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Beyond Words or Bound by Words? Is Translation a Linguistic Operation? Revising the Linguistic Approach

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Abstract

In the most contemporary era, the theories of Translation Studies are shaped by cultural, post-colonial and linguistic approaches. These theories, most probably, the theory of linguistic approach, as it is universally believed, conceptualize translation as a type of systematic operation of language of the Source Language Text on that of the Target Language Text. This research paper attempts to examine whether translation is an act beyond words or bound by words. Through examining various approaches applicable to the field of Translation Studies, it is attempted to prove how translation as an activity rest on the language only as translation is very often considered an operation of the language transfer governed by the structural correspondences of two different languages where sometimes equivalents are possible and sometimes impossible. Though the cultural turn after its emergence threatened the linguistic dominance, allowing modern theories to oscillate, it is impossible to translate even the culturally loaded words without the aid of the language. Words are the carriers of culture, religious concepts, political jargons and what not.

Key Words: linguistic approach, cultural turn, theories, Translation Studies

1. Introduction

This research paper revisits the linguistic approach in relation to Translation Studies to reassess and re-establish the relevance, significance and limitations, if at all, of linguistics for translation. The significance of the linguistic approach cannot be reduced with a view to the invasion of the cultural turn in the area of Translation Studies. No one can

comment on the linguistic turn in Translation Studies without naming the role played by pure linguistic critics and translation critics namely Halliday, Saussure, Catford, Nida, Bell, Roman Jakobson and others. The contribution of linguistic critics has already reasserted the act of translation as an act of decoding and recoding. Here, decoding may refer to the language of the Source Language Text and the recoding may

refer to the transfer of the meaning of the same language into the Target Language Text. Though the linguistics was slowly and gradually displaced from the centre, as it is traced in this research paper, it was never and will never be abandoned entirely.

The very point whether translation is only a linguistic operation or not an activity remains at the heart of Translation Studies. Earlier theorists believed that translation is an activity taking care of the transfer of meaning governed by linguistic laws whereas the contemporary translation critics believe that the act of translation has been challenged by the cultural turn. To prove this point, Susan Bassnett writes, "the translator treats the text in isolation from the culture at his peril" (Bassnett 2005: 23). One cannot declare translation beyond words by inviting risks on his part since translation operates only and only at the linguistic level. Can translation be non-linguistic? Should translation be non-linguistic? Is linguistics not a foundation or the stepping stone for translation?

2. What is a Language?

In order to establish the relation between the language and translation, first it is necessary to know and define what the language is. According to linguistics, the language has been defined by many linguists. While defining the language as a system of signs, Saussure in his *Course in General Linguistics* states that in it "the only essential thing is the union of meanings" (Saussure 1959: 15) as it "expresses ideas, is therefore comparable to a system of writing" (Ibid: 16) and Saussure further adds, "It is both a social product of the faculty of speech and a collection of necessary conventions that have been adopted by a social body to permit individuals to exercise that faculty" (Ibid: 10). To Edward Sapir, language is, "a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols" (Sapir 1921: 8),

to Noam Chomsky, "a set of sentences, each finite in length and constructed out of a finite set of elements" (Chomsky 1957, 13), with reference to habitual behaviour, to Leonard Bloomfield language is, "the totality of utterances that can be made in a speech community" (Bloomfield 1933: 26),

While linking the language to the communicative purpose, Roman Jakobson considers it "be investigated in all the variety of its functions" (Jakobson 1960: 350). M. A. K. Halliday links the language to the semiotics saying that it is "a system of meanings" (Halliday 1978: 2).

Ludwig Wittgenstein says that "The meaning of a word is its use in the language" (Wittgenstein 1953: 43). To Levi-Strauss, language is "a social phenomenon and a cultural product" (Levi-Strauss 1963: 33), to George Yule, language is "a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication" (Yule 2017: 4), to David Crystal "Language is the systematic, conventional use of sounds, signs, or written symbols in a human society for communication and self-expression" (Crystal 2003: 3). According to Benjamin Whorf, "Language shapes the way we think, and determines what we can think about" (Whorf 1956: 212) and in view of Mikhail Bakhtin, "Language lives only in the dialogic interaction of those who make use of it" (Bakhtin 1981: 183).

On the basis of the definitions discussed here, it is noted that the expression of human thoughts depends on the use of the language which directly links language to translation. Since the language is "a system of distinct signs corresponding to distinct ideas" (Saussure 1959: 10). These definitions foreground the use of language as a combination of structure and meaning.

3. What is Linguistics? Its Concept:

Having defined language, it is essential to define what linguistics is to establish the relationship between language and linguistics,

between language and translation. To simplify, language is what we speak and linguistics is how we speak. Language is the object of study, one has to say whereas linguistics is the scientific study of the language. Language is the practice of speaking theorized by linguistics.

“Linguistics” as a specific independent discipline studies language not in relation to history or philosophy but language as itself, as a self-enclosed and an autonomous system of the history of language. The modern term “linguistics” has been derived from the Latin *lingua* meaning a “tongue” and *istics* meaning “knowledge or science”. Thus, linguistics as a science studies the origin, nature and development of language in a historical comparative way. Linguistics studies not one particular language but all human languages as a universal part of human behaviour. In the global village, apart from describing and analysing the language, linguistics also clarifies and presents the meaning in relation to Translation Studies. Aiming also at studying the components of the language system, it has facilitated the use of the language as a tool for translator. In Latin, translation is referred to as *ocusedion linguarum* meaning “the translation of languages” thus associates the relationship between translation and linguistics as a specialized branch of applied linguistics having an ability to understand foreign language.

According to the foundational linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, language is the unique system of language. He states, “Linguistics is only a part of the general science of semiology” (Saussure 1959: 16). To Leonard Bloomfield, “Linguistics is the science of language” (Bloomfield 1933: 1), to David Crystal, “Linguistics is the scientific study of language” (Crystal 2003: 3), to Victoria Fromkin, “Linguistics is the scientific study of human language” (Fromkin 2014: 3), to Sapir, “Linguistics is concerned with language as a human phenomenon” (Sapir 1921: 1), to Noam Chomsky, “Linguistics is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener. . .” (Chomsky

1965: 3), to Halliday, linguistics is “the study of how people exchange meanings through the use of language” (Halliday 1978: 2).

When Roman Jakobson states that “Linguistics is concerned with language in all its aspects—language in act, language in evolution, and language in operation”, he establishes the relationship with the linguistics and language (Jakobson 1960: 350). To George Yule, “linguists are interested in the nature of language and communication” (Yule 2017: 1). To Jean Aitchison, linguistics is “concerned with the mental processes involved in language use” (Aitchison 1992: 1). To Geoffrey Finch, “Linguistics is the systematic study of language, its structure, use, and meaning” (Finch 2000: 1). In the similar fashion, Kramsch relating culture to language, says, “Linguistics examines how language creates meaning within cultural contexts” (Kramsch 1998: 3).

There are some Indian critics as well who have successfully defined linguistics. To note a few of them. . . S. K. Chatterji linking language structure to culture states that “Language is the most complete expression of the mind of a people” (Chatterji 1960: 3). Kapil Kapoor while defining the Indian linguistics philosophically says that “In the Indian tradition, language is not merely a tool of communication but a mode of knowing” (Kapoor 2001: 19).

3.1 History: Collaborative Development of Linguistics and Translation Studies:

It is attempted here to record the theoretical events in the history of linguistics and Translation Studies while establishing the connection between the two. For translators, the knowledge of linguistics is indispensable for translation is an activity of language transfer. Indisputably, today linguistics has progressed as a science of translation with its insight in this activity. The examination of the vast domain of translation to discuss what linguistics can add to the study of translation results into a legitimate question: Where would one begin?

According to George Steiner, after a "sterile" debate over "literal", "free" and "faithful" translation in the 1950s and 1960s, more linguistically-oriented approaches in the study of translation emerged with Vinay and Darbelnet (1958), Roman Jakobson (1959), Mounin (1963), Malblanc (1963) and Nida (1964) who allow linguistics to embrace translation unconventionally (Munday 2001: 9). Jakobson affirms that linguistics affects translation because "Any comparison of two languages implies an examination of their mutual translatability" (Jakobson 1959: 233-34). More scientific approach marks out the territory of the academic investigation of translation represented by Nida and in Germany by Wolfram Wilss, Kade, Neubert and Koller in Heidelberg. Thus, the linguistic theorists of the 1950s and 1960s aimed to create formula for something as fluid as language possibly being pragmatic.

Development in linguistics has offered much to Translation Studies bringing it very close to it. Translation is to C. Taylor undeniably "a linguistic phenomenon, at least in part" (Taylor 1998: 10), to a German theatre actor Ulrych and an Italian professor of English translation Bollettieri Bosinelli it "takes place within specific cultural contexts" like discourse analysis, text linguistics, sociolinguistics and pragmatics (Ulrych & Bollettieri Bosinelli 1999: 229), to Fawcett a translator without grounding in linguistics functions with a toolkit incomplete and to Shveitser it is an object of linguistic study. Thus, linguistics, when looked at in relationship with translation, refers to those branches which are concerned with the "social aspects of language use" only locating the Source Language and the Target Language firmly with their cultural contexts (Bell 1991: 13).

Surveys on linguistics made by Holger Pedersen (1924), Hans Aarsleff (1960s), Schmitter (1982), Koerner (1994) and others believe that basically the modern linguistics emerged with the publication of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's (1857-1913)

Course in General Linguistics (1914). For him, the only object of linguistics is *langue*, an abstract system of language, considered in it and for itself (Saussure 1959: 371). Linguistics with its productive theories and translation as a language activity, the connection between the two in terms of *parole* is inevitable.

The idea of formal association between linguistics and translation was established systematically by a Russian scholar Andrej V. Fedorov in 1949 who argues that translation theory is independent linguistic discipline. Later on, Fedorov's argument was further supported by an American scholar Eugene Nida in 1954 and by Vinay and Darbelnet in 1958 by establishing the cooperation between the two. Nida deals with theoretical and practical problems of translation. While transferring the meaning through language, says Nida (1964) linguistic and cultural differences between the SL and the TL are inevitable. Cultural differences may be more complicated than linguistic ones. In order to meet the requirement, Nida introduces two types of equivalences: dynamic and formal. Theorists like Snell-Hornby (1988) and Gentzler (1993) reject the theoretical notion of equivalence. However, linguists like Catford (1965), Toury (1980), Peter Newmark (1981), Pym (1992) and Koller (1995) define translation in terms of equivalence relations. In spite of formal shifts in translation, parallels in culture provide a common understanding. But Nida's negligence of form for the content is regrettably an act, according to Henri Meschonnic, of passing information only (Meschonnic 1979:126).

Translation is impossible without certain "shifts". Shifts are basically small linguistic changes that occur between SL and TL during the process of translation. Catford was "the first to use the term Shift" (Hatim and Munday 2004: 29). Catford concludes that "Meaning is a property of a language. An SL text has an SL meaning and a TL text has a TL meaning" (Catford 1965: 35). But Fawcett (1997) notes that while translating, we replace an SL meaning by

a TL meaning. Thus, transference of meaning is possible because "Language is . . . patterned behaviour" (Catford 1965: 2) and "All cognitive experience and its classification can be conveyable in any existing language" (Jakobson 2004: 115).

But the praxis of translation suffers from "finding TL translation equivalents" defining the nature of equivalence (Catford 1965: 21). Linguistic equivalent and translation equivalent are different. The linguistic equivalents maintain corresponding positions in the linguistic system whereas translation equivalent do the same in the linguistic performance. Very often when equivalents are unattainable, the direct copying of the SL elements into the TL elements or their "transliteration" or "transcription" is permitted. Normally, the values of the TL elements are those set up by the formal and contextual relationships in the TL itself. Therefore, it is possible to perform an operation of that part of a sentence in which values have set up in the SL text known as the process of "transference" (Catford: 1965: 43). However, Vinay and Darbelnet point out that transference is not a translation but an error either in translation, *calque* or a borrowing, *emprunt* (Vinay and Darbelnet 1966: 6; 8). The attempt to translate cultural items leads one into the possibility of transference. However, in 1965, Noam Chomsky, an American linguist, came up with a theory that there cannot be any "reasonable procedure for translating between languages" (Chomsky 1965: 30) but Roger Bell argues that translation can be invaluable to linguistics "as a vehicle for testing theory and for investigating language use" (Bell 1991: xvi).

Denigration of linguistic models, since 1980s, is the reason enough to characterize TS with "cultural turn" which is, according to Snell-Hornby, a very useful "U-turn" in TS because it "opens up new perspectives" for other disciplines to be benefitted (Snell-Hornby 2006: 166). Translation Studies is concerned with communication across cultures because translation is a "cross-cultural event" rendering

the translator, according to H. J. Vermeer, to be "pluricultural" (Snell-Hornby 1988: 46). A shift from linguistically-oriented approaches to culturally-oriented ones occurred labeling TS as culturally-concentrated activity. Vladimir Ivir also considers "translating means translating cultures, not languages" (Ivir 1987: 35). Nevertheless, it is argued that taking account of culture does not necessarily mean to dismiss any kind of linguistic approach to translation. Even from a linguistic point of view, language and culture are inextricably connected (James 1996; Kramsch 1998). Moreover, House very clearly states that the contextually-oriented linguistic approach helps a translator to tackle translation from both a linguistic and cultural perspective as it sees language as a social phenomenon embedded in culture and views the properly understood meaning of any linguistic item as requiring reference to the cultural context. (House 2002: 93). The linguistic studies of translation lead directly or indirectly into the cultural studies of translation. Thus, in order to enhance the role of culture while translating, it is not at all necessary to reject the fact that translation is primarily a linguistic activity. On the contrary, if aimed at a cultural goal, the best will be done so through linguistic procedures. Linguistics cannot fully account for the phenomenon of Translation Studies determined as well by other factors like cultural and postcolonial ones besides linguistic one. These factors will be addressed following.

4. Translation: Bound by Words or Beyond Words? Interdependence of Language and Translation Studies:

Many translation critics and linguists have directly or indirectly commented on the relationship between translation and language or linguistics. The following discussion and examples of various quotations prove that translation is bound by words not beyond words, rather translation and language are inseparable. Catford comments on the linguistics as the methodological foundation of translation when he says, "Translation theory is

concerned with a certain type of relation between languages and is therefore a branch of linguistics" (Catford 1965: 1). In order to focus on the problems of translation, Nida says, "The problems of translation are essentially linguistic problems" (Nida 1964: 12). As a craft, according to Peter Newmark, translation attempts "to replace a written message in one language by the same message in another language" (Newmark 1988: 7), according to Bassnett, "Linguistics . . . remains an essential component in any attempt to understand how translation works" (Bassnett 2005: 24).

Mary Snell-Hornby while integrating translation with culture and language records that translation is a "cross-cultural event" but it is always "carried out through language" (Snell-Hornby 1988: 15), Basil Hatim argues that "Translation involves a dynamic interaction between linguistic and contextual factors", therefore translation cannot be looked at in isolation to language and linguistics. (Hatim 1990: 3). To House, translation is "the result of a textually and linguistically mediated process" (House 2015: 23), to Pym, languages resist "translation in specific ways" (Pym 2010: 96), to Umberto Eco, translation is "the art of saying almost the same thing" in the Target Language Text (Eco 2003: 33), to Gideon Toury, "Translation inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions" (Toury 1995: 200).

Some Indian theorists are not opposite in their views about to the Wester critics of Translation Studies. A. K. Ramanujan says that "No translation can be made without a theory of language, explicit or implicit" (Ramanujan 1999: 185). Linguistics is always considered as the foundational one for Translation Studies. In the same light, Bholanath Tiwari argues that "Linguistics is the scientific study of language structure and meaning in their social use" (Tiwari 1966: 5). To G. N. Devy translation is a sort of "negotiation between two linguistic systems" (Devy 1993: 8) whereas to Rita Kothari, "In India, translation is impossible without

constant negotiation between languages (Kothari 2003: 12). Harish Trivedi argues that the cultural negotiation initiates when "translation foregrounds language" (Trivedi 2007: 280). Marching a step ahead, Rita Kothari introduces the role of grammar stating that translation "constantly negotiates grammatical and linguistic difference" in India (Kothari 2003: 12).

The interdependence of translation and Translation Studies is very clearly visible in the various opinions given by many translation critics. When Roman Jakobson makes the difference among three types of translation, his use of the 'lingual' allows the assimilation between translation and language. Jakobson writes:

1. "Intralingual translation, or rewording an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs in the same language.
2. Interlingual translation or translation proper an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language.
3. Intersemiotic translation or transmutation an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems" (Jakobson 1992: 145).

Is translation beyond boundary? Perhaps, no. It is true that very often translation challenges the linguistics, however, it can neither defy nor escape the same. To declare translation "beyond linguistics" i.e. boundary is not possible because, according to Basil Hatim, "Ideology is encoded and decoded in language" (Hatim 2004: 147). Bassnett repositions linguistics in Translation Studies saying that "Linguistics is a necessary starting point for translation" as the inevitable infrastructure required by translation is provided by the linguistics (Bassnett 2005: 24). The integration of translation, culture and linguistics with one another states that, according to Snell-Hornby,

translation is neither purely linguistic nor cultural wholly (Snell-Hornby 2006: 67).

The difference of language between the two cultures is clearly projected in the words of Cicero when he says, "I did not translate as an interpreter, but as an orator, keeping the same ideas and the forms" (Cicero 1949: 365). Discussing his personal experience of translation, St. Jerome states, "I render not word for word, but sense for sense" and the sense in a statement is available only when the statement is interpreted (Jerome 1933: 115). Dryden, in his *From the Preface to Ovid's Epistles*, accepting the role of language, particularly in the composition and translation of poetry says, "Poetry is of so subtil a Spirit, that in pouring out of one Language into another, it will Evaporate" adding further, Dryden states, "No man is capable of Translating Poetry, who besides a Genius to that Art, is not a Master of both his Authors Language" (Dryden 1954: 40).

Arguing on the structural foundation of any language, many linguists arrive at consensus in relation to its association to Translation Studies. Emphasizing the significance of every independent language, Tytler states that the translation of any text can be challenging for "languages differ not only in words, but in genius and structure" (Tytler 1791: 9). To Roman Jakobson, "Translation is the interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal systems" (Jakobson 1992: 7). Focussing on the act of translation as the replacement of language, J. C. Catford says, "Translation is the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another language" (Catford 1965: 20). To Nida, language is "a part of culture, . . . the most complex set of habits which humans possess" (Nida 1964: 130). The mutual interaction between signs of two different languages is in one sense the very act of translation. The same is emphasized by Bassnett stating that "Translation involves the transfer of meaning contained in one set of language signs into another" (Bassnett 2005: 23). To quote Snell-

Hornby, translation is "carried out through language" (Snell-Hornby 1988: 15) as "it is a kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions" (Toury 1995: 200). "Resistances" of the languages, says Pym "cannot be explained solely by culture" (Pym 2010: 96). While focussing on the grammar part, one doesn't and can't be free from the complexity of the structure involved in the very process of translation as, to quote Jeremy Munday, "Translation is constrained by the grammatical and lexical resources of the target language" (Munday 2016: 89) and also by "the systemic differences between languages" (House 2015 23).

4.1 Pre-lexical Limits of Lexes

Lexes have their own pre-limit encoded in them whereas in cases of idioms and proverbs they turn limitless as well. Cicero has also rightly said as above cited that he doesn't translate word for word. Words are bound / guided by the limited interpretative capacity of the register provided for them. Hence, Dolet states that "It is impossible to translate word for word well from one language into another" as language is also as a part of linguistic community, therefore, the translation of idioms and culturally loaded phrases is impossible word to word (Dolet 1998: 248). Such translation is, according to George Steiner, "nothing else but a total glossary" (Steiner 1975: 308). While reading a text, one must try to understand the "the spirit of the original text" coded within the periphery of words (Chapman 2002: 64). Very often, as it is argued by Walter Benjamin, translation is rendered limited by the use of the language itself. If the reader of the Target Language Text hankers "for likeness to the original", says Benjamin, "no translation would be possible" (Benjamin 1968:73).

No likeness of the Target Language Text with the Source Language Text is possible as Nida states, "Differences in language structure often require changes in meaning during translation" (Nida 1969: 12). The possibility of

interpretation of words for transferring into the Target Language Text, depends on as Mona Baker rightly says, a degree of interpretation imposed by the resources of language" (Baker 2011: 19). The translator always depends on the language for its interpretation though very often than not it is mischievous in its nature. This point has been highlighted by Venuti saying that "language is never innocent" (Venuti 2008: 17).

"Languages do not block translation" but says David Bellos "they do make it difficult" (Bellos 2011: 50). Different linguistic conditions condition the activity of translation. The question whether translation is beyond linguistics or linguistic operation stands answered when attempted to analyse. The translation can't be reduced to linguistics alone however it cannot do away with it.

5 Conclusion

Overall, communication is nothing but the translation of message from one person to another through the medium of language. Translation is a bi- and/or multilingual game not free from linguistics and anthropology. Leonard Bloomfield, Zellig Harris and C. F. Hockett, American structuralists, consider linguistics as classificatory science deliberately concentrating on the theory and techniques of linguistics as a circumscribed and defined science. John C. Catford, a British linguist and translation theorist, acknowledging Firth, argues in his book *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* (1965) that "Translation is an operation performed on language" and hence "any theory of translation must draw upon a theory of language- a general linguistic theory" (Catford 1965: 1). Though this work of Catford being a "static" model is very sharply and widely attacked by Agorni (2005), Munday (2001), Hatim (2001) and Venuti (2000/2004), it is very useful. Translation, though situated in the domain of linguistics as a theory of "applied linguistics" as well as "a branch of Comparative Linguistics", has not been given any

autonomous epistemological status (Catford 1965: 19, 20) because "no language can be translated without fundamental loss" (Steiner 1975: 242).

On the basis of the discussion made, one has to accept that though it is not impossible to translate, it is never easy as well due to the constraint of the structure of the language. David Bellos approves the very idea that though not very easy but never impossible to translate when he states, "Nothing is untranslatable, but everything is translated under constraints imposed by language" (Bellos 2011: 51). The problem occurs as "languages differ essentially in what they must convey and not in what they may convey" (Jakobson 1992: 7). It has to be accepted that all languages are different and therefore words used in them hamper the very act of translation. Mona Baker has rightly noted that, "No language has a one-to-one correspondence with another; meanings are always filtered through the resources of the target language" (Baker 2018: 18).

The research paper concludes to reconcile that translation is both beyond words and bound by words, limited as well as unlimited. Bassnett rightly observes, "linguistics alone cannot account for the process of translation, but it remains an essential component in any attempt to understand how translation works" (Bassnett 2005: 24). A balanced view offers a more common and comprehensive wisdom of translation as not only a complex but also as a multidimensional human activity. Many contemporary critics visualize language as a culture embedded structural system. Language provides an opportunity to readers / speakers to be interpreted accordingly. The mutual respect and interdependence of translation and language is evident in the very practice of translation. The very thought to translate initiates the relation between language and translation. Translation Studies must be understood as a linguistic act interwoven within the cultural system. With a view to declaring translation beyond boundary

endangers the very basic fact that translation cannot be done without the operation performed on the language. Thus, translation emerges as a type of the complete hybrid practice between words and their meanings with the language as a carrier of meanings.

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