

Literary Translation

الترجمة الادبية

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4th stage/ Morning & Evening classes

Lecture 2: Prose Translation

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What is Literary Translation

Translation of literature is fundamentally different from other categories. This is because the main principle of literary translation is the dominance of **poetic communicative function**. It means that in addition to rendering information to the reader, literary translation also has **aesthetic** functions. The artistic image created in a particular literary work will certainly have an impact on the reader. For this reason the literary translator should take into account specific features of the text such as **equivalence**:

A leopard never changes its spots

Literal Translation: الفهد لا يغير بقلعه أبداً.

Literary Translation (equivalence): من شب على شيء شاب عليه، الطبع غلب التطبع

It is the poetic focus of the text that makes this type of translation different from texts of an informative type. When reading a story, poem or any other type of literary work translated from a foreign language, we

observe the text itself with its meaning, emotions and characters. It is quite a challenging task to achieve the main goal of the translation - **creating a particular image for the reader as that found in the original text**. Therefore, literary translation might involve some **deviations** from the standard rules:

Patience is virtue

Literal Translation: الصبر فضيلة
Literary Translation: الصبر مفتاح الفرج

In the example mentioned above, the translator seeks for a phrase or certain terms to **achieve the same effect on the TL reader since a literal translation cannot reflect the depth and meaning of the SL literary work**. A literary translator reproduces a non-literal rendition of the original text. It is all about how the translator perceives it. He/she rewrites the text from the beginning to the very end. This applies, for example, when an obvious expression is replaced by synonyms or the structure of sentences is changed.

Equivalence and Formal Correspondence

It has been said that **there can be no absolute correspondence between languages** (Nida, 1964). Since correspondence is "any TL category which may be said to occupy, as nearly as possible, the same place in the economy of the TL as the given SL category occupies in the SL" (Catford 1965). As already mentioned, literary translation is far from literal or word-for-word rendering, i.e., the translator's duty is not only transferring the SL **author's ideas** but also taking into consideration the **style** and his/ her **structural devices** (i.e., figures of speech).

Let us consider the translation-equivalence-concept now. The idea strikes between "literal" and "free", "faithful" and "beautiful", "exact" and "natural" translation, depending on whether the preference was to be in favor of the "author" or the "reader", the SL or TL of the text (Newmark, 1988). However, the "dynamic equivalent translation" is very important and the translators (particularly Literary-translators) should have a lucid idea about this phenomenon. Eugene A. Nida (1964) argues that the dynamic equivalence in translation is far more than mere correct communication of information. Nida says that the definition of a dynamic

equivalent translation is to describe it as “the closest natural equivalent to the source-language message”. This definition includes three essential terms, namely:

1. **Equivalent**, which refers to the source-language message,
2. **Natural**, which refers to the receptor language, and
3. **Closest**, which “binds the two orientations together on the basis of the highest degree of speculation”.

Natural indicates three areas of the communication process: a natural description should fit the total **receptor language (TL)** and **culture**, the **context** of the specific message, and the receptor-language **audience**. Therefore, the translation should bear no clear trace of a foreign origin:

Green leaves and brown leaves fall from the same tree.

الأوراق الخضراء و البنية تقعان من نفس الشجرة : Literal

إن مع العسر يسرا Literary (equivalence):

أو: فإن تصاريف الزمان عجيبة .. يوما ترى يسرا و يوما ترى عسرا

In this example above, equivalence can render to the reader more understanding to the meaning of the sentence than being rendered literally. Since equivalence does not convey grammar only; but also the semantic meaning hidden within grammar. Equivalence **substitutes words** with **senses** relatively matches the SL ones yet preserving the same atmosphere found in the original. This technique is frequently adopted when the **content** is related to a SL **cultural** or **lexical reference** and has no equivalent in the other language. When the translator comes across such a problem of not finding a corresponding TL equivalent, the best method to be followed is to resort to a non-corresponding equivalent function in the TL culture:

He is as wise as an owl

حكيم كالبومة

It is noticed from this example that there is a gap between the two languages regarding the cultural aspect of the proverb. In English the word 'owl' stands for wisdom indicating a positive connotation while in Arabic culture it indicates a negative connotation referring to a 'bad omen'. In this case the translator seeks to substitute the word 'owl' with a symbol of wisdom that has the same impact in Arabic culture:

حكيم كلقمان

Such rendering not only provides a complete transmission of the idea of the proverb, but also it functions the same effect on the TL receivers as it does on the SL ones.