

## Theorizing “Exercise Book” through the Perspectives of Three Translation Theorists- Jakobson, Derrida and Benjamin

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**Abstract:** A noble translator uncovers a text for the target language readers. An amateur translator, on the other hand, may destroy the prospect, beauty, and liveliness of the text. Therefore, while translating a text, a translator has to turn on his/her utmost possible creative aptitude along with a fanciful imagination of linguistic ability in context. The text “Exercise Book” is a short story, the translation of “Khata”, extracted from the collection of Rabindranath Tagore's short stories titled Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Short Stories, translated by William Radice. This analysis attempts to explore the emotional narrative and discovers if it interprets the subjectivity of Uma's feelings and thoughts depicted in the short story “Khata” relatively. In addition, this paper is an exertion to understand and scrutinize which category of the translation does this story follow, while translating a text whether it is a sense-for-sense translation or word-for-word translation and whether it is a literary art form or not. For theorizing the translated short story three translation theories by Jakobson, Derrida and Benjamin have been reconnoitered in the paper.

**Keywords:** Translator, creative, sense-for-sense, word-for-word, art, translation

### Introduction

Translation as a transformative genre has been enhancing the field of literature since ages and simultaneously broadening the horizon of cultures with significance in the real life settings. It opens up the doors of other cultures so that the seekers can annex knowledge from the masterpieces of every single

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language. Hence, from the religious books to world history books, Greek mythologies to modern poetry etc. all the literary works have been translated several times, by several people, for several target audiences, and are contributing to the development and advancement of human civilization in several ways. Besides, translation study is needed in all fields of education. Therefore, in a sense translation is a way to cross the boundary of a limited conscience, ideology and belief. Because of the noticeable influence of translation in education, a teaching technique, Grammar translation Method (GTM), has also been developed, which is still unavoidable even after the emergence of several new methods. As translation makes an avenue to bridge between languages and by which it ultimately bridges between thoughts, inventions and cultures; Translation has its own beauty and freedom to bloom with its artistic potential. Radice took a fresh attempt to grab the attention of the readers of West by translating Tagore's wonderful short stories. Since the task of a translator is undoubtedly very challenging, a research on translation study and an analysis of a translated text can help the uprising translators to produce successful translations. "Exercise Book" is one of the short stories among the thirty translated stories by William Radice published in the book Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Short Stories. It is a wonderful translation of Tgore's masterpiece named "Khata". "Khata" is one of those stories by Tagore which he had written in the 1890s, when he had been living in the villages of East Bengal for the sake of looking after the family property. The rural lifestyle in East Bengal, its beauty and serenity of the villages opened up his creative imagination and opened his eyes to see a new world that had been ever unexplored by him. Although Tagore's short stories are always heart melting for the readers, the question is, how much heart melting is the translated version of it? In order to explore the translated text through a critical lens, the translation theory from three articles by renewed theorists have been explored in this qualitative research paper. The articles are Jakobson's "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation", Jacques Derrida's "What Is a 'Relevant' Translation?" and Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator".

The following first chapter is a literature review of some research in translation studies, the second chapter is about the constructive arguments of the theorists of translation. The third chapter is an analysis or the theorization of the short story "Exercise Book". And the fourth chapter is a conclusion of the overall discussion of the paper followed by a last chapter of references.

### Literature Review

Critics and researchers have always been enthusiastic in scrutinizing the traits of translation.

A researcher, Rosemary Arrojo, analyzed the lens of viewing a translator's task and the developed relationship between the original piece and the translated version of it, which might have been changed by the emergence of postmodern translation theories. He talked about how the theories insightfully recognize “the translator's inescapable authorial role in the translated text”(Arrojo, 1994). In addition, he approached that “an increasing awareness of the impact of gender-related issues to the production of meaning is beginning to encourage a promising union between feminism, contemporary textual theories, and the emerging discipline of translation studies” (Arrojo, 1994). Hence, a notion of political motivation in translation has been newly introduced and the emerging issues and discipline of translation, gender, female translators feminist practice in translation, postmodernism etc. have been enlightened as well as a progressive union among them has been encouraged. Therefore, the critic found that “contemporary, postmodern theories of language are beginning to recognize the inevitable echoes of the translator's voice in the translated text.” (Arrojo, 1994, pp- 147-148). There is a similarity of my attempt of theorizing a translated text with this paper, which is that this analysis describes the relationship of the original text and the translated one. However, this paper is largely focused on the works of “female translators who share not only an awareness of their gendered voices but, mainly, of the political responsibilities associated to such voices” (Arrojo, 1994, pp- 149), whereas my paper is not concerned about gendered voice, it is only focused on a particular text of a renewed male translator named William Radice.

Two more researchers, Burbekova Saule and Nurzhanova Aisulu analyzed the integration and interactions of the national cultures in translation. According to their finding “Literary translation should be considered in the context of literary interaction as a part of multi-ethnic factor” (Saule and Aisulu, 2014, pp-119). This paper discussed modern concepts like communicative equivalence for translation accuracy, freedom of translation, issues of interlinear translation, synthesis of cultural, psychological, and linguistic factors, categorization of translation methods and establishing grounds for

translation accuracy. In addition, according to their approach "Translation Studies in Kazakhstan has had many directions and common issues of prose, poetry and drama, the specifics of the translation process, and the place of translation studies in multicultural literary process has become the subject of translation studies" (Saule and Aisulu, 2014, pp-119). In their qualitative analysis they have promoted the idea that "any text is translatable due to the general principles of translation"(Saule and Aisulu, 2014, pp-119) and here is the similarity of this paper with my analysis because I also focused in the point that how successfully Radice recreated a piece of literature following the principles of translation.

Another researcher, John Burrows compares "fifteen English versions of Juvenal's Tenth Satire"(Burrows, 2002) in his paper titled "The Englishing of Juvenal: Computational Stylistics and Translated Texts". According to Burrows, cultural differences are always the challenge of translation and often the comparison of a translated text with the original one brings out that difference in both large and small. In addition, this type of comparison also grabs the attention on connotations and untranslatability of a number of conceptual and ethnic words. This research also found "small Saussurain mismatches" (Burrows, 2002, pp-677). In addition, the paper discussed the ways of identification of a translator's "stylistic signature". In my paper I have also discussed about the cultural context of the original text by juxtaposing both the translated and original text and also I have analyzed how Radice met that challenge of cultural context in his translation of Tgore's wonderful story.

### Theoretical Framework

Roman Jakobson, one of the noteworthy Russian linguists and theorists of twentieth-century vividly described his overview of translation in the prolific essay, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation". That masterpiece was written in 1959 and published in "On Translation". Jakobson was an initiator of structural linguistics who established the idea that meaning lies with the signifier instead of the signified. In the essay, he notably disproves Bertrand Russell's idea. According to Russell, it is important to have the idea of nonlinguistic acquaintance with any word to understand the meaning of it. For example, to understand the meaning of 'Cheese' one should have a nonlinguistic familiarity with 'Cheese'.

However, Jakobson argues that to understand the meaning of a word and to understand the context in which it is used, one should have linguistic acquaintance with the word, as the linguistic verbal sign gives its meaning. For example- 'Cheese' can be defined as 'food made of pressed curds' or the word 'bachelor' can be translated as 'unmarried man'. In addition, Jakobson classifies the translation of a lingual sign in three different categories. One is intralingual translation which indicates the translation of a lingual sign of a language into another lingual sign of the same language. For example - the translation of the English word 'play' can be 'game' in the same English language. Second one is interlingual translation which means the translation of a lingual sign of a language into the lingual sign of another language. For example- the English word 'Peace' can be translated into Bangla as 'Shanti'. The third one is Intersemiotic translation which includes the translation not having the main focus of the translator on translating word for word rather the main focus kept on translating the information or message that the lingual sign produces. For example- the poem "Musée des Beaux Arts" by W. H. Auden translates into a meaningful painting.

In addition, language has to create a mental concept. When a translator translates something her/his language should turn on all the creative imagination to think of sense for sense translation because all cognitive experiences are conveyable in any existing language. Besides, he thinks where there is any lack of words or deficiency there the ways like- loan language, neologism, etc. can be applied as the solution to find hard-to-find words. Moreover, Jakobson argues that a translator should not worry about grammatical failings of the target language unless it is a poem. Since all the grammatical terms in every language are not the same. Besides, the Russian language has gender pronouns but in Bangla, there is no gender pronoun. Even Russian dates are divided gender-wise as Monday is masculine, Wednesday is feminine and so on. Hence, a translator may find much difficulty. However, a translator should not worry about it, rather should only be concerned about his own language. Then he points out that language differs in what it must convey not in what it may convey and the verb of the source language is very important in the case of translation. So, the translator should look for the verb first and it will say what to do and what not to.

Finally, he said that poetry is untranslatable. As simile, metaphor etc. are difficult to translate and also grammatical issues make it difficult. So, a translator may make a creative transposition of a poem but it is not possible to translate poetry.

Prominent French philosopher, Jacques Derrida is well known for his theory of deconstruction. "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?" is a text which deals with his deconstruction theory. It is documented from a lecture which he delivered in a French literary translation institute, Assises de la Traduction Littéraire à Arles in 1998. This lecture brought about a revolution and this text is considered as an instrumental and influential text in the realm of translation study. Derrida is known as a player who played with words. In the text he produced the idea that a single word can have multiple meanings determined by various cultural, political and linguistic contexts instead of having any innately attached meaning. According to him, choice underlies in terms of relevance. Thus, one has to choose which meaning is relevant. In addition, a relevant translation means the translation that seems well suited, appropriate, justified, welcomed and coming at the exact time when one expects it. From this masterpiece of Derrida, I found the most interesting aspect is that, according to him, translation stands in between two contrasted possibilities of being possible and impossible. In order to make it understandable he discussed two principles of economy. One is law of property. Here property means something that is proper and that is appropriate. When one travels from a language to another language, s/he should keep concentration on which path is the best one to reach the goal of translation. The goal obviously is to make it most relevant to the source text. He defined translation as an ongoing process so relevance depends on the loss the translation has gone through, the travel that the language has taken, the interconnection of meanings, on the process of transmutation etc. In addition, relevance means what is closest to the source text. So, the relevance somehow depends on Derrida's "Différance", a pun of "difference" and "deferment". Since, where a translator should bring difference according to the context and where s/he should not, all these things simultaneously makes a translation relevant. The second principle is law of quantity. Quantity means it has to be calculable. Here he talked about count and account. According to him, whatever a translator says in translation, s/he has to be accountable for that. And at the same time s/he has to count the quantities. For example- if s/he translates a text of ten pages into one page,

s/he has to be accountable for what s/he does. Because it is impossible to keep all the quantities and shorten the large number of pages. So, here comes the questions of impossibility. Thus, he said a text is as much as translatable as it is untranslatable. Hence, a translator always goes through the tension of whether the translation is correct or it could be more appropriate. Hence, a text can be translated thousands of times and because of this untranslatability there is no absolute translation of a text. Even the religious holy books like the Holy Quran, Bible etc. cannot be absolutely translated. For example of both laws - a translator cannot transfer a prose into a verse and cannot make an epic a short story. In addition, in translating a sonnet s/he has to maintain the stanza divisions like octet and sestet as well as cannot make it less than fourteen lines or more than that. Because the life of a poem lies in its rhymes, so changing rhymes means killing the poem which is violence of breaking laws of property and of quantity.

Benjamin's essay "The Task of the Translator" is an exertion to think of a translated work as an art. An art form that is concerned with "what happens when one language passes into another" (Nabugodi,2019). Hence, as poetry is an artistic work in the same way translation is also an artistic literary work instead of a secondary formation of a writing. According to him, appreciating an art work does not mean or is not limited within interpreting the inner content to come up with a moral lesson. In addition, "Translation is a mode. To comprehend it as mode one must go back to the original, for that contains the law governing the translation: its translatability" (Benjamin). So the translated work may have an echo of the real piece of work. Besides, an artwork is primarily not meant for communication so the main target of a translation is not communication only. Even "No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the audience" (Benjamin) so no translation is for the reader's sake only. While every form of artwork has its individual and unique meaning for the individual enjoying it, the intention of translation is also not limited to admiration, instruction, information or delight to the reader. Therefore, according to him a translator's task is to "ultimately serve the purpose of expressing the innermost relationship of languages to one another" (Bullock, 2004, p.255).

In a nutshell, translation is not absolute work as there are some existing gaps in different languages that translation cannot recover. However, according to

Jakobson a common ground or an accepted way is always to be found or established if the aim is to be understood and understand. Whereas, the fun of reading Derrida is that he constantly makes a reader think about all the endless infinite possibilities of infinity. According to him, a relevant translation should be aimed at giving the most appropriate meaning of a text. However, it can never give the final meaning, since the idea of independent meaning of a word is impossible. Eventually Benjamin's piece of theory comes up with the idea that translation is a literary art form having an unique artistic value and meaning of its own.

#### Theorizing "Exercise Book"

Tagore's opened floodgate of creativity is noticed mostly in the realms of poems and short stories. He was the foremost writer in India, who introduced the genre of short story as a literary art form with artistic perfection. Moreover, "It is interesting to note that nobody before Tagore had written about the ordinary men and women, especially about the poor and the downtrodden with such psychological depth in Indian literature" (Chakravarty, 1998, p.46). As if he felt every single moment of the humble and struggling village life more than his urban rich life and elite existence. Since Bangla prose was not much celebrated and developed in the 1890s, he carved out his creative path for this art form and adopted an adequate language from the very known ordinary people which ensured the artistic success of the literary works. In addition, Tagore beautifully told in a talk with writer and critic Buddhadeva Bose in May 1941, "I observed the wonderful ways of life of Bengal's villages...!wrote from what I saw, what I felt in my heart --- my direct experience...Those who say my stories are fanciful are wrong" (Radice, 2005, p.13). Thus, one can feel the pulse, the emotions and the living souls of the region of Bengal in the pages of Golpoguccho. Therefore, translating such short stories is indeed a challenge for any translator.

Radice took that challenge to introduce these beautiful works of Bangla literature to the readers of world literature. As Tagores' short stories prominently visualize an intense and deep thought in a very miniature setting, Radice had to do almost the same while translating the story. "What distinguishes his translations from those of his predecessors is his 'imaginative and intuitive' approach"(Dasgupta,2014, p.1). In addition, Radice followed



Tagore's strategy of translation which he shared with Rothenstein through a letter in 1915, Tagore wrote, "Macmillans are urging me to send them some translations of my stories but I am hesitating for the reason that the beauty of the originals can hardly be preserved in translation. They require rewriting in English, not translating" (Lago, 1973, p.216). Here Tagore emphasized on a sense for sense approach and creative re-creation of the original story instead of mere word for word translation. Indeed, in his translated story, "Exercise Book" Radice came up with the same strategy like Tagore and said, "In translating his prose, the challenge is no less great" (Radice, 2005, p.232).

The story revolves around the attachment of a little girl with her exercise book which she keeps with her for years and takes with her to the in-laws house. Unfortunately, no one from her in-laws appreciated her writing habit and snatched the exercise book. While analyzing "Exercise Book", some ideas of the noteworthy theorist, Jakobson, appear very much relevant and significant. Jakobson initiated the idea that meaning lies with the signifier instead of the signified. He emphasized on having linguistic acquaintance with the word to understand the meaning of that word and to understand the context in which it is used. That idea is noticed in "Exercise Book", since Radice used an alphabetical glossary of Bangla words in his book which helps the target language readers to be acquainted with the linguistic appearance of unknown Bangla words. Although it is almost impossible to ignore the cultural gap, the alphabetical glossary makes the context easier to understand for the readers. According to Jakobson's classification of translation, this is an interlingual translation in the sense that it is translated from one linguistic sign to another linguistic sign. However, it can be considered as an intersemiotic translation too, since it is not a mere literal translation, rather it visualizes maybe not the whole like the original piece but a number of aspects of the culture of East Bengal to make a sense among the readers through the "Introduction" part which vividly describes the picture of Bengal and the background of the stories. In addition, Jakobson argued that "in terms of cognitive function, language is minimally dependent on the grammatical pattern" (1959, p.237) and according to his idea only while translating a poem the translator should maintain grammatical structure and rhyme scheme; Otherwise in rest of the case the translator shouldn't be too much conscious about the grammatical rules. In his translation, Radice translated some poetic lines both maintaining grammar and rhyme, such as he translated the lines,

"*Poralekha kore je  
Gari ghora chore she*" (Tagore, 1926, p.131)

As-

"He who learns to write  
Drives a horse and cart" (Radice, 2005, p.173)

Also he translate the poetic line

"*Jol pore, pata nore*" (Tagore, 1926, p.131)

As- "Rain patters, leaves flutter" (Radice, 2005, p.173)

Prominent French philosopher, Jacques Derrida is well known for his theory of deconstruction. "Exercise Book" can be analyzed through the shades of Derrida's deconstructionist overview. Derrida played with words. He produced the idea that a single word can have multiple meanings determined by various contexts instead of having any innately attached meaning. In addition, a relevant translation means the translation that seems well suited, appropriate and justified. That same overview is seen in "Exercise Book", since Radice translated the term "Horidasher Guptokotha"(Tagore, 1926, p.131) as "The secret adventure of Haridash" (Radice, 2005, p.173). Although, the word "guptokotha" means "secret talk", he translated it as "secret adventure" to make it more relevant to the context. In addition, Derrida introduced 'law of property' and 'law of quantity'. Radice seems to follow both the laws, since he neither made the story shorter by excluding any important point nor made it broader by adding unnecessary words. In addition, he did not kill the soul of the story by too much self-interference, rather the translation seems lively because of his well adorned word collection for translating the true sense of it. Then comes the questions of impossibility as Derrida believed that a text is as much as untranslatable as it is translatable. Although Radice did a great work however, because of this untranslatability of every text, before Radice others also translated the short stories of Tagore and still people are translating after Radice. It is only because of that untranslatability and the search for a more relevant, more appropriate translation.

Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator" attempted to introduce translation as an art form. Since poems are not intended for the readers, translations should not be intended for the readers. According to him, art is meaningful for the individual enjoying it. In addition, the primary intention of art is not to instruct, inform or not even delight the audience.

“Exercise Book” makes a reader highly enjoy the story and feel the agony of Uma for losing her childhood through such translated lines like- "Dada, I beg you, take me home again just once- I promise not to annoy you" (Radice, 2005, p.176), which touches a reader without any doubt no less than an art work. Although it is impossible to ignore the gap between the emotions of the people who belong to two different cultures and beliefs, yet as a translator Radice portrayed the emotional attachment of the original text much masterly. Besides, here Radice could translate the word "Dada" as "brother" but he did not change it in order to keep the soul of the art alive. Because "brother" doesn't hold the same profoundness of attachment between siblings that the word "Dada" possesses.

Benjamin believed that the job of a successful translator is to carefully search for the core or soul of an original piece of work and try to produce a reverberation or echo of it. He not only emphasized on taking into account the literal meaning along with the changes with the passage of time but also the connotative meanings attached with the words. Radice mentioned about the different aspects of Bengal in the “Introduction” by divisions like sthale ( on land), jal pothe (by water), ghate (at the ghat), he introduced the readers with the rivers and glossary of Bangla words and a chronology of time which ultimately help a reader to understand the place as well as the time period of the story and the connotations of each word. Thus, it is clear that Radice searched for the core of the story for the postmodern Western readers.

According to Benjamin "all great texts contain their potential translation between the lines". Here he wanted to mention the emotions and the feel of a text which do not remain in the lines but somewhere in between the lines. That emotion of Uma and her agony of losing the exercise book can be felt in the translation of Radice in between the lines like- "Pyarimohan picked up the exercise-book and loudly read out from her childish writings. As she listened, Uma tried to clutch the nethermost depths of the earth. The other girls collapsed into peals of laughter. Uma never got the exercise- book back again." (Radice, 2005, p.178). Although Radice had not directly mentioned in the translated story that Uma had been totally broken after losing her exercise book, these lines convey the message of Uma's emotional disruption to the readers, as if the emotion is hidden in between the lines of the story. Thus, as a good translator, instead of writing directly about the agony, Radice wrote

something which made the readers visualize the mental trauma of Uma in that very moment. So there is no doubt that Radice fulfilled his task of a translator by searching for the life of the story, since his academic translation keeps everything needed to understand the sense of the source story.

### Conclusion

William Radice tried to bring out the inner soul of the source book "khata" in his translation "Exercise Book" as much as possible since it is the ultimate goal of a translator. Even though it is difficult to feel and portray the sense of individual sensitivity, the feeling of privacy, and public insult in respect of the sociocultural gap between the contexts of the writer and the translator. However, all the holistic views, perspectives, efforts, and endeavors made the translation a timeless creation of aesthetic art. In addition, it fulfills many diversified features of the theories of Jacques Derrida, Roman Jakobson, and Walter Benjamin. Besides, it conveys an appreciable meaning of the source story in a relevant way. Eventually, it is worthy to conclude by saying that this translation of Tagore's masterpiece is indeed an artwork having its individual ability to touch the hearts of the readers and it is a valuable contribution to treasure in the realm of translation studies.

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