

The Translation Of Humour In The Film *Charulata*: Loss Of Meaning In Translation Of Humour From Bengali To English Language.

Md Nasiruddin Firoj

Kalyani University

Author's note

The author of this paper is Md Nasiruddin Firoj. Md. Nasiruddin Firoj, is a research scholar at the M. Phil course of the Department of English, University of Kalyani, India. He is doing his M. Phil in translation Studies. The area of his study is the subtitles in the films of Satyajit Ray. The subject of his study is the translation of the original soundtrack into the English subtitle. He is studying how the culture- specific references have been translated in the subtitle. He completed his MA in English Language and Literature from the same department and qualified to Lectureship as approved by the University Grants Commission of India. He currently is an adjunct faculty at the Department of English, Nagar College, Nagar, Murshidabad, India.

Address:

Vill: Nowdapara,

P.O: Kaladanga,

PS: Daulatabad,

Dist: Murshidabad,

West Bengal

Pin: 742304

Mob: 9062816061

Email: firoj.nasiruddin@gmail.com/ mnfengku17@klyuniv.ac.in

Orcid Id: 0000-0002-6615-5000

Introduction:

The present paper deals with the translation of humour in the film *Charulata* or *The Lonely Wife* directed by the famous Bengali film director Satyajit Ray. The translation is a rendering of a text from one language to another language. In this process of rendering a text, the original text from a text is being translated is called the source text or the ST. The other language, on the other hand, into which the text is translated, is known as the target text or the TT. In this film, the original Bengali language of the film *Charulata* has been translated into the subtitle in the English language. In the translation of the film, the original soundtrack in the Bengali language is the source text and the subtitling is the target text.

Charulata is a Bengali film directed by the famous director Satyajit Ray. The film is based on a short story written by Rabindranath Tagore named “Noshtonir (নষ্টনীড়)”. Satyajit Ray himself said that he made his films primarily for the Bengali audiences. He was also of the opinion that subtitle cannot translate every aspect of a film. It is because of the differences between the two cultures. As a result, it becomes difficult for the non-Bengali audience to understand his films.

A film does not only contain the soundtrack, but also other linguistic features through which the meaning of the film is conveyed to the viewers. In the translation of the film in another language through subtitling, these meaning are very often left untranslated. As a result, the viewers have to rely on the film, to understand those meanings. It is practically impossible to translate all those things in the subtitle as there is not enough space available on the screen for this.

In the translation of an audiovisual text from one language into another language, the cultural aspect of the text also gets translated. Very often it is found that these cultural terms are localised in the target text language. Humour is one such example of this cultural term which is also translated. In the translation humour, it is often found that the meaning of the humour in the source text is altogether lost in the target text. In some other cases, the meaning gets distorted. It becomes necessary in a translation that this loss is minimized for so that the target viewers can have the intended meaning of the source text in the target text. Translators use various strategies in their act of translating humour to minimize this loss of meaning. Still, the loss of meaning in the translation of humour cannot be prevented. In the film *Charulata* too, the subtitler has used several strategies. But the subtitler could not stop the loss of meaning of humour of the source text in his act of translation. This paper studies the loss of meaning in the translation of humour in this film.

Humour:

It is the use of humour in a language that creates a sense of laughter, and releases the pressure of the moment. According to Vandaele, “humour is what causes amusement, mirth, a spontaneous smile and laughter” (Qt in González 138). From this, it can be seen that the principal purpose of humour is to amuse and to entertain. This amusement arises from the incongruity of the meaning. The speaker expects that the listener must also understand these contexts in order to derive the meaning of his/her comment and get amused by it. One of the salient features of humour is that it leads people to believe that they are superior to other people. According to Vandeweghe, this feeling of superiority is also related to the feeling of aggression. This aggressive nature leads them to make a joke out of other people's suffering.

Another aspect of humour is that it never functions in isolation. The mere understanding of the language used in humour is not sufficient enough in the understanding of the humour. One has to understand the context of the use of the language for understanding humour. Humour is a cultural reference the origin of which is rooted deeply in the social, cultural, linguistic and personal contexts of the speaker. Humour, according to Jorge Diaz Cintas, is rooted “in socio-cultural, linguistic and even personal contexts” (214).

Like other aspects, humour is also one of the essential parts of the literary works. In films too, it is an important ingredient. In the translation of the original soundtrack into the subtitling, these humours are also translated by the subtitler.

The translation of humour:

In order to subtitle humour, a subtitler must have to understand the humour in the source text. One should translate humour in such a way so that it creates the same effect in target text as it has in the source text. Subtitlers need to be creative in their approach while translating humour from the source text into the target text. Humour arises from play of words, and from the combination of word and visual image on the screen. This wordplay is very important in the creation of humour. For example, verbally expressed humours arise from the play of words. In the wordplay, according to Delabastita, “structural features of the language(s) are exploited in order to bring about a communicatively significant confrontation of two (or more) linguistic structures with more or less similar forms and more or less different meanings” (Qt in Diaz Cintas 222). As a result, some humours become easier for the subtitler to translate while some prove to be difficult.

Problems in the translation of humour:

Due to the cultural context of humours and the structural characteristics of the source text, the translation of humour has never been as easy as that of the translation of the other features of a language. Language has always been culture specific. According to Edward Sapir, 'language' "is a guide to social reality" (Bassnett 22). There are certain words and phrases like puns, proverbs, idioms which are very culture bound and which cannot be understood by the people who are unfamiliar to that particular culture. Therefore these terms are needed to be translated in the target language (TL) in such a way so that it generates equivalent meaning just like that of the phrase used in the source language or SL. Equivalence has been defined as "a relationship between two texts: a source text (ST) and a target text (TT). Equivalence relationships are also said to hold between parts of STs and TTs" (Kenny 96). There are always certain terms in one particular language which are not available, in its equal term, in another language. For this reason it is very often found that the translator has to face some certain problems. In the translation of humour, there appear several problems because of this. Sometimes, humour becomes untranslatable because of its cultural references. Usually, untranslatability occurs when one fails "to build functionally relevant features of the situation into the contextual meaning of the TL text" (Catford 94). Some words of a particular do not have equivalence in other languages. Such instance of untranslatability also occurs in the subtitling of the original dialogue in the film subtitling. But in the subtitling of humour, it occurs frequently. Here the translatability occurs due to lack of equivalent words in the target language to describe and convey the meaning of the source text humour in the target text. For example, the name of the card 'iskapon (ইস্কাপন)' has been used in the making of humour in the source text. The equivalent word is also there

in the target language. But it does not have the element of pun in it like the source text word. This lack in the target text language renders untranslatability in the act of subtitling.

Loss of meaning in films:

The untranslatability inevitably leads to the loss of meaning in the translation of humour. It is the very nature of translation that results in the loss of meaning. The lack of equivalent words leads to untranslatability which in turn leads to the loss of meaning in the translated text. The meaning is lost in the subtitling of this film too. There are several instances in the film where the meaning has been lost because of the absence of equivalent words in the target text language. Dialect is always associated with a particular area or region, and its understanding remains within that particular area. This limitation of dialect causes a problem in translating it into another language and culture.

Translation of humour in *Charulata*:

In the film *Charulata*, the source text which is the Bengali language has been translated into the English target text in the subtitling. The humours are also translated from the source text into the target text. But the meaning is lost in the translation of humour. The loss is caused by the lack of equivalent source text language in the target text language. This loss of meaning in *Charulata* in the translation of humour discussed below.

- a. Creating a sense of humour by playing with the word “iskapon (ইস্কাপন)”

(00:17:08- 00:187:14):

In the card playing scene, the sister-in-law of Charulata and the wife of Umapada, Mandakini is seen pronouncing the names of the cards. During the play, she craves for a

certain card named, chiriton (চিড়িতন). She shortened the named to chire. Apart from referring to this card, chire also has another meaning in the source text language. It refers to a kind of puffed rice. This reference is totally an indigenous one. The source text language viewers can easily understand this reference.

But it is in her pronunciation of the name of another card where this sense of humour is heightened. While she was craving for 'chiriton, the card that she has got is 'iskapon'. The sense of laughter arises from her pronunciation of the name of the card. She pronounces it as ish... kapon (ইস ... কাপন) with a long stress on the initial syllable 'ish'. The syllable 'ish' also refers to a word in the source text language which is used to mean a sense of dejection. It is used to express "amazement, pain, sorrow etc." (Dasgupta 124). She is dejected that her desired card has not come out. This expression of her dejection in a humorous way creates a sense of laughter among the source text viewers.

But no viewer from the target text can understand this sense of laughter and the humour that lies in her mode of expression. In the subtitling, the phrase "ish...kapon" is translated as "Dar'n it— spade". The translated text fails to convey the meaning of the source text. The original humour of the source text is also missing here.

- b. Translation of "ha hoye royeche je pash, oi charlkhana singaray dhuke jabe or modhye (হা হয়ে রয়েছে যে পাশ, ওই দিয়ে চারখানা সিঙ্গাড়াই ঢুকে যাবে ওর মধ্যে)" as "It's got a tear so big/ four singara could fit inside"(00:28:30):

Charulata asks Amal to give his shirt to her so that she can stitch those torn places in that shirt. Amal gets confused and asks which shirt she is referring to. In reply, Charulata says that she is referring to the shirt that he is now wearing. There is a big hole on the right side. The hole is even visible on the screen. She remarks that the hole is so big that all those ‘singara’ that he has in his plate can easily pass through. The humour is generated here with the combination and interaction of the visual image on the screen and the audible soundtrack. Here Charulata makes a joke of Amal’s shirt by using pun. She makes a pun on the word “ha”. In the source text language, ‘ha’ refers to both the ‘open mouth’ (Dasgupta 1919) and the hole of a shirt. When one eats, he/she opens up his/her mouth. Similarly, his shirt is opening up as if it also wants to eat all those ‘singara’. This joke by Charulata takes Amal by surprise. He stands there stranded. Then she reacts a bit angrily. This humour made out of the use of pun is easily accessible to the source text viewers who know all these aspects. But, to the target text viewers it is, almost impossible to understand. They would not get the pun involved in the word ‘ha’.

c. Translating “ekebare backward chhatrer khata dekhar moto (একেবারে ব্যাকওয়ার্ড

ছাত্রের খাতা দেখার মতো)” as “It’s like correcting exams by the worst in the class!”

(29:12):

Amal was asked to check the proof of the newspaper. He goes to give it to Bhupati after checking. While giving it to Bhupati, he remarks that the proof is erroneous. He refers to the checking of an examination paper written by the weakest student in a class. He says it in such a way that Bhupati starts laughing. The humour is in his manner of speaking. But in the subtitle, this humour is lost. In the subtitle, it is translated as “It’s like correcting exams by

the worst in the class”. The translation has been equivalent to the original expression made by Amal. But it does not carry the sense of humour that is there in the source text.

- d. Translating “prachinar kando dekho, Bankimer kotha uthte bhromorer gunjon arohbho hoye gelo” (প্রাচীনার কান্দ দেখো, বঙ্কিমের কথা উঠতেই ভ্রমরের গুঞ্জন আরম্ভ হয় (গেলো) as “Look at our traditional woman/ You mention Bankim and she starts snoring.” (39:52):

In the room, Charulata, Amal, and Mandakini are seen chatting with each other. Mandakini asks Amal if he wants to play card. Amal replies that they will discuss literature now. He and Charulata start discussing. In the meantime, Mandakini falls asleep and starts snoring. Seeing this, Amal comments, “prachinar kando dekho, Bankimer kotha uthte bhromorer gunjon arohbho hoye gelo (প্রাচীনার কান্দ দেখো, বঙ্কিমের কথা উঠতেই ভ্রমরের গুঞ্জন আরম্ভ হয় (গেলো).” Here, Amal refers to her snoring as ‘bhromorer gunjon’. She is snoring like the buzzing of bees. The humour lies in the use of the phrase ‘ভ্রমরের গুঞ্জন’ and its connection with Bankim. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee is a famous Bengali writer. Every educated Bengali knows him. But Mandakini seems to be not interested in discussing Bankim’s writing. Therefore she falls asleep and starts snoring. For this reason, Amal refer Mandakini to ancient women who is not interested in study. Her snoring sounds like the buzzing of bees. But, in the subtitling, the translator has not referred to the comparison made by the speaker in the source text language. It is simply translated as ‘snoring’. This translation does not carry the sense of humour of the source text. As a result, the audiences in the target text miss the humour.

- e. Translating “Dube dube jol khachho na to?/ khaboi to. Tumi ze lukiye lukiye mod khao. Jol to tobu bhalo (ডুবে ডুবে জল খাচ্ছো না তো?/ খাবই তো। তুমি যে লুকিয়ে লুকিয়ে মদ খাও। জল তো তবু ভালো)” as “You haven’t been up to anything, have you?/ What if I have? You drink on the sly. Don’t you?” (01:00:01):

In the bedroom, Charulata’s elder brother and his wife Mandakini were talking to each other. Charu’s brother asked his wife if she is plotting something in his ignorance. He said, “dube dube jol khachho nato.” In the Bengali language and culture, “dube dube jol khaowa” refers to something evil which is being done in secret. It is translated into the English language as “You haven’t been up to anything, haven’t you?” In her reply to her husband’s query, Mandakini innocently said, “khaboi to. Tumi ze lukiye lukiye mod khao. Jol to tobu bhalo.” Here the humour lies in her innocent reply. She could not get the figurative meaning of her husband’s utterances. She just took it in its literal meaning and replied accordingly. Her speech has been translated as “what if I have? You drink on the sly. Don’t you.” Here in this example of the translation of humour from the Bengali language to the English language, the translator has adequately translated the original meaning of the source text language into the target text language.

- f. Translation of “Eta ki tax holo dada?/ ami nije sahityo korbo?/ Na tomar bou ke sahityo korabo? (এটা কি ট্যাক্স হল দাদা?/ আমি নিজে সাহিত্য করব? না তোমার বউকে সাহিত্য করাবো?)” as “What kind of tax is this? Instead of writing myself/ I’m to help your wife write.” (00:33:50-56):

After discussing the tax system imposed by the British in India, Bhupati has asked Amal to teach and inspire Charulata in creative writing. As an immediate reaction, Amal replied by saying, “eta ki tax holo dada?/ ami ni je sahityo korbo? Na tomar bouke sahityo korabo?” Here, the humour lies in his expression and in his remark “eta ki tax holo dada?” as they were talking about tax system; Amal refers to this request by Bhupati as a kind of tax for his free lodging in Bhupati’s house. It has been translated into the subtitle as “What kind of tax is this? Instead of writing myself/ I’m to help your wife write.” Here, in this translation, the original sense of humour is literally translated into the target text language. The target text audiences will have to derive the sense of humour from the visual expression of the screen and the subtitle.

- g. Translating “Dadar ki soubhagyo!/ tomarou hobe/ ki, choti?/ bou (অমল: দাদার কি সৌভাগ্য/ চারুলতা: তোমারও হবে/ অমল: কি, চটি?/ চারুলতা: বউ)” of the source text as “Amal: what good fortune/ My cousin has/ Charulata: you shall have/ What he has/ Amal: you mean slippers?/ Charulata: a wife” (00:34:57- 35:08):

In the room, Charulata was making slippers for her husband. Amal entered the room and seeing Charulata making slippers, remarked that his cousin is lucky. He said, “dadar ki soubhagyo!” Charulata replied that Amal will also have the same fortune. She said, “tomarou hobe.” Amal thought that she is talking about a pair of slippers for him too. But he was not sure about it. For this reason, he asked her, “ki, choti?” She replied by saying that it is not slipper, but some other thing. It is “bou.” Amal gets bemused in Charulata’s reply. It is because he has not expected such a reply. Here, the humour lies in the contrast between the expectation and reality. Amal expected one reply, but got another. In the subtitling of this

conversation, the subtitler has translated it into a literal manner. But the actual humour is in their visual expression which is not translated in the subtitle. The humour is to be derived from the visual aspect of the film.

- h. Translation of “Girish Ghosher posar gelo/ e obhinetar juri nei (গিরীশ ঘোষের পসার গেলো/ এ অভিনেতার জুড়ি নেই)” as “Girish Ghosh had better to watch out/ Bhupati rivals him as an actor” (01:29:17-25):

In the party at Bhaupati's house, one of his friend asked friendsti if he knows about his wife Charulata's writing activity. He replied in negative. Then his friend brought out the copy of the magazine in which the piece of Charulata's writing has been published and showed it to Bhupati. Still, Bhupati nodded his head and said that he knew nothing about it. Then another friend humourously taunted Bhupati by referring him to the famous Bengali dramatist and actor Girish Ghosh and asked the actor to watch out. It is because Bhupati has arrived to rival him in acting. His friend said, “Girish Ghosher posar gelo/ e obhinetar juri nei.” He referred to Bhupati as an actor here. In the English subtitle, the subtitler has translated this as “Girish Ghosh had better to watch out. Bhupati rivals him as an actor.” The translation carries the same meaning of the original text. But the humour is lost here. It is because of the use of culture-specific reference in the form of Girish Ghosh. Girish Ghosh is a writer in the Bengali language. Here, Girish Ghosh is a culture-specific reference. Culture- specific references are “entities that are typical of one particular culture, and that culture alone, and they can be either exclusively or predominantly visual (an image of a local or national figure, a local dance, pet funerals, baby showers), exclusively verbal or else both visual and verbal in nature” (Chiaro 156). Almost everyone in the source language culture is acquainted with the

name of Girish Ghosh. But it is not so with the target language culture. The target language culture does not have Girish Ghosh as a writer. As a result, when the speaker humourously compares Bhupati to Girish Ghosh, the target language audiences do not understand the meaning implied in the comparison.

Conclusion:

It is clear from the above discussion that no matter which strategy is incorporated in the translation of humour from one language to the other language, the loss of meaning is inevitable. It is because of the reason that humour is totally culture specific. It depends on the use language within a specific culture and language. Whenever it is translated from that culture into another culture and language, the sense of humour gets lost. This inevitable loss of meaning is also there in the translation of humour in the film *Charulata*. The humour of the original Bengali language has been lost in the translated English subtitle. The translator could not prevent the loss of meaning.

Works Cited

Bassnett, Susan. *Translation Studies*. 3rd Edition, London and New York, Routledge Publishing House, 2002.

Catford, J. C. *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1978.

Chiaro, Delia. "Issues in Audiovisual Translation." *Routledge Translation Studies Portal*, 17 Nov. 2016, www.routledgetranslationstudiesportal.com. Accessed 23 Dec 2017.

Chiaro, Delia. "Laugh and the World Laughs with You: Tickling People's (Transcultural) Fancy." *Translating Humour In Audiovisual Texts*, edited by, Gian Luigi De Rosa et al., Bern, Peter Lang, 2014, Pp 15-24.

Dasgupta, Birendramohan editor, *Sansad Bengali- English Dictionary*. Kolkata, Sahitya Samsad, 1994.

Diaz Cintas, Jorge, and Remael, Aline. *Audiovisual Translation: Subtitling*. London and New York, Routledge, 2007.

González, Rebeca Cristina López. "When intertextual humour is supposed to make everyone laugh... Even after translation." *Audiovisual Translation – Research and Use: Studies in Language*, edited by Mikolaj Deckert, Vol 53, Peter Lang Edition, Frankfurt am Main, Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, 2017, Pp 135-145.

Kenny, Dorothy. "Equivalence." *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, edited by Mona Baker and Saldanha Gabriela, Second Edition, London and New York, Routledge Publishing House, 2011, Pp 96-99.

Ray, Satyajit directed. “*Charulata*.” 1964, *Youtube*, Uploaded by Grand Canian, 09 Aug, 2017,
www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVuZLVrPq98.