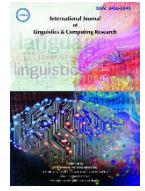




International Journal of Linguistics & Computing Research

Journal Homepage: <http://cphfs.in/research.php>



Languages Develop or They are Developed

Professor Udaya Narayana Singh
Chair-Professor & Head, ACLiS
Amity Centre for Linguistic Studies (ACLiS)
Amity University Haryana, Gurgaon
Pachgaon, Manesar PIN 122431
E-mail: unscil51@gmail.com

When languages develop on their own, the time that it takes for the historical events to unfold in a particular manner is unspecifiable.

Viewed in one way, like many other histories, language history is nothing but a catalogue of a series of accidents -- some planned, some others spontaneous, and some that come as chain reactions. In another reading, history of a language would appear as a mirror of an age -- a whole generation, a century or a millennium depicting the life of an entire nation or language. In the second sense, language history is the documentation of a series of on-going and ever-enveloping events which are all products of time.

Whichever view of history we may entertain, when languages develop as a consequence of a set of historical processes, they take a little longer time than those that develop because of planned interventions. Languages that develop on their own can be said to have undergone *primary standardization*.

Languages that are developed undergo *secondary standardization*. More often than not, in cases of the latter type, it is very difficult to differentiate between the periods of standardization and modernization. Both these processes go hand in hand in respect of these languages because of the time constraints within which these latecomers bloom. It is more than a convention that when a language undergoes primary standardization, the processes of modernization follow it soon after, in course of time.

Gone are the days when languages could develop on their own. One difference between the advent of modernism in course of the last two centuries and the postmodern situation prevailing today is that all languages in today's world advance and develop because of various internal and external pressures, and because

of the ensuing tensions. As against this, there was a time when a language could develop as a consequence of either natural historical forces or chance emergence of a towering literary personality. Such primarily standardized languages, however, had no model before them to imbibe. In comparison, languages of today have a number of models of primary development before them, and they have an option to follow any one of these models (with suitable modifications, wherever necessary) or chart a completely new course by scrupulously avoiding the known courses of action. For today's languages to develop, therefore, there have to be policies that have already worked elsewhere which have to be re-implemented. Alternatively, there must be models which can be translated, if the elites that influence decision process of the state want it to be so. The options here are between being *innovative* or being *translative*.

It would not take one long to realize that between these two options, translative is a better, surer and faster way to develop. Innovation (howsoever ideal it may be theoretically), like any act of creativity, runs the risk of being a failure and counter-productive. If nothing, it is surely more time consuming than any translative strategy. It is not surprising that many of the underdeveloped and developing languages today start from a point where they attempt at translating metaphors, myths, proverbs, terms, sciences, cultures, and language structures. Many, of course, end up translating attitudes and fashions first, which relegates the twin task of textual transference and language development to the background. Where this does not happen, and when a number of texts are actually transferred, the source and target languages show a tendency of 'coming together' or *converging*. I would not hesitate to imagine that much of what we call *linguistic convergence* emerges from translative actions which members of converging speech communities use as 'gap-filling devices' – as techniques that

erase distances. They also try recreating certain language functions, something that allows either linguistic dominance or improvement of status of one language over the others in the same speech community. That is the reason why many languages of the Third World -- be it Hindi in India or Hausa in Nigeria -- very quickly learn the art of dominating over other indigenous languages, at least in formal speech functions.

Since it is increasingly becoming evident that the translativity model is the fastest way of growing, it places a tremendous responsibility on the shoulders of the translators and language planners of the underdeveloped language communities. The persons engaged in such work of translating (voluntarily or willy nilly, because of pressure on them) have to be ready to listen to a lot of criticism and unkind remarks. But in all fairness one has to give them and their products or attempts a certain amount of time (to see if they gain acceptance). For instance, in spite of the best efforts of a term planner or a translator, the terms created by him or her and planted in a user-environment may take time to gain acceptability, even when the domain is limited.

Any critic of a glossary of technical terms would easily lay the blame on the translator without realizing how the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis on linguistic relativity also works in acceptance or rejection of such proposals for reform. Like one is bound by one's language and by one's culture, both of which bind each other, one is also bound by the science and technology one inherits naturally. It is only normal for a critic to view any other type of categorization of knowledge and belief with a kind of skepticism. In fact, what is expressed as a dissatisfaction against a term is often actually a refusal to appreciate another kind of system. When one translates economics, politics, science or culture of another community, the terms and expressions one opts for have this primary aim of being a match for what they name. It is not fair to blame the translator for introducing something 'foreign', because the ultimate goal of the translator is to use his discretion of coining a term as an instrument of growth. The sooner the translations are naturalized the faster will the language grow.

Almost all the modern Indian languages have a number of grammatical devices including some syntactic operations which did not exist in their early stages or in their initial prose literature. Such imprints existed not only in known and visible aspects of grammar such as punctuation and lexis, they permeated into syntax, too. The tradition of translating the ancient Indian texts into modern Indian languages always existed but translation from the non-western, non-Indian sources began only in 1801 in Urdu (from Persian *Araish-e-Mahfil*) and in 1805 in Bengali (*Totaa itihaas* from Persian *Tutinaameh*; also *Paarasya itihaas* from Arabic, available in 1834). Beginning from 1803, one finds a regular flow of translations from English into modern Indian languages starting with *The Oriental Fabulist* into Hindi, Urdu and Bengali (and later into Marathi in 1806).

These trends not only influenced the grammatical structure of modern Indian languages, they also started interlingual rendering of texts among the modern languages, such as Bengali *Krittivaasa Raamaayana* into Manipuri *Langoi Shagd Thaba* in

1802. Or, consider Marathi *Raajaa Prataapaadityaace Carita* (1816), which was a translation from a Bengali book published in 1801 (cf. Sisir Kumar Das 1991:75-77). Notice that this is only a revival of the tradition of what I had called horizontal translations (cf. Singh 1990) in India whereas vertical translations from a western classic or from ancient to a modern Indian language was more accepted activity. But in the ancient times, translations between Indian languages and other Asian languages were also a common phenomenon. Whether one talks about Ashvagosa's *Buddhacarita* or the Thai *Raamaayana*, or the Tibetan translation of the Bengali *Caryaapada*, or the Japanese temple inscriptions of Pali sayings, there are a number of philological studies on this aspect.

I have claimed elsewhere that the horizontal translation must be the base on which one can build a new translation theory (cf. Singh 1990). This kind of a translation theory is sure to be different from the one based mainly on vertical translation -- from the languages of power to those that lack it. Here, translation provides us with a model of growth of underdeveloped languages. Any theory of translation based on the political equations such as $SL = \text{DOMINANT}$ and $TL = \text{DOMINATED}$ (because 'the dominated' is often colonized and oppressed) is bound to carry a bias which will ultimately affect use of translation as a tool of development, because it is now clear from the work of Trivers 1985 and Layton 1989 that there is no objective basis for speaking in terms of higher or lower forms of entities either in the physiological evolution or in the evolution of social behavior. If so, there is no reason why we should let the ills of vertical vision color our theory of translation or development.

Let us make it clear that while evolution knows no verticality, development (whether natural or planned) may give rise to an unequal relationship close to the notion of verticality. We are only trying to raise the question that challenges the validity of using the experiences of the 'developed' as the basis of building a theory of language development for the 'undeveloped', as has been done by almost all the western scholars initially, including Joshua Fishman, Charles Ferguson, Jonathan Pool, and others, although some of them have since changed their positions. We take the position that much of the monistic theoretical arguments on language development came from the sociolinguistic background and bias of the Western scholars who grew up in a very different kind of social condition than the one experienced by the world waiting to be developed (cf. Singh 1992). However, I would not subscribe to a conspiracy theory here as theirs was not necessarily an organized effort to drown the voice from the East. I guess this was true because otherwise it is difficult to explain as to how so many scholars with different disciplinary backgrounds could agree upon a common characterization of development, namely, that it was a 'homogenizing' process (cf. Huntington's 1976 nine-fold characterization of modernization).

At this point, some readers of this piece may find a contradiction in the position we have taken here, because we reject 'homogenizing' as a characteristic of modernization (and development), and rate 'translativity' as a better way of growing

than 'innovation', and at the same time argue in favour of a horizontal translation process as ideal for the developing world. One might say that translation from the developed to the underdeveloped would in effect promote 'homogeneity', and defeat all our talks of 'pluralism'.

However, I do not see any contradiction in this because translation, in the first place, can never be like an act of duplication or photography. Translation is a very creative activity – as much as original writing is. The demands that are usually made on them in terms of fidelity and exactitude seem ill-advised as translations can only be approximations, the closeness or distance between two texts depending on a number of factors. Translation is thus always [+ or - SL TEXT]. And it is this indeterminacy which is interesting about translation because it makes translation parallel to creativity of other kinds. This is also what makes translation as an extension of literature.

It also explains how translation is a way of growing -- growing to be different. In the present volume, we bring to you different perspectives on translation with reference to the ideas floated by some of the best researchers on translation but do not engage ourselves into an exhaustive discussion of the theoretical positions of all schools. The essays included here, some published and others fresh from the oven not only dwell on various issues of the act of translating, but also tackle the question of defining our time and space or the other creative activities we are engaged in as a part of social semiotic. The essays explore and use extremely rich instances of actual translation of texts between Indian languages and English, and among Indian languages – often to make a theoretical point. As is evident from a reading of this book, it attempts promote a healthy marriage of two fast-growing disciplines, 'Translation Studies' and 'Language Planning'. What is generated from this move has the potential of becoming an important academic discipline with tremendous potential for applications.