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Translating literary prose

Translation has always been a complex activity including various linguistic and extralinguistic factors. Translation of literary prose is also the art of conveying the beauty of different genres and an author’s inner world and intentions to share something special with the audience. It is more or less exact literary replication of the original ‘text’, taking into account literal, cultural, psychological and other realities of the target language.

Evidently, ‘prose-translation’ is the translation of novels, essays, fiction, short stories, comedy, folk tale, hagiography, works of criticism, science fiction etc. It is a type of literary creativeness where the written-work of one language is re-created in another. It is an inherent idea that the translation of poetry is very problematic, yet we have to agree that the translators also have to face lots of difficulties when it comes to translating prose.

However, when the source and target languages belong to different cultural groups, the first problem faced by the prose-translator is finding terms in his or her own language that express the highest level of faithfulness possible to the meaning of certain words. For example, there are some words that are related to typical fabrics, cookery specialties, or jobs; they also represent specific culture and the translators should be very careful in translating such words. They also find it difficult to render ambiguous puns. Similarly, the titles of stories and novels provide many examples of such ambiguities, which are hard or even impossible to translate.

A literary translator must also be skilled enough to translate feelings, cultural nuances, humour and other delicate elements of a piece of work. In fact, the translators do not translate meanings but the messages. That is why, the text must be considered in its totality.

The translation of literary prose is different from literary creativity because its existence depends on the existence of an object of translation, a work to be translated. However, it is not always possible to sketch a separate border line in the real literary procedure between prose-translation and all creative literature. In some examples, a work may not be a translation in the common sense, but it may not be possible to express it absolutely as a work of literary creativeness.

The most particular problems that the translators face include- illegible text, missing references, several constructions of grammar, dialect terms and neologisms, irrationally vague terminology, inexplicable acronyms and abbreviations, untranslatability, intentional misnaming, particular cultural references etc.

Nonetheless, there are some theorists who think that 'literal translation' is not possible. They present three main reasons supporting their stance:

1. Because a particular word in one language often contains meanings that involve several words in another language. For example, the English word 'wall' might be rendered into German as *Wand* (inside wall) or as *Mauer* (exterior wall);
2. Because grammatical particles (verb tenses, singular/dual/plural, case markers etc.) are not available in every language;
3. Because idioms of one language and culture may be utterly perplexing to speakers from another language and culture.

In conclusion, the following solutions for the translators of literary prose can be offered.

Initially, the translation of literary works - novels, short stories, plays, poems, etc. - is considered a literary recreation in its own right. However, as far as the solutions are concerned, the prose-translators should start with the careful adherence to the following principles:

1. a great understanding of the language, written and verbal, from which he is translating i.e. *the source language*;
2. an excellent control of the language into which he is translating i.e. *the target language*;
3. awareness of the subject matter of the book being translated;
4. a deep knowledge of the etymological and idiomatic correlates between the two languages;
5. a delicate common sense of when to *metaphrase* or 'translate literally' and when to *paraphrase*, in order to guarantee exact rather than fake *equivalents* between the source- and target-language texts.