TRANSLATING ODIA TEXTS INTO ENGLISH AND THE ISSUE OF UNTRANSLATABILITY WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO *RAKTA TIRTHA ERAM* (ODIA, 1986)

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the concept of untranslatability which is the greatest difficulty faced by any translator. This problem exists in two forms: linguistic, i.e. when the target language has no corresponding words, tenses, phonetic or grammatical entities that occur in the source language; and cultural, i.e. when the target language and its culture lack a relevant situational feature for the source language text (allusions, symbols, puns etc.). While translating the Odia texts like that of *Rakta Tirtha Eram* (Odia, 1986) into English, untranslatability becomes a huge setback for the translators. However, Translators deal with untranslatability by employing a number of procedures. These include adaptation, borrowing, calque, paraphrase, translator's note, etc. This paper presents the specific problem of untranslatability resulting from the time-gap that exists between the source language (Odia) as and when it was presented, and the target language, i.e. English while translating a historical text.

Keywords: Untranslatability, Linguistic Untranslatability**,** Cultural Untranslatability

INTRODUCTION

Rakta Tirtha Eram (Odia, 1986) by Dr. Jagannath Patanaik, an Odia critique on history that bagged the Odisha Sahitya Academy Award in 1986 for its academic brilliance, describes the most ghastly massacre that took place at Eram in the Balasore district which is a memorable event in the history of India's Freedom Struggle and it can be fittingly called the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy in Odisha where 28 persons were killed and 56 persons were injured. It is true that nowhere in India so many people were killed in a single police action during the Quit India Movement for which *Eram* has been named as *Rakta Tirtha* or the bloody pilgrimage by Prof. Patnaik. Outlining the importance of this rare Odia aide-memoire, Prof. Amiya Kumar Pattanayak, former Vice-Chancellor, Utkal University of Culture, observes that "Prof. Patnaik's strenuous efforts in bringing the truth to limelight and to project it as an all India incident would have been amply rewarded had it been written in English for the readers outside Odisha.

73

Nevertheless the book has provided the scope for others to follow the line and a number of books have been written in English basing on this well-researched writing. Prof. Patnaik had his own valid reasons in writing the book in Odiya and in giving it a catchy title, unlike a standard research-oriented title" (Pattanayak et al. 174-175). So the English rendering of the book has been felt immensely and while translating the historical texts of the book into English untranslatability becomes evident which has been underlined in the following herewith.

THE ISSUE OF UNTRANSLATABILITY

Bond, 2005 book entitled "Translating the Untranslatable" is to be mentioned. It describes a way for a machine translation system to generate words and inflections that are obligatory in the target language, but not in the source language. The specific case he looks at is the translation of articles (*a*, *the*) and number (singular and plural), going from Japanese to English. Hence, as Wikipedia defines, "Untranslatability is a property of a text, or of any utterance, in one language, for which no equivalent text or utterance can be found in another language when translated."

THE PROBLEM OF UNTRANSLATABILITY IN ODIA TEXTS

Rakta Tirtha Eram consists of essays on an important incident of history. As per Meera Atkinson and Michael Richardson, "History is 'the original', the writings its translation." It means translating the historical texts means translation for the second time. Translation of historical texts poses not only the difficulty of having a gap between the SL and TL, but also the gap between two different periods of history. For example, *Rakta Tirtha Eram* describes the events and incidents of colonial India, i.e. India before 1947. At that time Odia language had a different set of words. Therefore, the author has used many Odia terms in the said work which are archaic today. While translating this work into English, the translator has to search for the same set of English words prevalent in the contemporary period.

Catford (1965: 93 – 103) distinguishes two types of untranslatability: a simpler linguistic untranslatability, in which a linguistic element is missing or different; and more complex cultural untranslatability, in which a situational cultural frame of reference is different. Both types of untranslatability are found in the historical texts of *Rakta Tirtha Eram.* Thus, "it is the historical essence of narrative, which is not limited only to the organics of consecutively linking one word to another."

Linguistic Untranslatability in Odia-English Translation

Professor Liu Biqing wrote in his Modern Translation Theories that "The structure of language commonly shows the characteristics of the language, these characteristics only can be found in relative language, the similar transfer is difficult to find in non-relative language, for it need to change the code completely." View from the etymology, English belongs to the Indo-European language, while Odia belongs to the Indo-Aryan language, so there exit the linguistic untranslatability, which includes the following aspects: phonology, character, figure of speech, and so on.

A. Untranslatability in Phonology

Any language has its own special phonemic system, which cannot be replaced by other language. There are large differences between Odia and English, and most of the pronunciations in one

74

language do not have equivalent in the other language. Therefore, they cannot be translated into the target language.

For example: (1) In *Rakta Tirtha Eram* "ମରିବୁ ପଛେ ଉରିବୁ ନାହିଁ" is used on many places. The author wrote the whole passage in homophone words. This is a typical example of untranslatability caused by phonemic system.

B. Untranslatability in Character Structure

Odia words consist of characters carrying their meaning, but English words consist of alphabets that are meaningless. They are completely different in writing. Odia has a writing skill of describing characters, for example: (2) "ମୁରଲୀଧର, ଶ୍ୟାମସୁନ୍ଦର, କମଳାପ୍ରସାଦ" These proper names bear special meanings and used as the special feature of Odia characters. But English names have no such special meaning in alphabetical system, so they are absolutely untranslatable.

C. Untranslatability in Figures of Speech

Most of the languages have their own figures of speech. Just because of the existence of figure of speech, the languages become vivid and interesting. In translation practice, if the target language cannot show the figure of speech in source language correctly, it is not faithful to the content, thought and style of the source language. Although their meaning are similar, it will lessen the language influence of the source text. The people who speak Odia and the people who speak English have large differences in the way of thinking and aesthetics, so when they express the same concept, they often use different figures of speech. These caused the untranslatability in Odia- English translation. The following are the main aspects:

1. Puns

Pun means humorous use of a word that has two meanings or of different words that sound the same. Puns pack several meanings into one word, and it is extremely unlikely that any other language will pack into the same set of meanings, so it is difficult to translate into the target language.

Example one: (3)"ଗୌରାଙ୍ଗଚନ୍ଦ୍ରଙ୍କ ଗୌରାଙ୍ଗ" - Here"ଗୌରାଙ୍ଗ"is a pun, and it is translated into "the fair body of the Fair-man (name of the person). In this translation, the translator did very well, but he cannot translate the pun completely.

Example two: (4)"She is too low for a high praise, too brown to a fair praise, and too little for a great praise." The "low" and "fair" are all puns in this sentence. "Low" means short in height and low social status. "Fair" means pale skin, light in colour and justice. There is no word or phrase in Odia having the two meanings together, so the translator cannot translate the two correctly into Odia, only adopt one meaning, and lose the other meaning.

2. Alliteration

Alliteration is using the same letter or sound at the beginning of the two or more words in succession. It is a common figure of speech in English, especially in proverb, advertisement, novel and so on and most of the alliteration are untranslatable.

For example: (5) "ଜାତି ପ୍ରୀତି" - This is alliteration used in *The Rakta Tirta Eram.* But after translating it into English, we cannot see this effect.

Cultural Untranslatability in Odia-English Translation

Edward Taylor gave the definition culture in his the Primitive Culture: "Culture or civilization taken in its wide anthrographic sense is that complete whole which include knowledge, beliefs,

75

art, morals, law, custom and other capabilities and habits acquired by a men as a member of society." Peter Newmark wrote in his A Textbook of Translation: "I define the culture as the way of life and his manifestation that are peculiar to a community that uses a peculiar language as its means of expression." Translation is a very important medium for cultural exchange between people using different languages. It is one of the most important tasks from translators and translation researchers viewing problems of translation from the angle of cultural exchange in order to increase the degree of cultural exchange achieved by translation as much as possible.

It is known to all that language is an important aspect of culture. Culture includes and affects language, it is this ground from which language grows and develops. All languages are the product of the culture as well as of the nation. They all have long historical background and various cultural connotations. The history, social system, natural environment, religion and customs are all shown vividly in their culturally-loaded words, proverbs, idioms, and so on.. In traditional practice, there are often no such words in target language, and the translators have to find the similar codes or make some new codes to replace, so when these culturally loaded words are translated into another language, the cultural connotations are lost. Nida once pointed out that: "For the success translation, being familiar with two cultures is even more important than mastering two languages, because the language has its meaning only in the cultural background." Odia culture belongs to eastern culture, while English culture belongs to the western culture. There are essential differences between eastern culture and western culture, so the untranslatability is understandable.

A. Untranslatability Resulted from Culture Gap

1. Material Culture

Different nations live in different places, and will have different images for the same thing. In *Rakta Tirtha Eram,* for example: (7) the word "ହୁଲହୁଲି" has been used many times. "ହୁଲହୁଲି"is difficult to translate into English. In English, the daffodil is the symbol of spring and happiness, but in Odia, it is only a kind of flower called "କୁମୁଦ"

2. Traditional Culture

People live together in one country or region, and will form their own traditions, these traditions will pass from generation to generation. And other countries or regions people may not have these traditions, even they have, but in different meaning, thus making these traditions untranslatable. For example: (8) According to English tradition, the family will throw old shoes to the unmarried couples when they go out of the house, which means wish them luck, but if this tradition is translated into "ଜୋତା ପିଟା", the Odia people will misunderstand it. For in Odisha, throwing old shoes to a woman means to abuse her. For the traditional reason, a lot of appellations are untranslatable. The meaning of English uncle include such Odia words as father's younger brother, father's elder brother, mother's brother, father's sister's husband, mother's sister's husband, father's younger brother or a friend or acquaintance about the same age as a young person's parent. It would be considered a terrible mistake in Odia culture to refer to the father's brother as ଶାଳା, so if the relation is not clear in English, it cannot be translated into Odia.

3. Religious Culture

In religion, translation becomes the mission. Odia have translated in this field for a long time, but Odia people do not have Christianity background. Thus many of the culture will make Odia

76

people misunderstand. For example: (9) " End of the world" will make Odia people think of the coming of great disaster or ପ୍ରଳୟ, in which all the human being will die, and they will feel fear. But to the English people, it has nothing to do with disaster. It is the coming of the justice moment.

4 . Historical Culture

The history of a nation is the record of the social development. Idioms and legends provide ready support in this respect. "The main problems that idioms and fixed expression pose in translation relate to the two main areas: the ability to recognize and interpret an idiom correctly; and the difficulties involved in rendering the various aspects of meaning that an idiom or a fixed expression conveys into the target language." An idiom or fixed expression may have no equivalent in the target language. One language may express a given meaning by a single word, another may express it by a fixed expression, and a third may express it by an idiom, and so on. So it is unrealistic to expect to find equivalent idioms and expression in the target language in all cases. The idioms and expressions may be culture-specific which makes it difficult to translate or is untranslatable. The expression such as Kangaroo Court, related to specific cultural background provides a good example. And the historical stories or legends also have their culture element, for example: (10) "ରଣହୁଙ୍କାର" is a specific term in *Rakta Tirtha Eram* to express a special noise by a warrior in a battlefield. But we don't get the exact English term for it.

THE METHOD OF COMPENSATION

Compensation is a special method that is used to reach the equivalence when there is no equivalent concept and suitable expression in the target language. It is widely accepted that the language phenomenon of untranslatability is not absolutely untranslatable, especially in the cultural aspect. In translation practice, when dealing with this kind of phenomenon, the translator always makes great effect to get relatively satisfactory version, following are the methods often used by translators to compensate.

A. Adaptation

An "adaptation", also known as "free translation", is a translation procedure whereby the translator replaces a social, or cultural reality in the source language with a corresponding reality in the target language, this new reality would be more usual to the audience in the target language. This method aims at maintaining the elegance and intelligibility in the target language at the sacrifice of the form of the source language, but without changing the main cultural message of the original. For example: (11) "ସେତେବେଳେ ଐତିହାସିକ ଭାରତଛାଡ ଆନ୍ଦୋଲନର ପ୍ରକମ୍ପନରେ ଆକୁମାରୀ ହିମାଳୟ ଦୋହଲୁଥାଏ ।" Here, the Odia term "ଆକୁମାରୀ ହିମାଳୟ"(From the Himalays to Kanyakumari) sounds quite like "peninsula". So we can translate this into English as "At that time the entire Himalayan peninsula was wavering under the high trembling of the Quit India Movement.

B. Borrowing

Borrowing is a translation procedure that the translator uses a word or expression from the source language in the target language holus-bolus. Differences between cultures may mean that one language has expression and concepts that may not exit in another. For example, we have no

77

ready-made equivalent for the English, "Coca-cola", "coffee", "sofa", "motor", "Brandy", "chocolate", and so on. Face with such words and expressions, the translators are hard-pressed to convey the original meaning and are often left with no choice but to borrow the original lexical items. So these words come into Odia as: (12) "କୋକା କୋଲା", "କଫି","ସୋଫା", "ମଟର","ବ୍ରାଣ୍ଡି", "ଟକ୍ଲେଟ୍", etc.

C. Translator's Note
A translator's note is a note (usually a footnote or an endnote) added by the translator to the target language to provide additional information pertaining to the limit of translation, the cultural background and any other explanation. "Nida also points out that the footnote can explain contradictory customs, identify unknown geographical or physical objects, give equivalent of weights and measures, provides information on plays on words, include supplementary data on proper names and add information which may be generally useful in understanding the historical and cultural background of the document in question." In a word, using this method can turn some untranslatability into a certain degree of translatability.

For example: (13) the term "କର୍ଣ୍ଣଧାର" in *Rakta Tirtha Eram* can be considered.

Note: "କର୍ଣ୍ଣଧାର" The word has been used for a great warrior after the epical Indian fighter Karna.

D. Calque
Calque is a translation procedure that a translator translates an expression (or occasionally a word) literally into the target language, translating the element of the expression word for word. Peter Newmark refers it to as semantic translation. It is a method of translation that aims at preserving the most cultural message of the source text at the sacrifice of the formal element of the target language, and sometimes even the intelligibility of the target text. For example: (14) "ତାଣ୍ଡବଲୀଳା" in *Rakta Tirtha Eram* which means a fierce dance in English can be translated into English as "skeleton dance"

E. Paraphrase
"Paraphrase is as extended synonym and inevitably an expansion and a diffusion of the original text. It is only justified when an item of terminology technical institutional cultural, ecological, scientific cannot be explained in any other way. E.g. by TL equivalent, transcription, neologism by reproducing the encyclopaedic tenor for the linguistic vehicle." Sometimes, some words in their source language do not have equivalent in the target language, so it is difficult to use calques or other method to compensate. And what we can use is paraphrase, for example: (15) The Odia idiom "ନରମେଧ ଯଜ୍ଞ" in *Rakta Tirtha Eram* can be translated into 'the Bloody Massacre' in English.

CONCLUSION
For the differences in linguistic and culture, we should accept that there does exist untranslatability between English and Odia. But we never neglect the fact that there are numerous language universality and cultural similarities. Such as integration, cultural diversity, network technology revolutionary, the world is getting smaller and smaller. We are sure to

believe that the language and cultural communication will be more and more, and the barrier between languages will be less and less.

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