

Issues in Translating Flora and Fauna

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Abstract:

A language is developed through its interaction with culture on the planes of time and space. Every human society has culture. Culture is conditioned by the land, the climate, the social customs, the laws, the religions, the language and other factors associated with them in their daily life. All cultures serve to meet the basic needs shared by human beings. Every culture has methods of obtaining food and shelter. Translation, a branch of study, aims at bringing together the nuances of two different cultures and languages, encountering socio- cultural and linguistic codes. The flora and fauna of a particular region is characterized by the climatic conditions; what the species consumes for energy; what predators it has the amounts of heat, light or moisture it needs; and the conditions under which it reproduces. Since the flora and fauna vary from region to region not all languages have the right equivalent for a particular animal or plant. Therefore translation encounters problem while translating a text from one language into another. To take a concrete case, few verses from *The Naladiyar* written by the Jains in Tamil and their translation in English by G. U Pope have been analysed elaborately. As such, a study has been undertaken in this paper to analyse the issues a translator faces and the strategies he employs while translating a text from Tamil into English that are linguistically and culturally far apart.

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Translation is an activity of enormous importance in the modern world and has become an established area in language studies, being the main criterion for achieving communication. Communication between cultures can be achieved through translation. Catford (1) defines

translation as "a process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another". Thus, translation is considered an operation performed on languages. Catford builds his definition on the concept of equivalence, describing translation as the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another language. Through translation, people are introduced to different languages and ways of thought. It is important to understand the relation between language and culture in order to train translators and interpreters. "What truly distinguishes translation is that it takes place in the context of the relations between two cultures, two worlds of thought and perception" (Delisle 74) .Translation is important as a source of diffusion of knowledge of every kind. By understanding the development of every aspect of culture in other civilizations, people can also enrich their understanding of their own culture. Translation is thus not the production of one text equivalent to another text, 'but rather a complex process of rewriting that runs parallel to the overall view of language and of the "other" people have throughout history; and to the influences and the balance of power that, exist between one culture and another'(Alvarez and Vidal 4).

In 1988 Newmark defined culture as "the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression", thus acknowledging that each language group has its own culturally specific features.

Flora

Plants grow in almost every part of the world. But not all kinds of plants grow in all parts of the world. For example, cattails live only in such damp places as swamps and marshes. Cacti on the other hand are found chiefly in deserts. Coniferous forests are made up mainly of trees that are coniferous and evergreen. Trees found in such evergreen coniferous forests are firs, larches, spruces and pines. The pointed triangular shape of these trees helps them shed heavy snow.

Many elements make up a plant's environment - the location, climate and physical features of a region. One of the most important factors is weather- sunlight, temperature and precipitation (rain, melted snow and other moisture). The environment of a plant also includes the soil and the other plants and animals that live in the same area. All these elements form a

natural community. No two natural communities are exactly alike, but many resemble one another more than they differ. Important land biomes include the tundra, forests, scrub, grasslands, savannas, and deserts. Thus the ecological set up varies from region to region.

In the ancient period, the land of the Tamils known as Tamil- akam was spread up to the hill of Vengadam in the north, Kerala in the West, Bay of Bengal in the east and the Indian Ocean in the South. It has *kurinchi* ‘mountain’, *mullai* ‘forest’, *neytal* ‘ocean’, *marutam* ‘river’ and *palai* ‘desert’ tracts and each tract has its characteristic flora and fauna. England is an island in the Northwestern Europe. It is covered by rolling plains, laid out in a patchwork of fields and meadows. The coastline is a shifting scene of steep cliffs, golden beaches, jagged rocks, and fishing towns. Hence, Tamil Nadu located in Torrid zone and England located in temperate zone have their characteristic flora and fauna. Therefore a translator who translates a text from Tamil into English would encounter lot of problems while rendering those terms in the other language. To take a concrete case, few verses from *The Naladiyar* written by the Jains in Tamil and their translation in English by G. U Pope have been analysed elaborately.

Transliterated Terms

Since not all kinds of plants grow in all parts of the world, the flora in a given locality in a given language may not have equivalents in the language into which the text is translated. In such cases, when the terms are not of crucial importance to the literary piece and if it is difficult to find a commonly used substitute in the target language, the translator might transliterate the names of trees and flowers.

In the 238th quatrain there is a reference to those who abandon their have-not relatives. This phenomenon has been compared to the beetles visiting the *kāntal* (fhe;j;s)flower on the high mountains. If the *kāntal* flower does not bloom on the high mountain the red spotted beetle will never go there. In this description the name of the flower *kāntal* is rendered in transliteration as it is a indigenous flower and has no one-to-one equivalent in English.

“fy;Nyhq; Fah;tiuNkw; fhe;jhs; kyuhf;fhy;

nry;yhthQ; nrk;nghwptz;bdk; - nfhy;iyf;

fyhmw; fpspfbAq; fhdfehl>-

,yhmmh;f; fpy;iyj; jkh;!”

When on the high hill’s crags the *kanthal* blooms no more the crimson-spotted beetle tribe seek not its bough; - Lord of the hills wherefrom they scare parrots with stones! – *the needy have no kin* (Nal 184)

Here the syntactic marking ‘blooms’ helps in fixing the referential meaning of *kānta!* as a flower. So in places where the TL reader will infer the meaning of the terms from the context, the native terms might be retained.

The theme of the 180th quatrain in *the Naladiyar* is that the evil association brings ruin. To exemplify the theme, the poet brings in a comparison. It is said that during the breaking out of forest fires, the trees like *cantaṇ am* and the valuable *vēñ kai* will also burn along with the worthless brushwood. Here *cantaṇ am* is duly translated as sandalwood and *vēñ kai* is rendered in transliteration. Substitution has been resorted to by the translator here. Substitution is the practice of translating some items and transliterating some other items. This strategy levels up the differences and eliminates the strangeness of the foreign culture. It makes the reading easy for the TL readers.

Translated Terms

In places where the translator feels that the TL reader may understand some vegetation, he has translated the regional terms.

i. While describing the type of friendship in the 216th quatrain, the poet makes a comparison between trees and men. Friendship with some men must be maintained daily, or their friendship would cease. Three kinds of trees are compared to three types of friendships: the lowest, the medium and the highest. The areca palm, which requires daily care, is compared to the lowest sort of men. The Coconut tree, which requires constant care, is compared to the

medium type of men and the Palmyra that requires no care and is of incalculable value to the highest type.

filahah; el;gpw; fKfidahh; ; Vid

,ilahahh; njq;fpdmidah; ;jiyahahh;

vz;zKk; ngz;izNghs; wpl;lQhd; wpl;INj

njhd;ik cilahh; njhlh;G

The lowest sorts of men in friendship are like the Arecanut tree. The middle sort is like the cocoa-nut tree. Attachments to the chief of men who are old friends-is like the Palmyra tree of rare worth: what was given that first day was given once for all. (Nal 216)

Here *kamuku*(fKF)> *teñ kin a*(njq;fpd) and *peñ ñ ai*(ngz;iz)are aptly translated as ‘areca’, ‘coconut’ and ‘palmyra’.

ii. In the quatrain 236 of chapter XXIV, that deals with unreal friendship,the poet emphasizes the theme that one should not trust others, taking into account their birthplace and association. To illustrate this he makes a reference to regional flower like *ambal* and *kuvalai*.

xUePh;g; gpwe;njhUq;FePz;lf; filj;Jk;

tphpePh;f; FtisiaMk;gyxf; fy;yh;

ngUePuhh; Nfz;iknfhspDePh; my;yhh;

fUkq;fs; NtWgLk;.

The *Ambal* (water lily) doesnot equal the expanding *kuvalai* though born and growing together with it in the same pool: though they attain to intimacy with those of generous instincts, the deeds of men in whom these instincts are lacking will be diverse. (Nal151)

Here the translator has transliterated the names of the flowers *āmpal* and *kuvalai*. But in the title the translator has given the translated terms ‘water lily’ and ‘lotus’. In the translation also,

he has mentioned the translated term water lily with a note so that the TL readers can grasp the meaning.

iii. In the 244th quatrain, the poet has given definition for friendship between good men and bad men by way of illustration. Although it ripens amid the leaves of ‘margosa’ (*vembu*), the plantain (*vālai*) does not differ its sweet taste at all. Likewise good men would not be affected by corrupt influences. Here the two flora *vembu* and *vaazhai* are translated into ‘margosa’ and ‘plantain’ respectively.

The translator has skillfully used various techniques like transliteration, substitution and using generic names for specific terms to make the SL terms accessible to the TL readers.

Fauna

Fauna is a word originating from Latin. The origin of the word fauna is a bit shrouded in mystery. According to Roman mythology, Fauna refers to the goddess of fertility. Fauna is sometimes referred to as Fauns, meaning forest spirits. By definition, fauna is a group of indigenous animals of any geographical region.

In places where a particular animal lives in large number and in numerous varieties, the language of the place has too many terms for that animal. In Arabic, Camel which serves the people in so many ways is referred to by various terms such as *jamal*, *nāqat*, *budn* and *ibil*. In Tamil, an elephant is referred to by various terms-*kaḷiṟu* ‘a male elephant’, *piṭi* ‘a female elephant’ *vēlam*, *mattakajam*, *kuñjaram*, *kēsari* and *varanam* (95). In *The Naladiyar* also, there are references to elephants in many quatrains. So it abounds in fauna. The principles and procedures adopted by the translator for tackling fauna are discussed in this section.

As noted earlier with the exception of some animals, almost all animals have equivalents in all languages. So the translator is not forced to borrow foreign terms. In *the Naladiyar*, almost all the fauna mentioned by the poets can easily be translated by the translator.

1. In the 240th quatrain of chapter XXIV, the poet speaks about unreal friendship being seen in pleasing exterior under the title ‘unreal friendship’. While describing the bad company of wise men, the poet says that it is like the cobra playing with a female viper.

cUtpw; fike;jhd;fz; Cuhz;ik ,d;ik
gUfw; fike;jghdPh;mshaw;Nw;
njhpTilahh; jPapdj;jhh; MFjdhfk;
tphpngilNahlhbtpl; lw;W.

Here the term ehfk; and tphp are aptly translated into cobra and viper.

The absence of generosity in those whose exterior is pleasing,
is like the mingling of water with the milk provided for food:
When men of understanding take to bad company it is like the
disporting of a cobra with a female viper. (Nal 153)

2. Charity is held to be the ultimate perfection of the human spirit, because it is said to both glorify and reflect the nature of God. The absence of charity is the theme of the chapter XXVIV. In this chapter ,while defining true benevolence, the poet compares beggars to a calf and benefactors to a cow.In the following lines, the terms *kaṅ ru* (fd;W) and *ā* (M) are precisely translated as ‘calf’ and ‘cow’.

,utyh; fd;whf<thh;Mthf
tpufpw; Rug;jhk; tz;ik
ty;yth; Cd;wtbahNghy; tha;itj;Jf;
nfhy;yr; Rug;jhq; fPo;.

Liberality is that which yields its gifts spontaneously the askers
being as the calf and the givers as the cow; meanness yields
only when put into a strait and forced, as a cow with no good
instinct gives a scanty supply when strong ones press. (Nal 180)

1. Men of lofty mind aim at noble ends, and they do not care for present results alone. In the 152nd quatrain of the chapter XVI, the poet insists whether successful or unsuccessful the good will be held blameless. He also says that one's aim should always be high. It is better to miss a lion than to hit a jackal.

,irAk; vdpDk;> ,irahnjdpDk;>
 tirjPuvz;Zth; rhd;Nwhh;; - tpirapd;
 ehpkhcsq;fpopj;jmk;gdpw; wPNjh
 mhpkhg; gpiog;nga;jNfhy;?

Whether success attend, or do not attend the work, the excellent will ever ponder blameless ends. - Is the shaft that missed the lion worse than the arrow sent forth, that with its impulse pierced the jackal's heart? (The Nal 102)

Here the two fauna referred to are *narimā* (ehpkh) and *arimā* (mhpkh). The TL equivalent 'nari' denotes 'fox', but it is wrongly translated into 'jackal' whose equivalent in SL is *kullanari*. Though both of them come under the dog family, there are lots of differences between fox and jackal. Foxes are a bushy tailed, sharp-snouted member of the dog family. They are quick and skilful hunters. A jackal is a wild dog. Arabs call it 'the howler' because of its mournful cry and yapping, usually heard at night. Jackals are chiefly scavengers that feed on dead animals. The common jackal looks more like a fox than a dog. Thus both fox and jackal differ in many aspects. Still, the difference is not a glaring one in translation, for the TL readers are unaware of it.

2. While describing friendship of a person with the uncongenial ones, the poet makes a reference to the activities of a monkey when it meets its father. In the SL, it is given as *manthi* 'a female monkey' where a male monkey is known as *kaduvan*. But the translator has plainly translated it as 'monkey', regardless of the gender specifications.

The above study shows that a translator cannot and need not be always zoologically precise. In translating most of the terms, the translator has tried to appeal to the TL readers with

some common names so as not to overload the communication which might affect the readability.

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