

A Consideration of Dialectal and Stylistic Shifts in Literary Translation

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Abstract : Literary writing carries the stamp of the current language of its time. In translating such texts, it becomes a challenge to capture such reflections which may be evident at several levels: the level of dialectal use of language by characters in stories, the alterations in syntax as tools of writers' individual stylistic choices, the insertion of quasi-proverbial and gnomic utterances, and even the level of the pragmatics of narrative discourse. Discourse strategies may differ between earlier and later texts, reflecting changing relationships between narrators and readers in changed cultural and social contexts. This paper is a consideration of these features by an approach that combines historicity with a description, contextualizing language change within a discourse framework. The process of translating a collection of writings of Punjabi literature spanning 100 years was undertaken for this study and it was observed that the factor of the historicity of language was seen to play a role. While intended for contemporary readers, the translation of literature over the span of a century poses the dual challenge of needing to possess both accessibility and immediacy as well as adherence to the 'old world' styles of communicating and narrating. The linguistic changes may be observed in a more obvious sense in the difference of diction and word formation – with evidence of more hybridized and borrowed forms in modern and contemporary writings, as compared to the older writings. The latter not only contain vestiges of proverbs and folk sayings, but are also closer to oral speech styles. These will be presented and analysed in the form of chronological listing and by these means, the social process of translation from orality to written text can be seen as traceable in the above-mentioned works. More subtle and underlying shifts can be seen through the analysis of speech acts and implicatures in the same literature, in which the social relationships underlying language use are evident as discourse systems of belief and understanding. They present distinct shifts in worldview as seen at different points in time. However, some continuities of language and style are also clearly visible, and these aid the translator in putting together a set of thematic links which identify the literature of a region and community, and constitute essential outcomes in the effort to preserve its distinctive nature.

Keywords : cultural change, dialect, historicity, stylistic variation

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