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specialized Translation
Lecture 1

Introduction

First of all, we would like to welcome you, dear students, to the second term and to this course in specialized translation. We would also like you to know that we understand the difficulty of the situation we are all experiencing right now, and appreciate all the efforts exerted on your as well as the university's part to make up for the time lost as a result. We will try our best to minimize the loss and work together to get through these exceptional times safely.

As for our course in specialized translation, you are aware that, as usual, the subject is shared by two tutors. This term, I will be working with you on translation from English into Arabic, while Professor Maysoon Zahri will focus on Arabic/English translation. The specialization we will mainly work on this term is literary translation. That is the translation of literature in its several genres.

Of course, translation courses should usually be interactive with students presenting their different versions of the translation of a certain text, which opens the door for discussion of the pros and cons of these versions and the possibilities for improving each. Although the situation right now is unusual, we can still have some sort

of interaction using social media tools where students can share their versions of the translation of the requested text and open the door for discussion. I will arrange with the department and get back to you with suggestions next week.

Before we embark on this project, it would be very useful for you to read the following article on the challenges of literary translation, as it briefly introduces some of the major issues that will arise when translating literature. The article is written by Richard Brooks and published on May 29, 2017. It can be viewed on the internet via the following link.

<<https://k-international.com/blog/the-challenges-of-translating-literature/>>

After the article, you will find an extract from the novel *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte. You can start working on it for next lecture, when we would have figured out a suitable solution inshallah.

The Challenges of Translating Literature

Literary translation is the translation of creative and dramatic prose and poetry into other languages. This includes the translation of literature from ancient languages and the translation of modern fiction so that it can reach a wider audience.

Why is literary translation important?

Literary translation is of huge importance. It helps to shape our understanding of the world around us in many ways. Reading Homer and Sophocles as part of a classical education in school helps to build an understanding of history, politics, philosophy and so much more. Meanwhile, reading contemporary translations provides fascinating insights into life in other cultures and other countries. In a fast-paced world so rife with misunderstanding and confusion, such efforts to share knowledge and experiences across cultural boundaries should be applauded.

The history of literary translation

An entire history of literary translation is far too big for the scope of a single article. Indeed, *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English* runs to five whole volumes, such is the depth and complexity of the subject. Suffice to say that literary translation has been taking place for thousands of years.

History has seen countless translators come and go. Many of their names we will never know, but some – King Alfred the Great and Geoffrey Chaucer, for example, who both translated Boethius from the original Latin – had the power and influence to ensure that their translation efforts were not lost to the sands of time.

What makes literary translation so difficult?

The translation of literature differs greatly from other forms of translation. The sheer size of the texts involved in literary translation sets it apart. Tackling a translation that runs to hundreds of thousands of words is not a task for the faint-hearted. Nor is recreating poetry in a new language, without losing the beauty and essence of the original work.

One of the key challenges of literary translation is the need to balance staying faithful to the original work with the need to create something unique and distinctive that will evoke the same feelings and responses as the original. This can be particularly challenging when it comes to translating poetry.

Poems are written with incredible attention to detail. Not only are the words and phrases important, but the number of syllables and the entire rhythm of the completed work. It's

a challenging task to complete just in one language, let alone when trying to recreate a poet's work during a translation. Daniel Hahn, director of the British Centre for Literary Translation, sums up the issue beautifully:

“There's not a single word in any of the languages I translate that can map perfectly onto a word in English. So it's always interpretative, approximate, creative. Anything that is, itself, a ‘linguistic’ quality will by definition be anchored in a particular language — whether it's idiom, ambiguity, or assonance. All languages are different.”

As literary translators will attest, a single word can be extremely troublesome. The author of a work of fiction has chosen that word for a good reason, so the translator must ensure that it is faithfully delivered in the target language. However, what if no direct translation is available? Or what if several options exist, each with a slightly different nuance? Urdu language translator Fahmida Riaz outlines her approach to such thorny issues:

“Every piece you translate comes from the pen of an individual, so you have to give it an individual treatment. I try to retain the ambience of the original culture, rather than the language, as it is reflected in the text.”

Translating novels

Translating novels is just as tricky as translating poetry – and can often be more so. Best-selling author Patrick Rothfuss explains that it is not just the length of the text involved which is problematic:

“Names are important things. And real names, names that actually exist in the world, don't make a lot of literal sense. This is because real names tend to accrete and evolve over time.

“I work hard to create real-seeming names for things in my world. Names that give a strong impression without actually saying anything. Names like Mincet lane, and Cricklet, and Downings.

“These real-seeming (but in reality made-up) names sound really good in English, but they're a huge pain to translate.”

Then there's the need to stay true to the original text while not translating it literally. It's about recreating the atmosphere of the original novel without translating it word for word. Humour, irony, plays on words and plotlines revealed by implication rather than explanation all serve to make this even harder.

A further complication is the assumed knowledge of the reader. References to customs, practices and traditions may be easy to understand when reading a novel in one's own

language, but how does a translator deliver that level of built-in knowledge to a reader in another country who may be unfamiliar with the original language's cultural quirks?

What skills does a literary translator need?

Clearly, literary translation requires a very particular skillset. The translation of literature is a far more creative art than many forms of translation. When translating a pharmaceutical product information leaflet, for example, it's essential to deliver text that is a word for word interpretation of the original. However, for the translation of prose and poetry, creative writing ability is just as important as linguistic prowess.

Confidence in one's ability is also essential. It's fine to get bogged down with how to truly represent the meaning of a sentence – or even a single word – but the translator also needs to know when it's time to make a choice and move on (and also when, several pages later, that nagging doubt about going back and making changes needs to be listened to!).

The ability to deliver continuity is also essential –, particularly in long novels. Remembering facts (like the minor character mentioned some 30,000 pages being the hero's cousin by marriage rather than blood) will save an awful lot of flicking backwards and forward to check things.

The state of the literary translation industry

Over a decade ago, Bowker estimated that just 3% of the books published in the US were translations. Research published by Literature Across Frontiers in 2015 confirmed that the translation of literature for the English and Irish markets echoed this pitiful level. Despite the low figure, there were some encouraging signs that literary translation into English was increasing. Literature Across Frontiers (LAF) director Alexandra Büchler observed:

“The statistics show a steady growth of literary translations over the past two decades in absolute numbers and this is very encouraging. General translations grew by 53% between 1990 and 2012 and literary translations by 66%. This is of course reflected in only marginal percentage growth due to the growth in the overall publishing output.”

The LAF report also highlighted the diversity of source languages when it came to translation for English and Irish readers. Swedish, Dutch, Norwegian, Arabic and Japanese were all among the top ten languages translated. Eastern European languages, on the other hand, were woefully underrepresented, meaning that:

“... we are clearly missing out on entire swaths of literary landscapes in our immediate neighbourhood.”

Just as translation into English often ignores minor languages, so does literary translation into other languages. The European Council of Literary Translators' Associations reports that up to a staggering 80% of all literary translations in smaller countries are from English. The translation of literature from minor language to minor language is a huge gap in the field of literary translation.

The changing face of literary translation

Literary translation has undergone something of a renaissance of late. The changing of the Man Booker International Prize in 2016 to reward the translator of the winning novel on a par with the author represented a significant shift in the importance of literary translation.

Also telling is Amazon's eagerness to take on the translation of literature – clearly there is money to be made from investing in literary translation. Its translation publishing arm, AmazonCrossing, has risen rapidly to prominence, accounting for 10% of all translations in 2016 and backed by the financial strength to roam the world in its quest for exciting literature. AmazonCrossing is now the most prolific publisher of translated fiction in the US. It covered 15 languages in 2016, including Indonesian, Hebrew, Russian, Chinese and Finnish.

This exciting growth bodes well for the future. The translation of literature is hugely important in our modern society and Amazon is well-positioned to play a key role in promoting the sharing of literature between countries, translating into English as well as into other languages. With so many political and economic divides and injustices in the world, anything that can bring us closer to understanding other cultures surely deserves to be celebrated.

Please prepare this text before next week

Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte, Ch24

As I rose and dressed, I thought over what had happened, and wondered if it were a dream. I could not be certain of the reality till I had seen Mr. Rochester again, and heard him renew his words of love and promise.

While arranging my hair, I looked at my face in the glass, and felt it was no longer plain: there was hope in its aspect and life in its colour; and my eyes seemed as if they had beheld the fount of fruition, and borrowed beams from the lustrous ripple. I had often been unwilling to look at my master, because I feared he could not be pleased at my look; but I was sure I might lift my face to his now, and not cool his affection by its expression. I took a plain but clean and light summer dress from my drawer and put it on: it seemed no attire had ever so well become me, because none had I ever worn in so blissful a mood.

I was not surprised, when I ran down into the hall, to see that a brilliant June morning had succeeded to the tempest of the night; and to feel, through the open glass door, the breathing of a fresh and fragrant breeze. Nature must be gladsome when I was so happy. A beggar-woman and her little boy—pale, ragged objects both—were coming up the walk, and I ran down and gave them all the money I happened to have in my purse—some three or four shillings: good or bad, they must partake of my jubilee. The rooks cawed, and blither birds sang; but nothing was so merry or so musical as my own rejoicing heart.

Mrs. Fairfax surprised me by looking out of the window with a sad countenance, and saying gravely—“Miss Eyre, will you come to breakfast?” During the meal she was quiet and cool: but I could not undeceive her then. I must wait for my master to give explanations; and so must she. I ate what I could, and then I hastened upstairs. I met Adèle leaving the schoolroom.

“Where are you going? It is time for lessons.”

“Mr. Rochester has sent me away to the nursery.”