

First Translations between Languages/Cultures: Catalonia and India

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First translations between languages/cultures: Catalonia and India

Sameer Rawal

I am a translator, poet and doctoral student in translation studies at the UAB, Barcelona. I translate between English, Hindi, Spanish and Catalan languages, and interpret for Urdu and Punjabi too. In my doctoral research I am working on Interculturality and Literary Translation between distant languages, basing the study on my published and unpublished translations of Catalan literature to Hindi and English. I believe that Translation studies is an amalgam of many disciplines, and translation is a highly complex process involving various theoretical and practical aspects as many here would agree. Translation itself is an intercultural act as beyond the language code, the translator is also interpreting between the two languages, cultures. I have the advantage of being one of the first translators between two languages, at least as far as I know, and the cultural problems surrounding literary translation from Catalan to Hindi is also the subject matter of my doctoral research. Here in this presentation I would like to describe and explain the framework and the various ideologies, communication models, interdisciplinary streams of thought which I had in mind as I performed the act of translation from Catalan to Hindi. I am sure that analysing the practical and theoretical questions pertaining to the translation we do, we can grasp many things which aid and help us formulate the path our translations can take, and find their own proper places. Since we have a limitation of time here, I have tried to be precise and introduce main lines through which I want your attention to go through.

Broadly speaking, multicultural interaction can be defined as interculturality. Obviously this concept entails the presence of more than one language in a given space-time, a specific location. And thus, if there is more than one language, there is translation occurring, because not all the languages will be comprehensible to all the members of a given community, which could be the whole world too, as the absolute example. The matter becomes broader and bigger in size when we delimit the culture/collective defining parameters within a multicultural community to these categories: original nation, culture, social group, socio-economic class, language, psychology and individual, so on and so forth. Interculturality as a study matter serves in each one of these instances. Translation as a result serves in inter-lingual, and at a more subtle level at intra-lingual levels too in a multicultural ambience. In a nutshell, we have a lot to do with Interculturality, and it is the super group, in which many studies can be justly accommodated, enjoining various interdisciplinary researches, as in it many issues and subjects criss-cross.

One such area of study belonging to Interculturality would be the issue of East-West. 'Issue' here is a decorative, apparently lighter name given to a more profound problematic. One of the questions to be answered and analysed in this problematic are how does East see West and how does West see East? The applications of the practical results of this research are manifold and can be used to resolve diverse conflicts and understand communication blockages. The origin of the problematic lies in ancient times, and a more significant twist was given to it in the Western imperial expansion stage (medieval centuries). Clearly it has got to be linked with a thirst of power, of domination and subjugation, inherent, or controversially inherent qualities of the human beings. But to make things simpler let us reserve ourselves to the description of the contemporary situation. An image of a person or a collective or the other is a result of the interaction one has had with that other, an interaction which gives rise to opinions,

ideas on the nature, ideology, thought, personality etc. of the other. This interaction could result due to various reasons, and to name a few, there are areas like the journalistic media, arts, literature, cinema, history, academic research, direct contact, family relations, friendships etc. Literature is one of the important means through which the other is recognised at a deeper level, as it implies subtlety. Literature, which could be fiction or non-fiction, always works in a paused manner, at the receiver's end, the reader's end. It plays with inner ideologies, manners of thought. And it is the word which is primary here, not the image which logically follows the word afterwards. Added to all this is the portability of the literary product, you can carry it, read it whenever you like, re-read it, and so forth. Literature is a very significant source of information amongst many others present that exist, Internet being the latest entry into the fray.

Translating literature therefore carries a responsibility which is not very evident to most. The readership in general may not pay attention if they are reading the original or the translated version of a work. They are not habitual to do so because obviously they are not translation experts. They do not have a meta-discourse on translation, and thus it is not a surprise when generally people are told that someone is doing research on translation then their immediate question is: translation between which languages? So added to the subtlety of the process of formation of the other and gaining information about the other through literature, is the further ignorance of the placement of the process of translation and its dynamics. No general, common reader has begun to directly question the authority or the capability of the translator, and the place of 'action', the 'real' place where most probably most of the formation of the image of the other takes place is this 'general' reader sphere.

From the East/West division we further have to delimit ourselves to India/West division, which is the subject matter of this presentation. It was during the times of British colonial presence in India that Indian literature seriously started getting translated to European or Western languages. With this the process of the formation of the image, of the idea on the other, in this case, the idea of the 'Indian' other began to get formed seriously too. We will not indulge ourselves too much into the ideology of this translation, but it seems quite obvious with various instances and examples belonging to the period that strategic political colonial planning seems be the basis and the cause of such translations. Religion was one of the main themes to be translated to be further served as an aid into the mind of the 'native'. Major Hindu religious books saw their European languages versions in this period, many 'firsts'. Translation was used a tool, a very important tool at that time because the other means of the formation of the other were not there; there was no media, no technology, not even easy transport mediums and communication means.

At the same time the reverse effect was also taking place on its own. Some part of Indians were reading European literature in translation and in original and gradually forming the knowledge of the Western other. These persons were in the majority of cases trained by the Europeans themselves, and a bias in their opinions, interests was much clearer than anything else. Translation aided to create inequality and homogenising of the respective cultures, in both the directions.

For many Indians since a long time, West generally means English speaking countries. And for many Westerners, India since a long time has meant spirituality, Hinduism, multitude of people, films, poverty, etc. The 'history' of cultures, even though present all the time, tends to evaporate from the minds of the people and what remains is that which is created in the present moment by the means mentioned above, to form an

image on the other. Such is the reality of the world now.

So what happens when a conscious effort is taken to translate and interpret mutually unknown cultures and languages? More specifically to our matter of study here, what happens when a minority Western language literary work is translated to a locally important Indian language? The translation act demystifies the 'homogeneity' of the respective cultures and shatters some previously erroneously existing images. It introduces an element of 'reality' therein. Catalan literature occupies a niche place in the Iberian literature. And Iberian literature is also not very well heard in the Indian peninsula. On the other hand, Hindi literature though locally, domestically within India has a strong presence, its export to outside world, generally and especially to the Iberian Peninsula is almost nil. Within India Hindi literature is strong in numbers, but at the social acceptance level, it has to yet to work hard to achieve the same status as let us say the Indian English literature, which has made inroads to almost all the major languages of the world, including in the Iberian Peninsula. But we have to remind ourselves that English writing in India in its origins owes a strong debt to English/Western language and culture at least ideologically, even though after almost sixty years of its independent, unforced presence in India makes a strong case for believing that it has more Indian elements than English ones. To give an example, a few years back one used to hear that English writing in India is 'translated' literature, translated at the core itself, at the time of writing, as the characters, players of that literature were not English speaking in reality; but now due to the strong existence of a Indian indigenous English speaking population within India, which considers English as yet another Indian language, the literature being produced in English seems to be leaving the 'translation at core' aspect, and has a more 'real' ground to it.

But in any case the 'lookout' zone for this English speaking population in India is the group of English speaking countries in the world. In many ways the West remains limited to English speaking part of the world for this population. The growing importance of English as the lingua franca of the world associated with the political power of English speaking countries is also a significant factor in this process.

All these reasons and facts indicate us the attention one has to devote to a project involving translations between two unknown cultures, distant languages. Each case would be different, and each case would have its own peculiarities. I would now like to illustrate by talking specifically about a case, the translation of *La plaça del Diamant* from Catalan to Hindi, done by me. This is the first novel to be translated from Catalan to Hindi, and the second literary piece; the first one being a collection of Ramon Llull's texts, essays. From the start I could see that if the translation would be seriously read by Hindi speaking population of India, which is around forty percent of the total Indian population, it would help them disintegrate the idea of the West a bit. One could ask why disintegrate the ideas of the West? To answer I would just change the verb, and say that it would help them to distinguish the plurality that exists within the West, a heterogeneous mixture of different ethnic groups. And taking reference from what I said above, it would also help them to disassociate West with English speaking countries as well, which generally speaking seems to be a phenomenon less entrenched in Hindi speaking population rather than the English speaking Indian population. Besides this, it would help Catalan literature to grow and get recognised as a culture, an ethnic identity. All in all it would be an exercise in intercultural communication forging a bridge where there was none till now.

Linguistically speaking, the translation may not fall into the category of the accepted 'foreignness' in the Hindi speaking world, but it is a question of habit, and more

quantity of translated literature would clear away this hurdle. The word *plaza*, for example, does not have a conceptual equivalent in the Hindi language, and not even in the Western imagery which Hindi literature could employ, and here lies the novelty of introducing heterogeneous, plural elements. We are aided by the clear, lyrical prose of the original novel and its appealing universality in this case, the universality of emotional, sentimental, humane background. The translation cannot lose its basic elements therefore, and at the same time the reader gets a clear idea of the original culture of the novel, its whereabouts, its exoticness, and its distinguishing features; its difference and thus a new category gets created in the reader's mind, which coincides with the proper name of the culture and is not a subset of a bigger geographical or conceptual or falsely created identity.

I could give you more examples from the translation, but let me first say that in Interculturality the monolithic homogenous images of the West and the East have to be dissembled to give forth a rightful description and nomenclature to each ethnic identity, especially those ones who are under some kind of pressure, be it political, social, or related to power; and translation between distant mutually unknown languages gives rise to such possibilities. I would call this real intercultural communication, for reasons explained above, and a more just way of doing things. The times are so that we cannot and should not separate ideology from the work we do as translators and interpreters. And this phenomenon has to flow in both the directions, for both the languages/cultures in question.