

Translation as Trial of the Foreign: A Study of Hindi Translation of Caligula

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Abstract:

Philosophical texts are rich in both ideological and literary dimensions. Since the primary aim of such texts is to convey philosophical concepts to readers, the preservation of the original ideas is essential in the process of translation. However, translations of philosophical texts often exhibit certain gaps or shifts, which may arise from the translators' individual preferences as well as their cultural, political, and ideological backgrounds. The objective of this article is to analyze the Hindi translation of one of the renowned works of Albert Camus done by Sharad Chandra, entitled *Caligula*, through the perspective of Antoine Berman. This paper aims to present an in-depth case study that highlights the effects of the deformations observed in the translation of this philosophical text. In this regard, the study aims, first, to provide a brief overview of the philosophical ideas of Albert Camus, followed by an outline of Antoine Berman's translation perspective, which will serve as the theoretical framework for the analysis of the text. The study will then examine selected examples from the text in order to analyze them through Berman's perspective.

Keywords: Philosophical text, Albert Camus, Translation analysis, Antoine Berman, Deformation tendencies

1. Introduction:

Philosophy plays an important role in human life as a means of exploring human existence and the truth of life. Many philosophers have used literature as a medium to express their ideas in a distinctive style. As a result, their literary works often contain implicit meanings that are meant to be uncovered by readers. Philosophical texts are therefore frequently translated for foreign audiences. Since every philosophical expression carries a specific meaning, the choice of words and expressions in the target language plays a crucial role in the transmission of philosophical thought. The literary works of Albert Camus offer a powerful illustration of his philosophy through textual representation. However, translating these works is particularly challenging, as Camus's philosophy is not expressed directly but is conveyed through carefully chosen language and the personalities of his characters. For this reason, the translator's lexical and stylistic choices have a significant influence on the transmission of Camus's philosophical ideas.

Antoine Berman's approach to translation examines the various gaps and potential deformations that may occur in the translation of philosophical texts. To this end, Berman proposes twelve deforming tendencies that serve as an analytical framework for evaluating philosophical translations and identifying the translators' preferences. In this study, the philosophy of Camus will first be outlined, followed by a brief explanation of Berman's translation theory in order to provide the theoretical framework for the analysis. Some selected examples from *Caligula* will be examined for this study.

2. Absurdity and Revolt:

Albert Camus was a French philosopher best known for his philosophy of the absurd, which is closely linked to questions of human existence. Through his literary works, he portrayed the apparent meaninglessness of human life. His philosophy is grounded on the idea of the absurdity of existence and in the notion of revolt against this absurd condition. For Camus, the

concept of the absurd emerges from the recognition of the incompatibility between the intensity of lived, physical life and the certainty of death. Human beings often spend their entire lives engaged in repetitive work and futile labour, in a good hope and expectation. In doing so, they transform their spontaneous existence into a mechanical routine, repeating the same actions day after day, much like a machine, which makes their existence fundamentally absurd. However, knowing that death is inevitable for all, they are questioning the universe to understand the meaning of such life. Regardless of how this awareness is reached, it often results in profound despair, accompanied by a loss of meaning and value in human existence. This metaphysical distress constitutes the central theme in Camus's thought.

According to Camus, death is not a solution to the absurdity of the universe; rather, it merely puts an end to the possibility of confronting the problem of absurdity. On the contrary, human beings should accept this absurdity in life which will give rise to a spirit of revolt inside them, which in turn encourages the affirmation of a fuller and more conscious existence. Revolt, in this sense, consists in acknowledging the absurd while simultaneously inventing a reason to live under all circumstances. This relationship between absurdity and revolt is also reflected in Camus's literary style. This relation is necessary for understanding the philosophical references embedded in his works and for preserving the implicit meanings of these references in their translation.

3. "Trials of the foreign" by of Antoine Berman:

Antoine Berman is a French translation theorist who places strong emphasis on the idea that meaning is closely bound to the letter of the source text, which, as a literary work, is inherently unique. If the signifier and the signified are separated, the originality of the source text is distorted, as the relationship between letters and meaning constitutes a singular mode of expression within the text. Accordingly, the source text

contains a specific set of internal rules governing the use of letters, through which the signifier and the signified are linked in a unique manner. Unlike many other theorists, Berman's approach focuses on the translator rather than on the translated text itself. According to him, the translator's experience plays a significant role in shaping translational preferences. By examining the actions of translators, Berman seeks to explain prevailing translational tendencies and their possible consequences.

He argues that concepts and expressions that are not commonly used in the target language should be carefully preserved in translation in order to maintain an awareness of the foreignness of the source text and its culture, and to prevent distortion of the text's originality. Berman identifies twelve deforming tendencies that may occur in translation and that undermine the stylistic, linguistic, and contextual integrity of the source text. Twelve deformation tendencies of Antoine Berman:

1. **Rationalization:** It involves the modification of sentence structure and word order as well as the punctuation, which Berman calls the most meaningful and changeable element in a prose text.
2. **Clarification:** translator makes certain elements that remove the ambiguity and reveal something that is not meant to be apparent in the text.
3. **Expansion:** translation tends to be longer than the original. it's a kind of over translation, where explanations may render the text clearer but they actually obscure its own mode of clarity. It's stretching the length of the text which impairs the rhythm of the text.
4. **Ennoblement:** it's rewriting of the original text in a more elegant way destroying the structure and rhetoric of source text.
5. **Qualitative impoverishment:** This refers to lexical loss in translation. Prose works usually contain many words and chains of meaning, making them rich and abundant. A single idea can be expressed through several different words. If a translation reduces this variety to

- fewer words, the richness of the original is lost and the work becomes less recognizable. Even though the translated text may become longer through expansion, it still suffers from a loss of meaning because it lacks the original lexical richness.
6. Quantitative impoverishment: This refers to replacing words and expressions from the original text with ones that lack sound richness and expressive meaning. Some words are iconic because they create a mental image and suggest a resemblance to what they refer to. As Spitzer notes, playful or imaginative words often behave whimsically, like the many varied words for “butterfly” across languages. This does not mean that the word “butterfly” literally looks like a butterfly, but that its sound and physical form carry something of the butterfly’s essence. Both prose and poetry create such effects, producing what can be called surfaces of iconic meaning.
 7. The destruction of rhythms: A novel has rhythm just like poetry, and often contains many different rhythms. Because the whole novel is in constant movement, it is harder for translation to completely destroy its rhythm. This is why even a poorly translated great novel can still affect readers. Poetry and theatre, however, are more fragile. Still, a bad translation can seriously damage rhythm, for example by changing punctuation without reason. A translation ruins his unique rhythm by greatly increasing punctuation, especially commas, compared to the original.
 8. The destruction of underlying networks of signification: A literary work has a hidden level beneath the visible text. In this deeper layer, certain words are linked to each other and form networks below the surface of what we read. This hidden layer carries repeated word patterns. These word chains are part of the text’s rhythm and meaning. Some words reappear after long gaps and belong to the same network because of their similarity or shared focus. Such words show recurring concerns or perceptions, even though they appear far apart, sometimes in different chapters and contexts that do not obviously require them.
 9. The destruction of linguistic patternings: The systematic nature of a text goes beyond words and metaphors to include sentence types and structures. When a translation rationalizes, clarifies, or expands the text, it often destroys this system by adding elements that do not belong to it. As a result, the translation may seem smoother or more stylistic, but it actually becomes inconsistent and incoherent. It turns into a mix of different writing styles introduced by the translator. Readers sense this inconsistency and often do not trust the translated text as a “true” text. In short, making a translation more uniform cannot hide the loss of the original text’s inner structure.
 10. The destruction of vernacular networks or their exoticization: Prose naturally contains many vernacular (every day or local) elements. It also aims to be concrete, and vernacular language is more physical and expressive than refined or “cultivated” language. Local words often carry richer meaning than their standard equivalents. Moreover, prose often tries to capture spoken language. So, removing vernacular elements seriously damages a prose text. This can happen by deleting diminutives, changing active verbs into abstract nouns, or replacing vivid local words with flat explanations. Sometimes vernacular terms are simply translated into neutral descriptions, which weakens their effect. A traditional way to deal with vernaculars is exoticization, but this is problematic. It may involve using italics or adding stereotypical local color to seem “authentic.” Such practices distort and even ridicule the original text. Translation works only between cultivated languages, and excessive exoticization turns genuine foreignness into caricature.
 11. The destruction of expressions and idioms: Prose is full of images, expressions, figures, and proverbs, many of which come from

everyday language. Most of them express meanings or experiences that may seem to have similar expressions in other languages. However, replacing them with so-called “equivalents” weakens the original text. Even if a proverb has a similar one in another language, using it does not truly translate the original. Translation is not about finding equivalents but about preserving the foreign expression. When readers encounter a new proverb in translation, they recognize it as related to familiar ones, and this actually enriches their own cultural and linguistic world.

12. The effacement of the superimposition of languages: Novels often contain more than one language or language variety. This can be the mix of a local dialect with a common language, or the coexistence of two or more standard languages within the same text. Many writers use this technique, and in some cases one language deeply influences another, even at the level of sentence structure. An extreme example is a novel that blends many languages together. Translation threatens this linguistic layering. The tension and balance between different languages or varieties in the original text often disappear, and the translated text becomes uniform but the important contrasts between local speech and standard language are lost. This is a major challenge in translating novels and requires serious thought from the translator. Every novel contains such linguistic diversity, and brings together many different voices and ways of speaking.

In particular, there is a risk of losing the ideological elements embedded in the words of philosophical texts unless these deforming actions are avoided. Therefore, great attention must be paid, while translating, to ideological references in order to ensure an effective transmission of ideology. Numerous texts can be analyzed in terms of philosophical deformations. *Caligula* by Albert Camus is a good example demonstrating deforming tendencies with regard to philosophical references. At this point, we will discuss a few

selected examples from the Hindi translation of *Caligula* within the framework of the following deforming tendencies: the destruction of underlying networks of signification, quantitative impoverishment, and the destruction of locutions and idioms.

4. Analysis of some selected examples:

4.1. The destruction of underlying networks of signification:

- a. **ST** : on croit qu'on choisit et puis on est choisi. (p.42)

We believe that we choose, then we are chosen. (Literal English Translation)

TT: दुःख, विवाह की तरह होता है। हम समझते हैं, चुनाव हम कर रहे हैं, और फिर हम करते भी हैं।

This passage concerns the problem of misfortune in human life. It suggests that one might believe human beings willingly descend into the abyss of suffering and are therefore responsible for their condition. In reality, however, misfortune is presented as something that occurs due to fate rather than personal choice. Human beings do not choose misfortune; instead, they are chosen to undergo this experience in life. Sharad Chandra's translation approaches this idea differently and does not appear faithful to the original text. In the translated version, human beings are portrayed as responsible for their circumstances, and the misfortune they experience is shown as their own choice, whether made consciously or unconsciously. This interpretation directly contradicts Camus's original idea. Thus, our translation of this text is “दुःख, विवाह की तरह होता है। हम समझते हैं, चुनाव हम कर रहे हैं, लेकिन हम चुने जाते हैं”

- b. **ST** : la vie n'est pas bonne. (p.61)

Life is not good. (Literal English Translation)

TT: जिंदगी सुख का कोई सपना नहीं।

The above text addresses the philosophy of life. According to Camus, human life is absurd and lacks inherent meaning. Human beings are not

truly free, as their actions are driven by arbitrary goals. As a result, life involves a constant struggle for survival. In the target text, the translator introduces a manipulation of the original meaning. Sharad Chandra attempts to translate the source text by modifying its philosophical stance, suggesting that life is not merely a dream of happiness. This intervention creates a gap in meaning, and consequently, the target text does not appear faithful to the source text. Thus, our translation of this text is “जिंदगी कभी आसान नहीं होती”

c. **ST** : Elle a guéri des blessures plus graves. She healed more serious wounds. (Lit. Eng. Trans.)

TT: उसने तो और भी गहरे घाव दिए हैं।

This sentence refers to the healing power of time, that is, the idea that time has the ability to heal all kinds of wounds. However, in Sharad Chandra's translation of the source text, time is presented as being responsible for all the misfortunes that happen to human beings. As a result, the meaning of the translated text is exactly the opposite of that of the original text. Thus, our translation of this text is “उसने गहरे से गहरे घाव भी ठीक किए हैं।”

d. **ST** : il devient évident que Caligula se tient mal à table. (p.80)

It becomes evident that Caligula behaves badly at the table. (Lit. Eng. Trans.)

TT: यह जाहिर होने लगता है कि कालीगुला को टेबल पर बैठना नहीं आता।

The target text does not convey the same meaning as the original. The source text refers to Caligula's improper behavior or lack of decorum at the table. However, in the translated text, Caligula is presented as someone who does not even know how to sit properly, despite being a king. This creates a shift in meaning, and therefore Sharad Chandra's translation does not appear faithful to the original text. Thus, our translation of this text is “यह जाहिर है कि कालीगुला मेज पर दुर्व्यहार कर रहा है।”

4.2. The destruction of expressions and idioms:

a. **ST** : une de perdue, dix de retrouvées. (p.39)
One lost, ten found. (Lit. Eng. Trans.)

TT: एक गई, दस मौजूद हैं।

The expression mentioned above is not uncommon, but it seems that Sharad Chandra has translated it almost literally, which does not appear appropriate in relation to the original. This is particularly notable because there exists an expression in Hindi that is nearly equivalent to the source text. Thus, our translation of this text is “समुंद्र में कई सारी मछलियां हैं।”

b. **ST**: Une seconde!

One second! (Lit. Eng. Trans.)

TT: एक मिनट!

In general, the expression “one second” refers to asking someone to wait for a brief moment; it does not mean counting an actual second. This usage is also common in our culture, where the same expression is used to request that someone wait for a short while. Therefore, there is no justified need to replace the word “second” with “minute” in the translation, as Sharad Chandra has done. Consequently, his translation does not appear appropriate. Thus, our translation of this expression is “एक सेकेंड!”

4.3. Quantitative impoverishment:

a. **ST** : je prends en charge un royaume où l'impossible est roi. (p.63)

I am taking charge of a kingdom where the impossible is king. (Lit. Eng. Trans.)

TT: मैं उस राज्य की बागडोर अपने हाथ में ले रहा हूँ जहाँ कि एक असंभव राजा है।

Everyone is a slave to the absurd, but according to Caligula, he alone succeeds in freeing himself from this condition and rises to the status of a free man after attaining knowledge. He perceives this state as an inhuman quality, which is why he calls himself “the impossible” in a positive sense. However, the use of the word असंभव creates a neutral impression of Caligula's character. As discussed earlier, it is Caligula himself who is

speaking about himself. Through this passage, he presents himself as an exceptional and uncommon figure by using the term “the impossible” to describe himself. Thus, our translation of this text is “मैं उस राज्य की बागडोर अपने हाथ में ले रहा हूँ जहाँ कि एक असाध्य राजा है।”

b. **ST** : Il rit d'une façon passionnée.
He laughs in a passionate manner. (Lit. Eng. Trans.)

TT: दीवानेपन से हंसता है।

Sharad Chandra's translation appears unusual in our language and therefore feels somewhat strange within our cultural context. The word दीवानेपन is commonly associated with love, which has no connection to the meaning of this text. As a result, the target text shows a manipulation of the original sense. To restore a more appropriate and realistic meaning, the word दीवानेपन has been replaced with ठहाका. Thus, our translation of this expression is “ठहाका मारकर हंसता है।”

c. **ST** : Cela ne suffisait pas pour que sa mort te chasse trois jours et trois nuits dans la campagne et te ramène avec ce visage ennemi.

That was not enough for his death to drive you for three days and three nights into the countryside and bring you back with that enemy face. (Lit. Eng. Trans.)

TT: यह तो कोई वजह नहीं हुई की उसकी मौत तुम्हे तीन दिन और तीन रातों के लिए जंगल में खदेड़ दे और फिर तुम वापस आओ ऐसी भयंकर मुख-मुद्रा लेकर।

The translator has rendered the expression “visage ennemi” as भयंकर मुख-मुद्रा, which refers only to Caligula's facial expression, suggesting that his visual appearance is frightening. However, according to the context of the text, after returning from the countryside Caligula begins a series of death sentences as an enemy figure, creating an atmosphere of terror among the courtiers. Therefore, शत्रुतापूर्ण रवैया is a more appropriate translation for “visage ennemi,” as it conveys hostility and threat rather than merely a

frightening facial expression. Thus, our translation of this text is “यह तो कोई वजह नहीं हुई की उसकी मौत तुम्हे तीन दिन और तीन रातों के लिए जंगल में खदेड़ दे और फिर तुम वापस आओ ऐसी शत्रुतापूर्ण रवैया लेकर।”

5. Conclusion:

Literature requires a deep understanding of the underlying messages of a text and a certain degree of creativity in its translation. However, the convergence of literature with philosophical and ideological references makes a literary text far more complex for the translator. Even a minor intervention by the translator can put both the content and the purpose of a philosophical text at risk. Deformations damage the perception of the philosophy that is meant to be transmitted to the target culture. Therefore, deforming tendencies cause greater harm to philosophical texts than to simple literary works. The translator must minimize such deformations as much as possible in order to reproduce the original ideas of the text as established by the author. Otherwise, these deformations generate a sense of contradiction for readers, making the philosophical text difficult to understand. In fact, the Hindi translation of *Caligula* by Sharad Chandra is, to a large extent, a faithful interpretation of the original text, and his interventions are justifiable to a certain degree. However, a philosophical text does not permit even the smallest shift in meaning in translation, since such changes can completely undermine the central notion of absurdity that the text seeks to convey.

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