

LITERARY TRANSLATION: CULTURAL ISSUES, REASONS AND SOLUTIONS BETWEEN ENGLISH AND TAMIL LANGUAGES

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Abstract

This paper entitled 'Literary Translation: Cultural issues, Reasons and Solutions between English and Tamil Languages' tries to bring out a common definition for translation to cover all aspects translation issues. So it brings out various issues pertaining to translation which include linguistic and culture. It gives examples for such issues and tries to solve it. This paper gives diagrammatic explanations using Eugene Naida's model. It details the cultural issues when a translator translates culturally loaded words from Tamil language to English language and the vice versa. Finally it suggests Peter New Mark's suggestion to solve these issues. This paper aims at bringing a perfect definition for translation and also at a perfect translation without any loss of cultural and linguistic meaning.

LITERARY TRANSLATION: CULTURAL ISSUES, REASONS AND SOLUTIONS BETWEEN ENGLISH AND TAMIL LANGUAGES

In the older days, translation was considered as an act of bringing a text from one language into other languages; it might seem perfect outwardly. But this is not common to all varieties of translation. It varies from subject to subject, place to place, and time to time. Act of bringing of one text from one language into other languages may be common; but the manner of 'bringing' changes. Translating a science text is totally different from translating a literary text. Translating a legal text is totally different from a financial text. As everyone needs a shirt which can suit him, every discipline needs a translation method which suits to that discipline. A particular shirt cannot suit everyone; in this way, a particular type of translation cannot suit to all subjects.

To understand the act of translation, we should define translation first. But defining translation is the toughest thing when we seek for a definition to cover translations of all subjects; defining translation itself is a complex one as it has got various issues and problems.

When we think about the translation of science text, we tend to translate it word by word. If it is the case with the translation of business documents, we see the aptness of the target group. When you happen to translate a technology transfer, the translator should know the technology and its application very well. A translator should be familiar with legal terms when he is to translate legal documents; because every technology is the outcome of its social, political and economical culture. Each word is not an isolated one; it is a sign of cultural activity which carries a lot of meaning. As Roland Barthes, in his deconstruction theory says, 'words don't have fixed meaning, it changes from place to place; time to time'. So, we can't adopt a common methodology to translate all types of texts. But there is no doubt that translation is an act of rendering a text from one language into other language or languages and from one form into other form or forms.

Translation cannot be seen as a whole as its methods vary differently for different subjects. With this change in method, we can have various types of translation. Science translation, business translation, medical translation, mathematical and engineering translation, commercial, financial, legal translation, technical translation, web translation, software translations are some of the translations which are in common use. The method of translating a text is different for each type of translation. We can group them into two broader categories as **literary translation and non-literary translation**. Translations of literary text like poem, play, novel, short story, prose and so on are termed as literary translation; the other texts other than literature are considered non-literary texts and the translations of such non-literary texts are termed as non-literary translation. Non-literary translation includes the translation of technical documents, business and commercial documents, legal and judicial documents and texts pertaining to information technology along with internet source materials.

The Making of culture plays a vital role in creation of language. Culture is the identity of a society. It is the face of human community pertaining to particular geographical location. So, culture changes from place to place. A culture is created based on the life styles of a society in a region by applying trial and entire method. A culture is the outcome of the long experiences of a society. An individual cannot create a culture but it is formed by the behavioral patterns of the society. Every aspect of culture is defined by the experiences of the society and eventually it takes a final shape and this would become the rules and principles of the society of a particular kind. Human convenience and comfort become the designing factor of the culture. Every society has its own convenience and comfort and so culture varies from

place and time to time. This change shows the growth and development of a particular society.

Wife in Indian culture is not the same as a wife in English culture; the dress code in India is not the same as in England. The convenience of a society plays a pivotal role in forming the cultural aspects. Time also plays its own significant role in the formation of culture. How I respected my father is a shock to my son as it is totally different from the way how my son regards me. So, it is a matter of convenience that culture changes from place to place and time to time.

Let us see some unique definition for culture propounded by some scholars:

Peter New Mark says that culture can be defined as the way of life and a manifestation that is peculiar to a community that notes a peculiar language as its means of expression. A culture in particular is practiced by its members and this manifestation is conveyed through a language. So, language becomes a tool to the evolution of culture in a society. **Peter New mark's** definition of culture is a new mark as he includes language into culture, since language is an outcome of a culture in any society. And further he adds in his '**A Textbook of Translation**' that cultural exchange as language is a part of culture, takes place among communities as language as its medium.

Edward Taylor sees that culture is a complete whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom and other capabilities and habits acquired by a man as a member of a particular society. If a man is born in England, he will acquire English as his language and his will practice English culture. Acquired and practiced habits by man as a member of a particular society is that man's culture. The behavioral patterns of an individual in any community, as **Taylor** noted in his **The Primitive Culture** indicates his culture and society and by that he becomes a part and parcel of that society. As a representative, not only he practices his culture but transmit to his posterity, from his generation to the next generation. So, culture is a blanket cover which covers many under one name of a particular culture.

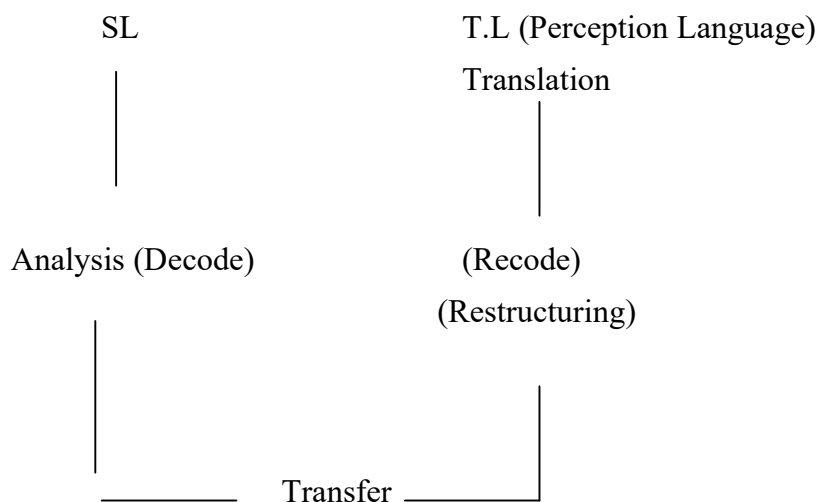
Henkovits defines that culture is a man made part of the environment. Here the environment is the natural habitat and the social settings in which human life is lived. **Henkovits** points out that culture is nothing but the way in which human life is led. Every society has its own formula to run its life. That formula which makes every human being to adopt in his / her life is, in its broader sense, a culture. A culture is by the people, of the

people and for the people. Culture in its broader sense means, is the characteristics and knowledge of a particular human race, comprising religion, art, habits and custom. A culture can spread to other cultures when an opportunity occurs; since British ruled India for more than two hundred years, India still witnesses' English culture in India. British culture exerts its influence on language, food, dress and style of our life. Every culture is a unique one with its special characteristics.

As we look for the cultural issues in literary translation, we tend to analyze how culture becomes an issue, on what aspects in a literary translation.

Let us see the role of Cultural Issues in Literary Translation. **J.C. Catford** pronounces two occasions of untranslatability. One is linguistic and another one is culture. Translation is completely a linguistic activity and linguistics is completely blossomed from culture. The extended form of culture is language which is used as a medium of expression of cultural aspects like beliefs, values, ethics, education and way of life belonging to a particular human society. Culture affects language and language affects translation.

It is, at this juncture, important to see the **Eugene Nida's** diagram which delineates the process of translation as follows:



What are decoding and recoding with the representation of **Eugene Nida's** diagram of translation process, we understand that when a text is given for translation in **Source Language (SL)**, the first step is to decode to have analysis on various meanings for the given text. If the given text has more than one meaning, one should weigh the option which suits to the given context and select. And we have to recode the selected one by restructuring it into

the **Target Language (TL)** after transferring the meaning. Now the translation process is complete.

The English word ‘Yes’ has two meanings in Tamil as ‘Mk;’ and ‘rhp’. You ask a question ‘Is your name Tejas?’ to a girl, then the girl will say ‘yes’.

When the same girl is asked another question, ‘will you help me?’, then the girl will reply again ‘yes’.

In English, answers for both the question are ‘yes’ only.

But when you ask the same questions in Tamil to the girl, she will answer differently.

Is Tejas your name?

Yes, Tejas is my name.

cdJ ngah; Nj[]h?

Mk; vdJ ngah; Nj[].;

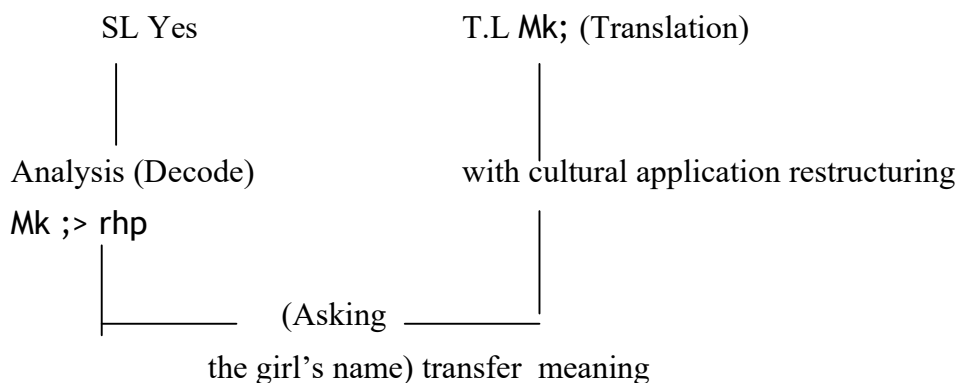
Do you help me?

Yes, I do help you.

eP vdf;F cjTthah?

rhp> ehd; cq;fSf;F cjTfpNwd;.

From the above example, English word ‘Yes’ has two uses in Tamil as ‘Mk;’ and ‘rhp’: So, the translator should see the context of the SL and accordingly select from the options in TL. To explain the English word ‘yes’ into Tamil, we can draw the following diagram following Eugene Nida’s formula:



Let us discuss about the Cultural Issues in Translation between English and Tamil languages. As every society has got its own culture, with its unique characteristics, no culture can be similar to each other. So, we can come across uneven aspects in every culture. Culture

with dissimilarities will have differences in contexts in their own languages. Cultural aspects with their varied nature produce untranslatability in their language when they are translated.

In English 'liquor' means brandy, wine, beer but in Tamil it has more meaning for different variety like brandy, wine, beer, spirit, alcohol, and so on. It means high quality drink along with low quality.

In our old Tamil culture, we have கஜ and ஈ;ஈ. The English 'arrack' is translated as ருஹக; (Saraayam). Now arrack is replaced by liquor. Now ருஹக;. is replaced by 'ரூஈ;ஈ' (Sarakku). Originally sarakku – ரூஈ;ஈ means grocery materials in a general merchant which are used for all our domestic commitments like cooking, washing and bathing. Vegetables would not be included into this.

But now ரூஈ;ஈ (Sarakku) in Tamil means the old word arrack and Liquor now is used as a common word for Brandy, wine, beer, vodka in English and ரூஈ;ஈ is used as a common word for arrack, brandy, wine, beer, spirit, alcohol in Tamil. The word 'drinks' is used to refer to high quality items in English Language.

So, liquor may be translated as ரூஈ;ஈ (Sarakku). Liquor and ரூஈ;ஈ (Sarakku) have no connectivity between them; linguistic, material, structural and semantical connectivity are not found between them. Then how is it translated as ரூஈ;ஈ (Sarakku)? Here translation takes place based on 'usage'. The usage of liquor and sarakku are the same in both the languages i.e., in Tamil and English. If you translate liquor into Tamil, then it will be 'ஈபுடக;'' (Thiravam). This thiravam (ஈபுடக;) does not mean liquor as it refers to some other liquid materials like oil, milk and water. Here the usage of liquor is considered and equated with the usage of ரூஈ;ஈ. So, equivalences are identified and used to have a perfect translation.

Cultural translation takes place in customs. Custom is a value system of a society. We have a special meaning for every of our social activity. This meaning is a created one and we attach less importance or more importance as we are taught by our forefathers. In our Tamil culture, crows are considered our dead forefathers. So, on our forefathers death, as a mark of end of all rituals, we take food only after serving food to crows; and we would be waiting for the crows to eat. After they take food, we will take food. Because the crows are our forefathers and they should be fed first. There is no such tradition in English culture and in fact they may ridicule us for such customs in our culture. Crow is a simple creature for English people but it is the embodiment of our forefathers.

Let's consider the word 'aunty'. The English people use this word 'aunty' to refer to mother's sister, father's sister, a neighbor woman, any unknown lady and all middle and above middle aged ladies. But in Tamil, we have rpd;dk;khs ; (Chinnammal) or rpj;jp (Chithi), nghpak;kh (Periyammal), mj;ij and in general mk;kh (amma) to refer to middle and above middle aged ladies. When we translate 'aunty' into Tamil, we must be careful about the relationship which the word refers to. If we have a direct translation of 'aunty' as mj;ij (aththai), to refer to chithi rpj;jp it will be a blunder. So, the translator should have the knowledge of this cultural relationship which is totally vary of English culture.

We can see how Cultural Translation takes place in Religion. According to Hindu mythology, our age is called fypAfk ; (Kaliyugam). The functioning of this universe will come to an end in this yuga. Here Kali means the evil things and in this Kali Yuga, the evil deeds are on the rise. God, which is unbearable to this state, will destroy this earth. God will perform a total destruction of this earth very soon is the meaning of Kaliyuga i.e., fypAfk ; in Tamil. But there is no such anticipation in Christianity. But Christianity has judgment day for every 'individual'. Judgment day in Tamil refers to 'a day on which court's verdict is pronounced' and it has nothing to do with our culture. fypAfk ; (Kaliyuga) in English does not have anything culturally as judgment day in Tamil does not have anything culturally. The translator may understand when they come across such culturally loaded words to translate, that translation is more than the act of bringing one text from SL to TL. It is bringing one text from SL culture to TL Culture.

Let us see some Solutions to the Cultural issues in Translation. **Peter New Mark** has evolved some strategies to deal with cultural issues in Translation: They are listed below:

1. Naturalization

It is a strategy that involves when an original word is transferred into the other language in the original form. This occurs at times when we don't have an equivalent word in the target language to maintain the degree of importance which has in its original language. So the SL word is transferred as such without any change in its original form.

The Tamil word 'rasam' – $\text{urk};>$ a liquid dish prepared using tamarind, pepper, garlic, tomato and seeragam and is mixed with rice to eat. When it is translated into English, as 'pepper water', it doesn't bring the original sense, it may tell that it is a liquid dish but it doesn't bring the complete sense of $\text{urk};$ (rasam). So, in order to maintain the degree of its completeness, the word $\text{urk};$ (Rasam) may be transferred into English in its original form and

then it will be naturalized automatically. The English word ‘Hello’ has been transferred into Tamil and it has become an original word in Tamil with its regular usage by naturalization.

2. Neutralization

It is a paraphrase at the word level when an SL word is translated into TL. The translator may be tended to do any mini paraphrase when he doesn’t have a cultural equivalence. So the TL reader can understand what the SL word tries to convey. When ‘gold finch’ is translated into Tamil, it is hard to have a Tamil equivalence and the translator is pushed to do a mini paraphrase ‘rpte;jKfk; nfhz;l xU ghLk; gwit’ i.e., ‘a red beaked singing bird’. With neutralization, the target reader is enabled to understand what the SL word conveys. When we refer to ‘mfu Kjy’ (Agara Muthali) a Tamil dictionary for the meaning of ‘gold finch’ we find it is ‘jpp;jphp gwit’. The word jpp;jphp (Thithiri) is not a common word and many Tamils don’t know of this. Even if you translate ‘gold finch’ as ‘jpp;jphp gwit’ (Thithiripparavai) we have to give again a mini paraphrase to make the Tamil readers understand what gold finch is.

3. Functional Equivalence

The aim of translation is making the target language readers receive the message of the SL text. For example, a translator is given a proverb like ‘make hay while the sun shines’. He cannot have ‘word for word’ translation. Then he will translate as ‘ntapybf;Fk; NghJ itf;Nfhy; cUthf;F’ . This ‘word for word’ translated version does not give the meaning of the source language text. It is not meaningful and complete also. In such a case, the translator should go for functional equivalence. The translator should analyze the function of SL text and bring the same function into TL. Then the functional equivalence for the given proverb ‘make hay while the sun shines’ is ‘fhw;Ws;sNghNj J}w;wvf;nfh;’ (Kaattrullapoth thootrikkol). We can now find out the functions of both the texts are same, similar and equal. This is functional equivalence. Function of a language is purely cultural and so a text of a language has different meaning in other languages.

4. Additional Note

A translator cannot convey the message completely when he translates culturally loaded words. So, he may be compelled to give some additional information about certain facts to the TL reader. This additional note may be considered like foot note or end note which gives more information when it is required for some terms. Nida explains “the footnote can explain contradictory customs, identify unknown geographical or physical

objects, give equivalent of weights and measures, provides information of plays, or words include supplementary data on proper nouns and add information which may be generally useful in understanding the historical and cultural background of the document in question". Additional note converts certain untranslatables into translatables.

We can try for the word, **MWKfk**; (Arumugam). It may be a name for an individual and it is also the name of the Lord, the Omnipotent. So, while translating this proper noun **MWKfk**; the translation should see its cultural implication. If it is used as name of an individual, it does not require an additional note. **MWKfk**; (Arumugam) as six face. But when it is translated as the name of the Lord, then the translator may give additional note as follows:

Note: **MWKfk**; (Arumugam) is a Tamil God; Also known as Muruga, Skanda, Karthikeya and many. He is the son of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvathi. He performed Surasamkara, a war against Naraka, a demon to maintain peace harmony among human beings. His brother is Lord Ganesa. He is worshipped in Tamil Nadu, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and he is an important deity around South Asia. He is God of Revolution and War. This additional note gives some cultural message to the target language readers. This particular word cannot have the equivalence in TL. So, this entire cultural context can't be loaded on one word. So the translator needs to give some additional note for such words.

5. Paraphrase

This is needed, when there is no equivalence for a word or phrase or for some idioms and metaphors in T.L. To convey the meaning we can paraphrase it so that the TL readers receive the meaning without any loss. Paraphrase is nothing but an extended synonym and it will expand and diffuse the meaning of the original text. For example, the Tamil metaphor **mtd; tPl;by; vyp> ntsapy; Gyp**. In this text, the **vyp** (Eli) rat and the **Gyp** (Puli) tiger do not mean the real rat and the tiger. It means their quality; rat stands for cowardice and tiger for bravery. We can't find equivalence to this in English. So, we can paraphrase it as follows:

He is a coward at his home but brave in streets.

Conclusion

The Tamil culture is entirely different from English culture. It is difficult to find cultural equivalences for some culturally loaded words of Tamil. On such occasions untranslatability is unavoidable. To minimize or bridge the gaps between these two cultural terms, as this paper suggests, we can employ naturalization, neutralization, functional equivalences, additional notes and paraphrase. Translation is a global vehicle which carries

all knowledge from place to place and delivers them for the benefit of human community. So, this entity should be enriched with various ways and means to have a perfect translation.

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