Editorial Mediations in Translation: A Study of Translator's Role Beyond Linguistic Equivalence

Jyotika Elhance

Associate Professor, Department of English, Vivekanand College, University of Delhi, Delhi (India) E-mail:<elhancejyotika@gmail.com, jyotikaelhance@vivekanand.du.ac.in>

Abstract

Translation is a process that involves in-depth comprehension, analysis, transference, and reconstruction keeping the grammatical, referential, connotative, denotative, and socio-cultural meaning of the source text intact. In highly literary translations, simple, word-to-word translations alone do not suffice. What is required is a quality translation that is accurate, error-free and that which offers relevant contextual and cultural nuances of the original text to its readers. For it to be so, the process must go through rigorous checks and rechecks, expert editing support and responsible proofreading to ensure quality. There is confusion about the role of translators, editors, proofreaders, and reviewers as their area and scope of work often overlap. Though editing and proofreading are two separate activities, they often get used interchangeably. Their end objective is similar - delivering accuracy and quality but the degree of criticality varies. There are different linguistic aspects involved in it; each must work towards imparting a finesse to the text in hand. This paper intends to trace how the lines between them are vague and how the translator is expected to take over the three-in-one role, the myriad challenges that she must face before a polished product can be delivered to the publisher.

Keywords

Translation, Source text, Target text, Socio-cultural nuances, Connotative meaning, Denotative meaning, Editing, Proofreading .

6

Editorial Mediations in Translation: A Study of Translator's Role Beyond Linguistic Equivalence

1. Introduction

William Tyndale was the first person to translate the Holy Bible from Hebrew and Greek into English which created quite a furor in the early 16th century Catholic England. If it hadn't been for him, the protestant Reformation and Renaissance movements would have had a different story to narrate. Similarly, Latin and Roman Literatures are offshoots of Greek literatures to a great extent. In fact, the entire human civilization owes its very existence to translations. Without them, many of the ancient texts on literature, philosophy, medicine, astronomy, and several other branches of knowledge would have either gone extinct or would have been rendered undecipherable. Chaucer, Homer, Horace, Kalidas, Shudrak would have all faded into oblivion. Very few would have heard of Orhan Pamuk or Haruki Murakami. In India, we have always believed in *Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam* i.e., the entire world is one big family. It is through the translations that we can access the rich literary heritage not only of the various regional Indian literatures but also of world literature at large.

Today, we are living in a multilingual, multicultural world, where globalization and commercialization have blurred the borders. The need to understand each other's language, literature, culture, way of life, politics, religion has become even more imperative as it impacts our lives on an everyday basis. Since there are hundreds of languages and dialects that are spoken all over the world, each with its own distinct culture and cultural nuances and styles, the role of translation and interpreting gains further centrality. A piece of visual art is there for everyone to see, admire and appreciate but a piece of literature requires a reader-base who can read and understand the language in which it is written. Translation picks these texts from their language-specific regions and gives them the required acceleration to transcend boundaries.

2. Multidimensional Role of Translators

In her book, *Introductory Course in Translation Principles*, Barnwell defines translation as "a re-telling, as exactly as possible, the meaning of the original message in a way that is natural in the language into which the translation is being made" (Barnwell, 1986, Introduction). Translation is a process that involves in-depth comprehension, analysis, transference, and reconstruction keeping the grammatical, referential, connotative, denotative, and socio-cultural meaning of the source text intact. In highly literary translations, simple translations alone do not suffice. What is required is a quality translation that is accurate, error-free and which takes care of providing its readers with relevant contextual and cultural nuances of the original text. For it to be so, the process has to go through rigorous checks and rechecks, expert editing support and responsible proofreading to ensure a good quality translated text. According to the International Standard ISO 17100:2015, translators must check their draft translations "for possible semantic, grammatical and spelling issues, and for omissions and other errors, as well as ensuring compliance with any relevant translation project specifications" (Mossop, 2019: 18-19).

To accomplish this, the translators need to be linguists par excellence with a thorough academic and practical knowledge of both the source and the target language so that the flavor of the original work is retained. It is not merely about literal translation, substituting word-for-word, but about translating and interpreting ideas, concepts, cultural nuances inherent in the source works and conveying them into another language altogether. Translators deconstruct the crux of the text and reconstruct it in a parallel language. They are multi-taskers engaged in multidimensional activities of translating, analyzing, interpreting, editing, proofreading all together. The existence of linguistic complexities and non-equivalence in various language-systems make their work extremely challenging. They need to have the required skills to build bridges of communication between different knowledge systems and possess the expertise to select the right registers, words, phrases, grammatical structures, and socio-cultural contexts.

Translators have the ability to create brand-new text from the original. At times, the act of translation becomes challenging when they are unable to find right equivalents of the region and

culture-specific words and phrases in the target language. They cannot take the source text too lightly or deviate from their path and ascribe their own meaning to the words written. It is imperative for them to remain faithful to the source work or risk it becoming an adaptation or a transcreation. Often issues relating to the translation come up for discussion as to whether a particular piece requires a word-to-word literal translation or a free translation, or whether the region-specific words should be used in their original language or be defined in terms of footnotes or glosses, or how a culturally sensitive topics should be approached. If we go by the chess-game analogy, the truth is - "In translation, context is Queen. There is no King." The translator needs to be well versed in all the areas to give her valuable inputs.

There are misperceptions aplenty about the roles of translators, editors, proofreaders, and reviewers primarily because their area and scope of work overlap to a considerable extent. Each language that is spoken in the world has its own unique set of grammatical and syntactical rules regarding sentence structures, sentence length, spellings, punctuation, etc. but they are all guided by certain common factors that bring out their significance in every translation. Editing and proofreading are two separate activities but are often used interchangeably. Their end objective is similar - delivering accuracy and quality but the degree of criticality varies. There are numerous linguistic aspects that need to be worked upon at length to make the work error-free. Before delving further, let us also have a quick overview of some of the various literature reviews on the same.

3. Literature Reviews

In *Handbook of Translation Studies*, Gambier & Doorslaer (2010) discuss the multifaceted role of translators as editors, reviewers, and proofreaders. The book explores the editing process in translation, the importance of linguistic and stylistic reviews, and the role of proofreading in ensuring quality translations. Shlesinger & Jettmarová, (2006) have also examined the socio-cultural aspects of translation and interpreting, including the role of translators as editors and reviewers and its impact on the final product. The translators are "intercultural mediators who evaluate consistency, coherence and even formatting - functions that are typically associated with editors and proofreaders", argues Anthony Pyn in his work, *Exploring Translation Theories* (Pyn, A., 2014).

Snell-Hornby, M. (2006) focuses on the key developments in translation studies and discusses the evolving role of translators. Brian Mossop published his 4th edition, *Revising and Editing for Translators* from Routledge in the year 2019 wherein he writes extensively about the overlapping and distinguishing features of editing, reviewing, and proofreading. Mona Baker and Gabriela Saldanha write about the intersecting of translation, editing and publication in their edited volume, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*. While shedding light on the multifarious role of translators as editors, reviewers, and proofreaders, these reviews emphasize the importance of translators' linguistic and stylistic expertise in ensuring the quality and accuracy of translated texts.

4. Editing, Proofreading and Reviewing

Since no human being is perfect, and are liable to err howsoever careful or experienced they might be, there is a need for editing, revising, and proofreading even the most seemingly 'impeccable' work before it goes out in the public domain. The best and the most renowned of them may commit some inadvertent oversights despite their best intentions.

4·1 Editing

If one goes by the definition, "editing is the process of selecting and preparing written, photographic, visual, audible, or cinematic material used by a person or an entity to convey a message or information. The editing process can involve correction, condensation, organization, and many other modifications performed with an intention of producing a correct, consistent, accurate and complete piece of work" (Mamishev, & Sean, 2009: 128).

Brian Mossop, in his book *Revising and Editing for Translators*, lists a few elements of the many that can go wrong with a translation: from typographical errors to format inconsistencies to grammatical problems to inappropriate treatment of a genre, etc. There are four broad types of editing: copy editing, stylistic editing, structural editing, and content editing (Holmes, 1998). There are some corrections that do not conform to any pre-set linguistic rules, for example, when the inter-sentence connectors are poor or if there is excessive verbosity then stylistic editing is required to bring about fluency in the text. The vocabulary and sentence structures have to be tailored to suit the target audience.

Content editing of the text is required both at the micro and macro level to rectify all factual, logical, or syntactical errors and to rule out obscurity and confusions of every kind. Accuracy is the touchstone for all editorial works which lends finesse and quality to the final product. It is only when the writer has finished writing that the role of editor comes into play where she checks for any stylistic dissonances in usage of language, vocabulary, grammar, etc. Some of the points that are kept in mind while editing any piece of writing are:

- Is the introduction clear and purposeful? Do paragraphs have topic sentences? Is there a clarity? Has every idea been given sufficient weightage?
- Are there any unnecessary digressions?
- Do the chosen words express the ideas correctly? Or has there been an excessive use of thesaurus throughout the document?
- Has there been an appropriate use of voice? Passive voice is always preferred over active voice. Is the overall tone appropriate for the target audience?
- Are the sentences unnecessarily long and winding? Is excessive explanation diluting the narrative?
- Has the gendered language been used appropriately?
- Have the linking words been used appropriately to connect ideas?
- Is the text a meaningful whole?
- Has the text been worded concisely? Is terminology consistent?
- Is the conclusion concise and clear?
- Does the text meet the readers' needs?
- Are the citations in place?
- Have the copyright laws been adhered to?
- Is it error free and print-ready?

Editing, as such, plays a significant role in the presentation of a particular literary or artistic work - be it a film, a piece of fiction or a document, or a research paper or an article. On it depends the readability, quality, and crisp style. Editor lends clarity, consistency and succinctness of style and register to the edited work keeping it as close to the source work as possible. The translator too, if she so wishes and if she possesses the required linguistic expertise, can take over the roles of editor, proofreader, and reviewer all rolled into one.

Editors rectify all loopholes, flaws, gaps, and disconnects, lend it a consistent fluidity and a natural style and transform it into an independent creative piece. Many a times, when the work in hand is split amongst multiple people owing to its sheer size, it is the editor's task to ensure that consistency and coherence in style is maintained throughout the work. She also needs to ensure that the edited work complies with the patron's requirements.

A skilled editor has dynamism and the linguistic prowess of both the source and target language texts along with an in-depth understanding of the socio-cultural nuances. Apart from this, excellent communication skills, flexibility, adaptability, ability to research and multitask, advance knowledge of computer and computer-aided software becomes imperative. That lends her the expertise to edit and polish all the finer nuances of translation.

4·2 Proofreading

Proofreading, on the other hand, is about correcting superficial errors in the typed copy before it goes into final print. There could be errors in formatting, punctuation, grammar, spellings, syntax, etc. Once the task of the copy editor is over, the role of the proofreader comes in. She combs through the entire document minutely and sifts out any flaws or errors that could have been left behind including typographical ones and makes it print-ready. Howsoever meticulous the editor may be with his work; some slipups and oversights inadvertently crop up that require rectification. Faulty or incorrect use of punctuation or grammar may mar the text in question, put off the reader for all times to come, crash its market-worth and destroy its brand value completely. Therefore, the role of a competent proofreader is also equally important. Earlier only one copy used to get typed and all the corrections were incorporated manually in that but in today's digitally advanced era, corrections can be done in the soft copy itself. There are now various online apps and software available that can flag any inconsistencies and rectify them with a simple click of a key.

Thus, editing is related to the overall linguistic quality and appropriateness which retains the natural look-and-feel of the original text, whereas proofreading is the final double-check on the printed copy to rule out any errors before it gets published.

4·3 Reviewing

Similarly, reviewing too is undertaken by a subject matter expert who is a native or near-native speaker of the target language. A reviewer's work is to assess the quality of translation and smoothen out all rough edges through proof reading. She double-checks the linguistic reviews and anomalies, if any, in its quality, consistency, tone and style. It is an objective evaluation of the literary piece where one adheres to the conventions and guidelines of the target language in question.

5. Translator as Editor, Reviewer, and Proofreader

The question that arises then is, should a translator also take on the work of editing, proofreading, and reviewing upon herself as is expected of her? Can she be a good editor, proofreader, and reviewer too? Academic translators are quite often confronted with such questions. Are there any clear-cut answers to these? Probably not, since the work in-hand is subjective by its very nature. It is wholly dependent on the kind of skill-sets that an individual translator possesses. Why are the translators then expected to edit and proofread their own work thoroughly and meticulously before submitting it to the publishers? Probably, a fresh pair of eyes would evaluate it more differently and more objectively and detect any possible slipups, shortfalls, redundancies, inconsistencies, or typographic errors which would have escaped the translator's eye. Since they must switch between two syntactically diverse language-structures, the chances are that they may inadvertently leave behind occasional traces of the source language in their translations. And despite feeling that they have accomplished the task to their satisfaction and are all set to go into print, there still might be some areas left that need further refinement. The best of the authors, writers, award winning translators, literary giants may require the help of editors to polish their works. Just as authors need editors to edit their works, similarly translators too may need editors. They can obviously edit their own work but it would be better if the work passes through the eyes of an independent editor, especially if it has to go into print.

However, if the translation is for private circulation, notes, lectures, translated abstracts, etc. then professional editing becomes optional. Editing is not required if the translation is a literal one, for e.g., for information brochures, instruction manuals, directions,

questionnaires, etc. It is also not required if it is for a limited audience, such as an M. Phil or doctoral thesis but if the focus is to publish it, then it becomes desirable. Many a times, the publishing houses have their own in-house team of editors and proof-readers but they still expect the translators to give a finished product that is duly edited, proofread and is print-ready. This might lead to certain inadvertent flaws in the final copy for they cannot be expected to fulfil both the roles simultaneously.

Though the translators are extremely proficient in both the source as well as the target language, yet editors have a keener eye for detail. They can undertake different types of edits on a particular piece of writing - content edit, structural edit, copy edit, line edit and/or mechanical edit. They can edit the text keeping the target audience and market in mind. Often with the first draft, the translators do not even realize that flow and fluency is somewhat compromised but the expert editors are able to identify and fix any lapses that may have been inadvertently committed in the process of translation. They not only weed out inconsistencies in the translated texts but are able to remodel them according to the target audience and market requirements. They are equally adept in giving a bilingual review of both the source and target texts in question. Their professional commitment requires them to not only verify the efficacy and appropriateness of the references quoted but also to make sure that the translated message is conveyed accurately.

As such, before it comes out as a print copy, the original text must pass through several revisions and re-revisions, edits, and reviews. It is proofread minutely to discard any dissonances and flaws. Both the editors and proofreaders work meticulously to rule out the lurking inconsistencies, if any. Their focus is to improve the overall style, check the accuracy of grammar, punctuation, spellings, references, etc.

The translators too are expected to undertake the same process to produce quality translation. "They serve as invisible editors and rewriters", states Venuti Lawrence in his seminal work, *The Translator's Invisibility*. Since they are so closely associated with both the source and the target text, that they can easily replicate their expertise and take over the work of editing, reviewing, and proofreading the manuscript not only for themselves but for the original author as well. She also needs to tread cautiously and ensure that she does not impose her own personal style upon the text in

hand or resort to over corrections. Neither should she interfere with the original unnecessarily and mar its uniqueness either by over-simplification or by an excessive use of jargon. Since the translator too is a language professional who understands the finer nuances of each word and phrase used, their work tends to overlap. The editor, on the other hand, may or may not be an expert of the source language from which the translator has translated. It will not pose as much of a hindrance for it is not imperative for her to know the source text but it would be advantageous to have an in-depth idea regarding the translated text and look for false cognates, if any.

Many a times culturally loaded idioms become a stumbling block. Prepositions too work differently in source language and target language and so do punctuations. These flaws make the structure weak, if due care is not taken. Editing a translation does not require much structural editing, it is mostly copy-editing and sometimes stylistic editing too. Once the translated manuscript is received by the editor, he has to do a concordance check to see if all the paragraphs are incorporated properly from the source text.

The translators, too, sometimes take liberties with translation to ensure readability and fluency. By the time the product reaches her, it has already undertaken several rounds of reading and re-reading, checking and re-checking, editing and re-editing, reviewing and re-reviewing. Despite this, the translators sometimes come across certain dissonances that need to be addressed. It may appear as a lapse on the part of a reviewer or editor of the original text, but it usually is not so. Instead, it raises an important question as to why and how do these weak spots surface typically at the end of the line, when it is undergoing translation? The answer probably could be found in the nature of translation itself. What gets translated is the idea, concept or meaning behind the text more than merely words. It is only when the translators deconstruct and reconstruct them in target language that the flaws surface. Since they too are writers of sort, who are engaged in rewriting the text-in-question into a different language-system after scrutinizing it thoroughly, it isn't surprising if they encounter certain discrepancies in the process. Professional translators are likely to question and seek clarifications in such instances since they are the ones who read the text most closely. They may encounter certain resentment too from the author/editor who might feel that her authority is being challenged. The occasional misprints may be overlooked but when it is related to

more intricate issues like rephrasing the entire sentence or correcting the terminology used in order to enhance the fluency, the translator may find herself in a tight spot.

5. Conclusion

Translation and editing are both subjective activities. Every contribution matters in the entire game of things - be that of a writer or editor or proofreader or reviewer or translator. They aren't separate entities or rivals who are competing against each other but are engaged in complementary activities that enhance the quality of the end-product created.

Today, in the age of artificial intelligence, we have different apps and devices at our disposal which are designed and customized to do our every bidding. We have Google translate, dictionaries, thesauruses, glossaries, and apps like Grammarly that correct grammar and do spell-checks, etc. too. They are helpful to some extent as they flag the inherent errors but it is always a human touch that is required to rectify them. Computer-aided translations provide the backend support, no doubt, but their success rates are rather dismal. Many a times, the end-result turns out to be ambiguous and disheartening, and even nonsensical at times, especially when a literary translation must be accomplished. As such, the need for a human translator is unlikely to fade away.

References

Baker, M., & Saldanha, G., (eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (2nd ed.), London and New York: Routledge, 2009.

Barnwell, Katharine, *Bible Translation: An Introductory Course in Translation Principles*, Third Edition, Dallas, US: Dallas Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1986.

Bassnett, Susan, *Translation Studies*, Third Edition, London: Routledge, 2002.

Cronin, Michael, *Translation and Globalization*, London: Routledge, 2003.

Gambier, Y., & van Doorslaer, L., (eds.), *Handbook of Translation Studies*, Volume , Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2010.

Holmes, James S., *The Name and Nature of Translation Studies*, James S. Holmes, Translated!Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988. (It is an expanded version of a paper presented in the Translation Section of the Third International Congress of Applied Linguistics, held in Copenhagen, 21-26 August 1972).

http://www.translationindia.com/

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/translation

Mamishev, Alexander, Williams, Sean, ***Technical Writing for Teams: The SREAM Tools Handbook***, Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, John Wiley & Sons. Inc., Hoboken, 2009, 128.

Mossop, Brian, ***Revising and Editing for Translators***, United Kingdom, Taylor & Francis, 2019, 18-19.

Munday, Jeremy (ed.), ***Translation as Intervention,*** Continuum Studies in Translation, London: Continuum, 2007.

Pym, A., ***Exploring Translation Theories*** (2nd edition), London and New York: Routledge, 2014.

Pym, A., Shlesinger, M., & Jettmarová, Z. (eds.), ***Sociocultural Aspects of Translating and Interpreting***, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 2006.

Snell-Hornby, M., ***The Turns of Translation Studies: New Paradigms or Shifting Viewpoints?***, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 2006.

Venuti, L., T***he Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*** (2nd edition), London and New York: Routledge, 2008.   ★