

Collaborative translation and digital space: An inclusive cultural policy

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Abstract

This paper presents an empirical investigation into the collaborative translation efforts undertaken with members of few endangered linguistic communities in India during and following the Covid-19 pandemic, utilising digital medium. The Calcutta Comparatists 1919 is an esteemed academic institution that focuses on the translation of literary works from marginalised and endangered languages into more widely spoken languages. Additionally, the organisation is actively involved in the digital preservation of cultural texts of endangered tribal languages. Several collaborative workshops were conducted on three languages, namely Subarnaraikhik, Sheshabadia, and Toto. Subarnaraikhik is spoken by communities residing on both sides of the Subarnarekha river, which passes through different linguistic regions. Sheshabadia is the language of a marginalised linguistic community with a historical lineage dating back to the mediaeval era. Lastly, Toto is a critically endangered tribal language. During the collaborative translation process, individuals from different regions of the country were involved, and texts written in their selected languages were translated into English. Given that a significant majority of our participants hailed from urban locales and non-source cultural environments, and taking into account the constraints imposed by the pandemic, we opted to employ digital ethnography as a means to acquaint our participants with the source culture. This involved exposing them to various forms of textual material, such as songs and folktales, as well as immersing them in the landscapes, cultural practices, and social dynamics associated with said culture. Digital platforms such as YouTube, Google Photos, music streaming services, and social media platforms, in conjunction with demonstrations from members of the relevant community, facilitated our participants' understanding of the contextual background of the texts. In the current post-pandemic landscape, we have employed field translation as a methodology for the translation of texts originating from endangered languages. This paper will discuss the use of digital ethnography as an adequate method for facilitating the translation of marginal cultural texts between the periphery and the centre, drawing upon relevant case studies as references.

Biography

Dr. Mrinmoy PRAMANICK teaches in the Department of Comparative Indian Language and Literature, University of Calcutta. His areas of interest are translation studies, language and community, discipline and discourses of comparative literature and world literature, migration - refugee and border and dalit literature. He finished a major project on Indian exodus from South East Asia and worked on a project on Bengali Dalit Oral narratives. He has published, edited and translated seven books and quite a few articles in reputed journals. He is an executive committee member of comparative literature association of India and president of Calcutta comparatists 1919. He also works on Marginal literature of West Bengal. He is currently running an Indian Council of Historical Research sponsored project on the history of language studies in the Universities of Calcutta, Mumbai and Madras. He translated Sharan Kumar Limbale's *Dalit Sahityache Soundarjya Shashtra* and Ganesh Devy's *Off Many Heroes* into Bengali. His translation of Kalyani Thakur Charal's poems into English *I Belong to Nowhere*, was published by Tilted Axis, London. He edited *Dalit Sahitya Charcha*, *Lekhalekhir Pathshala*, and *Kathay Kathay Limbale*, *Oh Priest Give Me the Seeded Banana*, *Memoir of Sundarban: A Journey from an Island*.