

**FUTURE OF TRANSLATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE**

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**Abstract:**

*The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a fundamental restructuring of India's educational system. One of its most significant yet underexplored aspects is the central placement of translation as a pedagogical, cultural, and institutional practice. This extended research paper provides a comprehensive critique of translation in the context of NEP 2020, analyzing its theoretical bases, implementation challenges, and transformative potential. Drawing on postcolonial theory, translation studies, sociolinguistics, and policy analysis, the paper argues that NEP 2020 makes translation a crucial agent of educational equity and cultural democratization, while simultaneously revealing deeply rooted linguistic politics and infrastructural shortcomings. The study concludes by offering recommendations for creating a sustainable and ethical translation ecosystem in India.*

**Keywords:** NEP 2020, Linguistic Justice, Bilingual, IKS, Mother Tongues, Digital Translation, AI, NLP, OER and STEM

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**Introduction:**

Translation has always shaped the intellectual landscape of the Indian subcontinent. Well before colonial intervention, the exchange of texts between Sanskrit, Prakrit, Tamil, Persian, and later English resulted in vibrant cultural and philosophical transformations. As Harish Trivedi notes, “translation in India is not merely a linguistic activity; it is a cultural and political act” (Trivedi 4). With the publication of NEP 2020, translation has once again become a focal point in national discourse, presented as essential for multilingual education and knowledge accessibility. NEP 2020 emerges at a moment when linguistic diversity, digital transformation, and educational inequality intersect. The policy's emphasis on mother-tongue instruction up to Grade 5 or 8 demands large-scale translation of textbooks and digital materials. Simultaneously, its commitment to inclusivity requires translation for marginalized linguistic communities.

Despite these ambitions, translation remains one of the least developed academic and professional sectors in India. This paper therefore situates translation at the center of a critique of NEP 2020, asking: How does the policy conceptualize translation? What theoretical and ideological assumptions shape its directives? What challenges obstruct implementation? And what future directions does it open for translation studies and practice?

**Historical Background: Translation in Indian Education:**

Translation has never been peripheral to Indian education. Ancient Indian texts circulated through multilingual interpretations and commentaries. Buddhist scholars translated Pali and Sanskrit scriptures into Chinese and Tibetan, shaping enormous intellectual traditions outside India. During the medieval era, Persian and Sanskrit translations

mediated knowledge across courts and religious institutions.

The colonial period institutionalized translation through the **English Education Act (1835)**, which promoted English-language education and translation of Western texts into Indian languages. Post-independence linguistic debates continued to center on translation as a nation-building tool. The three-language formula of 1968 relied heavily on translation, though its inconsistent implementation limited impact. NEP 2020 must be understood as a continuation of this long history. However, unlike previous policies, it explicitly integrates translation into structural educational reform.

#### **Translation and NEP 2020: A Detailed Examination Mother-Tongue Instruction and Pedagogical Translation:**

NEP states that,

*“wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5 shall be the home language or mother tongue”* (India, Ministry of Education 12).

This requires translation at massive scale:

- Textbook Translation,
- Bilingual Content Creation,
- Classroom Translation (Translanguaging),
- Teacher-Support Materials.

Without translation, the mother-tongue mandate cannot function.

#### **Indian Institute of Translation and Interpretation (IITI):**

Perhaps the most ambitious proposal is the creation of IITI, envisioned as a national hub for:

- Training Professional Translators,
- Coordinating Multilingual Terminology Development,
- Promoting Translation Research,
- Supporting Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS).

However, NEP provides no specific timeline, funding mechanism, staffing model, or governance structure for IITI.

#### **Translation for Knowledge Democratization:**

Translation plays a pivotal role in **knowledge democratization**, the process of making knowledge accessible to all sections of society regardless of language, region, caste, or class. In multilingual countries like India, where linguistic diversity is immense, translation becomes essential for ensuring that educational, scientific, and cultural knowledge is not restricted to dominant languages such as English or Hindi.

Through translation, textbooks, research findings, government documents, and digital resources can reach learners in their **Mother Tongues**, promoting inclusivity and equal learning opportunities. It bridges the gap between privileged and marginalized communities by removing linguistic barriers that often determine access to quality education. Translation also strengthens regional languages by expanding their vocabulary in science, technology, law, and the humanities, thereby enhancing their functional capacity.

In the context of NEP 2020, translation is envisioned as a tool to democratize knowledge by supporting multilingual education, creating bilingual teaching materials, and disseminating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) in diverse languages. It empowers learners by enabling them to study complex concepts in the language they understand best, fostering deeper comprehension and critical thinking.

Overall, translation serves as a **catalyst for educational equity**, linguistic diversity, and participatory knowledge creation, making learning more inclusive and culturally grounded.

**Theoretical Framework:**
**Postcolonial Translation Theory:**

Tejaswini Niranjana argues that translation in colonial India served as an instrument of power, constructing epistemic authority (Niranjana 3). NEP's privileging of certain languages risks repeating such power dynamics.

**Cultural Translation:**

For Homi Bhabha, translation transforms identity as it mediates between cultures (Bhabha 1994). NEP's vision of multilingual classrooms aligns with this perspective but fails to address the complexities of cultural hybridity.

**Functionalist and Skopos Theory:**

Hans Vermeer's Skopos theory emphasizes purpose in translation. NEP-based translations must satisfy pedagogical goals—clarity, child psychology, cultural familiarity—which requires specialized training.

**Sociolinguistics and Linguistic Justice:**

Scholars like Annamalai argue that Indian language policy often reinforces major language dominance under the guise of multilingualism. The NEP 2020 framework may unintentionally strengthen linguistic hierarchies.

**Opportunities Created by NEP 2020:**

NEP 2020 creates significant opportunities for transforming education through translation and multilingual practices. By encouraging instruction in the mother tongue and regional languages, the policy opens the door for large-scale translation of textbooks, digital resources, and research materials, enabling millions of learners to access knowledge in languages they understand best. This democratizes learning, especially for rural and first-generation students, by reducing linguistic barriers that previously limited academic participation.

The policy also promotes the development of new translation technologies and linguistic tools. Initiatives like National Educational Technology Forum (NETF),

DIKSHA, and National Digital Library of India (NDLI) create structured platforms where AI-driven translation, Natural Language Processing (NLP), and Open Educational Resources (OER) can flourish. These encourage collaboration between universities, tech companies, and language experts, generating opportunities for innovation, research, and capacity-building in Indian languages.

Further, NEP 2020 enhances the professional scope for translators, educators, linguists, and content developers. It encourages the establishment of translation units, interdisciplinary language labs, and skill-development programs that prepare students for emerging careers in localization, digital humanities, and multilingual communication. Overall, the policy creates an ecosystem that values linguistic diversity and supports inclusive, equitable, and future-ready education.

**Rejuvenation of Indian Languages:**

Translation facilitates linguistic development in fields where Indian languages lack technical vocabulary. Terminology creation in STEM, law, and medicine will expand linguistic functionality.

**Growth of Translation Studies as a Discipline:**

With interdisciplinary learning and flexible curricula, universities can develop:

- BA/MA Translation Studies programs,
- Minors in Applied Linguistics,
- Research fellowships,
- Interdisciplinary translation labs.

**Employment Opportunities**

NEP creates unprecedented demand for:

- Educational translators,
- Digital content localizers,
- Subtitlers and dubbing translators,
- Government translators,
- Interpreters for administrative services.

### Digital Translation: AI, NLP, and OER

Digital translation brings together **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**, **Natural Language Processing (NLP)**, and **Open Educational Resources (OER)** to make multilingual knowledge widely accessible. AI-driven translation tools, such as machine translation engines, speech-to-text systems, and automated subtitling platforms, significantly speed up the process of converting content across languages. These systems use NLP algorithms to analyze linguistic patterns, context, and meaning, enabling more accurate translations than traditional rule-based methods.

NLP contributes to digital translation by enabling computers to process human languages—understanding syntax, semantics, sentiment, and discourse. This allows for advanced applications such as real-time translation, voice assistants, adaptive learning platforms, and multilingual search engines. In education, NLP tools help convert textbooks, lectures, and academic materials into multiple languages quickly and cost-effectively.

Open Educational Resources (OER) amplify the impact of digital translation by providing freely accessible learning materials that can be adapted and translated without copyright limitations. When OER is combined with AI-supported translation, it enables the rapid creation of multilingual textbooks, e-content, and learning modules, especially in regions with limited resources.

In the context of NEP 2020, digital translation plays a transformative role by supporting mother-tongue instruction, promoting multilingual digital libraries, and ensuring equitable access to educational materials. Together, AI, NLP, and OER democratize knowledge, break linguistic barriers, and move India toward an inclusive and technologically empowered learning ecosystem.

### Challenges:

Translation as a tool for multilingual education under NEP 2020 faces several key challenges. A major difficulty lies in maintaining accuracy while translating diverse academic disciplines, especially subjects that involve technical vocabulary, idiomatic language, or culturally embedded concepts. Machine translation tools, though increasingly sophisticated, still struggle with contextual meaning and often produce literal or ambiguous outputs that can misguide learners. Human translation, on the other hand, demands significant time, financial investment, and specialized training, making large-scale implementation difficult in resource-constrained institutions.

Another challenge is ensuring consistency across translated materials. Variations in dialects, regional linguistic practices, and pedagogical styles can result in uneven quality. Teachers also face difficulties integrating translated resources into existing curricula, particularly when they lack adequate training in translation-oriented pedagogy. Moreover, unequal access to digital infrastructure, devices, and high-speed internet creates disparities in who can benefit from translated digital content. Finally, copyright restrictions and limited availability of Open Educational Resources (OER) slow down the creation of high-quality, freely accessible translated learning materials.

### Limitations:

Despite its promise, translation-based learning under NEP 2020 has certain limitations that restrict its full effectiveness. One major limitation is the inherent difficulty of capturing culturally rooted meanings, metaphors, and disciplinary nuances in another language without distortion. Even expert translators may struggle to retain the original text's tone, depth, or conceptual clarity. Machine translation systems, while

improving, remain limited by algorithmic biases, insufficient training data for many Indian languages, and their inability to interpret context, emotion, or non-literal expressions.

Another limitation is scalability. Producing high-quality translated educational content for India's vast linguistic diversity is labor-intensive and costly. Institutions may find it difficult to continuously update translated materials in line with changing curricula or technological advancements. Additionally, translation alone cannot replace the need for direct language proficiency; learners may still struggle with advanced academic texts if over-dependent on translated versions. Copyright issues, lack of standardized glossaries, and inconsistent terminology across regions further complicate the process. Together, these limitations highlight the need for multi-layered strategies that combine translation with pedagogy, capacity building, and technological support.

#### **Pedagogical Implications:**

The integration of translation into teaching and learning significantly reshapes classroom pedagogy. First, translation acts as a bridge between learners' linguistic backgrounds and academic content, enabling deeper comprehension, especially in multilingual contexts. When teachers use translated materials—textbooks, glossaries, or bilingual modules—students grasp complex concepts more easily, reducing cognitive load. Second, translation-based activities develop critical skills such as comparative language analysis, cultural sensitivity, and metalinguistic awareness. These skills strengthen overall language proficiency and enhance students' ability to transfer knowledge across domains. Third, digital translation tools (AI, NLP, and machine translation systems) encourage collaborative and learner-centered approaches, where students evaluate, refine, and contextualize automated translations. Finally, the thoughtful use of translation in pedagogy promotes

inclusivity by ensuring that students from diverse linguistic backgrounds can access equal learning opportunities, thereby democratizing the educational experience.

#### **Institutional Preparedness:**

Institutional preparedness refers to the capacity of educational institutions—schools, universities, government bodies, and supporting agencies—to effectively implement new policies, such as the multilingual and translation-focused initiatives proposed in NEP 2020. Preparedness involves having the **necessary infrastructure, trained personnel, administrative systems, financial resources, and technological tools** required to execute translation-related tasks at scale.

A key challenge is the **shortage of trained translators, language experts, and teachers** skilled in bilingual or multilingual pedagogy. Without adequate professional development programs, institutions struggle to produce quality translated materials or manage multilingual classrooms. Another major aspect is **infrastructure readiness**, including digital platforms, translation labs, high-quality language corpora, and access to reliable technology—tools essential for digital translation and content creation.

Institutional preparedness also depends on **coordination among agencies** such as NCERT, SCERT, state textbook boards, universities, and language commissions. Clear guidelines, timelines, and quality assurance mechanisms are necessary to maintain consistency across languages and regions. Financial preparedness is equally crucial, as large-scale translation work requires sustained investment in human resources, technology, and content development.

In the NEP 2020 context, institutional preparedness ultimately determines whether policy goals—such as mother-tongue education, multilingual resources, and

knowledge democratization—can be realistically achieved.

### Ethical Issues in Translation:

Ethical issues in translation arise from the translator's responsibility to represent meaning accurately, respect cultural contexts, and avoid distortions that may harm individuals or communities. One major concern is the balance between **fidelity and adaptation**. Excessive literal translation can obscure meaning, while over-adaptation may distort the author's intent. The translator must make informed choices that maintain both clarity and integrity.

Another ethical issue concerns **representation and cultural sensitivity**. Translators must avoid reinforcing stereotypes, marginalizing minority voices, or erasing culturally specific knowledge. Misrepresentation of indigenous, tribal, or marginalized communities can have long-term social consequences, particularly in educational materials.

**Power relations** also shape ethical concerns. Translation can perpetuate linguistic hierarchies—such as privileging English over regional languages—or silence less-dominant languages. Ethical translation must promote linguistic equity and respect the cultural autonomy of all communities.

Additionally, issues of **authorship, ownership, and copyright** arise in the translation of creative and educational content. Translators deserve recognition for their intellectual contribution, and their rights must be protected.

In educational contexts, especially under NEP 2020, ethical translation requires accuracy, inclusivity, transparency, and accountability, ensuring that learners receive knowledge that is reliable, culturally respectful, and free from bias.

### Recommendations:

1. Establish IITI with clear governance structures and adequate funding.

2. Create national multilingual terminology databases for STEM, humanities, and social sciences.
3. Professionalize translation through diploma and degree programs.
4. Train teachers in translation pedagogy and translanguaging.
5. Support translation in tribal and endangered languages through community participation.
6. Build Indian language corpora for computational translation.
7. Ensure linguistic equity across all states and languages.
8. Integrate translation ethics into translator training.
9. Provide financial support to states for large-scale textbook translation.
10. Promote public-private partnerships in digital translation technologies.

### Conclusion:

Translation in NEP 2020 is both a visionary and challenging endeavor. It offers unprecedented opportunities for linguistic democratization, educational equity, and cultural revitalization. Yet the policy's success depends on systemic redesign of translation infrastructure, pedagogical innovation, and ethical practice. When implemented thoughtfully, translation can become the backbone of India's multilingual educational future.

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