

SYNOPSIS

**PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATION:
A STUDY OF TRANSLATION THEORIES FROM THE
SIXTEENTH TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE VIDYASAGAR UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD
OF THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (ARTS) IN ENGLISH

BY

ARUN PRAMANIK
[Registration No. **084/Ph. D. (Arts)**]

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
FACULTY OF ARTS
VIDYASAGAR UNIVERSITY, MIDNAPORE
WEST BENGAL, INDIA**

2016

“Translate or Die.”

This little, sharp and striking sentence from Paul Engle seems to sum up the value and importance of Translation Studies in the contemporary world and translation as a discipline of literary activity. It is because of translation that some of the richest treasures of world literature are accessible to a vast majority across the globe. Translation is never an easy flowing activity. The linguistic and cultural diversities make it difficult for a translator as he/she tries to resituate the Source Text (ST) meaning into the Target Text (TT).

The purpose of translation theory, as Susan Bassnett argued, is to reach an understanding of the process undertaken in the act of translation and not, as is so commonly misunderstood, to provide a set of norms for effecting the perfect translation. Theorization started with Cicero, and it still continues. The contemporary theorization on translation reveals that translation, instead of being merely a literary phenomenon, is also intensely a cultural-political act. A close scrutiny of the theories of translation reveals how translation theories move from the ‘linguistic’ paradigm to the ‘cultural’, and finally to the ‘ideological’.

The present dissertation is an attempt to make a study of the theories of translation, and to unearth the problems of translation sometimes leading to the ‘politics’ of translation. The dissertation has been laid out five chapters.

Chapter I entitled “Translation: Origin, Definitions and Problems”, is devoted to map the etymological signification, the possible definitions and the problems inherent in translation. No language is ever pure. And no culture is ever monolithic. Language and culture not only do

vary, but also develop and change with the passage of time posing enormous difficulties to a translator. Both the linguistic and cultural problems are analyzed here through examples.

Chapter II is entitled “Translation Theories from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth century”. From Etienne Dolet’s first theoretical formulation on translation in 1540, through George Chapman’s process of translation, Ben Jonson’s emphasis on the natural genius of the translator, Abraham Cowley and John Denham’s libertine concept of translation, we come to John Dryden and Alexander Pope both advocating the balanced path while to Dr. Johnson, elegance of translation matters most. While Alexander Fraser Tytler and Matthew Arnold argued the translator’s close focus on the SL text, H. W. Longfellow advocated curtailing of the translator’s freedom.

Chapter III entitled “Translation Theories of the Twentieth Century” is devoted to the twentieth century translation theories, especially theories up to 1980s. From a continuation with the Victorian ideas of translation – literalness, pedantry and archaizing – we move to an emphasis on language and its role in literature, propagated by the New Critics, structuralists and the post-structuralists. Benjamin’s task of the translator, I. A. Richards and Pound’s methodology of translation, Nida’s translation process, Catford’s linguistic theory, Derrida’s deconstructive view of translation, the polysystem theory, the cannibalistic theory, and Vermeer’s theory of ‘translational action’ (‘skopos theory’) are closely studied.

Chapter IV is devoted to the ‘Politics of Translation’. During 1980s Translation Studies took, what Mary Snell Hornby termed, the ‘cultural-turn’ in Translation Studies with theorists like Susan Bassnett, James Holmes, Andre Lefevere, Lawrence Venuti, Harish Trivedi, Tejaswini Niranjana, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and others.

Chapter V, entitled “From Theory to Practice”, attempts to study how the concerns of Translation Studies work, if they work at all, in translational practice. Select English translations of Bangla stories of Mahasweta Devi and Bangla translations of Jhumpa Lahiri’s stories in English are closely scrutinized and comparative analysis attempted with special attention to the possible intention/politics in the choice of texts and the act of translation, deviation/mis-translation/manipulation leading to misrepresentation, the theoretical preoccupation of the translator(s), the relative prominence of the translator (or its absence) affecting the act and the possibility/danger of appropriation of voice/space by the translator, along with some basic issues of translation.

The concluding chapter sums up the arguments put forward in the earlier sections and the deductions of the case studies attempted in the penultimate section of the dissertation. It also points to the possible extensions to the present study that may be taken up by future researchers.
