

**Distortion or Translation: Studying Figures of Speech in  
*Ramcharitmanasa***

**Hemlata, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil., Ph.D. (Research Scholar)**

**Dept. of English**

**BPSMV Khanpur Kalan (Sonapat), Haryana, India**

**[hemlata144@gmail.com](mailto:hemlata144@gmail.com)**

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**Abstract**

Translation is a process in which a text in one language is translated into the other language for the purpose of providing it to the readers of the other language. In this way, a larger community of readers can read and understand the culture of the other language and areas. It is hardly possible to retain the same order in target language. The translation of poetry is much more difficult to translate. First of all, it is impossible to translate an epic like *Ramcharitmanasa* into verse. Since this epic is composed in a regional language, i.e. Awadhi, there are many words those are culture-specific and therefore difficult to translate. Tulsidasa has used many figures of speech in his work. These figures of speech provide it richness, vitality and musicality. But while translating it from Awadhi to English, these figures of speech can't retain their richness.

**Keywords:** *Ramcharitmanasa*, Figures of speech, translation, poetry, language, culture, etc.

Translation is a process in which a text in one language is translated into the other language for the purpose of providing it to the readers of the other language. In this way, a larger community of readers can read and understand the culture of the other language and areas. Some of the theorists take it as a purely linguistic process while other critics consider it a sociological and cultural. James Catford defines translation from the linguistic point of view as, "Translation may be defined as follows: the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent material in another language." (qtd.in Das 1)

But to get/find the equivalent material in target language is not an easy task. As the language is a cultural phenomenon. Cicero describes translator's dilemma as, "Translation is both linguistic and cultural activity and it is concerned with communication of meaning." (Das 38) When we translate one text in another language many problems are faced in the process of translation. Susan Bassnett asserts, "If I render word for word, the result will sound uncouth and if compelled by necessity I alter anything

in the order of wording, I shall seem to have departed from the function of a translator.” (Bassnett, Susan 43)

As far as ‘order of word’ is concerned, there are many languages where the order of word is totally different. English is SVO (Subject- verb-object) language but Hindi is SOV (Subject- object-verb) language. It is hardly possible to retain the same order in target language. The translation of poetry is much more difficult to translate. First of all, it is impossible to translate an epic like *Ramcharitmanasa* into verse. Since this epic is composed in a regional language, i.e., Awadhi, there are many words which are culture-specific and therefore difficult to translate. Its literary echo cannot be translated into English. Rhythm, rhyme scheme, *vakrokti*, *rasa* and meter of poetry are almost distorted in translation.

Tulsidasa has used many figures of speech in his work. These figures of speech provide it richness, vitality and musicality. Without figures of speech poetry becomes monotonous and dull. But while translating it from Awadhi to English, these figures of speech can’t retain their richness. Some of the figures of speech may be translated from one language to target language. Figures of speech based on comparison like metaphor, simile, hyperbole and personification can be translated in other language to some extent, but nuances do not remain the same. Figures of speech based on sound such as alliteration, onomatopoeia, homonyms, pun, etc. can’t be translated. It is not only difficult but almost impossible to find the series of words beginning with same consonant sounds in target language. One language may have numerous synonyms starting with same sound whereas the other language may not have variety of words for the same word. In the same way homonyms and pun are not easy to find or impossible to find in both ‘SL’ and ‘TL’.

Here is an attempt to analyze some of the figures of speech in *Ramcharitmanasa*:

*Kahi kahi koti kakapata kahani, dhiraju dharahu prabodhisi rani.  
Kinhisi kathin padhayi kupathu, jimi nanavyifiriuthhikukathu.*

With myriad crafty stories, she comforted the queen and asked her to be of good cheer. Then she taught her many a lesson in evil, making her as inflexible as a piece of dry, shriveled wood that never bends. (*Ramcharitmanasa* 217-18)

In this quatrain Tulsidasa has described Manthara who provokes Kaikeyi for sending Rama to forest. Here Tulsidasa has used many figures of speech. In the very beginning, ‘*kahikahi*’ repetition is used to convey or increase the effect of provoking the queen. In the first line repetition of /k/ sound is there. Again, in the second line in ‘*dhiraju dharahu*’ and in the third line in ‘*Kinhisi kathin padhayi kupathu*’, there is repetition of /dh/ and /k/ sounds respectively. In last two lines of the quatrain the act of making the queen inflexible by Manthara is compared with “a piece of dry, shriveled wood that never bends”. In these lines Tulsidasa has used repetition, alliteration and simile.

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**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 19:4 April 2019

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*“Lage bitup manohar nana, baran baran bar beli bitana.*

It was planted with charming trees of various kinds and overhung with beautiful creepers of varied hue.” (*Ramcharitmanasa* 130)

In the later part of the line in ‘*baran baran*’ the repetition of same word is given and in ‘*baran baran bar belibitana*’ repetition of /b/ sound is impossible to translate in English.

*“Sang sakhi sabh subhag sayani, gavhin geet manohar baani.*

She was accompanied by her girl companions, lovely and clever. They sang songs in ravishing tones.” (*Ramcharitmanasa* 130-31)

The repetition of /s/ sound in the first line when translated in English it can’t be done as there are not such words in English starting with same consonants. But in the translation of the second line ‘*gavhingeet*’ translated as ‘sang song’, the repetition of same consonant is used.

*“Kaam krodh mad moh nasavan, bimal bibek birag badhavan.*

“It destroys lust, anger, pride and infatuation and encourages pure wisdom and detachment.” (*Ramcharitmanasa* 31) In these lines there is repetition of /k/, /m/ and /b/ sounds in “*Kaam krodh*’, ‘*mad moh*’, ‘*bimal bibek birag badhavan*’ respectively in Awadhi. In English translation no repetition can be done.

*Jimi jimi prabhu hara tâsu sira timi timi hohi na pâra,  
Sevata bisaya bibardha jimi nita nita nutana mârâ.*

As often as the Lord struck off his heads, so often they sprang up without end, as new lusts grow ever more and more in a man who is devoted to his senses. (*Ramcharitmanasa* 546)

In these lines repetition of ‘*jimi jimi*’, ‘*timi timi*’ and ‘*nita nita*’ is used but in English the sentence structure does not allow the repetition of same words as it would become funny in English. Though in English translation also translator has tried to repeat the same words as, “as often as”, “more and more”.

*“Brind brind mili chali logayi.*

Women streamed forth in crowds.” (*Ramcharitmanasa* 112)

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As compared to the former examples of repetition translation of ‘brindbrind’ is not possible in English.

*“Mrig mad chandan kum kum keecha, machi sakal bithinh bich beechea.*

All the lanes of city were muddy with pastes of musk and sandal and saffron.”  
(*Ramcharitmanasa* 112)

In these lines the repetition of /k/ and /b/ sounds in ‘*kum kum keecha*’, and ‘*bithinh bich beechea*’ is used. Here translator has tried to repeat the /s/ sound in ‘sandal and saffron’ but in ‘musk and sandal and saffron’ seems awkward because there should be ‘a comma’ after ‘musk’ but not ‘and’.

*Kankana kinkini nupura dhuni suni, kahata lakhana sana rāmu hardaya guni.*  
*Mānahu madana dudumbhi dinhi, manasa bisva bijaya kaha kinhi.*

Hearing the tinkling of bangles and small bells of her girdle and the anklets, Rāma thought within himself and then said to Lakshmana, “it sounds as though Cupid has sounded his kettledrum ambitious to conquer the universe. (*Ramcharitmanasa* 131)

In this quatrain Tulsidasa has used many figures of speech (not deliberately). In ‘*kankan kinkini*’, ‘*manhu madana*’, ‘*dudumbhi dinhi*’, ‘*kaha kinhi*’, ‘*dhuni suni*’ and ‘*lakhana sana*’; these phrases are examples of alliteration because of the repetition of /k/, /m/, /d/, /k/, /ni/ and /n/ sounds respectively but all the repetitions are missing in its English translation. Tulsidasa has also used imagination metaphor when he compares/ imagines the ‘tinkling sounds’ of Sita’s bangles, girdle and anklets as if they are the kettledrum of Cupid (The God of Love) which is translated in its English translation. But to explain or transfer the meaning in target language, translator has to use so many words to communicate the sense to the reader. Even then he is not able to translate its musicality and imagery.

*Dasa disi dāha hona ati lāgā, bhayau paraba binu rabi uparāgā.*  
*Mandodari ur akampati bhari, pratimā sravahin nayana maga bari.*

Fierce flames broke out in all the ten quarters, and though there was no new moon, a solar eclipse occurred. Mandodarī’s heart beat wildly and idols shed tears from their eyes.  
(*Ramcharitmanasa* 554)

In these lines Tulsidasa has described the terrible condition of universe at the death of Ravana. He has used hyperbole while describing the event. In the first line ‘*dasa disi daha*’, there is repetition of /d/ sound. We can see the repetition of same consonant sound in some of the phrases in its English translation i.e. in ‘fierce flames’, ‘though there’ and ‘no new’. There is a repetition of /f/, /d/, and /n/

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sounds respectively in these phrases. A figure of speech oxymoron is also used. How the ‘fierce flames’ and ‘solar eclipse’ can happen at the same time!

*Rāvana sira saroja banacari, chali Raghubira silimukha dhari.  
Dasa dasa bāna bhāla dasa māre, nisari gaye chale rudhira panāre.*

Swarms of Raghubira’s arrows flew at Ravana’s heads as though had been bees that haunt a lotus bed. Rama smote each of his ten heads with ten arrows which pierced them through and through and blood gushed forth in torrents. (*Ramcharitmanasa* 545)

This quatrain is very rich with its figures of speech. Figures of speech used here are not only for the sake of decoration, but they are used to convey the deep meaning. Tulsidasa has compared Ravana’s head with a lotus bed, Raghubir’s arrows with swarming bees. As the bees destroy the lotus bed in the same way Raghubir’s arrows destroy Ravana’s heads. Here the word ‘silimukh’ is used for two different words; one is for ‘bees’ and the other is for ‘arrows.’ Thus, the figure of speech used in these lines is pun and it is not translated in to English. Though the translator is more or less able to convey the sense in lengthy paragraph. Thus, figures of speech have made the language loaded with multiple meanings.

*“As manas manas chakh chahi, bhayi kabi buddhi bimal avgahi.*

Having seen the said Manasa Lake with the mind’s eyes and taken a dip into it, the poet’s understanding got purged of all its dross”. (*Ramcharitmanasa* 29)

In these lines ‘manasa’ word is used twice and each has its different meaning. The first ‘manasa’ is used for ‘manasa lake’ and the second ‘manasa’ is used for mind’s eye. Thus, the homonym used in these lines is untranslatable in English.

*“Murti madhur manohar dekhi, bhayeu bidehu bidehu biseshi.*

Beholding Rama’s sweet and charming appearance, king Videha (Janaka) was particularly beside himself with joy.” (*Ramcharitmanasa* 124)

In these lines in ‘*Murti madhur manohar*’ and ‘*bidehu bidehu biseshi*’ there is repetition of /m/ and /b/ sounds respectively. In its English translation alliteration gets distorted. The word ‘*bidehu*’ is used twice in two different senses. The first one is used for king Janaka and the second is used for the ecstatic condition of the king he gets beside himself. The homonym used here is untranslatable in English.

*“Bharatupranpriyapavhinraju, bidhi sb bidhimohinsammukhaaju.*

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Again, Bharat who is dear to me as my own life will get the sovereignty, God is altogether propitious to me today”. (p- 229)

In this line also, the word ‘*bidhi*’ is used twice in two different contexts. The first one is used for God and the second used for ‘altogether’. Thus, the figure of speech used here gets distorted in English translation. As there is no similar word in different languages.

“*Dubudh manogati praja dukhari, sarit sindhu sangam janu bhari.*”

The people in this unsettled state had the current of their ideas as disturbed as the water where the river runs into the sea.” (*Ramcharitmanasa* 370)

At the time of Rama’s departure to forest the people of Awadh get ‘unsettled’ and this unsettled/disturbed state of mind of people is compared with the water where the river runs into the sea. This compared metaphor can’t be translated in English.

*Ugharahin bimala bilocana hi ke, mitahin dosa dukha bhava rajani ke.*  
*Sujhahin Rāmacharita mani māmika, guputa pragata jahan jo jehi khāmika.*

Then the mental vision brightens and expands; the attendant evils and sufferings of the night of mundane existence disappears; and the acts of Rama like hidden diamonds and rubies plain to see, are discovered in whatever mine they may be. (*Ramcharitmanasa* 2)

Tulsidasa has used metaphor in these lines. “Mundane existence’ is described here as ‘night’ and the story of Rama is described as ‘hidden diamonds and rubies’. As the night can’t hide the brightness of diamond in the same way the story of Rama safeguards one from the clutches of this material world. Here translator is unable to translate the metaphor and the richness of poetry gets distorted.

## To Conclude

Thus, a brief analysis of the figures of speech used in *Ramcharitmanasa* makes it clear that there are many problems while dealing with the figures of speech in translation. Some of the figures are easily translated but their poetic beauty gets distorted. Simile, metaphor, and hyperbole are some of the figures that may be translated easily from one language to the other. But there are some other figures of speech that are simply impossible to translate. As there are not the same set of homonyms in any language. So, the homonyms and pun used in one language can’t be translated into the other language. Some of the figures of speech based on sound are also not similar in many languages. That is why alliteration, repetition, onomatopoeia, etc. are some of the figures that vary from one language to the other. As Awadhi is a dialect of Hindi, the translation of these figures is easy to retain in Hindi, but it is very hard to find the same words starting with same consonants sounds in English.

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This brief analysis of figures of speech in Awadhi and its translation into English makes it clear that in translation many aspects of language get distorted.

Though translation is a distortion of ideas, language, form, style yet the importance of a translation can't be ignored as it works as a "cultural bridge- builder". (K. Singh 32) The very essence of *Ramcharitmanasa* lies in its musicality, rhyme and rhythm. It is highly embellished as far as its poetic beauty is concerned. It has many epic qualities in its translation in English; its music, rhyme scheme, rhythm, meter, figures of speech and also its genre (as it is translated into prose not into verse) get distorted. Although so many things are distorted yet its sense, its philosophy, its ideas are translated and conveyed to the readers of a wider range of language speakers.

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