

Bearing Across: Cultural Passages of Multilingualism and Translation

Dr.S.Siraj Ahmed, Associate Professor, Dept of PG Studies in English, Sahyadri Arts College, Shivamogga, Karnataka -577203

Email: sirajahmeds@gmail.com

Translation and Multilingualism

There have been many scholarly expositions to analyze the inextricable link between translation and multilingualism. It is possible to identify a wide ranging array of negotiations between translation and multilingualism through texts, institutions, cultures and societies which are interconnected with each other in many ways.

Particularly, the phenomenal multilingual turn has posed many challenges to translation practice initiating an elaborate debate about the tremulous relationship between context and co-text. The task of translator has become more demanding due to the interface between the context and the co-text. **The rise of multilingualism has forced to redefine the unitary, fixed notions of native speaker and mother tongue.** Multilingualism has such far reaching consequences that it necessitates the redefinition of the notion of nation. We live in a multination state where the traditional notions of a given territory or a homeland sharing a distinct language and culture are dislocated due to the rise of multilingual turn. Given this condition, through translation practice cultural identities are translocated and the centralization of languages is challenged.

However, translation and multilingualism have not been studied in relationship to each other. In the last decade the connections between multilingualism and translation have gained scholarly attention. The study of the complex interface between translation and multilingualism help us to redefine long held assumptions about English as “the” link language in multilingual societies, the phenomenon of world Englishes, literary canons of world literature and others.

Some recent scholars have questioned the term bi/multilingualism, and instead suggested *heteroglossia*. For example, Blommaert (2012) argues that the terms such as ‘multi-

lingual', 'multi-cultural', or 'pluri-', 'inter-', 'cross-', and 'trans'- **all suggest an a priori existence of separable units (language, culture, identity), and** they suggest that the encounter of such separable units produces new units: 'multilingual'/ 'mixed'/ 'hybrid' languages and identities. (Blommaert 2012, p. 2). Creese Blackledge and Takhi (2014) suggest that Bakhtin's term *heteroglossia* is more appropriate term for multilingualism than others. The term multilingualism envisions languages **in terms of fixed boundaries, while heteroglossia refer to languages as "..... the heterogeneity of signs and forms in meaning making"** (p. 193)

Translation practice can be defined as a condition to move away from **centralization of languages to mediation and neutralization of languages. Translation initiates the process of dissemination of knowledge between the source language and the target language. This eventually dismantles the division between languages making the cultural diffusion possible. Similarly,** in a multilingual society no language can claim a privileged position over the other. It is argued that in many Asian and African multicultural societies English can play a dubious role being a lingua franca-language of global communication or also as a lingua franca-kenia-global language of mis-communication or discommunication.

Christina Higgins in her **English as a Local Language: Post-colonial Identities and Multilingual Practices(2009)** argues that the notion of English as a distinct code, as a global language is destabilized due to the implications of the hybridity and linguistic bricolage in which English often participates. English is considered as one of the urban vernaculars or ways of using language and as a form of code switching between languages (Makoni *et al.*, 2007)

For Higgins, the Bakhtinian concept of *multivocality* offers a more useful way of understanding English use in diverse contexts. Multivocality refers both to the different 'voices' present in a single utterance -where multiple meanings are conveyed simultaneously. Multivocality establishes *multiplicity* as a starting point for the analysis of language, treating contexts of multilingualism as open-ended and creative spaces of language intersection.

Bakhtinian concept of *multivocality* offers a more comprehensive framework for interpreting the hybrid and transcultural language used in such societies. The concept of multivocality refers to the dual nature of English as an imperialistic language and English as a language that has been re-appropriated in local contexts.

For Bakhtin (1981), language itself is a dialogue of multiple voices and speaking positions that interacts with centralizing (centripetal) and decentralizing (centrifugal) forces. **Because, heteroglossia steadily challenges the unification and standardization of language by establishing new meanings via innovative linguistic intersections. It is also a very useful concept for theorizing English in multilingual contexts as a centripetal force- English being an imperialist language and as centrifugal force- English as a language of re-appropriation.**

English and Multilingualism

Nevertheless, English is considered a transcultural resource which facilitates mobility and fosters a wide inter-lingual communication in multilingual societies. It is to be noted that English is one of the languages central to multilingual translation. The pervasiveness of English has resulted in the paradigm of World Englishes/multiple Englishes in developing countries and the rise of world literature creating complex problems in the field of language and literature. The centrality of English in the global scenario has resulted in creating serious doubts about its viability and application. As Pennycook succinctly puts it “while on the one hand, we may want to acknowledge the usefulness of English as a language of global communication, we ... also need to acknowledge it as the language of global miscommunication, or perhaps, ‘dis-communication’”.

Rita Kothari and Judy Wakabayashi remark that in the multilingual setup of India, English is not only considered as the privileged medium of global discourse but one among the many languages of multicultural exchange. In a multicultural society of India, English operates both as a centripetal language- as an imperialist language and other as a centrifugal force as a

language of re-appropriation and cultural diffusion. This has greater impact on the literary cultures of India. In a multilingual society like India translation is not just an act of replacement of one language with the other. It is not a passive activity of word transfer but an active process which is responsible for the origin of new literary movements in bhasha languages. Translations of Romantic literature, modernist literature and black literature have given rise to novel literary movements Navodaya, Navya and Protest literatures in bhasha languages.

Indian writing of the present/today can be argued as an essentially a multilingual canon. Unlike European literary contexts it is not premised on monolingualism. The entire body of Indian literature is based on interconnection and cross-fertilization resulted by translational and multilingual practices.

As Kothari and Wakabayashi note, the exchanges between major and minor streams in Indian literature have taken place largely through translation (2009: 9). Translation in India, to a large extent, privileges English as a language of translation, at the expense of bhashas. On the other hand, translation is also a mode to 'vary the major language', in Lawrence Venuti's formulation (1998: 137).

Even the body of Comparative literature, which brings multiple languages together, is premised on the practice of multilingual translation. Comparative literature makes a provision to evaluate literary traditions beyond the known paradigms of nation, culture and language and the circuits of reception. Translation is at the root of the theorization of comparative literature and cross cultural understanding.

Further it is assumed that world literature is enabled by translation. However the very idea of world literature is considered to be an Orientalist conception (Mufti: 2006). English is the primary/privileged mode of translation in the canon of world literature and precisely it is the reason for the unequal reception and hierarchical assumptions embedded in it.

Through the act of translation, the canon of contemporary Indian literature can be redefined into Indian literature(s) in a multilingual context. Translation from bhashas into English and translation within bhashas creates a new modes of theorization. This would also result in reconceptualizing of world literature above and beyond 'Anglophone writing'.

Another major implication of translation is that it would enable us to imagine and theorize Indian literature from within India itself, rather than as an object of study on a western postcolonial syllabus. Particularly, we can consider the phenomenal rise and reception of the autobiography as an illustration of this argument. The development of a distinct genre, the 'subaltern autobiography', as a product of translation practice in India. The genre of autobiography differs distinctly from the Western context and the canon of world literature.

The publication of dalit/subaltern autobiographies have suddenly catapulted the translator as a dominant figure. Omprakash Valmiki's autobiography *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* has also been translated and provided with a critical introduction by a noted scholar, Arun Prabha Mukherjee. The inclusion of such texts into the syllabus of postcolonial studies in western academia and the scholarly attention to such texts have created a global market for the English translations. More importantly translation assumes a political function in fostering alternative canons to the dominant Anglophone literary canon, and can help the development of a politicized identity across languages.

It is argued by K Satyanarayana and Susi Tharu that the genre of Dalit Literature is a recent meaningful addition to the world literature. If Dalit Literature has got global reception it is due to multicultural/multilingual pursuit of translation. The remarkable achievement of translation practice is that Dalit autobiographies have simultaneously reconfigured the canons of world literature and Indian literature.

The translations of Dalit autobiographies are accused of homogenizing the Dalit life and catering to the voyeuristic curiosity about the caste and gender atrocities. However, the significant change in the perception about caste/gender and the similarities drawn between Balck literature, slave and aboriginal narratives cannot be rejected completely. Dalit literature has

moved away from its regional and localized trappings and has become the narrative of human rights violations due to the translation practice.

English plays a dual role in the translation practice as it simultaneously part takes in ‘horizontal’ translation, namely that which occurs between the bhashas, and ‘vertical’ translation, that which occurs from the bhashas into English. English is undoubtedly the language of the hegemonic elite but it has become a principal bearer of the scourge and a means for the dissemination of Dalit identity.

The sustained flow of translations from Hindi to Tamil, from Kannada to Tamil, from Marathi to Tamil have strengthened the knowledge about each other’s struggles, and created solidarity across languages and regions. Such a tendency has fostered a multilingual and cross-cultural political identity for Dalits.

References

1. Blommaert, J. *Discourse: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.2012
2. Creese, Angela, Blackledge, Adrain, Takhi, Jaspreet Kaur ‘The ideal Native Speaker: Negotiating Authenticity and Legitimacy’ *The Modern Language Journal* (2014) Vol. 98 No.4 pp 937-951
3. Higgins, Christina. *English as a Local Language: Post-colonial Identities and Multilingual Practices*. Bristol: Multi Lingual Matters, 2009.
4. Makoni and A. Pennycook (eds) *Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2007.
5. I A. Pennycook, “Beyond Homogeny and Heterogeny. English as a Global and Worldly Language”, in C. Mair (ed.), *The Politics of English as a World Language: New Horizons in Postcolonial Cultural Studies*, Amsterdam, NewYork, Rodopi, 2003.
6. Kothari, R. and Wakabayashi, J. (eds) *Decentering Translation Studies: India and Beyond*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2009.
7. Venuti, Lawrence ‘Introduction, Special Issue on Translation and Minority’, *The Translator* (1998) vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 135–144

8. Omprakash Valmiki. *Joothan: A Dalit's Life*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003

IJSER