

Theoretical Perspectives of Postcolonial Translation: An Intensive Reading of a Bangla Translation of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

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Abstract

'Translation Studies' and 'Border Crossings' are interrelated. Literature needs to be translated to reach other parts of the world crossing the borders with its cultural and social norms and values. Cross-border connection is made through the translation of literary masterpieces of a culture. In an unknown language, a writer far away from society comes closer through translation. It carries the socio-economic world from one country to another, thus connecting mankind. A common understanding and familiarity are found when a text of an once colonized area is translated into the language of another place that shares the same experience of colonial rule. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is translated into many languages of the world, including Bangla. The present study will explore the recent translation of the African text in Bangla by Dr. Elham Hossain, with the concerns of awareness of culture and cross-border issues of language and culture. This paper also intends to focus on transnational aspects of Postcolonial Transnational theory. In the translation of a postcolonial text by a postcolonial translator, the subaltern talks to the subaltern despite cultural differences and thus the translation becomes transnational. The paper will explore the contextual translation of Achebe's widely known novel and its linguistic transfer of the culture with references to the translation.

Keywords: Border, Culture, Postcolonialism, Postcolonial Translation Theory, Transnational

1. Introduction

The barriers of borders, both cultural and linguistic, can be crossed through translation. It connects East to East, East to West – all over the world. Translation makes a bridge between two cultures. Writing and translating are both creative works. Translation is no more a mere linguistic transfer in the postcolonial world. It becomes a cultural interpretation. Chinua Achebe's seminal fiction *Things Fall Apart* is itself an influential postcolonial work. Translation of this non-Western text written in English, in Bangla is challenging. Dr. Elham Hossain has taken the initiative. This text is translated into Bangla by a few other translators, too. Dr. Hossain translated *Things Fall Apart* as *Shobkichu Vengechure Jay* (সবকিছু ভেঙ্গেচুরে যায়) in 2021. Dr. Hossain's Doctoral dissertation was on the novels of Chinua Achebe. His research and interest in Achebe and African literature helped him translate this African text into Bangla. His comment on Achebe in his essay

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'Chinua Achebe: An Exponent of a 'Write Back' Narrative' clarifies the prospects of the postcolonial writers –

Chinua Achebe, like many of such postcolonial writers, writes back the Western Hegemony of epistemology. (Hossain, 2022b, p. 150)

Achebe wrote this novel in a period of transition from colonial clutch to freedom in his nation, Nigeria in 1958 and it is the product of his reaction to the colonial hegemony in Africa - Achebe's novels emerge as his response to the colonial project of dehumanizing local Culture. (Hossain, 2022b, p. 154)

Dr. Hossain also finds that,

His writings reveal the wealth of African culture. Actually, Achebe's writing is cast against the Western platitude about the Africans. His portrayal of African life and culture is an attempt to come out of the ghetto existence imposed upon the Africans by the Europeans. (Hossain, 2022b, p. 156)

In the essay titled "Chinua Achebe's English: An Afrocentric Orientation of a European Language", Dr. Hossain says,

Whatever Achebe has written in English is not English Literature, but African Literature owing to its content and context. (Hossain, 2022b, p. 120)

In a conference of 'A Conference of African Writer's of English Expression' at Makerere University in 1962, Achebe himself says –

...if literature is written in a tribal language, it may be called tribal literature, not African literature as Africa is an entity of varieties of tribes and tribal languages. (Hossain, 2022b, p. 125)

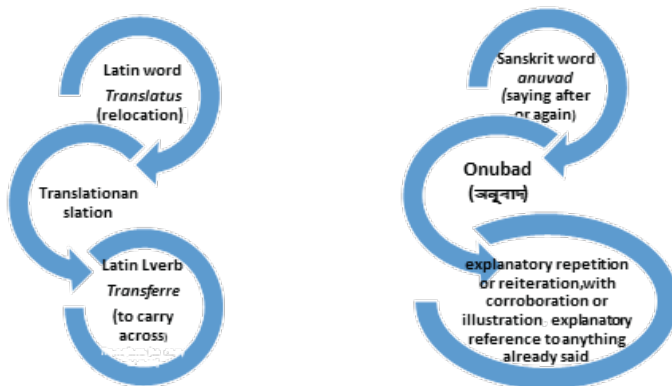
The Bangla translation of this African text is easily understood by the target audience which is readers from Bangladesh, not because of this same experience of colonialism and Mr. Hossain translates the African world, not the English world. So, the readers get acquainted with a different culture irrespective of cultural and geographical distance. When we read the Bangla translation, we find a group of people like us who were being dominated, not dominators. Thus, the translation becomes important from a postcolonial perspective. Here power dynamics is not an issue. Moreover, Achebe in the source text uses English as a globalized language, not as a language of colonizers. In postcolonialism, English is a language that is used, shared, and enjoyed by everyone from all corners of the world. Achebe's use of English is that he uses English, not in its original syntax, but in Igbo syntax. (Hossain, 2022b, p. 121). He presents the cultural heritage of his community by penetrating Igbo words, idioms and phrases, myths and proverbs. As Dr. Hossain comments,

It is speciality of his English. Also, he seems to experiment with English language in the syntax of Igbo language and thus Africanizes the colonizer's language. Achebe attempts to localizing English language by infusing a good number of pidgins into it. (Hossain, 2022b, p. 123)

The writer and translator both are from the same historical background of being exploited nations. Such translations of non-Western fiction in other languages open a new dimension of translation studies.

2. Translation and Translation Studies

Translation is transferring or rewriting a text from one language to another. It is a very intimate act of reading. Many classical works of world literature are translated from one language to another. We learn about the writings of Homer, Virgil, Leo Tolstoy, and many other writers' writing from their languages to English and major English writings of the West in our local languages. The origin of the English word 'translation' is the Latin word 'translatius' and the Latin verb 'transferre' which means 'relocation' and 'to carry across' consecutively. In Bangla translation means 'onubad' (অনুবাদ). This word comes from Sanskrit 'anuvad' which means 'saying after or again'. It also means an illustrative explanation and repetition or reference to anything already said.



The plot of Things Fall Apart revolves around the pathetic downfall of a strong African man, Okonkwo. This novel's subject matter is his belief, love for his tradition and country, his mistakes and concepts of masculinity, and his final failure to face the colonial regime. His relationship with his family, friends, relatives, and the community are narrated here in connection to the rituals, traditions and history, and nature of Nigeria, in a broader sense, Africa. The very essence of native people and their lives is reflected here. The translation of Dr, Elham Hossain brings the

traditional life of Igbo people with its legacy and drawbacks closer to the Bengali readers with the same affinity of once being colonized.

3. Postcolonial Translation Studies

Postcolonial translation studies demand to clarify the concept of postcolonialism be clarified first. According to Bill Ashcroft,

The term has subsequently been widely used to signify the political, linguistic and cultural experience of societies that were former European colonies. (Ashcroft et al., 2007. p. 168)

After the colonial period is over the effect and impact of colonial rule on the life and culture of the former European colonies are examined and explored in postcolonial literature. Postcolonialism is a discipline that engages us with the imperialistic impact of Europe on the rest of the world. -... these disciplines continue to engage with the impact of European imperialism upon world societies. (Ashcroft et al., 2007. p. 169)

In the history of Translation Studies, it is found that the Colonizer's ideology of superiority also exists in the translation of the text. They used to consider their work (both fictional and nonfictional) as 'original'; thus, 'others' are their copy if they read it or accept it as the original. Thus translation of their writings is the way of making a 'civilized' world through their ideology. In the postcolonial translation theory, this so called originality is challenged and the nonwestern writings in English are considered as 'original' too but the translations of those writings are not mere copies. They are called transformation or transcreation or rewriting and sometimes new writing too.

4. Postcolonial Translation Critic

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a major postcolonial translation critic opines in her book *The Politics of Translation* -

The politics of the translation of the culture of imperialism by the colonial subject has changed noticeably. (Spivak, 2004, p. 402)

In an intimate act like translation, reading is very important. Translator's understanding of the language and situation of the writer whose text is going to be translated matters. Translator's intimate reading helps him to respond to the language the most to translate it. In postcolonial translation, imperial or colonial thought of the politics of language and translation is changing because the translators are considering their task as creative work, not a political one. As Spivak

says – We have to turn the other into something like the self in order to be ethical. To surrender in translation is more erotic than ethical. (Spivak, 2004, p. 400)

Now, Dr. Hossain gets two benefits here in translating Achebe's novel. He does not need to 'turn' to 'other' as Bangla (target language) is his mother tongue and being a part of the colonial experience the source text speaks to him as it comes from the same experience of colonial rule. As a bilingual translator of postcolonial time, he can take advantage to convince his target audience to accept the translation in his native language and make it more familiar to them. Translating an English fiction written by an English writer and translating a non-English writer's English fiction are different. Ethnocentricity is an issue here -

If we were thinking of translating Marianne Moore or Emily Dickinson, the standard for the translator could not be "anyone who can conduct a conversation in the language of the original (in this case English)". When applied to a Third World language, the position is inherently ethnocentric. (Spivak, 2004, p. 404)

The post-colonialism always emphasizes identity by challenging the impact of Western cultural colonialism. So, in the translation, subject-object connection is important to feature hybridity. Wenhua Hu and Shi Zhenmei refers Homi K Bhaba, Edward Said and Spivak regarding their contribution in the field of Postcolonialism in their article "A Postcolonial Perspective on the Cultural Translation Studies".

Its important symbol is the Said's Orientalism, which is called "the creation of the postcolonial areas" by Spivak. And then through post-colonialism masters including Said, Spivak and BhaBha's motivation, the post-colonialism has the present glory. (Hu, 2015, p. 582)

In Postcolonialism, translation is an intercultural transfer. The creativity of both the writer and the translator is important. The linguistic and cultural boundaries are crossed by the translator and it becomes a metatext. Maria Tymoczko says in her essay 'Post-colonial Writing and Literary Translation',

The task of the interlingual translator has much in common with the task of the post-colonial writer; where one has a text, however, the other has the metatext of culture itself. (Bassnett, 2002, p. 21)

Dr. Hossain's translation of *Things Fall Apart* is also a part of the process of intercultural transfer in postcolonial translation studies. He familiarizes the unfamiliar words, myths, and culture in a postcolonial text from Nigeria and their custom through his translation.

Another postcolonial Translation critic Tejaswini Niranjana focuses on the

asymmetrical relationship between power and translation in the colonial context in her book *Siting Translation: History, Post-structuralism, and the Colonial Context*. She connects Post-Structuralism to Postcolonial Translation theory too. In Post-Structuralism, past or history is important. Analysing a concept's history is necessary for a better understanding. Differences between past and present interpretations of any concept can exist. It can be possible to look at the same idea from entirely different points of view. Translation or Translation Studies in colonial period and postcolonial appear with diverse thought. It raises questions about the colonizer's view of translation. Niranjana opines,

The strategies of containment initiated by translation are therefore deployed across a range of discourses, allowing us to name translation as a significant technology of colonial domination. (Niranjana, 1992, p. 21)

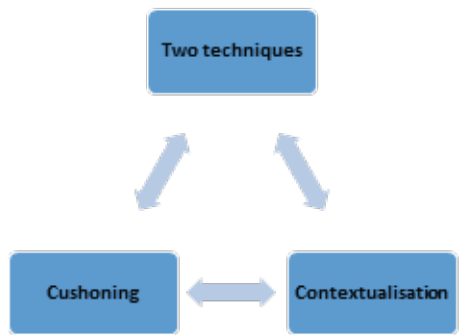
She says in another place,

Colonial society presents a good example of workings of a hegemonic culture. The discourse of education, theology, historiography, philosophy and literary translation inform the hegemonic apparatuses that belong to the ideological structure of colonial rule. (Niranjana, 1992, p. 33)

The historiocity helps to bring a change of idea and this notion is very significant in postcolonial translation study. The ideological structure of the colonizers is not responding here. Dr. Elham Hossain translates Achebe, who challenges the language of colonizers by creolizing it by infusing Igbo words and phrases in it. Thus the source text itself is free from colonial hegemony, and so is the translation.

5. Postcolonial Translation Techniques –

Postcolonial Translation theorists suggest various kinds of techniques. In the translation of Dr. Hossain two techniques, suggested by Chantal Zabus, a professor of English Literature, Postcolonial and Women's Studies at the University of Paris are reflected. She recommends 'cushioning' and 'contextualisation', two African strategies. In 'cushioning' the source text is elaborated with explanatory words or phrases. In 'contextualisation', the translator creates a context for the target audience, unfamiliar with the African phrases and words for a significant functioning of those to them.



Two techniques suggested by Chantal Zabus (Pun, 2018, slide 7)

Observation of some of the lines from both the texts (ST and TT) makes it clear that Dr. Hossain applies both the techniques of ‘cushoning’ and ‘contextualisation’ in his Shobkichu Vengechure Jay (সবকিছু ভেঙ্গেচুরে যায়) -

Things Fall Apart and Shobkichu Vengechure Jay (সবকিছু ভেঙ্গেচুরে যায়) –

<i>Things Fall Apart</i>	সবকিছু ভেঙ্গেচুরে যায়
The Commissioner did not understand what Obierika meant when he said, ‘Perhaps your men will help us.’ One of the most infuriating habits of these people was their love of superfluous words, he thought.	কমিশনার বুঝতে পারলেন না, ওবিয়েরিকা আসলে কি বোঝাতে চাচ্ছে। বিশেষ করে, “সম্ভবত আপনার লোকেরা আমাদের সাহায্য করতে পারবেন” - এই কথার তিনি মর্মোদ্ধার করতে পারলেন না। ভাবলেন, এই লোকদের একটা বড় দোষ হলো - এরা অপ্রয়োজনীয় শব্দ ব্যবহারে গুস্তাদ।
Each of the nine <i>egwuguu</i> represented a village of the clan. Their leader was called Evil Forest.	প্রতিটি ইগুইগু গ্রামের এক একটি গোত্রের প্রতিনিধিত্ব করে। এদেও দলপতিকে বলা হয় এভিল ফরেস্ট বা অশুভ বন।
It is not bravery when a man fights with a woman.	নারীকে প্রহার করা সাহসিকতা নয়।
He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: <i>The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger</i> .	অনেক ভেবেচিন্তে তিনি তাঁর বইয়ের শিরোনাম ঠিক করেছেন: নাইজেরিয়ার নিম্নাঞ্চলের আদিম গোত্রের মানুষদের সভ্যকরণ।

Table: 1

In his translation, he added annotation of the pidgin frequently used by Achebe in the source text with Bangla meaning at the end of the book for a better understanding. Dr. Hossain has not only provided the meanings but also added

explanatory elaboration of those creolized words (pidgin), like he describes 'Foo foo' as a special dish made of yam, 'Chi' as the meaning in Igbo as dawn and the Igbo belief of the souls of their ancestors which can be both good and bad depending on whose soul it is, 'Eke day' as the four days week of Igbo clan where the days are Eke, Oye, Afo and Nkwo' etc.

In creating a context (contextualisation), Dr. Hossain also keeps the target audience and their understanding in his mind. The above table shows some of the examples from the texts. He translates 'তিনি মর্মেদ্বার করতে পারলেন না' for 'he thought' so that his readers can easily feel the reaction or failure of the Commissioner to understand the natives for the gap of communication between the colonizers and colonized.

6. Translation to Transnational

Interaction of word to words, transmutation of identity, in translation, a text is recomposed to connect humanity through a reevaluation of people's language. Postcolonial Translation Studies are gradually decolonizing the colonial concept of translation. Dr. Elham Hossain's translation of Achebe's text is an example that how translation in the postcolonial age is connecting non-Western cultures through the hybridity of language and culture. Power between different languages is getting balanced now and lessening Western philosophy's colonial domination. Octavio Paz claims that translation is the principal means we have of understanding the world we live in.

The world of the 21st century is a world where people are getting closer through translation. They are getting familiar with, sharing their feelings, and finding the reflection of their own images in the writing of a writer who is not from their same linguistic background. Interlingualism of translation in postcolonial studies inspires the exploration of various cultures of different territories of the world in a more minute way and thus helps interested readers and academics to study Postcolonialism in a better way. Translation is not only about language but also about power dynamics. G. Spivak talks about the crucial role of translation – it resists colonial power dynamics. It is a multidisciplinary field – scholars linked postcolonial translation theory to issues like gender, race, and class from the late 20th century. It is deeply connected to power, culture, and identity.

Equivalence isn't much easier, as two languages may have opposite meanings in many words or terms. (Cultural) Connotations are an issue for translation. Connotations and Metonyms make the translation easier to the target audience. Bangla translation makes the belief of the Igbo people easier. In Bengali

culture, the mother's position is supreme irrespective of religion and class. When we read the superior feelings of that Igbo clan about mother in Bangla translation, it touches us, connects us, and makes us feel that we are part same human clan.

In Postcolonial translation studies, power dynamics are in emphasis. Colonizers used to believe their ideology, philosophy, their culture, literature, habits, values of life, and customs as 'original' and expected the rest of the world, especially non-Western area people, to merely 'copy' them to become 'civilized', 'modern', and 'updated'. Their attitude to look to the people of colonized areas as 'others' is carried in their translation theories too. Their literary work is original and carries their cultural hegemony. Their English writings to be translated to other languages or literary works of other languages should be in English for international recognition. Now this is creating various new forms of colonialism – cultural, intellectual, economic, social, and very obviously cultural-political.

A common place of understanding and feelings between Africa and Bangladesh is the readers' interest in history and politics. The natives' response to the colonial hegemony was more or less very similar in both places. Thus translation paves the way for transnationalism.

7. Conclusion

Three elements of translation are, Source, the Translator, and the Target (reader), and the purpose of translation is the cultural connection between both ST and TT. Translation is a powerful instrument to understand language and culture by crossing boundaries. Dr. Elham Hossain's translation of *Things Fall Apart* serves the purpose of translation. Translation Studies are interrelated to cross-border considerations. Cross-border connection means crossing borders to familiarize oneself with distant cultures and norms. It carries socioeconomic aspects, traditions, and ideologies from one place to another, thus connecting mankind.

The translator's intimacy with the text is reflected in the translation here. We find it in Dr. Hossain's translation. Achebe's protagonist, Okonkwo, becomes one of us, and Bengali readers can relate to his tragedy. A common empathetic familiarity is found for the same experience of colonial rule. In this translation, both the writer and translator are concerned and aware of their cultures. In Linguistic transfer by Dr. Elham Hossain of a postcolonial text, the subaltern speaks to a subaltern, and translation becomes transnational.

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