

The TRANSLATOR AS AN ENTREPRENEUR: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE
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This paper deals with Translators as entrepreneurs who are slowly getting aware of their profession and have begun coming to a common platform to share knowledge, experience and resources - a most desired step necessary for the better future of the profession. Further, this paper will propose "networking" as a possible solution to entrepreneurs who can economize their process and speed up their growth by using available resources and infrastructure without having to invest huge.

Keywords:

Bilingualism, multilingualism, challenges, economizing efforts, Babelfish, Google, limited resources for translators, entrepreneurship, common platform, networking, Co-creating values

Before we enter into discussion on the Translator as an entrepreneur it is important for us to define entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship means different things to different people. For J.A Timmons, *The Entrepreneurial Mind*, 1989, it is the ability to create and build something from practically nothing. For Wennekers and Thurik, *Linking Entrepreneurship and Economic Growth*, 1999 it is the creation of new economic opportunities. For Wickham, *Strategic Entrepreneurship: A decision making approach to new venture creation and management*, 1998, it means creating and managing vision and demonstrating leadership. For Peter Druker, *Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, it is a practice with a knowledge base.

Conceptually and in practice, the term hints of no stereotypical model. Yet it has its root in the French word 'entreprendre' which literally means to undertake - indicating the minimum characteristics of an entrepreneur.

From the perspective of economic functions, three crucial characteristics of entrepreneurial activity are: risk taking, innovation and venturing into new business activities for profit. (David Kirby, *Entrepreneurship*, 2003 McCraw Hill).

National Knowledge Commission (NKC), the core advisory body to the Prime Minister of India, which focuses on creating knowledge capital, has recognized entrepreneurship as one of the key factors of wealth creation and employment generation. As per NKC, 'Entrepreneurship is the professional application of knowledge, skills and competencies and / or of monetizing a new idea by an individual or a set of people by launching an enterprise

de novo or diversifying from an existing one (distinct from seeking self employment as in a profession or trade), thus to pursue growth while generating wealth, employment and social good'.

Entrepreneurship in India

Entrepreneurship has been 'embedded in the Indian genius and is a part of its tradition'¹. To quote the renowned economist, T.N. Srinivasan, 'India has been an entrepreneurial society...we had the entrepreneurial skill but suppressed it for too long a time...and now it is thriving. The entrepreneurial spirit is an ongoing characteristic of India's history, particularly visible in a number of communities engaged primarily in trading.'² Traditionally, the Entrepreneurship of such communities is facilitated principally by the successful use of informal 'entrepreneurial ecosystems' and interdependent business networks. Further, there is also a rich tradition within the Indian Diaspora, spanning the past several hundred years, whose spirit of enterprise is legion.

Entrepreneurship in India occurs in 'far more encompassing and far reaching ways than in developed countries', and could, therefore, be far more complex,' for there is so much more that needs to be done.'³ Commentators today celebrate the ubiquitous Indian attitude of 'jugaad' (a Hindi word roughly translated as 'creative improvisation...a tool to some how find a solution based on a refusal to accept defeat, and calling on initiative, quick thinking, cunning and resolve...to quickly fulfill market demands at the lowest possible prices'⁴) as an entrepreneurial trait that has been as much a part of everyday Indian living as its rich tradition of philosophy and speculation.

The salience of Entrepreneurship in India has intensified in recent times, particularly with the rise in knowledge-intensive Services. New entrepreneurs who do not belong to traditional business communities have begun to emerge in large numbers; Entrepreneurship has grown rapidly, visibly so, creating wealth and generating employment especially in the past twenty years. Crucial efforts initiated after economic liberalization - including systematic attempts to reduce the 'licence raj', greater efforts to make finance more easily accessible to entrepreneurs and other institutional support to 'techno-preneurs'- have helped improve the climate for Entrepreneurship.

The Translator as an entrepreneur

After several years of struggle, in many countries Translation has evolved as a professional activity and its practitioners have been able to get a professional status. However, it is important to note that India, in spite of having recognized and documented the presence of 1635 rationalized mother tongues, classified into 234 mother tongues and grouped under 122 languages, has failed to achieve professional status for its translators. Translation is an activity that not only helps bridge communication gap, rather it facilitates the whole set of

¹ R. Gopalakrishnan, Prosperity Beyond Our Cities by Spreading Enterprise, AD Shroff Memorial Lecture, October 17-18, 2007

² Dwijendra Tripathy (ed.), Business Communities of India: A Historical Perspective. 1984

³ Tarun Khanna, Billions of Entrepreneurs: How China and India are reshaping their future and yours, 2007

⁴ See Pawan K Verma, Being Indian

business activity in terms of localization and globalization thus generating employment. An individual translator not only generates employment for himself/herself but also facilitates multiple activities and thus multiple employment activities ranging from DTP, advertising, education etc. to development and facilitation of high-end software and products. A translator applies his knowledge, skills and competencies and consistently evolves and applies new ideas at the individual level or collectively and in most of the cases, he/she is one person enterprise that generates employment and wealth and contributes to the economic development of the country.

It is also notable that most of the translators in India are forced to orient their profession and tune it as per the language demand of the industry by being restricted to the roles of language teacher, BPO employee, tele caller, etc. Those who remain loyal to their professional orientation as translator become freelance translators and often slowly grow into translation agencies. Unlike big business houses, translation businesses are usually run from home or from sparsely-furnished small offices, have limited resources and often the owners don't know where the next penny is coming from to keep the operation going. Most of the time, such translators or agencies work in isolation and lead lonely existences as few can empathize with their troubles.

Socio- Cultural situation of translators in India

Bilinguals have always been respected in India as persons with superior qualifications, and they have played a pivotal role in social and cultural change. Slowly, bilingualism has become so widespread that it is complementary in nature. For example, an individual may use a particular language at home, another in the neighborhood and the bazaar, and still another in certain formal domains such as education, administration, and the like. In addition, the languages of national and international communication, Hindi and English, are also part of the linguistic repertoire of a sizeable number of Indians. In India, linguistic diversity is not by accident, but is inherited in the process of acquiring the composite culture of India.

Economic Situation of a translator in India

On the one hand, bilingualism/ multilingualism have played a pivotal role in shaping the diverse society of India, and even UNESCO has appreciated India's situation on maintaining its linguistic diversity. On the other hand, Indian translators face challenges that are byproducts of the bilingualism / multilingualism inherent in Indian society. For example, it is very common to equate a translator with a bilingual neighbor, friend, relative or office colleague who are readily available for help or extend their services either at a very low price or, many times, even for free. I define these actions as part of the entrepreneurship attitude inherent in almost every Indian who tries to make best use of available resources and economizes his/ her efforts by making use of available resources. In this case, the resources are readily available bilinguals or multilinguals. These challenges become tougher when a Project Manager, knowingly or unknowingly equates the service cost of a professional translator with that of his in-house bilingual colleague whose services he / she has been availing of, free of charge. The challenge becomes stiffer when a translator has

to explain to the Project Manager or the Indian Businessman (who still insists on using online freeware like Babelfish, Google or Systran) the difference between a machine translation and a professional translation, while trying to bid for an international project. This further confirms the resolve of an Indian businessman to prove his entrepreneurship skill which finally leads to a fiasco.

Making of a translator in India

As explained above, in spite of India's very rich and continuing diversity of languages, there are only a few universities that offer translation courses in their curriculum, and these find it difficult to sustain themselves because of lack of infrastructure, lack of trained faculty, lack of well formulated course curriculum and, above and all, public lack of awareness and government apathy.

In this situation, it becomes very challenging for a translator to evolve as a professional, and those who evolve as professionals can be easily put into the category of entrepreneurs as they develop the ability to create and build something from practically nothing, and they practice this process of building wealth daily and continue to face all odds with a hope that one day they would be established translators.

External challenges faced by the translator entrepreneur

Once a professional translator starts interacting with the Industry, external challenges multiply. The translator goes on to face many other issues, including payment issues with clients followed by lack of continuity of work, government apathy towards professional recognition, lack of established standards, lack of certification, lack of funds for up gradation of skills, etc.

Global challenges faced by the translator entrepreneur

Many of the leading portals have developed a strong foothold in India. It is true that they have given good opportunities to many of the translators to get in touch with domestic as well as International agencies and that this has resulted in an increase in income. However, it is important to note that most of these portals are operated from outside India and they follow their own rules. Many times, Indian translators are cheated and then, to add insult to injury, blamed for bad quality. This kind of situation arises because of a mismatch of expectations, lack of documented guidelines and supports that agencies or clients must offer translators. Outsourcing is a good phenomenon, but service takers as well as service providers need to develop trust and culture sensitive relationships that is so often lacking in these web portals.

Competition from International agencies

It is true that the majority of Indian translators still follow the translation approach of translation - many times translations are handwritten, followed by typing, re-checking - and final delivery; this translation approach has its own importance, but it results in

delivery delay and lack of quality control, making the whole affair vulnerable to stiff competition.

On the other hand, International agencies who maintain in-house teams of translators are sophisticated. They make use of trained translators who are well versed with computer applications and CAT tools (Computer Aided Translation Tools). Unless Indian translators also upgrade themselves with this modern translation approach, they will continue to suffer the snobbery of a select privileged few. Also, there are a few MNCs who have already made their presence in the Indian market, and, as a matter of practice, with their organizational strength and economic power, it would be easy for them to develop an economically competitive process that would be a big challenge to Indian translators entrepreneurs who are still struggling for their identity. By the time they realize their weaknesses, it would be too late to start competing with these translation houses.

Internal challenges faced by the translator entrepreneur

An individual, after having gone through the hurdles involved in evolving as a translator, faces the next stage of problems and challenges that many times originate from his / her own self:

- 1) Translation activities have been treated as a very personal and private affair by individual language professionals. Many times, even best friends do not share information between themselves about their translation projects.
- 2) Translators suffer from an identity crisis - Let us say, an Indian language professional refers to himself as a translator in a gathering of friends or acquaintances who otherwise have no other association with the translation industry. The response the professional's statement would commonly receive would simply be, "Okay, this is what you do. But what is your profession?" This underlines the very simple fact that the translation industry generally has very little professional recognition in the perception of the masses. This does affect the credibility and the position of a professional translator in the eyes of his social peers. This is what we translators refer to as an Identity Crisis.
3. Ego clashes - identity crisis makes an individual more sensitive to issues that have been making him suffer, any new initiative is regarded with suspicion - once suspicion comes - questions are asked, many times resulting in absurd questions offending egos and ultimately, failure of any collective initiatives for professional development.
4. If at all logic prevails - the established translators start fearing loosing their business which they have established since years, making personal efforts - but very privately. Under no circumstances do they want to come to a common platform and discuss relations or issues related to their clients. But this thought is not expressed directly (part of identity crisis), rather it is expressed in terms of pin-pointing personal or professional or organizational weaknesses of the individual who has taken the initiative.

Successful translators and diversification

In spite of all the odds mentioned above, there are quite a good number of translators in India who face these challenges and overcome all hurdles to finally make a living and contribute to the economic and cultural growth of the country. In addition, there are a few who grow enough to launch small and medium sized translation enterprises which further add value to translation as a profession.

Need for collaborative efforts

With the collaborative efforts of a few like minded professional translators, the Indian Translators Association was established in December 2007. It seeks to unite the widespread translator and interpreter community of India on a common platform to address issues for the betterment of the industry and take steps to ensure that its members provide services meeting the professional standards of the industry. Its integration with the International Federation of Translators (FIT) in July 2008 and its subsequent collaboration with Termnet Austria prove its commitment towards achieving its objectives and goal of developing a vibrant platform for the translator's community of India.

Networking as a Possible Solution

To counter external as well as internal challenges a translator needs to take into consideration the phenomenon of globalization that has brought tremendous dynamism into market forces. The world is evolving towards finding innovative ways of achieving customer satisfaction that is based on $N = 1$ (one consumer experience at a time) and $R = G$ (resource from multiple vendors and often from around the globe).⁵ To achieve competitiveness and provide unique, personalized experiences to consumers the firm needs to create a system that involves individual customers in co-creating a product / service that provides a unique experience. No firm is big enough in scope and size to satisfy the experiences of one consumer at a time. Therefore, all firms will access resources from a wide variety of other big and small firms - a global ecosystem. The focus is on access to resources, not ownership of resources. Not to go too deeply into the logistics of this innovative thought, it is very important to understand that even the biggest companies do not own all the necessary resources to cater to the needs of their customer, nor do they have complete production in-house as the new dynamics of market demands inter-dependency on internal and external sources.

The above thoughts are very encouraging for an entrepreneur and especially for the translator who depends heavily on external sources and who does not have enough funds to own resources. As explained above, nor do the big business houses have the complete ownership of resources. The idea is to have fast access to these resources. A translator entrepreneur needs to be connected to fellow translators within his own country as well as outside the country to have access to information and knowledge and develop teams for

⁵ This phenomenon can be more understood by going through the writings of management guru C.K Prahalad and M.S. Krishnan in "The New Age of Innovation: Driving Co-Created Value through Global Networks, Tata Mc Graw Hill, 2008

the execution of a project through available resources and provide services and achieve customer satisfaction. For developing connectivity and networking, there are already various online systems in place that allow free access to their platform and offer options to develop connectivity and develop social or professional networks that further helps individual members to build on relationships, share knowledge and help in the overall growth of a complete social or cultural system thus allowing the creator of the system to benefit from the presence of a large number of human networks connected to its server. Amongst many other networks, I find Google, LinkedIn, Face Book, Hotmail, Groupsite and Twitter to be examples of the N=1 and R=G phenomenon.

Even for translators, there are well known networks that work wonders, and a translator must tune himself / herself to changing dynamics and bring competitiveness through using these networks (for example, Termium Canada, Terment Austria or even Termtruk and various other initiatives). In the Indian context, although there has not been a very visible network of translators, empowered by big business houses, however many personal initiatives are in place (for example, www.linguaindia.groupsite.com) and it is expected that in times to come when better understating of the market comes, translators would start networking in an organized way and such private initiatives would become part of a collective initiative covering a considerable number of translators.

All that remains to be said in conclusion is that, while Indian translators as entrepreneurs are slowly evolving, in spite of many obstacles, they are yet to explore their fullest potential by adopting a common platform. On the one hand, this, and the other hurdles and set backs can be attributed, to a large extent, to vestigial colonial mind sets on all sides (the colonizer and the colonized) which have so far endured past their expiry dates yet continue to exert influence. Perhaps the time has come for change and, given the shared impacts of events, East or West, North or South, salvation for all lies in sharing knowledge, experience and resources. The future of translation as a profession lies in the "networking" of entrepreneurs to economize processes and sustain growth by using all available resources and infrastructure. All that this requires is the investment of goodwill across the globe.

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