# XV. Loss and Gain in Translation

Once the principle is accepted that sameness cannot exist between two languages, it becomes possible to approach the question of *loss and gain* in the translation process. It is again an indication of the low status of translation that so much time should have been spent on discussing what is lost in the transfer of a text from SL to TL whilst ignoring what can also be gained, for the translator can at times enrich or clarify the SL text as a direct result of the translation process. Moreover, what is often seen as 'lost' from the SL context may be replaced in the TL context, as in the case of Wyatt and Surrey's translations of Petrarch. Eugene Nida is a rich source of information about the problems of loss in translation, in particular about the difficulties encountered by the translator when faced with terms or concepts in the SL that do not exist in the TL. He cites the case of Guaica, a language of southern Venezuela, where there is little trouble in finding satisfactory terms for the English *murder, stealing, lying,* etc., but where the terms for *good, bad, ugly* and *beautiful* cover a very different area of meaning. As an example, he points out that Guaica does not follow a dichotomous classification of *good* and *bad,* but a trichotomous one as follows:

(1) *Good* includes desirable food, killing enemies, chewing dope in moderation, putting fire to one's wife to teach her to obey, and stealing from anyone not belonging to the same band.

*(2) Bad* includes rotten fruit, any object with a blemish, murdering a person of the same band, stealing from a member of the extended family and lying to anyone.

*(3) Violating taboo* includes incest, being too close to one's mother in-law, a married woman's eating tapir before the birth of the first child, and a child's eating rodents.

Nor is it necessary to look so far beyond Europe for examples of this kind of differentiation. The large number of terms in Finnish for variations of snow, in Arabic for aspects of camel behaviour, in English for light and water, in French for types of bread, all present the translator with, on one level, an untranslatable problem. Bible translators have documented the additional difficulties involved in, for example, the concept of the Trinity or the social significance of the parables in certain cultures. In addition to the lexical problems, there are of course languages that do not have tense systems or concepts of time that in any way correspond to Indo-European systems. Whorf 's comparison (which may not be reliable, but is cited here as a theoretical example) between a 'temporal language' (English) and a 'timeless language' (Hopi) serves to illustrate this aspect **.**

Q.**I** Give the exact meaning of the following words first in English and second in Arabic: gain, approach, indication, encountered, dichotomous, trichotomous, rotten, blemish, taboo, incest, tapir, variation, trinity, temporal, reliable.

Q.**II** Derive as many words as you can from the following words: indication, transfer, ignoring, replaced, enrich, context, problems, cites, trouble, moderation, violating, untranslatable, documented, significance, reliable.

Q.**III** Give the opposites of the words below and use them in good English sentences of your own: accepted, low, enrich, clarify, ugly, obey, rotten, extended, reliable, timeless.

Q.**IV** Answer the following questions briefly:

1. Is it possible to approach the question of *loss and gain* in the translation process if we replace sameness by similarity?

2. Should we spend more time on what is gained rather than on what is lost? Why?

3. Why is Eugene Nida considered a rich source of information about the problems of loss in translation?

4. What is the problem with Guaica?

5. Do not we Arabs sometimes follow the trichotomous classification of good and bad followed in Guaica?

6. How should we view the different variations in concepts of different languages?

7. What is the problem between English and Hopi?

Q.V Translate the trichotomous classification of good and bad into Arabic.

Research Activity:

It is said that we partition reality according to our languages. What is the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis? What does it say about differences existing between languages?

**Quote of the Day:**

**In its happiest efforts, translation is but approximation, and its efforts are not often happy. A translation may be good as translation, but it cannot be an adequate reproduction of the original.**

George Henry Lewes