

# Translation of Hindi Short Stories into French: Cultural and Linguistic Challenges

**Mr. Rishav Aryan**

Assistant Professor

Amity School of Languages

Amity University, Lucknow Campus, India

**Mr. Mohd Sharif Waseem**

P P Savani, University, CFLS

Dhamdod, Kosamba, Gujarat, India

## Abstract

Translation is much more than just changing words from one language to another; it plays a key role in linking different cultures and bringing literary worlds together. Recently, more people are showing interest in sharing the beauty of Hindi literature with readers who speak French. However, this process is rarely straightforward. A translator doesn't merely translate sentences; they navigate the underlying cultural nuances and distinctive stylistic elements that give a story its essence.

This study looks closely at the challenges by examining the French translations of famous writers such as Munshi Premchand and Bhisham Sahni. The study looks at how translators deal with difficult idioms, expressions that are specific to a culture, and the special structure of Hindi stories through their short stories. It looks at how translators approach their work—whether they adapt a concept for a new audience, borrow a word directly to preserve its original flavor, or substitute a cultural reference to make it more relatable.

In the end, the results show that good translation requires careful balance. It needs to remain very true to the original tone while making the story feel real and easy for a French audience to understand. It shows that translators do more than just speak different languages; they play a key role in connecting cultures.

## 1. Introduction

Translation is widely recognized as a vital means of promoting cross-cultural communication and the exchange of literary works. Translation helps people read texts in different languages, which lets them experience various cultures and literary traditions. Bassnett (2014) says that translation is more than just changing words from one language to another. It also involves understanding and reshaping the meaning in a new cultural context.

Hindi literature is a rich and wide-ranging storytelling tradition in South Asia, dealing with themes like rural life, unfair treatment in society, traditional customs, and changes in politics. Writers like Munshi Premchand are well-known for showing the real life situations in Indian villages, while authors like Bhisham Sahni look into the social and political changes happening in modern India. Translating these literary works into French enables Francophone readers to become acquainted with the cultural nuances of Indian society.

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Translating Hindi literature into French has several challenges. Cultural expressions, idioms, and social references that appear in Hindi stories often don't have simple or direct equivalents in French. Venuti (1995) says that when you translate something, you have to carefully balance the cultural values from the original language with those of the language you're translating into.

This study examines the cultural and language-related challenges faced when translating Hindi short stories into French and explores the strategies translators use to address these problems.

## Research Objectives

- i. To examine cultural factors that make translating from Hindi to French challenging.
- ii. To look into how differences between Hindi and French affect the process of translating literature.
- iii. To figure out translation methods that help keep the original message clear and accurate.

## 2. Literature Review

In the field of Translation Studies, theoretical discussions repeatedly emphasize the inseparable connection between language and culture. One of the most influential frameworks was established by Eugene Nida in 1964, who introduced the concept of dynamic equivalence. Nida said that a good translation isn't just about copying the original structure. Instead, it should make the new audience feel the same emotions and think the same way as the original readers did when they read the source text.

Lawrence Venuti (1995) suggested a difference between domestication and foreignization. Domestication makes the text easier to understand by adjusting it to fit the cultural habits of the people it's being shared with, so it feels natural to them. Foreignization, on the other hand, keeps the text close to its original culture, making it clear that it comes from a different place and reminds the reader of its unique background. In his 1988 work, Peter Newmark distinguished between semantic translation, which emphasizes the precise transmission of the author's message, and communicative translation, which aims to make the content clear and effective for contemporary readers.

From a Comparative Literature point of view, translation is seen as an important link between different literary traditions. Roman Jakobson (1959) is well known for saying that translation is about interpreting words from one language into another, which means you have to think carefully about the culture and meaning behind the words.

When examining Indian literature specifically, André Lefevere (1992) and other scholars have pointed out that culture-specific idioms and references present the greatest challenges for translators. Hindi literature is full of words that are connected to special social systems, religious ceremonies, and everyday activities, which usually don't have a direct match in European languages like French. Even though there's growing worldwide attention on Indian content, not much research is being done on how Hindi translates to French. This study aims to address that gap by examining the intricate relationship between linguistic choices and cultural adaptation in this particular translation pair.

### 3. Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach that focuses on closely examining text in depth. This method is made to look into how meaning changes and gets transformed when switching from one language to another.

#### Selection of Primary Sources

The research looks at a carefully chosen group of short stories from two of India's most important writers:

- **Munshi Premchand**
- **Bhisham Sahni**

These specific authors were selected because their narratives are deeply rooted in authentic cultural contexts and offer profound social commentary, providing a rich landscape for analyzing translation difficulties.

#### Systematic Research Procedure

The investigation is done using a clear, four-step method that analyzes things carefully.

1. Textual Selection: Identifying specific, representative passages from the original Hindi source material.
2. The goal is to translate these chosen parts into French.
3. Hurdle Identification: Finding out the specific language obstacles and cultural differences that come up during the change process.
4. Strategic Evaluation: Assessing the effectiveness of various translation techniques: such as adaptation or borrowing used to resolve these complexities.

By using this qualitative approach, the research goes deeper than just word-for-word translation and looks closely at how cultural details are kept and changed as they move from Hindi to French.

## 4. Cultural Challenges in Translation

### 1. Translating literature is more than a linguistic exchange

Translating literature is more than a linguistic exchange; it is a delicate act of cultural transplantation. As Susan Bassnett pointed out in 2014, a translator's main job is not just to change words, but also to carry over the important cultural meanings that are connected to those words. For French readers, reading a Hindi short story is like stepping into a completely new world, full of traditions and everyday life that don't have a direct match in Europe.

Take, for instance, the term "panchayat." While it can be dryly defined as a "village council," a literal translation fails to capture its social weight as a grassroots judicial and administrative heart of the community. A translator has to figure out how much of that subtle meaning to include. Should they retain the original Hindi term to preserve authenticity, include an explanatory note, or seek a French cultural counterpart?

### 2. The Challenge of Munshi Premchand

The writings of Munshi Premchand face a particular set of challenges. His stories come from the heart of rural India, and they often show the tough life of poor people, the struggles between different castes, and the daily challenges of farming life.

A French reader may have difficulty understanding the importance of a character's struggles in terms of society and economy if the translation fails to connect rural Indian life with what Western literature usually expects.

André Lefevere (1992) proposed the "Rewriting" Theory, which suggests that translation is really a type of rewriting. He believed this process is strongly shaped by the ideas and literary values of the culture that receives the translated work. So, translating Premchand into French needs a plan that keeps the original story true and also makes it interesting and easy for French-speaking readers to understand.

### 3. Finding the Middle Ground

Ultimately, the goal is to achieve a "dynamic equivalence." Translators serve as mediators who must balance two competing interests:

1. Preservation: Making sure the original spirit and special cultural elements of the Hindi version stay intact.
2. Ensuring the process flows naturally in French so the reader isn't constantly pulled out of the story by confusing terminology.

By carefully handling these cultural challenges, translators make sure that the deep human stories in Hindi literature, like those beautifully written by Premchand can touch readers in Paris or Lyon just as they do in Varanasi.

## The Linguistic Tightrope: Structural Divergence

One cannot simply translate Hindi into French without engaging in considerable "mental gymnastics." The most immediate challenge lies in the fundamental structure of the two languages.

**The Syntax Struggle:** Hindi uses a Subject–Object–Verb structure, which feels a bit roundabout and more descriptive. French, however, follows the Subject–Verb–Object (SVO) order in its sentence structure. For a translator, this isn't just about moving a verb; it's about recalibrating the emphasis of the entire sentence. In Hindi, the action usually feels like it's finishing up at the end of the thought, but in French, the action is shown much earlier. Not fixing these structures isn't just about having poor grammar—it messes up the flow and rhythm of the original story.

### The Idiomatic Wall: Beyond Literalism

Idioms are the "flavor" of a culture, and as Peter Newmark (1988) famously argued, they are often the most difficult elements to transfer across borders. They depend on cultural symbols and images that aren't present in the language they're trying to reach.

Take the common Hindi saying "Nau do gyarah ho jana." A strict translator might attempt to convert the numbers directly, but a French reader would still be completely confused. The "spirit" of the phrase refers to a sudden, panicked disappearance. While "prendre la fuite" captures the clinical meaning of "taking flight," a truly creative translator might seek something even more evocative to match the colloquial punch of the Hindi original. This is where the translator stops acting like a technician and begins acting like a writer.

### The Problem of "Vibe": Dialects and Social Register

When authors like Bhisham Sahni incorporate regional dialects or colloquial "Bazaar" Hindi into their stories, they indicate the character's social status, background, and level of education.

The question is: What would be the French version of a rural Haryanvi accent or a particular kind of Delhi Street language? There isn't one. Translators sometimes create a "stylistic equivalent"—like using an old-fashioned French way of speaking or a special rhythm—to show that the character is not talking in standard French. As Roman Jakobson said in 1959, translation is basically about interpreting something. We aren't seeking a twin; we are seeking a surrogate that holds equal importance.

### Strategic Navigation: How Translators Adapt

To go from the dusty streets of a Premchand story to the refined world of Parisian literature, translators use a set of particular methods.

1. Adaptation vs. Literalism: While literal translation is the "safest" route to preserve the source text's skeleton, it often leaves the reader feeling cold. Adaptation lets the translator change cultural

references, such as a particular food or a local tradition, so that the French reader experiences the same feeling as the original reader did.

2. The Power of Borrowing: Sometimes, the best way to translate is not to translate at all. Terms such as "Guru," "Panchayat," or "Dharma" carry significant historical weight, and translating them into "Teacher" or "Council" would be an insult to the text's authenticity. By keeping the original word "Borrowing," the translator brings the reader into the Indian landscape.
3. Cultural substitution is the "equivalence" approach that Nida supported in 1964. If a particular Hindi saying about bad luck uses a black cat or a broken pot, and French culture has a different sign of bad luck, the translator might change the image but keep the same meaning so the effect feels the same.

## Final Discussion and Synthesis

The evidence indicates that translating Hindi short stories into French involves a high-stakes balancing act. You can't just be a linguist; you have to act as a cultural bridge between people.

As Susan Bassnett (2002) highlights, the most successful translations are those that understand the "framework" of the culture as much as the vocabulary of the language. In the works of Premchand, the hardships faced by farmers are not just stories—they reflect real social and economic issues. If a French translation loses that rough edge and instead uses only classy words, then the translation hasn't done the author justice.

## Conclusion

This analysis highlights that the journey from Hindi to French is filled with linguistic and cultural pitfalls. Looking at the works of Premchand and Sahni, we realize that translation is a thoughtful and complex process that requires ongoing discussion and adjustment. Whether it's navigating the SVO/SOV divide or deciding when to leave a word like "Pandit" untranslated, the objective remains the same: to ensure the French reader experiences the same heartache, humor, and humanity that the Hindi reader felt decades ago. Future research might find it helpful to examine how these challenges change as stories move from short stories to longer, multi-generational Hindi novels.

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