Plato's Allegory of the Cave:
Interrogating The Subjective and Objective Dimensions of Translation

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Abstract

Plato's allegory of the cave as demonstrated in his *The Republic* is basically about the existence of two worlds of lived existential realities which can be summed up as subjective and objective. Conscious experience played a major role in the allegory which bifurcates the subjective and objective dimension necessary for effective translation. The allegory is a representation of the real, from the unreal as well as the perspectives derivable from affinity to the senses or intuitive knowledge. In the allegory, there are two actors in the whole drama of reality who are the subjects of circumstances (those trapped in the cave and the one who gained freedom from the cave) owing to their discrepancies in beliefs which can be conceptual or textual. Going by the linguistic theory of translation, the study attempts to understand the place and importance of the subject (translator) and his engagement with the object (Source Text-ST, Source Language-SL). The aim of the study is to consolidate on the efforts of the translator who swims amidst the tide of social realities and expectations in the face of doing a thorough job. The study holds the position that this aspect of translation can aid in the general understanding of translation studies just as Plato's allegory of the cave has been very informative in the area of demarcating knowledge and truth from opinion.

Keywords: Plato, Allegory Translation, Subject, Object, Theoretical Framework, Effectiveness.

Introduction

Translation is an important aspect of human life for several reasons. It involves the making clear of languages from a socio-cultural setting to another language in a different socio-cultural setting. This has helped to advance human knowledge and encourage cultural diversity as well as global harmony which have yielded progress in human epistemic advancement and greater ethical coherency. Susi Harliani (2019,p. 122) holds the view that the most common definition of

translation is the "process of translating or copying from one language to another". This would mean the direct translation of sentence from a particular language (Source Language) to a different language entirely (Target Language). However, translation is not just all about translating as it is also about what is being translated.

The content of what is being translated and how it is translated is very important to translation and often downplayed. While quoting Larson, Harliani (2019, p. 123) observes that "translation consist of transferring the meaning of source language into the receptor language. This is done from the form of the first language to the form of second language by the way of semantic structure". It is therefore, not just all about a word translation. Irrespective, in the process of translation, many factors come into play such as the cultural background and ideological biases of the subject (i.etranslator) over and above the thing being translated (Object). Deficiency of understanding language or language involved, and lack of style in either of the languages can also pose a challenge.

Plato's allegory of the cave holds positive implications for translation. This is because the allegory is based on two bifurcated realities; that is, a condition of social and perceptual framing where the subject is not offered opportunities to be different in their interpretation of reality and a situation where the subject strives inwards to observe true reality. Both realities are a bifurcation of the world based on how we perceive it as sentient beings, and a real world which does not depend on how we are conditioned perceptually. Thus, the intelligible or intuitive dimension of reality is over and above the sensible. This is at most why Calabrese (2020, p. 435) avers that Plato's allegory portrays "a search for intelligibility since it is a desire to catch the entirety. In this regard, translation should not be guided by how sentences or words appear but should strive to attain intelligibility to be able to render effective translation of texts resulting in the perfect communication of ideas.

In a bid to undertake a thorough job of translation, the subject is required to strive above the mere graphic representation of texts and sentence and endeavor to search for intelligibility through the employment of intuitive insights. This is where this study aims at paying attention to the translator who, in a bid to doing a thorough job is faced with social tides which are always out to condition the mind towards a one-sided view of semantic understanding in translations. The study attempts to see to the idea that the translator should imitate the action of the individual in Plato's allegory who forsakes the cave to encounter the truth. Thus, the translator is required to be able to decipher truth to make sure to offer truth in the process of translating as this would help in advancing true knowledge rather the conditioned opinion of a conditioned public.

I. Translation and Exactitude

Generally, at the mention of translation, one is drawn to think about a process of translating words and meaning from a source text (ST) to a target test (TT). This involves lots of processes which can be very cumbersome, judging from the style and method in which the ST is based; not to mention the translator's own judgment and understanding of what is being translated. This has yielded various views on what translation is and the method in which it can be made perfect. Fawcett (2003, p. 1) avers that "translation is a language activity" and this means that it is totally business oriented in language. By being language oriented, translation involves

semantics, morphology, etymology, syntax, as well as phonology, all of which are crucial to language and translation. Thus, "any theory of translation must draw upon a theory of language- a general linguistic theory" (Fawcett 2003, p. 1).

This understanding is too simplistic and direct in that, it only seems to establish translation as a sole linguistic business without recourse to what the process of translation entails. This is why, Fawcett (2002, p. 1) notes that "Noam Chomsky was rather more skeptical about the implications of his theory for translation, saying that his theory "does not, for example, imply that there must be some reasonable procedure for translating between languages". It is therefore expected that in the process of translation, a clear explanation of the processes undertaken needs be outlined so to decipher true translation from quackery.

Catford (1967, p. vii) upholds that "translation is an activity of enormous importance in the modern world and it is a subject of interest not only to linguist, professional and amateur translators, and language teachers, but also to modern world. In the 21st century, translation is not simply limited to those aspects of study, but to the academia as a whole since STs are translated from all academic fields, to TTs in all academic fields. Hence, if there exist certain errors in translation, such errors are likely to yield epistemic problems that may not be good for humanity's progress. Again, Catford (1967, p. 27) makes two distinctions in translation which are textual equivalence and formal correspondence thus:

> A textual equivalent is any TL text or portion of text which is observed on a particular occasion … to be the equivalent of a given SL text or portion text. A formal correspondent on the other hand, is any TL category (unit, class, structure, element of structure etc.), which can be said to occupy as nearly possible the 'same' place, in the 'economy' of the TL as the given SL category occupies in SL…it is clear that formal correspondence is always approximate (27).

This implies that the literature of the Target Language (TL) must be textually equivalent to the literature of the source language (SL). This has to do with the meaning, nature, and context of what is being translated. On the other hand, it connotes that, in a translation process, the space occupied by wordings in the TL in expected to approximately fill the same space in the SL. This is however required so to have a sort of balance in translation. In the same vein, Catford (1967, p.35) observes that meanings are very important to translations and that translations are usually defined in reference to meaning. Thus, he notes that "a translation is said to have the same meaning as the original"just as Ukpong (2017, p. 79) avers that translation "strives for mastery, it strives for exactitude, competence and perfection of some sort…" In this case, translation is meaningless if it is not dependent on the quest to unravel and denote meaning.

In the process of translation, accuracy, precision, and exactitude are mostly required. This is because translation ought to be done with formal correspondence and textual equivalence with recourse to meaning of what is translated from the SL to the TL. The fact that meanings are involved in translations is not just enough. It is expected that translation communicates not just meaning but one that is exact, precise, and accurate. This point is very important for epistemic directedness and intellectual proximity. It is on this note that Plato's allegory of the cave breeds

lots of significance for translation because it values the truth rather than opinions and involves intuition and criticality in its quest for truth, pointing to the fact that the individual, that is, the translator, is expected to carry out the job of translating with clarity and exactitude.

II. Plato's Allegory of the Cave

In the allegory of the cave, as derived from Book VII of *The Republic,* Plato paint a picture of prisoners deep in a cave, who are chained in such a way that they can only look at one direction without neither being able to turn to the left nor to the right. But have been this way all their lives. In regards to this, Plato (1991, p. 514b) notes that "their light is from a fire burning far above and behind them. Between the fire and the prisoners there is a road above, along which see a wall". Thus, the fire behind them above a raised platform has men carrying images passing through the fire in that their images reflect on the walls in which the prisoners are looking.

Plato (1991, p. 514c-515a) writes that "'they also see along these human beings carrying all sorts of artifacts, which project above the wall, and status of men and other animals wrought from stone, wood, and every kind of material; as is to be expected, some of the carrier's utter sounds while others are silent'". the implication of this is that the prisoners chained to look at one direction will feel that the images they are seeing are the real one and the sounds they hear are made by the shadows which they see (Pato 1991, p. 515a).They will never think of anything different or wish anything different from what they are chained to see. This implies the way in which people are being conditioned to see things from one prism without thinking of an alternative position. In this sense, everyone is simply doing the same thing and when this occurs, truth is shielded and opinions take the center stage.

In the same vein, Plato writes that if by chance, an individual escape from the cave and goes on to see daylight and how things really are, his eyes will be hurt and if he returns into the dark cave, his eyes will be hurt by the darkness in it. Consequently, Plato (1991, p. 515e,516e) avers that ""and, if the compelled him to look at the light itself, would his eyes hurt and would he flee, turning away to those things that he is able to make out and hold them to be really clearer than what is being shown?" However, this man, having been released would pity his folks in the cave and would want to help them attain freedom to come and view the real world and not that of shadows. Plato asks what may be his fate if he is seen trying to do such? Thus, Glaucon is asked "if they were somehow able to get their hands on and kill the man who attempts to release and lead up, wouldn't they kill him? (1991, p. 517a). Glaucon answers in the affirmative".

Plato's allegory of the cave has varied implications for translations by way of extrapolation. This is because the translator may decide not to view STs with a critical mindset in other not to convey a clear and precise and translation into the TT. This is often due to the fact that the translator may want to be moved by conventionality, that is, like the slaves in the allegory of the cave, chained to look at one direction. Such may deter the underlying meaning of what is being translated and in turn, translate only the shadows of the ST. Translation involves a subject who is the translator and an object which is the text being translated. The subject is not necessarily single but may involve a plurality of individuals. The object is mostly divided into two which involves the source text (ST), and the target text (TT).

Subject and Object Dichotomy in Translation

The process of translating a text usually involves the subject and an object. This has to do with the translator and the translated text(s). However, the process of translation does not end here but also involves a bifurcation of the source text (ST) and the target text (TT). These two texts have distinct languages which the translator, expected to be competent in both languages, would have to translate from the ST to the TT. Thus, if the ST is written in English language, the objective of the subject may be to translate the text which is so written into any other language such as German, French, Spanish and so on. Alwazna (2017, p. 366) avers that in translating the ST into the TT, the translator is expected to observe the following stages: familiarize with the background information of the source text, analyze the source text, transfer from the ST to the TT, produce the first of the target text, produce the second draft of the target text, revise and test the translation that is done from the ST to the TT. All of these involve not just a transfer of semantic structure but also of meaning. Hence, the question of how such transfer takes place is very crucial to accuracy and precision in translation.

In the translation process, the subject views the object as distinct from itself. This implies that, the nature of the object (ST and TT) can be both determined by the subject, that is, the translation process depends much on how the subject handles it. If he is conditioned to see things only in one direction, then translation may not be accurate and precise since such would mean that the subject is conditioned to view things only in the direction that is familiar to him. Such a subject may not be able to observe that concurrent changes in language, the addition of new words and meanings, and the growth, and development of contexts in both the ST and the TL.Akhiroh (2020, p. 4) notes that for aclear-cuttranslation to occur, the source text must be able to achieve a parallel with the target text. Thus, the subject shouldn't deviate from the theme or meaning, or semantic structure of the source text, but presents it as it in the source text into the target text. However, how such a feat can be achieved seamlessly remains a fundamental issue in translation.

Anthony Pym (1993, p. 2) offered Christiane Nord's solution to such a problem, suggesting that in the process of translating the subject ought to identify and isolate ST elements or themes that may be preserved or adapted in the translation. This brings to the case of whether the subject's biases or cultural conditioning can have a role to play in the activity between the subject and the object. Ukpong (2020, p. 165) however notes that, "a people's worldview about reality may hinder effective translation if not properly understood".

The point advocated for here is to have a translation that will be objective and not a translation that will be ridden with certain "idols of the mind or distempers" that may make the subject to translate the ST as if there is a personal grouse with the idea that are inherent in it or allow the epistemic barriers of his mind to shroud his sense of reasoning and aim towards a concrete, precise, exact, and transparent translation. Plato's allegory of the cave offers a solid foundation on which translation can effectively be carried out as a business aimed at portraying truth rather than opinions and translating texts as they are rather than as they simply appear to be. In this case, the translator ought to dig deep to discover the underlying information that is crested in a ST into a specific TT.

III. A Theoretical Framework for Effective Translation

As noted, Plato's allegory of the cave offers invaluable insights as to how translation can take a more definite path that would yield greater efficiency in the transfer of knowledge and ideas from the ST to the TT. This can greatly reform the process of translation so that in translation process, the translator ought to have a good grasp of the language of the ST and TT, as well as the source language (SL) and target language (TL). But it may not seem alright if his grasp is not different from the floating linguistic grasp of other translators or the kind of grasp that is not the product of deep intellectual insight. Thus, Seresova and Brevenikova (2019, p. 3) opine that "the concept of understanding can be explained as the comprehension of text content, which does not include only knowledge in itself, but also intellectual understanding". However, transferring sentence and meaning in the contexts in which they are written ought to be a task that involves the subject's full sincerity and honesty in being sure to achieve an exact replication of same meaning and context in the TT. Translation is a serious intellectual business which requires supreme insight. This is because any error in translation can lead to error and distortion in knowledge which has a serious and disastrous epistemic consequence. Plato's allegory of the cave offers great insights in translation in that, it prods the translator to always strive higher towards achieving exactitude, truth, and precision in the process of translation so as to be able to transfer true knowledge.

Evaluation and Conclusion

In a globalized era with postmodern scripts, it is difficult to have knowledge confined to only one language. The world is in a state of unending progression in science, and every other academic sphere of human endeavor. This is a reality due to the inextricable network of translation done with hundreds of languages. These translations have helped humans who are familiar only to their language of birth to acquire knowledge in a language that is intellectually crippling. Thus, the translation of texts or speech ought to be taken seriously so as to curb the issues that come with linguistic and contextual differences. The subject (translator) is expected to observe the object (the text or speech being translated) while being armed with the intellectual and intuitive insights to be able to access the originality of STs and maintain such originality in Tts.

The aim of this study has been to thoughtfully employ Plato's allegory of the cave as a theoretical framework towards achieving exactitude in a translation process. In the course of this study, a wealth of knowledge has been offered in regards to translation, on why it is important to achieve exactitude in translation from the philosophical perspective of Plato's allegory of the cave, subject and object dichotomy in translation and the consequences that hold for a subject text and a target text. This study has also presented the significance of Plato's allegory of the cave in translation studies. Conclusively, the study makes the point very lucid that translation from the basis of language is an important and serious epistemic prima that must be given a serious impetus so that it adds up to the unending global experience in knowledge, transfer of knowledge, and the application of knowledge.

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