Kumar's *Lajjo*," listed various social, linguistic and cultural reasons that led to difficulties in the translation drawing repeated references from the Mona Baker's book, *In Other Words: A Coursework on Translation*. The various strategies of translation used by the translator like; as replacement, omissions, additions and synthesis were recorded in this paper. For instant, the translator recorded the nature of difficulty in the interpretation of a particular portion of the source text and also his strategy to solve this problem in these words:

> For example, deciphering the meaning of this sentence was problematic."कांटा दरूट टमटमाते दीये की तरफ देखती रही" (Kumar 55). In this sentence, it is not clear, whether the lamp is outside or inside the house. On the first impulse, the translator thought of seeking the help of the author in comprehending this sentence, but finally, this idea was dropped, and the ambiguity in the translation was retained. So, the sentence was translated as: "Kanta stared at the fluttering *Diya*, placed at a distance." (5)

The translator also recorded the difficulty faced by the translator in translating the words at the level of their "hyponyms" in these words: "If the word "mutter" is to be translated into Hindi, then it will only have to be translated with its exact hyponym, "बड़बडाना" and the word cannot, in any case, be translated as, "फुसफुसाना" (6). Similarly, the translator explained why certain words like "चारपाई" here were translated in a particular manner. A strategy to translate certain words having, ". . . no 'orthographic' correspondence between the 'elements of meaning' and the words in the two distinct languages was also explained" (7). Similarly, the translator expounded the difficulties faced in translating reduplicated and onomatopoeic expressions due to separate; "selectional and collocations restriction", cohesive devices and referents in the two languages (Baker 15). The translator added new data to the field of

translation studies, by giving his take on the infamous form-content dilemma, often faced by the literary translator. The translator shared his opinion about this dilemma in the initial stages of the translation and how and why this opinion changed gradually during the process of translation.

The translator contributed to the "implicit theory" of translation by recording his trans-creational experiences in the paper titled "Trans-creation in Literary Translation of Shanta Kumar's *Lajjo*". In the said paper, the translator tried to explain why creativity plays an important role in the solution of problems of translation. The translator also explicated, how creativity can improve upon the flaws of the original, resulting in an improved and rejuvenated version of the original in another language. Here also, the translator added "new data" by listing some instances when he completely abandoned the theory of equivalences and retorted to arbitrary creativeness to account for the social-cultural context. An instant from the said paper is reproduced here to make this point clearer.

> For example, it is perfectly OK for a Hindi-speaking person in India, to drink tea, but English sensibilities will get disturbed, if they had to drink tea. Instead, the English people usually sip tea. As far as drinks are concerned, anyone associated with English culture knows what drinks, mean for the English people. So, in the translation of this sentence, "भाभीजी, आपने तो चाय पिलाने को कहा था, पर आप तो चाय से नहलाने लग पड़ी" (30) the verb "पिलाना" was replaced by English verb, "have" and the sentence was translated as; "Bhabhiji you asked me to have tea, but you have started bathing us with tea." (Sharma "Transcreation" 77)

It was also explained why certain lexical items were retained in the translation and added to the gloss. The translator also documented some interesting moments in the extant translation, when he was able to achieve the exact degree of fidelity to the original. He writes giving one such instance:

> This particular phenomenon was witnessed, while translating series of these sentences: "आप घबराओ मत। यहीं बैठो। सरकारी ईमारत मे एक कमरा खाली हे,रात आप वहाँ पर सो जाओ। आपका सब प्रकार का प्रबंध हो जायेगा।" (Kumar 47). To the translator's surprise, these sentences

> were easily translated as: "Do not you worry. Be seated here. A room is vacant in the government building. You sleep there at night. Everything will be arranged for you" (Sharma 66). Though the translator has to use his creative skills and replace certain source lexical items, with equivalent target lexical items, it was relatively easy to translate these sentences. (81)

The translator also tried to explain the phenomena of restructuring of sentences, which led to the breaking of the sentences, the addition of sentences and also the replacement of punctuation marks in the translation by listing some examples. He explains this process as:

> The entire effort of breaking the structure of the original sentence and then realigning them according to the grammatical conventions of the target language can be compared to the operation carried out by an expert cardiac surgeon, who dexterously replaces the original heart with its, artificial substitute after ripping open the patient's chest. (82)

Theories are hypotheses to be tested for the veracity of their claim. Such examination of theories results in "error elimination", which generates new problems, requiring the need for new theories to solve them (Chesterman "Translation"). So, this never-ending cyclic process of testing theories and the generation of new problems keeps on occurring, resulting in the unattainability of final knowledge. The translator too explains the different processes through which the first draft leads to the final translation. After every edition/ revision, a new theory of translation is generated. For example, let us examine how this sentence from the original was translated in the first draft and then how it was translated in the second and final draft. Original: "वह बदमाश तो किसी को भी नहीं छोड़ता।" (Kumar 46). First draft: "That scoundrel does not leave anybody." Final translation: "This scoundrel does not spare anyone." So, it can be seen that the translation produced in the first draft may not make much sense to the target text audience and may confuse and baffle them. However, the final translation had shed its source language colour and come closer to the target language conventions.

The theories can influence the translators in two ways: one at the linguistic

level and the other at an ideological level. Linguistically, a translator may be influenced by such discussion as "word for word" translation or "sense for sense" translation. S/he can also be influenced by the "theory of equivalences". At the ideological level, translation theories can have a huge impact on a translator. Such emotional issues as "the concept of erasures" or the discussion on "Heterographic" or "Homographic" translation can drastically alter the translation practice. The novel *Lajjo* is generally considered a Hindi novel and even the author believes that he is serving the interest of the Hindi language through his writing.

Moreover, much research on his works has been carried out in the Hindi department of various Universities. Hence initially, the translator too believed that he was translating the novel from Hindi into English. However, after reading a research paper by Manoj Chayya, the entire perspective of the researcher towards the novel changed. While evaluating author Jayant Khatri's works, Chayya observed that Khatri is a native of Kachh, but he writes in Gujarati and hence he is translating the *Kacchi* culture in Gujarati. So, to translate Khatri is like the second translation (198). Applying the same assertion to Shanta Kumar's works, the researcher could easily surmise that Kumar and Khatri are located in a similar linguistic position as far as their writings are concerned. Shanta Kumar is a native of Kangra, but he writes in Hindi and hence he is translating an absent Kangri text into Hindi. Hence, the researcher discovered that *Lajjo* is not an ordinary Hindi text, but a Kangri text that was translated into Hindi. This stance of the researcher was reiterated by the presence of a sizable number of Kangri lexical items (relating to the culture of the region) in the novel. In addition, some dialogues in the novel were written in the Kangri dialect. Hence, translating *Lajjo* into English was the second translation of *Lajjo*.

In the extant literary scene in India, English is usually regarded as a neo-imperialistic, hegemonic, linguistic demon, out there to swindle the regional literature of India. However, while translating the novel, the researcher discovered that many writers from the region wrote in Hindi and not in English. So, it was concluded that the Hindi had appropriated the regional dialects in far perilous ways, then realized, especially in so-called Hindi-dominated regions of North-Western hill states. The scrutiny of the novel made it amply clear that

by encoding certain *Kangri* lexical items in the text and also by putting *Kangri* voice in some of the character's mouths, the writer had unconsciously tried to resist the domination of Hindi in his work and it was only to expand the cultural base of *Kangra* that the writer had made a bitter compromise to write in Hindi. The translation of *Lajjo* was also deeply influenced by St-Pierre Paul's essay, "A Fine Balancing Act: Translation in (Post) Colonial Settings". In this article, the researcher focused on three main issues of translation in a postcolonial context. The linguistic violence exhibited by the act of the translation, second on the replacement of cultural artefacts of a language by "abstract identities" of the target language and third on the communication gap created between neo public school educated English speaking minorities and government school-educated majority. This paper influenced the translator in two ways. First, he analysed all three issues in his paper titled "Translation of *Lajjo* as an Antidote to the Noxious Excesses of Postcolonial Writings"; Exploring the linguistic hierarchies in *Kangra*, it was found that there is a sense of shame in conversing in *Kangri* in any formal situations in *Kangra* and that "The authorities draw a strange linguistic power by conversing in hegemonic languages. This might have been one of the possible reasons, why some of the Pahari writers chose to write in Hindi" (Sharma 181). The scholarly opinion expressed by Pierre led the translators to reduce the linguistic violence in the extant translation and also prompted him to conserve the cultural artefacts of the original. Hence like the author, the translator consciously decided to retain the *Kangra* dialect and the cultural terms in the translation. The researcher chose to translate *Lajjo* so that the cultural base of the Kangra gets expanded in other linguistic regions of the country and the world. In addition, the translator made a conscious decision to retain the regional flavour in the translation.

Scholars are constantly trying to decipher the other areas of knowledge that translation studies constitute. By and large, the field of translation studies has moved much ahead of the initial debate on 'word for word' or the 'sense for sense' translation. In fact, the discipline of "Translation Studies" is anything, but authoritarian and every translator has his/ her opinion about it. The discussion about the distinction between theory and praxis and also the limited role of theories of translation in actual practice makes it clear that there is a gap between theory and praxis. Hence the role of theory in practice is naturally

questioned. As the translator faces open-ended problems during translation, the academic-based theories fail to provide the predetermined solutions to these problems. The process of translation as a phenomenon can be explained in diverse manners and each of these explanations has its reasoning, logic and function. As a field, translation is studied in relation to the context and also in relation to the variables like the author and translator. As an important variable, the translator describes the process of translation as it happens during the act and hence could contribute immensely to the academic discourse in the field of translation.

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