

Translatology: What Hobbles It

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Two percent of the people think. Three percent think they think and ninety five percent would rather die than think
– George Bernard Shaw.

Abstract

Noting that man hasn't as yet awakened fully rationally to the life-giving life-enhancing power and life-refreshing life-sourcing civilization-deepening beauty of literary translation, the Note argues that the possible anodyny of (Literary) Translation Sciences as they obtain today cry out for a good deal of rationally illuminating rigorisation. Part of the anodyny is linguistic (and cultural) naivet , as we argue. See Giridhar 2005 for a rational elucidation. Lexicalisations like the Sanskrit word dharma for example have been subjected to unacceptably na ve, irrational and supremacist, and hence glaringly unscientific, treatment. This has been demonstrated (See Giridhar op cit). We will talk about it here as well. Part of the problem is the waffly kind of demagoguery that sustains itself over the years. For example, people talk(ed) of eco-translation. Has any piece been translated with eco-translation in mind? If not, what is its status? It, as seems to be the case, exists in the air as cerebral gymnastics? Is there a translation precept which has no conceivable relation to translation praxis? Following Ramayana's several regional avatars, there was some piquant and fashionably exultant buzz about originals undergoing several forms in response to the narrativisation requirements of target cultures. I know of no modern literary piece which has had such avatars because apparently, the translator doesn't know what to do! Does it mean these different avatars, however nebulously defined, are theoretically optional? Adaptation, I rationally assume, is technically different from translation. Essentially, there is no

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'adaptation', for example, for discursive or scientific discourse.

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It is now a truth consensually acknowledged that the 'whole quality' of the original text never goes across in translation. Kannada (or any linguistic) dialectal variation is a persuasive example of this fact. The dialectal variants of the verb 'to be' in Kannada viz. *ide/untu/aite/aiti/ada* to mean 'is' translate only as *is* in English and nothing else. The words *tamma*, literally 'kid brother' and *tangi* lit. 'kid sister' are used in Northern Kannada land as affectionate address terms for younger boys and girls, much like *awwa* lit. 'mother' and *appa* lit. 'father' are commonly used for elders. *appa* lit. 'father' is used suffixed to sentence units in Southern Kannada land for younger boys! You can't say in English, "Ey Kid brother!" "Ey Father!" or "Ei, Mother!" English does allow though such usage in the form of words like *uncle* and *aunty*. There is precious little the translator can do about this since it is how natural language operates. The Kannada *ri* suffixed to verbs, nouns and when addressing for example husbands seems unrenderable in English. 'Sir' is not quite it! *ri* seems delightfully honorific and intimate at the same time, unlike 'sir'? Imagine a Kannada or Indian housewife calling her husband 'sir'! ...

English doesn't distinguish between an honorific *he* and a non-honorific *he*. But Kannada does so that there is a character in a novel I Englished who felt bad because a character used the disrespectful *avanu* 'he' for a character instead of *avaru* the respectful 'he'. There is no way to articulate it in English. The closest parallels may not do.

Instead of *anna* ‘elder brother’ a character, in his idio-dialect says, *yanna* ‘elder brother’. The *anna-yanna* alternation seems elusive: *big brother* - *dear brother biggie*? *Aayi* is an honourable affectionate suffix used with elderly female names in northern Karnataka. *Dholawwa aayi*, I rendered as, ‘the motherly Dholawwa!’ Bilinguals may have problems with such translations.

Structural equivalence notwithstanding (See Giridhar 1991), word order could be a translation hassle: A messenger in a Kannada novel reporting to the queen says,

sainyadhikari *rajananna* V
commander-nom(0) king-acc ?

the Kannada sentence leaving what the commander did to the king delightfully open by leaving the sentence-final verb unfilled, unspecified. The (verb-medial) English translation would be the odd

The commander...the king,

which sounds singularly odd as an English translation of the beautifully, if tantalizingly, incomplete Kannada sentence. The queen asks the courier back.

rajanna ...?
king-acc

This short pithy query may be translated as the long ‘What did the commander do to the king?’ and not as the possible but unacceptable ‘?-king’ or as ‘(the commander) what the king?’

There is no way a code-switched Kannada sentence for instance can go across to English for instance with the same hybridity: In the case of *Gowdre! jaraa naaayi hidiri!* ‘Respectable Gowda, Sir! Please hold the doggie!’, the code-switched Hindi hedge *jaraa* lit. ‘a little’ cannot go across as a code-switch.

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majgi baaLa swaada adaava! "The buttermilk is very toothsome!"

buttermilk-nom(-0) much taste be-prs-3pn

swaada 'tasty' is an Urdu word nativised in Bijapur Kannada. This colourful hybridity as indeed the structural colour of buttermilk deemed as a count noun (and hence the plural in the verb *adaava*, 'are' *va* signifying plural number) go unrendered. One cannot say 'buttermilk are' in English.

There could of course be and are areas where dialectal variation can be ferried across.

The nonself-identity or the non-mathematically layered-up design, of natural language and texts, could be another reason for the *whole quality* not going across.

A back translation typically doesn't end up in the original version of the original text. Imagine translating directly back to Spanish a Kannada translation which has come through Icelandic, Tagalog and English. That the good, the great, or the arguably final translation is NOT a point but a range has its origin in this nonself-identity of texts. *The translated source language original sounding like a target language original, the ultimate in all translation, is a range, NOT a point.*

Then there is the Kannada bilingual's genuine dissatisfaction with the English translation of Kannada classical literature, for instance, because of his admittedly and expectedly different reading and cognitive experiences, which could possibly be an inscrutably unobjectifiable and unquantifiable entity. *Central to and integral to this nonself-identity is the absence of word-to-word rendering, not just of multi-word lexicalisations like idioms, phrasal verbs, popular adages, of unique daily recyclable linguistic structural templates, and of individual language realisations of universal categories of number,*

gender, case, tense, aspect, mood etc, but of deeply conventionalised cultural cognitive constructs. In Kannada, for example, (the first meaning is the literal word-to-word one, unacceptable in English and the second is the acceptable free rendering),

nanna magaLu doDDavaLaagiddaaLe *My daughter has turned big.

‘My daughter has come round’

tale oDedu seeru
measure of solids)

*breaking the head, one seer (a

‘One seer levelling off the contents to the container top.’

hoogi hoogi avLna madve aada *having gone and gone,
he married her!

“Of all persons, he married her!”

Among many such examples is the Hindi sentence:

bukhaar jaane kaa naam hii nahii letaa *The fever isn’t taking the name of leaving!

“There are no signs of fever leaving.”

The translator’s alleged and anarchically blown-up runaway freedom with the content of the original, which freedom remains undesirably nebulous it seems to me, possibly proceeds from this iron-clad fact of this interestingly and richly open nonself-identity.

The second content in the following picture, the content that is redone, reformed, is the centre of contention in translation, where a recontextualisation, reethosisation and re(echo)texturisation, involving the translator’s alleged largely undefined runaway freedom, take place. The submission here is what we can do with this content is not a free-for-all. That will hardly do justice to the power and beauty of the life-giving

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life-enabling life-refreshing exercise (literary) translation surely is.

form >> content ∞ CONTENT >>form

There is a significant catch here, which, (un)arguably, theoretically reins in this runaway freedom of the translator: there is something to be said about legally valid translation, for example. To be legally valid, a translation has to authentically and comprehensively carry across the spirit and essence of a document. If the translation of a text (a contract, an agreement, a title deed or any text for that matter) is to be legally valid, then the 'whole quality' or at least the whole quality that matters has gone across, to be sure. In which case the first sentence this note struck out with about the 'whole quality' warrants a rethink.

I vehemently argue for some such analogous yardstick in literary translation as well, leading to more rigorous, less airy, analytical and assessment tools, making for translation sciences and literary sciences, music sciences and so on. Mystic mystery-laden inscrutable subjectivities leading allegedly to wondrous and magical creative outcomes that man seems to be compulsively lured by have no inherent self-contained existence and hence cannot take man far.

Now, something like 'anything goes' seems to be trending in the name of transcreation, in the name of creatively braided departure from the source narrative. It is clear that there is a technocratic deductivist substrate, a noninductive spring board, a departure terminal, to every field of human enquiry driven by a set of considerations of reason etc. *The obvious chasm between airy precepts and the solid ground reality of the praxis of translation has gone unacceptably unexplained in Translation Studies.* I know of no literary translation that has been done going (formally exclusively and exhaustively or holistically) by the linguistic turn or the cultural turn or the

power turn or the eco-turn or the geo-turn or the cognitive turn (of Cognitive Translatology) and I don't know what other turns man has invented. Nor have there been several avatars of a modern piece in response to the several narrativisation requirements of different target cultures. Several (Sahitya award winning or otherwise good) Indian language literary artefacts have been translated into more than fifteen other Indian languages besides English. I don't think these linguistic-cultural renderings into different languages of a single original piece have, due to human intervention, changed in response to the narrativisation requirements of the target ethos, like Ramayana for example is supposed to have done.

What is the theoretical status of this chaotically exorable stance, of rewriting, which leaves the translator all at sea as to what to do, faced with the original piece and the project of translating it? That is, apart from the fidelity of various hues, what does she do? Think of translation (quite laudably) as a site of cultural traffic and think along the lines of themeing the translation around gender, nation-building, man's evolution, equity, God ...? Or is it the case that this viz an inexplicable unbridled rewriting is what theory provides for but practitioners are at a creative loss as to how to go about it! I have seen translators who ballyhoo about letting their creative floods flow through these creative theoretical sluice-gates, mocking the fidelity part as *muula-vyaadhi* origin-disease, Kannada for 'piles', do nothing but faithful translation. In case they do other than the fidelity of some sort, has it to do with the translator's whims or is it really theoretically underpinned? *That is, does what she does go beyond, or is determined by something beyond, the individual, by the theoretical spaces of the discipline is a critical question to ask.* Or is it a theoretically allowed hybrid?

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There is an inwardly evolutionary rationale of growth in any discipline, the disciplines dutifully steering clear of the creating human subject, or the creating human subject dutifully steering clear of the discipline per se, I assume. Workers in the field ONLY impetus or drive this growth which is directed from inside, as it were. Every field of human inquiry exists inherently, has its own internal logic of growth, much like the human body whose growth and healing are internally driven. The seed is inherent. Outsiders ONLY water, manure, feed, and fuel this seed. Physicians only manipulate, supplement etc this internal logic. Field workers in the field of inquiry only realise this potential logic. (See Giridhar 2015 reprinted in Giridhar 2021 for some elucidation). Not externally foisted inputs, much like a literary piece grow or ought to grow organically and not through the whims and whammies of the author's mindset, although to be sure it is the human author who is the creating agent.

I would take, with a bottle of theoretical salt, the tenet of 'prescriptive antiessentialism' that says that to translate a text mechanically as it is without any 'creative' alteration of subjective braiding embroidering etc. is not interesting, because it militates against the dictum of an unwarranted, whimsical and prejudiced 'intervention' by the creating agent.

This viz the fact of the dancer and the dance being separate somewhere and yet indistinguishable, I assume, is the greatest paradox of all open and forward-looking human creation. This creating subject-vitiated human literary creation has happened in Kannada literature, for example, Kannada readers being effete, apparently but surprisingly powerless and dumb witnesses to such a phenomenon.

In Economics, for example, man can manipulate demand or supply but if he can intervene and manipulate the dynamics of the supply-demand interface, then there may not be anything in

this realm of Economics worth studying. Autobiographical narratives of the social facet of natural language, derivative as this facet is, for example, need to be rigorously rationally grounded to be scientific. Or else they border on waffly demagoguery.

Translation Sciences continue to be hobbled by such airy and speciously impressive naive irrationals. Within the limitations of interlinguistic translation, the idea is to make the reader live the feel, the taste, tang, the tone, the timbre and the soul and essence of the original through the allegedly formidable, impermeably alien language barrier, making the translation more than 'adequate'. Cultures are subsets of what all humans share, which fact should make their vehicles namely linguistic codes pretty commensurable. Nothing human is alien to humans! There is at the same time something about the natural language that does make for the slim but real possibility of untranslatability. But man has unfortunately latched on to this to parade the self and supremacism. The Hindi royal *ham* 'we' for referentially singular human first person is an irrefutably great example to pedestal natural languages, it seems to me, although 'pedestal' may not be the word. And I have precious little or next to nothing to say against this delightfully healthy inequity, that Hindi, unlike other natural languages, formal-structurally recognises the great inviolable ontological dignity of individual humans, a dignity that reflects the imperious self-contained personal power that every human must feel, in a tango of course with respect and concern for every sentient!

For example, the word *dharma* is a putatively fashionable non-translatable, for which proposal there is no real rationale. Alienable divorceable marriages that linguistic objects are of form and content, pretty much like human marriages, there is nothing about *dharma*, which makes it, especially unlike lexicalisations of any other language. No one talks about this!

People forget that the phonetic sequence *dharma* is a linguistic object, encoding culturally, but NOT nebulously, configured human cognition. The amalgamation of a chip from the rock of cognition quarried as meaning with a sound sequence from the world of speech sounds is noticeably quite unlike that of the human sperm with the ovum, the latter of which, unlike the former, results in an ontologically different inalienably singular third entity. The sperm and the ovum do not remain the same in the foetus, but in the case of words, although there is the entity of the constitute word, the constituent form and the constituent meaning remain the same in the new entity. By the way, the rock of cognition that I broach here from which meanings are chipped is a rock all humans share without exception. To say therefore that some humans cannot understand or cannot be made to take the cognitive route to understand a word in any natural language, or that what has been packed in a lexicalisation by an ethos can't be unpacked is typically not tenable. To aver that the passage of time makes it so is puerile.

That a linguistic object in one particular natural language is distinctly special is suspect, to say the least. Ashok Vohra (2022)'s elaborately but really irrelevantly laid out concerns in his piece of 'Dharma is Not Rigid, It's Everchanging by Nature' need to be addressed. After declaring that "its meaning continues to be an enigma to scholars" (the identity of these scholars is not revealed!) and that P.N. Kane showed how its meaning finally has settled down to signifying, "the privileges, duties and obligations of a man, his standard of conduct as a member of Aryan community, as a member of one of the castes, as a person at a particular stage of life", he avers that "the difficulty in defining the notion of dharma is further compounded by its different kinds: *vyakti dharma*, *kutumba dharma*, *samajika dharma*, *rashtra dharma*, *varna dharma*, *ashrama dharma*, *guna dharma*, *svadharma* and *apad dharma*.

Each one of them describes a rule of action that may at times conflict with other rules.”

Vohra significantly, if not conveniently, forgets hundreds of other dharma collocations possible such as *niirina dharma* water-dharma, *mysuru dharma*, Mysuru-dharma, *maNNina dharma* soil-dharma, *kallina dharma* stone-dharma, *kadalina dharma* sea-dharma, *athithi dharma* guest-dharma, *kaLLana dharma* thief-dharma and so on. It is like saying the grammar of the word *book*, for example, is compounded by the fact that it collocates with so many other locutions, as in Giridhar’s book, Chemistry book, cosmology book, soil science book and hundreds of others. “Each one of them (the collocations with the word *dharma*)”, he avers, “describes a rule of action that may at times be in conflict with other rules.” This conflict is, frustratingly, not exemplified. A lexical item, called a contronym, has antonymous meanings, like the word *sanction* has, as in ‘Russia has been sanctioned (penalization) and ‘His loan has been sanctioned’ (approved). English has lots of contronyms like cleave, before, either, to dust, apology, spike, foment(?) etc. *Dharma* could be one, going by Vohra’s averments.

The conclusion then is Vohra’s averments cut no new ice either about translation as a phenomenon or about a linguistic object like *dharma*. They are unscientific or antiscientific.

The surprisingly simple submission is that given a linguistic stretch with the word in question, its putatively multifarious senses can be captured getting at the selectional affinities that obtain between the word and other constituents in the stretch, a sample of which is the following in Kannada:

dharma pathni ‘lawfully wedded wife’
niirina dharma ‘the nature of water’
dharma chathra ‘charitable dwelling house’
nanna dharma ‘my obligatory moral duty’

yuga dharma 'the being/nature of an era'

....

(To speak authoritatively about language in isolation from real linguistic stretches like phrases, sentences and discourse, as many naïve nonlinguists do, is to waffle in the air, for the expressive homo loquens is homo syntacticus!). This is true of all lexicalized linguistic objects. There is nothing elusively vague about the word *vague*, nothing elusively convoluting about the word *dharma* or elusively obfuscating about the word *obfuscating*. This is one of the beauties of natural language, one of its salient characteristics that make it one of the cognitive wonders of nature. And the primary prototypical meaning among the hardly surprising various meanings of the word *dharma* is “structural/ethical template”. The Hindi *pani-puri*, for example, has been defined as “hollowed semolina with potato-garbanzo mash with cumin-tamarind water.” There is no reason whatsoever not to say that what has been packed can be unpacked.

Concluding Remarks

The generic burden of this piece is that there is nothing like unbridled rambling human creativity. It is egregiously irrational to think what is *is* what ought to be. That whatever happens is what ought to have happened. That the mere fact of whatever a writer or painter or musician or sculptor or translator does justifies what he does. *This commonly held ipso facto validity is NOT right it seems to me.* This is reflected in Bassnett’s (1999:11) observation that “the study of translation involves mapping the journeys texts undertake.” This piece is a simple plea for a rational rigorisation of the inner spaces of translation as a human phenomenon. A robustly reasoned creative path is the path to take and the destination likely would be entirely fair, as in the physical sciences. That one

takes it as fair is the horripilating beauty of all rational human enquiry.

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