



THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSLATING POETRY

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Annotation: *Translating poetry is a complex endeavor that goes beyond simply converting words from one language to another. It requires a deep understanding of the source and target languages, cultures, and literary traditions. Translators face numerous challenges in attempting to capture the essence, rhythm, imagery, and emotional impact of a poem while remaining true to the original text and the aesthetics of the target language.*

Key words: *Translation, Poetry, Language, Culture, Meaning, Interpretation, Artistic Expression, Cultural Context, Literary Devices, Form, Structure, Rhythm, Meter, Sound Devices*

Poetry relies on the evocative power of language, employing a rich array of literary devices to create a unique and unforgettable experience. Translators confront the daunting task of navigating this intricate web of words, striving to capture not just the literal meaning but also the subtle shades of emotion, imagery, and sound that make the original poetry sing. Poetry often uses metaphors, similes, puns, and other figurative language that depend heavily on cultural context and linguistic nuances. These devices can be difficult to translate effectively, requiring a deep understanding of both languages and their cultural associations. For instance, a metaphor rooted in a specific cultural tradition might lose its impact when directly translated into another language. Consider the English idiom "to kick the bucket," which is a metaphor for dying. A literal translation into another language might not convey the same humorous or ironic effect, depending on the target culture's understanding of death and buckets. The rhythm and meter of a poem play a crucial role in creating its musicality and emotional impact. Translating poetry requires preserving the original rhythm and meter as closely as possible, which can be challenging when dealing with languages that have different phonetic structures and rhythmic patterns. For example, translating a Shakespearean sonnet into French, a language with a different syllable structure, would require significant adaptation to maintain the sonnet's original rhythm and rhyme scheme. Poetry often employs sound devices like alliteration, assonance, and consonance to enhance its aesthetic appeal. Translating these devices requires not only understanding their sonic impact but also finding equivalent sounds in the target language that evoke similar feelings and sensations. The famous opening line of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven," "Once upon a midnight dreary," relies heavily on



alliteration and assonance. Translating this line into another language would require careful consideration of the target language's phonetic patterns to create a similar effect. A literal translation, while seemingly accurate, can often fall short of capturing the poem's true essence. Literal translations can result in awkward syntax, unnatural word choices, and a loss of the original poem's poetic flow. Consider the line from Emily Dickinson's poem, "Because I could not stop for Death," which reads: "He kindly stopped, for me." A literal translation might sound awkward or even grammatically incorrect in another language, depending on the word order and sentence structure. To translate poetry effectively, translators must engage in a process of interpretation, understanding the poem's underlying themes, emotions, and artistic intentions. This requires a deep understanding of the original language, culture, and literary tradition. Translators often need to consider the historical and social context of the original poem, as well as the poet's personal experiences and beliefs. The ideal translation of poetry seeks to strike a balance between literal accuracy and artistic interpretation, conveying the essence of the original work while remaining true to the target language's aesthetic conventions. This delicate balance is often achieved through a combination of literal translation, creative adaptation, and cultural sensitivity. Poetry is deeply rooted in cultural context, drawing upon shared experiences, beliefs, and values. Translating poetry requires a keen awareness of these cultural nuances, as they shape the poem's meaning and impact. Poetry often makes use of cultural references, symbols, and allusions that might not be readily understood by readers in another culture. The translator must either explain these references in the translation or find equivalent references within the target culture that convey a similar meaning. For instance, a poem that references a specific historical event or figure might need to be adapted to include explanations or alternative references relevant to the target audience. Poetry frequently incorporates idioms and proverbs specific to a particular culture, which can be difficult to translate literally. The translator must find appropriate equivalents in the target language or provide an explanation of their meaning. The proverb "a stitch in time saves nine" might not have a direct equivalent in another language, requiring the translator to find a similar proverb or provide a brief explanation of its meaning. Different cultures have different poetic conventions and traditions, which can influence the way poetry is written and read. Translators must be aware of these conventions and adapt the translation accordingly, ensuring that it remains faithful to the original poem's style and form. For example, the structure and rhythm of a traditional Japanese haiku are distinct from those of a Shakespearean sonnet, requiring translators to understand and adapt their approach to different poetic forms.

And also Robert Bly takes a translation by someone who actually knows both the target language and English, who has actually translated the poem, changes



some words, and calls his product a translation. Robert Bly's folly becomes apparent with the following "translation" from *The Kabir Book*:

Knowing nothing shuts the iron gates;
 the new love opens them.
 The sound of the gates opening wakes
 the beautiful woman asleep.
 Kabir says: Fantastic! Don't let a
 chance like this go by!

From *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*, the Tagore-Underhill translation follows:

The lock of error shuts the gate, open
 it with the key of love:
 Thus, by opening the door, thou shalt
 wake the Belovèd.
 Kabir says: 'O brother! Do not pass
 by such a good fortune as this.'

Bly's version has transformed the meaning from God-union to human sexual copulation. Yogic philosophy claims that intense love for God awakens the soul and aids it in its search for God-union. The Tagore-Underhill translation has retained this spiritual significance. "The lock of error" signifies the human's mistaken belief that he is separate from God. Therefore, "love" opens the "gate" of separation.

By opening the gate, the devotee awakens the soul to the "Belovèd"—capitalized because it refers to God. Because the yogi's goal is to awaken his desire for God, Kabir as the yogi-guru admonished his followers not to pass by such good fortune as can be found by unlocking his heart of love to God.

In Bly's version, the poem promotes a human sexual opportunity. Few readers can pass by "iron gates" without their calling to mind Andrew Marvell's "Coy Mistress." And there is little doubt about what Marvell's speaker was seeking with his coy mistress. More importantly, "Belovèd" of the Tagore-Underhill version becomes in Bly's "the beautiful woman asleep."

This kind of misrepresentation is a prototypical example of what T. S. Eliot meant when he claimed that Eastern influence on the West had come through "romantic misunderstanding." After transforming the Supreme Being into a beautiful woman, Bly has the yogi-saint cry: "Fantastic! Don't let a change like this go by!" This mind-numbing act is an abomination, revealing an ignorance that would be funny if it were not so utterly misleading.

Ultimately, translating poetry is not just a mechanical process of converting words from one language to another. It is an artistic endeavor that requires creativity, imagination, and a deep understanding of both the source and target



cultures. The translator acts as a bridge between languages, cultures, and artistic expressions, bringing the poetry to life for a new audience.

Conclusion:

Translating poetry is a challenging yet rewarding endeavor that requires a unique blend of linguistic precision, cultural understanding, and artistic sensitivity. It is a process of interpretation, adaptation, and creation, where the translator strives to find the perfect balance between fidelity to the original text and the demands of the target language. While the challenges of translating poetry are numerous, the rewards are equally great, as translators play a vital role in bridging the gap between languages, cultures, and artistic expressions, making the beauty of poetry accessible to a wider audience.

LITERATURE:

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