

## Introduction

The Holy Prophet Mohammad (may peace be upon him) is quoted to have said, “**Otlebol elme walo beşin**<sup>1</sup>.” This statement, highly lofty and prominent as it is, not only indicates the Holy Prophet’s great concern with science and human understanding, but it also perpetuates the conception of the necessity of communication between the world’s peoples and nations, no matter how separated they are in their ideologies, concepts, strategies and traditions.

Societies, primitive or highly developed, have found and still find two major alternatives to pursue: firstly, to encompass themselves and avoid encountering new developments and technologies taking place in other communities, and secondly, to participate in an active cultural, economic, scientific and relational give and take to and from other communities. The former, as it was most favored by the ancient primitive communities, is not favored today. The latter, mostly appreciated by modern societies, is so highly pursued by nations that problems of common understanding and meaningful communications are the major problems the world today has come to experience, particularly after the world wars.

What this need was really in antiquity and pre-historic era is yet a matter of investigation, though not so significant and relevant for the aims of this book. Nevertheless, a general conception might be that the first contacts between peoples were conducted by merchants who did not care about lofty ideas or common understanding among nations, but followed a policy of profiteery and exploitation, They traced a less amiable trend and used suppression instead of friendship to develop relationships. Traders, financiers, religious missionaries and government go-betweens made any effort to subjugate people and to rob them off their properties. The more amiable attitudes developed when nations came to understand that a life of peace and tranquility could be achieved, and it can never be reached except through international cooperation and friendship, A significant role in this understanding was played by the small voice of translators who made every effort possible to bring about the sense of friendship and to replace the hostilities with it. Translators did their best to end enmities, to replace light with darkness, and to “metamorphose ... friendship into

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1. (Seek for knowledge even in Trans-China) اطلبوا العلم ولو بالصين

knowledge, and the world ... into:

“ ... the better world of men  
Whose spirits are of one community;  
whom neither Deserts, Oceans, Rocks, nor Sands  
Can keep from the ‘intertraffic of mind’”

(Samuel Daniel)<sup>1</sup>

The insatiable thirst to know what other nations did and how their great thinkers thought has been and still is seen, to a higher degree, among some nations, and, to a lesser degree, amongst others. The thirst for learning was never quenched among Iranians who always innovated new knowledge and searched for new ideas. A quote from Edward Browne<sup>2</sup> on an old Persian poem may illustrate this great tendency to learning:

ویشوم واشم از این عالم به در شم  
ویشوم از چین و ماچین دیرتر شم  
ویشوم از حاجیان حاج پرسم  
که این دیری بسه یا دیرتر شم  
“I go to make a journey  
Beyond far China’s shore  
And, passing, ask the  
pilgrims Who trod this  
way before Winds on the  
road yet more?”

(Arberry’s translation)<sup>3</sup>

Knowledge and thoughts are expressed both verbally and in writing with language. Languages differ from one another making the task of finding cultural and literal correspondences among them a difficult one. Nevertheless, human common attitude and sense demands this great yet difficult task to be carried out by certain people who have experience in the job and are familiar with the techniques required. Bates states:

“Nothing moves without translation. Human experience is covered by three terms: emotions, techniques, and thought. Emotions (fear, etc.) do not change in character: thought and techniques do. No change in thought or in techniques

spreads without the help of translation, because if it is to spread, it has to spread from people to people, and therefore from language to language.”<sup>4</sup>

The number of people who are involved in translation and consider themselves competent enough to undertake this task is incalculable, whereas the number of those who are experienced and have mastered the techniques in any specific community is indeed small, As Sir Stanely Unwin states:

“The idea so frequently entertained that mere knowledge of a foreign language is all-sufficient, is a complete fallacy.”<sup>5</sup>

He further adds that knowledge, no matter how exhaustive it is, can never suffice unless it is associated with a comprehensive knowledge of techniques involved in translation and a possession of a real ability to enact them. The translator’s competency in his/her native language to predominate the others is a must.

Translation, despite its significance in trans-world relations, has always been considered a second-hand art, and thus not given the prestige it deserves. “On this account”, says Hilaire Belloc, “it has never been granted the dignity of the original work, and has suffered too much on the general judgement of letters” (1931: 6). The underestimation of its value has, in the past undoubtedly been due to the incompetency of some translators or interpreters who have initiated this genuine and exhaustive task without being fully aware of the underlying techniques and the problems in hand. To illustrate the origin of this misconception, an example is cited from Ruth Ronald:

“ ... in the US-Iranian negotiations of 1980-81 for the release of the hostages, the political differences had been aggravated by language misunderstanding, since four different tongues were involved from time to time: English, Persian, and, for the Algerian mediators, Arabic and French. A common Persian noun ‘ta’ahod’ which according to Persian-English dictionaries can mean ‘guarantee’, ‘commitment’, or ‘undertaking’, became a particular source of contention during the final stages of the bargaining. When Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed-Ali Rajai informed reporters that Ayattollah Khomeini had agreed to a proposal suggested by Algerians, he used the word ‘ta’ahod’, which was ... understood to signify an ‘undertaking’, but by others to mean ‘guarantee’. Later Radio Tehran interpreted the word as ‘guarantee’ but the translators in London rendered it as ‘undertaking’.”

(1982: 3)

Ronald has mentioned another interesting instance which signifies the importance of translation in understanding nations and how its mistreatment might lead to chaotic situations. Apparently after the Potsdam Conference of 1945, the Washington Administration sent an ultimatum to Japan demanding that country's surrender. Tokyo sent back a reply containing the word "mokusatsu" (i.e., delay until discussion has been taken place), which was mistranslated as "ignored". As a result political misunderstandings over-shadowed their relations.

(1982: 3)

Translation in Iran is still in its infancy. Most of it is subject to task and temperament rather than to the techniques involved and the knowledge of theories of translation. Most regrettably, this has led to the underestimation of the great translators' tasks, whose reproductions are to be considered as masterpieces next to or as important as the originals themselves. Generally speaking, the significance of the translators' contributions to the easiness of world affairs and cultural exchanges has not been fully appreciated by some high officials, save by the common people? One cannot be unmindful of some officials' low evaluation and underestimation of the translators' and interpreters' roles when he, checking the list of the Iraqi delegates at an IPU Conference, and noticing that only four of them were MPs and the others translators and interpreters, called the formers 'dignitaries', and the latter 'junks' (literary 'garbage'). He certainly had ignored the fact that no ideas would be properly conveyed if the translators or interpreters were not cooperating as they always do.

*The aims of this book are four fold:*

- a. to make a review of the translation literature and to trace the development of translation and interpretation theories from antiquity to the present;
- b. to illustrate some common problems translators and interpreters face and the techniques how to confront them;
- c. to evaluate the new theories dominating the fields;
- d. to select the best notions and techniques advocated by theoreticians to enhance a general understanding of the fields.

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