



Lapis Lazuli -An International Literary Journal (LLIJ)

Vol.4 / NO.1 /Spring 2014

Translation, Discourse and Foucault: Resisting and Producing Meanings

Sunij Kumar Sharma

Abstract:

Translation is one of those literary activities that help in the production and resistance of various discourses and their meanings in different cultures. Like some western cultural activities, which seem strange to our culture, are being spread through the translation of creative nonfiction writings or narrative journalism, in the name of global activity. These types of translated narratives are providing meaning to some new discourses and resistance to the existing ones. In the academic world there is also a discussion on the issue of translation as tool of developing the global understanding of things and replacing the need for universal language; but it has some problems and controversies. Michel Foucault's idea of discursive formations has also been used

Lapis Lazuli -An International Literary Journal (LLIJ) ISSN 2249-4529

Vol.4/ NO.1/Spring 2014

URL of the Journal- <http://pintersociety.com/>

URL of the Issue: <http://pintersociety.com/vol-4-no-1-spring-2014/>

© www.pintersociety.com

Translation, Discourse and Foucault: Resisting and Producing Meanings

in the present paper while defining the role of translation in the maintenance and production of knowledge.

KEYWORDS: *Foucault, Translation, Epistemology, Discourse, Meaning, Power, Culture, Resistance, Narrative Journalism.*

Translation in the recent decade of 21st century has emerged as an interdisciplinary area of study and in the light of recent developments in the field of translation studies we observe that the scholarly labour is less concerned with the linguistic features and comparative study of original and translated texts and more with the hermeneutic conception of translation. The act of translation is not always the transmission of comprehensible cultural values in the target language space but sometimes it engenders the space for those institutions and disciplines which are normally rejected in the name of taboo in the target language culture. In some other instances translation makes some appropriate or inappropriate changes in the perception of reality by reordering and rearranging the system of discourses.

The term discourse stands for discussion or simple conversation and has become a part of normal academic discussion but the poststructuralist implications and assertions regarding the term are more close to philosophical debates in the tradition of knowledge. Michel Foucault, the famous French philosopher and poststructuralist of twentieth century, travelled from madness to sexuality forming his arguments on the ground of discourse and epistemology. In the Foucauldian study of power and knowledge the notion of discourse plays a significant role: “The longer I continue, the more it seems to me that the formation of discourses and the genealogy of knowledge need to be analysed, not in terms of types of consciousness, modes of perception and forms of ideology, but in terms of tactics and strategies of power (Foucault).” Discourse is used as a tool for the production and organization of meaning in society using the vehicle of language and it forms a world of human experiences and domains of knowledge. For Foucault, the term discourse defines “a general domain of all statements” and utterances which stand for some meaning and are visible sometimes in form of regulated practices. It develops through both the

written and unwritten forms of statements. Sarah Mills, a research professor at Sheffield Hallam University, writes:

Discourse is regulated by a set of rules which lead to the distribution and circulation of certain utterances and statements. Some statements are circulated widely, and others have restricted circulation. (Mills 54)

Sarah Mills takes the example of Bible and defines it as a discourse which is popularly circulated throughout the western culture. There are a number of practices which help in the circulation of these types of discourses. Like in case of Bible, we have journals and departments which keep themselves busy in producing a complete domain of statements which stimulates the circulation in the social world. But this notion of discourse is a bit difficult to understand because it also gives space to those activities which work against the circulation of existing discourses. It cannot simply be called the authoritative imposition of ideas on individuals rather we can say that it forms our perception about the reality through language. It forges the way we perceive the world and actions around us. We have in this world discourse of femininity, racism, fashion and many more. This term should not be confused with ideology because it has emerged from a complex analysis of power and knowledge nexus, which is effective through discursive practices. Unlike ideology, it covers a vast space of social existence and does not merely presents power as authoritative and negative but a blend of both positive and negative assertions. For instance, the discourse of demographic study measures the dimensions and dynamics of population in order to strengthen the rule of state machinery on the one hand and to formulate some welfare policies on the other.

In considering the term 'discourse' we must remember that it is not the equivalent of 'language', nor should we assume that there is a simple relation between discourse and reality. Discourse does not simply translate reality into language; rather discourse should be seen as a system which structures the way that we perceive reality. (Mills, 2003; 55)

Translation is one of those practices which help in both maintaining the flow of certain discourses and preventing the circulation of certain others. Translation is also a language activity, a process of making the second layer of perception. The first layer of perception is

Translation, Discourse and Foucault: Resisting and Producing Meanings

created by the author of the original text and the reality always stays at a distance from the readers. Translation of literary and non literary texts starts the process of introducing the statements of a particular institution from one culture to another culture in the name of global process for the advancement of human knowledge. But in this process the statements of a particular discourse are not all the time entertained by the target culture, sometimes these statements shape the realm of a new discourse or challenge the circulation of a pre-existing discourse in the target culture.

The production of discourses works on the design of exclusion and according to Foucault the procedure of exclusion are: “the author,” “commentary,” “disciplines” and “rarefaction of the subject.” There is long way of organizing, classifying and distributing the knowledge and making the difference between who can speak or not. When a set of statements related with a particular discourse gets translated into a different culture, it organizes a new discourse by having more or less changes in the previous one. For instance in India the translation of Marxist discourse, which was based on the notion of class struggle gave way to the affirmation of a pre-existing discourse of caste hierarchy. Juned Shaikh, an assistant professor who received his Ph.D. from the University of Washington in 2011, wrote a paper entitled “Kamyunista Jahirnama [The Communist Manifest].” In this paper he examined how the Marathi translation of Marx’ *Communist Manifesto*, published in 1931 as *Kamyunista Jahirnama* by Kamgaar Vangmaya Prasarak Mandala in Mumbai, played an important role in establishing the principles of class struggle as the doctrine for caste struggle. What we ascertain from this example is that the discourse of Marxism, which is based on the ideas of class struggle, when it emerges in the tradition of Indian social knowledge and understanding through translation, it changed the domain of the discourse of class struggle. In the process of such translations few statements are replaced by another set of statements, which engenders a new scene of debate.

The circulation of discourses is not only limited to the translation of literary and non-literary texts but it also covers the area of narrative journalism or the field of electronic media and newspapers. Narrative journalism is the fictitious or non-fictitious act of writing, performed by the journalist, while discussing the interpretation of an incident, event or story. In the field of journalism, translation is also being used as a tool for circulating the statements regarded with a

particular discourse. In today's world we see that most of the Indian language newspapers are putting their hands together with the western print media agencies in order to achieve a global stage for various performances. This translation of narrative journalism is leading to the production of new discourses and the resistance of existing discourses in the target culture. For instance, we can take a recent example of "slut walk" which covered a lot of space in different newspapers throughout the world and became a prevailing topic in various debates. The whole discussion started with an incident in 2011 in Toronto, when a police officer referred to some women and survivors of sexual assault as "sluts" and gave them advice that "dressing like sluts were inviting their own victimization." The main objective of this "slut walk" march was to communicate that people should end blaming the "victims of sexual violence." There were almost 200 countries that participated in this protest but there emerged a problem: when the narration of this whole incident was translated in the newspapers of Indian languages particularly Hindi, their readers faced a lot of problem in understanding the exact message behind "slut walk." The Indian print media could not help itself from adjusting the whole scene in the available Indian social discourses, which distorted the original meaning. It was started as a discourse in support for the rights of those who have been sexually assaulted but in the process of journal narrative translation in some language cultures it entered into the domain of the discourse of fashion and sexuality.

Since the accounts and narrations of queer and gay literature encounter a social prohibition or taboo in India, it can be seen that such type of narrations and accounts are being utilized in order to produce some elements of comic relief in Indian films and fictions. The friction between the narration of gay identities and the forces prohibiting reception of such kind of literature gives way to a new understanding which has transformed an act of sexuality into an act of comic performance. The struggle between foreign and indigenous discourses at times produces new discourses and carries forward the long tradition of knowledge but in some cases this struggle leads to "epistemic violence." The Indian print media of regional languages has started associating with western print media agencies like New York Times and Guardian and some newspapers reserve a permanent space for the translation of write-ups by European journalists. Thus, it can be considered that this borrowing in form of translation has been expanding the domain of various discourses and making more or less changes in the corpus of existing discourses.

Translation, Discourse and Foucault: Resisting and Producing Meanings

The mind of a translator is always affected by the socio-cultural tendencies of his or her world and the simple act of translation participates in a larger activity of organizing and managing discourses in a social world. Roland Barthes in his famous essay “Death of the Author” says that “a literary text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture”, in the light of this we can assume that the task of a translator is to reestablish the network of connection between the pre-existed tissues of quotations and different centers of culture. This reestablishment of network is always different from the original establishment by the author. A translator, knowingly or unknowingly, behaves according to the institutions and practices of the target culture. It is not possible to circulate the ideas of a discourse in their original forms through translation as the practice of translation revolves around the production and resistance of meaning suitable to the target language culture.

Works Cited

- Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & other writings (1972-77)*, ed. Colin Gordon, New York: Pantheon Books, 1980. Print.
- Mills, Sarah. *Michel Foucault: Routledge Critical Thinker*. New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.
- Shaikh, Juned. ‘Translating Marx: *Mavali*, Dalit and the Making of Mumbai’s Working Class, 1928-1935’. *Economics and Political Weekly*, Vol. XLVI, No.31, 2011. Print.
- Venuti, Lawrence. Ed. *The Translation Studies Reader*. London & New York: Routledge, 2000. Print.

About the Author:

Dr. Sunij Kumar Sharma is serving as a Guest Faculty in the Dept. of English, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh-202002. He has done his PhD on the topic “Remapping Power: A Study of Foucault’s Discourse on Power in Select Plays of Wole Soyinka and Derek Walcott.