

CHALLENGES OF TRANSLATING POETRY: THE FILIPINO TRANSLATION OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S SONNET 18

KAY TEPAIT JUANILLO

Department of Liberal Arts and Behavioral Sciences,
Visayas State University
kayjuanillo@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Translation plays an important role in understanding different culture and societies. Among the various kinds of translation, many scholars have debated the difficulty even impossibility of literary translation, especially Poetry. Translation of poetry requires the preservation of the specific aesthetic and expressive value when the work is transferred from the source language to the target language, which may be changed or altered after translating the work. This study is based on translation theory, which recognizes the idea that different languages encode meaning in differing forms. This study also shows the complications in translating poetry as compared to other literary works like prose. The aim of this research is to discuss the different linguistic, cultural, and aesthetic issues in translating poetry specifically, in the Filipino translation of William Shakespeare's Sonnet 18. This study is significant as it encourages experimental strategies that can show the uniqueness of translation as a linguistic and cultural practice. As a result of this study, it can be concluded that the task of the translator is not to express what is to be conveyed but to find the intended effect upon the language into which she/he is translating in a way that leads to produce the echo of the original, even though it is impossible to be able to create a replica of the original text.

Keywords: *Filipino translation, sonnet 18, source language, target language, translation*

Introduction

Translation plays an important role in understanding different culture and societies. This is an old communication method used between different countries throughout the world. Translation is defined as the transfer of ideas from one language into another language. It is a highly complicated process that is considered to be one of the essential, fundamental, and adequate ways in transferring culture. Since not everyone speaks the same language, translation has been a key to effective, efficient, and empathetic communication between languages and cultures. Individuals translate one text to another not only to spread information, knowledge, and ideas but also to express their culture, society, and beliefs which is critical for people to know different works and ideas that can expand their knowledge.

However, Sapir (1956) stated that no two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct world, and not merely the same world with different labels attached. The translators, therefore has to reproduce in another language what the original author previously expressed in his native language, with the intention of making it accessible to a greater number of people. Since translating language/text requires dealing with the linguistic and cultural differences, Hatab (2015) indicated that translators also have to take the sociolinguistic aspects of language such as politeness, terms of address, as well as aspects related to the discourse into consideration, and understand how these concepts are manifested in each culture for

the translator to be able to convey the work in the best possible manner.

Among the various kinds of translation, many scholars have debated the difficulty even impossibility of literary translation, especially Poetry. According to Jakobson, poetry is claimed to be untranslatable because the form of words in verse contributes to the construction of the meaning in the text. Thus, translation of poetry requires the preservation of the specific aesthetic and expressive value when the work is transferred from the source language to the target language, which may be changed or altered after translating the work.

Keeping the poem's form and meaning is therefore one of the most common problems encountered in translating poetry. Additionally, since Literature is viewed as a cultural portrait of nations and communities, it is a great challenge for the translator to keep both the aesthetic and cultural components of the source text, and the culture of the target reader. Thus, those who will attempt to translate poetry must culturally and politically identify him/herself with the original poet while making sure that he/she is sensitive and fluent with the source and target language, as well as their poetic traditions as not to sacrifice the form for the meaning or vice versa.

For the past years, different scholars have studied the difficulties of translating poetry. A paper by Shaheen Sara (2018) entitled *Politics and Poetics in Translation of the Classic* seeks to uncover the politics surrounding the selection and elimination in the process of translation by presenting instances of the translation of classical masterpieces supported by contemporary postulations. According to Sara, there are multiple manners in which a translation can be approached but none provide a universal model or blueprint for translation as it is not free from the translator's ideology and intervention. Besides cultural appropriation and maintaining equivalences (grammar, style, vocabulary), untranslatability is one of the major challenges for the translators of ancient epic romances such as the Ramayana, the Iliad or the Dastan-e Amir Hamza. Despite the sincere efforts of the

translator, the politics of censorship, bowdlerization, publishers and power structures are major impediments of translation and discourses. Therefore, translation becomes an incomplete simulacrum of the original text.

Another research paper by Ildiko Pusztai-Varga (2016) analyzed the Hungarian and English target language translation of contemporary Finnish poems. The translation solutions of culturally-bound lexical elements were compared in both Finnish-Hungarian and Finish-English translation directions. The results of the study show that English-language translators of contemporary Finnish poems more frequently use translation solutions which are less creative and do not stray far from the original source language text. Hungarian translators, on the other hand are more courageous in deviating from the source text and adapting their translations to the target language.

Additionally, a paper by Yohanes Maria Restu Dian Raharjo (2018), analyzed the translation of Indonesian poem entitled *Aku* by Chairil Anwar, which was translated by Burton Raffel. Based on the analysis, it was found that the works of dynamics and pragmatics equivalence are needed in translating the poem because they can accommodate flexible relationship between elements of the Source Language and Target Language such as social and cultural concepts conveyed or depicted by the poem.

From the related literature mentioned, there are different research regarding the translation of poems from one language to another, however very few research studies the issues concerning the translation of poems from English to Filipino. Therefore, this study analyses the texts from the Filipino translations of William Shakespeare's Sonnet 18. This study will be useful in understanding the issues and challenges that occur in the process of translation, and how one's culture and language can affect the form and meaning of a translated work. Likewise, this study can be used by language and literature teachers as a basis in the discussion of translation, its theory and how it is used in practice. More specifically, this research will discuss the following (1) linguistic and

cultural issues in translating poetry, (2) aesthetic issues in translating poetry, and (3) the issues with the Filipino translations of William Shakespeare's Sonnet 18.

METHOD

This research is based on the translation theory which recognizes the idea that different languages encode meaning in differing forms, yet guides the translators to find appropriate ways of preserving meaning, while using the most appropriate forms of each language (Vallejo, N.D.) In the theory of translation, according to Larson (1984), the translator discovers the meaning behind the forms in the source language and does his/her best to produce the same meaning in the target language, using the forms and structures of the target language. Consequently, what is supposed to change is the form and the code and what should remain unchanged is the meaning and the message.

This study is a textual analysis which employs to analyze words and phrases to identify the issues occurring in translating poetry. This analyzes the Filipino translations of William Shakespeare's Sonnet 18 by comparing it to its source language. In conducting the research, the researcher used descriptive qualitative design which involves the collection of data in order to answer the concerning current status of the object of the study and the research question. The data source of this research is William Shakespeare's Sonnet 18 which is one of the most translated poems of William Shakespeare which was published in 1609; and is considered as one of his best-known sonnets out of the 154 sonnets written. Sonnet 18 is written in a typical Shakespearean sonnet form, having 14 lines of iambic pentameter, which contains three quatrains and one couplet; it also has the characteristic rhyme scheme of abab cdcd efef gg. The poem reflects the rhetorical tradition of an Italian or Petrarchan sonnet. Petrarchan sonnets typically discussed the love and beauty of a beloved, often an unattainable love, but not always. It also contains a volta, or shift in the poem's subject matter, beginning with the third quatrain.

As the only instrument for this research, the researcher needs to consider

the pertinent features of the research in order to avoid biases. Moreover, this research regarded the role of the researcher as the outside viewer, also called as etic – wherein the researcher did not participate on any certain activity, phenomenon, or program related to the data.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The Linguistic and Cultural Issues in Translating Poetry

The Filipino Language is a diverse language wherein the meaning of words change depending on the place it is used and the context of how it is used. Various research about translation have been conducted due to the diversity of the language, however, few work has been carried out to fully understand the different issues of translating poetry to Filipino. This research, on the other hand, does not only discuss one issue of translation, but it discusses the different translation issues on the aspect culture, language, aesthetic.

The Linguistics and Cultural problems according to Tisgam (2014) includes the collocation and hidden logic which is also called to be non-standard syntactic structure. As for the translation of the collocations, the translated version of the poem should not look awkward to the readers. One thing to keep in mind is that collocations do not really tend to be similar in different languages; conversely, they are differently made and may be used in different ways to mean totally different expressions.

Another point to consider in term of linguistic matter is the obscured or hidden (nonstandard) syntactic structures. Such kinds of structures may be written in a poem on purpose as a part of the expressive function of the text. For this reason, these kinds of organizations should be rendered as closely as possible (Temirov, 2012).

Accordingly based on Mashadi Said, the socio-cultural problems also in translating poetry exist in the phrases, clauses, or sentences containing word(s) related to the four major cultural categories, namely: ideas, behavior, product and ecology. The ideas include belief, values, and institution; behavior includes customs or habits; products include art, music, and

artifacts, and ecology includes flora, fauna, plains, winds, as well as the weather. For example:

Figure 1. Excerpt from the English and Filipino Translation of Sonnet 18

Excerpt 1:

*Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:*

Excerpt 2:

Filipino Translation A

*Dapat ka bang ihambing sa arawan
Tunayngang ikaw ay mas kabigha-bighani:
T'wing Mayo'y unaalimpuyo and ulan
Na tinapos ang init na napakaikli;*

Excerpt 3:

Filipino Translation B

*Ihambing ba kita sa isang araw ng tag-araw?
Mas kaiga-igaya ka at mas banayad:
Mayugyog man ng marahas na hangin ang mga bubot ng Mayo,
At ang pananatili ng tag-araw napaka-ikli;*

In these line, the meaning of *Summer* symbolizes grace and beauty which gives an image of elegance to the person being described. However, the cultural equivalence or the near equivalence of *Summer* does not always have the same meaning for countries like the Philippines, who experience hot and agonizing climate. Another problem in this translation is the differences in the words used to translate the word *Summer*. For the first translation, the translator used the word *arawan* which may mean in English as on a daily basis or daily, and not really the direct translation of *Summer*. The second translation on the other hand, *araw ng tag-araw* is a suitable Filipino translation for *Summer*.

In this process of translation Nida and Taber (1969) explain that translating consists of reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style. Translation, involving the transposition of thoughts expressed in one language by one

social group into the appropriate expression of another group, entails a process of cultural de-coding, re-coding and en-coding. As cultures are increasingly brought into greater contact with one another, it is the cultural aspect of the text that we should take into account.

As with the problems above, the translator most like do not have enough choices of words, he/she has to supply the cultural equivalent in the target language even if the meaning might be confusing for the readers. Consequently, one can say that the role of a translator is crucial for he/she must understand the exact meaning of the source language and in the target language in order to close the gap between two or more languages concerned.

The Aesthetic Issues in Translation

In a poem, the beauty is not only achieved with the choice of words and figurative language like in novels and short stories, but also with the creation of rhythm, rhyme, meter and specific expressions and structures that may not conform to the ones of the daily language.

Aesthetic values, or poetic truth, in a poem are, according to Newmark (1982), dependent on the structure (or poetic structure), metaphor, and sound. These values have no independent meaning, but they are important in the text. If the translator destroys the word order, and the sounds, he/she distorts the beauty of the original poem. So, the problem in translating a verse is how to retain the aesthetic values in the Target Language, which are dependent on the structure and sound.

According to Hariyanto (no date), poetic structure includes the plan of the original poem as a whole, the shape and the balance of individual sentences in each line. These aesthetic values do not carry an independent meaning, but they are correlative with the various types of meaning in the text. This means that if the translator destroys the word choice, word order, and the sounds, he or she spoils the beauty and the expression of the original poem. Gracefulness, gentleness, for example, will be ruined if the translator provides unsophisticated alliterations for the original carefully-composed alliterations.

Thus, maintaining the original structure of the poem may mean maintaining the original structure of each sentence.

Sonnet 18 is written in a typical Shakespearean sonnet form, having 14 lines of iambic pentameter, which contains three quatrains and one couplet; it also has the characteristic rhyme scheme of abab cdcd efef gg. To address the aesthetic issue of the two Filipino translations, the researcher analyzed the poetic structure of the two translations to compare it with the poetic structure of the source text.

Figure 2. Excerpt from the Filipino Translation A of Sonnet 18

Excerpt 4:

Filipino translation A

*Dapat ka bang ihambing sa arawan|
Tunay ngang ikaw ay mas kabigha-bighani:
T'wing Mayo'y umaalimpuyo and ulan
Na tinapos ang init na napakaikli;*

This translation followed the same poetic structure with the Source text, however we are unsure if it is faithful to the original text when it comes to its meaning.

Another aesthetic factor in translation is sound. Sound is anything connected with sound cultivation including rhyme, rhythm, assonance; onomatopoeia etc. and a translator must try to maintain them in the translation. As Newmark (1981) further states that in a significant text, semantic truth is cardinal meaning is not more or less important, it is important, whilst of the three aesthetic factors, sound (e.g. alliteration or rhyme) is likely to recede in importance... rhyme is perhaps the most likely factor to 'give'-- rhyming is difficult and artificial enough in one language, reproducing line is sometimes doubly so. In short, if the translation is faced with the condition where he/she has to make a sacrifice, he/she should sacrifice the sound.

On the other hand, the translator has to balance where the beauty of a poem really lies. If the beauty lies more on sounds rather than on the meaning (semantic), the translator cannot ignore the sound factor.

Figure 3. Excerpt from the Filipino Translation B of Sonnet 18

Excerpt 5:

Filipino Translation B

Ihahambing ba kita sa isang araw ng tag-araw?

Mas kaiga-igaya ka at mas banayad:

Mayugyog man ng marahas na hangin ang mga bubot ng Mayo,

At ang pananatili ng tag-araw napaka-ikli;

This translation does not follow the same Shakespearean iambic pentameter of abab cdcd efef gg as compared to the first translation. Therefore it shows that the sound factor was ignored in this translation.

The issues with the Filipino translations of William Shakespeare's Sonnet 18

According to William R. Schmalstieg, a professor at Pennsylvania State University, the difficulty of translating poetry is twofold: the words and meaning on the one hand, and the flow and rhythm (or rhyme) on the other. As he claims in his article, most translations of poetry are really bad. One can find no rhythm or rhyme in such "professional" works of translation. This is mainly because the translator knows the foreign language too well and his or her language too poorly or vice versa. Additionally, their grasp of both languages may be limited to the writing of academic and formal papers whereas the procedure of translating a work of poetry requires rather literal and sometimes colloquial language.

When it comes to the Filipino translations of William Shakespeare's Sonnet 18, there are some issues which the researcher came across. One of these is that the translator sometimes cannot bring rhythmic pattern in the target language (see Filipino Translation B). According to some poets, if the poetry lacks rhyme, then it seems to be a body without a soul. Although, the second translation was translated well, still the beauty of the poem seems to be lost.

Another issue is the choices of words, in various languages some words have a special meaning and carry symbolism, but when a poem is translated sometimes the words lose its symbolism. Example is for the first translation, it does follow the same poetic pattern used in the original text however, the meaning of words or how the words are structured creates a

different meaning from the source text. In the source text, there are also ornamentals like comma, semi colons, etc. which cannot be used regularly after specific words. The lack of these elements may create a double meaning.

Lastly, one of the issue with the Filipino translations is the meaning of the text as a whole. The translators may have tried to preserve the poem after it was translated, but it can be seen that the two translations are not the same if the words used are analyzed. The first translation follows the same pattern with the original text however the meaning as a whole has already changed, on the other hand, the second translation does not follow the same poetic structure as the original text however the meaning of the text has more similarities with the source text.

CONCLUSION

To Translating poetry is considered one of the most complicated types of translations. By means of the correspondence of meaning, word choice, rhyme, rhythm, and some other poetic devices in the poem a poet intends to express his or her ideas of a certain thing or a situation, experiences they or other people had, humane feelings such as love, revulsion, admiration, friendship, faith as well as descriptions of certain things or some circumstances they may experience. Poems could be written in different languages throughout the world but they carry certain meanings and purposes which are tended to be universally understood regardless which language they were written in.

The impossibility of translating poetry appears on many levels. One factor is the linguistic and cultural level. This level can be represented by two sublevels; the words and meaning which are shown through images, similes, metaphors, etc.

Another factor is the Aesthetic level. Aesthetic values, or poetic truth, if the translator destroys the word order, and the sounds, he/she distorts the beauty of the original poem. So, the problem in translating a verse is how to retain the aesthetic values in the TL text, which are dependent on the structure and sound.

In translating poetry, one can stress that preserving and reproducing the poetic effects is considered a major challenge to translators because the written word appeals not only to the eye, but to the ear as well. In other words, the dictionary can offer little help, the translator must work by intuition and try to be creative.

As a result, the task of the translator is not to express what is to be conveyed but to find the intended effect upon the language into which she/he is translating in a way that leads to produce the echo of the original, even though it is impossible to be able to create a replica of the original text. In other words, what should be preserved are the emotions, the invisible message of the poet and the uniqueness of the style in order to obtain the same effect in the Target text as it is in the Source text.

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