



Democracy Translated in the Time of Pandemic

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Abstract: The time of pandemic is a test of resilience of nations' social sustenance. Democracy, which can either be direct or representative, functions mainly on certain fundamental keystones. These keystones are managed, rather run by the three decision making system, which are; Majority rule, Super-majority and Consensus. The process of translation, on the other hand, involves a translator who changes between two different languages, the Source Text (ST) in Source Language (SL) to Target Text (TT) in Target Language (TL). Whether as a process or a collaborative work, translation undergoes certain stages before the completion of its product. Technically, one could say that he or she lives in a constitutionally democratic state of existence, when in fact the entire world has long fallen prey to cognitive capitalism. This research paper attempts to string together Democracy and Translation, and use it to analyse how it influences the world under pressure with reference to the pandemic period.

Keywords: Democracy, Translation, Cognitive Translation, Pandemic.

World as we know is at the verge of collapse. The pandemic fervour has sent chill all over the bones and veins of the world and nations are at the outlook for chances of survival amidst surging toll of death. This is neither the first instance, nor would be the last where the world is struck with deadly disease. In fact, every century has had an epidemic outbreak that lasted from months to a couple of years. The time of pandemic is rather a test of resilience of nations' social sustenance.

The term democracy comes from two Greek words; Demos which mean 'common people' and 'Kratos' which mean 'strength'. The words were joined to form 'Demokratia' to either mean 'strength to the common people' or 'strength of the common people'. This later became 'democracy'. History traces the best of democratic rule to the Golden Age of Pericles in Fifth century BC. The democracy of ancient Greeks were far different from what we experience at present, as women, slaves and immigrants were not included in the concept of Democratic power among them.

Translation, on the other hand can be referred to the product (the translated text), the process (the act of translation) or the field of Studies (Translation Studies and Theory). Here, the process involves a translator who changes between two different languages, the Source Text (ST) in Source Language (SL) to Target Text (TT) in Target Language (TL). Whether as a process or a collaborative work, translation undergoes certain stages before the completion of its product. If we take Translation as a Process, which

starts from the Source Language, what immediately follows would be the Selection and Analysis of the Source Text. This stage would be followed by choosing a Professional translator, translating the text into TL, Editing, Incorporation of Suggestion, Publishing of the work and Reception of TT in TL. If translation is considered as a collaborative work, it would include SL, Client, Translator, Language Editors, Publisher and TL. Now, what I want you to understand is that, translation, in its theoretical and practical approach, is not only functional on oral or written level, rather it functions on cognitive level as well.

Before I introduce cognitive translation, I should state the term cognitive science. Introduced in the 1950s, as an offshoot of neuroscience and psychology, cognitive science deals with one's mind and its perception. Cognition refers to the mental process underlying our ability to perceive the world, remember, talk about and learn from experience and modify behaviour accordingly. I would like to use Cognitive translation to string together democracy and translation. Translation is a three tier cognitive action before the release of its final product. The famous neuroscientist David Marr in 1982 categorized Cognitive actions into three levels, namely Computational, Algorithmic and Hardware level. My objective is to compare the three levels of cognition with the fundamental principles of democracy that WE EXPERIENCE in the current global scenario.

Democracy, which can either be direct or representative, functions mainly on certain fundamental keystones. Most of the nations around the world follow REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY in the form of Parliamentary or Presidential democracy. These keystones are: Freedom of Speech and Assembly, Inclusiveness, Equality, Membership, Consent, Voting, Right to Life, Minority Rights. These keystones are managed, rather run by the three decision making system, which are; Majority rule, Super-majority and Consensus. Technically, one could say that he or she lives in a constitutionally democratic state of existence, when in fact the entire world has long fallen prey to cognitive capitalism. The corporate or capitalists successfully uses cognitive capitalism [in the form of cognitive translation] as their invisible tool to meet their needs visibly. Cognitive Capitalism points out to a third phase of capitalism where the focus is on immaterial assets, especially related to information and include intellectual properties, patents and knowledge, where the public interest in the digital age are appropriated privately by creating an artificial scarcity. As Mackenzie Wark defines; Information, like land or capital, becomes a form of property, monopolised by a class of VECTORALISTS, who control the Vectors along with which the information is abstracted, just as capitalist control the material means. While talking about democracy, one would not be able to leave aside an important factor that the society confronts in its functioning, which is tradition. Tradition has always been tug by two social poles, the ones who reject tradition and the others who agree to every ounce of tradition, and which has become decisive power factors in democracy. The beliefs and biases, as pointed out by Heidegger, "we inherit from our time culture" continue to exist in the space to be appropriated by the generations to come, often lost in logic in comparison to the actual motif behind tradition, eventually coding social experiences on the basis of prejudices they have amassed through the medium of tradition. Democracy is also a result of the 'impact' and 'response' the social experiences have created in its space through the means of culture and tradition. Tradition becomes the hinge that balances the democratic messages and political meanings across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Vectoralists make use of tradition, as common people across the world gain influential access to transnational sequences of events, to draw every outcome that may be generated in their favour. Tradition becomes a detonator which has no fuse wire to reboot once initialised. In other words, tradition is the earliest instance of cognitive conditioning a man or a woman goes through, allowing them to be taken along the path the tradition has chosen. It would be easier to observe democracy through the scope of translation process than the moon-spectacle of social politics.

If one is to consider Democracy as a Translation Process, the Common People who are the Source Language in the Process are pushed aside by the Vectoralists, who use their cognitive capital of rich digital data-platform to select and analyse a Source Text in the form of a Representative Democracy which is favourable to them. The emergence of Post-truth during the election of campaign of Mr Donald Trump is an example. It was later pointed out that mass public relation (PR) campaigns were carried out via Print, social and digital media to ensure the success of Mr. Trump, in ways a clinical psychologist might influence his or her patient to change a certain attitude. The information relayed in this context were a

mixture of truth and fiction which often edged to wrong statements that were shot against his opponent to win the election battle. The concept of post-truth itself was a cognitive blank or shield, enforced to step outside the age old frame of truth and lie in a Christian society, politically. Trump and his party were the vectoralists here who easily manipulated the Source Language which were the citizens of US.

If one looks upon democracy as a collaborative work, the Vectoralists are the clients, who make use of the digital capital and its operators as translators to 'edit' the opinion of the public so that the end result may be favourable to them. Jio is an example. The telecom market such as India, where High speed internet providers included Idea, Vodafone, BSNL, Airtel, Reliance, MTL, Jio and so on has undergone a spectral change resulting in an upper hand for Jio alone in the market. The telecom market may be said to be under 'Edit'. Once other Internet providers are run out of business, the end result would be favourable to the vector power here, where the Source public would be left with no other choice but to follow the 'result' which then becomes a Target output. Here, the vectoralists transform one's democratic right to choice into 'only choice available'. How does this affect the world, especially during the time of Corona? The vectoralists, whose capitalist agenda runs information and technology, can decide what information the public may gain access to. During the time of a pandemic, people would naturally be scared and would look for sources or options that may help them to survive. These Vectoralists or Cognitive capitalists work at first on Computational level, where general information on the subject is made available. As they move on to the second stage, which is the Algorithmic level, they 'decide' upon methods of input representation and how it is transformed into output, in such a way that the cognitive capability of parties involved as recipient, which is the public, would be autocratically influenced to changes favourable to the cognitive capitalists. We were talking about Democracy all along, and see how autocracy has crept into the midst without us realising that its autocracy and not democracy! This is what happens in algorithmic level with vectoralists at the helm. Once the second stage is carried out, the Hardware level, which is the third level, becomes relatively easy. A quick example would be unverified information or fake news related to Covid that has spread like Greek fire all over the world, creating as much a pandemic as the original one.

If this is how democracy is translated, and now that we have seen who translates democracy thus, the only question remains is who benefits from this. Surprisingly, the answer would be 'not just the Vectoralists'. Of course, the ones who holds power, the ones who control cognitive capital and data play such tricks to keep their interests safe, yet, we may also find that a loose race of information in front of the public may actually benefit or harm everything that holds society together, which are, culture, language, religion, traditions, customs, fraternity, education and so on. Literature, up until the digital boom, was the cognitive platform used to influence or manipulate societies, through the means of emotive influence. Just like an emotional reader may easily be influenced than a critical reader, an emotional profile on social media may easily be manipulated on the algorithmic level, because, an emotional public is easy to handle than a critical public. In democracy, we can only have critical public for the power is with the people, as the term suggests.

Cognitive ability is a decisive factor of human capital, which influences the growth of a nation. It is worthy to note the take of Heiner Rindermann and James Thompson on cognitive ability and economic freedom, where they say "the ability level of intellectual class [cognitive ability] increases a society's economic freedom...The increase in economic freedom also has a positive effect on societies' wealth...In the long run, the interaction between cognitive ability and physical, social, institutional and cultural environments are mutually reinforcing, producing what economists refer to as a virtuous spiral"ⁱⁱ (Cognitive Capitalism: Effect of Cognitive Ability on Wealth, as Mediated Through Scientific Achievement and Economic Freedom).

But, the economic-freedom paradigm which may suit the First world nations is a misfit on the third world ones which swim amidst asymmetry of political and power structure. Differences in wealth have made economic sustenance unfavourable for the third world. When cognitive abilityⁱⁱ and industrious disciplineⁱⁱⁱ make rich countries richer, the same followed in the third world makes the private individuals wealthier, while leaving the general public to a lacuna of poverty and hopelessness. Democracy, which proportionally depends on tradition, culture and society to function in the third world nations (the first world democracies

rely more on economic freedom than culture or tradition) takes on the role of a translator that is faithful to the source concept [which is cognitive capitalism in this case] on a national level. Within the cradle of power asymmetries, techno-capitalism has dominated cognitive ability of the majority of general public in Third World, where, their industrious disciplines were dictated to them over the years through social, cultural, linguistic and digital means in order to re-encode them into a transhumant mass beneficial to the benefactors of capitalism who may employ cognitive colonialism over the 'national discipline'. It would not be wrong to assume the world to have fallen prey to cognitive capitalism where democracy is translated in favour of vectoralists by enhancing digital manipulation of emotions and thoughts on a global level. To quote Rebecca M Henderson, the pandemic

has shown us so vividly what is wrong. Inequality is no longer simply an abstract idea. It is a reality that many 'essential' workers must show up even when they are sick because they have no savings and no paid leaves. That racism is not something that was solved by civil rights movement... Watching states bid against each other for vital medicine equipment while the federal governments fumble its response to the virus has made the reality of our broken politics very clear
(Economics & Society, July 28).

When democracy is translated in the time of pandemic, the world demands a new path which is no more run by market and corporate vectoralists and their techno-capital cognitive colonialism; rather, one that is balanced by transparency and accountability. One must not forget that the lack of check upon market by governments created the 'omniscient' corporate who became powerful enough to write off governments as 'trash to be washed down the gutter', through the means of post-truth and cognitive remodelling as discussed in the first part of this paper.

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ⁱ It is a complex chain of events that reinforce themselves through a feedback loop.

ⁱⁱ Also known as cognitive competence, it is the ability to think, the individual’s store of true and relevant knowledge, and the intelligent use of this knowledge.

ⁱⁱⁱ It refers to the personality traits such as diligence, commitment, conscientiousness, discipline and self-discipline.

