



Inter-cultural Translatability Issues with Special Reference to Ancient Bhartiya Texts

Dr. Perna Malhotra

Associate Professor, Department of English, University of Delhi, New Delhi

Article Info

Received: 08 May 2023,

Received in revised form: 10 Jun 2023,

Accepted: 18 Jun 2023,

Available online: 25 Jun 2023

Keywords— Translation, translation studies, translatability, equivalence, source language, target language, interculturality, adaptation

©2023 The Author(s). Published by AI Publications. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

Abstract

In contemporary times, we are part of a multi-nationalistic and multi-culturalist society and citizens of a globalised world. Translation helps in being better connected and mediated with others. Translation has acquired greater significance in today's times by providing linguistic accessibility to the market forces though much of it had been in vogue for centuries and played a creative role in the dissemination of international cultures and eventually acculturation. Translation as an old practice holds immense significance in our increasingly globalised world. It is the art of conveying meaning and messages from one language to another, allowing individuals of diverse backgrounds to connect and understand each other. Translation serves as a vital bridge between cultures, facilitating the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and experiences. Its importance lies in enabling effective communication and fostering mutual respect and appreciation for the richness and diversity of human languages and cultures. However, interculturality in translation may pose multiple issues. The terminology of one culture may not have exact equivalence in the target language. There could be more issues related to the intentions of the translator/s, their competence to deal with nuances of language, and the consequence of such fallacies caused by multiple factors. The biggest problem is that they cause a long-lasting impact on the understanding of texts, and thus, the cultural and historical facts.

I. INTRODUCTION

“Writers make national literature but translators make universal literature”- Jose Saramago

Translation serves as a powerful tool for overcoming language barriers and promoting effective communication. In a world where people speak thousands of languages, translation allows individuals from different linguistic backgrounds to understand and interact with one another. It enables the exchange of ideas, information, and experiences, fostering meaningful dialogue and collaboration across borders. Without translation, the barriers posed by linguistic diversity would hinder global progress and limit our ability to work together towards shared goals.

Languages are an integral part of a culture's identity. Translation plays a crucial role in preserving and promoting cultural heritage. It allows literary works, historical texts, and important documents to be translated into different languages, ensuring their accessibility to a wider audience. By making these cultural treasures available to diverse communities, translation helps to safeguard and celebrate the richness and uniqueness of various cultures. It enables the transmission of cultural values, traditions, and knowledge from one generation to another, contributing to the preservation of global cultural diversity.

Translation is the key to unlocking a vast treasure trove of knowledge and expertise across different languages. Scientific research, academic publications, and

technological advancements need to be shared globally to foster progress. Through translation, scholars, scientists, and experts can communicate their findings and discoveries to a broader audience, transcending language barriers. This exchange of knowledge promotes innovation, fosters collaboration, and accelerates advancements in various fields, ultimately benefiting humanity as a whole. If Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali*, which was originally written in Bangla had not been translated into English, it would never have got Nobel Prize in literature. If Bible would not be translated into English, maybe it would not have become a much-translated book afterward. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 2011 was originally prepared in English, Spanish, and French but was later on translated into 438 languages including Hindi.

In a globalised world, businesses are increasingly operating on an international scale. Translation plays a crucial role in expanding market reach, breaking into new territories, and fostering cross-cultural trade. By translating marketing materials, product descriptions, and legal documents, businesses can effectively communicate with customers from different linguistic backgrounds. Translation helps to build trust, establish connections, and bridge cultural gaps, enabling companies to tap into new markets and seize global economic opportunities.

Translation has come a long way from the translation of classics of Greek and Roman to the machine translation of present times. Through this period, it has traversed a journey of many beliefs, myths, and parameters of judgment. Some thought that bringing in equivalence from a Source Language to the Target Language was the only task of a translator; others believed in identical reproduction of an original text.

Depending upon the closeness to the source text, the level of faithfulness is decided. The more freedom is given to a translator, communicatively the better translation can be got. Adaptation can be the farthest end of freedom, wherein just the gist of the source document is conveyed for a specific purpose, like the movie adaptations of novels and written texts; children's abridged versions of bigger texts in a target language.

The first English translation was done by Wycliff of the Bible in 1382. It is interesting to note that immediately after this translation a decree was passed by Oxford about not translating scriptures in an individual capacity and not to read such versions. This decree remained valid till the fall of Constantinople. The printing press was invented much later, therefore, the translation of Wycliffe Bible is in handwritten format. 1611 version was called the King James version and fifty translators collaborated on it. English prose translation

took another century as the first prose translation in English was *Le Morte Darthur* based on Arthurian romances.

Translation fosters cultural understanding and promotes empathy and tolerance among individuals from different backgrounds. By providing access to diverse literature, films, and artworks, translation allows people to immerse themselves in different cultures, perspectives, and worldviews. It helps to break down stereotypes, dispel misconceptions, and foster appreciation for the unique perspectives and traditions of others. Through translation, individuals can develop a deeper understanding of different cultures, promoting harmony and fostering a sense of global citizenship.

Translation is a fundamental tool that promotes effective communication, preserves cultural heritage, enables the exchange of knowledge, enhances economic opportunities, and fosters cultural understanding and tolerance. In an interconnected world, where language diversity is abundant, translation serves as a powerful force that unites humanity and facilitates meaningful connections. It empowers individuals to bridge gaps, embrace diversity, and build a more inclusive and harmonious global community. The importance of translation cannot be overstated, as it allows us to celebrate the richness of human languages and cultures while enabling us to work together toward a shared future.

Since translation deals with languages, and languages keep evolving, therefore, translation also has acquired different dimensions according to changing languages. Translation requires much more than knowing two languages. It requires many other skills and qualities required for translation in addition to the knowledge of the original and the target language. Discipline and continuous practice have no substitute in translation. Even a native speaker of a particular language may not be a good translator vis-e-vis non-native speakers as s/he may lack the aptitude for translation.

Source Language (SL) and Target Language (TL) are the two terms related to translation from a particular language to a specific language. A translator creates an image of an author and then sees to it to become a reality in the real world. The role of a translator is not just confined to word-to-word translation, rather it is much deeper.

II. TRANSLATABILITY ISSUES WITH REFERENCE TO ANCIENT BHARTIYA TEXTS

However, translating ancient Bhartiya texts presents a unique set of challenges due to their rich cultural and linguistic complexities. These challenges stem from factors

such as linguistic variations, cultural context, antiquated vocabulary, and the intricate nature of philosophical and religious concepts. These texts were written in various languages, including Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, and regional languages. Each language has its own nuances, grammatical structures, and vocabulary. Translators must possess a deep understanding of these languages and their historical evolution to accurately capture the intended meaning of the texts. Moreover, the lack of standardised spelling and pronunciation in ancient texts adds an additional layer of complexity.

The cultural context of ancient Bhartiya texts makes them stand alone. They often contain cultural references, metaphors, and symbols that are deeply rooted in the historical and social context of the time. Translators need to have a profound knowledge of Bhartiya history, mythology, customs, and traditions to decipher and convey these cultural nuances. Without a thorough understanding of the cultural context, the essence and subtleties of the original text may be lost in translation. The texts contain vocabulary and idiomatic expressions that may be obsolete or no longer in common usage. The meanings of certain words may have evolved or changed over time, making it challenging to accurately capture their original intent. Translators must possess expertise in both the source and target languages to bridge this linguistic gap and choose appropriate equivalents or explanations that convey the intended meaning to modern readers.

Many ancient Bhartiya texts delve into profound philosophical and religious concepts, such as Darshana, Advaita Vedanta, Yoga, etc. These concepts often involve intricate metaphysical, mystical, and abstract ideas that can be challenging to express in other languages. Translators need a deep understanding of these philosophies and religions to accurately convey the nuances and subtleties inherent in the original text. Moreover, finding equivalent terms or concepts in the target language that adequately convey the richness of the original text can be a daunting task. Ancient Hindu texts are known for their layered meanings, poetic expressions, and intentional ambiguity. Translators must navigate through the multiple possible interpretations and convey the intended meaning without sacrificing the poetic and metaphorical aspects of the text. Striking a balance between maintaining the literary beauty of the original and ensuring clarity for the target audience is a delicate task that requires exceptional linguistic and interpretive skills.

Further, many ancient Bhartiya texts have multiple manuscript variants, which differ in terms of wordings, phrases, and even entire sections. Translators face the challenge of selecting the most authentic and reliable

versions of the texts. Textual criticism, which involves comparing various manuscripts and determining the most accurate readings, is a crucial aspect of translating ancient texts. It requires extensive knowledge of textual analysis methods and the ability to make informed decisions based on the available evidence. Therefore, translating ancient Bhartiya texts is a complex endeavour that requires not only linguistic proficiency but also deeply cultural, historical, and philosophical knowledge. Overcoming the challenges of linguistic variations, cultural context, antiquated vocabulary, complex concepts, ambiguity, and manuscript variants is essential to faithfully convey the profound wisdom and insights encapsulated in these ancient texts. Skillful translators play a vital role in bridging the gap between ancient wisdom and modern readers, allowing the treasures of the ancient Bhartiya civilization to be accessible and appreciated by a broader audience.

Translating Sanskrit Hindu texts poses specific challenges due to the intricacies of the Sanskrit language, the profound philosophical concepts embedded in the texts, and the religious and cultural context. Sanskrit is a highly complex and ancient language with a rich grammatical structure and a vast lexicon. It contains numerous verb forms, declensions, and compound words, which can be challenging to accurately translate into other languages. The Sanskrit language also carries layers of meaning, metaphorical expressions, and poetic devices that require careful consideration during translation. Sanskrit words often have multiple meanings and nuances, and the context determines the intended sense. Translators face the challenge of capturing the various shades of meaning and conveying the richness and depth of the original text in a target language. The multivalence and polysemy inherent in Sanskrit words can lead to interpretive challenges and require translators to make nuanced decisions. Sanskrit Hindu texts delve into profound philosophical concepts, such as Advaita Vedanta, Yoga, Karma, Dharma, and Moksha. These concepts often lack direct equivalents in other languages, making it difficult to convey precise meaning and philosophical nuances. Translators need a deep understanding of Hindu philosophy and its subtleties to choose appropriate terms and explanations that accurately convey the intended meaning without oversimplification or distortion.

Sanskrit words often lack direct equivalents in English, particularly when it comes to philosophical and spiritual concepts. For instance, terms like "Atman" (the individual soul) and "Brahman" (the ultimate reality) pose challenges in conveying their profound meanings and nuances in English, which may not have exact linguistic or cultural equivalents. Sanskrit words often have multiple meanings depending on the context. For example, the word "Yoga"

can refer to the physical practice of postures, the philosophical system, or the state of union with the divine. Translators need to carefully consider the context to convey the intended sense and avoid potential misunderstandings.

Ancient Sanskrit texts often contain references to specific cultural practices, rituals, and deities. Translating these references requires providing explanations and annotations to make them understandable to readers from different cultural backgrounds. It is essential to strike a balance between preserving the cultural context and making the text accessible to a wider audience. Further, Sanskrit has a flexible word order and relies heavily on declensions and conjugations. Translating these structures into English while maintaining coherence and readability can be challenging. Translators must make decisions about word order and rephrase sentences to convey the intended meaning effectively.

Sanskrit texts, especially sutras, and aphorisms, are often concise and open to multiple interpretations. Translating such texts requires careful consideration of the possible meanings and capturing the essence of the original while maintaining clarity. Striking a balance between preserving ambiguity and providing clarity is a delicate task for translators. Sanskrit texts often use metaphorical language and poetic devices to convey complex ideas. Translating these metaphors into English without losing their poetic and symbolic qualities can be challenging. Translators need to find appropriate ways to express the intended meaning while preserving the beauty and depth of the original metaphors. The texts make cross-references to history, legends, and cultural symbols that may not be widely known outside the Bhartiya cultural context. Translators must provide explanations or footnotes to help readers understand these references and appreciate their significance within the text.

The ancient Hindu texts are deeply rooted in the cultural, Dharmic, and Darshnic context. They contain references to Hindu deities, rituals, Itihasa, and legends, which may be unfamiliar to readers from different cultural backgrounds. Translators must provide appropriate explanations and annotations to ensure that readers understand the cultural and religious significance embedded in the text. Striking a balance between preserving the original context and making the text accessible to a diverse audience is a challenge. Moreover, many Sanskrit Hindu texts are composed in poetic forms, such as shlokas (verses) or sutras (aphorisms). These texts often employ metaphorical language, symbolism, and allusions that add layers of meaning. Translating such texts requires not only linguistic skills but also an understanding of the poetic devices and cultural symbols used. So, there comes a big challenge for the

translators to capture the poetic beauty and convey the intended message in the target language. Moreover, Sanskrit Hindu texts have been transmitted through various manuscript traditions, resulting in textual variants and discrepancies. Translators must navigate through these variants and make informed choices regarding the most authentic and reliable readings. Textual criticism and the study of commentaries and scholarly works are crucial in determining the accurate rendition of the text.

Translating Sanskrit Hindu texts is a complex task that requires proficiency in the Sanskrit language, a deep understanding of Hindu philosophy and culture, and the ability to capture the poetic and metaphorical essence of the original texts. Translators face challenges related to language complexity, philosophical concepts, cultural context, poetic language, and textual authenticity. By surmounting these challenges, translators play a vital role in making the wisdom and insights of Sanskrit Hindu texts accessible to a wider audience, fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation for the rich heritage of Hindu philosophy and spirituality.

During the colonial period, British scholars did undertake extensive efforts to study and translate Sanskrit texts due to understand the colonised as well as to fulfill their academic pursuits and research interests. These scholars, known as Orientalists, sought to explore and understand the rich cultural and intellectual heritage of India, including its ancient texts. The translation of Sanskrit texts was driven primarily by scholarly curiosity, the desire to gain insights into Bhartiya history, philosophy, and literature. The British administration in India also recognized the importance of studying and documenting the diverse cultural traditions of the subcontinent. Notable British scholars, such as Sir William Jones, H.H. Wilson, Max Muller, and others, dedicated significant efforts to translating and interpreting Sanskrit texts. Their translations contributed to the Western understanding of Bhartiya philosophy, and literature. However, it is important to note that the translation of Sanskrit texts by British scholars was not without its limitations and biases. Some translations may have been influenced by the cultural and intellectual context of the time, as well as the colonial mindset. Additionally, the translation process itself involves inherent challenges, as discussed earlier, related to linguistic complexities, cultural nuances, and philosophical concepts. These translations may have contributed to the broader understanding and appreciation of Sanskrit literature and the cultural heritage of Bharat. However, it is essential to approach these translations critically and consider them in conjunction with other interpretations and commentaries by scholars from diverse backgrounds.

It is in this context that one needs to understand that the Western translation of Bhartiya texts has caused some misconceptions and long-lasting damage to the Bhartiya civilisation. When translating ancient Hindu texts to English, there are specific terminology issues that arise due to the nuanced and context-specific nature of the original Sanskrit terms. The very term "dharma" encompasses a broad range of meanings, including duty, righteousness, moral law, and cosmic order. Translators face challenges in finding an equivalent term that captures the depth and complexity of the concept. Depending on the context, "dharma" may be translated as duty, righteousness, moral principles, or even as the natural order of the universe. Same way, "Karma" refers to the law of cause and effect, the consequences of one's actions. Translating "Karma" requires conveying the idea that every action has repercussions, but also considering its broader philosophical implications, such as the concept of reincarnation and the accumulation of karmic effects over multiple lifetimes.

The term "Maya" represents the illusory nature of the phenomenal world. It is often translated as "illusion," but this can be misleading, as it implies complete falsehood. Translators must find a balance between conveying the concept of the transient and deceptive nature of reality while acknowledging its inherent connection to a deeper spiritual truth.

"Atman" does not refer to the English "soul", while "Brahman", too, does not have an equivalent in any Western language. Translating these terms requires careful consideration to distinguish between the individual and the transcendent while capturing the interconnectedness and unity underlying these concepts. "Moksha" denotes liberation or spiritual enlightenment, the ultimate goal of human existence. Translating "moksha" involves finding a term or phrase that conveys the idea of transcending the cycle of birth and death, attaining liberation from suffering, and merging with the divine. The relationship between a "guru" (spiritual teacher) and "shishya" (disciple) carries deep cultural and spiritual significance. Translating these terms requires finding appropriate equivalents that convey the teacher-student bond, the transmission of knowledge, and the guru's role as a guide and mentor.

Translators face the challenge of capturing the philosophical depth, cultural nuances, poetic beauty, and linguistic complexities of the original texts while making them accessible and meaningful to readers from diverse backgrounds. Translating such terminology requires a comprehensive understanding of the cultural, philosophical, and religious contexts of the original Sanskrit texts. Translators must strike a balance between conveying the

specific meaning of the terms and ensuring their understanding and accessibility to a diverse audience. Additionally, providing explanatory footnotes or commentaries can help readers grasp the nuanced meanings embedded in these terms.

Interculturality plays a crucial role in translation as it involves the transfer of meaning and communication between different cultures. Translators must consider the cultural context of both the source and target languages. This includes understanding cultural norms, values, beliefs, and practices that shape language use. Failure to account for cultural context can lead to misinterpretations or inappropriate renditions that do not resonate with the target audience.

Idiomatic expressions and cultural references pose challenges in translation. These linguistic and cultural nuances may not have direct equivalents in the target language, requiring translators to find alternative ways to convey the intended meaning without losing the cultural connotations. Cultural references, such as historical events or literary allusions, may need explanation or adaptation to be understood in the target culture.

Translations must navigate cultural taboos, sensitive topics, and potentially offensive language. Translators must be mindful of the cultural sensitivities and social norms of the target audience to avoid causing offense or miscommunication. This requires adapting and modifying the language to maintain cultural appropriateness while preserving the original intent.

Translation decisions can have ethical implications, particularly when dealing with sensitive topics or contentious issues. Translators may face dilemmas when balancing faithfulness to the source text with cultural sensitivity, political correctness, or the potential for misinterpretation. Ethical translation practices involve making informed choices that respect the values and integrity of both cultures. Localisation involves tailoring a translation to the specific cultural, linguistic, and market requirements of the target audience. It involves adapting not only the language but also elements such as units of measurement, currency, idiomatic expressions, and even visual elements. Translators need to understand the target culture deeply to ensure that the translated text feels natural and resonates with the local audience. Certain concepts or words may be untranslatable due to cultural or linguistic differences. Translators must find creative strategies such as using footnotes, explanations, or paraphrases to convey the essence of untranslatable concepts. They strive to strike a balance between faithfulness to the source text and ensuring comprehension and relevance in the target culture.

Overall, interculturality issues in translation highlight the importance of cultural competence, sensitivity, and adaptability. Translators must navigate the complexities of different cultures and languages to bridge the gaps and facilitate effective communication across cultures.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bell, T. Roger. (1991). *Translation and Translating: Theory and Practice*. Longman Group UK.
- [2] Snell-Hornby, Mary (Ed.) (1995). *Translation as Intercultural Communication: Selected Papers from the EST Congress, Prague*.
- [3] Qin Huang & Roberto A. Valdeón (2022) Perspectives on translation and world literature, *Perspectives*, 30:6, 899-910, DOI: 10.1080/0907676X.2022.2132062