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Translator's Liberty and Originality: Reexamining the Concepts in the Context

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Abstract- Translation is very familiar, but a very complex activity. Therefore, the role of the translator is not a very easy one. More significantly, the translator, in the act of translation, is constantly in a state of making choices between two dissimilar systems to reach an unattainable balance point (called the equivalence). In spite of such a difficult nature of the task, the role of the translator is one of the most undervalued ones. Ideally, a translator is expected to represent the source text exactly and yet, in doing so, he/she is robbed of another supreme quality of a creative artist- 'originality'. Within this context, this paper aims to explore the extent of liberty practiced by the translator and reexamines the concept of originality related to this.

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Abstract- Translation is very familiar, but a very complex activity. Therefore, the role of the translator is not a very easy one. More significantly, the translator, in the act of translation, is constantly in a state of making choices between two dissimilar systems to reach an unattainable balance point (called the equivalence). In spite of such a difficult nature of the task, the role of the translator is one of the most undervalued ones. Ideally, a translator is expected to represent the source text exactly and yet, in doing so, he/she is robbed of another supreme quality of a creative artist- 'originality'. Within this context, this paper aims to explore the extent of liberty practiced by the translator and reexamines the concept of originality related to this.

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I. INTRODUCTION

As a system or culture, translation involves the author of the source text, the translator and the readers of the translated text. The source text is considered as the original text, and henceforth the author of the source text is generally considered to have the prestige of 'creative originality'. The task of the translator is to decode the message of the 'original text' (the source text) into a different language. Therefore, the common assumption is that the translator is just a mediator and he/she is doing a 'secondary job'. The translator often has to hear that he is not doing anything 'original'. But in reality, a particular language is never independent of its society and culture, and instead, a language accumulates a culture and transmits the history of that particular society (Sapir, 1956). As a result, in the act of translation, the translator has to take into account the cultural components of the language he/she is translating into. Furthermore, no two languages are similar (since their origin is not in the translation of each into the other) and for this reason, the translator has to find out, adjust, make up for and even create for the non-existent linguistic, cultural and literary elements in the translation. Here comes the question of their agency of liberty.

In the world of literature, the tradition of translation is one of the earliest. Translations have been the most comfortable means of access for the readers to the signature literary texts of other languages. But the act of translation is not a very comforting one to the

translator. A good literary translation requires expertise in both languages involved, an awareness of the cultural sensitivity, a very good research skill, and creativity among many others. Having considered the complexity of the task, this paper reexamines the concept of originality and explores the scope and extent of liberty within the range of translation. The paper is divided into three sections. The first section examines the nature and scope of originality in the context of a translator. The second section dwells on current concepts of liberty in translation and assesses the value of it within the system. Finally, the third section puts forward how these two things are correlated.

The paper argues that the qualities of originality and liberty in the translators, as contextualized in the discourse of translation, are as essential as required for any creative artist. It is a wrong conception that translators lack originality and translators' liberty always yield negative consequences. The practical considerations, on the contrary, reveal that without originality and liberty a translator's work lack all vitality and spontaneity.

II. TRANSLATOR'S ORIGINALITY

Now and then, while watching a movie or reading a novel we come across phrases such as 'based on an original story of/by...' or the like. Let's first look at the meaning of the word 'originality' and then relate it to the field of translation and reexamine the concept. On the simplest level, originality means not being copied from another implying its authenticity. It is "produced directly by an artist" (Lindley, 1952, p.17). On another level, originality also relates to concepts such as novelty, innovation, creativity, uniqueness or marking a difference from the existing set of work. Therefore, when a book or a movie presents an original story, there is a high amount of value attachment to it. But in modern times, we have come to acknowledge the fact that "literary works are never completely new and this is a fallacy, for they are always based on preexisting works, and inserted in a certain literary genealogy" (Brisolara, 2011, p.111). Here comes the necessity of reviewing the concept of originality.

That originality is "a fundamental problem of literary history" was also acknowledged by Wellek and Warren (1948, p.258). This becomes even more problematic when we try to apply the term in the field of

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translation. In his book *The World, the text, and the critic* on the chapter on originality, Edward Said explained:

From this debate comes the general division of work into active, on the one hand, and theoretical-contemplative on the other. In a specialized form this division persists today in literary demotic as the distinction between creative-original and critical-interpretive writing. This generates another division, symmetrical to it, that creative-original writing is primary, whereas any other kind is secondary (Said, 1983, p.127).

In translation studies, Said's dichotomy of 'creative-original' and 'critical-interpretive' is evident also where the latter applies to the translator. However, Said is fully aware of a sort of discrimination for which he uses the terms 'writer-author' and 'critic/scholar-author' to acknowledge the latter to some extent. His description portrays vividly a binary set of values associated with the two groups:

A writer-author suggests the glamor of doing, of bohemia, of originality close to the real matter of life (always we find this closeness of reality and originality); a critic/scholar-author suggests the image of drudgery, passivity, impotence, second-order material, and faded monkishness. (Said, 1983.p.128).

This is why the translator is invisible. The scope of the translator's originality needs to be measured within its own range. It can be well clarified by analyzing a situation- Mir Mosharraf Hossain wrote the prose epic *Bishad-Sindhu* in Bangla based on the tragic story of Karbala, but he does not stick to the historical details. Fakrul Alam (2016) translates the text in English as *Ocean of Sorrow* and Haq praises him for not missing any details of the massive 'original' (Haq, 2018). 'Original' obviously means here the source text. Now, theoretically speaking, Hossain's story is not completely new or his own invention. Hossein is original by the fictional codes. If judged by the codes of history, he would not be attaining that status. Similarly, Alam's *Ocean of Sorrow* is original in its own right. Venuti (1995) also defended the translator's position asserting the status of each translation as a new original text in *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. We need to conceptualize originality not as a discreet entity, rather as a contextualized one. In the medium of translation, to convey the content and form of the source text is also a principle of the translator's originality.

III. TRANSLATOR'S LIBERTY

An Italian phrase goes- "traduttore, traditore", which means 'translator, traitor'. The pun implies that in the act of translation the translator always does something extra instead of a simple transfer of words into a different language. This means the translator is not a mere passive medium of a transmission, he/she engages his/her self in the process and exerts own

choice, perception, interpretation in the product. Translator's liberty may be understood as any conscious deviation from the source language text in the act of translating. A translator has to go through two contradicting pressures. First, he/she has to be faithful to the source text. Second, he/she has to deliver a natural translation which ensures the readers' ease of perusal. But this is impossible as no two languages have exact words for each other. Susan Bassnett (2002) also argued,

Equivalence in translation, then, should not be approached as a search for sameness, since sameness cannot even exist between two TL versions of the same text, let alone between the SL and TL version. (p.36)

Therefore, the translator has to depend on his/her intellect and creativity to make up for the gap between source language (SL) and target language (TL). This is his/her liberty and it should not be narrowly interpreted as an arbitrary treatment of the source text. At this point, it is worth noting the prevalent notions about this freedom or liberty of the translator in the discourse of translation. Translators are often accused of 'taking liberty' in inserting their personal opinions into the work of translation. In this sense, the aspect of the translator's irresponsible and utilitarian deviation from the source text is stressed in defining the term. Therefore, it implies a tone of disapproval mostly anywhere. What this paper argues that the translator's liberty, as a concept, is more identifiable with the translator's creative agency which affirms his/her authorship. How that agency is used, that is completely a different issue. For example, a man possesses enormous physical strength. He can kill a man or save a man. If he kills somebody, the problem is with the man, not with his strength.

Like a translator's originality, translator's liberty should be described within the context of translation. In cases of translation where the translator deviates on a large extent (both content and structure or any), and he/she does it intentionally, that can be called adaptations. This is the example of unrestrained use of liberty.

IV. ORIGINALITY AND LIBERTY IN TRANSLATION; THE CORRELATION, AND THE NATURE OF THE BETRAYAL

The translator is a betrayer in the sense that being imposed by the linguistic and cultural restrictions, he/she is necessarily going to deviate. Therefore, the truth is every translator enjoys a certain amount of liberty intentionally or unintentionally. The originality of a translation may spring forth from a cautious and studied assertion of liberty. Despite a common reluctance to its acknowledgment, translator's liberty is an essential element in the act of translation. In literary translation,

attitude, subjective interpretation, rhetoric are of key importance.

Translation never communicates in an untroubled fashion because the translator negotiates the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text by reducing them and supplying another set of differences, basically domestic, drawn from the receiving language and culture to enable the foreign to be received there. (Venuti, 2000, p.482)

This is why when a particular novel or story or the like is translated into a different language, the characters, main events do not change, but the phrases, particular setting, etc. get domesticated. This domestication is necessary firstly because it rescues the readers from the painstaking swallowing of an absurd and alien text (translated), and secondly because it saves the source text from being insipidly communicated. So, paradoxically, in the act of the betrayal lies also the efficacy of the communication. The nature of the 'betrayal' can also be a significant indicator of how original the translation is. A 'cultural' shift in translation from 'textual' orientation has made this association more evident. With the evolution of time, the aim and nature of translation have evolved too. In ancient times, (e.g. the Roman translating Greek) formal properties of a language were no less important than the content in translations since borrowing those structural elements was also a chief concern (Bassnett, 2002). But, in recent times there can be no denying of the fact that the primary purpose of translation is the communication of the message. The message of a text consists of both linguistic and extra-linguistic factors. When a translator starts transmitting the message to a different language group, the extra-linguistic factors of the source language are very likely to create a bar for the target language groups to comprehend in a native-like way. Instead of a word-for-word translation approach, use of imagination and creativity to adjust to the target culture without altering any major issues is likely to be more effective in this case. The translator needs to employ his creative agency here. If wisely applied, the translation can excel even the source text in terms of literary value and can be regarded as an original. But, then again, the concepts of translator's liberty and originality are closely related, not causally related.

Derrida's view regarding translation is relatable in this context. He argued that no translation is ever possible. It is rather safer to use the term 'transformation' or 'regulated transformation'. According to Derrida, "Difference is never pure, no more so is translation, transformation of one language by another, on one text by another" (cited in Gentzler, 2001, p.167). Following this, it can be argued that a translator is also an author and not a mere negotiator. Like any author, he/she has the creative agency or liberty though under restrictions of a different nature. This also certifies a

translation to have the potential of being original. In literature, when a particular text is translated by different persons, none of the translations become identical. Like authors of the source texts, translators also have idiosyncrasies. Their originalities as thinkers and interpreters reflect in respective translations.

However, the perspective of discussing the liberty of the translator so far has not yet touched the point that translation is not always unaffected by political dimension. It is true that a translator's liberty and originality are highly capable of inducing a more subtle and hegemonic politics. Perhaps this is the reason for which this agency has more often been discouraged and disapproved instead of being regarded as a strength and essential. This is a power and as any of its kind can be exploited for manipulation, misrepresentation and any other specific purpose. A translation can be used to manipulate a particular language and culture, and to suppress weaker nations (Spivak, 2000). In colonial India, the translations of the Bible and other religious books, for example, are not without a political agenda in mind. Even before that, in medieval India, translations of Sanskrit *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* patronized by the non-native (in a sense, e.g. non-speaker of the language being translated into) royal rulers cannot simply be convinced as innocent acts of flourishing literature. The political purpose has played its part there.

V. CONCLUSION

In modern critical theories such as deconstruction, postcolonialism, intertextuality, etc., it is assumed that no writing is absolutely original. In that case, the work of a translation is not original too since the text it transmits is not original itself. But on a broader level, if any literary piece written by an individual author is esteemed with elements of originality in it, a particular translation of a particular text is not an exception as well. Secondly, it is a narrow viewpoint to equate 'translator's liberty' with a wanton misrepresentation more or less of the source language text. It is rather the agency of the translator which is essential for the continuous decision-making process during the act of translation. It is true that inappropriate and disproportionate use of liberty in translation misguides the readers and can result in the exploitation of them. But the misuse of a privilege or agency exists in every sector and which sector are we shutting down to prevent the malpractice? As in anywhere else, the practitioner's ethical consideration is more significant in dealing with such matters. Certainly, a dull mechanical fact report is not to be preferred at the cost of a lively and natural piece of literature.

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