

## Guest Editorial

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It was when I was requested to speak to the participants of a Refresher Course in Translation at CIIL in 2003 and I conducted a workshop on the reviewing of translations that the idea of organising a seminar on the reviewing of translated texts occurred to me. When I broached the matter with the then Director of CIIL, Professor Udaya Narayana Singh, he readily agreed. The seminar was organised subsequently through the Translation wing of the CIIL under Dr. P. P. Giridhar's stewardship. The seminar titled "How (not) to Review Translated Texts." was organised in the Department of English, University of Hyderabad and was cosponsored by CIIL and the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi on 19-20 January 2007. The seminar brought together almost all the players — reviewers of translation, editors of review magazines, readers of translated texts, translators and translation studies scholars — in an attempt to take stock of the reviewing scene in the field of translation, to critically evaluate its role and offer useful steps for its improvement. Fifteen of the papers read at the seminar have been put together in the present issue of *Translation Today*. The papers thus reflect many aspects of the process of translation-reviewing. At the outset I thank Dr. P. P. Giridhar and the Director, CIIL for allowing me to guest-edit the proceedings of the seminar. I thank each of the contributors for having waited long for the publication of the papers.

I must pause to submit that most of the papers — and my theme paper perhaps meant this without explicitly stating it — are on reviewing of translations of 'literary texts' though many of the issues they discuss have a bearing on other translated texts as well. While this may have restricted the scope of the theme of reviewing translations, some of the papers have focussed on reviewing of books in general that make the volume useful to anyone interested in the phenomenon of reviewing as well.

As the format of the journal allows for an abstract at the beginning of each of the articles, I am not going to dwell on each of the articles in detail but deal with some of the issues they raise.

One of the issues they raise concerns the identity of the translator, an issue that is largely ignored by reviewers. The presence at large of the 'original' author obviously overshadows the identity of the translator making him invisible. Reasons for the effacement of the translator's name in the reviews is also explained in terms of the role of the publishers of translated texts who relegate the translator's name to an obscure corner of the book. K. M. Sherrif suggests that translation review should be treated as 'an instance of cultural interface.' He believes, rightly, that this will ensure that it does not remain mere 'promotional material' for the book. It will also help in terms of its discussion not being restricted to the quality of the translation, but its ideological implications. Meena Pillai discusses the ill effects of treating a translation from another culture into one's own as a 'domestic inscription' rather than as 'one that bears the function of intercultural communication.' In fact, she terms such practice of translation as bad translation ethics as it does not respect the linguistic and cultural differences of the source text. She seems to suggest that without a 'more punctilious scrutiny of the process of assimilation of the "foreign" and "other Indian" traditions and texts into Malayalam' and a lack of theoretical and critical engagement with the practice of translation the reviewing of translation is bound to degenerate.

Ought the reviewer to know the source language to be able to do a good job of reviewing? The response to this question has been mixed. Looking at it from the point of view of a reader of translations, Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly points out the negative aspect of choosing a reviewer who knows the source language and says that such a person 'is not likely to be satisfied with any translation because it will never approximate to the original.' On the contrary, such a reviewer perhaps is best suited to the task as s/he alone is in a position to judge the translation as a cultural transaction between the languages. She makes an interesting observation that drama is one of the most vibrant fields of translation activity wherein translation 'is done out of a real and immediate need (performance) and there is a spontaneous feedback from the audience.' She rightly points out that though each

performed text is not printed subsequently, here is an instance of drama reviewing, albeit as performance and not as translation.

Anand Mahanand emphasises the need for a shift in the reading of translations from focussing mainly on the target language to the source culture, especially when the source texts are oral narratives that involve different levels of transmission. Reviews of oral narratives, he says, must pay attention to the several stages involved in process of translation of such texts.

That review of translated texts must be done by specialists trained in the discipline of translation is emphatically made by Mahasweta as it involves issues such as conformity/non-conformity to the target language system, abridging source texts etc. She provides a clue to the state of affairs in translation, of translators who do not 'even know why or how they would re-write the original without distorting or editing it in any way' and of reviewers who are content to 'dissect the characteristics of the original, of analyzing what the original text had to offer.' She says that the translators 'need to know the two languages sensitively enough to disentangle the ambiguities and the polyvalence of the original and transfer it to the target language as best as possible' and that we need reviewers who understand that translation involves 'very important questions regarding inter-cultural transfers. One might agree that a familiarity with the issues in the discipline of Translation Studies may make one a good reviewer of translated texts, but would it necessarily make one a good translator? One is tempted to ask this question because she does raise questions regarding the making of a writer and critic.

The view that a reviewer of translation needs to be a specialist is reiterated in Tutun Mukherjee's article where she refers to J. M. Coetzee's Reviewer as Reader (RAR) who, as the 'ideal receptor' and 'quality control officer,' is expected to have 'a certain degree of competence in the subject and expertise in the process involved,' an expertise which 'may not be required of any other reader.'

While we see the point that an awareness of the issues involved in the semantic and cultural transfers involved in the activity of

translation may certainly enhance the understanding of translators and reviewers, the question is: how do we understand the position taken by N. Venugopal, a translator and a reviewer himself, who argues that a translator has ‘the duty to edit the original text keeping in view the sensibilities and linguistic and cultural traditions of the target language’? This duty would obviously involve his trust in the translator’s knowing what is best for the target culture. This inevitably brings in the subjectivity and ideology of the translator. Such a position takes us close to the view that ‘translation was always determined by target-accessibility and therefore, had to conform to the norms of the target literary system,’ a view Mahasweta contests in her article.

What is a good translation review seems to be the easiest and yet the most difficult question to satisfactorily answer. Most articles here have dealt with this question as the title of the seminar ‘How (Not) to Review Translated Texts’ urges them to do. Kamala, for instance, says that ‘what constitutes a good translation review depends on a number of parameters determined by its intended audience.’ All the same, invoking Sujit Mukherjee, she zeroes in on what must find a place in a good review — the name(s) of the translator(s), the date of the original work/translation, the translation policy followed by the translator(s) or lack of any mention of it, the editorial policy of the publishing house including information about whether it is a first translation, a re-translation or a self-translation, the reasons for the choice of author and work for translation as well as the inclusion or exclusion of certain elements for translation, certain features that stand out in the translation and the positive points in the translated work.

Padikkal wishes to look at literature as a product of culture and says that in the very process of production of culture, it also re-produces or modifies or modifies culture according to the social aspirations of the social group that creates literary texts. He therefore sees review, reception, critical engagement etc., as representing the nature of the emerging culture at a given point in time in history. He considers translated texts (presumably from English) into the Indian languages during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as

having performed the role of changing the literary relations in these languages and as having even rewritten the histories of these literatures. He avers that translators have used English models to 'write modernity' into Indian languages. Consequently, their translations were not bound by principles of fidelity, but freely interpreted the source texts in order to fashion a new language into their culture. Drawing on Tejaswini Niranjana, he refers to this humanistic notion, wherein translators attempt to exclude themselves from the text in order to present it as a unified and transparent whole, as the commonsense notion that prevails in India. He sees the prevalence of this notion as one of the major reasons why reviewers do not mention the translator. How do we understand this in terms of the notions of the so-called 'invisibility' of translators? Isn't the 'invisibility' of the translator in any translation just a pose or a pretence? Aren't the ideologies that govern any translation practice, stated or otherwise, always already inscribed in the product?

Panchanan Mohanty, Ramaswamy and Ramesh Malik feel that review and evaluation of translations must include comparison of translations of the same text, wherever they exist as they help us understand the intentions behind such efforts. They also point out that a translator's scholarship on the authors being translated certainly contributes to the quality of the translations. While the criteria they set for themselves for deciding on a good translation are mainly drawn from the principle of proximity to the original, the conclusion they arrive at by analysing two translations of Phakir Mohan Senapati makes them support the position that it is preferable to translate from L2 to L1, and not vice-versa.. Does this mean one can arrive close to a source text which is not in one's own language, only when one translates into one's own language? Doesn't this support theories of native speaker's competence?

This brings us to the article by Subbarayudu. He begins his article on a review of a recent translation of the Telugu play, *Kanyasulkam* by Vijayasree and Vijay Kumar into English wherein the reviewer suggests that 'translations of such classical works ought

to be done by eminent Telugu scholars whose literary-historical, cultural and dialectal credentials are impeccable, in collaboration with English/American translators whose authority over English and its dialects/variants would enable them to suggest appropriate equivalents.’ The only concession the reviewer seems to give is that the translation can be done by a non-native speaker in collaboration with a native speaker. Perhaps, just the native speaker of English would not be in a position to acquire the desired the scholarship of the author he may be translating!

Doesn't all this bring us inevitably to the question of equivalence? Translation is impossible if we believe that each language is so unique and interprets the world, each in its own way. Or we must believe that we need different languages precisely because they are very different as they help us understand the world we live in multiple ways. Looked at from this angle, translation bypasses the question of equivalence per se. Perhaps this is the reason for the re-emergence of adaptation and rewriting. The 'cultural turn' in Translation Studies may thus be viewed as a celebration of multilingualism as well.

That reviewing of translations is carried out in the most haphazard manner, giving summaries of what seem like a review of the source text, not mentioning the name of the translator, inattention to the quality of translation, the publishing firm's and reviewing magazine's responsibility in this matter are aspects that have been raised by most of the articles. Drawing on some of these aspects, Sachidananda Mohanty underscores the point that caught in the tangle between questions of fidelity and betrayal, discussions of translation seem to concentrate on the product rather than the process. Good translation reviewing, he argues, must look into the location of the translator, the manner in which s/he deals with textual traditions and contextual factors, the knowledge of intellectual or publication history s/he brings to bear on reviewing, its role in the shaping of literary change and development and in the creation of new genres. Extending Bassnett's comment on the ethical role of translation, he posits an ethical role for reviewing. He says that 'it is also a battle 'against the

dictates of the globalised culture that seeks to level down all differences, specificities and diversities.’

Sindhu Menon takes us to some interesting early translator-reviewer exchanges in the English context to say that though the reviewing scene may not have changed drastically since then, in terms of charges of lack of fidelity to the original, it certainly has lost its ‘cut and thrust ability of riposte which had at least made the early reviews readable.’ She is concerned about the non-acceptability in the academic world of the English translations from Malayalam or Telugu or Urdu or Hindi while translations of Tolstoy and Plato, or Marquez and Borges have gained a canonical status. Moving from general principles of reviewing for the mass media, she attributes bad instances of translation-reviewing, where the reviewers’ desire to parade their own ‘multilingual skills as far better than the translator’s, could delay the acceptance of texts translated from Indian languages.’

In his detailed response to each of the questions posed in the theme paper for the seminar, Sudhakar Marathe attempts to focus on each issue from the point of view of the translator, the reviewer and the publisher and provides answers. He underlines the sad state of translation reviewing in India, analyses the causes for it that stem from the culture of reviewing in general. Among the concrete suggestions he makes for the improvement of the situation are the need for ‘a set of journals or significant portions of existing journals exclusively devoted to translation reviewing, for which purpose publishers and editors of newspapers and magazines need to be educated concerning the importance of translation,’ for ‘highly qualified as well as sensitive reviewers’ who alone must review translations and for ‘translators who are honest and open-minded enough to confront criticism and valuations’ of their work.

Writing from the point of view of a publisher (viz. of IRB, a successful review magazine), Subashree Krishnaswamy emphasises that the fact that the ‘work comes to us “filtered” through the “translator’s lens” can never be forgotten or ignored.’ She classifies

the reviewers into those who are 'translation-blind,' those who are 'translation-aware' and the 'nitpickers.' She is concerned about reviewing that praises a translation saying that 'it reads so well that one forgets it is a translation,' which is a sure reflection of the translator's invisibility. Drawing on Venuti, she argues for the reviewers' attention to the 'bumps on the surface' of the translations that allow for 'the cadences of the original language and culture to be heard.' She wants reviewers 'who never lose sight of the fact that the book is a translation and [who] view the translator as a special kind of writer, possessing not an originality that competes with the author's, but rather an art which uses the stylistic devices that tap into the literary resources of both the languages.'

There are references in the articles to the role of market forces, forces that have a definite bearing on the kind of translations that get published, the way translators are mentioned in translated works and the kind of reviewing they receive. I wish we had an article or two from the point of view of translation publishers to know their perspective. From my own point of view as a translator, I cannot refrain from mentioning the pressures exerted by publishers on translators to ensure that translations become eminently readable. Of course, one understands their concern for quality and for a finished product that has to be ultimately marketed. What measures can we put in place to see that the complex process of translation which happens through a negotiation between the writer of the source text, the translator and the publisher gets highlighted? And how does one protect the rights of the translator as that 'special kind of writer' who must become more and more visible, and more and more recognised?

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