

Cultural Translation of a Folktale of Haryana: Issues and Perspectives

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Abstract:

This article aims to understand the processes of cultural translations of the regional language traditional texts. With a case study of a particular folktale from Haryana, we will try to understand the expressions that are typically Haryanvi and rendered using particular linguistic devices in one or two dominant languages of Haryana. We would explore how the borrowing or calque have been used as linguistic techniques of translating the traditional texts in a dominant language variety Hindi for Haryana. The study has been conducted on the basis of a folktale selected from a collection of Haryanvi folktales and close analysis of the text in Hindi and with a particular experimental translation in English.

Keywords: Cultural translation, Haryanvi, Hindi, dominant language, borrowing, calque

Haryana is a unique state which is identified with Hindi even though Haryanvi in itself can be considered a language. The Census data define that the seventy percent of people speak Haryanvi dialect of Hindi with related dialects like Mewati and Bagri. (Census 2011) Thus, we may consider the 'Haryanvi dialect of Hindi' as a dominant language variety spoken in Haryana. This language variety has its own cultural expressions which are unique in its folklore also. In this paper, we will try to understand how a folktale in the Haryanvi language may be transmitted to others through Hindi or English. English does not carry the cultural consciousness of Haryana – on the contrary, English is alien to the Haryana's cultural traditions. Regarding Hindi, we may say that linguistically Haryanvi (with Mewati and Bagri) are languages in themselves and have their own cultural repositories. In this article, we will consider all these language varieties not as dialects but as languages which are carriers of the sociolinguistic cultural repository. When a folktale is transmitted through the dominant languages like Hindi and English in contemporary India, it may lead to loss of some cultural aspects of the original text which are mostly available in oral traditions. The moments these oral texts are written, they are presented in one of the dominant languages of the region – in the case of Haryana, it is either Hindi or English.

The status and use of Hindi and English in Haryana are different. While English remains alien to the cultural consciousness, Hindi is part of the Indian cultural scenario which includes Haryana. However, often the regional languages like those of Haryana would have words and expressions that may not be understood by the average Hindi speakers of other regions. Such regional variations mostly represent the rural and agricultural experiences of the people inhabiting a particular region. The same is true for the folktales of Haryana. In this paper, we will try to see the Hindi rendering of a Haryanvi folktale to identify the moments of cultural translations through borrowings or calque type translations retaining the original expressions or at least the structure of the original expressions of Haryanvi. As a case study, we have selected the story entitled "Tapakla" from a collection of Haryanvi folktales. [Nisha, 2021]

The first observation on the story would be regarding the title of the story. The word ‘Tapakla’ can hardly be understood by average Hindi speakers of other regions. ‘Tapakla’ is a typical Haryanvi word which signifies the ‘rain drops falling down inside the house when the roof is leaking’. This is almost an onomatopoeic word imitating the sound of the rain-water drops – such onomatopoeic words are often found in the regional varieties of Hindi as most of these varieties have emanated from the rural experiences where the word-formation happens on the basis of primary level interaction with the nature. The title ‘Tapakla’ has a sequence of sounds which imitate the sound of the falling water drops. This imitation of sound of the falling water drops gives it a ‘life’ as the sound travels like an animate being. ‘Tapakla’ thus gets an animated character in the context of the story – this goes well with the tone and tenure of the story. ‘Tapakla’ appears as a frightening character for the protagonists of the story. The story is about the psychological factor of fear as a living entity which has the capacity of changing our behaviour. The story has the elements of fables (with animal characters) and folk elements as the human characters are drawn from the traditional settings of the rural society of Haryana.

Before we try to understand the concept of cultural translations in rendering the story in Hindi or in English, let us first define the parameters by which we will understand ‘cultural translation’ in this context. The concept of ‘cultural translation’ was first given by Basnett and Lefevere. (1990) Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research defines cultural translation as “In the most general terms, cultural translation denotes a process where a cultural form (1) moves from one context (2) to another, and implies some agent (3) doing the moving.” This definition implies that a story can be considered a cultural form in Haryanvi which has moved to the other cultural context if it is rendered in Hindi or in English. The translator or the presenter (narrator of the story if it is being conveyed orally or performed in any other visual form) undertakes an exercise in cultural translation. In this process, an oral form has been transformed into a scripted one. This scripted form helps to take the story into those lands which have not received this story as a traditional cultural folk form. The person who would have scripted and presented it in print or other forms, which help to take it to other cultural contexts, becomes the agent which facilitates the movement of the original Haryanvi cultural form. Such a change naturally exhibits new forms of language usages and brings in some narrative techniques that engage the target reader in novel ways. If we analyse the language of the story, we may notice some such forms. For example, the fourth sentence of the story has a novel use in Hindi which may not be generally accepted in standard Hindi–‘vahin subah se gaayab tha’. The nasalisation of the first word in this sentence is an influence retained from the original language usages. The fourth sentence has similar flow of an oral narrative. In the fourth sentence, there are five expressions not connected by verb used in the sentence and yet this sentence has been presented as one sentence in the written script tradition of Hindi. The agent has been instrumental in moving the text from Haryanvi to Hindi – but has retained the original flow of the narrative in Hindi in such a way that it conveys the meaning but may not be acceptable according to the grammatical constructions of the sentences in Hindi. The last sentence of the first paragraph has a use ‘gahre jangal’ – this is again not a normally accepted Hindi usage. In Hindi, generally, the expression ‘ghane jangal’ is used. However, in the regional varieties of Hindi, in this context the Haryanvi variety, has such influences where we can use alternative expressions for ideas that are conveyed differently in the generally accepted forms of Hindi as per the semblance of a standard variety. Another similar use is ‘kumhaari’ for the wife of ‘kumhaar’ – this process of making feminine from the accepted form is according to some rules of gender transformation of words. The more standard variety of the feminine of ‘kumhaar’ would be ‘kumhaarin’ in relatively more standard form of Hindi.

The definition and the examples above from the Hindi rendering of the text exhibit how the cultural translations have, perhaps unconsciously, happened in the process of presenting the story in Hindi for a larger audience who may not fully understand or enjoy the Haryanvi recension of the text. Even the explanations provided by the agent in the Hindi narrative exhibit similar cultural translation processes. For

example, we may see the following, “mujhe sher se nahi tapakle (baarish me jhopri chune) ka dar lagta hai. Kahin vah na aa jaae.” In this, we may see the explanation of ‘tapakle’ in the bracket – ‘baarish me jhopri chune’. The explanatory sentence is not complete – it is just a written form of the ‘oral rendering’ of the meaning of word ‘tapakla’ in the context. Generally the explanatory notes in translation are provided in such language that conform to the accepted written form of the formal variety of the language. However, here the written text conforms more to the oral variety of the folk narration. This shows that the agents involved in the cultural transformation processes have either consciously or unconsciously been influenced by the original oral folk forms of narrating the story. And this has happened between two languages which exhibit by and large similar cultural space. Hindi and Haryanvi are not completely alien to the cultural space –they rather operate in the same cultural space in a particular context of Haryana as diglossic forms. Even though linguistically they may be considered two different languages, they have a lot in common to make them mutually intelligible in a specific linguistic and cultural situation. If we see the English translation of the selected lines for analysis, the situation might be even more complex in terms of rendering of the cultural narrative through the translation processes. We could not find any such English translation in publication of this folk story and hence we are going to give some examples from a translation done by a student under a translation experimental situation. The translated text is as follows:

“There was a potter. He lived with his wife and kids in a shabby hut. He had only one donkey. This donkey was missing since morning. This was the season of monsoon and it was already getting dusky with lightening and dark clouds looking in the sky, the rain was upon them. The potter’s wife began saying, “I haven’t seen our donkey for hours. I looked far around. Can’t find it anywhere. You search and bring him back. I hope it’s not deep in the forest.”

The potter interrupted, “The lion would eat him in the forest.”

The potter’s wife proceeded, “It’s not the lion that scares me, I’m scared of *tapaklai* (derived from the word *tapakla* which refers to leakage; *tapakla* is the personification of leakage). What if it comes.”

The above translation uses several interesting processes with respect to the cultural translation of the text. Obviously, the language English is alien to the cultural context of the original Haryanvi text. We may notice that there is formation of the feminine form of potter based on the suffixation to the masculine form of the word. And this changes the flow of the narration. Even the ‘rainy season’ has been changed to ‘monsoon’ which is more of a geographical phenomenon and less a notion of the season. So, the rendering of the natural surroundings of the culture has been transformed according to the understanding of a student who has gone through the educational curriculum of our teaching and learning systems. The ‘season’ and the ‘geographical phenomenon of monsoon’ have been at par for this translator. The oral flow of the fourth sentence in the Hindi rendering of the text (which exhibit the original Haryanvi folk versions) have been meticulously explained by an attempt to use the correct forms of the English language. Similarly, the explanation of the word ‘tapakla’ exhibit a deliberate attempt to explain the linguistic and literary processes by which the meaning has been conveyed. The subject of this experimental translation to English understands Haryanvi, Hindi and is educated in contemporary system of English where the Indian English is widely used as the medium of instruction of almost all the subjects. The English translation represents that variety of English which is generally used in education systems in Haryana. Some aspect of orality has been exhibited in this English translation also (which are generally exhibited by this variety of English users in their oral expressions). For example, “I looked far around. Can’t find it anywhere.” The second sentence here begins without any subject pronoun – this is not acceptable in standard form of English. It shows rather the native language influence of the translator. So, we may conclude on the basis of this limited study of the English translation that the culturally alien language also is taking roots in the original context of the folk

narrations of the story. The situation is getting almost 'triglossic' with Haryanvi, Hindi and English presently being used simultaneously in the same cultural space with a particular history along with a complex socio-linguistic contemporaneity.

Though we have not analysed the full text taking its parallel versions in the three languages, the study above helps us understand how the cultural turn in the use of languages in narration of the traditional wisdom, folktales, religious stories etc is shaping up in the context of particular regions of Haryana. If we consider some other varieties like Mewati, Bagri, Punjabi and Rajasthani as spoken in various parts of Haryana, and compare the same story being presented in different ways, we may understand how the cultural translation processes are shaping up the contemporary language and literary scenario of Haryana. As a conjecture for further scope of studies in this area, we may conclude that similar studies in future may be taken up in the context of other language varieties which have similar stories rendered differently. Presence of English in different contexts may make the study even more intriguing as the presence of English in the Indian context is related to several educational and social hierarchies in the Indian context, more specific to Haryana.

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Addendum:

The extract from the story that has been used for analysis:

Ek kumhaar thaa. Vah apne biwi-bachchon ke saath tooti si jhopri me rehta tha. Uske paas ek hi gadha tha. Vahin subah se gaayab tha. Saanjh hone ko aayi, barsaat ka mausam, bijli chamke, kaali ghanghor ghataayen ghanghanakar umdi aayen, baarish ab aayi hi samjho. Kumhaari kumhaar se kehne lagi, "Badi der se apna gadha nahi dikh raha. Maine baahar dur dur tak dekh liya. Kahin nahi mil raha. Tum usko dhoondh lao. Kahin gehre jangal ki taraf nahi chala gaya ho."

Kumhaar beech me hi bola, "Jangal me use sher kha jaayega."

Kumhaari kehne lagi, "Mujhe sher se nahi tapakle (baarish me jhopri chune) ka dar lagta hai. Kahin vah na aa jaae." (Page 107)

Nisha, (2021), "*Haryana ki Lokkathayen*", Prabhat Prakashan, New Delhi