



Translation and Its Features: Insight into Buddhist Aspects

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Abstract

Translation is a complex cultural and epistemological act that goes beyond simple language use to support human communication and the transfer of knowledge across cultural boundaries. This research article critically analyzes the procedures, theoretical frameworks, historical development, and key features of translation, with an emphasis on Buddhist literature and translation tradition. It contends that translation requires doctrinal accuracy, cultural sensitivity, and linguistic in religious and philosophical contexts, especially Buddhism. Challenging the notion of impartial equivalency, the study explores how socio-cultural, interpretative, and ideological frameworks reshape meaning in translation. The central thesis posits that translation mediates between languages and worldviews in a communicative and reconstructive manner. Employing a qualitative descriptive methodology, it examines historical record, theoretical texts, and primary materials from Buddhist translation traditions in China, Tibet, and Nepal. This work assesses methodological approaches in Buddhist textual transmission by combining Skopos theory, Equivalence theory, and Cultural Translation theory. The findings highlight important aspects of translation, including its theoretical foundations, historical evolution, and subtle procedural aspects. The study concludes by highlighting translation as a culturally mediated activity that is essential to the spread of Buddhist teachings throughout the world.

Keywords: Translation, Buddhism, Theory, Source Text, Target Text.

Introduction

Translation derived from the Latin *translation* ("to carry across"), is more than just a linguistic act, it is a dynamic cultural, philosophical, and epistemological process that allows ideas to be preserved, transmitted, and transformed across civilizations, particularly in religious and philosophical domains. Catford defines translation as "the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)" (Catford, 1965, p.20), emphasizing the intentional search for equivalences that retain meaning while translating from source language (SL) into target language (TL). Similarly, Levy views translation as a communication act in which the translator decodes and recodes messages for target audiences, ensuring both integrity and emotional responses (Levy, 2011, p. 23). Translation, therefore is an intricate process that demands linguistic accuracy, cultural authenticity, and tonal precision, making it essential for intercultural communication and the dissemination of complex human experiences.

In Buddhist history, translation has been the vehicle for disseminating profound doctrines, such as *śūnyatā* (emptiness), *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination), and *bodhicitta* (awakening mind) from Indic traditions into Chinese, Tibetan, Central Asian, and global contexts. Buddhist scholarship emphasizes that accurate understanding hinges on precise linguistic rendering (Powers, 2007, p. 153). From early Pāli translations into Sinhalese and Chinese to the Tibetan translation has preserved and adapted the *Dharma* across linguistic and cultural landscapes. The Tibetan and Chinese translation movements (2nd -10th centuries CE) remain paradigmatic, yet Nepal's role is equally pivotal. As a reservoir of Sanskrit manuscripts and a center of translation effort, Nepal's Newar Buddhist communities preserved the Sanskrit canon long after it had declined in India, combining classical texts with vernacular commentary. Contemporary Nepali organizations, such as the Lumbini International Research Institute (LIRI), carry on this tradition by translating canonical literature into Nepali and English with academic accuracy.

This research article argues that Buddhist translation is a hermeneutical practice requiring more than formal equivalence, it demands cultural, doctrinal, and contextual alignment to ensure authenticity and accessibility. As Venuti notes, translation is inherently interpretive, revealing the target culture's worldview as much as the source text's meaning (Venuti, 1995, pp.18-19). This complexity intensifies with Buddhist sutras and tantras, where concepts like *śūnyatā* or *nirvāṇa* resist direct equivalence, requires contextual adaptation. Thus, Buddhist translation must balance doctrinal precision with audience accessibility. Despite its historical importance in imparting spiritual and philosophical teachings, modern discourse frequently reduces Buddhist translation to a technical philological effort, ignoring its interpretative, epistemic, and transformative elements. Such reductive approaches obscure

translation's active involvement in developing Buddhist thought over time, languages, and cultures.

Statement of the Problem

Modern translation theories such as Nida's equivalence models, Vermeer's Scopos theory, and Venuti's concept of foreignization and domestication, view translation as a culturally rooted act that emphasizes function, context, and audience. However, their applicability to religious texts remains unequal. Buddhist translation has distinct challenges due to its specialized vocabulary and doctrinal intricacies, as witnessed in Chinese and Tibetan traditions. There are gaps remain between ancient Buddhist hermeneutic and contemporary translation theories. This research investigates these intersections, looking at historical, theoretical, and procedural aspects while highlighting underappreciated contributions to Buddhist textual transmission. This article is guided by three central research questions:

1. What are the historical, theoretical, procedural aspects of translation and Buddhist translation traditions?
2. How do the features of translation manifest in the rendering of Buddhist texts across linguistic and cultural boundaries?
3. Why is translation essential for preservation, interpretation, and cross-cultural transmission of Buddhist Knowledge system?

To address these questions, the research pursues three corresponding objectives.

1. To examine the historical development, theoretical foundations, procedures and contextual factors of translation and the translation tradition within Buddhist contexts.
2. To analyze the core features of translation and their implication for rendering Buddhist texts across diverse linguistic and cultural setting.
3. To evaluate the significance of translation in sustaining and disseminating Buddhist knowledge systems, highlighting its roles as both a doctrinal and cultural process.

Existing scholarship on Buddhist translation emphasizes the intricate balancing between linguistic fidelity, doctrinal integrity, and cultural adaption. Scholars like Śāntarakṣita and Vimalamitra were instrumental in preserving the metaphysical subtleties of Sanskrit texts during translation, as documented in John Power's *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism* (2007).

In his essay *the problems of Translation and Transmission in Buddhist Tradition* (1989), Luis Gomez emphasizes the hermeneutical depth required to interpret concepts such as *śūnyatā* and *tathāgatagarbha*. He argues that such translation often involves recontextualizing entire worldviews. Modern translator such as Gene Smith's *Among Tibetans Texts* (2001) offer practical insights into the ethics of Tibetan-English translation as well as the importance of Nepalese repositories in preserving Sanskrit manuscripts. *Monk Householder, and Tantric Priest* (1992) by David Gellner delves deeply into Newar Buddhism in Nepal, demonstrating its ritual bilingualism and crucial role in preserving Sanskrit Buddhist traditions long after they had declined in India.

In response to contemporary translation theory, academics like Peter Newmark in his *A Textbook of Translation* (1988) and Eugene Nida in *Toward a Science of Translating* (1964) present frameworks like communicative/semantic translation and dynamic/formal equivalency, which are crucial in striking a balance between doctrinal depth and idiomatic clarity. The western propensity to domesticate foreign writings is criticized by Lawrence Venuti in his *The Translator's Invisibility* (1995), who instead promotes "foreignization" as a tactic for maintaining cultural individuality, which is especially pertinent to Buddhist Texts. In their *Translation, History, and Culture* (1990), Bassnett and Lefevere, among others, stress that translation is more than just a language transfer; it is an act that is influenced by culture and ideology and that reshapes texts within certain historical and power-related contexts. *The Art of Translation* (2011) by Jiří Levý presents translation as a dynamic decision-making process in which translator meticulously balances literary effect and accuracy in order to convey meaning, style, and cultural context.

Despite these literatures' contribution in the context of translation, the majority of research remains narrowly focused on Chinese or Tibetan Buddhist translation traditions, with little attempts to connect modern translation theories with historical Buddhist practices of translation in a comparative, cross cultural contexts.

This research employs a qualitative, descriptive, and interpretive methodology that lies at the crossroads of translation studies and Buddhist philosophical hermeneutics. The study is based on three major theoretical approaches: Skopos Theory (Vermeer & Reiss, 2014), which emphasizes purpose-driven translation; Equivalence Theory (Nida, 1964) which emphasizes functional and dynamic meaning; and Cultural Translation Theory (Venuti, 1995) ; Bassnett & Lefevere, (1992), which views translation as an ideologically and politically embedded practices. These frameworks aid in analyzing how Buddhist translations balance doctrinal authenticity and cultural significance. The study's methodology includes textual analysis and interpretation. Canonical Buddhist texts and their classical translations are primarily sources of data, whereas scholarly works publishes and unpublished literatures,

digital publication in Buddhist philosophy and translation studies are used as the secondary sources of data.

This study admits some limitations. Its scope is no-quantitative, with a focus on current translations rather than original text philology. The article deliberately focuses on doctrinal and philosophical literature, avoiding tantric ritual texts and modern popular adaptations. Geographically, the research focuses on South and central Asia, mainly India, Nepal, China and Tibet. These limitations ensure a focused investigation while highlighting potential avenues for further research.

Historical Context of Translation in the Western Tradition

Since ancient times, the practice of translation has been essential to intercultural communication, acting as a medium for the dissemination of spiritual, intellectual, and literary knowledge. In the Western tradition, the systematic rendering of Greek writings into Latin during the Roman Empire marked the beginning of translation efforts. The interpretive method established by Cicero (10-43 BCE) literal accuracy by arguing for prioritized meaning over literal accuracy, advocating for a sense-for-sense translation as opposed to word-for word translation. This principle was later adopted by Saint Jerome (c.347-420 CE) who employed dynamic equivalency to maintain theological complexity in his Latin Vulgate translation of Bible. (Munday, 2016, pp.32-33)

During the Middle Ages, translation in Europe was primarily associated with Christian academia, with Latin serving as the common language for doctrinal and intellectual discourse. The Renaissance saw a trend toward humanistic translation, emphasizing stylistic refinement and contextual correctness in the interpretation of classical texts (Bassnett, 2013, pp.60-65). Translation was progressively secularized during the enlightenment, and it became a tool for scientific and philosophical exchanges. John Dryden (1631-1700) identified three translation methods: metaphrase (literal), paraphrase (sense based), and imitation (creative adaptation), representing emphasis in translation philosophy (Munday, 2016, pp.44-45).

In the twentieth century, translation studies became an academic discipline. Eugene Nida proposed the distinction between formal and dynamic equivalence, saying that effective translation must reproduce the influence of the original text on its intended audience (Nida, 1964, pp. 159-160). Lawrence Venuti later criticized domesticated tactics asking for foreignization in order to retain source text's cultural and linguistic individuality (Venuti, 1995, pp.17-20). This theoretical evolution emphasizes translation transition from a pragmatic instrument to a culturally and politically involved process.

Translation of Buddhist Texts: A cross-cultural Hermeneutic

The translation of Buddhist scriptures constitutes one of history's most extensive and philosophically intricate textual enterprises. Originating in India, the Buddhist canon was transmitted in multiple languages, including Pāli, Sanskrit, and Prakrit. The Theravāda tradition codified the Pāli Tipitika in Sri Lanka (1st century BCE), emphasizing monastic discipline and early doctrinal formulations. However, the Pāli canon's influence remained regionally confined until modern times (Norman, 1983, pp. 4-6).

The emergence of Mahāyāna Buddhism fueled the composition of extensive Sanskrit literatures. Over the first millennium of its presence in China, Buddhism spread primarily through the efforts of translator-missionaries from India and Sino Indian Central Asia—such as Lokakshema (active 147-186), the renowned Kumārajīva, and Paramārtha as well as by prominent Chinese pilgrims and scholars Faxian (c.337-c.418), Xuanzang, and Yijing (635-713) (Williams, 2009, p.132). As Buddhism spread in China, translation became a state-patronized activity. Early Chinese translators, such as An Shigao (2nd century CE) and Lokakshema struggled with translating abstract Sanskrit concepts like śūnyatā (emptiness) and tathagatagarbha (Buddha nature) into Chinese (Gomez, 1989, p.16). Kumārajīva (344-413 CE) transformed Chinese Buddhist translation by prioritizing doctrinal fidelity and literary style, producing major works such as the Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra, Vajracchedikā Prajñāparamitā sūtra, Madhyamakakrikā. Xuanzang (602-664 CE) made a historic pilgrimage to India and returned with systematically translated texts, including the Yogācārabhūmi Śāstra and Abhidharmakośa (Cheung, 2014, pp. 93-109 & p. 156).

In Tibet, translation was institutionalized under royal patronage. King Songtsen Gampo (7th century CE), initiated the Tibetan script to facilitate translation, while King Trisong Detsen (8th century CE) established Samye monastery. Indian masters like Śāntarakṣita and Padmasambhava collaborated with Tibetan *lotsāwas* (translators) to produce Tibetan canon. King Ralbachan (815-836) contributed significantly to the translation of the Buddhist Sanskrit canon into Tibetan by sponsoring translation projects under the leadership of Beltshek aiming to standardize translation equivalents for Buddhist Texts. This team developed glossary of Sanskrit and Tibetan terms (Mahāvīyutpatti), as well as revised the written language to increase the accuracy of Tibetan translation in terms of Sanskrit grammar and syntax (Powers, 2007, p. 149 & Ghimire, 2021, p. 70).

Samye tradition translated the Buddhist Sanskrit canon, tantra texts including Hevajra, Chakrasambhara Tantra, Guhya Samaja Tantra and Kalcakra Tantras and known as ancient (Nyingma) tradition. This effort culminated in the creation of the Kangyur (Translated words of the Buddha) and Tengyur (commentarial literatures) (Powers, 2007,

p. 162). " ..Tibetan translations of Sanskrit texts found in the *Bka' gyur* and *Bstan gyur* , they were impressed by the meticulously faithful rendering that the translators achieved" (Smith,2001, p. 181). The Kagyu tradition is the teaching lineage of Nagarjuna, Saraha, Savari and Maitripa, which was handed down to Tilopa (982-1054) and then Naropa (1016-1100). Naropa's main disciple was Chogi Lodro of Mar known as Marpa Lotshawa (1012-1097) and he was the first Tibetan from the Kagyu lineage to begin his career as a Buddhist translator. Atisha Dipamkar (982-1054) arrived in Tibet in 1042 A.D., the translation after Atisha's revival is known as *sarma* (new) translation.

Nepal, particularly the Kathmandu valley emerged as a critical repository for Sanskrit Buddhist texts after their decline in India. Sanker Thapa referencing Purna Ratna Vajracarya , notes that Newar scholars were actively engaged in both teaching Buddhist doctrine and Translating Buddhist text into Tibetan. In addition to these efforts, they also contributed a significant body of indigenous Buddhist Literatures (Thapa, 2024, p. 72). Newar Buddhists preserved and transmitted Sanskrit manuscripts, blending ritual use of Sanskrit with vernacular Newar, despite their contributions, Nepal's role has been marginalized in a broader translation study, though scholars like Gene Smith have highlighted its significance for understanding intra-Asian transmission (Smith, 2001).

The Translation Process and Theoretical Frameworks

Newmark defines translation as an operational process that occurs at four interconnected levels: the source language (SL) text level, the referential level, the cohesive level, and the level of naturalness. Linguistic analysis is the first step in translating SL texts. The referential level entails creating a mental representation of the described objects and events, whether real or imagined, in order to enhance comprehension. The cohesive level assures grammatical and logical consistency, while the naturalness stage produces language that is contextually appropriate for the intended audience. Together, these layers allow translators to faithfully and seamlessly modify the original message. Newmark stresses that translation is not mere linguistic substitution but a structured, dynamic process demanding attention to context, tone, and cultural resonance (Newmark, 1988, pp. 19-22). Translators must know both source and target languages, as well as navigate cultural, linguistic, and even political subtleties, in order to effectively express meaning. Thus, their duty goes beyond linguistic fidelity to cultural mediation, ensuring that the originals' essence and communication purpose are preserved and relevant to the new audience (Newmark, 1988, p. 45). In this approach, translation process becomes a culturally ingrained act of Communication rather than a mechanical exercise.

Levy expands on this interpretative dimension, claiming that translation occurs through three layers of interpretation: the author's idea of reality, the translator's reinterpretation of the source material, and the reader's comprehension of the translated work. He recognizes three critical steps of the process: apprehension, interpretation, and re-stylization. During apprehension, the translator determines the author's emotional tone, aesthetic ideals, and ideological perspective. Interpretation entails revealing the text's creative truth, especially when direct linguistic parallels are unavailable. Finally, re-stylization entails imaginatively translating the material into the target language while maintaining fluency and stylistic coherence. However, Levy warns that imposing foreign stylistic tendencies can result in unexpected distortions, (Levy, 2011, pp. 31-48). These emphasize that translation is a multidimensional process that requires creative judgment, cultural literacy, and philosophical sensitivity.

Theoretical Approaches to Translation

Translation is fundamentally an act of rewriting that promotes literacy innovation and cultural interaction while also carrying the potential for manipulation and power dynamics. As a "recodification" of the original text, it generates new ideas, genres, and literary techniques, thereby shaping the evolution of translation theory (Frawley, 2000, p.251). Being a creative process, translation gives birth to new linguistic and cultural codes, demanding theoretical frameworks to guide its implementation.

As a branch of comparative linguistics, translation theory examines relationships between languages beyond synchronic or diachronic distinctions, emphasizing that translation is always unidirectional from source language (SL) to a Target Language (TL) (Catford, 1965, pp.19-20). The theory provides a framework for making informed translation decisions by focusing on linguistic units at multiple levels of texts, paragraphs, sentences, clauses, and words. Andy Cheung cites Ezra Pound and Walter Benjamin's philosophical theories of translation, Eugene Nida's linguistic era, functionalism, the "cultural Turn" and descriptive translation studies, and post colonial writers like Lawrence Venuti as influential (Cheung, 2013, pp. 1-15).

Pre-linguistic or Philosophical Theory

The philosophical tradition in translation studies emphasizes translation as an interpretive and transformational act rather than a mere reproduction. Ezra Pound (1885-1972) advocated for absorbing and creatively changing source text ideas. Walter Benjamin (1892-1940/ 1823-2012) claimed that translation reveals the "afterlife" of the original by establishing new meanings rather than duplicating surface content (Benjamin, 2004, p.

76). These philosophical principles define translation as a creative activity that revitalizes literatures across time and cultural borders.

Linguistic Theory

Linguistic approaches emerged in the mid twentieth century to synthesize translation analysis and focuses on achieving structural and semantic equivalence between the source and target languages. Roman Jakobson established three translation types: Intralingual (rewording within same the languages), interlingual (between languages), and intersemiotic (translation into nonverbal sign systems) (Jakobson, 1959, p. 233). J.C. Catford developed equivalence theory using Hallidiyan linguistics, defining translation as "the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent material in another" (Catford, 1965, pp. 20-21). Eugene Nida introduced concept of dynamic equivalence, prioritizing target audience response over formal correspondence (Nida, 1964. pp.159-160).

Functionalist (Skopos) Theory

Skopos Theory, developed by Hans Vermeer and Katharina Reiss (1984), focuses on the translation's purpose (skopos) and target context. Vermeer argues that "the end justifies the means" in translation, implying that the intended function dictates appropriate strategies (Vermeer, 2014, pp. 113-114). This target oriented approach freed translators from strict fidelity, constraints, prioritizing communicative efficiency over formal equivalence (Nord, 1997, pp. 30-34).

Cultural Theory

The "cultural turn" in the 1980s-90s expanded translation studies beyond linguistics. Bassnett and Lefevere (1990, pp.4-5) framed translation as cultural mediation shaped by power relations. Lawrence Venuti (1995, pp. 20-21) critiqued domesticating strategies through his concepts of foreignization that is highlighting cultural difference and domestication which is adapting to target norms. Postcolonial scholars like Spivak (1993, p. 179) further examined translations role in colonial power dynamics .

Contemporary Development

Theoretical diversity in translation has increased significantly in recent decades. Cognitive approaches investigate translation decision making process (Halverson, 2014, p.45), while eco-translation studies tries to explore environmental dimensions in translation practices (Cronin, 2017, pp.10-12). Additionally, digital humanities research examines the growing influence of machine translation (Moorkens, 2020, p. 98). These contribution

highlight translation theory's ongoing evolution as an interdisciplinary field addressing global communication challenges.

Methods and Types of Translation

Translation employs a variety of methods aimed at balancing accuracy and naturalness in the target language. Newmark and other scholars suggests many methods and types of translation including word for word, literal, faithful, communicative, semantic, adaptation and free translation (Newmark, 1988, pp. 45-48). He divides these approaches into source oriented and target oriented tactics. Source oriented methods include word to word translation, which preserves the original word order but frequently misses context, and faithful translation, which prioritizes the authors' intent while adapting syntax for the target language. Target oriented methods, such as communicative translation; prioritize clarity and cultural adaptability, ensuring that the content speaks naturally to the audience.

On the other hand, semantic translation rigidly preserves the original meaning; while adaptation modifies cultural references for greater localization. Literal translation respects the SL's grammatical structures by translating them into nearest TL equivalents. Free translation deals with maintaining original meaning while utilizing the TL'S natural features such as regular word order and grammar. Specialized translation requires expertise in areas such as law, medicine, technology, and finance, where accuracy and terminology are crucial. Furthermore, audiovisual translation, including subtitling and dubbing, necessitates synchronization with visual media while remaining culturally relevant.

Advancements in technology have further revolutionized translation procedures, with computer assisted translation (CAT) systems improving consistency and efficiency (Newmark, 1988, pp.196-197). Machine translation and Ai-powered translation provides speedy results and contextual awareness but lacking to ensure quality ultimately effective translation combines linguistic skill, cultural awareness, and technological tools to bridge gap across languages.

Key Features of Translation: Traditional, Buddhist, and Modern perspectives

Translation, essential to cross cultural communication, conveys across languages while preserving contextual and cultural essence, the subsequent section explores its multidimensional features.

Equivalence and Fidelity to Meaning

Translation theory emphasizes various types of equivalency, each serving a unique purpose. Formal equivalency prioritizes a literal, word for word approach, which is commonly employed in legal and technical translations where precision is required. Dynamic equivalency, on the other hand, focuses on transmitting the original text's intended effect, allowing for more flexible phrasing while maintain emotional and rhetorical impact (Nida, 1964, pp. 159-166). Functional equivalence ensures that the translated text serves the same communication function in the target culture. In Buddhist tradition translation, fidelity is particularly crucial; as sacred writings must maintain doctrinal accuracy without distortion (Schmithausen, 1991, p. 72).

Linguistic Accuracy and Structural Considerations

Translators frequently encounter linguistic challenges such as syntactic difference, grammatical mismatches, and idiomatic expressions that lack direct equivalents. To address these issues, they employ strategies like paraphrasing modulation, and contextual reinterpretation. Buddhist texts pose additional difficulties due to polysemous terms e.g. *dharma* and complex philosophical concepts that require careful handling to avoid misinterpretation (Munday, 2016). The ideal translation maintains both accuracy and natural fluency, ensuring accessibility without compromising the text's depth.

Context Preservation and Cultural Sensitivity

The meaning of a text is inextricably linked to its cultural, historical, and ritual context, thus translators must be aware of this. Buddhist scriptures, for example, include metaphors, doctrinal concepts and culturally specific idioms that may not appeal to modern or non-Buddhist audiences. Translators must act as cultural mediators, using techniques like explanatory notes or adaptive representations to bridge gaps (Bassnett, 2013). This process ensures that the translated material preserves its original meaning while remaining relevant to new readers.

Specialization and Terminological Precision

Specialized fields such as law, medicine, and religious studies require precise terminology to maintain uniformity and avoid ambiguity. In Buddhist translation, essential phrases like *śūnyatā* (emptiness) and *nirvāṇa* (liberation) need scholarly accuracy to maintain their doctrinal weight. Translators often rely on glossaries, commentaries, and digital databases to ensure terminological coherence across texts.

Expertise in Scholarly Interpretation and Ethical Accountability

Buddhist text translation is a highly interpretative process that must require scholarly expertise in languages, philosophy, and cultural studies. This frequently necessitates the creation of new terminology or the imaginative modification of preexisting ones (Venuti 2012; Shimomura, 2006). However, a strong ethical commitment must go in hand with this intellectual rigor. It is crucial to uphold doctrinal integrity since any misunderstanding or simplification could lead to readers and practitioners receiving the wrong spiritual guidance (Schmithausen, 1991).

Collaborative Practice and Context-Driven Methodology

The function and purpose of the text must serve as the direction for the methodological approach used in Buddhist translation. A useful framework is provided by Skopos theory, which holds that the suitability of a translation to its intended purpose determines its success (Vermeer, 1989). For example, philosophical treatises may be easier to understand when presented dynamically for contemporary readers, but liturgical texts which are frequently employed in ritual and meditation need formal equivalency to maintain rhythm and ceremonial discernment (Williams, 2009, pp. 13-14). These calculated decisions emphasize the necessity of a flexible, context-sensitive translation methodology. Major translation projects like the Tibetan Kangyur demonstrate how cooperative efforts have always been used to manage such complexity. There were frequently multidisciplinary projects in which monks, academics, and linguists collaborated to ensure the textual and spiritual authenticity (Shimomura, 2006).

Balancing Transformation with Technological Support

All translation is inherently transformative. In today's context, technological tools like computer-assisted translation (CAT), multilingual corpora, and terminology databases have become invaluable in enhancing consistency and accuracy (Munday, 2016, pp. 289-291). These tools enable cross-textual comparisons that can illuminate textual variants and reduce errors. The balance between digital efficiency and human discernment is thus central to maintaining the authenticity of Buddhist teachings in translation.

Living Sanskrit Tradition of Nepal

Nepal preserves a rich legacy of Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts, including reserved writings like the *Prajñāpāramitā* and *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*. These ancient writings, which are still preserved in monasteries and libraries, play an important role in ceremonies and intellectual research. Newari scribes and monastic communities continue to transcribe and

recite them, insuring their preservation. This living heritage emphasizes Nepal's crucial role in preserving Buddhist Sanskrit literature.

Manuscript Culture and Preservation

The Kathmandu Valley's vihāra system has kept Newar Buddhist's Sanskrit manuscript history intact. Cataloguing efforts have found over 15,000 pre-modern manuscripts, including rare Vajrayāna works like the Guhyasamāja Tantra in pre-Tibetan versions (Von Rospatt, 2015, p. 203). These manuscripts were preserved through ritual copying, considered an act of merit (punya), as well as through guild-based scribal lineages maintained by Vajrācārya priests. Additionally, monastic libraries (*bāhās*) provided climate controlled storage, ensuring the longevity of the sacred texts.

Ritual Performance as Translation

Newar Buddhism employs a unique bilingual transmission model where Sanskrit remains the sacred language for rituals (*pūjā, dīkṣā*), while Newar (Nepal Bhasa) serves for exegetical commentary. As Gellner observes, the power of Sanskrit mantras is believed to reside in their exact phonetic form, rendering translation not just unnecessary but potentially ritually dangerous (Gellner, 1992, pp. 47-48). This challenges conventional translation paradigms that prioritize semantic comprehension over performative efficacy.

Contemporary Theoretical Challenges

Recent scholarship has criticized the Eurocentric dominance in Buddhist translation studies. Some scholars argue that western academia has systematically marginalized Newar vernacular commentaries (*tīkāś*) in favor of Tibetan translations. This bias echoes Spivak's concept of "translational violence" where colonial-era renderings of Buddhist terms often imposed Protestant Christian frameworks, distorting indigenous interpretations (Spivak, 1993, pp. 179-200).

Digital Humanities Approaches

Modern digitalization initiatives have made tremendous progress in conserving Nepal's textual history, although facing unique hurdles. The Nepal-German Manuscript Cataloging Project has digitalized over 5,000 texts, however the metadata frequently ignores ritual context. Similarly, the Buddhist Digital Resource uses AI-assisted text comparison but struggles to decipher tantric symbols. Meanwhile, the SARIT (Search and Retrieval of Indic Texts) Sanskrit-Tibetan corpus has produced connected lexicon databases but excludes completely Newar items.

The Significance of Translation in Buddhism

Buddhism has benefited greatly from translation, which has allowed holy books like the dharma and teachings on *Nirvāṇa* to cross linguistic boundaries. Modern interpretation and early translations into Chinese and Tibetan have made Buddhist philosophy available all round the world permitting cultural adaptation that ensures the doctrinal continuity. Buddhism's worldwide impact and spiritual heritage would be restricted in the absence of translation. Its core contributions in preservation, dissemination, and evolution of Buddhist teachings are examined in the following section.

Preserving the Canonical and Doctrinal Heritage

Buddhist translation were originally composed in languages like Pāli, Sanskrit, and Prakrits, therefore their transmission across linguistic and cultural borders required diligent translation efforts. This was especially important as some source languages, like Sanskrit, eventually disappeared from regular use. Bronkhorst (2011) points out that translation ensured the survival of key Buddhist texts as Sanskrit became a dead language, allowing them to remain accessible and influential. The Buddha's teachings were preserved in manuscripts by translator in China, Tibet, and elsewhere, and they constituted the foundation of enduring Buddhist traditions. Without translation, much of the Buddhist canon may have been lost to history.

Interpreting and Clarifying Complex Doctrines

Translation in Buddhism is a significant interpretive endeavor that changes doctrinal understanding. Some philosophical ideas, such as *śūnyatā* (emptiness), *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination) and *bodhicitta* (the waking of mind), lack direct translations in other languages. As Venuti points out that translation is a cultural act of generating values by inscribing an interpretation into the source text, reshaping its original meanings to suit the linguistic, cultural, and ideological context of the target audience (Venuti, 2013, p. 96). Thus, translation is not a neutral process but an act of interpretation that necessarily influences doctrinal understanding. Translators such as Kumārajīva in China and Śākya Paṇḍita in Tibet had a profound impact on the philosophical trajectories of Buddhist schools, highlighting how translation may redefine meaning and practice.

Facilitating Cross-cultural Transmission and Adaptation

By transcending linguistic and cultural barriers, translation enabled Buddhist teachings to adapt to local worldviews, values, and intellectual traditions. Scholars like Xuanzang and Faxian translated Indian Mahāyāna Texts into Chinese, which helped integrate Buddhist philosophy with Daoist and Confucian frameworks. The cultural adaptation of

Buddhist doctrines was made possible through the sustained translation of canonical texts (Heirman and Bumbacher, 2007, p. 2). This process gave rise to distinct traditions like Chinese Chan, Japanese Zen, and Tibetan Vajrayāna, illustrating translation's role as a dynamic cultural mediator.

Constructing Local Buddhist Epistemologies

Buddhist translation has actively contributed to the development of localized Buddhist epistemologies in regions such as Tibet, China, Japan, Korea. The translation of Indian texts into local languages involved not just linguistic conversion; it entailed the development of a scholastic vocabularies and commentarial tradition. As Bassnett observes that each translation is a reconstruction that reconfigures the epistemic space of the receiving culture, highlighting the transformative impact of translation on the intellectual and cultural landscapes of these regions (Bassnett, 2013, pp. 81-86). The Tibetan Kangyur and Tengyur reflect both translated scriptures and an indigenous intellectual heritage.

Democratizing Buddhist Teachings in the Modern Era

Translations into English and other modern languages have been prompted by technological advances, worldwide Buddhist organizations, and western intellectual interaction. Initiatives such as the Pali Text Society and the 84000 projects have increased access to Buddhist texts, allowing lay practitioner, researchers, and spiritual seekers around the world to connect with the tradition. Mrozik emphasizes that modern translation efforts expand the reach of Buddhism, allowing it to engage in contemporary ethical, philosophical, and psychological discourses (Mrozik, 2007, pp. 7-9). Buddhist ideals now inform a wide range of field, including mindfulness, psychology, ecological ethics, and interfaith communication. Translation maintains old knowledge while also ensuring Buddhism's relevance in a continuously changing world.

Conclusion

Translation serves as a vital bridge for translating knowledge across linguistic and cultural boundaries. In both western and Buddhist traditions, it has enabled the dissemination of philosophical, literary, and spiritual insights. The western world from ancient Greece and Rome through the Renaissance used translation to advance science, humanism, and literature. Similarly, Buddhist translation movements, especially in China and Tibet, developed advanced methods to ensure doctrinal accuracy and semantic essence. Unlike mere word for word translation, Buddhist translation involves deep interpretative engagement to bridge philosophical and cultural contexts. Central teachings such as *śūnyatā* (emptiness), *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination), and *tathāgatagarbha* (Buddha-

nature) require careful treatment through explanatory notes, adapted terms, or retention of original expressions due to profound metaphysical significance.

Over time, translation theory evolved from strict linearism to more flexible approaches like dynamic equivalence, incorporating cultural, cognitive, and semiotic considerations. These developments have enabled translators to make complex Buddhist doctrines accessible without compromising their integrity. Historical translation efforts, such as those by Kumārajīva in China and within the Tibetan canon, illustrate the importance of collaborative scholarships and theological commentary in preserving both clarity and depth. The Tibetan canon and Kumarajiva's Chinese translations projects exemplify the use of dynamic equivalence, emphasized doctrinal fidelity and semantic clarity to maintain both accessibility and accuracy in translation. Although western models like Nida's functional equivalence and Skopos theory offer useful insights, their application to Buddhist texts must be carefully calibrated to respect the religious and stereological dimensions inherent in the works.

The features of translations include deeper aspects like intellectual, interpretation, fidelity, equivalency, cultural adaption, and ethical accountability in addition to simple word substitution. In Buddhist translation, where doctrinal; correctness, philosophical subtleties, and spiritual profundity must be carefully maintained, these factors are more important than anywhere else. Buddhist translation thus demands not only linguistic fidelity but also intellectual integrity, cultural attunement, and ethical responsibility.

The research bridges classical Buddhist hermeneutics with contemporary translation theories, arguing for an interdisciplinary framework that accounts for historical, doctrinal, stereological and socio-linguistic complexities. Translation functions a tool to preservation, interpretation, and cross cultural transmissions, vital to the continuity of the Dharma across generation. The research article also emphasizes the need to recognize marginalized traditions such as the Newar Buddhist tradition of Nepal whose hybrid oral-written transmission and preservation of Sanskrit Buddhist literature offer a compelling alternative to dominant Sino-Tibetan paradigms. A more inclusive and context sensitive approach is essential for representing the full diversity of Buddhist translation tradition in today's globalized world.

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