

CHALLENGES FACED BY A TRANSLATOR

NIVEDITHA C LOBO
ASST PROF. OF ENGLISH
GOVT. FIRST GRADE COLLEGE,
HALEYANGADI

Writing an original text is quite a formidable task. However, the task of a translator is more difficult than that of the original writer. The writer expresses his/her ideas and emotions, however intricate and complicated they may be in his/her own language. The translator's task is much greater and more difficult, for s/he has to relive not his/ her own experiences but that of a different person and produce a work that presents the original idea in a different language.

Paul Goodman says "To translate, one must have a style of his own, for otherwise the translation will have no rhythm or nuance, which come from the process of artistically thinking through and moulding the sentences; they cannot be reconstituted by piecemeal imitation. The problem of translation is to retreat to a simpler tenor of one's own style and creatively adjust this to one's author."

There are several challenges that one faces during translation. To begin with, the translator must have the ability to read, and comprehend the language of the text and in doing so be able to interpret its complexity. The translator must not only possess knowledge of vocabulary and grammar but must also be able to grasp the innumerable subtleties and intricacies of language that the author of the original document uses to express himself/ herself. If the translation is to have the same register, connotation and effect as the source text, the translator must be able to distinguish sincerity from irony, formal jargon from slang and academic phrasing from colloquialisms. S/he must be able to recognise idioms for what they are, rather than translate them literally. A translator needs to know where in the document a crisp and formal expression is required and where to use a figure of speech which is not very formal. A document cannot be translated in its literal meaning. Literal language means words that do not deviate from their original meaning. Document translations should consist of the closest natural equivalent of the original document. It is a type of idiomatic translation which ensures that the translation is closest to the meaning intended by the original writer. A common example is the proverbs in a

language. A proverb in English, if literally translated into another language would seem ludicrous and would fail to drive the meaning home. In addition, s/he must be aware of the various shades of meaning words can have, depending on the context in which they are used. Many a times, the translator is not just expected to decode a source text but will have to rewrite it in a manner that reflects its style and is suitable to the target audience. This calls for a great deal of dexterity and creativity, on the translator's part, in using his/her own language. S/he will need to master a wide variety of registers - formal, colloquial, idiomatic, ironic - and use them as required. Moreover, many languages have several different dialects within the same language. Each dialect may offer varying degrees of differences for similar words or phrases, ranging from slightly to totally different. Translation training may centre on the standard or correct dialect, without adequately preparing the translator for the differences in morphology, pronunciation and vocabulary that may be present in other dialects of the same language.

Translators will also have to meet the requirement of accuracy and reliability. Accuracy calls for concentration, it determines client satisfaction. Translators who are structurally inaccurate will never achieve true professionalism, no matter how advanced their linguistic repertoire. The translator is also required to be reliable. A reliable translator is one who tries to produce as faithful a version of the source document in the target language as possible. This means that s/he will make every effort to cover the content and intention of the source text in full, while refraining from any personal interference with that source. Nothing should be lost in translation, but nothing should be added either. Due to the requirement of reliability, translation can become a balancing act between the need to remain faithful to the source and the desire to produce an attractive, readable or meaningful text. Ideally, a translation should be no more readable or meaningful than its source, although we are aware that this only applies as an academic criterion. In commercial practice, clients will expect translations that meet the quality standards of the target language and audience, irrespective of the quality of the source.

In addition, a professional translator must have the linguistic skills sets required for translations in specific specialty areas. For example, a legal text requires an entirely different type of style and terminology than a technical document or a brochure. All translators do not have a vast store of vocabulary of the target language/ languages. S/he may have a good knowledge of the

vocabulary of her/his mother tongue, but the same often doesn't apply to the other languages. While translating legal, medical and educational documents, a translator needs to consult from dictionaries and thesauruses to search for the appropriate terms. S/he has to go over the translation again and again, to identify any words or phrases that might make the translation look sloppy or unprofessional. Translation is a meticulous job, which takes every ounce of a translator's effort and energy.

Translation problems also frequently arise due to cultural differences in the usage of certain words and terms. What may be a perfectly acceptable usage in one area may mean something completely different in others, causing translation issues. Seeking to discover the intended meaning in these cases may require the successful translator to seek additional details in order to ensure a correct final translation. Borrowed words can also cause a great deal of problems in translation. Scholars of the English language understand that many words used in English are actually borrowed from Latin, French, Greek and other languages. Correctly transcribing these borrowed words can be confusing if the translator is not well versed in the language being transcribed. The translator sometimes brings in his own beliefs and experiences in interpreting a document. This could potentially harm the document's accuracy, intent and effect. This is a natural problem that occurs with every translator .

There are also some rare words whose meanings escape, not only the general public but also the dictionaries. The translator should have enough common sense and intuition to come up with the closest possible word for it. Only a thorough understanding of the language and the field of translation warrants such advanced skills. Contextual understanding of the document is extremely important. Untranslatability is another hindrance to translation. This problem arises when an utterance in one language, has no equivalent text or utterance in another language.

According to Trans Infopreneur Inc., a translation company based in Bangalore, Indian language translation projects are difficult to handle due to paucity of quality translators. Even though India is a very large country, there are very few qualified translators who have equally good command over English and their mother tongue/vernacular languages. Linguists who have studied in vernacular medium find it difficult to comprehend the nuances of English. Conversely, linguists who have studied in English medium find it difficult to write fluently in their mother tongue (even though they can speak it fluently). The problem is more acute when translation has to be done from Indian languages into English.

Other problems include, lack of standardized terminology in various domains, sometimes translators are unable to type characters properly due to inadequate knowledge of Indian keyboard layout. Moreover, terminology research takes longer than that for European languages as information is not easily available over the Internet. Specialists from respective professions have to be consulted. For example, for medical translation we have to consult a doctor who has good command over his native tongue. S/he can guide on to which term would be understood by the target audience (in most cases, the common man). Terms used in standard bilingual medical dictionaries may not be understood in vernacular/rural environment. On the other hand, if legal documents have to be translated, the standard administrative terms used by the respective state government and high courts would have to be used. Such terms may not be understood by the common man.

Modern translators are also faced with the problem of purity in translation. Most Indian languages for instance, have English words, like computer, internet, and so on which are very comfortably used by the natives of that language without translating them into their language. Therefore when a translator translates from English to an Indian language, say Kannada should s/he use the English word or the equivalent in the target language? For example, in a sentence like- “She turned on her computer and browsed the Internet for valuable data.” When this sentence is translated, if the translator uses the Kannada equivalents for ‘Computer’ and ‘Internet’ they may not be understood by the natives themselves.

Many people use automated translation software for translation. Such software cannot give absolute accuracy. The input does not always equal the output. Translation, like all writing, is not something that a computer could do as well as a human. There are challenges one has to face when attempting to do machine translation. Not all the words in one language have equivalent words in another language. In some cases a word in one language is to be expressed by group of words in another. Moreover, two given languages may have completely different structures. For example English has SVO structure while Kannada has SOV structure. Even when translating a simple sentence, an automated translation could actually present very embarrassing word structures.

In Conclusion, a competent translator should have a very good knowledge of the language, written and spoken, from which s/he is translating (the source language); an excellent command of the language into which s/he is translating (the target language); familiarity with the subject

matter of the text being translated; a profound understanding of the etymological and idiomatic correlates between the two languages; and a finely tuned sense of when to paraphrase ("translate literally") and when to paraphrase, so as to assure true rather than spurious equivalents between the source- and target-language texts. A competent translator should not only be a bilingual but also a bicultural. Translation is not a layman's job. Translators should have the required expertise to translate documents and must be professionally experienced and equipped to do so.

References

Baker, Mona. In Other Words. A Course book on Translation. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

Goodman, Paul. Five Years: Thoughts During a Useless Time. 1969.

<http://www.transinfopreneur.com/>

<http://www.danatranslation.com/>