

Active vs Reactive Texts in the translation of Thirukkural

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Abstract: Though Language provides the ability to imagine and to interpret one text from the other, Linguistic untranslatability arises many times due to the problem of suggestive meaning. A word could have different kinds of meaning through its etymology and association. While all translators are not creative writers, their suggestion of words could never be the same. But a translator's job is to reactivate the text from the active one. There are many problems of translation to which we haven't given much attention. A Language is not only a tool of communication, but also it is a living guide for human beings to communicate. It has its own culture, heritage and tradition. It is quite clear that a poor translation can lead to much confusion when most of the native ideas are foreign to these translators. The Problems of translation are like worms in the bud. It perishes the originality of the text and makes the translation a mere paraphrase. There are vast differences between a machine and a human being in the use of language. Machine's memory capacity is enormous and it is able to repeat the same as it is without changes in the text. But the human brain is not the same as like the machine. It is distinguished by its imaginative power; Because Language is the creative part of our brain. The functionality of the human brain is also different from one another. No writer thinks alike as the other. So the problem must be solved through step by step systematic analysis of the text. In my research paper, here is a deep analysis on the recreation of Thirukkural by G.U.Pope.

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Translating literary works is, perhaps, always more difficult than translating other types of text because literary works have specific values called the aesthetic and expressive values. The aesthetic function of the work shall emphasize the beauty of the words (diction), figurative language, metaphors, etc. While the expressive functions shall put forward the writer's thought, emotion, etc. And the translator should try, at his best, to transfer these specific values into the target language (TL). As one genre of literature, poetry has something special compared to the others. In a poem, the beauty is not only achieved with the choice of words and figurative language like in novels and short stories, but also with the creation of rhythm, rhyme, meter, and specific expressions and structures that may not conform to that of the daily language. In short, the translation of poetry needs 'something more' than translating other genres of literature.

Like the other great Vedic literatures, the Ramayana & the Mahabharata, Thirukkural is an epic. However, here the heroes are not princes & kings, nor are there any battles between

demons or massive, monstrous armies. Instead, the hero of the poem is the common man, and

Thiruvalluvar tells his experiences in the form of poetry. It contains 133 chapters with 10 couplets each. Like Francis Bacon in Literature, Thiruvalluvar talks about various topics that are relevant to human life. The Kural is not a book of rules, laws or commandments. But it is a book with sharp observations of real life, a deep understanding of human weaknesses and strengths, and wise suggestions as to how we can live up to our fullest capacities as free human beings.

To the Tamilians, the Thirukkural is a divine book, but not in the sense of the Koran or Bible, which offer an obstinate outlook on the religious experience. The Thirukkural is simply a book to live by, a code of moral conduct to which all creeds, castes & colors can connect, whose lofty idealism has been acclaimed by all the religions of the world.

Thirukkural is the most sacred text among the Tamil literary works. Even though the author name is unknown to us, it is widely said to be written by Thiruvalluvar. The book is translated into many languages by translators. Though Thirukkural is written on the basis of our Tamil culture, it is widely accepted all over the world for its well known ethics. Thirukkural is worshipped as the most sacred text especially for its ethical and moral values.

Thirukkural comes under one of the ancient texts of our Tamil literature. So it has various differences from our modern Tamil which is used colloquially. It makes Thirukkural a very difficult one to translate in modern languages. According to V.C.Kulandhaisamy, "A cultural term in one language may not have an equivalent one in another culture. The word 'Dharma' in Sanskrit is an example. It is not possible to find or coin a single term in English for Dharma; consequently the word Dharma is transliterated and used in English as it is."

All proper nouns in Thirukkural never have equivalent words in other languages. They are transliterated. Transliteration is never considered a very good translation. Then we should ask which is a good translation? How can a translator reactivate from the activated text?

Thirukkural is very simple and extremely subtle. It is written in couplet form which is written only with seven words. The text is written 2000 years ago. But it is timeless and still it exposes the civilization of our Tamil people. It is said in one of the histories of our literature that Thiruvalluvar submitted the palm-leaf manuscript of his work to the 49 Pandits of the Sangam age. In modern age, it is available as books in paper. In 1272, the poet Parmelazhagar arranged Thirukkural in the present form. In translation, it is impossible to translate Thirukkural as same couplet with seven words. Many translators have tried to paraphrase Thirukkural in so many languages. The question which arises in our mind is whether translation has cherished or perished in the originality of the text.

The first translation was made by an Italian Priest, Stantius Beschi. In 1853, Rev. Drew made Thirukkural translation before G.U.Pope. The latter one's text is appreciated than his predecessors. G.U.Pope came to Tamilnadu at the age of 18. He considered himself as a student of Tamil. Though he could write in verse form, his text was varied in metre. When he considered other translators, they have translated partially or totally in heptametric couplets or in tetrametric. The word Kural itself means in Tamil as short verse in Venba metre of two lines each.

Thirukkural could say the morals which were needed essentially by our human beings. However this is impossible to analyze the variations of translations of Thirukkural. Let us deal with some of the translator's effort to make the reactive text from the active text and a good translator who tries to keep up the originality of the text.

The first couplet of Thirukkural from the 'Praise of God' is translated by Rev.E.J.Robinson like this.

"Eternal God all things precedes ,
As Alpha all the letter leads."

The same couplet is translated by G.U.Pope as

"A, as it's first of letters, every speech maintains
The 'Primary Deity' is first through all the worlds domains"

E.J.Robinson translates the second couplet of the 'Blessing of rain' as

"The rain begets the food we eat:
The precious rain is drink and meat."

The same couplet is translated by G.U.Pope as

"The rain makes pleasant food for eaters rise;
As food itself, thirst quenching draught supplies."

These variations in translation leads to a confusion that the problem is not only in the equivalent word but also in the equivalence of the form. Though Pope's translation is varied in metre and form, his translation is considered as worthy rather than others because of its content which gives the same suggestive meaning as like Thiruvalluvar. Pope uses the nuances of translating to keep the spirit of the originality of the text where others concentrated only on the form of Thirukkural.

Thirukkural's moral concepts are very easy to capture because it has an universal idealistic nature which has the power to reform the modern world by its ethics. Valluvar has divided it as Virtue, wealth and Love. The final couplets of Love cherishes the culture of Tamilians love life, custom, discipline, amusement and relationship. All these ideas prove how Tamil society was a civilized one 2000 years ago. In England, English was considered only as the language of the common people . By some of the critics, English was not accepted as a language. It was only a dialect at that time and not a language. In my opinion, I think English has been enriched only by the translation of Thirukkural. The sacred text is not written for the rich or any other particular community. It is written for the common people of our society. Hence there is no astonishment for us to reactivate the sacred text again in a common people's language.

When do we appreciate the efforts of translators for translating a moral text to other languages. We should realize the problems of the translators because the development of English was enormous only after it was widely accepted as the national language of England. Then it turned to be the lingua franca of the world.

Due to England's imperialistic ideas, English is made as an International language. Countries such as the U.S.A , U.K, Australia and Canada also have English as their National Language. When there is no similarity between British and American English, How is it possible for the translators to translate the active text as reactive one. Eventhough the Americans have English as their national language, when they try to read Thirukkural in English, they couldn't feel the Nativity , sense of their language and so it again creates the problem.

In English most of the Words are translated from German, French, Latin and Greek, All these words are accepted as English words now. In Tamil, though we follow colloquial language to speak. The words which are derived from other languages will never be accepted by Tamil scholars as their language. They pay much devotion to originality.

K.M.Munshi , in his introduction to Rajaji's translation comments on the greatness of Thirukkural

" In its essence, Thirukkural is a treatise par excellence in the art of living" . In his view, Thirukkural is not only a sacred text but it is also an art of living which teaches how to lead a life. So it is the duty of the translator to reactivate the art of living.

Andre Lefevre also opines the same."Translators who translate with rhyme and metre as their first priority ,often find themselves neglecting other features of the original".

Thus my conclusion is how so ever the translators scratch their heads and translate a piece of work, it does not contain the complete essence of the original. But however the translations give us a chance to read through other works of art belonging to other languages which enables us to widen our knowledge and enrich our mind and to have a broad vision of the world. Thus Thirukkural translated in other languages provide the needed philosophies of life even for the foreigners.

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