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Learning and Teaching the art of Translation Post-NEP

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The National Education Policy is indeed a blessing in disguise. One of the main key objectives behind its policies is the revival of Indian languages, culture, and tradition to make young learners take pride in their Indianness. The NEP has tried to encourage this through the implementation of multilingualism and multidisciplinary programmes. This will ensure that students learn vernacular languages and later take up courses like content writing, creative writing and translation studies to hone the skill of translation. The reason is that language, grammar and writing skills are the key to a successful translation. Translating from languages like Sanskrit, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Kannada, etc to English, or vice versa enables the exchange of knowledge and ensures that everyone feels connected and enriched. Translation crosses out the problem of the language barrier and promotes acceptance of India's wide and varied cultural heritage in India and abroad. Anthony Burgess quotes:

'Translation is not a matter of words only: it is a matter of making intelligible a whole culture.'¹ (Burgess)

With culture, comes the gift of traditional virtues and values; language and literature help young minds easily imbibe these themselves and also spread them worldwide through translation. Moreover, the NEP emphasizes studying ancient classical texts of Sanskrit and the translation of its manuscripts. The main reason is the huge reservoir of scientific knowledge in Sanskrit texts, like Vaimânika Shâstra. After the implementation of NEP, for example, a student can study the Sanskrit text 'Science of Aeronautics' which was conventionally a study of Arts stream, while pursuing Science, and maybe later do a PhD on these two and come up with innovative research. To summarize the importance of 'Translation Studies' backed up by the NEP 2020 is that this would enable young minds to get spiritually and intellectually connected to the roots and give them scientific wings to fly.

Now for budding translators, what is translation? Translating from one language to another is an art; it is a skill.

'to conceive of translation as a form of art; an art form, moreover, whose unique concern is what happens when one language passes into another.'² (Benjamin)

It is not an innate skill, nobody is born with it, it is acquired and slowly

refined with experience. The more one practices and translates, the sharper the skill becomes. Only the translator himself can witness all the major and minor ways in which he/she has progressed.

But from where to begin? What are the prerequisites to begin translating? First and foremost is the knowledge of two or more languages, generally the language of the original text and the one in which the book needs to be translated. This demands a good command of those languages —vocabulary, diction, word choice, etcetera. Also, since translating is a form of a write-up, a flair for writing is essential, which is again an acquired skill. What more is needed for good error-free writing is the mastery of grammar. Hence, both competency, i.e. the rules of language, and performance, i.e. actual writing are crucial.

Now, since translation is a byproduct of the original text, is it twice removed from reality as Aristotle says? Not according to Walt Benjamin.

'...translation is a form of artistic writing alongside poetry rather than a secondary derivative of literary art'³ (Benjamin)

Hence, it is evident that authors and translators are two different entities, having different roles, and dealing with different kinds of texts, but one cannot say who is superior to whom. The role of a translator is sometimes tougher than the author. An author is like a free bird who can express his/her thoughts, feelings and experiences, without restraints. On the contrary, a translator is a caged bird, who has to retain the original flow of ideas and feelings in the restraints of a language.

But by following some guidelines before translating, the tough job of a translator can become somewhat easier. If the author is reachable, alive and near, the best would be to meet him/her in person; in case the author is unreachable, far or dead, reading his biographies or autobiographies might help. These two ways ensure that the translator gets into the psyche of the author, feels and writes in the same way so that the same pure intention reaches the audience. Another way is to find out the author's goal behind writing; this will give the translator an edge over others. It is also essential to find out your goal behind translating the work. For most of the present translators, it is not the monetary gain, but something abstract that gives them the satisfaction of translating. By following these guidelines, the translator does not remain a caged bird but finds his/her happy place within the depths of the author's heart and brain, which is the origin of the work. This means the translation gets closer to the original and is not twice removed from reality.

Now, there are errors that a budding translator can make during the translation, and being aware of them reduces the chances of committing such mistakes. The first is translating it in a literal sense, word by word; such translations sound artificial. Somewhere the readers can feel, the tone of the original language. It is like someone wearing a coat on a dhoti; a mismatch. The next error is exactly the opposite of the first. Suppose one translates the text into English, and for retaining the tone of the new language, the translator loses the feel and tone of the language in the original text.

Some other errors include either cutting short on essential words, or verbosity and using too many words; a fine balance between both of these is essential. The best would be to get into the shoes of the author, which is easier when he/she is a well-known personality, and deeply analyze his/her writing style, thought process and intent of writing. In this way, the translated work will vibrate with the original work in every possible way — syntax, meaning, tone, flow and flair of writing. Yet, it is easier said than done. The toughest part is to pace up with the rhymes, puns, idioms and figures of speech used in the original text. Sometimes, translating these happens naturally, whereas at other times it is like running behind a mirage, and later being satisfied with a close resemblance. But at times, the point is translating the feelings, and not the words. This will make the translator get away with the guilt.

Apart from this, learning the grammar of both languages is very essential. To begin with, tenses; tenses help one to realise if the action represents the present, past or future time. Moreover, understanding whether the activity is in perfect, continuous or perfect continuous tenses, always makes a great difference in the translated sentence and its meaning. After this part of the sentence is fixed, the next are connectors or conjunctions, which are of two types: coordinators like and, but, etc, and subordinators like if, when, etc. Connectors ensure the flow between two phrases, sentences, and paragraphs; they make the text a united whole and make the readers sail smoothly. Connectors are like accessories, how we use them to groom ourselves is another story. What sounds better and more logical out of the following: 'He proposed and she said yes.' or 'She said yes and he proposed.'? A logical connection must be there not only between two sentences but also between two phrases. What makes the ride difficult is verbosity, jargon and high-vocabulary words. So, it is better to use simple vocabulary for the sake of the majority of your readers because the motive is conveying and not showing off. Hence, short and simple sentences are the best — they are easily digestible, retain the interest of the readers and are impactful. To make sentences short and crisp, use gerunds, infinitives, participles, and phrases. For example: 'I read the article and got a lot of knowledge.', can be better written as: 'Reading the article enlightened me.', and so on. While using phrases, ensure that they are not repetitive. For example: 'Indeed, he is a good person in reality.', can be better written as: 'He is indeed good.' We must also stay away from minor errors in article usage and subject-verb agreement. For example: 'The dust in all rooms is annoying.' Here, the verb must agree with the subject 'the dust' and not 'all rooms'.

After translating the text as per the norms of grammar, what comes at the end is editing and proofreading. Many tools are available for editing, but it is always better to be self-reliant. At last, one should check for inconsistencies and keep the content uniform throughout the text. For example, for one object or person, two spellings might be correct, but using one consistently, throughout the text, is important. Similarly, there are more than one ways to punctuate a text, but it would be better to follow one pattern for all those kinds of sentences. Sometimes, the translator has to recheck facts and resources or do some research work. For instance, the words

'Israelis' and 'Israelites' have different meanings; similarly, the terms 'Medes' and 'Midianites' are not similar. Hence, a translator has to be extra conscious.

Apart from the conventional ways in which proofreading is done, there are a couple of things that must be considered. First, check for content that might create controversy or hurt the sentiments of some people. The second reading must be to check the flow of the information: both logical flow and emotional connection.

The above points are crucial for learners to imbibe and teachers to teach. The educators must frame the syllabus on translation studies on these guidelines, such that these essential skills are polished. It can be only possible when the teaching method is learner-centric and not teacher-centric. The lectures must focus on experiential knowledge, rather than theoretical knowledge. A teacher must help the learners to interpret the basic nuances of translation by studying the original text and its translated version simultaneously. For example: Studying the Gujarati travelogue of Saint Madhavpriyadasji's 'Israel ni Dharmayatra' alongside its English translation: 'A Pilgrimage to Israel', etcetera. Also, the budding talent of learners can be refined by giving them internship opportunities, especially a chance to work with authors, translators, linguists and content writers.

To summarize, translation is an art and ability that needs to be developed by anyone who has an interest in this high-purpose activity. Although it may appear difficult and may demand accuracy, the skill can be easily honed with practice and the right guidance from educators focusing on learners' requirements. Some basic steps need to be followed before, during and after the translation. It's better to start translating, rather than to get into the theoretical aspects. And through the National Education Policy 2020, many learners will get scope and opportunity to polish their multiple skills, languages and talent. They will be able to gift the world with the best literature and translations. As Ezra Pound rightly says: 'A great age of literature is perhaps always a great age of translations.'⁴ (Pound)

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