

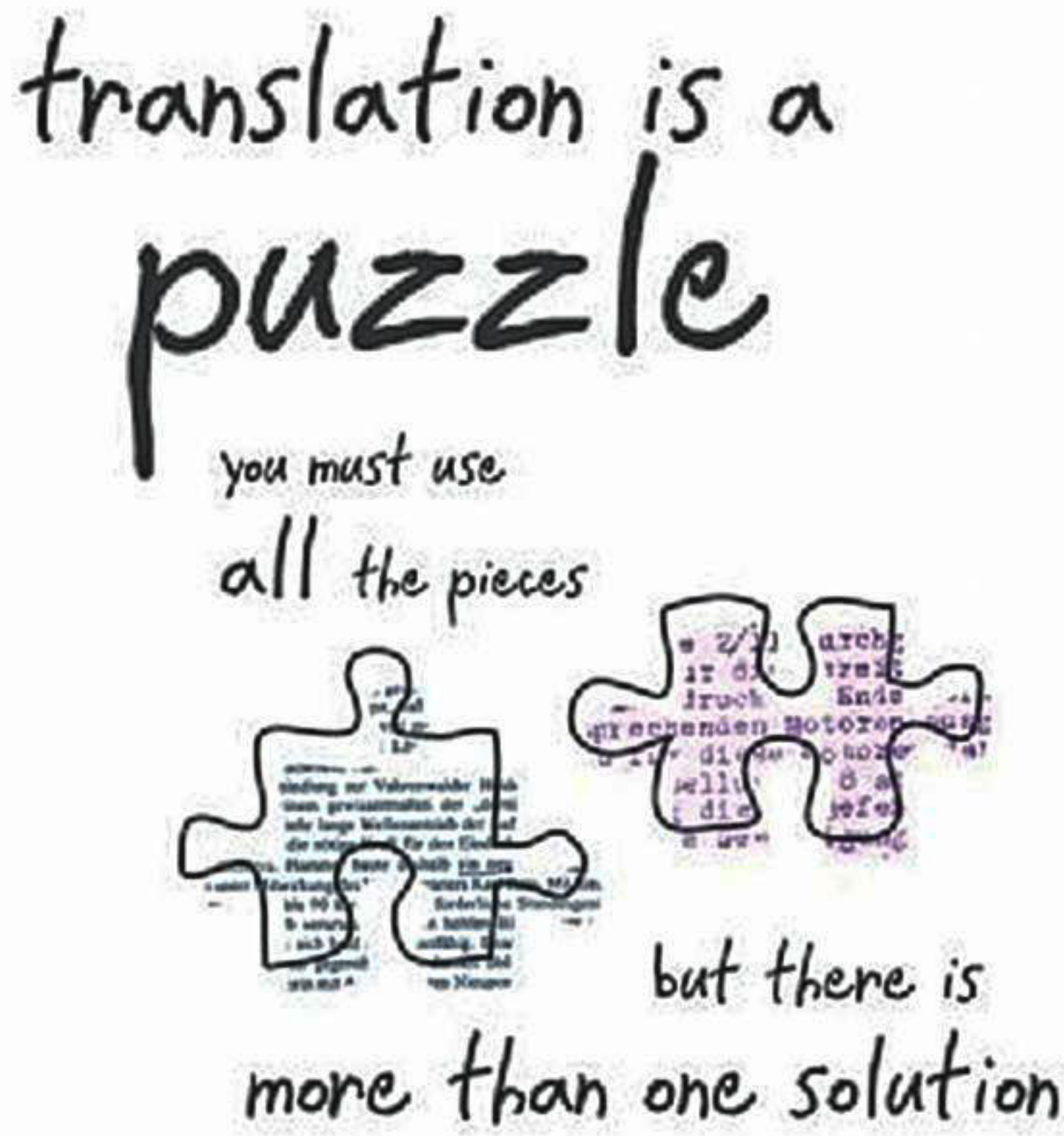
## Musing Lightly on the Issues of Translation

FAYEZA HASANAT

**DEFINING TRANSLATION**  
Roman Jakobson once defined translation as a rewording of verbal signs that uses other signs of the same language, as a proper interpretation of verbal signs done in another language, and lastly, as transmutation, especially when it interprets verbal signs by means

linguistic vision of Utopian harmony. And the most harmonized translation is instrumental in its approach to understand the empirical meanings, and hermeneutic in its effort to bring the readers as close as possible to the original text by smudging the difference between the two languages.

explicating the target language and the source text. The translator then tests the abductive solutions inductively in psycho-socio-cultural linguistic context of both the original and the target language. By sifting through the seemingly unrelated elements, the translator develops a pattern, which she uses in the deduction process, in order to generalize, synthesize, and harmonize the two texts.



Recently, I have come across a significant number of Bangladeshi online journals, diligently invested in literatures in translation/translation literature. Without mentioning any online magazines or pointing at any specific translator, I will say that I found both their efforts and outcome immensely impressive. While browsing through their works, I became curious about the mindset, background knowledge, preparation process, and the translation methods of the aspiring translators. As a translator myself, I am always intrigued by what I call the epistemology of translation. Since the epistemological pursuit of the translator is what bridges the gap between the original and its translation, I want to muse lightly on that issue and throw some old light from my end, which the young and aspiring translators of my country might find helpful.

**DEFINING A TRANSLATOR**  
Sharing a common language does not automatically turn us into efficient translators. We may understand a text written in a different language about a culture we are familiar with, but that does not necessarily qualify any of us to be competent translators. Because cultural knowledge and historical references are not intuitive knowledge, we must not either overlook or undermine any word, or even a punctuation mark used in the original text, no matter how slight or unimportant it may seem.

Let me use my own experience as an example. I prefer to call myself an accidental translator, for lack of a better phrase. After inadvertently discovering my interest in translation studies, I translated Nawab Faizunnesa's *Rupjalal* in 2009 and did not take up any other project until recently when I translated Nileema Ibrahim's *Aami Birangana Bolchi*. However, I do not consider the long interval between the two projects a proof of my translative incompetence. After all, my existence as a diasporic woman (read a Bangladeshi woman teaching English literature at a university in an outlandishly republican state in the USA) is nothing but a continuous translation of Self. I translate (my existence as an other in the language and culture that is not mine, so that they acknowledge me and see me on their level but on my terms), therefore I am.

There! I have given you my very own Cartesian cogito of 'being' in translation.

of non-verbal sign systems. In these regards, **autonomy** (or the translator's action), **equivalence** (or the connection with the foreign text), and **function** (or the notion of how the translated text is connected to the receiving language) are the three key components to an effective translation.

In a broader sense, translation theory falls into two categories: instrumental and hermeneutic. In the first category, meanings are based on reference to an empirical reality. It focuses on objective information production. In the hermeneutic category, language is constitutive of thought and meaning. This approach acknowledges the translator's autonomy, and focuses on the socio-cultural ideology of both the original and the translated text. Whatever approach the translation might follow, be it pragmatic or cognitive, psycholinguistic, or ethnographic, its purpose is to offer a

### THE METHOD

Translation is a triadic process of **Instinct, Experience, and Habit**. Instinct is the unfocused readiness; experience is grounded in real world activities, and habit is the act of synthesizing instinct and experience. The Instinctive skill of a translator improves through reading (texts, other translated works, one's own translation) and writing (endless drafts of one's own translation), and research (about the original text's author, history, culture, and language, among others). A translator should work intuitively, test her intuitive responses against all she has learned about the original, and then internalize the knowledge, before synthesizing in her own words. For Charles Sanders Pierce, this triadic process is dependent on another triad of **Abduction, Induction, and Deduction**. The translator begins abductively by

### THINGS NOT TO ASSUME

- The translators must never assume that:
1. their knowledge of the original text is perfect.
  2. their knowledge is detailed enough to undertake the task.
  3. their knowledge about the text's genre, structure, history, politics, or philosophy is sufficient.
  4. they are the masters of the original's syntax, and that the meaning of a word is always stable.
  5. they have the right to abuse their translative power.
  6. they have the power to suppress the original author.
  7. and finally, they must never assume that their readers are a bunch of fools.

### HEAR ME, ONE LAST TIME

Translation is transformation of meaning. As a translator, you are giving preference to some meanings over others. You are translating yourself into the thought of the other language. Translation is an intimate task, in which the Self of the translator acknowledges the Self of the original text. Because writing is nothing but a continuous play of words, translation acknowledges the impossibility of reaching flawless precision.

As a translator, you do not use language; instead, it is language that uses you. You are the medium through which language speaks itself. Therefore, do not overlook a word that you find too difficult, or a cultural idea too complicated to render. Linger on that one word/idea/aspect until it translates itself into your thought. You will attain your goal the moment your thought and language synchronize and transform two totally different worlds into one.

And how do you know you have captured the essence of the original words in yours?  
Well, you just do.

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## POETRY

SAMIA AHMED



## Seeking Purity

If we eventually are  
What we eat,  
Then the greed of humans  
Leads to what we shall be.  
Whole supply chains of deceit,  
Adulterations and interventions,  
Additives, colours, hormones and chemicals unnatural,  
All distorting  
Purity.  
Alien components floating through  
Our bloodstream,  
Layers of strangeness  
Lining organ tissues,  
Molecules that attach to cellular growth,  
Surely reforming our DNA...  
Perhaps glazing our core,  
With impurity.  
Yet remember,  
Our mind lies above this deceit,  
Our choice,  
to embrace positivity  
Our willingness,  
To uphold its beauty and purity.

## Fleeting Childhood

Childhood  
Is an abstract concept  
To many who grow up too fast.  
Migration and work are real,  
While homely comforts are a thing  
Of their past.  
Silence and servitude  
Crucial to the roles  
In which they are cast.  
They wake the earliest,  
Serve round the clock,  
And eat the last.  
Growing up with scolding,  
Discrimination and violence,  
That should leave us aghest.  
Childhood, indeed,  
Is a concept of their past.

Samia Ahmed is a poet from Bangladesh and has been widely published. A wistful Existence is her first book of photo-poetry, collaborating with a Czech photographer.

## FICTION

# Postmortem of My Skin

NAYER SULTANA

Pasty green doesn't suit you. White makes you look darker. Why would you even dare to wear black? That's forbidden. Don't even think about wearing yellow. It looks too much yellowish on you, like a blob of mustard on a piece of brown bread. How about you stay naked so that they can stare at you from head to toe and skin you alive with their eyes? How about you wash yourself with tons of laundry detergent so that you look clean? Apply some turmeric paste even though dressing up in yellow makes you look sallow. You should apply some rice face mask but you cannot wear white. Put on those charcoal peel thingy, too. Instead of saving money for your dream car in future, why don't you think about saving money for a laser treatment? Pretty face boosts your confidence. Trust me. It's a privilege. The color of your skin doesn't define your identity; it defines your beauty, and this is what you should believe, or maybe forced to believe.

You are a third grade student. For some unknown reason you don't have any friends in your new school. They look at you as if they are looking at a bug flying around and can jump on them anytime. They look at you as if you are selling flowers on the street and they are not willing to buy any from you. During "tiffin period" all of them run to the playground and start playing. You go near them and they tell you to move away or stand away. You have always been told to move or stand in "the corner." That's what you do better. That's what suits you. That's where you belong; at the corner of everyone's eyes like eye sand. Itchy, sticky and disturbing.

You do not simply have the luck that someone in your family would like you. They don't even bother to look at you even if you are hit by a tennis ball-- until you beg them

to look at you. *Look at me, I got hurt so bad.* They just stare back at you.

*Hey! We're going to get scolded if our moms notice that she got hurt while she was with us.* Said one of them.

*Oh, shut up you. No one will even notice she got bruised. I bet she is going to get an invisible bruise.* Then they start walking away. You follow them like a lost puppy that needs attention or maybe a puppy on a leash who has a rude owner.

You are just a kid. Maybe a quiet and miserable eight or nine-year-old. You love to go to your dad's office. His colleagues love you. They let you sit on their big office chair. They let you play with the typewriter and sometimes teach you how to use that. But it bothers you when one of them asks dad,

*You and Bhabi have fair skin. Why is our little angel so dark?*

A painful thing about the typewriter is that unlike Microsoft Word, you cannot undo stuff you have already written even if you make a spelling mistake. You have to start from the scratch again using a new paper. Even if you throw away the paper, it's still there. You have the option to recycle or maybe throw the paper in water. That might help.

You are nineteen. You are with your eight-year-old cousin. You are having a sisterly bonding moment and you are thrilled. You think maybe she is the one family member who likes you. *Why do you look so dark? Look at me, I am so pretty. I think you look devilish.* That isn't the first time you are asked question like this from a kid. You don't know how to respond. You feel like using her face for a punching bag. That's a violent thought. Maybe you are evil.

You are twenty-two. The dark-skinned guys do not have to worry about getting a girl.



They don't care if they are "full city roasted" coffee or "French roasted." No one is judging them; they are simply not made with the same mechanism as the dark girls. Yet you somehow managed to get a boyfriend. But you do not have guys falling for you like your other friends and cousins. You know the reason. You try to make yourself believe it's because you have a boyfriend. You are insecure about your boyfriend too because he has fair skin and when you go out people often make comments like, *"Look at the couple. The guy is so handsome and good looking. Why is he with this girl?"* So, you wonder, too,

why is he with you? This question haunts you down and day by day you become more insecure and weird.

But hey! There's always these little perks you have for being who you are. Your mom will not have to worry about people coming with marriage proposals. She wouldn't have to worry about too many guys looking at you and calling you *Hot or Pretty Face*.

You are twenty-three. It's New Year's Eve. It's time for you to leave. Leave your country and go to a strange place full of unknown faces. You are done with your packing. That's what you did for New Year's Eve. There were boom-dhooms of the firework and people yelling *Happy New Year* without having any clue whether they are going to have a "happy" new year or not. You just went to the veranda to see what all the fuss is about. *Come here and pack your bag with us.* Yelled your mom. Suddenly, there was a knock on the door. Well, quite a few knocks. It's your cousin and aunt; come to wish you *Happy New Year* as you are leaving them for good. You are happy. Really happy like a freaky little kid with a creepy Batman mask on her hand, which is black and has two holes for eyes and mouth.

*Go there and marry a white dude, bon. You are not getting any fairer than this you know. At least the kid will come out prettier.* Said my cousin who maybe has the severe sickness called; "I Cannot Stop Myself from Projectile Vomiting the Stuff I Have in My Brain; Which Is Basically Horse Shit And Dead Worms."

Here we go again, with all the crap about the kid you never want to have because taking care of yourself with all the childhood trauma and depression had been a tough job so far. Besides, you do not want to bring a child who might have your dark skin and

obviously your depressive genes.

*Do not give her those Haram ideas. Do not even think about doing anything Haram. But you have to think about the amount of dowry you have to give if you want to marry her off with a decent guy, Bhabi.* Said my Aunt who has a thing called "Typical Bangladeshi female sadistic misogynist with a touch of stupidity syndrome."

Then again there are few perks of being a dark girl in your society. Your family members (not your parents though) wouldn't have to worry about you standing near to your cousin who is sitting like a doll in front of her future in-laws, because there's no chance that they are going to look at you and maybe choose you instead of her for their son. You can walk a lot under the sun without worrying about getting scorched. You do not have to use so many products to keep your skin "Fair & Lovely."

A dark guy does not have to worry about all these. He is brought up as the king of the world. As the one who can criticize a girl by her skin color. As the one who can gossip with his friends about how a *kala meye* has looked at him and smiled the other day, and he didn't like it. But you are only given the rights to judge a guy by his earnings, his properties, his intelligence but not his skin color. Why would you? You are a girl, remember? I am not saying you should judge a man by their skin color or that it is right to judge a man by their property and income. I am just saying, you are a girl and that's what you are told to do, or given permission to think about. So just get out from this box full of "unfair & ugly" thoughts they put in your head.

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