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Translation is an Impossibly Possible task for Non-natives: An Oxymoron

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Abstract

Translation seems a spoon feeding activity if it is taken mere transference of meaning from one language to another i.e. source language to target language. A good translation is usually considered, a translation in which merit of the original work is so completely transfused into another as to be distinctly apprehended by the native speaker of the country to which that language belongs as it is by those who speak the language of the original work. This vendetta leads to the presupposition that there may be other types of translations i.e. a bad translation, an average translation, or the best translation. There is another controversy of free (sense) and literal translation (sense & style). Sometimes it is taken as word for word translation and sometimes as sense for sense translation. But the problem arises when the cultural, poetical, linguistic, stylistic, and technological issues are involved in translation. To find out its inherent impossibility, the participants were given one quotation to translate it from Urdu to English. It is concluded that although the quotation which was given for translation was quite simple and did not have cultural and equivalence problems to a great degree, yet the varied responses with respect to structure, understanding, punctuation, and expression show that it was not an easy task.

Keywords: translation, free translation, literal translation, meaning, transference

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1. Introduction

"Translation is an impossibly possible task" is an oxymoron showing two opposite things at a time. Before going into the controversy, we see what translation is. Beyond the notion stressed by the narrowly linguistic approach, that translation involves the transfer of meaning contained in one set of language signs into another set of language signs through competent use of the dictionary and grammar, the process also involves a whole set of extra-linguistic criteria (Bassnet, 2002). According to Taylor (1998), much liberty is taken in translation where the source language semantic is untouched.

As far as translation from one language to another language is concerned, there are two extreme approaches. One group is of the view that translation is impossible because of the fact that in one language reality is received by one way and in the other language it is perceived in another way. Different languages are engrossed in their own worlds. So, reality from one world cannot be shifted fully and comprehensively into the other world. This view was propounded by American researchers Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf. Lotman (1978) is of the view that society, culture, literature, and art are products of a language, which constitutes the very central part of culture. No language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture; and no culture can exist which does not have at its center, the structure of natural language.

On the other hand, Jakobson (1959), a Russian linguist, is of the view that translation is possible, but one cannot expect to achieve full equivalence between the source text and the target text due to the fact that such equivalence is impossible in an intra-lingual translation with the use of synonymy, so it cannot be expected in an inter-lingual translation. He further clarifies that each language unit consists of connotations and associations that are impossible to transfer. He concludes that translation is only an adequate *interpretation* of an alien code unit and equivalence is impossible (Bassnett, 2002).

Although many linguists nowadays believe that untranslatable texts can be translated indirectly by changing the source item, and explaining there is no definite term in the target language that is implying the same meaning and expression from the source language. Hence, it is more likely that every meaning in an original text can be translated into a target language, and therefore everything is translatable.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Translation is merely taken as a spoon feeding activity for a non-linguist. But it is not the case when it studied as a separate discipline. Its importance is neglected due to its current status in the market along with its complications are not yet thoroughly explored. Balloc (1959) has discussed the problem in his lecture in 1931 as the art of translation is a subsidiary act and derivative, on account of it has never been granted the dignity of the original work. The corresponding misunderstanding of its character has added its degradation; neither its importance nor its difficulty has been grasped. So, having all this in mind, the focus of this attempt is to find out how translation is an impossibly possible task?

2. Literature Review

Sapir claimed 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 worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached. Lotman (1978), a soviet semiotician, supports Sapir's argument by saying that society, culture, literature, and art are products of a language, which constitutes the very central part of culture. No language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture; and no culture can exist which does not have at its center, the structure of natural language. For truly successful translation, biculturalism is even more important than bilingualism, since words only have meanings in terms of the cultures in which they function (Yang, 2010).

On the other hand, Jakobson (1959), a Russian linguist, has distinguished three types of translation:

- Intralingual – within one language,
- Interlingual – between two languages within the same sign system, and
- Intersemiotic – between two sign systems.

He explained that translation is possible, but one cannot expect to achieve full equivalence between the source text and the target text due to the fact that such equivalence is impossible in an intra-lingual translation with the use of

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synonymy, so it cannot be expected in an inter-lingual translation. He further clarifies that each language unit consists of connotations and associations that are impossible to transfer. He concludes that translation is only an adequate interpretation of an alien code unit and equivalence is impossible.

Andre Lefevere (1992) has proposed the theory of rewriting and said that translation is one of the forms of rewriting. Shuping (2013) defined the nature of rewriting: All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting Center for Languages and Translational Studies 91 is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society.

Actually, there are two factors that may affect producing an accurate and a mirror translation of the original text. Linguistic untranslatability occurs when there is no lexical or equivalent term of an expression from the source language in the target language, while cultural untranslatability is due to the absence in the target language culture of a relevant situational feature for the source text. The two are often closely related.

Since different languages use different words to describe things, they must be describing different things. The world I perceive will therefore differ from the world you perceive. Since we inhabit different, mutually exclusive worlds, communication between them is impossible. There are different types of meaning i.e. experiential meaning, intentional meaning, and logical meaning (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). But which type of meaning the translators are taking while translating?

In English, the name of an animal is different from the name of the meat derived from it. Hence, while farmers raise "pigs," the name of meat is "pork, bacon, sausages, etc." Similarly, while a Scottish farmer may own a "sheep," he will make "mutton" pies. The latter distinction is not present in French. In France, farmers both raise and eat "moutons." This distinction can be represented diagrammatically as follows.

State	English	French
Animal	*Sheep*	*Mouton*
Meat	*Mutton*	

It is evident then that English speakers inhabit a world where sheep graze on grass and mutton is served in pies. French speakers therefore inhabit a world where "moutons" graze on grass and are also served in pies. These two positions are irreconcilable and thus, translation between the two is impossible. To posit "sheep" as a translation of "mouton" would impose a distinction which is nonexistent in the source language. Similarly, to posit "mouton" as a translation of "mutton" would mean ignoring the distinction made in English.

In "dictionaries" "equivalence" is created between the lexical stores of two or more languages. Thus, if we search for the French word "mouton" in one of these lists, we are very likely to find a forced equivalence with the words "sheep" and "mutton." The very fact that two "equivalents" are posited for a single word should be enough to dissuade this practice, but sadly it is not.

Interesting equivalence problems are found in Urdu and Hindi where grandparents are distinguished between father's father and mother (*dada, dadi*) and mother's father and mother (*nana, nani*). Italian makes no distinction between 'brother's/sister's son' (i.e. nephew in English) and 'son's/daughter's son' (i.e. grandson in English). Both are *nipote* in Italian. In English, parents' siblings' children are all cousins irrespective of their sex. But they have many names in local languages of Pakistan as '*chachair*', '*mussair*', '*phuphair*', etc. In Hindi and Urdu, single item '*kal*' refers to both 'tomorrow' and 'yesterday' in English.

There is another controversy. Manfredi (2008) points out that the above distinction can be divided into two main perspectives, those that consider translation either as a 'process' or a 'product.' To this twofold categorization, Bell (1991, p.13) adds a further variable, since he suggests making a distinction between translating (the process), a translation (the product), and translation (i.e., "the abstract concept which encompasses both the process of translating and the product of that process").

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The evidence is clear—translation is utterly impossible. It is unthinkable to reconcile divergent realities. If Inuit tribes have several words for snow and we only have one, it is clear that they experience more than one kind of snow placing their experience firmly outside the range of expression possible in English. To say otherwise is to extend the borders of translation outside of that which is proper and reasonable.

3. Methodology

3.1 The Design of the Study

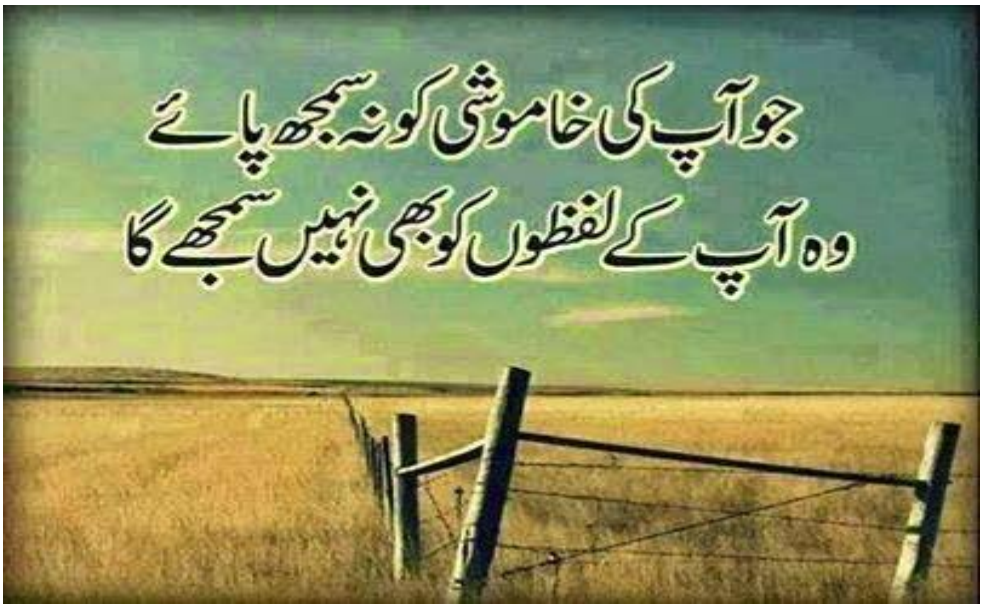
The nature of the research is both qualitative and quantitative. The researcher has manually analyzed the content of the collected data i.e. content analysis method is used in this research. Along with frequency distribution has been checked. In this context, using qualitative strategy as interpretive framework is useful as it involves the interpretation of the translated discourse. Moreover, its epistemology is based on qualitative tradition, known as hermeneutics. The term hermeneutics is used here in terms of the translator's knowledge of the source text, his comprehension of the participants' intention and then the interpretation he makes on the basis of that comprehension. Through a quantitative study, a quotation was administered to the 25 students in order to check the perception of the learners.

3.2 Participants

This quotation was photocopied and distributed to twenty five students in the classroom of the Leads University. The purposive sampling technique was used, because according to the researcher, the class of translation studies could give best information to achieve the objective of the study. The same quotation was also sent by email to translate and send back the response. But most regretfully, there was no response from most of the people. So, I have to explain the responses I got.

3.3 Instrument

A quotation for translation was given to the population.



That quotation is selected from Urdu which was given to translate into English. The responses have been analyzed and explained both quantitatively and qualitatively. Students of the Leads University were the population for this research. Particularly, the students of translation studies class were included for the purpose of this research. The researcher himself distributed the above mentioned quotation in the form of photocopy.

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4. Data Analysis

4.1 Descriptive Analysis of the Data

After getting these responses, they have been arranged keeping the similarities in them so that they can be compared and contrasted with other responses. It is also pertinent to mention that these translated texts are given as received with wrong spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure.

Those who are unable to understand your silence, would not understand your words either.

One who do not understand your silence he will never understand your words.

The one who cannot understand your silence will not understand your words.

He who cannot get your silence He won't be able to get your words either.

One who does not understand your silence! He/she cannot will be able to understand your words too.

The one who cannot understand one's silence, cannot perceive one words.

He, who could not understand your silence; he will never understand your words.

He, who could not understand your word; he will not be able to understand your silence/ quietness.

If he/she does not understand silence then how he/she understand your word.

If a person does not understand your silence, then he/she will not/ never understand your words

Who does not understand your silence He would never understand your words.

Who could not understand your silence He will never understand your words.

Who could not conceive your silence He will never conceive your words.

Who cannot understand your silence He cannot understand your words.

Who could not understand to your quietness, He will not understand to your words.

Who does not understand your silent He cannot understand your words.

Who cannot understand your silence He will never understand your words.

Who do not understand your silence He will never understand your words.

Who was not understand your silence That will not understand your words.

Who cannot understand of your silence. He will not understand of your words.

Who does not understand your silent, He would not understand your words.

Who don't understand your silence feelings; he cannot understand your words feelings.

Who do not here your silence will never hear your words.

Who cannot understand your silence he will not understand your words.

Who do not understand your silence will never understand your words.

Words would never be understood by those who r unable to give meanings to ur silence

There is no need to give any justification or explanation to a person who cannot understand your inner feelings.

Anyone who cannot understand your silence will not even understand your laughs.

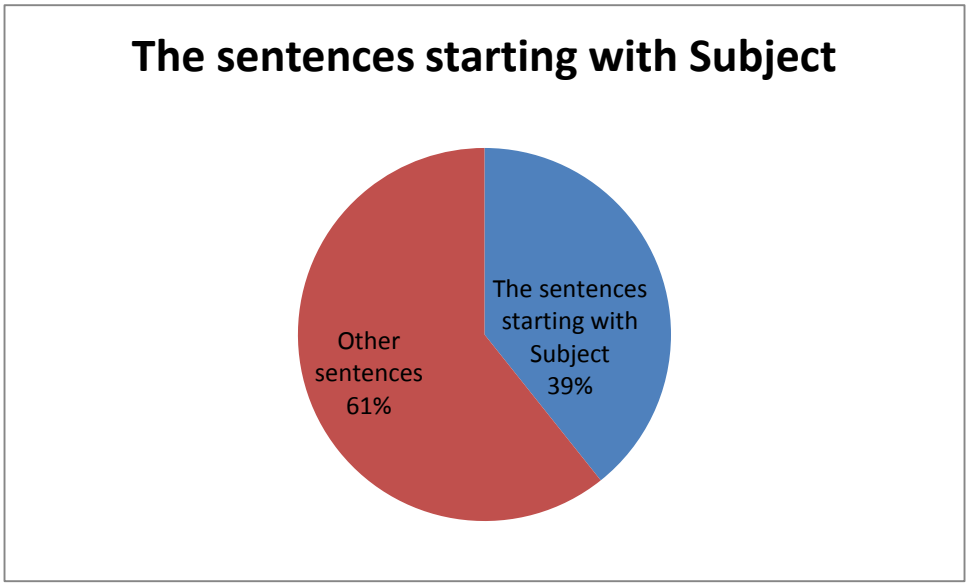
(Internet application translation from voice translate app)

We shall discuss them with different angles.

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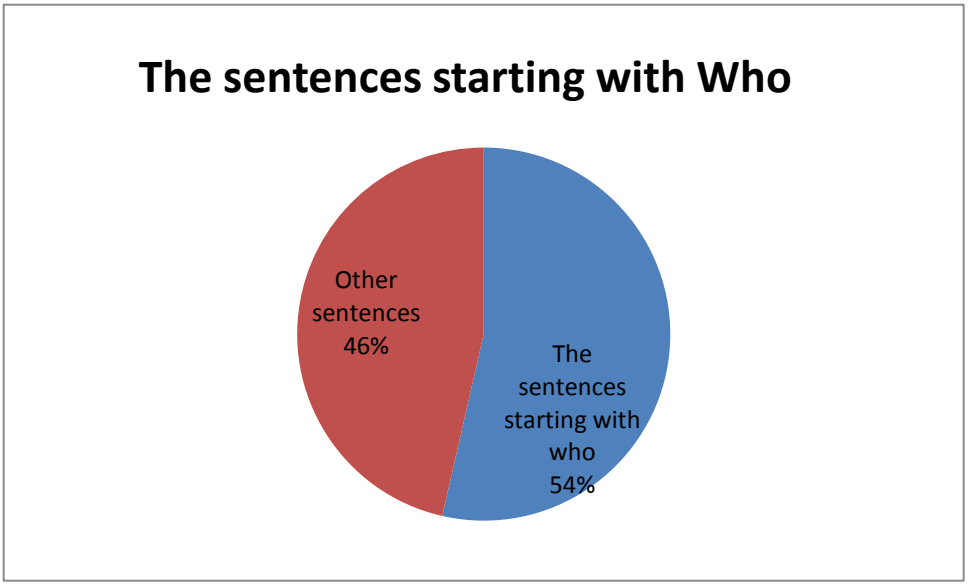
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The sentences starting with Subject (Those, one, the one, he, a person, any one)



This chart shows that 39% people started their sentences with some subjects. Others did not do so. It shows that translators have tendency to translate in many ways.

The sentences starting with Who:

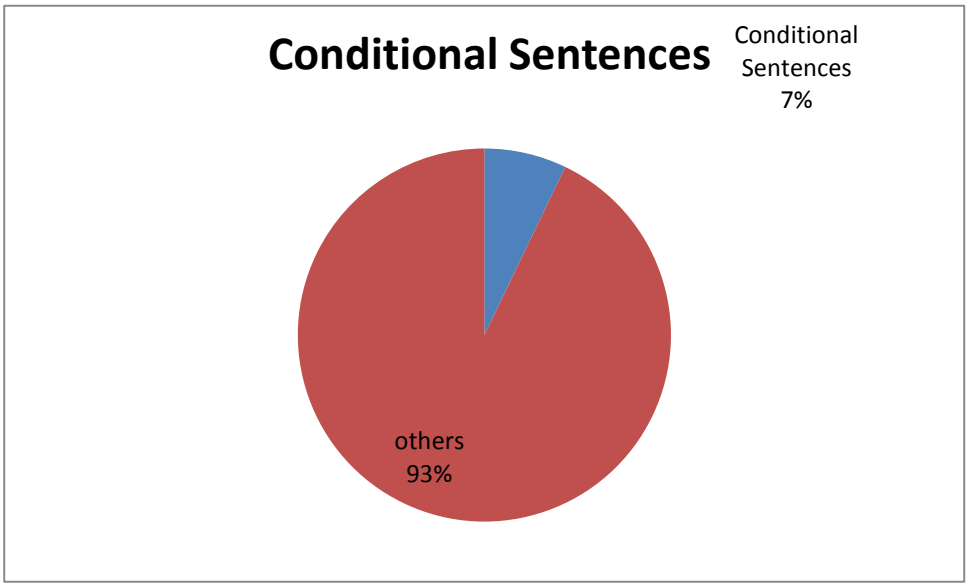


This chart shows that 54% people are starting the sentence with 'who.' In prescriptive rules, it is wrong to start a sentence with 'who' where 'who' is a relative pronoun. But this use in itself is eye-opening and may advocate the descriptive rules. This tendency also advocates the word for word translation. As in Urdu quotation, starting is with '*Jo*' which is directly translated into 'who.'

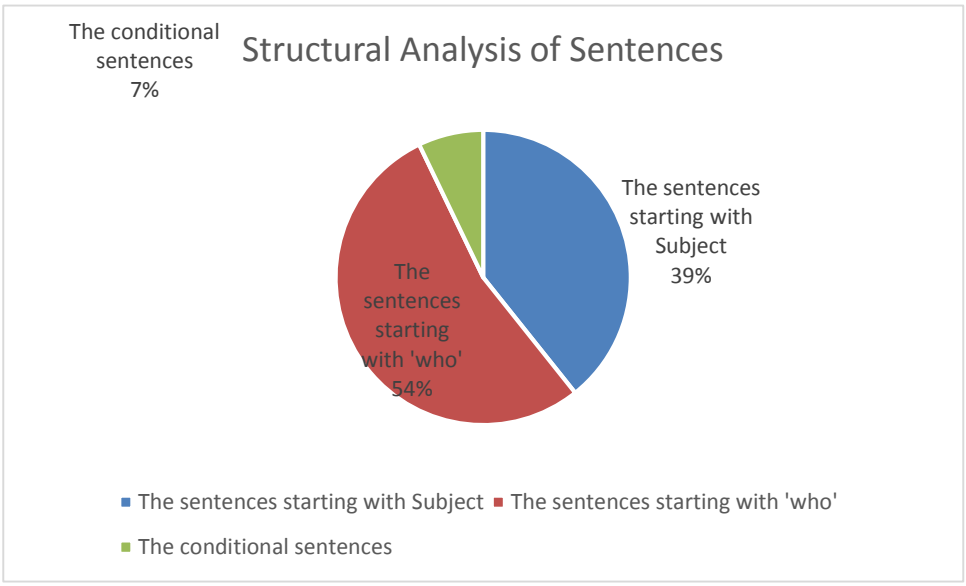
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Conditional sentences



This chart shows that 7% people are translating the quotation in conditional sentences which shows another trend in translation.



This chart shows the range of the use of structures in translation the same quotation. This also shows that structurally the same sentence may be taken in different ways. It is also important to note here that one person has used passive voice structure which is not included here. But it also emphasizes the same point we have emphasized here: translation is impossibly possible task.

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It is also important to note here that different people have perceived the meaning of the quotation in different ways. It is evident from the use of different words for one thing. We know that each word has connotations and collocations. The way people have translated the quotation, shows their level of perception of meaning. Mostly people have translated in word for word translation. The difference was with their own level of proficiency in the use of grammar. Some stated with subjects and after that use 'who' as relative pronoun. Some started directly with 'who' and used subject 'He' or 'She' in the second part of the sentence. This was the major structure used by the people.

Use of punctuation marks and capitalization in the sentences is also very different. Change of the punctuation mark may change the meaning, tone and attitude of the sentence. It is quite clear from the given translated sentences that some translators are using comma (,) to separate two parts of the sentence. Some are using nothing to separate two parts of the sentence. Some are using 'then' to separate two parts of the sentence. Some are using small letters in the start of second part of the sentence. Some are using capital letters in the start of second part of the sentence when there is no full stop or any other punctuation mark before them.

However, there were some sentences which attracted attention. One of such sentences is sentence number 8 (He, who could not understand your word; he will not be able to understand your silence/ quietness.), the translator totally missed the point rather the perception was opposite to the meaning given in source language text.

Some translators have used the word 'feeling' in order to give expression what they actually perceived. Examples are sentences 22 (Who don't understand your silence feelings, he cannot understand your words feelings.) and 27 (There is no need to give any justification or explanation to a person who cannot understand your inner feelings.).

Sentence 27 (There is no need to give any justification or explanation to a person who cannot understand your inner feelings.) is an interesting translation. Whereas in all the sentences except 27, there is proposition that there is expression of feelings e.g. love etc. and you need not express your feelings in words if the person cannot understand your feelings when you are silent. But in sentence 27, the word 'justification' shows as if you were going to give some justification or explanation for something wrong you have committed. Which understanding of the original source language text is appropriate becomes a debatable question here.

Sentence 28 (Anyone who cannot understand your silence will not even understand your laughs.) This is an Internet application translation from voice translate app). When I was collecting data for the translation, I approached one person in order to get translation of the quotation. Instead of translating the quotation himself, he pulled out his smart phone, opened voice translate app and uttered aloud the quotation. After a moment, there appeared not only the sentence in English but also the voice from the mobile. The last word of this translation 'laughs' is quite interesting. This is the translation of the word '*lafzon*' in Urdu. Why has the app taken this word as 'laughs' is not understandable? However, this translation emphasizes our own point: translation is an impossibly possible task.

5. Discussion

The selected quotation was quite general and did not have any cultural, semantic, or equivalence problems in it. Even when there is so simple quotation, the response is not the same. From the point of view of translators, it was not so simple. As we know that different translators perceive the meaning differently according to their own knowledge, skill, and cultural awareness. At some points, the problem of perception is different, so is the translation done by them. One great problem is of grammatical equivalence, which is found in abundance in the translation done by the population.

In ideal translation, prescriptive rules of grammar are emphasized but practically, descriptive grammatical rules are emphasized. From the inspection of the translation of this quotation, it has been highlighted that descriptive rules are more important: how people use the grammar rules practically because idealized prescriptive rules have been used by less number of people. This justifies what Taylor (1998) concluded, much liberty is taken in translation where the source language semantic is untouched.

This attempt agrees with what Jakobson's (1959) view that translation is possible, but one cannot expect to achieve full equivalence between the source text and the target text due to the fact that such equivalence is impossible in an intra-lingual translation with the use of synonymy, so it cannot be expected in an inter-lingual translation. The translation done by people can also be categorized from literal to free translation. Some people have translated the quotation literally and some have translated it freely. This further justifies Bassnett (2002) that 'translation is only an adequate *interpretation* of an alien code unit and equivalence is impossible.'

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6. Conclusion

We can conclude that although the quotation which was given for translation was quite simple and did not have cultural and equivalence problems to a great degree, yet the varied responses with respect to structure, understanding, punctuation, and expression show that it was not an easy task. As we know that each word has symbolic and cultural color and meaning; its own collocation and connotation; with almost impossibility of complete synonymy, the variety of translated text exhibits the impossibility of translation from one language to the other language. The above given analysis of the translated text shows that although it is quite difficult to translate from one language to the other language yet the translated text (although something is lost or gained during the process of translation) gives some meaning and purpose is achieved to some degree. This complication can be handled if people are given knowledge about and importance of translation studies as a subject. Along with, governments should take certain steps, either to create jobs in market or pass certain legislations.

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