

Challenges of Translating Indigenous Proverbs, Idioms and Metaphors into English Language

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ABSTRACT:

India is a multilingual country, where all the regional languages exist simultaneously. It is the home of people speaking 22 recognised languages, hundreds of mother tongues and dialects. But the dominance of English continued over the years, English became the only means of communication. In political, economical, cultural and educational affairs, therefore it becomes essential to understand English and our mother tongues to connect to our communities. In Indian context the role of translation is very significant. It is through translation that we can communicate with one another. Indian languages have rich treasure of indigenous idioms, metaphors and proverbs. Translating these into English presents multifaceted challenges and these challenges are rooted in the interplay of cultural, social, linguistic worldview. Indian indigenous expressions are drawn from different languages like Hindi, Marathi, Kannada, Tamil, Bengali etc, as well as tribal tongues such as Santali, Gondi, Bhill, kolamikoraga, soliga etc.

KEYWORDS:

Indigenous, Idioms, Metaphor, Proverbs, Translation, Hybridization.

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Introduction:

In Indian indigenous languages idioms, proverbs and metaphors hold significant social, cultural and literary importance. It can be seen across community identity or heritage. They are treasures of knowledge, traditional wisdom and community values. They are carried in myths folklore, traditions, and history from generation to generation. They are verbal arts that carry the philosophy of community. They often encoded the moral lessons, ethics and social livings and reflected the connection between man and nature. Idioms, metaphors and proverbs show the expressive power of indigenous languages, provide unique ways to complex emotions, humour, wisdom and hence they enrich the linguistic identity. They are used to teach values and wisdom indirectly, therefore the writers, poets, storytellers, scholars often use them to bring local flavour in the literary works. They add rhythm, humour and depth to the meaning, hence they are not mere devices but the treasures of rich collective wisdom, so whenever they are translated into English language it becomes difficult to retain the stylistic beauty and the depth of meaning and its relativity to indigenous languages.

Meaning:

Proverb: A proverb is a short traditional well known saying that expresses general truth on advice of common human experiences. They are metaphorical and concise. They are pearls of wisdom.

ex. Rome wasn't built in a day.

In Hindi it means- लोकोक्ति. in Marathi- म्हण (mhan) and in Kannada- ಗದಮಾತುಗಳ. Hindi

ex. जैसी करनी वैसी भरनी.

Literary meaning- 'As you sow, so you reap'. means your

actions determine your consequences.

Idioms --:in Hindi –मुहांवरें, in Kannada– ಮುಕ್ಕುಕಗಳು and in Marathi– वाक्प्रचार

Idiom is a phrase whose literal meaning is different from its literal meaning and its individual words.

Ex. Raining cats and dogs.

Metaphor:

In Hindi, in Kannada– ರೂಪಕಗಳು. and in Marathi – रूपक

metaphor is a figure that directly compares two unlike things by stating one is another without using like , as or so. It is implied simile.

ex. The World is a stage.

अति तेथे माती.

This Marathi proverb has rhythm and brevity that is vanished in English translation.

ex. नाचता येईना आंगन वाकडे

In English it can be translated as–

‘A bad workman blames his tools’. This translation leads to confusion about intended humour.

Challenges of translation:

I. Cultural challenges

The Indian idioms, metaphors and proverbs are deeply imbedded in Indian diverse historical, social, linguistic, cultural fabrics. These Indian languages are influenced by Hinduism, Buddhism, tribal traditions and colonialism. When translated into English that translation does not match the Indian view point and

that leads to loss of nuance, humour and depth of meaning.

Ex. Hindi proverbs

ex. जैसी करनी वैसी भरनी

Literary meaning- 'As you sow, so you reap'. means your actions determine your consequences.

ex. नदी के बहने से पहले ही उसका पानी पियो

Drink river water before it flows away.

It evokes Indian agrarian life and landscape; it is hard to translate into English hence the translator risks the cultural erasure and prefer to equivalents. Homi Bhabha argued that such gaps high-light hybridity and favours of dominant language.

example. Kannada ಮಾತೆಮನುಜಮಾತೆದನುಜ.

Literally means - words can make divine, words can make him demon.

But the figurative meaning is 'speech has power to elevate or destroy.

Kannada proverbs often use rhythm, rhyme or pun, though translatable the poetic brevity and rhythm vanish.

Ex. ಹಸಿವೆದ ಹೊಟ್ಟೆಗೆ ಊಟವೇ ದೇವರು.

Literally means -food is the God to the hungry stomach.

English equivalent - Bread is the staff of life.

The Kannada version conveys religious and cultural ideas. God=food, but when translated in English it sounds materialistic. And it loses its context of Indian culture.

In Marathi, proverbs are drawn from rural life, they have rich tradition. They convey cultural wisdom, life morals and humour.

They do not match to English speaking. Marathi expressions are steeped in regional, cultural life and humanity.

Ex. 1) अडला हरी गाढवाचे पाय धरी.

The literal meaning is Narayan stepped and held the donkey's legs.

2) काखेत कळसा आणि गावाला वळसा.

It literally means 'pot under the armpit and wandering around the village'.

It describes futile efforts. Such translation challenges the lexical mismatch, misinterpretation of cultural references.

Hindi Metaphors, idioms and proverbs often emphasize the spiritual, communal values.

Idioms like-

ex. नौ दो ग्यारह होना.

Literally means -Nine and Two become Eleven.

ex. जिसकी लाठी उसकी भैंस

Means 'whoever has a stick owns the buffalo'.

The translation problem arises because English expressions lack direct English parallels which cannot refer to humour, tone, and sensitivity, so difficult in conveying cultural illusions without foot-notes or paraphrases. They are often poetic so the translation becomes absurd., lose charm.

Kannada proverbs and idioms are intertwined with Dravidian roots, Lingayat philosophy and spiritual texts like vachanas. Kannada metaphors like

ಸಾಸಿವಿಯಮೆಲೇಸಾಗರವರೆದಂತಾಯಿತು.

It is like ‘Ocean rushing over a mustard seed’.

Ex. ನುಡಿದರೆಲಿಂಗ ಮೆಚ್ಚಿ ಹೌದೆನಬೇಕು.

It means in English ‘

‘Speak so that Linga is pleased’.

Such expressions are difficult to translate without footnotes, can lead to philosophical delusion.

Kannada idioms are rooted in culture

ex. ಗಾಳಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ಅರಮನೆ ಕಟ್ಟುವುದು.

Literally means – building a castle in the air. the Kannada version is harder but English seems romantic.

II. linguistic challenges

Translation of idioms, metaphors and proverbs from Indian languages to English involves significant linguistic hurdles. Some key challenges include cultural ultrastability, semantic nuances, structural differences in grammar and syntax. The translators often face problems finding approximate equivalents, paraphrases or they use explanatory notes to convey intended meaning.

Idioms aren’t meant to be taken word to word humour, sarcasm or moral lesson. Hindi and Marathi are the languages from Indo Aryan family and Kannada belongs to Dravidian, therefore they differ in word order, gender marking and verb structures. .It complicates idiomatic flow.

example: वह खुनका घूँट पीके रह गया.

Literally means Hedrunk draught of blood and remained.

Actually, it is meant to express suppressed anger, or to swallow an insult so it feels grotesque in translation.

example जहाँ चाह वहाँ राह

Means 'where there is will there is way'

But translation losses simplicity.

Kannada ಕಾಸಿಗೇಬಿದಂತೆ.

Literal meaning something that fell for a coin.

In figurative language it means appearing and expectedly. The coin metaphor is cultural, losses it's meaning in translation.

Example: ಹುಲಿಮುಂದೆನರಿ.

literally means --a fox Infront of the tiger.

meaning. 'Weak facing the strong' but in translation its losses the animal hierarchy.

Marathi language is also rich in folk wisdom. Translating Marathi proverbs, idioms and metaphors into English involves many challenges including adapting metaphors, the local flora and fauna. It Misses local punch.

ex. उंटा वरुन मेंढ्या हाकणे.

Literally means- herding goats from the back of camel. But actual meaning is managing impossible or impractical.

ex. अनुभव शिकवितो.

Literally means -experience teaches., learning from life.

In translation the purity of Indian culture black and white disappears.

III. Contextual Challenge

Contextual challenges in translation arises due to deep cultural, figurative and linguistic nature of these expressions. They often rely on social, cultural, context that directly do not match to

English equivalence leading to the potential loss of meaning, nuances. The contexts do not match to English speaking context due to the structural, linguistic differences between these languages. machine translation leads these problems.

Hindi idioms, metaphors and proverbs are in figurative language. often rooted in historical, cultural, social context making direct translation problematic.

ex ऊंटके मूंह मे जीरा. A cumin seed in camel's mouth. Means too little for too much need. In English it means a drop in the ocean the direct translation confuses the readers.

Kannada: ಮಂಗನ ಕೈಯಲ್ಲಿ ಮಾಣಿಕ್ಯ.

A monkey with pearl necklace. Suggests valuable thing in wrong hands. In English 'casting pearls before swine.'

The translation leads to semantic mismatch, loss of humour, sarcasm or wisdom from the original.

Marathi proverb. आती तेथे माती. Too much leads to ruin. In this proverb the meaning is translatable but the compact rhythm is lost.

Conclusion:

Indigenous translations into English poses many challenges as these proverbs, metaphors and idioms are deeply rooted in Indian social, cultural, philosophical, traditional, contexts. So the translation into English is not merely a linguistic exercise but often transcends the literary world. Translators often face challenges of untranslatability, cultural losses, semantic distortion and over simplification. Sometimes it can capture the spirit and the original depth but difficult to preserve original imagery and cultural resonance. Therefore effective translation demands not only linguistic skills but knowledge of cultural history along with creative, contex-

tual awareness rather than trying to translate literally while respecting the uniqueness of indigenous voices.

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