

## Unit: 22: Challenges in Shakespeare Translation

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### Introduction

There are many challenges in translating Shakespeare into any language. It is assumed that the difficulty in the linguistic and cultural transfer of a text from a language to another increases with the distance between the linguistic and cultural distance between the languages in question. As a text comes fully alive in its cultural context, the loss of that context has to be made up through substitutions in localization and through adequate notes in foreignization. Localization means bringing the foreign text to the target language reader and foreignization refers to bringing the target language reader to the foreign text.

The texts of Shakespeare who lived in the sixteenth century London do not mean the same even to the Londoners today because of the diachronic changes in their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Certainly, it is bound to be an even more compounded issue for people who read him in other languages. The key issues are how to transfer him linguistically, retaining his superb use of language, for which he is primarily known.

In this unit, we will look at these five topics:

1. Translation
2. Early Shakespeare Translations
3. Linguistic Translatability
4. Poetic Translatability
5. Cultural Translatability

### Shakespeare Translation

There are many issues specific to Shakespeare translation: his stature, his primary corpus and translation corpus. The first is his phenomenal reputation which dwarfs others in comparison. One of the issues of Shakespeare translation is that there is a big gap between the translations met for performance and translations meant to be read in pointing texts. Aesthetic conventions followed by the men of letters translate often tend to produce Shakespeare for the page and not on the stage.

The transfer of knowledge and culture across languages requires translations. The popularity of printing technology led to an increase in the number of translations and contributed to social changes because of the dissemination of information across languages. Analysis and interrogation of the traditional word vs. sense dichotomy have led to the rise of the independent discipline of Translation Studies. Shakespeare translations are important in translation studies because his texts are translated into many languages across the world and can be approached without religious strictures.

Catherine: I cannot tell vat is dat.

King Harry: ... I will tell thee in French ... Je quand sur le possession de France, et quand vous avez le possession de moi,--let me see, what then? ... It is as easy for me, Kate, to conquer the kingdom as to speak so much more French. ...

Catharine: Sauf votre honneur, le Francois que vous parlez, il est meilleur que l'Anglois lequel je parle.

King Harry: No, faith, is't not, Kate: but thy speaking of my tongue, and I thine, most truly-falsely, must needs be granted to be much at one. But, Kate, dost thou understand thus much English, canst thou love me? (5H 5.2)

The translation appears as a topic in Shakespeare. It is used to connote inter-lingual communication, as well as a physical transformation. Translators as interpreters are featured in *Henry V* (5.2) and in *All's Well that Ends Well* (4.1). In *Henry V* there are many instances of literal translation, like the wooing scene (5.2). The marriage of French and English is bound to produce a son who is "half-French, half-English" (5.2.208). *The Merry Wives of Windsor* also has many references to translation. Master Page gets a lesson Latin (4.1), the French Doctor Caius makes "fritters of English" (5.5). In *Love's Labour's Lost* the "feast of languages" (5.1) one finds Holofernes critiquing Armado's Spanish (5.1). Hamlet's "transformation" (2.2) makes Claudius ask Gertrude to "translate" Hamlet's behaviours in the closet scene so that Claudius can "understand" (4.1) and Gertrude, like a modern-day translator, interprets Hamlet's actions for him.

In his Epistle Dedicatory to his *Rival Ladies* (1663), John Dryden had thought that

Shakespeare (who with some errors not to be avoided at that age, had, undoubtedly, a larger soul of poesie than ever any of our nation) was the first, who, to shun the pains of continual rhyming, invented that kind of writing which we call blank verse, but the French more properly, *poesie mesurée*; into which the English tongue so naturally slides that in writing prose its hardly to be avoided. (Dryden II: 136)

Dryden who wrote in his *Essay on Dramatic Poesy* (1668) that Shakespeare's language is "a little obsolete" was very conscious of the process translation.

Dryden and Davenant had translated/adapted/rewrote Shakespeare intralingually for Restoration audience.

- *The Tempest* as *The Enchanted Island* (1667),
- *Antony and Cleopatra* as *All for Love*, (1677), and
- *Troilus and Cressida*, as *Truth Found too Late* (1679).

In the preface of *Truth Found too Late*, they claimed that they were trying "to remove that heap of Rubbish, under which many excellent thoughts lay wholly bury'd". In the 'Preface to *Troilus and Cressida*' (1679) he points out how he can find

in every page either some solecism of speech, or some notorious flaw in sense ...[and that] many of his words, and more of his phrases, are scarce intelligible. And of those which we understand, some are ungrammatical, others coarse; and his whole style is so pestered with figurative expressions, that it is as affected as it is obscure. (Dryden IV: 255)

In the Preface to his translation of Ovid's *Metamorphosis* (1680), Dryden proposed classifying translation into three categories: metaphor, paraphrase and imitation. Metaphor is the word-for-word translation into another language, the paraphrase is an intra-linguistic translation, and imitation is the process of adaptation.

## Early Shakespeare Translations

The early Shakespeare translations appeared outside England probably in curtailed forms. The *Wanderbühnen* ('travelling companies') who toured northern Europe when Shakespeare was alive are speculated to have staged reduced versions of Shakespeare's popular plays in translation. Germans claim to have records of a play 'about the Jew' and another one titled '*Brother-murder Punished*' staged there.

Some of the early Shakespeare translations in European languages include Alexander Sumarokov's *Hamlet* (1748), Catherine II of Russia's *Merry Wives of Windsor* (1786), and *Rastochitel'* (*Timon of Athens* 1786) into Russian; Jean-François Ducis's (1733-1816) *Hamlet* (1769), *Macbeth* (1784), *Othello* (1792), *Le Roi Léar* (*King Lear* 1783), *Roméo et Juliette* (*Romeo and Juliet* 1772) into French; Johannes Boye's *Hamlet, Prinz af Dannemark* (Copenhagen 1777) into Danish; Francesco Gritti's *Amleto* (1796) from Ducis's version into Italian; Niels Hauge's *Macbeth* (1855) into Norwegian; Luis I of Portugal's *Hamlet's* (1877) into Portuguese; Leandro Fernández de Moratín's *Hamlet* (1798) into Spanish; and Friedrich von Schiller's *Macbeth* (1801) into German; Andres Varonos Theotokis's Greek *Macbeth* (1819) from Ducis's version.

The works of Ducis and Alexander Dumas who adapted Shakespeare to the theatrical and cultural conventions of the French were the early successful stage versions. Ducis did not know English but produced successful stage versions of *Hamlet* (1769), and *Romeo and Juliet* (1772), *King Lear* (1783), *Macbeth* (1784), *Othello* (1792) based on the translations of Pierre Le Tournier (1736-88) and of Pierre de la Place (1707-93). Le Tournier's faithful translations failed as they did not follow the French cultural conventions, but Ducis's stage versions which conformed to the French cultural expectations not only popularized Shakespeare across Europe but also became the source of Shakespeare translations for many European languages. His *Hamlet* "became the most frequently produced eighteenth-century drama at the *Comédie Française* after the works of Voltaire" and became the source for the first Italian (1772, Spanish (1772), Dutch (1777), and Swedish (1787) versions of *Hamlet* (Heylen 29); and also for Viskovatov's first Russian *Hamlet* (1811).

Shakespeare appeared in the Middle East not directly from English, but from his translations in other languages. In Turkey, he was first introduced in their languages by travelling Italian troops and local Greek and Armenians. Armenian *Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello* (1842), *King Lear* (1860), *Hamlet* (1866); Greek *production of Hamlet* (1842) were the early ones. Hasan Bedreddin and Mehmet Rifat's first stage version of Shakespeare (*Othello*, 1876), and the first complete page version (*Hamlet*, 1908) were indirect translations from French. Although *Othello* (1888) was played at Tabriz in Iran in the Turkish language, the first Persian Shakespeare (*The Taming of the Shrew*, 1900) appeared indirectly from French.

Egypt also had Shakespeare from the French and was politically conscious. Najib Haddad's *Shuhada al-gharam* (*Romeo and Juliet*, 1892) differed from Shakespeare in details. In Tanyus Abdu's *Hamlet* (1901), Hamlet marries Ophelia and kills Claudius; His *Khayal al Rijal* (*Othello*, 1898) focuses more on domestic violence.

In Iraq, *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar* (1930) openly criticized the local customs. *Romeo and Juliet* (1973) portrays a family feud and shocked the traditional society by featuring an onstage kiss. *Doctor Othello* (1965) became a play of murder and revenge and *Desdemona* (1989) a detective investigation of the murder of Desdemona with the help of tape recorders, forced confessions and questioned the idea of

truth. Jabra Ibrahim Jabra who translated *King Lear* (1968), *Coriolanus* (1974), *Othello*, *Macbeth* (1978), *Hamlet*, *The Tempest* (1979) also translated Jan Kott's *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (1979).

Shakespeare first appeared in China with *Ying-guo shi-ren Yinbian yanyu* (*Wit of an English Poet*, 1904), an adaptation of Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* by Lin Shu who did not know English but relied on the interpretation of Wei Yi. Tian Han's (1898-1968) translation of *Hamlet* (1922) was the first Shakespeare as play in Chinese. The Chinese used fiction, prose and verse to translate Shakespeare. Chinese has four complete translation of Shakespeare. Cao Weifeng (1911-1963) translated Shakespeare's verse as verse. The Taiwanese scholar Liang Shiqiu (1903-1987) faithfully translated Shakespeare in prose and refused to use "sound-unit" method. Zhu Sheng Hao's (1912-1944) translation (1935-44) along with Song Qingru was a nationalist effort at a time when China was under Japanese occupation. Fang Ping's (1921-2008) *The New Complete Works of Shakespeare* (2000) mirrors Shakespeare's prose, blank verse, rhymed couplet, and rhymed verse with their Chinese equivalents.

In the Meiji era (1868-1927) Japan adapted Shakespeare into Kabuki theatre. The Japanese had no idea of European realist drama, and so used the forms they knew to adapt Shakespeare. It adapted *The Merchant of Venice* as *Sakuradoki Zeni no Yononaka* [*Cherry Blossom Season: World of Money*, 1885]. The New Drama movement (*shingeki*) in late Meiji era deliberately ignored traditional dramatic forms in favour of more realistic mode and moved away from Kabuki and classics, which they regarded as out of date. Shoyo Tsubouchi's *Shizaru Kidan* (*Julius Caesar*, 1884) a free translation as a ballad drama used the seven-five syllable metre of traditional tanka, haiku, Kabuki and Noh. His *Hamlet* (1911) was the first *shingeki* presentation of Shakespeare.

In Korea, references to Shakespeare had been appearing in magazines like *Sonyum*, *Chungchun*, and *Hakjickwang* since 1908. Beerbohm Tree's *Macbeth* was screened there in 1917. The first translation of Shakespeare was Ku Lee-Byung translated *The Tempest* from Charles Lamb's *Tales From Shakespeare* in 1919. In the next year, Oh Chun-Won translated a scene from *The Merchant of Venice* (4.1) and in the following year, Hyun Chul attempted an indirect translation of *Hamlet* from Japanese in 1921-22.

The Indians were introduced to Shakespeare after the advent of the English in India. A Fort William student Claude Monkton's translated *The Tempest* in 1809. Even before that English travelling actors have been performing Shakespeare since 1770 in British India. The first surviving literary translation of Shakespeare into Indian language was by Iswarchandra Vidyasagar who translated *The Merchant of Venice* as *Bhrantibilas* (1856). Since then, almost all Indian languages have Shakespeare translations. At least three languages (Bengali, Marathi and Malayalam) have translated all the works of Shakespeare. In Malayalam, the first Shakespeare translation was that of *The Comedy of Errors* by Kalloor Oommen Philipose as *Aalmaarattam* (1866). It inspired the first translation of Kalidas's plays from Sanskrit into Malayalam.

Important African translations include Sol Plaatje's Tswana translations like *Diphosho-phoho* (*The Comedy of Errors*, 1930), *Dintshontsho tsa bo Juliuse Kesara* (*Julius Caesar* 1937); Julius Nyerere's Swahili translations *Juliasi Kaizari* (*Julius Caesar*, 1963) and *Mabepewi wa Venisi* (*The Merchant of Venice*, 1969); Uys Krige's Afrikaans *Twaalfde Nag* (*The Twelfth Night*, 1967) etc.

The issues in these translations could be classified under three heads: linguistic, cultural and ideological. Linguistic issues refer to the questions of linguistic equivalence and faithfulness. Cultural issues refer to cultural equivalence and the cultural factors leading to localization and foreignization.

While ideological interferences lead to alternate readings from below, censorship affect translation from above.

### **Linguistic Translatability**

A translator transfers story, characters, meaning, and ideas of a text into another. He is likely to fail in translating the sound effects and wordplay. This challenges translators in their translation of Shakespeare who revels in these. Translation of poetry is another problem and has led to many trans-creations, which are preferred by the artists who try be faithful to the original and believe that faithfulness involves equivalence than literalness.

Shakespeare's plays are scripts meant to be performed on stage and therefore, have another layer of significance. The Germans distinguished between poetic translations and the stage translations. Dingelstedt intralinguistically translated AW Schlegel's German translations of Shakespeare for German theatre although Schlegel's works were metrical, aesthetic and faithful translations. Germans regarded Schlegel's Shakespeare translation as too romantic to reflect Shakespeare's stagecraft. The French preferred verse translations for the stage, and used literary prose translations for reading.

Translatability of poetry is a philosophical question and whether to translate Shakespeare's texts into prose or in verse has troubled many. While some claim that poems cannot be translated at all, the reality is that many of these are translated well. Such translations, critics say are only rewritings. Translation of poetry into any language is bound to affect the sound quality, musicality, rhythm, and phonetic imagery of the original. Poetic diction, subtlety, nuances and metaphoric language often get sacrificed in plain prose translations. Even to show the distinction between poetry and prose is an issue. Shakespeare translators oscillate between complete processes, to complete verse with varying degrees of compromises in between. In writing, a verse line begins with a capital letter at the beginning of each line. Most translators use rhyming verse in place of Shakespeare's unrhymed iambic pentameters.

Poets exploit the different combinations of stressed and unstressed syllables to create a musical effect. The repetition of sound patterns create rhythm and this has a certain effect just like musical beats. In the speech, these sound patterns created by different stressed and unstressed syllable units create rhythm. These sound effects are very difficult to translate. You can understand phonetic stress by saying words slowly.

Shakespeare emphasizes certain syllables more than others and wrote in iambs. A verse line has many units of a certain number of regular stressed and unstressed syllables or 'metrical feet'. Dactyl is a metrical foot with three syllables arranged in the order stressed-unstressed-unstressed, creating an impression of fast movement and force. Two syllable foot like trochee has a stressed-unstressed pattern and Iamb has an unstressed-stressed pattern. Shakespeare used iamb which resembled natural English speech. His poetic passages have five iambs in a line. These unrhymed iambic pentameter lines, called blank verse, were used to express passionate as well as reflective speech.

"To be, or not to be: that is the question" (Ham.)

"If music be the food of love, play on." (TN)

"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" (Sonnet)

The sound effect of Iambic pentameter lines are difficult to translate into languages which do not have "monosyllabic" words. Word-for-word translation can make these lines longer than their originals. Its naturalness helped actors to memorize passages and audience to understand these. It also sounds like the heart-beat: *di-dum, di-dum, di-dum, di-dum, di-dum, di-dum*.

Adding to this complexity was the effort to translate Shakespeare's prose passages as verse and to translate Shakespeare's unrhymed iambic pentameters as

- 1) unrhymed or rhyming verse
- 2) ten syllabic lines resembling iambic pentameter
- 3) local poetic forms similar to blank verse
- 4) invent local metrical feet resembling blank verse--some based on sound, on characters.

### Poetic Translatability

The French regarded Shakespeare as too crude for the refined French stage. Apart from linguistic pride, the animosity with the British also played a part in this position. In his discussion of Shakespeare and English tragedy in Letter no. 18 in *Lettres philosophiques* (1733-34), Voltaire hopes to make him acceptable to the French and attempted "to render the uncouth Englishman's rough blank verse into acceptable French alexandrines" (Levitt 322). In the same vein, La Place translated *Hamlet*.

In Chinese, the Yale-educated poet and translator Sun Dayu (1905-1997) translated Shakespeare into a form of verse that matched Blank Verse. Liang Shiqiu preferred prose saying that Chinese does not have 'blank verse' and that the plays are to be performed, not recited. Bian Zhilin (1900-2000) translated the verse as verse and adopted literal translation, while Zhu Shenghao used free translation.

Most Indian languages preferred prose to translate Shakespeare. Most Hindi translation of Shakespeare is also in prose. Harivansh Rai Bachchan's *Macbeth* was the first Hindi Shakespeare play in verse to be staged as Hindi. However, as Hindi does not have a metre corresponding to blank verse, he translated *Macbeth* and *Othello* (1959) using an unrhymed traditional *rola* metre. Malayalam preferred prose. K Ayyappa Panikkar, himself a poet, edited the Complete Works of Shakespeare into Malayalam twice—first as fictional adaptations for children in 1970s and later as faithful translation in 2000. He instructed his translators to use only prose. Even earlier, the best-known *Othello* translation in Malayalam by MR Nair (Sanjayan) relies on prose. He also defends his choice of prose.

This does not mean that poetic translations were not attempted. In Malayalam itself, many have tried translating blank verse using poetic forms. Kodungalloor Kunjikuttan Thampuran, who did not know English and worked with the help of an interpreter, translated *Hamlet* and *Othello* using the regular poetic metre. His contemporary A Govinda Pillai used *Upajati* metre. In Telugu, VV Sastri used a metrical quatrain *tetageethi* to translate *Julius Caesar* as *Seejaru Charitramu* (1876). In Hindi, Harivansh Rai Bachchan used *rola* metre to translate *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. KS Nissar Ahmad's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Kannada and Jaswant Thakar's *Macbeth* in Gujarati are linguistic and stylistic experiments.

Chinese translators experimented with blank verse more intently. Sun Dayu (1905-1997) proposed the concept of *yinzu* or "sound-unit", allowing the representation of a word not using 2 or 3 characters, enabling the composition of lines with more sound units using more than one character but permitting single stress. This became popular in the Chinese translation of the blank verse. Bian Zhilin's literal translation (*zhiyi*) acknowledges his debt to Sun Dayu and the most popular Chinese Shakespeare translator, Zhu Shenghao who used sense translation (*yiyi*) and verse used metrical *dun*. Shenghao preferred parallel halves to convey the sound effect, but Zhilin used five duns in each line as in iambic pentameter. Their use of rhyme, repetition, antithesis, parallelism etc. gives a musical quality to Chinese Shakespeare. Rupert Chan's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* also used ten monosyllabic lines with a down-up down-up tone similar to *di-dum, di-dum*.

The Korean translator Hyonhu Lee's *Hamlet* also uses the traditional Korean rhythm of three-four, three-four to translate *Hamlet*.

### **Cultural Translatability**

His translations across the world adapt him culturally. Following the conventions used by Ducis in his French productions, the Arabs also use dagger instead of a pillow to kill Desdemona. Ducis argued that mothering someone with a pillow was deemed unmanly and barbaric. The Arab world also followed this not only because they translated the play from the French version of Ducis, but also because they also thought it was the manly and valiant way of killing.

The Arab translations of Othello focus on Othello's Arab identity. They highlight it with Arabic names like Utayl, and Attalah and some also localize Iago as Yakub ('Jacob'). Khalil Mutran's archaic Arabic *Othello* Arabizes the play and also removes the offending traces of race and religion: strumpet versus Christians, malignant turbaned Turks, circumcised dogs etc. He also deletes all references to the Ottoman Empire and makes Othello and noble and articulate spokesperson of Arab cultural nationalism.

Localization is best seen in the titles of the translations. Titles are suggestive of the preoccupation of the local context that produced them. A German translation of *Hamlet* titled *Der besträufte Brudermord* (*The Condemned Fratricide*, 1710), Arabic *The Al-Hamlet Summit* (English 2002; Arabic 2004) by Sulayman Al-Bassam is some examples. The traditional reading of *The Merchant of Venice* as a play about religious otherness use Shylock at the centre. But by making Portia as the central character it is read as a discourse on women's empowerment as in *The Woman Lawyer* (Chinese 1927), *Oru Puthia Savitri* (*A New Savitri*, Malayalam), and by foregrounding money and concerns of capitalist preoccupation in Chinese *A Pound of Flesh: the World of Money* (1885). Lin Shu's Chinese translation of Shakespeare was marketed as "stories of gods and spirits" (1904). It translates stories in this translation of Lamb's Tales with titles such as "The Ghost's Command" (*Hamlet*), "The Ghost's Enchantment" (*Macbeth*), "Marriage Stratagem" (*The Twelfth Night*), and "Committing the Crime of Passion" (*Romeo and Juliet*).

Cultural translations relocate the story into the local culture. Shakespeare's Africanised reinterpretation is best found in Welcome Msomi's *uMabatha: The Zulu Macbeth* (1960), and the RSC's *Tempest* (2009). Jairaj's *Kaliyattam* transplants *Othello* into North Malabar cultural context defined by sacred groves where theyyam dance is performed as *Kaliyattam*. Another example of cultural adaptation is the Japanese translation of *King Lear* by Kuniyoshi Munakata into a Noh text. It begins with a touching reunion between Cordelia and Lear. Her ghost appears as the personification of Buddhist mercy and invites Lear to the next world. The Buddhist philosophy of Japan makes this transformation of Lear into a story of salvation and redemption possible and natural.

In Bengali, Bharatendu Harischandra's *Durabh Bandhu* changes the title of the play *The Merchant of Venice* into one that evokes Indian ancient tales *The Panchatantra*, aptly summarizing the play as one of a rare friend. He uses local names for Venice (Vanshpur), Portia (Purashree), and Shylock (Shailaksh), and substitute money lending Jew in Christian Europe with rich and austere Jain in Hindu India. In Hindi, Harivanshrai Bachchan's *Othello* culturally adapts the image of tender "white ewe" in Shakespeare's Christian England which holds a lamb in high regard with "she calf" in Hindu India which reverts cow, and the passage in Othello:

Even now, now, very now, an old black ram  
Is tupping your white ewe. Arise, arise;

appears in Bachchan's translation as:

*Abhi is ghadi kahi tumhari ujli bacchia si kanya par kala mota saal chada hai,*  
(a big fat bull is now riding your little white innocent tender she calf)

Indigenization popularizes Shakespeare. The classic case of senior and respected doyen of Bengali stage Harish Chandra Ghosh's' expensive "Scot Style" foreignized *Macbeth* (1893) spectacularly failed on the stage while his student Amarendranath Dutta's *Hamlet* localized adaptation as *Hariraja* (1896) became a phenomenal success.