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Technology

ON INTERSEMIOTIC SHIFT IN JUNGLE BOOK: FROM PAPER TO SCREEN

KEY WORDS: Anime, Imperialism, Intersemiosis, Pedagogic role

Dr. Sandal Bhardwaj

Assistant Professor (Italian Language and Studies), Department of Hispanic and Italian Studies, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad – 500007.

ABSTRACT

Translation theorists, see “translation as an active reconstitution of a foreign text mediated by irreducible linguistic, discursive and ideological differences of the target language culture.” Children’s literature requires essential adjustments according to the receiving culture audience. Taking the connotation of adaptation as intersemiotic translation into account, the study centers on the classic animation series that went on air --- The Jungle Book in Hindi --- on Indian television in October 1989. The series was an adaptation of Rudyard Kipling’s The Jungle Book. Several modifications took place in Kipling’s sinister original text. Anime makes an attempt to negotiate between colonial undertones and domestication of the tale, posing a question on the authoritative voice of “White Man’s Burden.” Foucault stresses that the author’s function historically changes over time. “Adaptation” --- usually viewed as “free translation” --- is an ambivalent activity that gives enough freedom to ensure what Walter Benjamin calls “the after-life of the original”.

INTRODUCTION

Cinema and literature have had a long and unending relationship with each other ever since the commerce of filmmaking started. Written verbal texts have always been inspirations for umpteen visual texts since both represent the 'art of storytelling'. This notion can be envisaged by the ways they are enjoyed. While a written text is enjoyed through reading, a film or TV show is enjoyed through watching. “Visual images stimulate our perceptions directly through language, color, movement, and sound whereas stimulation is indirect in the case of a written text.” (Bluestone, 1961, p.62) Another thing that differentiates both is that a written text is controlled by one person, the author, whereas the meaning a film conveys to the audience results from teamwork.

Adaptation: A Shift

“As a product, an adaptation can be given a formal definition, ... there appears the wall of translation, but adaptation in a way is translation too.” (Hutcheon, 2013, p.5) In this newer understanding of translation, adaptations are re-mediations to a different medium, in the form of inter-semiotic transpositions from one sign system (e.g. words) to another (e.g. images). Originating from the Greek term “semeion”, meaning mark or sign, ... renders signs as meaningful anomalies, that are integral for making sense as they expedite correspondence.

Thus, taking into account the notion of adaptation as a translation into another medium, the study presents a comparative analysis of the novel *Jungle Book* and the Japanese anime series (known as *Jungle Book Sh nen Mowgli*) in particular; which was dubbed in Hindi for the Indian audience. *Jungle Book* anime was an adaptation of Rudyard Kipling’s 1894 stories collection and was aired on Indian television in 1989.

Supporting the idea of Lawrence Venuti, anime’s Hindi remediation can be considered an intersemiotic translation because it is the text reconstitution, with the cross-cultural transposition, in another linguistic group, epitomizing a subtle blending of sameness and difference.

The current study which belongs to the domain of qualitative research attempts to explore, whether Kipling’s original theme is lost through the adaptation. Up to what extent this animated version is close to the novel? How the classical western narrative structure is reconstituted in this anime?

ANALYSIS AND OUTCOMES

Like any other adapted text, even this anime represents a degree of compromise where Kipling’s notions about a Jungle are retained but many elements are combined with

alterations to suit modern children’s sensibilities. The investigation presents adaptative shifts e.g. anachronistic elements that emerged from the prevailing post-colonial theme, took another shape in the anime with an eye on social and market relevance.

“The common reason that canonical classics influence filmic representations is that the author has already completed the creative process of inventing plots, characters, and worlds”. (Desmond, 2006, p.14). Rudyard knew a lot about India and was fascinated with jungles as his parents were part of the British national wave who moved to the country. Kipling had a notion of the jungle with its own rules and leaders, as the human world. Kipling projected his experiences through a feral boy, Mowgli, who was raised away from people of his kind and who ends up being a part of an altogether different community. Mowgli’s character was based on a true story of a feral boy Dina Sanichar, raised by wolves. The *Jungle Book* stories were inspired, albeit in part, by the ancient Indian fable texts *Panchatantra*. Like any animal fantasy, this text too presents animals anthropomorphically: talking, reasoning, and living with facets of human personality.

Intersemiosis And Mutations

During the process of transposing a novel (unimodal verbal sign) into a (multimodal) audio-visual representation, several constraints influence the adapters’ decisions: the audience’s requirements in terms of age, degrees of text comprehension for hearing-impaired, inappropriate projection of divergent social values, or commercial concerns, to mention a few. “Children’s cannons adaptations into audio-visual texts require numerous adjustments ...” (Müller, 2013, p. 1-8), ranging from changes of small details to deletion or alteration of entire parts of a story to meet the children’s intellect with the idea of the pedagogic role. As a result, there is no apparent post-colonial structure representation on this multimodal platform, as it could negatively impact young children.

In India, *Jungle Book* gained more popularity because the anime was closely dubbed into Hindi with a local and intimate touch. The opening song of the Hindi version, “Jungle Jungle Baat Chali Hai” was an instant hit that was reused as the title track of Disney’s film *Jungle Book* (2016).

The term 'Anime,' as per the Merriam-Webster dictionary referred specifically to Japanese-disseminated animation style often characterized by vibrant colorful graphical characters and fantastical themes. The anime overshadowed Kipling’s sinister jungle with the 21st-century, utopian model of colorful forest animations that enchants the viewers with its enigmatic romanticism.

Kipling's novel and the anime, both reflect the function of classical western narrative structure, and yet there are dynamics of exchanges that existed between both versions. Through anime an attempt is made to negotiate between colonial undertones and domestication of the tale, posing a question on the authoritative voice of "White Man's Burden."

While cunning Sher Khan is a native, Mowgli, was viewed as a byproduct of the imperialist artifact. The anime replays a significant dichotomy of characters sans colonial undertones. The notion of colonial hegemony is replaced with juvenile dynamism, harmony, teamwork, and friendship with other species.

Many fictions with the theme of heroism often present the same classical western narrative structure. The Three Act Structure is commonly used in writing for stage and screen, referred as: exposition, complication (or conflict), and resolution (dénouement).

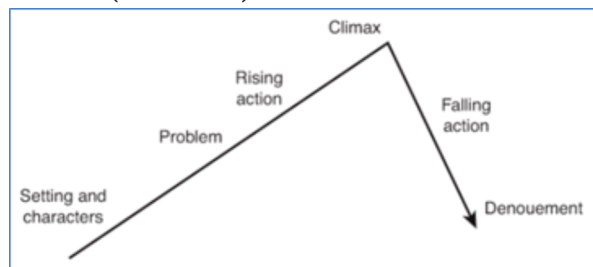


Figure 1: Freytag's Plot Diagram

There are three characters in the classical western narrative structure: "the hero, the villain, and the society" (Todorov, 1967, p.70-76). The story explains the hero's struggle to save society from an oppressor. Initially, there is a balanced situation that later turns into an imbalance. In the end, however, the situation gets under control.

Since the anime is a long multimodal project, Mowgli gets enough opportunities to live up to his heroic potential but undeniable aspects are retained which problematize his depiction as a hero. Where other versions focus on subsiding tensions between Mowgli, his jungle mates, and the villainous tiger, in 52-episode anime, the adapting agents keenly attempt to normalize Mowgli's character: his rootlessness, his constant struggle to fit into the wolves' pack and conflicts with the bloodthirsty tiger in the jungle. The original projects him as a muscular boy but the anime portrays him as skinny-legged.

The sociocultural elements amendments render the story meaningfully interesting in a postmodern society. While Kaa, the python, is a villain in all the versions, the anime presents this creature as a parent figure who rescues Mowgli from perils. Kipling didn't assign names to all the wolves, whereas, all of them have been assigned names in the anime. Anime's old lupine leader Akela is killed by Sher Khan during a battle, whereas in Kipling's version, the assassination of pack's supremo was executed by young wolves. Kipling's story concludes with the departure of Mowgli from his multicultural environment to live with humans. The anime ended on a hopeful note of trust between the general populace of the jungle and the villagers. Kipling presents a duality of gender. Terrorizing and butchering hundreds of beasts is more of a manliness exhibition. Also, there is no significant feminine animal character in the *Jungle Books* aside from the mother wolf. But in the anime, she has not only been given the name 'Chameli' but also, she has been assigned the post of the pack's leader after Akela. This could be a positive symbol of gender hegemony break-up.

Dudley elaborates the phenomenon of adaptation into three distinct but interrelated perspectives: borrowing,

intersecting, and fidelity/transformation. By borrowing, filmmakers hope to win the audience by retaining the charm of the prestigious title or subject. The Hindi anime retains the same title and the law of the jungle. By the second mode, intersecting, we understand that to be dramatized --- a novel must be modified, with the elimination of controversial complexities. The anime presents the idea of scaling down the darker tone of western imperialism. Thirdly, by the mode of fidelity/transformation, we understand that the task of adaptation is to bring back the spirit of the text through transformation into a concrete visualization in terms of acting, dialogue, audio-visual effects, animation technology, etc.

"A filmic adaptation must remain an exclusive piece of art with the possibility of modifications in the content of the original work to fulfill the audience's expectations. (Hutcheon, 2006, p.16) Though the romantic affair between Mowgli and Radha is one of the plotlines of the anime, we see the odd interracial romantic hint between she-wolf Leela and Mowgli. But whether Radha or Leela, these experimental bold aspects can be seen neither in Kipling's version nor in Disney's adaptation.

CONCLUSION

"The circulation, attribution, and appropriation modes of discourse vary with culture and are modified in each particular case". (Foucault, 2000, p.231). The anime is a statement of the social upheaval in Kipling's hierarchical settings. For example, Sher Khan symbolizes dominance over other animals. Additionally, the segregation done by the colonial system of people based on gender, race, and species is well depicted. However, the notion behind this hostility is not apparent to the tiny-tot audience for whom this adaptation was purposely made.

"Adaptation" --- usually viewed as "free translation" --- is an ambivalent activity that gives enough freedom to ensure "the after-life of the original." (Benjamin 1968, p.71) The re-composition of classic animal anthropomorphic cannon into a melodic visual presents a compensatory narrative of cheerfulness, about the youth negotiating with difficult times.

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