Translation Theories and the Third World Literature: A Conceptual Review

Nagendra Bahadur Bhandari

Department of English, Bishwa Bhasha Campus, TU, Kathmandu

Corresponding Author: Nagendra Bahadur Bhandari, Email: nagendra@pncampus.edu.np
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Abstract

This article examines translation theories which explore the practices of reinforcing the colonial stereotypical images of the Third world people and culture while translating the Third World literature into English. The unequal power relations between the First World and the Third World, and the historical colonization have influenced both the product and process of translation. Moreover, the translator, a politically and culturally constructed subject, is caught up in the nexus of institutional demands and expectations of the readers. These factors also influence in the selection of the texts and writers of the translation. Consequently, the translation of the Third World literature into the language of the First World involves in manipulation due to unequal power relationship, subjective influence of the translator, and the cultural and linguistic untranslability. This article discusses these issues in references to the critical writings of Anuradha Dingwaney, Carol Maier, Mahasweta Sengupta and Mary Layoun.

Keywords: Colonization, first world, third world, manipulation, translation

Background

The history of translation dates long back in the human civilization. Initiated with historical and religious books like *Bible*, *Ramayan*, the act of translation has become a recurrent phenomenon in the production and dissemination of knowledge.

George Steiner divides the history of the theory and practice of translation into four periods. The first period extended from the Roman translators Cicero and Horace up to the publication of Alexander Fraser Tyler's essay "On the Principles of Translation" in 1791. The central characteristic of the period was the immediate and

empirical focus of the practical work of translation. The second period ran up to the publication of Valery Larbaud's *Sous I'invocation de Saint Jerome* in 1946. That period was hermeneutic methodology of approach. The third period began from 1940s. There was introduction of structural linguistic and communicative theory in the field of translation. The fourth which co-existed with the third has its origin in the 1960s. There is the reversion of hermeneutic approach recently.

Although Steiner's divisions give a perspective, studying translation diachronically is really a difficult task. Susan Bassnett opines that the distinction between 'word for word' translation and 'sense for sense' translation, which was established within Roman system, has continued to be the point of debate in one way or another. The emergent nationalism especially after 1960s has directed the debate of translation towards the issue of culture. The debate of cultural (mis) translation has occupied a crucial place especially in the practice of translation of 'third world' texts in to 'first world' languages.

Approaches of Translation

There are broadly two distinct approaches of translation. The first approach is more concerned on the message on the linguistic text. J.C. Catford in *A linguistic Theory of Translation* defines translation as the replacement of source language text material by equivalent target language text material by equivalent target language material. He considers translation as a branch of comparative linguistic. He introduces the phenomena of 'total translation' and 'restricted translation'. The phenomenon of the total translation is the replacement of the source language phonology and graphology. Restricted translation is replacement of source language textual material by equivalent target language material.

His theory of translation is the theory of meaning. He considers meaning as a property of language. He also points out the difference between translation and transference. In translation source language meaning is substituted by target language's meaning but in transference the implantation of source language meaning into target language texts take place. He makes it clear that source language texts are not absolutely translatable because of linguistic and cultural untranslatability.

Although Catford's theory of translation discusses various aspects and problems of translation, he remains silent about factors that influence the process of translations such as a translator, his/her audiences, aim and the power relation between source language culture and target language culture. In the second approach, Engene A. Nida focuses on the role of receptor. His approach is sociolinguistic. He takes into consideration the contextual features besides the textual and linguistic features. Pragmatic and emotive meanings are more important factors in transferring the message from the source language to target language. Ninda enumerates the three stages in translation. In the first stage, the original text gets reduced into its Kernels. In the second

stage, the meaning of source language gets transferred in the receptor language on the structural level. In the last stage, the generation of the stylistically and semantically equivalent expression in the receptors language takes place.

In all these three stages, Ninda argues that the role of human subjectivity can't be ignored in translation. The translator is a product of a culture in which s/he lives. S/he can't help being subjective. Moreover, he also talks about two types of equivalencies: formal and dynamic equivalences. A formal equivalence focuses on message while dynamic equivalence is oriented toward the receptor response. He states that the ultimate purpose of the translation is to make it sound as original as possible. This sociolinguist approach seems quite relevant in the translation from the third world language into the first world languages.

Third world and Translations

The Third world is generally designated to the cold war, when two opposing blocs: one capitalist countries led by the United States of America (the First World) and the communist countries led by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (the Second World) appeared to dominant world politics. Within this bi-polar model, the third world consisted of economically and technologically less developed countries belonging to neither blocs. Most of them had experienced colonialism. Politically, they are non-aligned nations. They are Latin America, African, the Middle East and Asian countries. Some of them are moving out of their previous situation and are on the verge of joining the ranks of industrialized countries. However, the colonial mindset has shaped the First World people's perception about the Third World people and culture.

Edward said argues that the First World people have defined the Third Word people and culture as savage, backward, undeveloped primitive, exotic etc. in their literature and other form of cultural and political representation. Such practice of negative presentation contrasting with the First World which has been defined as civilized, rational and developed is called "othering". It divides the world between 'US' (the First World; civilized) and 'other' (the Third World; savaged). Translation of the Third World literature into the First World language also reinforces the concept of 'othering'. Some of the theorists like Anuradha Dingwaney, Carol Maier, Mahasweta Sengupta and Mary Layoun have raised such concerns and suggested some strategies of resisting such cultural and linguistic (mis) translation.

Language, Culture and Space in-between

Anuradha Dingwaney in her introductory essay about "Translating 'Third world' cultures" shows relationship of language and culture. She also discusses the politics of the act of translation in association with the positionality of the translator. Borrowing ideas from Frantz Fanon who argues that to speak a language is to take on

a world; a culture, Anuradha opines that language is embedded with culture/world. So, while translating from one language to another language; the translator can't merely search for equivalent words in the target language. Rather, translator must attend to the context (a world/culture) from which these words arise and in which they are received. The reader's main concern is to study translation of culture or the politics of translating 'third-world' cultures.

The texts written in the Third World' language(s) are presented to the Western audience through translation. It is through translation the Third World cultures travel to the West. In another words the Third World cultures are transformed into a form that is comprehensive to the audiences of the First World through translation. In Anuradha's opinion, translation entails varying degree of violence in order to make foreign culture comprehensible to the World. First of all, the Third World literature and culture are constituted as that of "other". The unequal power relationship between the First and Third world constantly influence the practice of translation. Moreover, the institutional constrains, the disciplinary demands, the expectation of the audiences also influence the process of translation. In this sense, the translators are worried to meet the expectations of the Western audience and institutes. Furthermore, the politics of translation involve in selecting the text of translations. Certain texts and Writers are purposefully selected to meet the expectation of the Western audiences. This selection also affects in what various third world readers come to see as apt representations of their own and other non-western cultures.

Anuradha also talks about the negotiation processes the translator undergoes. In this regards, she calls the space between: the space of translation where the self of one culture encounters and more importantly interacts with an "other". It is fertile and disquieting space. The in-between space is also a transculturation space in which two cultures collide before the production of the translated text. The power relationship of the First World and the Third World influence the negotiation process of the translation. Moreover, the position and affiliation of the translator remain crucial. The translators of the Third World literature, who are primarily the Westerners or Western educated persons, cannot liberate themselves from the legacy and hegemony of the Western education and world views. The translators also make their position and power evident in translation.

Loss, Intimacy and Inquiry

In "Toward a Theoretical Practice of Cross Cultural Translation" Carol Maier is more concerned about inequality, power relation and difference while translating the Third World literature into the First World language. She explains some misconceptions the novice translators may have about translations. They think that translations are primarily a question of substitution and unavoidable betrayal (loss). Carol thinks that such assumptions not only misrepresents but also distort the reality.

For Carol the "loss" is not the product of the impossibility of transferring a given meaning from one language to another. It is concern with the practice of translation itself. For instance, the novice translators are more concern about the product then process because of pressure of publishers and readers. They move as quickly as possible through the space between the languages. Consequently, translator's notes are often written in apology rather than communication from the "space between". The avoidance of the "between space" leads to the failure to acknowledge the human interaction that occurs when one language proves inadequate in the presence of another.

Carol thinks that translations as an activity that explores the interaction and ambivalence. It can be defined as an interdisciplinary activity that allows for the articulation of the "betweens". The act of translation provides an opportunity to translators to speak and to investigate their own interaction with text. At this point, Carol stresses the need for a thorough examination of translation's role as a political practice. The process of translation should not be taken as a "transportable content" but an act of "relations". The individual allegiances or "terrortorealization" addresses the inadequacies of the conventional description of the activity of translation.

The recent theories and practices of translation valorize the differences. However, But, only on the focus of differences suppresses discussion of inequality by assuming that the difference will automatically erase out inequality. The inequality is neither synonymous with nor contrary to differences. Ella Shohat notes that Postcolonial theory's celebration of hybridity blurs the difference and the inequalities within it. The concept of inequalities and imbalance of power have significance in discussion about what gets translated and for whom. Apparently, the translation of the Third World literature into English sustains unequal cultural exchanges between the hegemonic English language nations and the others. The inequality of power relationship is the main feature between the Western and Third world languages and cultures. In "Translator as Reader in Politics of Translation" Gayatri Spivak does not only address inequality, but also shows requirement for considering oneself (translator) as a reader sufficiently "intimate" with a text/a language/a culture to undertake a translation.

Carol thinks that the first world translator should explore translators "between" in term of inequality as well as difference and with acknowledgement of power relations between "First" and "Third" worlds. With these considerations he suggests two requisites; intimacy and inquiry. Translator should feel intimately associated with source language. If the translation is made quickly by translator not thoroughly familiar with the language and the culture being translated, the result will be homogenization of the Third World texts. A translator needs to develop an intimate relation with the text through close association and familiarity. Besides intimacy, inquiry is also an integral part of the translation. It is related to subjectivity and

identity of the translator. The translator needs to constantly interrogate his or her subjectivity and identity so as not influence the process and the product of translation. Moreover, translators seek new conceptual frames that can present one culture to another. Such frames are not readily found. So, translation is not a product rather it is a practice. It promotes inquiry rather than provides resolution of an inquiry.

Manipulation and Power

Mahasweta Sengupta explores how translation manipulates the original text because of power dynamics in "Translation as manipulation: The power of Images and Images of power". Translations of text from cultures which are not civilizationally linked and among which exists unequal power relationship manifest complex process. The act of translation often has various constrains. One of them is manipulation of power relation that aims constructing images of the source languages cultures. Such image preserves and extends the hegemony of dominant group. They construct the identity of source language/culture that is recognizable by the target culture. The representations of source culture through such images are taken as an authentic representation in the target culture.

Mahasweta elaborates that in colonial context, while choosing the text for rewriting; the dominant powers only select such texts which conform to the pre-existing parameters of its linguistics networks. These texts are rewritten according to certain patterns which undermines their complexities and varieties. They are presented as specimens of culture that is "simple" and "natural". Such reduction justifies colonizers civilizing mission and establishes superiority of the colonizer's. The colonizers exclude those texts which don't fit their idea of the other. The result of such process of exclusion is that the source culture: dominated culture is homogenized and domesticated.

Consequently, primitive innocence, simplicity and naturalness, mysticism and spirituality become the basic characteristics of the constructed images of the Third World in the translated texts. Ashis Nandy opines that such practices legitimatized colonialism by drawing parallels between primitiveness and childhood. If certain society was considered infantile, it would be justified to help them to grow. The hegemonic power of such images is so powerful that even a person from colonized group tries to write in English falls into the trap of such images. He seems to have no other option but to deploy the English language which already had some pre-existing system of defining the east. Mahasweta argues that the auto translation of Rabindranath Tagore's poetry in English clearly shows the hegemonic power of the "images" of English language regarding the imaginative literature of India. He felt that the process of rewriting from Bengali to English was not just a literal translation but was a new creation; a creation that could be judged according to the parameters existing in English language about literature from India.

Mahasweta elaborates that Rabindranath Tagore stresses on the spiritual and devotional aspects at the expense of other feature of original Bengali Poems while translating his own works. The enormous variety of subject matters, mood, and mode of the Bengali original was reduced to one simplified tone of devotion to a personal god in English translation. Mahasweta argues that Rabindranath Tagore fell in to the stereotypical image of the saint from the East who spoke of peace, calm and spiritual bliss in the troubled world. She concludes that translation is process of manipulation; a submission to the hegemonic power through the constructed images by the target culture as the authentic representation of the other.

Interpretation and Intervention

In "Translation, Cultural Transgression and Tribute and leaden Feet" Mary Layoun discusses how translation interprets and intervenes the source language and culture. Translation is an act of thinking own cultural tradition onto something that is not own. The 'something' refers to the distance created by time, space, language and the complex act of appropriation and interpretation. Without consideration of the context, reason, frame narrative, it will be very difficult to understand the act and product of translation. Mary emphasizes on situatedness of the production and consumption of the translation. Although translators are 'between language and culture', they are also subjects (product) of specific language and culture at a given moment. Similarly the readers who consume translation are also subject (product) of language, space and time.

She thinks translation both transgression and tribute of cultures and their boundaries. She opposes the Tala Asad's view that a good translation should always precede a critique. Since translation is intervention and interpretation, it can't be separated from critique. Translation is not only transfer from one language and culture to another. It is also making strange of the apparently familiar. It is interpretive re-presentation of the strange and foreign to comprehensible.

In Mary's opinion, translation moves between genders, between nationalities, between dominant and counter-dominant communities and also between histories. It also challenges the pre-existing cultural mapping and the differences. It can be the respond to the stories of injustice or ignorance or displacement by bearing across those stories to and for others and us. There is a tendency of ignoring the time and space between the languages and cultures of translations. But the time and space between is very much crucial and decisive to the end product of translation and consumption of the product. If the "between" (time and space) is diminished the translation becomes problematic. For multiple mappings of languages, cultures, social organizations underlie the act of producing and consuming translation.

Mary asserts that translation is also collision of desire to map or to know the apparently unmappable and unknowable. The older imperial plottings (mappings)

were unable to accommodate the spaces and times of either imperial centers or of their objects of territorial desire. The translation and the between were also caught by economic activities. The important issue is not mappings or translations itself. The most important issue is by whom and for whom those maps and translations are drawn and maintained. Translations also depends on the maps of knowable and plotable. Translation, very often, functions in the imperial maps which manipulate the space between with their power for their interest. Mary further asserts that even if we stop the translation which is manipulative, we can't protect the original. Even the original text/ language/ culture/ doesn't necessary ensure purity. Not only the space between but the space proper is also contested, and is full of multiple struggle.

Conclusion

The translation of the Third World literature into the First World language involves in manipulation of the images of the people and culture of the Third World. Primarily, the historical colonization and unequal power relationship influence both the process and product of translation. Within the unequal power relationship, the act of translation reinforces the images of the Third World people and culture constructed and perpetuated by the colonial discourses. As a politically and culturally constructed subject, translator is also caught up within the complex nexus of the power relationship, disciplinary and institutional demands, and expectations of the audiences. These factors influence the selection of the texts and the writers for the translation. So, who translates and who gets translated are crucial factors. Moreover, the time and space of the translation and consumption of the text are also important as they contribute to the production of the meaning of the text. We cannot expect accuracy in the act of translation because of cultural and linguistic untranslatability and involvement of human subjectivity as translators and readers. In this sense, translation is a form of manipulation which in case of the Third World literature involves in reinforcing the stereotypical homogenized images of primitivism, exoticism and spirituality. Such images can be deconstructed by paying attention of the unequal power relation, the social and cultural space of the translator and the context and purpose of the translation.

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