José Lambert, one of the founders of modern TS, asks a very pertinent question, “Is there any institution, period of history, or field of human activity that does not include translation in some form?”. The categorical answer to this question is No. Initially, TS was misunderstood to be heavily focused on literary translation only excluding other form of translation like interpreting and a rigorous pedagogical interest. However, this is no more the case now that TS covers into its research areas the study of non-literary translation, oral interpretation and commercial processes like dubbing and subtitling. One has to look around to vouch for the ubiquity of translation. Print and electronic media bank upon translation to convert the messages from wire services into mother tongue reports. Similarly, translation is a familiar routine activity in domains of technology, science, tourism, and law. It is difficult to imagine the existence of political, military organizations, MNCs, NGOs, religious and cultural societies etc in the absence of translation and interpretation. Forms of cultural transactions like films, theatre and folk performances profusely use various strategies of translation like dubbing, subtitling, adaptation as well as rewriting to connect with global viewers. Looking at the range and spread of the activity of translation, it has befittingly become a rage amongst academics and literary theorists. In a globalized world where the local is ceaselessly being translated into the global as the global unreservedly adapts to the local, the discipline of Translation Studies (TS) can potentially yield enriching insights into the processes through which a new “world
culture” is coming into existence. At present TS engages in a wide range of research and pedagogical activities like developing theoretical frameworks, conducting individual case studies, training translators and coming up with criteria for the assessment of translation. (Baker, 277) Since we are here concerned with the problematics of literary translation, all discussions in the forthcoming sections will be undertaken exclusively.

1.3.1 Mapping Translation Studies

The first and a valid map of TS was drawn by James Holmes in 1972 which is till date considered as providing an authentic framework around which all the activities in the academia are organized till date. Holmes compartmentalizes the discipline into what he calls pure translation studies and applied translation studies. The pure translation studies tries to explain the phenomenon of translation and further develops principles and parameters to articulate such explication. In other words, the interrogation of translation as a product and process is carried out under the name of descriptive translation studies (DTS) and theorization of these exercises in terms of principles and perspectives is undertaken within the bounds of what Homes calls translation theory, both of which principally are segments of pure translation studies. Within DTS there are subdivisions that seek to understand the mental process as defining the act of translation (process-oriented DTS), the nature of existing translations (product-oriented DTS) and the impact or function of translation in the society and culture of target language (function-oriented DTS).

Translation theory on the other hand is divided into several categories in line with a variety of restrictions like medium, area, text-type, rank, time etc. These will be taken up for discussion in the succeeding modules.

Finally, applied translation studies focuses attention on practical issues ranging from translator training, development of translation aids like dictionaries and glossaries and translation criticism at large. Given below is the flow chart that Holmes provides to map the discipline of TS.

1.3.2 Interdisciplinary Nature of TS

The above-given brief map of TS would make one realize that the discipline is not a single, isolated field of scholarly inquiry but a highly composite and interdisciplinary network of statistics, approaches, concepts and empirical assumptions drawn from diverse fields. Lawrence Venuti rightly says, in the West, from antiquity to late
nineteenth century, theoretical statements about translation fell into traditionally defined areas of thinking about language and culture: literary theory, criticism, rhetoric, grammar and philosophy. (Venuti, 2000) However, in twentieth century literary theory evinced an unprecedented expansion of the field in terms of the sheer diversity of approaches and insights drawn from language studies, post-colonial studies, gender studies, anthropology, sociology, cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, semiotics, media studies and most recently cultural studies. On deeper analysis, one finds that the discipline of TS draws on theoretical perspectives from almost all these domains as it influences research in these fields through its seminal insights. It's not surprising then that Stefano Arduini, a distinguished linguist at the University of Urbino and the director of the San Pellegrino Institute for Translating and Interpreting uses the metaphor of the rhizome to signify TS.

Up to 1960s, translation was considered a branch of linguistics on the grounds that it involved a transaction between two languages. Theorists like Catford, Nida, Taber, Pym and Koller maintained that the act of translation is predicated upon some kind of equivalence. J. C. Catford’s famous book A Linguistic Theory of Translation: An Essay in Applied Linguistics described the process of translation as substitution of Target Language (TL) meanings for the Source Language (SL) meanings. These theorists further came up with typologies of equivalence focusing on the rank (i.e. word, phrase, sentence, text) at which equivalence is said to obtain or on the type of the meaning (denotative, connotative, pragmatic) which was assumed to reside somewhere outside the language and held to be constant in translation. The theoretical premise on which linguistic approaches to translation are based is the referential theory of meaning which posits an extra-linguistic domain of signified (objects, people, emotion, memory, history etc.) to which linguistic signifiers can refer unproblematically. According to them, translation becomes possible when signifiers in the source language and the target language have the same referents in the outside world.

In 1970s there was growing realization that literary texts were constituted not of language but of culture, language being just a vehicle of culture. This means, not only are the words like roti, choli, kurta, dhobi, or aai “culture-specific” but the whole language was specific to the culture. In their trail-blazing article titled “Proust’s Grandmother and the Thousand and One Nights: The ‘Cultural Turn’ in Translation Studies” in Translation, History and Culture (1990) Andre Lefevere and Susan Bassnett make this point quite emphatically. They “exhort linguists to abandon their ‘scientistic’ attitude and to move from ‘text’ as a putative ‘translation unit’, to culture – momentous step that would go far beyond the move from the word as a ‘unit’ to the text.” Cultural turn in TS marks a departure from evaluating translated text in terms of its equivalence with source text to a set of questions that examine the historicity of translation. It carefully examines the status of translation in the target socio-cultural contexts and relates it to criteria for the selection of texts as well as the strategies employed by the translator. Lefevere, Theo Hermans and Gideon Toury have described translation as rewriting and a potential manipulation of literature that is subtly or explicitly undergirded by game of power. This will be taken up in detail later in following units. But at this point, it is worthwhile to say that TS shares important concerns with Cultural Studies in as much as it is attempts to unearth contexts of power as affecting any cultural practice or production. In their book titled Constructing Cultures (1998), Bassnett and Lefevere have laid down a common agenda of research to be conducted by TS and CS i.e. investigation of the ways in which a culture constructs the image of its writer and the politics behind it.

In Encyclopaedia of Translation Studies Mona Baker notes that insights from diverse fields may have enriched the domain TS in terms of methodologies and theoretical frameworks, the interdisciplinary nature of the discipline has left it fragmented and divided amidst the cacophony of theoretical approaches and perspectives that square
up in oppositional stance against one another. Due such internal dissent, it has become difficult for TS to develop and evolve a coherent research methodology of its own.

1.4 Major Debates in Translation Studies

An exhaustive study of the field of translation studies will make it crystal-clear that all the major debates in the field draw on the binarism operating at the level of the concept of language that a translator or translation scholar subscribes to. Explicating this, George Steiner says that translation theory rests on either of the instrumental or hermeneutic concepts of language or textuality. According to the instrumental concept of language or what the linguists identify as “the referential theory of meaning”, language communicates the meaning by referring to an empirical reality which remains somewhere outside the language and the features of this extra-linguistic domain of objects, person, emotion, memories, history find valid, authentic and corresponding expression in languages. These theorists firmly believe that translation becomes possible when the source and target languages have approximately similar or the same referents in the outside world. Little wonder that translation theories which subscribe to instrumental theory of textuality advocate equivalence and communication as primary purposes of translation activity. Hermeneutic concept, on the other hand, looks upon language as constitutive of reality and, by this logic, imparting it a specific meaning in line with social and cultural contexts. A hermeneutic concept of language leads to theories that privilege the interpretation of creative values which in turn is significantly influenced by socio-cultural contexts of the target language and literary system.

In his landmark book, The Translation Studies Reader, Lawrence Venuti keenly examines the theoretical binary of textuality as affecting the strategies of translation and the basic philosophy of translation as such. Building on the three-fold theoretical model given by Kelly (1979) he evolves a brilliant principle of, what he calls the “autonomy” of translation. By autonomy, he means a visible conglomerate of textual features, operations or strategies that distinguish translated text from both the source text as well as all the translated texts available in the target language. In simpler terms, it is an assemblage of all those characteristics that make a translated text what it is. Venuti’s formulation of the ‘translationese’ in The Translator’s Invisibility invests autonomy with positive attributes that mediate the process of cross-cultural communication in translation. In his brilliant analysis, Venuti goes on to posit that the entire history of the theory of translation is nothing but an account of the changing relationships between a translation’s autonomy, principle of equivalence and translation’s function. Based on these models, the following debates have stirred the discipline of Translation Studies till date.

1.4.1 (Un)Translatability

A bird’s eye view over the history of translation in west and to certain extent even in East is enough to reveal that the relationship of poetry and translation has been rather inverse at worst and strained at best. Extremist postulates like poetry is something “which is lost in translation” (Frost) best describes the worst while Fitzgerald’s allegory of a live dog being better than a dead lion worst describes the best. Both these approaches are woefully reductionist and purblind to the finer points and subtler issues involved in the extremely complex and reticular act that translation professes to be. The early theoretical formulations in the realm of translation fanatically zeroed in on the concepts of pure and total(itarian) equivalence and a weird idea of interlingual synonymy. Much to the translator’s chagrin, the ghost of equivalence still haunts him in the form of the self-styled poet-critic-theorists who naively liken the act of translation to an Indian woman matching the color of a blouse-piece with that of her newly-purchased sari.
Attempts have been made by poets, writers and philosophers and translation scholars to denigrate the activity of translation as impossible and thus futile. In his seminal essay “Principles of Psychology”, William James argues that our ideas, abstract conceptions and inward images are completely dependent upon words “to gain in corporeity and life”. His proposition rhymes with nineteenth century scholars like Wilhelm von Humboldt and Benjamin Lee Whorf and Edward Sapir in as much as they unanimously subscribe to the assorted principles of linguistic determinism and linguistic relativity. The former refers to the fact that language determines the worldview of the people that use it whereas the latter concomitantly means that users of different language see and perceive the world around them differently. This hypothesis later became popular as Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and questioned the logic behind the exercise of translating the world spelt out by one language with the help of another. Critics like Derrida also negated the possibility of arriving at ‘true’ translation. He brilliantly proclaims that since the quest for a single, authoritarian and unquestionable meaning is will-o’-the wispish, our attempt at pure and accurate translation is bound to meet with failure. In addition to this, aestheticians like Bradley and Bouwsma deny the possibility of translation on the grounds that translation attempts to separate words from their meanings which is absolutely impossible.

Though such perspectives have tended to inflate the notion of “untranslatability” to a discomforting degree, the followers of Cloak theories of linguistics represent the view that “language is a cloak conforming to the customary categories of thoughts of its speaker.” (Bruner, Goodnow, Austin, 1956). Philosophers like Karl Poper and linguists like Noam Chomsky passionately upheld the cause of the possibility and feasibility of translation by invoking the uniformity in the deep structures of different languages of the world. Finally, Walter Benjamin’s “The Task of the Translator” provided a key statement in the universalist, liberal-humanist philosophy of translation by privileging the act of translation as facilitating the release of “pure language” of humanity. This discussion will be taken up for elaboration in the following modules.

1.4.2 Status of Translation

A prevalent misconception about translation as being the accurate transcription of words from one language into another encourages us to forget the fact that “translation” carries with it the strong sense of changing, transforming, or altering one thing into another and that it is also intimately connected with the act of interpretation. Consequently, out of the five meanings isolated by The Oxford English Dictionary of translation, at least three underscore its explanatory, interpretive and transformative aspects. The asymmetrical statuses accorded to the original and translation in West are largely due to the emergence of printing which concomitantly bred the idea of an author as the sovereign ‘owner’ of his text which can be claimed by a translator only with a self-deprecating sense of personal ineptitude and inferiority. Alluding to the Christian myth of fall, exile and wandering, G N. Devy (2000) has averred that in western metaphysics translation is a “perpetual exile”, a fall from the origin. Perhaps western literary traditions evolving mostly from monolingual and monocultural conditions have always been apprehensive of the intrusion of ‘other’, a foreign culture entering their lives, through translation. The bloody history of Bible translations into different world languages bears a testimony to the western obsession with the question of authenticity as undergirding the act of translation. Andre Lefevere (1988) designates such an essentialist understanding of literature as corpus approach to literature which is indebted to the romantic concepts of a writer as a quasi-divine ‘creator’ with peerless ‘artistic genius’, ‘creativity’ and ‘originality’ and a translator as a drudge, a proletariat indulging into ‘second-hand’, ‘second-rate’ activity of botching up the original. Such a de facto dichotomy between the original and translation is ascertained off and on by literati in terms as lop-sided and sweeping as Matthew Arnold’s (1960) who famously said, the way to gain “any sense of the power and charm” of the great masters is “not through [their] translations…but through the original poetry.” The emergence and empowerment of heady idea of ownership surprisingly synchronized with
the initial stages of European imperialistic project. Thus, the simulative identity of translation is due, more significantly, to the imperial project of colonial expansion and consequently to the politics of ‘representation’, whereby the Europe, with its logocentric underpinnings, assumed the status of the Original regulating the identities of its inferior colonies which were obliged to be ‘translated’ in tandem with Eurocentric discourse. It should not, then, surprise one that Western theoretical perspectives on translation are woefully fixated on the glorification of the original and the valorization of notions of transparency, equivalence and fluency as positive attributes of translation. In obsequious deference to such essentialist, simplistic and politically fraught theoretical conceptualization of translation, the activity of translation in East as much as in West, despite its exponential proliferation, has continued to be invisible and on that account undervalued.

However, recent work in translation theory has exhibited a propensity to emphasize the transformative, transgressive and interpretive elements in translation. No doubt, this avant-garde departure apparently draws on Walter Benjamin's seminal essay "The Task of the Translator", but it has its roots first in the "linguistic turn" translation theory took under the influence of deconstruction, and later the "cultural turn" it took in its assimilation of recent anthropological and cultural theory. Where conventional approaches to translation were "unified by a conceptual framework which assumes original presence and a representation of it in the receiving society" (Gentzler, 1993), deconstruction shifted attention away from the interlinear to the transformational elements of translation by raising a series of questions about both presence and representation in translation. These arguments will be taken up for discussion at length in the subsequent modules.

1.4.3 Ethics of Translation

Ethics of translation refers to the ideal manner in which a translator should undertake the translation of the source text. The debate around the issue is heavily problematized by notions of morality and sanctity of the translator and the source text respectively. Ethics of translation has been discussed in detail by French translation theorist Antoine Berman. He draws on the German philosopher Freidrich Schleiermacher’s distinction between domestication and foreignization models of translation. Schleiermacher famously said that a translator could leave the writer in peace and move the reader towards him or behave the other way round. Out of these two, he recommends leaving writer in peace, i.e. foreignizing the translation by registering the linguistic and cultural difference of the source text in translated text. Such an idealistic position has been approved by post-colonial translation theorist like Tejaswini Niranjana and others who are concerned with making the translated text a site where a cultural other is not erased but manifested.

As against the source-oriented approach valorized above, polysystem theorists have evolved a target-oriented approach to the study of literary translation. This approach is also hugely significant in as much as it instructs the scholars to examine the historicity of translated text and the factors that influence a translator’s choice of texts and strategies of translation. Being non-prescriptive in its orientation, this approach is more interested in describing the process of translation than in laying down a set of do-and-don’t norms.

As a way out of this dualism, It would be suffice to say that the approach or strategy of translation in governed by factors like ideology of the time and equation of power defining a particular society which the translator inhabits. The act of translation means more than the purely humanistic notion of building bridges between culture and languages. Translation is deeply implicated in ideology, a fact amply vouched for by the bloody history of Bible translation into world languages. And after Walter Benjamin’s reclamation by deconstructionists, it has become
validly fashionable to ideologically interfere with the source text as way of imparting "after-life" to it and adding newness to the world.

References:


Assignments:

1. What are the major activities undertaken in the domain of Translation Studies. Underscore their significance in the globalized world with suitable examples.

2. Which, do you think, is the most pressing debate in TS that has been still topical throughout the history of translation? Justify your answer with reasons and examples.

See Jeremy Munday’s “Introduction to Translation Studies” at http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=iffkVwa9lno