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# The Question of Literary Translations and Students of Translation Reviewing Literary Works

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## ABSTRACT

Translation in general is the basis of a lot of debates and discussions, and translation of literary works is much more discussed because it is far more complicated. Yet, most translators deal with literary works the same as they do with other texts. It seems as if they only deal with semantic, syntactic and sometimes cultural aspects of the text language, while in literary works, pragmatic aspects is very much important, those aspects which are neglected very often. Therefore, this study, through library research and analyzing translation theories, attempts to suggest that both literary translators and students of translation reviewing literary translations should be much concerned with pragmatics and elements inherent in a piece of a literary work.

**Keywords:** Literature; Literary translation; Translation students; Pragmatics

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Translation works as a bridge between two different nations and cultures. It attempts to remove the gap between these different cultures. Now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the global age necessitates a universal culture, and translation is a means to achieve this goal. Literary translation specifically plays an important role in this regard. Students of translation are also aware of the importance of literary translation; therefore, in their studies, especially for their theses, they prefer to go to this significant branch. One should remember that translation and its students belong to the field of humanities, and it is natural that they are interested in literature, the most important subject of humanities. Like in all countries, in Iran, Students of translation survey literary texts for their studies. However, there is a big question: to what extent are these students familiar with literature? This question leads to other questions, not only in respect to students themselves, but also to literary translators. As such, through library research and analyzing translation theories, the objective of this study is to look at this problem. There is also another point of concern. It seems that most of students dealing with literary translations do not deal with all features of literary works. Since most of translators are concerned with linguistic and cultural elements when translating, most of studies of students are in this direction, too.

## 2. DISCUSSION

In technical translations, the significant point is rendering the content and the information of the source text. That is, only content and information contained in language is vital in these translations. Therefore, translators of technical texts are not mostly concerned with other features of language such as style, cultural, social and behavioral aspects, or the pragmatic, aesthetic as well as artistic features of the language.

However, literary translation deals with a lot of features along with linguistic and cultural ones. Although the two latter elements are important, it does not mean that either the translator or the students should ignore other elements of concern. Belhaag (quoted by Bahaa-eddin Abulhassan Hassan 2011, 2) points out to the characteristics of literary translations He believes that a literary translation should be “expressive, connotative, symbolic, focusing on both form and content, subjective, allowing multiple interpretation, timeless and universal, using special devices to ‘heighten’ communicative effect, and tending to deviate from the language norms.” These characteristics reveal the function of a study dealing with literary translation. That is, such a study should be concerned with these elements in order to determine whether the translator has observed these elements in his/her translation or not.

Undoubtedly, the main function of a translator is transferring the meaning of the source language into the target language. Yet, meaning itself consists of different types, and the translator should be careful about the type of meaning that is present in the source text. Sometimes meaning relates language to events, entities and so on. Here, this type of meaning is referred to as referential or denotative. Some other times, meaning is related to the mental state of the speaker, the type which is called connotative or expressive. Yet in other situations, the extra-linguistic situation affects the interpretation of a text, and in this situation, it is contextual, functional, interpersonal or situational (Crystal 1997, quoted by Bahaa-eddin Abulhassan Hassan 2011, 3)

What is significant is that language has a great deal of aspects and levels, and that all these aspects and levels have their own role in the total meaning of a text. The job of the translator is rendering all these levels in his/her translation. Therefore, he/she has to pay attention to phonetic, lexical, grammatical, semantic as well as pragmatic meanings to transfer the total meaning of the source text to the target text. In the studies of students dealing with literary translations what is observed is that they mostly concern themselves with grammatical, semantic or lexical meaning of the target source, and pragmatic meaning is usually missing. It should be mentioned that pragmatic meaning is related to the utterance meaning or the speaker meaning, which is opposed to sentence meaning. Most translators often neglect pragmatic meaning when translating a text. Here, the duty of scholars and students of translation is to deal with speech acts, presuppositions, implicatures, politeness and deictic expressions in literary translations to evaluate a translated work.

Stalnker (as stated in Sanchez 2009, 114) defines pragmatics and says that “pragmatics is the study of the purpose for which sentences are used, of the real world conditions under which a sentence may be appropriately used as an utterance.” When we come to literary works, pragmatics becomes much more significant and complicated. To clarify the point, it is worth to give an example from a literary work. In *Great Expectations*, Charles Dickens introduces his main character, Pip, in a specific setting, and describes this setting in detail. In this novel, like all other literary works, setting is a significant means and element because it is used to lead the reader, the good reader, enter into his own artistic world of creation. His aim is to lead the reader to comprehend the writer’s intention. Through this setting, Dickens employs sentences to describe something important; that is, the social, cultural, and economic condition of the society in which Pip and Magwitch live. The employed sentences have their own purposes and they are used as utterances. A good reader, familiar with elements of fiction, has the competency to understand what the writer utters. As such, a literary translator should be versed in pragmatics, in using elements of literature to comprehend the intention of the writer as the creator of that piece of work. Such a translator can transfer the intention of the creator into the target language. A quote from Sanchez (2009, 114) is necessary to reveal the point better. He believes that

Because pragmatics focuses on the way language, in the form of sentences and all kinds of utterances, is used in a particular communicative situation, when looking at the functionality of language in a given text there are areas that need to be dealt with which, more often than not, are not initially overtly apparent in the discourse but have a major implication on the resulting text.

A literary text has a lot of implications and intentions which are not explicitly stated, and the translator should understand them in order to be able to analyze in depth the message that the text is trying to convey.

Literary translation is far more than correct communication of information; it is, as Eugene A. Nida and Taber (1982, 200) say, “the closest natural equivalent to the source language message.” Naturalness is significant because the reader, the receptor of the literary work should enjoy reading this new work of art; he/she should feel its naturalness in his/her own culture and language. As such, it should not bear any sign of foreign origin, yet this work should take its essence from that foreign origin, as the simile employed by Petrarch (1985, 301) suggests. Petrarch suggests that the relationship between a literary work and its translation is like the relationship between honey and the flowers from which that honey is produced. Sanchez (2009, 133) believes that “of the various ‘foreign readers’ of a literary piece of work, the translator will be, so to speak, the most meticulous reader and the first one to try to establish the relationship between the writer and his/her world.” Actually, a literary translator should be more than this. He/she should be, first of all, a good reader. The nature of literature is so that everyone can approach it and take something of that. Undoubtedly, every individual can read literature and have his/her own understanding, but there is a world of difference between a good reader and an ordinary reader. The metaphor of the elephant in the dark room is suggestive here. The metaphor says that there is an elephant in a dark room. Whoever enters the room, based on the part of the elephant touched, names it differently and there are different interpretations. Accordingly, everyone’s identification as well as interpretation is specific to himself/herself. Only the person who experiences all the parts of the animal is able to perceive the object in the dark room. In case of the reader of literature, the same notion is true. Only those who equip themselves with the means of interpretation are able to understand literature and the render it to others.

Furthermore, literary translation is not merely changing words from one language to another. Since it deals with literature, the translator should be interested as well as versed in literature. Literature deals with both emotions and ideas. The creator of a literary work is different from ordinary people or even scientists. He/she lives with his/her emotions and imagination. A poet, a novelist, or a dramatist first of all is a genius. A literary man's job is sharpening the reader's vision and providing insight for him/her. Indirectly and figuratively, he/she talks about a social, cultural, behavioral, environmental, or universal issue, conflict or matter. To do this, he/she employs association. In fact, literature is associative, and to be so, it employs imagery, simile, metaphor, symbol, point of view, characterization, mysticism, myth, and much more elements to make its point home. These elements belong to pragmatics in literature. According to Ziaul Haque (2012, 97), "a literary translator must . . . be skilled enough to translate feelings, cultural nuances, humor and other delicate elements of a piece of work. In fact, the translators do not translate the meanings but the messages." As such, the translator of a piece of literary work should be able to understand the power of imagination and genius, to be able to interpret the work in order to leave the same impression on the target text reader as the impression the writer of the literary work has left on the source text reader. Even the student who wants to review this translation should be versed in literature and the way literature works. That is, artistic skills are necessary for both the translators and the students of translation. According to Clifford Landers (2001, 7), "in addition to thorough mastery of the source language, the literary translator must possess a profound knowledge of the target language," but this knowledge is not all that is demanded of a literary translator. Phyllis Gaffney (1999, 58) claims that "a highly receptive ear, an exceptional sensitivity to words, their origins, connotations and contexts, and finally an intuitive sixth sense which leaves the creative mind open to the subconscious" are demanded from a literary translator to make him/her a great translator.

### 3. CONCLUSION

According to most of translation theorists and those mentioned in this study, literature has its own characteristics and its translation necessitates its own specific methods. Dealing with literary works and their translations requires more than just the knowledge of the source or the target language. To translate a literary work necessitates, at least, literature talent, so do the studies dealing with these translations. There are only a few translations of literary works that have recreated the artistic world of the source text, and it is because of the fact that most of the translations performed in this field seem to lack pragmatic features. As such, one can conclude that some of the translators of literary works are not versed in literature. Also, it is obvious that students who are willing to review these kinds of translations should enhance their knowledge of literature.

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