

Theoretical ‘Turns’ in Translations Studies: an overview

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Abstract:

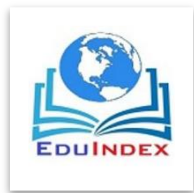
In everyday life, Translation is a natural process of communication. The informality of the process in everyday life situations matches the number of controversies and conflicts that surround the written literary translations. Metaphorical descriptions of translations are age old. The metaphorical description of ‘Spatial turn’ is an important concept in Translation theories. This metaphor, like the ‘cultural turn’, is necessitated due to different theoretical positioning in comprehending the translated texts. The researchers interrogating translational practices note two important differences in approach to translation. Firstly, the postcolonial theoretical framework questions the translations that follow the Euro-centric methods of translation. Second noteworthy point is the difference in the intra-lingual practices of translations that existed in India. There are significant research articles that draw attention to indigenous methods of translational practices of written literary translations. Some contemporary research articles analyze the metaphoric descriptions as limiting the discussions about translation.

Cartography of these theoretical discussions becomes necessary for a translation studies reader. The paper endeavours to present the cartography of the critical theoretical discussions. The first part of the paper discusses the colonial influences in translation. The second part of the paper presents the recent discussions in indigenous practices in translation. The final segment offers the most recent critique of the metaphorical ‘turns’.

Key terms: Spatial turn, indigenous literatures, indigenous translational practices, literary cartography

Translation is a natural process; it is an everyday reality. The informality of the translation process in everyday life situations matches the number of controversies and conflicts that surround the written literary translations—be it Homer’s *Iliad*, *The Ramayana* of Valmiki to Bhasha languages, or a folk epic. Each translated text is surrounded by a number of discussions and disagreements about the translation. The discussion could be about the authenticity of the Target Language Text (TLT) or translatability or the visibility of the translator. These debates stem from specific notions about language and/or cultural notions of language that allow creative transcreations. The metaphorical descriptions of translations like ‘transfer’, ‘bridge’, and ‘mirror’ and the more recent ones like the ‘cultural turn’ and ‘spatial turn’, emerge as the referential to discuss the theoretical framework of translation. Apart from these metaphorical descriptions, visibility of the translation, authenticity of the translated text, equivalence, and translatability are also some of the many conceptual discussions about translations. At each point of time, there are newer conversations about translations and newer debates that emerge.

The research objective of the paper is to present an overview of the significant conversations in translation studies that provide insights about translation.


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Translation Studies as a discipline emerged emphatically in the twentieth century. Initially, theoretical queries of translations focused on the relationship of linguistic structure of the 'Source Language Text' (SLT). It is important to note that these discussions begin in the Euro-centric notions of language and their notion of translations. Some of the key terms that were discussed prominently in the 1950's are 'translatability' and 'equivalence'. Both the concepts are based on Euro-centric linguistic notions of translation; deconstructionists questioned this notion of translation as transfer of meaning. Crucial discussions regarding translatability are put forth by *Eugene Nida* and *Roman Jakobson*. *Eugene Nida*, in the context of translating the Bible, proposes to create a shared referent that points to the meaning in the Source Language Text (SLT). *Roman Jakobson* expresses his certainty that there can be no complete equivalence between two words, but refers to the difference in words and sentence structures. The discussions are pointers to the question 'what is being translated?'

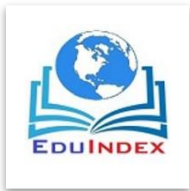
The latter part of twentieth century saw translation theories exploring two important questions. The first question is whether the translated text is a 'literal translation' or 'trans-creation'. The second question is about the role of 'culture' in translation. The important theoreticians at this point of time are Lawrence Venuti, Susan Bassnett, Andre Lefevere and Harish Trivedi. In fact, all the four theoreticians come closest to reader-response theory as they privilege the readers' perspective in the reading of the translated text. *Post Colonial Translation-Theory and Practice* Ed by Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, 1999, Routledge Publication and *Translation Studies Reader* Ed by Lawrence Venuti, 2000, Routledge Publication are the two books that present the expansive vision of the conversations in Translation Studies. Venuti explores the question equivalence and translatability expansively. Lawrence Venuti in his essay *Translation, Community and Utopia* observes: "MacIntyre argued that this problem of untranslatability is most acute with "the internationalized languages-in-use in late twentieth-century modernity," like English, which "have minimal presuppositions in respect of possibly rival belief systems" and so will "neutralize" the historical dimension of the foreign text (ibid.). In English translation, therefore, a kind of text which cannot be read as *the text it is* out of context is nevertheless rendered contextless. But in so rendering it, it is turned into a text which is no longer the author's, nor such as would be recognized by the audience to whom it was addressed. (ibid: 385, MacIntyre's emphasis)

It is *Susan Bassnett* and *Andre Lefevere* who argue for the role of culture in translation and introduces the concept of 'cultural turn' in translation studies. *Chen Yan* in the research article *Cultural Turn in the Translation Studies* observes:

Culture turn in translation studies was not turned up casually but had its deep social reasons. At the same time it was not put forward by Bassnett and Lefevere abruptly but came into being gradually. Bassnett and Lefevere just took advantage of the proper opportunity and made it formally known by the public. The social causes of culture turn in translation studies was complex. From the word-to-word translation to translation involving the background, the reality and the environment, it was a long and gradual history. (Pg 4, 2014)

The 'turn' towards cultural contexts in Postcolonial Studies has presented interesting opportunities for scholars in Translation Studies in India. The foremost important conversation in this direction is by *A K Ramanujan*. The two essays *Three Hundred Ramayans* and *Is there an Indian Way of thinking?* foreground the Indian epistemologies and practices in translation. He identifies three types of translations: iconic, indexical and symbolic. He discusses these in detail and then says this of translation: "These various texts not only relate to prior texts directly, to borrow or to refute, but they relate to each other through this common code or common pool. Every author, if one may hazard a metaphor, dips into it and brings out a unique crystallization, a new text with a unique texture and a fresh context." (pg 16, 1999)

However, a look at the intra-lingual translational practices in the vernacular languages of India reveals creative liberties asserted by the translator with respect to the source language text. The twentieth century writers and translators have examined the translations from English to Indian vernacular languages with specific references. For example, *D A Shankar*, *T S Sathyanath* and *V B Tharakeshwar* recognise and emphasize the familiarity with which English literatures were dealt with by the indigenous translators. Early translations from


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English to vernacular language depict the fact that the translations have conformed to the indigenous ideas of literature and ideologies. All three writers observe the ‘creative assertion’, with examples from the translations of various texts. D A Shankar in the essay *Transmogrification of Macbeth* cites the example of Srikante Gowda’s translation of *William Shakespeare’s Macbeth* to *Rudrapratapadeva*, who is *Malcom* in the play. This change was based on the Sanskritic tradition that did not allow the writer to name the play after the antagonist. T. S. Sathyanath and V. B. Tharakeshwar cite the instances of medieval practices of translation from Pali to Kannada in Kannada translational literary scenario where similar freedom was asserted by the translator that facilitated a creative transference of the source language text and made it immediately relevant to the reader in a different cultural context. V B Tharakeshwar notes of this in this research article *Translations into Kannada in 10th Century-comments on pre-colonial translation*: “While translating Dandi’s poem into Kannada, the author of KRM adds a few adjectives to Goddess Saraswati: “madhur aaraavochite, chatura ruchira padarachane”. Here we sense of tenderness associated with *Saraswati* and *Kaavya*: in a sense, feminization of (epic) literature is happening here.” (Pg 4: 2005) This observation about translation here points to the liberties that the translator could and did take while translating a SLT to TL. The western notions of translatability, authenticity and equivalence are not relevant. Such deductions also do not point to the politics of representation and/or representations of translations.

These discourses are important to understand the significance of the move towards ‘cultural turn’ in translation. It also draws attention to the liberties that the indigenous translators took while translating the text from the SL to TL. They are pointers to the different notions of languages that existed in pre-colonial and Colonial India. The fact that translators transcreated by making the bold changes to the SLT, perhaps, answers the question ‘What is translated?’

The early translation practices are examples that focus the attention to the possible alternative models in indigenous poetics of translations as well as practices translators adapted freely. These deliberations made in the past move the present discussions to the Postcolonial and indigenous turns in translations and translation studies. Postcolonial studies draws attention to politics of representation of literature and language. The major premise of Postcolonial Studies is the construct of binaries, its complications and of Postcoloniality. So, a comprehension study of Postcoloniality is necessary to the discovery of self and identification of self. Also, most conversations of Postcolonialism emerge from the interrogation of literary representations in literature and/or socio-political scenario. But, studies of translations from a Postcolonial perspective, and with specific reference to Postcoloniality, present a different facet of translation as translators draw on indigenous practices. So, in the indigenous context the translations and their practices are in a complex situation.

‘Spatiality’ is one of the most discussed concepts in the literary theoretical scenario today. The open market policies, globalization and technological progress on the one hand and acculturation, internationalization on the other contribute to the increased significance of the discussion of spatiality. *Angela Kershaw* and *Gabriela Saldanha* in *Global Landscapes: Introduction to Translation Studies* observe the use of metaphorical language to describe translation studies. “Metaphors are powerful theoretical tools: they have the power to change our perception and this to create a new reality . . . St Andre warns us of the risks of proposing new metaphors without having thought the implication of viewing the phenomenon under consideration under this new guise . . .” (pg 1, 2013) Continuing this line of argument, they ask:

Firstly, we would question the need to describe every new set of ideas about translation as a turn, since this vocabulary risks portraying translation studies as a discipline going round in circles. Western theory based on the TRANSLATION IS TRANSFER metaphors is in any case also spatial . . . and so the idea cannot really be said to constitute really be said to constitute a fresh “turn”. Nonetheless, the notion of space has acquired a new relevance in translation studies. The analysis of space has been an important stand in critical theory since the late 1960’s, as a recent study by Verena Andermatt Conley (2012) demonstrates. In 1998, surveying theoretical work on “the new cultural geography”, Sara Blair noted that over the preceding two decades, “temporality as the organising form of experience has been superseded by spatiality, the affective and social experience of space” (Blair 1998, 544 (Pg 3, 2013)



This argument is supplemented by the ‘landscape’ imagery is interrogated intensely. Like *Venuti, Angela Kersaw* and *Gabriele Saldanha* note that the binaries of translation studies viz., translatability/untranslatability, authenticity/transcreations etc, are centered in Europe. Secondly, their argument points to the hegemonic linguistic spaces of Europe which is unlike the Indian multicultural scenario where translations especially, inter-lingual, are freer and allow creative re-creations. This scenario suggests the need for indigenous theoretical framework that facilitates the multicultural methods of translation.

It is interesting to note the ‘turns’ in understanding translated texts have in two distinct ways. Beginning with translation as a mode of communication to linguistic discourses to cultural implications of translations depicts the complex manner in which the translation, the translated text and the translator have travelled. Literary Translations have always been considered the arena of scholarship. Today, translations surely demand scholarship from the reader too as the translator today provides an insight into the translation method that is adopted by her/him. Surely, it is an enlightening journey that the reader takes.

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