

**SITING TRANSLATION
HISTORY, POST-STRUCTURALISM, AND THE COLONIAL
CONTEXT by
TEJASWINI NIRANJANA**

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Presentation :-

<https://www.slideshare.net/slideshow/siting-translation-presentation-history-pdf/274608891>

Abstract :-

Tejaswini Niranjana draws attention to how translators such as William Jones portrayed colonised cultures as inferior and static in order to defend imperial dominance in the section History in Translation. Examining how translation reinforced passivity and effeminacy stereotypes by interpellating colonised persons into colonial discourses is the focus of Translation as Interpellation. Niranjana exposes how colonial translations' historicist foundations served to legitimize Western rule in The Question of History.

Research Problem :-

The part translation plays in maintaining colonial power structures.

Objective :-

To investigate the resistance potential of colonial translation processes and critique them.

Methodology :-

Applying Derrida's theories to a post-structuralist examination of colonial translations.

Key Findings :-

Although it might be reinterpreted as a means of contesting colonial narratives, translation served as justification for imperial dominance.

History In Translation :-

"The passion for English knowledge has penetrated the most obscure, and extended to the most remote parts of India. The steam boats, passing up and down the Ganges, are boarded by native boys, begging, not for money, but for books. . . . Some gentlemen coming to Calcutta were astonished at the eagerness with which they were pressed for

books by a troop of boys, who boarded the steamer from an obscure place, called Comercolly. A Plato was lying on the table, and one of the party asked a boy whether that would serve his purpose. 'Oh yes,' he exclaimed, 'give me any book; all I want is a book.' The gentleman at last hit upon the expedient of cutting up an old Quarterly Review, and distributing the articles among them."

- Charles Trevelyan, On the Education of the People of India

Meaning of this quote :-

The quote is a reflection of the colonial narrative that justified the colonial imposition of English language and knowledge systems by framing colonised persons as wanting Western education and culture. The coercive systems of colonial dominance that produced this reliance on Western knowledge are subtly erased as it portrays Indians actively seeking out English texts.

Connectivity to History in Translation:-

By showing how translation, as a colonial instrument, created the colonised subject as inferior and dependent, Niranjana challenges this portrayal in History in Translation. Trevelyan's depiction of Indians "begging" for literature is consistent with this, reinforcing their need for British intellectual and cultural direction. Such narratives are deconstructed by Niranjana, which exposes them as a component of the colonial endeavour to erase indigenous knowledge systems and the violence of colonial history while legitimising dominance.

Summary :-

SITUATING TRANSLATION :-

Niranjana examines how translation developed into a potent instrument of colonial dominance through her article, influencing depictions of colonized nations to support imperial control. By producing "textualized" representations of Indian culture, translators such as William Jones were instrumental in elevating the "golden past" while simultaneously highlighting the present's degradation. The colonial goal of "civilizing" the colonized was upheld by this story.

The traditional Western translation paradigm, which is based on the philosophical presumptions of faithfulness and openness, is criticized by Niranjana. She contends that translation was a deeply ingrained act of asymmetrical power relations throughout the colonial era rather than being impartial or objective. Translation created dominant interpretations of the "other," hiding the political and historical brutality of colonialism by portraying colonized cultures as static and inferior. For example, Manu's **Dharmasastra** and Jones's translation of **Sakuntala** presented India as an ancient civilization in decline, establishing a theoretical economics that supported British domination. By reinforcing British legal and educational frameworks and disparaging

local knowledge systems, these translations contributed to the justification of colonial dominance.

English education is justified by discrediting indigenous knowledge through translations. In order to defend imperial power, Niranjana criticizes translation's reliance on Western ideas of transparency and representation, contending that it fixed colonial cultures as static and inferior. In contrast, translation operated within a historicist framework that marginalized non-Western civilizations and elevated Western civilization as superior and progressive.

This teleological concept, which legitimized colonial dominance by fixing the colonized as immobile and incapable of self-determination, is criticized by Niranjana. Questions ideas of faithfulness and transparency in translation. De Man and Derrida's analysis of the influential article **"The Task of the Translator"** by Walter Benjamin. makes use of Derrida's **"supplement"** to demonstrate how colonial power is both upheld and challenged via translation.

TRANSLATION AS INTERPELLATION :-

This section explores how colonized individuals' identities were shaped to suit imperial objectives by using translation to "interpellate" them into colonial ideas. Niranjana demonstrates how translation produced subjectivities that were subservient to colonial power by referencing Althusser's idea of interpellation.

Administrators like James Mill and orientalist interpreters like William Jones created images of Indians as weak, docile, and incapable of governing themselves logically. Translations of legal, historical, and cultural literature that portrayed Indian society as fundamentally autocratic and in need of British intervention served to further these prejudices. Jones, for example, justified the necessity for British translators to "purify" and reinterpret Indian laws by highlighting the "insincerity" of Indian pandits and maulvis.

Three interconnected motivations :

- 1. The need for translation by the European, the native are unreliable interpreters of their own laws & Culture.,**
- 2. The desire to be a lawgiver, to give Indians their "own" laws., and**
- 3. The desire to "purify" Indian culture & speak on its behalf.**

Colonial ideals were also incorporated into a variety of discourses, such as governance and education, with the aid of translation. Translation legitimized the colonial goal and suppressed alternative narratives of resistance by presenting the colonized as reliant on the colonizer for intellectual and cultural leadership. Because these behaviors erase the agency of the colonized and uphold colonial systems, Niranjana criticizes them.

Translated Indian texts with Westernized coherence (e.g., Carey, Ward). Advocated salvation through conversion to Western religion. Macaulay's idea was to make middlemen who were English intellectuals and Indians by blood. Remove the "priests' tyranny" from Indian minds, according to Grant's thesis. Codification of Indian languages and creation of Western-style dictionaries. Standardization of texts reinforced Eurocentric cultural dominance.

THE QUESTION OF "HISTORY" :-

The historicist foundation of colonial translations is criticized by Niranjana in this section. Colonial authorities' use of historicism portrayed non-Western cultures as sluggish and archaic in comparison to the vibrant and forward-thinking West. Niranjana draws attention to the ways in which this paradigm was employed to stifle alternative historical narratives and legitimize the colonial effort.

Niranjana makes the case that translation was a place of ideological conflict rather than a straightforward act of conveying meaning by drawing on post-structuralist ideas, especially Derrida's critique of representation. By revealing how colonial translations produced their own realities and histories, she casts doubt on the idea that translation is an open process that offers direct access to an "original" text.

By dismissing non-Western cultures as "prehistoric," Hegel's worldview portrays history as a teleological, Eurocentric development. It reduces colonized peoples' histories to unchanging backgrounds and denies them agency. The dynamic impact of the past on the present is given top priority in Nietzsche's *wirkliche Historie* and Gadamer's *Wirkungsgeschichte*. By contesting colonial impositions, anti-essentialist histories make room for regional narratives.

A Hybrid Approach by Homi Bhabha exposes the inconsistencies of colonial rule. draws attention to how hybrid identities can be used to rewrite cultural narratives. serves as a platform for cultural negotiation, promoting creativity and contesting essentialist histories. challenges the "pure" nature of history by emphasizing its inherent inconsistencies and gaps. Deconstruction is used by post-colonial theory to undermine fixed identities that colonial narratives established. Affirmative deconstruction promotes reconstructive methods while upending colonial discourse.

Niranjana promotes deconstructing translation in order to challenge the colonial narratives ingrained in historicist paradigms. She sees translation as a potential resistance tactic that might demolish colonial images and restore cultural agency by revealing its ideological foundations. This method questions the hierarchical and teleological historical frameworks that still marginalize non-Western viewpoints.

Conclusion :-

In Niranjana's view, translation was not a neutral or linguistic process, but rather a powerful

ideological tool in the colonial endeavor. It maintained unequal power dynamics, produced hegemonic histories, and regulated the representation of the colonized. But by rethinking translation via a post-structuralist lens, Niranjana argues for its potential as a strategy of resistance. Through the deconstruction of colonial translations, cultural agency can be restored by contesting the historicist and teleological frameworks that still marginalize non-Western histories and cultures.

Question Bank

*** Long question answers:**

- 1) **Critically analyze how Tejaswini Niranjana uses the concept of "translation as interpellation" to critique colonial subject formation.** (Translation and Ideological Interpellation, Translation as a Tool of Colonial Power, Construction of Authority, Erasure of Difference, Cultural Essentialism, Poststructuralism and the Critique of Representation, Resistance and Rewriting, Reclaiming Agency, Deconstructing Colonial Translations, Interrogating Language, Implications for Colonial Subject Formation)
- 2) **Critically assess the intersection of post-structuralism and post-colonialism in Niranjana's deconstruction of translation.** (Post-Structuralism and Translation: Deconstruction and Representation, The Instability of Meaning, Translation as Violence, Post-Colonialism and Translation: Power and Subaltern Voices, Orientalism and Translation, Colonial Knowledge Production, Intersection of Post-Structuralism and Post-Colonialism, Critique of Eurocentrism, Unmasking Ideology, Destabilizing Binaries, Niranjana's Contribution: Translation as a Site of Resistance, Limitations and Critique)
- 3) **Critically assess the contributions of William Jones, James Mill, and Hegel to the colonial construction of Indian identity.** (James Mill: Utilitarian Critique and the Denigration of India, G.W.F. Hegel: Philosophical Denial of Indian History, Comparative Assessment, Post-Colonial Critique and Reclamation)
- 4) **Critique the role of Orientalist translation in shaping colonial policies and identities, as outlined in Niranjana's analysis.** (Translation as a Tool of Orientalism, Translation and Colonial Policy Formation, Construction of Colonial Identities, Niranjana's Post-Structuralist Critique, Critique of Orientalist Translation)

*** Short answers :**

- 1) Significance of Asymmetry in Translation
- 2) Historicist Model in Mill's History of British India
- 3) Translation as Interpellation
- 4) Translation and the Teleological Model of History
- 5) Denial of Coevalness
- 6) Hegelian Historicism in Colonial Discourse
- 7) Hegelian Historicism in Colonial Discourse
- 8) Translation and Historicism
- 9) William Jones and the Construction of Indian History
- 10) James Mill's Utilitarian Framework

*** MCQs :**

Multiple Choice Questions Select the appropriate Option.

Q 1: In a post-colonial context the problematic of translation becomes Significant site for raising questions of

- a) Knowledge and anthropology.
- b) representation, power & historicity.
- c) powerless, philosophy and history.
- d) philology, linguistics, and Literary interpretation.

Correct option :

(b) representation, power, and historicity.

Q 2: Trevelyan shows, with some pride, how young Indians, without any external compulsion,

- a) beg for "English"
- b) beg for "Knowledge"

c)beg for "Freedom"

d)beg for "Wisdom"

Correct option: (a) beg for "English"

Q 3: William Ward's preface to his three-volume is instructive for the virulence with which it attacks the depravity and immorality of the natives.

a) A View of the History, Literature and Mythology of the Christians

b) A View of the History, Literature and Mythology of the Muslims

c) A View of the History, Literature and Mythology of the Sikhs

d) A View of the History, Literature and Mythology of the Hindoos

Correct Option: d) A View of the History, Literature and Mythology of the Hindoos

Q 4: Colonial Society presents a good example of the workings of a Culture.

a)European

b)British

c)hegemonic

d) American

Correct Option : c) hegemonic

Q 5: The introduction of English education in India was primarily a result of a unified agreement between the English Parliament, the East India Company, and the native elite classes.

a) True

Or

b) False

Correct Option : False

Explanation:

The introduction of English education in India was an "embattled response" to tensions between the English Parliament, the East India Company, and the native elite classes, as well as to the missionaries' pressures, as pointed out by Gauri Viswanathan.

