The present article aims to explore cultural terms, and pitfalls in their translation in general, and strategies applied for compensating the gaps in the novel 'Seto Bāgh' 'translated as 'Wake of White Tiger'. The major finding is that the cultural terms can be classified in five categories and eight strategies have been found in use in their translation.

Keywords: Cultural terms, pitfalls, translation strategies

1. Introduction

Translation and human communication are assumed to begin concurrently. In the Western context, it has been speculated that the Tower of Babel is the initial cause of the advent of translation. In the Eastern context, natural sounds are supposed to be translated into language as mentioned in Vedic scriptures. After a long course of translation exercises, scholars started theorizing it. Recently, its multiple dimensions, theories and multifarious aspects have made the discipline of Translation Studies, a house of many rooms (Hatim, 2001). The discipline has immerged as a dire need of the day.

Theory of translation is assumed to have been developed since Cicero (55 BC), who first “championed sense against words and said a translator must be either an interpreter or a rhetorician” (Newmark, 1981, p. 4). It implies that Cicero introduced sense translation against the trend of word-for-word translation. He has summed up the narrator’s dilemma in these words, “If I render word for word, the result will surround uncouth and if compelled by necessity I alter anything in the order of wording, I shall seem to have departed from the function of a translator” (as cited in Bassnett, 2005, p. 49). It clarifies that translation cannot be both beautiful and faithful. This pre-linguistic attempt was the foundation to erect translation edifice. Thereafter, translation was regarded as a linguistic activity. Nida (1964) has viewed that translation is reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the message of the source language, in terms of meaning and style. In the same connection, Catford (1965) has defined translation as “the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language” (p. 20). So, translation is a linguistic activity and it caters to translation of one language with equivalent terms in another language. However, it is inadequate to tell what actual translation is. In a similar vein, Bassnett (2005) has viewed:

Translation involves the rendering of a source language (SL) text into the target language (TL) text so as to ensure that (i) the surface meaning of the two will be approximately similar, and (ii) the structure of the SL will be preserved as closely as possible. (p. 2)

Again, there is a problem that surface structures of the two languages may not be the same. Thus, translation is not merely a linguistic phenomenon.

Translation is also a cultural entity. For example, ‘white dress’ for a married female in the Eastern, particularly Hindu culture indicates ‘death’ of her husband but the same refers to ‘virginity’ and ‘chastity’ in the Western culture. Therefore, translation implies rendering of cultural contexts. To put in Newmark’s (1988) words, "Translation has been instrumental in transmitting culture, sometimes under unequal conditions responsible for distorted and biased translations ever since countries and languages have been in contact with each other"(p. 7). Likewise, Robinson (2002) has claimed that intercultural competence and awareness are far more complex. Further, House (2010) has also conceded that translation is less a linguistic and more a cultural procedure. So, translation is a tool to transmit source language culture into the culture of the target language. Beyond languages and cultures, translation needs to be seen through multiple lenses like pragmatics, literature, science and technology, to mention but a few. Nevertheless, culture

Translation is a crucial issue in this emerging discipline.

As a case of culture translation, the present article focuses on the translation of a historical novel Seto Bāgh to observe cultural terms in translation. The selected novel is the greatest historical novel to date in the Nepali language. The novelist, Diamond Shamsher Raṇa has portrayed the political and social systems of Nepal during the Rana Regime, especially three decades' history of Nepal. It has been rendered into English by Greta Raṇa, a native of Yorkshire, England. She has translated even the title as Wake of the White Tiger to preserve the pragmatic meaning of Nepali title Seto Bāgh. In it 'wake' connotes to a realignment of loyalties, a shifting of pledges from powerless factions to powerful ones (Raṇa, 1984). It is a tragic story for two reasons: (a) it ends on a tragic note, and (b) it destroys a family (Raṇa, 1984, Foreword). It is a symbolic novel as the title 'white tiger' refers to a mirage which old Jung Bahadur Raṇa was mistaken to see in the forest of Pattharghāṭā. This mirage was, perhaps, seen in the political scenario to see the bloodcurdling history white and clean (Neupane, 2017). Consequently, Raṇa regime got overturned. This novel is rich in cultural terms and its translation implies culture translation.

Against this backdrop, this study aimed at exploring the taxonomy of cultural terms and the strategies for translating them. The auxiliary aim was to investigate the pitfalls in translating the cultural terms.

Translation has been an inevitable part of better communication and a means of breaking language barriers in a global perspective of postmodern era. Therefore, translation is and should be a buzzword in academic and practical activities now and then. In light of this, the present study is significant, firstly, for prospective translation researchers. Secondly, it is highly useful for national educational policy makers, designers of curriculum materials and translation related personnel. Thirdly, it provides feedback to the translators, publishers and all those who are concerned to the academia of literature and translation.

2. Review of related literature

This section exhibits the review of related literature in order to set the frame of reference for the study.

2.1 Novel translation in Nepal: A glimpse

Novel, which is more interesting and more popular literary genre, is younger than other genres. The same is true for translation of novels. In a survey, Karmacharya and Ranjitkar (2002) have remarked that 134 novels have been translated from Nepali into other languages and vice versa. Out of this figure, 13 novels are found to be translated from Nepali to English. It is explicit that the tradition of translating Nepali novels into English began in 1972. Native speakers of English have done some translations whereas some are by non-natives. Similarly, some are published by Indian publishers while others by Nepalese publishers. It presents only the translations up to 2001. In the latter days, the tradition of translating Nepali novels into English has been flourishing. Some other translations include Sāniko Sāhas as Sani's Valour, Samānantar ākāś as Parallel Sky, Muguḷān as Muglan Palpasā Kyāfe as Palpasa Café, Phoolko āṭanka as Terror of Flower, Sukarūtākā pāilā as Socrates' footsteps, Athāha as Fathomless, to mention some of them. These data confirm that novel translation in Nepal is flourishing and, therefore, a study of this flow has been a vital issue.

2.2 Cultural terms

Generally, 'culture' refers to the set of unwritten rules, identified by the members of a particular community. In Richards, Platt and Weber's (1985) words, it is the total set of beliefs, attitudes, customs, behaviors, social habits, and so on shared by the members of a particular society. Similarly, Newmark (1988) has defined it as the way of life and its manifestations, which are community-specific. Against this backdrop, Newmark (1988) has classified the cultural terms into the following types: (a) Ecology that refers to flora, fauna, winds, plains, and hills, (b) Material culture that refers to artifacts, such as food, clothes, houses, towns, and transport, (c) Social culture that refers to work and leisure, (d)
Organizations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts, and (e) Gestures and habits. Adapting this taxonomy, the present study classified cultural terms into these five categories: ecology, material culture, religious culture, social culture and concepts.

2.3 Pitfalls in translation

Translation is viewed from different angles and perspectives. In this regard, Shanti (2008) has written:

Some scholars, such as, Savory define translation as an art; others such as Eric Jacobson define it as a craft, and others such as Eugene Nida define it as a science. Horst Frenz claims that translation is neither a creative art nor an imitative art, but stands somewhere between the two. (p. 19)

This view implies that translation is viewed differently by different scholars. Newmark (1988) has also supported this view as he has claimed that translation is a science, a skill, an art and a matter of taste. As it is difficult to define precisely, translation practices are not beyond limitations, problems and pitfalls, which are not recent terms.

Pitfalls were realized since the inception of translation. As translation is a multidimensional activity, it requires keeping balanced eyes on multiple issues (Figure 1). Basically, the aspects of translation are related to source language text (SLT) and target language texts (TLT). The linguistic, cultural, contextual and philosophical aspects of SLT and TLT should be observed for better translation.

Figure 1 demonstrates that a text may be pulled in the ten different directions. Hence, balancing these issues poses problems for the translator. Furthermore, languages are different and SL and TL may not have equivalent terms in all the contexts. In this regard, Culler (1976) has believed that languages are not nomenclatures and the concepts of one language may differ radically from those of another, since each language articulates or organizes the word differently and languages do not simply name categories; they articulate their own (as cited in Orududari, 2007, p. 1). This implies that problems are caused due to disparities among languages. As a result, transfer of message from SLT to TLT creates pitfalls. To extend this point, Das's (2005) opinion is worth quoting, “Since each word is changed with memory, associations and literary echoes, it is difficult to find full equivalence of an SL word in another word in TL” (p. 37). Illustrating the problem of equivalence in translation, Leonardi (2000) has mentioned that the notion of equivalence is undoubtedly one of the most problematic and controversial areas in the field of translation theory. Similarly, in his study, Särkkä (2007) has asserted that translation refers to an activity carried out in a given cultural context and so language external factors, i.e. the communication itself, impose certain limits on the translator's freedom of choice. Above all, in Venuti's (2006) terms, "Translation is often regarded with suspicions because it inevitably domesticates foreign text, inscribing them with linguistic and cultural values that are intelligible to specific domestic constituencies" (p. 67). The reviewed literature reveals that pitfalls are natural in translating across languages and cultures.

2.4 Strategies for compensation

The term ‘strategy’ refers to the actions undertaken to accomplish some task or purpose efficiently (Neupane, 2011). In Baker and Saldanna's (2011) words, “The term 'strategy' connotes goal in an optional way” (p. 282). Translation strategies thus can be defined as the actions or policies to compensate pitfalls in translation. In Mailhac's (2007) words, the strategy refers to a method employed to translate a given element/unit (including a whole text) making use of one or more procedures selected on
the basis of relevant parameters. Here translation strategies incorporate methods, procedures and techniques, used to render the ST into the TT.

Different scholars have presented different strategies. Nida (1964, as cited in Orduhari, 2007) has depicted two translation procedures, such as 'technical' and 'organizational'. Technical procedures deal with semantic and syntactic approximations whereas organizational procedures deal with communicative effectiveness. However, Newmark (1988) has distinguished translation methods and procedures. For him, methods are related to the whole texts whereas procedures for smaller units of language. His methods include word-for-word, literal, faithful, semantic, adaptation, free, idiomatic and communicative translations. So, Newmark's methods are in the continuum in which one pole is the semantic and the other the communicative. While discussing procedures, he has listed these: transference, naturalization, cultural equivalent, functional equivalent, descriptiv equivalent, componential analysis, synonymy, through-translation, shifts or transpositions, modulation, recognized translation, compensation, paraphrase, couplets and notes. These are really useful while translating individual units such as sounds, letters, words, phrases and sentences.

Hervey and Higgins (1992) have proposed the following techniques for compensating gaps: exoticism (literal translation/transliteration), cultural borrowing, calque (unidiomatic translation), and communicative translation and cultural transplantation (like adaptations). They have presented a scale for cultural transposition, a cover term for the various degrees of departure from literal translation to adaptation. According to Leppihalme (1997, as cited in Orduhari, 2007), there are three strategies for translating the proper name allusions (i.e. retention, replacement and omission) and nine strategies for translating key-phrase allusions. In the same direction, Harvey (2000) has recommended the four major techniques for translating cultural terms: (a) functional equivalence, (b) formal or linguistic equivalence, (c) transcription or borrowing, and (d) descriptive or self-explanatory translation. These techniques are mainly useful in translating legal terms/texts. Recently, Baker (2011) has advised strategies such as translation by a more general word, by a more neutral word, by cultural substitution, by paraphrase, and by illustration. In the Nepalese context, Bhattarai, Adhikari and Phyak (2011) have suggested four strategies as the major ways of bridging the gaps such as transliteration, transliteration plus explanation, transference and replacement of cultural expressions of the source text with those of the target language.

Adapting the aforementioned literature, the present study found eight different strategies used in translating cultural terms. They are: literal translation, substitution, definition, borrowing, deletion, addition, back translation and couplet.

3. Methods and procedures

The main objective of this study was to investigate pitfalls and strategies in the translation of culture rich novel Seto Bāgh. To this end, the researcher adopted the descriptive observational research design (Neupane, 2018) since he observed cultural terms based on a checklist following Newmark (1988) and descriptive statistics for presenting results and discussing the findings. In this study, the researcher collected data only from the secondary sources. He used the purposive sampling to select one hundred Nepali-English cultural pairs from the novel. The tool for data collection was observation with a check-list.

For the collection and analysis of the data, the following procedures were adopted: (a) He collected Nepali-English pairs from the novel; (b) He read the Nepali version, underlined the cultural terms and transliterated them by using Turner and Turners (2009) symbols; (c) He read the English version to find out the English equivalents of the terms; (d) He categorized selected one hundred terms into five categories such as ecology, material culture, religions culture, social culture and conceptual terms. He listed twenty terms for each category; (e) He identified the strategies used in translating the terms, calculated the frequency and analyzed them; and (f) He delved into the pitfalls in translation.
4. Results and discussion

This section deals with the presentation of results and discussions on the main findings. One hundred selected terms were categorized into these five types: (a) ecology, (b) material culture, (c) religious culture, (d) social culture, and (e) conceptual terms. Then, the frequency of the strategies was counted and presented in percentage. Also, some pitfalls were marked and analyzed.

4.1 Taxonomy of cultural terms

Based on the set taxonomy of cultural terms (viz. ecology, material culture, social culture, religious culture, and conceptual terms), the researcher delved into the novel for these terms. Out of one hundred samples, some of the illustrations of each type is presented, analyzed and interpreted in the succeeding paragraphs.

Ecology. Ecology includes geographical features such as seasons, hills, animals, trees, lakes, rivers, seas, stream, and environment. For example, representative Nepali terms like hariyo caur, bādel, pahād, barsāritu, and simal have been translated as green lawn, wild boar, mountain, rainy season, and a tree respectively.

Material culture. Material culture incorporates food, clothes, houses, towns, means of transport, ornaments, utensils, communication, and so on. For example, representative Nepali terms like mandir, chāna, baggi, aūthi, tāpke, phuli, and khukuri have been translated as temple, roof, carriage, ring, utensil, nosering, and khukuri, respectively.

Religious culture. This criterion includes religious activities, myths, names of Gods and Goddesses, religious beliefs, and so forth. For example, some of representative Nepali terms like bhajān, puja, cinā, pāp, dān, rekhi, narka, and yogi have been translated as hymn, worship, horoscope, sin, gift, powder, hell, and yogi, respectively.

Social culture. This category includes the terms related to social activities, customs, organizations, etc. For example, some Nepali samples like dāijo, banbhāt, sunār, adālat, rodhigha, māhute, and kaviraj have been rendered as dowry, picnic, goldsmith, court, rodhighar, mahaut, and kaviraj, respectively.

Conceptual terms. Conceptual terms include abstract/non-concrete concepts which can be presented by illustration. They are understood and shared only by the speech community, sharing the same language and culture. For example, some Nepali terms like kāji, guptacar, rājkāj, mudda, bidhavā, and sautā have been rendered as kaji, spy, politics, case, widow, and another wife, respectively.

The delineations, mentioned above, exhibit that the five types of cultural categories are profusely used in the selected novel. This finding matches with Newmark’s (1988) taxonomy of cultural terms.

4.2 Strategies used in translating cultural terms

The selected one hundred cultural terms have been found translated by using eight different strategies: literal translation, substitution, definition, borrowing, addition deletion, couplet, and back translation (Table 1).

Table 1 demonstrates that eight different strategies have been found in use to translate the cultural terms. Out of them, the most frequently used strategy is literal translation (44%) and the least frequently used strategy is back translation (2%). Only three strategies, literal translation, substitution and definition, are present in all categories. In total, the sequence of strategies, on the basis of frequency and percentage, is: literal translation (44%), substitution (22%), definition (9%), borrowing (7%), addition (7%), deletion (6%), couplet (3%) and back translation (2%).

These findings verify Newmark’s (1988) methods and procedures that are useful for translating individual units like words and phrases. Furthermore, they also confirm with the use of strategies recommended by scholars and translation theorists like Hervey and Higgins (1992), Leppihalme (1997), Harvey (2000), Baker (2011), and Bhattacharai, Adhikari, and Phyak (2011). However, this study reveals the eight strategies in order of frequency unlike any of these cited reviews. Further, literal translation is the most preferred strategy, whereas back translation is the least preferred one in translating cultural terms that subsume words and phrases.
Table 1. Technique-wise and Category-wise Comparison of Statistical Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.N.</th>
<th>Techniques Categories</th>
<th>Ecology</th>
<th>Material culture</th>
<th>Religious culture</th>
<th>Social culture</th>
<th>Conceptual terms</th>
<th>Total n/p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Literal translation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Substitution</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Borrowing</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Addition</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Deletion</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Couple</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Back translation</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(n\)- frequency of the strategies; \(p\)- percentage

4.3 Pitfalls in translation

Since its inception, it is accepted that translation is always approximate, not exact. It implies that pitfalls occur in translation. The present study noticed many pitfalls in translation, some of which are illustrated in the succeeding paragraphs.

In all the five categories, pitfalls have occurred. For example, in ecological terms 'khasi' has been translated as 'goat' but it is not clear because 'khasi' refers to castrated 'he-goat'. Similarly, 'simal' has been translated as 'a tree' which is very general and does not represent 'simal' only. Moreover, 'kāfal/aiselu' has been translated as 'fruits and flowers of mountain', which doesn't clarify the true meaning of the Nepali term. In the terms of material culture, 'galaicā' has been translated as 'carpet' which is too general and it cannot represent the true sense of the Nepali term. 'Kurtā' and 'tāpke' have been translated by using too general terms 'clothes' and 'utensil', which do not represent the true meaning. Moreover, 'khāt' has been translated as 'woollen bench', which is not clear. These data show that there is use of general term in place of a specific one (Baker, 2011) and thus pitfalls have occurred in translation.

Likewise, terms of social culture, religious culture and concepts have been translated by using general terms. For example, 'cinā' as 'horoscope', 'pāp' as 'sin', 'dān' as 'gift', 'rekhi' as 'powder', 'sūdini' as 'midwife', 'gorā' as 'beef eating foreigner', 'sautā' as 'another wife', 'rākebhut' as 'ghost carrying torches', etc. are not similar pairs but they are only loosely related. As a result, pitfalls have occurred in transferring meaning of SLT into TLT. The data show the use of less expressive /more neutral terms, and paraphrases (Baker, 2011), which have caused pitfalls in translation. Therefore, pitfalls are like snakes in the grass and the translators need to be cautious in translating such deceptively lurking elements in the texts.

5. Conclusion

Cultural terms refer to the words and phrases that adhere to a particular culture and the community. Cultural translation requires transferring cultural references across cultures. Therefore, pitfalls are natural to occur in cultural translation. To overcome the problems caused, strategies need to be used.

The cultural terms in Seto Bāgh can be categorized into the five types such as ecology, material culture, religious culture, social culture and concepts. To compensate the pitfalls in translation, these eight strategies are used: literal translation, substitution, definition, borrowing, addition, deletion, couplet, and back translation in order of frequency. Of the eight strategies, the most frequently used one is literal translation (44%) and the least frequently used is back translation (2%). Despite the use of strategies, some pitfalls have been observed. This implies that cultural translation possesses many pitfalls and losses in translation are usual. Yet, translators should be aware of the pitfalls in translation and the task of translating cultural terms should be continued to enrich both languages and cultures.

References


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