

## UNIT – 3

### (i) PROBLEMS OF LITERARY TRANSLATION

#### Semantic, syntactic, cultural-structures

Anne Cluysenaar, in her book on literary stylistics, makes some important points about translation. The translator, she believes, should not work with general precepts when determining what to preserve or parallel from the SL text, but should work with an eye 'on each individual structure, whether it be prose or verse', since 'each structure will lay stress on certain linguistic features or levels and not on others'. She goes on to analyse C. Day Lewis' translation of Valery's poem, *Les pas* and comes to the conclusion that the translation does not work because the translator 'was working without an adequate theory of literary translation'. What Day Lewis has done, she feels, is to have ignored the relation of parts to each other and to the whole and that his translation is, in short, 'a case of perceptual "bad form"'. The remedy for such inadequacies is also proposed: what is needed, says Cluysenaar, 'is a description of the dominant structure of every individual work to be translated.'

Cluysenaar's assertive statements about literary translation derive plainly from a structuralist approach to literary texts that conceives of a text as a set of related systems, operating within a set of other systems. As Robert Scholes puts it: Every literary unit from the individual sentence to the whole order of words can be seen in relation to the concept of system. In particular, we can look at individual works, literary genres, and the whole of literature as related systems, and at literature as a system within the larger system of human culture.

The failure of many translators to understand that a literary text is made up of a complex set of systems existing in a dialectical relationship with other sets outside its boundaries has often led them to focus on particular aspects of a text at the expense of others. Studying the average reader, Lotman determines four essential positions of the addressee:

- (1) Where the reader focuses on the content as matter, i.e. picks out the prose argument or poetic paraphrase.
- (2) Where the reader grasps the complexity of the structure of a work and the way in which the various levels interact.
- (3) Where the reader deliberately extrapolates one level of the work for a specific purpose.
- (4) Where the reader discovers elements not basic to the genesis of the text and uses the text for his own purposes.

Clearly, for the purposes of translation, position would be completely inadequate (although many translators of novels in particular have focused on content at the expense of the formal structuring of the text), position would seem an ideal starting point, whilst positions and might be tenable in certain circumstances. The translator is, after all, first a reader and then a writer and in the process of reading he or she must take a position.

So, for example, Ben Belitt's translation of Neruda's *Fulgur y muerte de Joaquín Murieta* contains a statement in the Preface about the rights of the reader to expect 'an American sound not present in the inflection of Neruda', and one of the results of the translation is that the political line of the play is completely changed. By stressing the 'action', the 'cowboys and Indians myth' element, the dialectic of the play is destroyed, and hence Belitt's translation could be described as an extreme example of Lotman's third reader position. The fourth position, in which the reader discovers elements in the text that have evolved since its genesis, is almost unavoidable when the text belongs to a cultural system distanced in time and space.

The twentieth-century reader's dislike of the Patient Griselda motif is an example of just such a shift in perception, whilst the disappearance of the epic poem in western European literatures has inevitably led to a change in reading such works. On the semantic level alone, as the meaning of words alters, so the reader translator will be unable to avoid finding himself in Lotman's fourth position without detailed etymological research. So when Gloucester, in *King Lear*, Act III sc. vii, bound, tormented and about to have his eyes gouged out, attacks Regan with the phrase 'Naughty lady', it ought to be clear that there has been considerable shift in the weight of the adjective, now used to admonish children or to describe some slightly comic (often sexual) peccadillo.

Much time and ink has been wasted attempting to differentiate between translations, versions, adaptations and the establishment of a hierarchy of 'correctness' between these categories. Yet the differentiation between them derives from a concept of the reader as the passive receiver of the text in which its Truth is enshrined. In other words, if the text is perceived as an object that should only produce a single invariant reading, any 'deviation' on the part of the reader translator will be judged as a transgression.

Such a judgement might be made regarding scientific documents, for example, where facts are set out and presented in unqualifiedly objective terms for the reader of SL and TL text alike, but with literary texts the position is different. One of the greatest advances in twentieth-century literary study has been the reevaluation of the reader. So Barthes sees the place of the literary work as that of making the reader not so translation studies much a consumer as a producer of the text, while Julia Kristeva sees the reader as realizing the expansion of the work's process of semiosis.

The reader, then, translates or decodes the text according to a different set of systems and the idea of the one 'correct' reading is dissolved. At the same time, Kristeva's notion of intertextuality, that sees all texts linked to all other texts because no text can ever be completely free of those texts that precede and surround it, is also profoundly significant for the student of translation. As Paz suggests all texts are translations of translations of translations and the lines cannot be drawn to separate Reader from Translator. Quite clearly, the idea of the reader as translator and the enormous freedom this vision bestows must be handled responsibly.

The reader translator who does not acknowledge the dialectical materialist basis of Brecht's plays or who misses the irony in Shakespeare's sonnets or who ignores the way in which the doctrine of the transubstantiation is used as a masking device for the production of Vittorini's anti-fascist statement in *Conversazioni in Sicilia* is upsetting the balance of power by treating the original as his own property. And all these elements can be missed if the reading does not take into full account the overall structuring of the work and its relation to the time and place of its production. Maria Corti sums up the role of the reader in

terms that could equally be seen as advice to the translator: Every era produces its own type of signedness, which is made to manifest in social and literary models. As soon as these models are consumed and reality seems to vanish, new signs become needed to recapture reality, and this allows us to assign an information-value to the dynamic structures of literature. So seen, literature is both the condition and the place of artistic communication between senders and addressees, or public. The messages travel along its paths, in time, slowly or rapidly; some of the messages venture into encounters that undo an entire line of communication; but after great effort a new line will be born. This last fact is the most significant; it requires apprenticeship and dedication on the part of those who would understand it, because the hyper sign function of great SPECIFIC

Literary works transforms the grammar of our view of the world .The translator, then, first reads/translates in the SL and then, through a further process of decoding, translates the text into the TL language. In this he is not doing less than the reader of the SL text alone, he is actually doing more, for the SL text is being approached through more than one set of systems. It is therefore quite foolish to argue that the task of the translator is to translate but not to interpret, as if the two were separate exercises. The interlingual translation is bound to reflect the translator's own creative interpretation of the SL text.

Moreover, the degree to which the translator reproduces the form, metre, rhythm, tone, register, etc. of the SL text, will be as much determined by the TL system as by the SL system and will also depend on the function of the translation. If, as in the case of the Loeb Classics Library, the translation is intended as a line by line crib on the facing page to the SL text, then this factor will be a major criterion. If, on the other hand, the SL text is being reproduced for readers with no knowledge either of the language or the socio literary conventions of the SL system, then the translation will be constructed in terms other than those employed in the bilingual version. It has already been pointed out in Section that criteria governing modes of translation have varied considerably throughout the ages and there is certainly no single proscriptive model for translators to follow.

## (ii) TRANSLATING POETRY

Within the field of literary translation, more time has been devoted to investigating the problems of translating poetry than any other literary mode. Many of the studies purporting to investigate these problems are either evaluations of different translations of a single work or personal statements by individual translators on how they have set about solving problems.<sup>8</sup> Rarely do studies of poetry and translation try to discuss methodological problems from a non empirical position, and yet it is precisely that type of study that is most valuable and most needed.

In his book on the various methods employed by English translators of Catullus' Poem 64,<sup>9</sup> André Lefevere catalogues seven different strategies:

**(1) Phonemic translation**, which attempts to reproduce the SL sound in the TL while at the same time producing an acceptable paraphrase of the sense. Lefevere comes to the conclusion that although this works moderately well in the translation of onomatopoeia, the overall result is clumsy and often devoid of sense altogether.

**(2) Literal translation**, where the emphasis on word-for-word translation distorts the sense and the syntax of the original.

**(3) Metrical translation**, where the dominant criterion is the reproduction of the SL metre. Lefevere concludes that, like literal translation, this method concentrates on one aspect of the SL text at the expense of the text as a whole.

**(4) Poetry into prose.** Here Lefevere concludes that distortion of the sense, communicative value and syntax of the SL text results from this method, although not to the same extent as with the literal or metrical types of translation.

**(5) Rhymed translation**, where the translator 'enters into a double bondage' of metre and rhyme. Lefevere's conclusions here are particularly harsh, since he feels that the end product is merely a 'caricature' of Catullus.

**(6) Blank verse translation.** Again the restrictions imposed on the translator by the choice of structure are emphasized, although the greater accuracy and higher degree of literalness obtained are also noted.

**(7) Interpretation.** Under this heading, Lefevere discusses what he calls versions where the substance of the SL text is retained but the form is changed, and imitations where the translator produces a poem of his own which has 'only title and point of departure, if those, in common with the source text'. What emerges from Lefevere's study is a revindication of the points made by Anne Cluysenaar, for the deficiencies of the methods he examines are due to an overemphasis of one or more elements of the poem at the expense of the whole. In other words, in establishing a set of methodological criteria to follow, the translator has focused on some elements at the expense of others and from this failure to consider the poem as an organic structure comes a translation that is demonstrably unbalanced. However, Lefevere's use of the term version is rather misleading, for it would seem to imply a distinction between this and translation, taking as the basis for the argument a split between form and substance. Yet, as Popovic points out,<sup>10</sup> 'the translator has the right to differ organically, to be independent', provided that independence is pursued for the sake of the original in order to reproduce it as a living work.

In his article, 'The Poet as Translator', discussing Pound's Homage to Sextus Propertius, J.P. Sullivan recalls asking Pound why he had used the phrase 'Oetian gods' instead of 'Oetian God' (i.e. Hercules) in Section I of the poem. Pound had replied simply that it would 'bitch the movement of the verse'. And earlier, in the same article, Sullivan quotes Pound defending himself against the savage attacks on his work in the following terms: No, I have not done a translation of Propertius. That fool in Chicago took the Homage for a translation despite the mention of Wordsworth and the parodied line from Yeats. (As if, had one wanted to pretend to more Latin than one knew, For Pound, the distinction between his translations and his Homage was clear, but for those critics schooled in nineteenth-century notions of the excellence of literalness, the distinction was irrelevant. Pound had very precise ideas about the responsibility of the translator, but his frame of reference would have been far closer to Popovic's than to Professor W.G.Hale's. Pound defined his Homage as something other than a translation; his purpose in writing the poem, he claimed, was to bring a dead man to life. It was, in short, a kind of literary resurrection. The greatest problem when translating a text from a period remote in time is not only that the poet and his contemporaries are dead, but the significance of the poem in its context is dead too. Sometimes, as with the pastoral, for example, the genre is dead and no amount of 88 fidelity to the original form, shape or tone will help the rebirth of a new line of communication, to use Maria Corti's terms, unless the TL system is taken into account equally. With the classics, this first means overcoming the problem of translating along a vertical axis, where the SL text is seen as being of a higher status than the TL text. Unless the translation is

intended as a crib, it also means accepting Popović's theory of the inevitability of shifts of expression in the translation process.

### (iii) TRANSLATING PROSE

Although there is a large body of work debating the issues that surround the translation of poetry, far less time has been spent studying the specific problems of translating literary prose. One explanation for this could be the higher status that poetry holds, but it is more probably due to the widespread erroneous notion that a novel is somehow a simpler structure than a poem and is consequently easier to translate. Moreover, whilst we have a number of detailed statements by poet-translators regarding their methodology.

The English translator's compression of Mann's sentence structures reduces the number of levels on which the reader can approach the text, for clearly the translator's prime concern has been to create a sense of rapid movement. So the second sentence has been integrated with the first to form a single unit and the fourth sentence has been shortened by deliberate omissions (e.g. *zu Schiff*—by boat). The stylized terms describing places have been replaced by straightforward, geographical names and the stately language of Mann's text has been replaced with a series of clichés in a conversational account of an overly long journey.

There are also other variations. The introduction of the protagonist in Mann's first sentence in such deliberately decharacterized terms is yet another key to the reader, but by translating *einfacher* (ordinary) as unassuming, the English translator introduces a powerful element of characterization and alters the reader's perspective. And it is difficult not to conclude that the English translator has inadequately grasped the significance of the novel when there is even a case of mistranslation, *Schlünde* (abysses) rendered as marshes. In the case of the English translation of the texts above, the sentences appear to have been translated at face value, rather than as component units in a complex overall structure.

Using Popović's terminology, the English versions show several types of negative shift involving:

- (1) Mistranslation of information;
- (2) 'Subinterpretation' of the original text;
- (3) Superficial interpretation of connections between intentional correlatives. Having begun by stating that I intended to avoid value judgements of individual translations, it might now seem that deviated from my original plan. Moreover, it might seem unfair to lay so much emphasis on cases of negative shift that emerge from the first few sentences of a vast work.

But the point that needs to be made is that although analysis of narrative has had enormous influence since Shlovsky's early theory of prose, there are obviously many readers who still adhere to the principle that a novel consists primarily of paraphrasable material content that can be translated straightforwardly. And whereas there seems to be a common consensus that a prose paraphrase of a poem is judged to be inadequate, there is no such consensus regarding the prose text.

Again and again translators of novels take pains to create readable TL texts, avoiding the stilted effect that can follow from adhering too closely to SL syntactical structures, but fail to consider the way in which individual sentences form part of the total structure. And in pointing out this failure, which is first and foremost a deficiency in reading, I believe that I am not so much passing judgement on the work of individuals as pointing towards a whole area of translation that needs to be looked at more closely.

Hilaire Belloc laid down six general rules for the translator of prose texts:

- (1) The translator should not 'plod on', word by word or sentence by sentence, but should 'always "block out" his work'. By 'block out', Belloc means that the translator should consider the work as an integral unit and translate in sections, asking himself 'before each what the whole sense is he has to render'.
- (2) The translator should render idiom by idiom 'and idioms of their nature demand translation into another form from that of the original. Belloc cites the case of the Greek exclamation 'By the Dog!', which, if rendered literally, becomes merely comic in English, and suggests that the phrase 'By God!' is a much closer translation. Likewise, he points out that the French historic present must be translated into the English narrative tense, which is past, and the French system of defining a proposition by putting it into the form of a rhetorical question cannot be transposed into English where the same system does not apply.
- (3) The translator must render 'intention by intention', bearing in mind that 'the intention of a phrase in one language may be less emphatic than the form of the phrase, or it may be more emphatic'. By 'intention', Belloc seems to be talking about the weight a given expression may have in a particular context in the SL that would be disproportionate if translated literally into the TL. He quotes several examples where the weighting of the phrase in the SL is clearly much stronger or much weaker than the literal TL translation, and points out that in the translation of 'intention', it is often necessary to add words not in the original 'to conform to the idiom of one's own tongue'.
- (4) Belloc warns against *les faux amis*, those words or structures that may appear to correspond in both SL and TL but actually do not, e.g. *demander*—to ask translated wrongly as to demand.
- (5) The translator is advised to 'transmute boldly' and Belloc suggests that the essence of translating is 'the resurrection of an alien thing in a native body'.
- (6) The translator should never embellish. Belloc's six rules cover both points of technique and points of principle. His order of priorities is a little curious, but nevertheless he does stress the need for the translator to consider the prose text as a structured

whole whilst bearing in mind the stylistic and syntactical exigencies of the TL. He accepts that there is a moral responsibility to the original, but feels that the translator has the right to significantly alter the text in the translation process in order to provide the TL reader with a text that conforms to TL stylistic and idiomatic norms.

Belloc's first point, in which he discusses the need for the translator to 'block out' his work, raises what is perhaps the central problem for the prose translator: the difficulty of determining translation units. It must be clear at the outset that the text, understood to be in a dialectical relationship with other texts and located within a specific historical context, is the prime unit. But whereas the poet translator can more easily break the prime text down into translatable units, e.g. lines, verses, stanzas, the prose translator has a more complex task. Certainly, many novels are broken down into chapters or sections, but as Barthes has shown with his methodology of five reading codes (see S/Z, discussed by T.Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics*, London, 1977) the structuring of a prose text is by no means as linear as the chapter divisions might indicate. Yet if the translator takes each sentence or paragraph as a minimum unit and translates it without relating it to the overall work, he runs the risk of ending up with a TL text like those quoted above, where the paraphrasable content of the passages has been translated at the cost of everything else.

#### **(iv) TRANSLATING DRAMATIC TEXTS**

The bulk of genre-focused translation study involves the specific problem of translating poetry, it is also quite clear that theatre is one of the most neglected areas. There is very little material on the special problems of translating dramatic texts, and the statements of individual theatre translators often imply that the methodology used in the translation process is the same as that used to approach prose texts. Yet even the most superficial consideration of the question must show that the dramatic text cannot be translated in the same way as the prose text. To begin with, a theatre text is read differently.

It is read as something incomplete, rather than as a fully rounded unit, since it is only in performance that the full potential of the text is realized. And this presents the translator with a central problem: whether to translate the text as a purely literary text, or to try to translate it in its function as one element in another, more complex system. As work in theatre semiotics has shown, the linguistic system is only one optional component in a set of interrelated systems that comprise the spectacle. Anne Ubersfeld, for example, points out how it is impossible to separate text from performance, since theatre consists of the dialectical relationship between both, and she also shows how an artificially created distinction between the two has led to the literary text acquiring a higher status. One result of the supremacy of the literary text, she feels, has been the perception of performance as merely a 'translation': The task of the director, therefore, is to 'translate into another language' a text to which he has a prime duty to remain 'faithful'. This position is based on the concept of semantic equivalence between the written text and its performance; only the 'mode of expression' in the Hjelmslevian sense of the term will be altered, the form and content of the expression will remain identical when transferred from a system of text-signs to a system of performance-signs.

The situation often provides the dialogue with its subject matter. Moreover, whatever the subject matter may be, the situation variously interferes in the dialogue, affects the way it unfolds, brings about shifts or reversals, and sometimes interrupts it altogether. In its turn, the dialogue progressively illuminates the situation and often modifies or even transforms it. The actual sense of the individual units of meaning depends as much on the extralinguistic situation as on the linguistic context. And the dialogue will be characterized by rhythm, intonation patterns, pitch and loudness, all elements that may not be immediately apparent from a straightforward reading of the written text in isolation. Robert Corrigan, in a rare article on translating for actors, argues that at all times the translator must hear the voice that speaks and take into account the 'gesture' of the language, the cadence rhythm and pauses that occur when the written text is spoken. In this respect, he is close to Peter Bogatyrev's concept of theatre discourse.

Bogatyrev, discussing the function of the linguistic system in theatre in relation to the total experience declares that: Linguistic expression in theatre is a structure of signs constituted not only as discourse signs, but also as other signs. For example, theatre discourse, that must be the sign of a character's social situation is accompanied by the actor's gestures, finished off by his costumes, the scenery, etc. which are all equally signs of a social situation. But if the theatre translator is faced with the added criterion of playability as a prerequisite, he is clearly being asked to do something different from the translator of another type of text. Moreover, the notion of an extra dimension to the written text that the translator must somehow be able to grasp, still implies a distinction between the idea of the text and the performance, between the written and the physical. It would seem more logical, therefore, to proceed on the assumption that a theatre text, written with a view to its performance, contains distinguishable structural features that make it performable, beyond the stage directions themselves. Consequently the task of the translator must be to determine what those structures are and to translate them in to the TL, even though this may lead to major shifts on the linguistic and stylistic planes. The problem of performability in translation is further complicated by changing concepts of performance.

Consequently, a contemporary production of a Shakespearean text will be devised through the varied developments in acting style, playing space, the role of the audience and the altered concepts of tragedy and comedy that have taken place since Shakespeare's time. Moreover, acting styles and concepts of theatre also differ considerably in different national contexts, and this introduces yet another element for the translator to take into account. As an example of some of the complexities involved in determining the criteria for the translation of a theatre text, let us consider the very vexed question of Racine, the French classical dramatist. A glance through the English translations immediately reveals one significant point—texts may have been translated singly (e.g. John Masefield's versions of *Esther* and *Berenice*) or as part of a volume of complete works (e.g. R.B. Boswell, the first translator of the Racinean oeuvre). This distinction shows straight away that whilst some texts may have been translated with performance in mind, others have been translated without such a precise notion.

In the Epistle, Crowne goes to some lengths to excuse the translation (claiming it to be the work of a 'Young Gentleman') and to explain why the production had not been a success. Crowne attributes the failure of the play not to the translation, although he admits that the English version had not bestowed 'Verse upon it', but to the expectations of the audience, accustomed to a given theatre tradition, who refused to respond to the 'thin Regalios' of the French theatre tradition. Yet less

than forty years later, Ambrose Phillips' version of *Andromache*, entitled *The Distres't Mother*, was such a success that it remained in repertoire right through the eighteenth century, with the leading role a favourite of most of the great English actresses of the period. What had Phillips done to make such a triumph of a play judged earlier to be unsuited to English taste? First, Phillips made substantial alterations to the play, shortening the text in places, adding speeches and, at the ends of Acts IV and V adding whole scenes, including a final scene in which the *Distres't Mother* prepares for a happy ending. This view of Racine's tragedy has led a number of critics to attack Phillips' translation as deviant, but in his Preface Phillips explains very clearly why he felt the need to adapt Racine: If I have been able to keep up to the Beauties of Monsieur Racine in my Attempt, and to do him no Prejudice in the Liberties I have taken frequently to vary from so great a Poet, I shall have no reason to be dissatisfied with the Labour it has cost me to bring the completes of his works upon the English stage. Phillips' principal criteria for translation appear to have been:

**(1)** Playability;

**(2)** The relationship of the play to the established conventions of the theatre of his day (a theatre which restructured Shakespeare in the interests of canons and of decorum and good taste);

**(3)** Clarity of the interrelationship between the characters. Accepting that the careful balance of characters, scenes and speeches so basic to the original would have no significance in English—or, if it did, would seem heavy and contrived—Phillips chose to restructure the play for an English audience.

In Act I sc. i, for example, the basis of Phillips' technique can be seen. In Racine, this first scene furnishes the audience with the basic information they will need to follow the plot (e.g. Oreste's love for Hermione, due to marry Pyrrhus, and Pyrrhus' love for the Trojan widow, *Andromache*). At the same time the scene introduces the fatal passion of Oreste with which the play will finally terminate. Pylade's role is to act as a foil to that passion, to provide the calming tones of reason. The balance of the scene hinges on the relationship between these two different types of men.

Phillip's translation preserves both the function of the first scene in introducing the plot lines and the balance of the relationship between the two friends, but he has achieved this comparability not by following the surface structure of the SL text, but by recreating the deep structure of the scene in theatre terms. So, for example, Oreste's long monologue is broken up, since monologues of such length were not part of English stage convention; Pylade is given more lines and developed more fully as a friend rather than as a foil, since the device of the *confidante* was not so acceptable on the English stage. To use James Holmes' terminology, Phillips has established a hierarchy of correspondences in which the written text is seen as an adaptable element in the production of live theatre)