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BA English Honours | Semester IV | ENG4FS112

Translation in Praxis

Module 2: Translation Methodology, Untranslatability, and Equivalence • Comprehensive Notes

Chapter 2: Methodological Challenges and Cultural Untranslatability

The practice of translation confronts severe theoretical and practical dilemmas. A translator is perpetually caught between **domestication** (assimilating the text into familiar target-language conventions) and **foreignization** (preserving the exotic strangeness and cultural friction of the source text), as articulated by Lawrence Venuti.

2.1 Literary versus Technical Translation

While **technical and legal translation** demands absolute terminological univocality, standardized accuracy, and neutral register, **literary translation** operates in the realm of aesthetic polyphony, sensory rhythm, metaphorical ambiguity, and emotional cadence. The literary translator must translate not merely what the text says, but what it does aesthetically.

2.2 Linguistic and Cultural Untranslatability

Catford and Bassnett identify two primary forms of untranslatability:

- **Linguistic Untranslatability:** Arises when no syntactic or lexical equivalent exists in the TL (e.g., culture-bound puns, wordplay, and idiomatic proverbs).
- **Cultural Untranslatability:** Occurs when a situational feature present in the source culture is entirely absent in the target culture (e.g., ritual terms like *Kanyadaan*, *Thalappoli*, or indigenous culinary varieties).

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1. Hermeneutic Paradigms and Textual Mechanics

Critical inquiry into Module 2: Translation Methodology, Untranslatability, and Equivalence reveals how textual forms construct meaning through complex aesthetic strategies and structural choices:

- **Structuralism and Semiotic Deconstruction:** The organization of signs, tropes, and syntactical structures establishes narrative authority while simultaneously revealing internal fissures. Binary oppositions embedded within the discourse—such as center versus margin, tradition versus modernity, and subjective interiority versus objective reality—are systematically problematized through textual slippages and ambiguous signifiers.
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- **Feminist, Queer, and Intersectional Critique:** Analyzing the construction of gender roles, patriarchal surveillance, and non-normative subjectivities provides crucial insights into how bodily experience, domesticity, and public agency are mediated across divergent historical moments and cultural landscapes.
- **Ecocritical and Spatial Dynamics:** Physical topographies, built environments, and non-human ecologies function as active participants in the narrative economy. Space is never neutral; rather, it reflects socio-economic stratification, environmental exploitation, and geopolitical borders that delineate belonging and exile.

2. Historiographical Context and Reception Theory

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3. Comparative Aesthetic and Thematic Matrix

The following analytical matrix summarizes key comparative dimensions across traditional interpretive paradigms and modern critical frameworks relevant to Module 2:

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