NECESSARY BUT IMPOSSIBLE TASK OF TRANSLATION: A PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The post structuralist perspective on translation is summarized by Jaques Derrida in his reply to Patrick Mahony at the round table on Translation as 'necessary but impossible task of translation'[1]. Relevance of this position gains its strength in its relation to other relevant positions on the theory and practice of translation. Going through the observations of post structuralist thinkers and other translation theorists, like: Roman Jacobson, Nida, Gideon Toury, one can conclude that 'Translatability' ('Uebersetzbarkeit'Walter Benjamin) of a literary work does not depend upon the translator but the work itself finds its translator from time to time as part of its 'afterlife'. For Walter Benjamin literariness of a work resides neither in the 'form' nor in the 'content' but in its universality that is to say, the amount of eternal truths, does a work bear in it. The post structuralist may question the concept of eternal Truth and may prove it as a convention created through violent hierarchies, but even in that case the violent hierarchy of truth and beauty (John Keats) in a work leads to its literariness and translatability. Therefore to translate means, to maintain the 'truth beauty' equation of literary work in another culture.

I. Translation and its representation

Generally the term translation is used to denote the process of converting a text from a language to another one; the conversion of a text from a source language to a target language. In a wider understanding of the term 'translation' includes conversion of technical and scientific texts into common language so that a non-expert of the subject may also understand what is meant by the source text. Dealing with psychoanalysis, A. Benjamin (1987) writes that "the unconscious is

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[1] Derrida Jaques: The ear of the other, Otobiography, Tranference and Translation, McDonald V. Christie (ed), Schoken books, New york. p. 98

translated into consciousness in Psychoanalysis"[2]. The speaking is also understood as a translation of 'thought'[3]. The term translation is also used for the conversion of a text from a historical language use to another historical language in the same language, e.g., conversion of the texts from old English to contemporary English etc.

History of translational practices dates back to 3000 B.C where the Babylonian written tablets of religious rites is converted to Sumerian and Acadian languages. Greco- Roman antiquity provides necessary inputs into the practice of translation. The Odyssey is translated to Latin by Livius Andronicus in 3rd Century B.C. Cicero (106-43 B.C) was most known translator of the classical world. St. Jerome, 'Vulgate' Bible translation is another mile stone in the history of translation. Martin Luther's (1530) 'Sendbrief vom Dolmetschen' explains the necessity of free and adapted translation (verdeutschen) so that common man can understand the Bible. In 18th century Alexander Tyler (1791) explains "that the translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work, that the style and manner of writing should be of the same character with that of the original, and that the translation should have all the ease of original composition"[4].

In Encyclopaedia Britannica the "Translation is the act or rendering what is expressed in one language or set of symbols by means of another language or set of symbols".[5] A.G Oettinger (1960) explains "translating may be defined as the process of transforming signs or representations into other signs or representations. If the originals have some significance, we generally require that their images also have the same significance or more realistically, as nearly the same significance as we can get. Keeping significant variant is the central problem in translating between natural languages, interlingual translation can be defined as the replacement of elements of one language, *the domain of translation*, by equivalent elements of another language, *the range*".[6] Catford (1965) defines translation as "replacement of the textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual materials in another language (TL)"[7]. For Nida (1976), translation is a process in which a person knows both the source language and the receptor language; decodes the message of the source language and encodes it into an appropriate form of receptor language.

Translation is produced across the national barriers and languages. The data given in the statistical year book, edited by UNESCO (1993)[8], indicates the   country wise details of the translational production.

Germany	11173	Great Britain	1560
USSR	7904	Czechoslovakia	1389
Spain	7337	Finland	1099
Netherlands	3974	Switzerland	1074

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[2] Koller Werner: Einfuehrung in die Uebresetzungswissenschaft, Quelle und Meyer Verlag GmbH& Co, Wiebelsheim, 7th Edition, 2004. p. 80.

[3] Koller Werner: Einfuehrung in die Uebresetzungswissenschaft, Quelle und Meyer Verlag GmbH& Co, Wiebelsheim, 7th Edition, 2004. p. 80

[4] Stolze Radegunndis, Uebersetzungstheorien: Eine Einfuehrung, Gunther Narr Verlag, Tuebingen, 2008. p. 21.

[5] Stolze Radegunndis, Uebersetzungstheorien: Eine Einfuehrung, Gunther Narr Verlag, Tuebingen, 2008. p.13

[6] Koller Werner: Einfuehrung in die Uebresetzungswissenschaft, Quelle und Meyer Verlag GmbH& Co, Wiebelsheim, 7th Edition, 2004. p.90

[7] K. Roy Mohit, ed. Studies in Translation, Atlantic publishers and distributors Pvt Ltd, Delhi, 2008. P.28.

[8] Koller Werner: Einfuehrung in die Uebresetzungswissenschaft, Quelle und Meyer Verlag GmbH& Co, Wiebelsheim, 7th Edition, 2004. p.30

Japan	3183	Belgium	680
Norway	2861	East Germany	620
France	2213	India	586

UNESCO statistical year book, 1993 also gives the details of the 'major source languages'[9] from which the most translations are being done.

English	32219	Danish	560
French	6732	Arabian	401
Russian	6595	Norwegian	278
German	5077	Finnish	249
Italian	1725	Japanese	235
Swedish	1193	Chinese	216
Czech	797	Bengali	89
Dutch	775	Hindi	45

II. Approaches to translation

Stolze Radegundis (2008) categorizes the different approaches to translation into two major groups: Universalistic theories of translation and relativistic theories of translation. Universalistic theories of translation investigate languages as instrument of communication, language as sign system and its functions. Generative transformations Grammatik (Chomsky 1965), Research on language universals, Structural semantic and the absolute translatability (Koshmieder) belong to universalistic understanding on translation. These theories base on the human reason as the source of knowledge. Ferdinand de Saussere (1916) explains language as a sign system and determines the language system (langue) as the object in language research which is understood as an abstract collection of language signs, grammar rules and their relations which are available for an individual as a social reality. For him language as a sign has two aspects: signifier and signified (signifiant and signifie) and these are inseparable like two sides of a paper. The semiotic triangle of Ogden/Richards (1923) applied the same to a communicative situation and argues that a sign (signifiant, word) symbolises its referent indirectly through its concept[10].
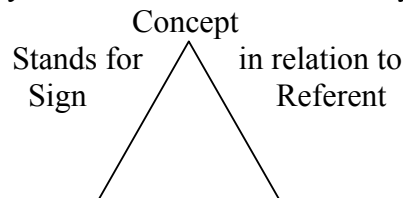
Charles M. Morris (1946) classifies the three aspects of signs as communicative signals into semantic: *the meaning aspect*; syntax: *the sentence construction*, Pragmatic: *the usage*. Noam Chomsky's (1965) theory on deep structures resembles idea of a form of thought that is common to all human beings. The concept of common logical forms which underlies all the

[9] Koller Werner: Einfuehrung in die Uebresetzungswissenschaft, Quelle und Meyer Verlag GmbH& Co, Wiebelsheim, 7th Edition, 2004. p.30
[10] Stolze Radegundis, Uebersetzungstheorien: Eine Einfuehrung, Gunther Narr Verlag, Tuebingen, 2008. p.39.

languages is the interest of study for the research of universals in languages. The assumptions are: a) all the languages are originated from one common language; b) The function of the language is same in all the language groups which are similar in their grammatical structures; c) Biological apparatus is common for all the human beings in relation to the cognitive process.

The theory of language universals and generative transformative Grammatik with their investigations on common aspects which are owned by many languages provided many insights into the theory of translation. Roman Jacobson classifieds the translation into 3 types: 1) Intra-lingual translation: interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language, 2) Inter-lingual translation: interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language and 3) Inter semiotic translation or transmutation: interpretation of verbal signs by non-verbal sign systems. Following the universal applicability of language signs, Koschmieder (1965) defines translation as:

> "Uebersetzen heisst, zum ausgangssprachlichen Zeichen ueber das ausgangssprachlich Bezeichnete das Gemeinte finden und zu demselben Gemeinten in der Zielprache ueber das zielsprachlich Bezeichnete das zugeordenete zielsprachliche Zeichen finden"[11].

Structural linguistic understanding of the language limits the language as a formalised system of signs and grammar rules and fails to understand the relevance of situation, function and action in language expressions. Based on Wittigensteins' understanding of language games, Austin develops speech act theory. For Austin, to speak is to act. The speech acts are further divided into locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary.

Gideon Toury (1995) divides the field of translation studies into following branches[12].

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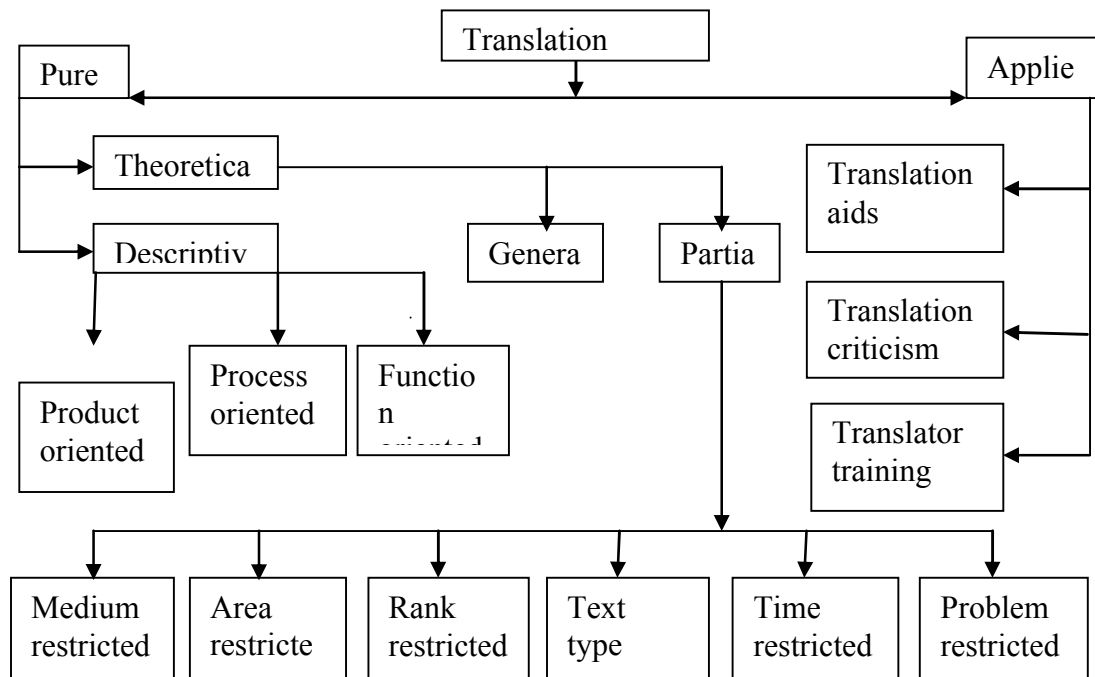
[11] Stolze Radegunndis, Uebersetzungstheorien: Eine Einfuehrung, Gunther Narr Verlag, Tuebingen, 2008. p.46
[12] Stolze Radegunndis, Uebersetzungstheorien: Eine Einfuehrung, Gunther Narr Verlag, Tuebingen, 2008. p.150.

Relativistic theories on translation include unity of language and thought (humboldt), *verfremdetes translation* (Schleirmacher) *language content study* of Weisberger, *linguistic relativism* of Sapire, *form oriented translation* of Walter Benjamin and *deconstruction and impossibility of translation* by Derrida. For Humboldt a language is the external appearance of the thought of the people in a culture, "The language is their thought and thought is the language. Therefore to approach a language is to allow the culture to grow in oneself with its own descriptions of reality[13]" and, makes the translation impossible. For Schleiermacher the difficulty in translation reflects the spirit of the original language (Geist der Ursprache). In order to present a precision to the loyal and free aspects of translation, Schleirmacher speaks of two methods: taking the author to the reader and taking the reader to the author through the translation. This will require the translation of the entire literature into a language so that the readers of translation may develop necessary quality to assimilate such an entrangement in the translation. For Weisberger, different languages are originated from different world views. The worldview of the mother language and that of another language is different and no equivalence is possible between two languages. By formulating linguistic relative principle, Benjamin Lee Whorf (1956) argues that there is a causal relation between the grammatical structure and world views. Different languages of different grammatical structures lead the users to different observations and evaluations. This is because the observers are different in their Worldviews. For Walter Benjamin (1923) the task of translating is based on translating the "mode of intention" (art des meinens) than what is "intended" (Gemeinte)[14]. Imitating the mode of intention of the original text in the target language is the task of the translator. Derrida, in his post structuralist view treats the translation as a necessary but impossible task.

Post structuralism an overview

Post structuralism is a self critic of structuralism. The description of "post structuralist" maintains within it a close relation to structuralism. Post structuralism is not in the sense of having killed the structuralism off; it is 'post' only in the sense of coming after and of seeking to extend structuralism in its rightful direction. Post structuralism is a critique of structuralism from within. Proponents of post structuralism, deconstruction point out that it is not amenable to any static definition or systematization because the meaning of the terms it employs is always shifting and fluid, taking its colour from the localized contexts and texts with which it engages. "A deconstructive reading of a text then practiced by deconstruction will attempt to display the logo centric operations in the text, by focusing on a close reading of the text's language, its use of presuppositions or transcendental signifies, its reliance in binary oppositions, its self contradictions, its *apriori* or point of conceptual *impassse*, and the ways in which it effects closure and resists *freeplay*"[15].

One of the major projects of deconstruction is to display the operations of "Logo centricism" in a given text. The term Logocentrism refers to any system of thought which is founded on the stability and authority of the logos, the divine word. It means that it is in the spoken logos that

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[13] Stolze Radegunndis, Uebersetzungstheorien: Eine Einfuehrung, Gunther Narr Verlag, Tuebingen, 2008. p.23.

[14] Benjamin Walter: "Die Aufgabe des Uebersetzers" in Walter Benjamin Gesammelte Schriften IV.I, Rexroth Tillman, ed. Suhrkamp Verlag., p.14.

[15] Habib M.A.R: "A history of the literary criticism from Plato to the present", Black Well Publishing Ltd, Malden, 2005.p.654.

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language and reality ultimately coincide, in an identity that is invested with absolute authority, absolute origin, and absolute purpose and teleology. One of the functions of the logos is to preserve the stability and closure of the orders of language and reality. It is because the logos holds together the orders of language and reality that the relation between signifier (word) and signified (concept) i.e., relation a) is stable and fixed, and the relation b) the connection between sign as whole and the object in which it refers in the world"[16]. If the logos are removed, then the entire order will become destabilized. "Once Logos vanish from the picture, there is nothing to hold together the orders of language and reality, which now threaten to fly apart from each other"[17].

Post structuralism reinstates the language to the notions of thought and reality, self and world, subject and object (other). In deconstruction the connection between thought and reality, self and the world, subject and object do not exist prior to language, with language merely being the instrument of their expression or representation. These dualities are understood not as equal opposites but as violent hierarchy in post-structuralist thinking. Instead "thought takes place in and is made possible by language"[18]. Therefore, language depends on the arbitrary and conventional nature of sign and there is no natural and conventional connection between the sign "table" and an actual table in the world. In the same way the connection between the signifier "table "and the concept of "table" is also arbitrary and conventional. Derrida writes "Every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written as a small or large unity, can be cited, put between the quotation marks, thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely non-saturable fashion"[19].

For Derrida, truth or reality is always a relation of linguistic terms. There is no truth or reality which stands outside or behind the language. Truth is a relation of linguistic terms and reality is a construct, ultimately religious, social, political and economic, but always of language, of various linguistic registers. Such understanding of the reality challenges the notion of identity. The "identity" whether of the human self or objects in the world, is no longer viewed as having a stable, fixed or pre-given essence, but it is seen as fluid and dependant like linguistic terms, on a variety of contexts. "The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the interplay of signification ad infinitum"[20].

Derrida points out that the oppositions, such as those between intellect and sense, soul and body, master and slave, male and female, inside and outside, centre and margin do not represent the state of equivalence of two terms. Rather each of this opposition is a "violent hierarchy "in which one term has been conventionally subordinated, in gestures that embody a host of religious, social, political valances. Hierarchical subordination of writing to speech is criticized by Derrida. For Derrida 'writing' designates the totality what makes inscription possible: all of the differences by which language is constituted. The term 'differance' in French differer, is used by Derrida to denote both 'to differ' and 'to defer' in time. Thus Derrida gives a temporal dimension to the notion of difference already proposed by Saussure. 'Trace', 'supplement', 'text', 'presence', 'absence' and 'Play' are the terms that are used by Derrida with

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[16] M.A.R: "A history of the literary criticism from Plato to the present", Black Well Publishing Ltd, Malden, 2005. P.651

[17] Habib M.A.R: "A history of the literary criticism from Plato to the present", Black Well Publishing Ltd, Malden, 2005. P.651

[18] Habib M.A.R: "A history of the literary criticism from Plato to the present", Black Well Publishing Ltd, Malden, 2005. P.652

[19] Derrida Jaques:" signature Event context" in Margins of Philosophy,in difference at the origin, p.97.

[20] Derrida Jaques: Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Boss, Routledge, London, pp 278-294. P.279.

an extended significance of 'Writing' in his works.[21] 'Iterability' or 'Citationality'[22] makes a sign to function as sign. Therefore a sign can be cited or itered in different context infinitely. Therefore the meaning of a sign is in a constant flux.

Post structuralist perspective on translation

 By taking a relativistic approach to translation he describes translation as "necessary and impossible task"[23]. Siting translation in the post colonial context Niranjana observes that "Conventionally translation depends on the Western philosophical notions of reality, representation, and knowledge. Reality is seen as something unproblematic, 'out there'; knowledge involves a representation of this reality; and representation provides direct, unmediated access to a transparent reality"[24].

Derrida's views are based on the Walter Benjamin's understanding of translation as a survival of the original (Ueberleben) infinitely. Derrida interprets the Heidegger in relation to translation as "translation is not simply a linguistic operation of transporting meaning from one language to another. That it is the operation of thought through which we must translate ourselves into the thought of the other language, the forgotten rethinking of the other language"[25]. On the basis of the 'impurity' of the languages and iterablity of the signs the universalistic translation theories especially theory of translation by Roman Jacobson and speech act theory of Austin and Searle are criticised by Derrida.

Jacobson's classification of translation into inter-lingual, intra-lingual and inter-semiotic are based upon an understanding of the language that presumes the existence of one language and of one translation in the literal sense that is as the passage from one language to another. But what we have as language is never one it is always much language in one language. Derrida in his reply to Patrick Mahony asserts that   "Translation can do everything except mark this linguistic difference inscribed in a language, this difference of language systems inscribed in a single tongue. At best it can get everything except this: the fact that there are, in one linguistic system, perhaps several languages or tongues. Sometimes – I would even say always – several tongues. There is impurity in every language"[26]. Therefore Jacobins classification of translation which presumes the passage of one language to another language is threatened by the impurity in the languages.

Derrida criticizes the communicative theories of language and speech act theory of Austin and Searle in his article 'signature event and context'. Communicative theories of language assume that an intention or thought of the sender is coded in the language and is received by the receiver and decodes the message and creates the feedback or response. Derrida's analysis on the 'writing' argues that it is the 'iterablity or citationality' of the sign makes language possible not the intention of the sender towards a performative utterance. That is to say a linguistic sign remains as written even in the absence of writer and reader. "A writing

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[21] Habib M.A.R: "A history of the literary criticism from Plato to the present", Black Well Publishing Ltd, Malden, 2005. P.653
[22] Derrida Jaques :" signature Event context" in Margins of Philosophy,in difference at the origin,p.90
[23] McDonald V. Christie (ed.): The ear of the other: Texts and discussions with Jaques Derrida, Schoken books, New york. P.99
[24] Niranjana, Tejaswini; Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context, University of California Press, 1992, p. 2.
[25] Derrida Jaques: The ear of the other, Otobiography, Tranference and Translation, McDonald V. Christie (ed), Schoken books, New york. P.115.
[26] Derrida Jaques: The ear of the other, Otobiography, Tranference and Translation, McDonald V. Christie (ed), Schoken books, New york.p.100.

that was not structurally legible –iterable beyond the death of the addressee would not be writing"[27]. Communicative theories are based on the understanding of context in which a linguistic sign is used or written. By analysing the context one reaches to the intentionality and meaning of the message. Derrida denies this and argues that a context is never absolutely determinable or its determination is never certain and saturated. "Every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written as a small or large unity, can be cited, put between the quotation marks, thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely non-saturable fashion"[28]. Commenting on the biblical narration of the Tower of Babel, Derrida explains the necessity but impossibility of translation. Presence of many languages though they are impure, necessitates the translation but neither the meaning nor the intention of the author can't be determined or fixed as they are in a constant flux and therefore translation is impossibility.

Going through the observations of Post structuralist thinkers and other translation theorists, one can conclude that 'Translatability' (Walter Benjamin) of a literary work does not depend upon the translator but the work, itself finds its translator from time to time as part of its 'afterlife'. For Walter Benjamin literariness of a work resides neither in the form nor in the content but in its universality that is to say, the amount of eternal truths, does a work bear in it. The post structuralist may question the concept of eternal truth and may prove it as a convention created through violent hierarchies, but even in that case the violent hierarchy of truth and beauty (John Keats) in a work leads to its literariness and translatability. Therefore to translate means is to maintain the 'truth beauty' equation of literary work in another culture.

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[27] Derrida Jaques:" signature Event context" in Margins of Philosophy, in difference at the origin, p.90.
[28] Derrida Jaques:" signature Event context" in Margins of Philosophy, in difference at the origin, p.97.

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