Chapter-VII
Translation of Classic Telugu
Short Stories
Chapter-7

7.0

Translation of Classic Telugu Short Stories into English:

RangaRao translated a few classic Telugu short stories. While doing so he offered his 'occasional thoughts on translation' in his 'Afterword' of the book 'Classic Telugu Short Stories'. Though he has not given any profound theories on translation, the discussion he initiates would be of great use for a beginner in translation. His attempt to analyse the process without using any academic jargon is noteworthy. Ranga Rao shares his problems he encountered in translating Telugu short stories and offers solutions too. The selection of the stories, picking only a few from a huge mass of Telugu literature itself would be a great task, which he had successfully done. In his Afterword, he gives a brief introduction to the Telugu literature and in the second part of it he discusses the practical nuances of translation and also a few instructions to be observed while translating fiction into English.

7.1 Occasional Thoughts on Translation

Translation is not an easy task as it is evident from his words, "... perfect translation is a mirage; ten out of ten is an impossible score in this area of human aspiration" (263). This has to be accepted first before venturing into this activity. If a translator accepts this fact he won't be disappointed. As the process is often found unaccomplished some term it as an activity of 'fascinating failure'. But translation is not an impossible task, it applies only to the unachievable target of perfect translation which is not possible. However Ranga Rao guides the translators to get at least a respectable score in their attempts of translation, if not ten out of ten.
RangaRao equates the process of translation to the transmission of electrical power where the losses are common. "Translation is transmission, of creative energy. Like the more mundane electrical energy, the longer the distance over which it is transmitted, the greater the scope of loss." From this it is clear that a work can easily be translated into Indian languages as the languages share some of cultural features with one another. The more akin they are the easier the transmission or translation. For instance from Telugu it would be easier to translate into Kannada as those two languages belong to the same family and the cultural similarities are more. Where as it would be more difficult to translate into a language like Hindi or Gujarati. However it would be on the whole a less daunting task to translate from one Indian language to another as they have an underlying spirit of unity and also share a few cultural aspects. The real problem arises only when the translation process involves English, a language spoken by many yet alien in many cultural aspects. While translating from Telugu, a Dravidian language into a European language English, a translator may face many problems, some of them may be insurmountable.

RangaRao discusses the hazards of the translator and mentions ethnicity as the first factor. Ethnicity pertains to the features of a population or a group sharing a distinctive cultural and historical tradition, often associated with race, nationality, or religion, by which the group identifies itself and others recognize it. The characteristics of such an ethnic group are supposed to be unique and particular to that social group.
7.2 Translation Problems

According to Ranga Rao food items, costumes, familial relationships, terms of endearment, expletives, rites and rituals, flora are components of ethos specific to a cultural group. Handling them while translating itself would be the toughest task of a translator.

7.2.1 Food

Many food items of SL culture have no equivalents in TL. In fact even with in India the food habits change from one region to another. While translating food items and also food habits it is the duty of a translator to make everything clear to TL readers. There is a reference to ‘gaarelu’, a popular food item of the Telugus. RangaRao retains the term in TL and gives an explanation with in brackets as ‘cookies like doughnuts made of black gram’. Pulusu is also explained in the same way as ‘a thick soup with vegetables’. In another instance he uses the expression ‘sweetened milk rice’.

“Gaviri’s stomach cried out in agony. She had a vision of the pewter vessel at home brimming with congee and a red dry chilli to go with it for relish.” (Classic Telugu Short Stories 197)

Gogu chutney and kandi sunni also find their way in to the TL text but with an explanation. The scientific name of gogu, Hibiscus cannabinus is also given. Many readers who are familiar with SL may find some of the explanations offered inadequate. But too much of explanation may make the text sound like a cookery book and it may also divert the attention of the TL reader. Hence Ranga Rao offers brief explanations immediately after the expressions.
Further the food habits also pose problems. There are two types of diet viz. \textit{tamasa} and \textit{satwika}. (Classic Telugu Short Stories 58) The first one comprising meat and other items where as the second one a bland vegetarian. \textit{Satwika} diet is associated with people of tolerance.

Brahman children should not drink water at houses of \textit{sudra} folk. Only if a drop of butter milk is mixed in water, they can drink it. (Classic Telugu Short Stories 166)

In the story Soap nut leaves, we find " ... soup of \textit{munelam} fish (wolf-fish) pomfret for \textit{iguru} (a curry boiled until the water has evaporated) ". In addition to the type of fish the translator also offers an explanation about the type of curry, \textit{‘iguru’}

7.2.2

\textbf{Costumes:}

The dress always differs from one region to another even with in India. Though \textit{sari} is worn by women in many parts of India, it varies in the way they wear it.

RangaRao retains the term \textit{‘parikini’} but offers an explanation that it is a long skirt. It may not be exactly equivalent but for the readers who are not aware of the SL dress pattern it suffices. Further a \textit{sari} also comes into fray when a woman weeps.

"Manikayamma garu covered her mouth with her hem and wept bitterly." (p.207) There is also an idiomatic expression in SL to refer to the act of a woman controlling her husband, i.e. \textit{‘by tying him to the edge of her sari’}. So dress may apparently appear of no significance in a text but it also poses some problems to a translator.
7.2.3

**Familial Relationships:**

It has been an accepted practice in translation to retain the primary kinship terms, like those denoting father and mother. The SL terms are retained as far as possible because they carry a unique emotional blend of love, respect and intimacy. Further *atta, pinni, peddamma* of SL have no exact unique equivalents in TL. Further the concept of *'eduru menarikam'* can be comprehended only by Telugu readers. The TL readers without a translator note may find it a complex phenomenon. It is also a common practice among the rural folk to address others with familial relationship terms such as *'mama' bawa* etc. though they are not related in reality. In such cases the translator should be cautious enough not to translate it semantically.

The chenchu said, "*Arre baava* (Hey, brother-in-law)! ..."

*(Classic Telugu Short Stories 98)*

Here this is the way chenchu tribals' usual way of addressing.

For instance *'amma' or 'thalli'* in SL mean mother. But these can also be used affectionately or mockingly to call a woman or a girl. *thalli* is used in a lofty style to mean mother. These subtle variations in contextual meanings have to be perceived by a translator.

Ranga Rao retains the very title of a short story, *'tatayya'*. How ever he gives the meaning in TL in brackets as *'my grandpa'* . Here it is interesting to note that *'tatayya' * in SL does not carry the idea of *'my'* explicitly. But in TL the translator makes it emphatic by adding *'my'* to *'grandpa'*. There are many instances where he used the SL terms of relationships.
"Peddamma, its you! After how many days I have seen you, amma! When did you arrive, chelli (Younger sister)?" he said. (Classic Telugu Short Stories 123)

"Please sit down amma, sit down," he said.

"Don't think of it now, annayya! Sister-in-law was fortunate..."

(Classic Telugu Short Stories 124)

"I shall go now. Attayya," Butchi Laksmamma, rising.

(Classic Telugu Short Stories 127)

7.2.4

Terms of endearment, expletives etc.

"Orrey , put this Nambi fellow in the Sun, bend him over and put a boulder on his back."

Narasimhulu gaped and said, "Aah! What is this injustice chandrayya? Are you saying it as a joke?" (Classic Telugu Short Stories 99)

"Chee, this wretched life of a woman!..." (Classic Telugu Short Stories 70)

In SL chee expresses disgust or aversion. The translator retains it in TL.

"Olammo, a scorpion!" cried a startled Paara.

Olamma is an interjection expressing shock.

Baboo- is used in SL to address any male member.

Ayyo in SL is an expression of regret that roughly means 'alas ' of TL. But as it sounds too refined for an uneducated Telugu character, the translator retains the SL expletives.

Further 'garu' is honorific inflection in SL, which has no equivalent in TL. Hence the translator retains it TL text.
“My father got it from the Bugata garu Prime Landlord.” (Classic Telugu Short Stories 194)

*bugata* is a title used for a land lord in north coastal Andhra districts. Garu is an honorific inflection.

Further it is quite unusual for a husband to address his wife by name. it is common for a man to address a woman with out any vocative which is peculiar to SL culture.

The opening lines of the story ‘Kamilini’ are so terse ‘talupu, talupu’ (door, door) Ranga Rao uses a blend of the vernacular (the door) with the Standard English usage (open the door) as “The Door! Open the Door!” ((Classic Telugu Short Stories 1).

“They reached the field of the prime landlord, Kambuktha garu” (Classic Telugu Short Stories 197)

*Kambuktha garu* is apparently a combination of the proper name of the man and his title- Kaamayya plus *bhukta*.

7.2.5

**Rites and Rituals:**

“With out performing the *sandya* rite all the three times, morning, noon, and evening, he would not touch even water. (Classic Telugu Short Stories 143)

Here *sandya* rites are a bramhin’s prayers said three times a day. Ranga Rao adds an explanation in the context itself so that there is no need of any glossary.
“His wife came and applying the vermillion to Butchi lakshmamma’s forehead, gave her tamboolam.” (Classic Telugu Short Stories 125)

tamboolam in SL is a ceremonial farewell to a married woman whose husband is alive with fruit, coconut, betel leaves and nuts. Some times it also includes a blouse piece.

“Amma ! You have come after so many years and I am not able to present you a simple sari and blouse piece. If only your sister-in-law were alive, would she have sent you away like this?” (Classic Telugu Short Stories 125)

“On the annual rites day, he too would chant mantras with the other brahmin folk.”

For ‘taddinam’ in SL the translator used ‘annual rites day’. The original literally means ‘that day’ commemorating a near relative’s death with offerings to the departed soul.

“I hope you are not treating it a godaanam (ceremonial donation of the cow)?” (Classic Telugu Short Stories 8)

godaanam is the donation of a cow, as a part of the Hindu obsequies to help the departed soul ford the River of fire, Vaitharini in hell. Once a cow is thus ritually donated it cannot be taken back.

“... ‘When the sacred string around my neck (tied by my husband during the wedding ceremony) broke, my luck too broke,’ and she went on lamenting inconsolably.” (Classic Telugu Short Stories95)
Here is the reference to the ritual of the Hindu marriage. It is an important episode in the Hindu marriage ceremony in South India. A Hindu bridegroom ties the mangalsutram around his bride's neck with three knots. When a husband dies, the sacred string is ceremonially removed. This is a ritual of making a widow. One of the more terrible curses hurled in a frenzied quarrel among backward folk is 'May your string break!'. Without the explanation offered by the translator, it would be difficult for TL readers to comprehend the text.

Further the SL customs include a woman giving birth in her puttilu, (birth place). Before maternity homes became popular, a woman always delivered at her mother's place. The TL reader may not be familiar with this idea.

7.3 e-factor and t-factor

Ranga Rao states that the higher the ethnicity factor (e-factor) the harder the translator's struggle. The translatability (the t-factor) is determined largely by the ethnic gravity and dialectical ambience of the vernacular short story. The more Indian the story is, the more difficult it is to translate. The t-factor is inversely proportional to the e-factor.

Hence the Indian fiction that is urban based can easily be translated into English as it ethnically nearer to the western culture. For this reason rarely a literary work in Indian English is found that depicts the authentic rural Indian life. The illiterate speech in vernaculars is denatured by educated expressions in English translations.
7.4

Three N's:

RanganRao offers three tools of translation which will be of use in translation of short stories from vernacular language in to English.

i) Neutralization: RanganRao prefers British English to American for presenting Indian fiction. Further he emphasizes the need to 'wash' English of its alien colour, flavour and association.

Learned words such as Latinisms may be avoided as our humble illiterate Indians, peasants cannot use phrases such as 'alas' 'good heavens', 'my foot' 'whew' etc. For this reason RanganRao retains some of the SL expressions such as 'ayyo' etc.,

ii) Naturalization: He prefers the choice of words that are appropriate to the character. For instance he prefers commonly used words to represent the cart man's speech in Karuna Kumar's 'Polayya'. He deliberately avoids the words that are unsuitable for a character. Thus the choice of the words in TL should comply with SL 'register' of the character.

iii) Nativization: RanganRao prefers to retain some ethos specific expressions such as 'parikini', 'sari' as there are no equivalents in TL. Further they add to nativity to the text. Idioms and proverbs are rich sources of native feel. RanganRao suggests the judicious use of them because excessive use may trouble a TL reader and eventually affect the readability of the text.
RangaRao prefers the use of terms of endearment such as ‘chelli’, ‘nayana’ etc., and expletives such as ‘abbey’ ‘ayyo’, ‘babbabu’ etc. and states that they act like pepper in vada. But a translator has to be careful because too many native expressions may make the text uninteresting for a TL reader. CLL Jayaprada comments “...Only later I realized too much of pepper also can make the vada unpalatable’. (Studies in Translation, Prestige 103)

7.4

Ethics of Translation:

RangaRao lists out ethics of translation:

i) Don’t translate the work when you do not love the original work.

ii) Every writer has a distinctive personality and unique style. The ultimate goal of a translator is to capture this in TL.

iii) Responsibility to the readers is the ultimate principle for a translator.

iv) Translation is not an academic exercise. Its goal is to provide purposeful reading experience to the non-vernacular readers, bridging two languages, two cultures, two minds.

v) The non-Indian readers must be prepared and be willing to absorb the culture shock.


7.5

**Procedure of translation:**

RangaRao also suggests a practical procedure to be followed while translating a work which is of great use for beginners.

i) **Read well, love and choose** - Before selecting a work, the translator should enjoy himself the work and then only he should go for translation.

ii) **Mark the words, phrases and constructions with potential for buckling and take creative decisions**

iii) **First draft** - the translated version will now have alternatives /synonyms, expressions, structures separated by strokes. A vernacular dictionary may be sued here to arrive at plausible solutions.

iv) **Fine-combing** - close examination should be done at this stage

v) **Quadrangular consultation** - collaboration with the author, the translator, the vernacular advisor and non-vernacular English specialist. It is a four square process.

vi) **Come back to the translation again and make necessary final changes.**

Thus RangaRao explains the various stages in literary translation which he terms as a ‘tournament of transmigrations’. He also cautions that ‘perfect translation is a mirage, ten out of ten is an impossible score in this area of human aspiration.’

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