

Negotiating Culture: Approaches to Translating Culture-Specific Elements from Spanish into Hindi

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Abstract

Translation is more than a linguistic exercise; it is a cultural negotiation that seeks to preserve meaning across languages. Literary translation, in particular, requires sensitivity to cultural identity and context. This paper explores Peter Newmark's strategies for translating culture-specific elements, applying them to Spanish short stories translated into Hindi. By examining categories such as material culture, ecology, social customs, organizations, and gestures, the study demonstrates how approaches like transference, cultural equivalence, functional equivalence, and naturalization help bridge cultural gaps. The analysis highlights that translation is not a mere word-for-word rendering but an act of intercultural mediation, enabling communication between distinct literary traditions and fostering mutual understanding across cultures.

Keywords: Translation, Culture-specific elements, Peter Newmark, Spanish–Hindi translation, Intercultural communication

Introduction

Translation is the way to convey the meaning of a source text to a target language while maintaining its original value. This requires strong linguistic skills. However, translating literary works demands a deeper understanding of cultural nuances to effectively transfer elements of cultural identity. Translation, understood as a means of communication between different nations with different languages, plays a crucial role in the transfer of culture from one language to another. In fact, the translator's work goes faraway beyond a mere interlinguistic transfer and contains a struggle between the source and target cultures. While translating literary works from Spanish to Hindi or vice versa, it is essential for a translator to know the Spanish culture as well as the Indian culture to transfer the cultural elements with equivalent meanings. Many theorists have contributed valuable strategies for translating culture-specific elements, providing invaluable support to translators. Notable figures in this field include Roman Jakobson, Vinay and Darbelnet, Mona Baker, Eugen Nida, Peter Newmark, Lawrence Venuti, etc.

Drawing on the work of translation theorist Peter Newmark, this article explores his strategies and techniques for translating culture-specific elements. I apply his methods to translate several short stories from Spanish into Hindi, demonstrating how Newmark's approach effectively bridges the gap between these distinct cultures.

Translation starts with a complex negotiation between languages, as the two languages do not share the same structure, syntax, and vocabulary. Therefore, adjustments are always made to give meaning to the unknown when there is no equivalent in the target language for a word or idea in the source language. Anyone who has translated a text can recognize that languages are never the same. Thus, no translation can

convey the same as the original. This means that the translator must engage both in the interpretation of the original text and in its restructuring in the target language.

Translation, especially as it is intended for cultural transmission, plays a crucial role in communicating between different cultures. Some scholars of the translation studies school point out, “*the study of translation is the study of cultural interaction*” M. Cronin (2003).

Additionally, Mueller-Vollmer, K., & Irmscher, M. (1998) describe the translator as an expert in intercultural communication, who is able to identify the most appropriate mediation methods for conveying the intended meaning within a specific sociocultural context. This is crucial because the precise meaning of a word or expression can undergo significant variations depending on the specific cultural environment in which it is used. The main reason is that some words are not universally understood and may acquire different meanings depending on the geographical context in which they are employed. When a word specific to a particular culture is adopted by another group of culture, it is essential to pay attention that its interpretation and meaning may undergo significant modifications. It is essential to consider the cultural context in which such a word is used in order to understand its true scope and connotations.

For example, the Spanish word “*Fiesta*” has a different significance from the one it has in India. In the Spanish context, it refers to a festive event or a social gathering, while in India, it may refer to a festival or a party among friends or family. The same applies to Spain: there are numerous words and expressions that need to be interpreted in light of the context in which they are used, which makes their direct translation into Spanish or Hindi difficult, since their meaning is intrinsically tied to the culture of origin.

Translation is not just about rendering words; instead, it encompasses specific concepts, cultural identities and the essence of a people, a country. In fact, words are not common in both languages, and the same word may have a different translation or meaning depending on the culture it is intended for. This is particularly the case with variants of the same language. For example, the word “*Boy*” in English is translated as “*chico*” in the Spanish of Spain, but as “*muchacho*” in Mexican Spanish.

Newmark’s strategies for translating cultural elements

Peter Newmark (1916–2011) was a well-known British translation theorist, best known for his systematic and pragmatic approach to translation strategies and theories. He made important contributions to the subject by organising translation methodologies, tactics, and procedures. His work is frequently studied in translation theory courses. Two of his best-known works are *Approaches to Translation* (Newmark 1981) and *A Textbook of Translation* (Newmark 1988). Newmark is recognised worldwide for his theories and for having proposed the five categorisations for translating cultural elements. His work continues to be relevant in both translation theory and practice.

Newmark (1988) defined culture as the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to the community using a particular language to express itself. He distinguished “culture” from the “universal” and the “personal” aspects of language. Most cultural elements can be identified because they are associated with the language of a particular country and cannot be translated literally. As a result, literal translation often fails to convey the same meaning as in the source language. Therefore, we must pay close attention before translating phrases, and a functional equivalent description is needed to convey the same meaning in translation. Consequently, Newmark categorized cultural elements into five categories for translating foreign words related to cultures.

He has proposed the following five categories for translating cultural elements into other languages:

- i) **Material Culture:** This includes physical objects and artifacts.
- ii) **Ecology:** This relates to environmental and geographical terms.
- iii) **Social culture:** This covers social customs, relationships, and norms.
- iv) **Organizations, Customs, Activities, Procedures, Concepts:** This encompasses a range of societal structures, practices, and ideas.

- v) Gestures and Habits: This refers to non-verbal and behavioral patterns.

In addition to these primary categories, Newmark further clarifies the subcategories to provide a more detailed approach to translating cultural elements. These categories and their respective subcategories are outlined below (Newmark, 1988).

Categories – Subcategories

1. Material Culture

- a) Food
- b) Clothing
- c) Houses and towns
- d) Transport

2. Ecology

- a) Flora
- b) Fauna
- c) Mountains
- d) Plains
- e) Winds

3. Social Culture

- a) Work and Leisure

4. Organizations, Customs, Activities, Procedures, Concepts

- a) Political and Administrative
- b) Religious
- c) Artistic
- d) Historical terms
- e) International terms

5. Gestures and Habits

- a) habitual actions and movements

The specific strategies for translating cultural elements

Based on categorization of cultural elements, Newmark (1988) also proposes a series of specific strategies that translators can employ to effectively shape these culture-bound elements in a target text. His taxonomy offers a practical framework for addressing the challenges posed by cultural non-equivalence.

Among the key strategies described by Newmark are the following:

Transference:

This strategy consists of directly transferring a word or phrase from the source language into the target language. The translator's decision to use transference depends on various factors, such as the nature of the term and the intended reader. Proper names, such as brands (e.g., Pepsi), people's names (e.g., Miguel de Cervantes), and publication titles (e.g., *El País* and *El Mundo*), are often transferred to maintain recognition and avoid potential ambiguities. In these cases, the cultural context usually accompanies the term, and it is expected that the target readers will recognize it or be able to deduce its meaning. The extent to which a translator opts for transference may also depend on how familiar target culture is with the source culture.

Examples:

Spanish- Siesta

Hindi- सिएस्ता

Spanish- Tango

Hindi- टांगो

Cultural Equivalent:

This method aims to substitute a cultural term in the source language with an equivalent term in the target language that possesses a similar cultural significance or function within the target culture. The idea is to get the target audience to have a similar understanding of the culture.

Examples:

Spanish- Tapas

Hindi- चखना

Spanish- Peso

Hindi- रूपया

Functional Equivalent:

This procedure is used to generalise or neutralise the cultural element in the source language by using a culturally neutral word. This process, which involves cultural componential analysis, is the most correct way to de-culturalize a cultural word.

Examples:

Spanish- Peseta

Hindi- पुराना स्पेनिश मुद्रा

Spanish- Reyes Catolicos

Hindi: कैथोलिक राजा फर्डिनांड और रानी इसाबेला

Direct Translation:

In Newmark's framework, direct translation refers to fundamental methods applied when there are linguistic and cultural similarities between the source languages and target languages. This method involves translating popular collocations, parts of complex phrases, and names of organizations directly. Also, it may involve borrowing terms directly from the source language or using calques, which consist of word-for-word translations that preserve structure. The primary objective of direct translation is to achieve clarity while maintaining the formal and semantic aspects of the source text.

Examples:

Spanish- Novela

Hindi- उपन्यास

Spanish- Luna

Hindi- चंद्रमा

Naturalization:

This strategy consists of adapting a cultural element from the source language by first adjusting its pronunciation to the typical phonetic patterns of the target language. Following this initial adaptation, the element undergoes morphological normalisation, meaning that its form and grammatical inflexions are modified to align with the standard grammatical structures of the target language. The goal is for the foreign elements to appear as natural and integrated as possible within the target language system.

Examples:

Spanish- Mango

Hindi- आम

Spanish- Café

Hindi- coffee

Componential Analysis:

The first stage in this approach is to compare a word or phrase in the source language with a word in the target language that has a similar meaning but is not a clear one-to-one match. To do this, you first show the parts of the meaning that are the same and then the parts that are different.

Examples:

Spanish- Sobremesa

Hindi- खाने के बाद मेज़ पर बैठकर परिवार या मित्रों के साथ बातचीत करने का समय

Spanish- Merienda

Hindi- शाम का नाश्ता

Deletion:

This process involves completely removing a word, phrase, or even a specific segment from the source text. This practice may be used for various reasons, such as maintaining fluency, avoiding redundancy, or adapting the content to the cultural norms and expectations of the target language. When deletion occurs, it is essential to ensure that the overall meaning and intent of the original text remain intact, even if certain elements are no longer present.

Examples:

Spanish- Antes de la clase, fui a pasear con Marta.

Hindi- हम मारता के साथ टहलने गए।

Spanish- Ella bajo despacio.

Hindi- वह धीरे-धीरे नीचे आई।

Couplets:

This is a translation technique in which the translator uses two to four alternative translation methods to deal with a specific case of non-equivalence or to convey a complex aspect of the original text.

Examples:

Spanish- Churros

Hindi- चुर्रोस, को गर्म चॉकलेट के साथ खाया जाता है।

Spanish- Gazpacho

Hindi- गसपाचो एक तरह का सूप

Recognized Translation:

This strategy involves using an established, official, or widely accepted translation for institutional terms or concepts when such equivalents exist in the target language. This approach prioritizes clarity, consistency, and adherence to conventional usage within the target culture and its specific fields (e.g., legal, political, educational).

Examples:

Spanish- ONU (Organización de las Naciones Unidas)

Hindi- संयुक्त राष्ट्र संगठन

Spanish- Los Estados Unidos de América

Hindi- संयुक्त राज्य अमरीका

Additions, Glosses, Notes:

This method involves translators adding extra information to the target text to make up for cultural gaps. It may include brief in-text explanations (glosses), footnotes, or endnotes that clarify culturally specific references and terms that may be unfamiliar or lack direct equivalents. This approach recognizes that simple translation is often insufficient to bridge significant cultural differences and highlights the importance of the translator's role in enhancing intercultural communication.

Examples:

Spanish- Tortilla

Hindi- एक तरह का स्पेनिश ऑमलेट

Spanish- Semana Santa

Hindi- ईसाई धर्म का पवित्र हफ़्ता

Synonymy:

This strategy uses a close equivalent in the target language when no literal translation is available. It prioritizes clarity and simplicity over perfect precision. Synonyms are used when a phrase in the target language has a meaning similar to the original, even if it is not an exact match. This option is often practical when it is tough to maintain the exact meaning or nuance in the target language. The main goal is to express the general idea clearly and effectively, accepting some loss of precise meaning in favor of naturalness and conciseness.

Examples:

Spanish- Maestro

Hindi- अद्यापक

Spanish- Autobús

Hindi- बस

Expansion/Reduction:

This procedure is similar to the amplification procedure described by Delisle and colleagues (1999). It means employing extra words in the target text to restate an idea or make the meaning of the source text stronger because it doesn't entirely match any one phrase in the target language.

Examples:

Spanish- Quinceañera

Hindi- लैटिन अमेरिका में लड़कियों का पंद्रहवां जन्मदिन मनाने का विशेष उत्सव

Spanish- Tapas

Hindi- छोटे व्यंजन जो मदिरा के साथ देते हैं।

Paraphrase:

This strategy focuses on explaining specific segments of the original text. Newmark suggests resorting to paraphrasing, especially in the case of “anonymous” texts with poor writing, implicit implications, or crucial omissions. A literal translation may fail to convey the intended message or resolve ambiguities. Paraphrasing helps make unclear information explicit, improving clarity and the impact of the target text. This approach recognizes that to remain faithful to meaning, it may be necessary to depart from the exact wording of a flawed or incomplete source text.

Examples:

Spanish- Dale la vuelta a la tortilla

Hindi- सकारात्मक सोचना

Spanish- Estoy muerto de hambre.

Hindi- मैं भूख से मर रहा हूँ।

Translation Label:

This is a temporary or provisional translation, often used for new institutional phrases or ideas that don't yet have a set counterpart in the target language. It is a temporary name that might be descriptive or useful until a more common or natural phrase is used in the target culture and language.

Examples:

Spanish- Las Fallas

Hindi- आग का त्योहार

Spanish- Botellón

Hindi- नाबालिग बच्चों की सड़क पर शराब पार्टी।

Modulation:

Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) say that this is a translation method that requires changing the point of view, perspective, or category of thought while expressing the same notion in the target language as in the source language. It happens when the translator changes the point of view to say the same thing in the target language.

Examples:

Spanish- No me importa.

Hind- मुझे इससे कोई फर्क नहीं पड़ता/ मुझे परवाह नहीं है।

Spanish- Me pongo nervioso.

Hindi- मैं घबरा जाता हूँ।

Shifts or Transpositions:

As defined by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), this requires changing grammatical terms from the source language into the target language, such as moving from singular to plural. Secondly, it involves changing source language structures into target language ones that are not identified as source language forms. Thirdly, it includes changing verbs in the source language into other word forms in the target language.

Examples:

Spanish- Las personas son amables.

Hindi- लोग दयालु हैं।

Spanish- Tengo sed

Hindi- मुझे प्यास लगी है।

Descriptive Equivalent:

This translation method emphasizes clarifying cultural expressions using easily understandable words. It often incorporates transparent elements, such as dialect, to help bridge cultural differences and effectively convey the original meaning to the target audience.

Examples:

Spanish- Corrida de toros

Hindi- सांड और इंसान के बीच पारंपरिक मुकाबला।

Spanish- Encierro

Hindi- इंसानों का सांडों के आगे दौरेना त्योहार के दौरान।

Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of the translation from Spanish to Hindi, using the approaches and strategies recommended by Newmark, highlights that translating cultural elements involves more than just a straightforward linguistic exchange. To translate, you need to know both the source and destination cultures very well. As this exploration of Peter Newmark's work demonstrates, a translator must act as an intercultural mediator, bridging the gap between the two cultures. Newmark's categorization of cultural elements and a comprehensive list of specific strategies provide a valuable roadmap for navigating the challenges one faces while translating a text.

As exemplified in this article, the application of Newmark's methods to translate Spanish short stories into Hindi highlights their practical utility. Strategies like transference, cultural and functional equivalents, and componential analysis are essential tools for ensuring that cultural nuances, idioms, and values are not lost in translation. Whether it's finding a Hindi equivalent for a Spanish fiesta or using descriptive glosses for terms like *Semana Santa*, Newmark's framework enables translators to make informed choices that respect the original text while making it available and meaningful to new readers.

Ultimately, the act of translating culture-specific elements is a creative and critical process that helps people from different cultures understand one another. Instead of translating word-for-word, translators should use these approaches and embracing a more culturally sensitive methodology, which can help foster a deeper connection and appreciation between diverse literary traditions.

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