

CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC ISSUES IN TRANSLATION OF FICTION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO AMIN KAMIL'S SHORT STORY "THE COCK FIGHT"

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ABSTRACT

Translation is as old as the art of writing or as old as history of education in general. It is occasioned by the social needs of people. Whenever, for instance, two linguistic groups interact as neighbors to each other, translation from and to each other's languages become inevitable if they must meaningfully communicate with each other in matters of commerce, intermarriage, education, legal issues, etc. Religious books like the Quran, the Bible, the Gita and the Guru Granth have been essentially translated to numerous languages in different parts of the world as a facilitator of missionary activities.

The Paper is a discussion of a case study of translating a short story from Kashmiri into English. The discussion revolves around the translation process and its reconstruction focusing on some of the linguistic and cultural issues encountered in the original and how they were resolved in the translation.

Keywords: Translation, Cultural Issue, linguistic Issue.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is based on the translation of a collection of short stories "Kashmiri Short Stories". *Kashmiri Short Stories* is a collection of translated Kashmiri Short Stories translated and compiled by M.S. Beigh. The specific discussion of the translation process and its reconstruction, however, will revolve around only one short story: Kar Jang (*The Cock Fight*).

The *Cock Fight* is a famous short story of Amin Kamil. He was born at Kaprin (Shopian), a village in South Kashmir in 1924. He graduated in Arts from the Punjab University and took his degree in law from the Aligarh Muslim University. He joined the Bar in 1947 and continued to practice law till 1949, when he was appointed a lecturer in Sri Pratap College, Srinagar. He was closely associated with the writer's movement of that era and under its influence switched over from Urdu to Kashmiri as his medium of expression. He is a well-known short story writer and a great poet of Kashmiri language. His so many works has been translated into different languages. He is truly a legend of literature of Jammu & Kashmir. Owing to the special cultural ties between communities, some of his works have been translated into French. But in general, little is known about him in outside the Valley.

Amin Kamil's story, represented here by *The Cock Fight*, offer a unique window into the everyday, domestic life of Kashmiri people. In his stories, we are able to see ordinary moments in the lives of ordinary characters unfold from the inside out. We see men and women who struggle to survive and understand the meaning of life in a culture startlingly different yet glowing with universal glimpses of love, hate, jealousy, fear, cynicism, pathos, disappointment, regret, and bursts of insight into the human condition

CULTURAL ISSUES IN FICTION TRANSLATION

The culture of every nation is considered to be an important aspect of the identity of that nation. It may be claimed that culture has a profound effect on the structure and lexicon of the language of that nation, i.e. every statement in any language has its local colour. Since different nations enjoy different cultures, it could simply be understood why the role of a translator is so crucial and transfer of a culture is so difficult. The domain of a culture is as vast as vocabulary and even more extensive than it. Because a culture word is always less context-bound than ordinary language and several cultures may be found within one language (Newmark: 1988), it is not as limited as the grammatical patterns to deal with easily.

One of the most difficult problems in translating is found in the difference between cultures. The people of a given culture look at the things from their own perspectives. Many words look like equivalents but are not. They have special connotations, or have different focuses in different cultures. For example, the culture of America, according to (Larson: 1984) focuses on working, earning money, sports; schooling and marriage while another one may not and in one language there may be a great concentration of vocabulary that has to do with farming but in another a great concentration with fishing.

Even when words seem to be synonyms from one cultural setting to another, they carry their own cultural baggage, for example, Rabassa (1984) believes that it would be difficult to maintain that the English “house” was completely synonymous with the French “maison”.

Furthermore, in every culture, there will be certain actions, which will be symbolic. If the action is simply translated literally, it may result in a wrong meaning. Social relationships are also a cultural element. In some cultures people used to live with their extended families which eventually resulted in a need to address each relative. For this reason, those people have different words to refer to each relation.

Customs and traditions are parts of a culture as well. Be it a marriage, funeral or festival, the story and the significance or hidden symbolism behind it becomes a stumbling block for the translator. Beliefs and feelings change from culture to culture. While dragon is kind and protective in Chinese, it is evil in English. For mourning the English wear black, but the Chinese wear white (Newmark, 1991). So this type of custom, tradition and cultural gaps puts problems in translation process. Let us have a look on literal translation of the assigned story “The Cock Fight”.

A literary translation is a device of art used to release the text from its “dependence on prior cultural knowledge” (Herzfeld, 2003). However, it is not an easy task to transplant a text steeped in one culture into another. Particularly demanding from the translator’s point of view is the use of culturally specific metaphors and allusions.

Metaphors

Kamil’s use of metaphors or similes is sparing and the few used pose no significant problems in translation. The Kashmiri noun phrase at the end of the following quotation might not be crystal clear but it is connotative and, therefore, was literally translated:

“Congratulations!” Jani the Skinny leaned out of her window and called to Shahmal. “When did this cock come?”

Shahmal had been waiting for this call ever since the rooster was brought, and the instant it came, she struck up an attitude, lifted up her head, smoothed out the imaginary creases in her pheran and, flourishing her silver earrings, said, “My

husband has just bought it. Four-and-a-half rupees he paid for it.” Shahmal stressed the word 'rupees' more than her husband had done a short while back.

“Must be from the countryside,” Jani the Skinny expressed her opinion quite innocently. “Yes, so it seems. A good cock.”

“And just imagine, it is only seven months old,” Shahmal fixed the age of the cock arbitrarily. “It is of a special breed, not usually brought to the town. And so expensive! Who would buy them?” After a pause she added in contemptuous tone, “People here would want only those scavenger cockerels!”

Other than that, Kamil’s metaphorical language seems to be affected by the western idiom. And no more is this point well illustrated than in the following italicized simile from the ending of the story:

This remark set Jani's heart on fire. She knew that she herself was the target of these contemptuous words. Flushing scarlet, she moved away from the window, crying, “I have something on the frying pan. You feed him as best you can.”

Such transparent similes pose no problems in understanding to the western reader.

Allusions

The occurrence of allusions, however, is more challenging. Not only does the translator of Kamil have to cope with the usual linguistic difficulties of translating from such a foreign language as Kashmiri, but he also has to handle different references and allusions. In some of its parts, the text of this story is interspersed with diverse references from Vadic and Budda Scriptures.

Religious elements, myths and the like are major components of any culture as well. They present major obstacles in translating a text. There are crucial issues, which demand the translator’s full attention. Nida and Taber (1982:178) elaborates on this difference as” In America, jokes from the pulpit are usually acceptable in fact, some of the best preachers regularly elicit laughs from their congregations, but in Europe similar language in the pulpit would generally be regarded as at least inappropriate if not decidedly uncouth.”

The following excerpts illustrate this point:

“Didn't you hear? The cock. He is crowing now. At the fall of the night!” Shahmal's voice was a wail. “What a creature of ill-omen to bring home!”

“Crowing?” Ghulam Khan puckered up his face. “What then? Are we to wake up for the Ramadan fast that the timing might delude us?”

“See what nonsense he talks!” Shahmal retorted angrily. “Get up quickly and kill him. Don't you know that a cock who crows at the fall of the night should be killed immediately? It is a creature of ill-omen.”

In this excerpt, there is more than one allusion. The reference to demons possessing human bodies is almost a universal superstitious belief shared in many cultures and is in no need of explanation.

“You should buy a cock of your own, do you hear? You welcome him on certain occasions, do you not? Yet the loss of a few grains of rice pinches you.”

The cultural reference to a husband buying pottery and rabbits slaughtered and live as gifts to his wife are indicators of the local culture. Keeping this reference adds foreign zing fidelity and gives the original flavor of a different culture. The reference does not need a footnote,

however, since it is clear from the contextual surroundings. The second reference is to the custom of some women in the Middle East who beat their cheeks and thighs as an ultimate sign of sadness when they are mourning their dead. The bracketed note was inserted in the text to ensure that the significance of this humiliating act on the part of the wife is not lost to the western reader.

LINGUISTIC ISSUE IN FICTION TRANSLATION

Narrative Style

Realism and attention to details in simple stark style characterize most of Kamil's stories and this aspect poses no problems to the translator. In some of his stories, however, Kamil is more experimental in his use of literary styles. *A Cock Fight*, for example, stylistically makes use of free direct style as a narrative technique. Congruent with this narrative style, Kamil probes into the character's multifarious thoughts and feelings without paying much attention to a narrative sequence since the emphasis is not so much on the external events as it is on the character's thought-events at a single moment. Particularly challenging from the translation point of view is handling the extensive use of free direct speech merged with the narration without any overt indication by a reporting clause or a switch to indirect speech. The following quote illustrates this point:

She was up on her feet. She even forgot to wash her Pheran (A dress wear in winter. It looks like Apron)

Which had been spoiled by her six-month-old baby. She felt as if she had found a treasure and cried to her husband instantly, "So you have brought it! I was apprehensive that you would come empty-handed even today".

"With this decision, she chanced to look at her husband's face. He seemed indescribably handsome and a flush came to her face. She slid her elbow away and was laying her head on the pillow when there was a sudden crowing from the pen. "Cock-a-doodle-doo ...!" Shahmal was stunned. She raised her head and listened intently, thinking that perhaps it was her fancy playing tricks on her. But there was another unmistakable crowing: "Cock-a-doodle-doo . . . !" And Shahmal felt as if her neck had been twisted and broken".

Here we have a descriptive sentence prefaced by the narrator's third person pronoun 'she' whereas the next exclamatory statement can be an expression of the character's consciousness or a commentary on this consciousness. The following question, however, starts with the first person possessive "*Cock-a-doodle-doo ...! Or you*" in an exclamation phrase, an indication that the utterance represents the subjectivity of the narrated subject. In other words, two different subjects of consciousness are present at the same time, but how do we know whose perspective or subjectivity is represented at a specific point in the discourse? This is a question that the translator of this literary style has to face throughout the story.

The translation of this kind of literary style has to pay particular attention to certain linguistic uses. For example proximal deictic adverbs and demonstratives such as *now, here, there, this, these*, etc. invites the inference of a speaking subjectivity. Other features like the use of third-person pronouns and past tense suggest the presence of another voice (Wright, 1995). Kamil relays some of the subjective impressions of his nameless character through the consciousness of that character, and, at the same time by using the latter features, he manages to maintain the narrator's perspective. Here is another example that illustrates this interaction or tension between the two perspectives:

She wished the cock would choke and be stricken dumb, so that Jani the Skinny would not hear him and be glued to the window. Instead of shooing him away, she picked up a lump of earth and threw it angrily at the cock, aiming at his head. It missed him, but he was startled and started crowing loudly and Jani the Skinny leaned out of her window.

The initial narrator's stance is indicated by the use of the third person pronoun at first descriptive. In the following Kashmiri part, this presence is dominated by the character's perspective, at least in terms of the explicit features of narration. The passage, then, can be understood as expressing the narrated subject consciousness. However, the experience is not just narrated but also mediated by the narrator's didactic and intrusive presence. As typical in this style, in many parts of the story the author portrays the subjectivity of his character from the vantage perspective of the reporting narrator and, through a process of empathy, identifies himself with the character (Brinton, 1995).

Semantic Prosody

Another area of sensitivity in the translation of this story is semantic or discourse prosody (Baker, 2000; Stubbs, 2001). This is the aura of meaning acquired by a lexical item "through its repeated association with other items in the language (Baker) or "a feature which extends over more than one unit in a linear string" (Stubbs). The pivotal word *Cock* in the translated story for example occurs so many times and interacts with a number of different mainly positive collocates. By looking at the textual environment of this word, however, we find that the author skillfully conveys a negative attitude towards its content by infusing it with irony and casting doubt on its traditionally pleasant connotations. Examples:

The hens ran away, clucking loudly. They knew for whom Shahmal's reproof was intended. Why, otherwise, would they have run for their lives? But, at a safe distance, they still pecked nervously at the stray grains of rice scattered around the Cock.

The overall effect is that the idea of the nest is a mythical construct that people tenaciously believe in when they know that it is not true. The challenge of the translation here is to capture the tone, the discourse coherence and the attitudinal meaning served by this semantic prosody.

Syntax and Punctuation

Kamil's use of Standard Kashmiri throughout his stories is a feature of his writing that facilitates the task of the translator. In spite of the standard Kashmiri prose style; however, he could be a quirky writer especially in the areas of syntax and punctuation.

The original literal arrangement of the clausal elements in the opening of the story reads as follows:

She was up on her feet. She even forgot to wash her pheran which had been spoiled by her six-month-old baby. She felt as if she had found a treasure and cried to her husband instantly.

Shahmal had been waiting for this call ever since the rooster was brought, and the instant it came, she struck up an attitude, lifted up her head, smoothed out the imaginary creases in her pheran and, flourishing her silver earrings, said, "My husband has just bought it. Four-and-a-half rupees he paid for it." Shahmal stressed the word 'rupees' more than her husband had done a short while back.

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In many cases, for the sake of clarity, I needed to shorten and simplify without sacrificing the deliberately repetitive quality of the style. At different places in the story, moreover, there was a need to sacrifice some stylistic idiosyncrasies since these peculiarities were sometimes hard to preserve. Calquing too reverently or following the distinctive syntax too closely would impede comprehensibility and yield unidiomatic results.

Another challenging task is the less standardized and more fluid nature of Kashmiri punctuation compared to English. The uses of commas, periods, and paragraphing in Kashmiri are more subject to the writer’s discretion and do not necessarily have a one-to-one relationship with English. Moreover, a series of question marks and a combination of a question mark and an exclamation point is possible in Kashmiri to produce a dramatic effect. These conventions, or lack thereof, are capitalized on in Kamil’s writing but they were normalized in the English translation so as not to violate the norms of the target language.

CONCLUSION

The language is a country culture carrier, reflects this country’s material culture, religious belief, manners and customs and so on. The language is different, the thinking mode, the behaviour way as well as the language expression way is also different. This shows that the translation is not as simple as it is not only doing language, in which it stresses culture in the story, Cultural reconstruction. Cultural reconstruction or Cultural translation falls naturally in the same areas of language which are to be mastered by anyone who seeks the title of a “translator”, i.e. vocabulary, writing, grammar etc. So, lack of ability in this area causes inevitable errors, which change the efforts of a translator to something meaningless or ridiculous. Thus, It is a great challenge dealing with a language that has a different feel and nuance embedded more in culture than in literal meaning, but I hope that this reconstruction of the translation process sheds some light on some of the linguistic and cultural issues that might be encountered in literary translation in general and from Kashmiri into English in particular.

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