

## **16. A Study of the Language Behavior in the Works of Translation in Sinhala and English with special reference to Literary Translation**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Translation came into the field as a powerful tool of interaction which operates within specific socio-cultural-political-economic-linguistic and temporal settings or contexts. Languages do not share same underlying patterns, rules and contents and therefore translation does not become an easy task. A translator who is dealing with two languages confront such kind of variations where he has to mould the pack of referential and connotative meanings, grammar and grammatical patterns, contextual situation and many more of the source language into another different mould of the target language.

Therefore, this study is aimed at identifying the language variations confronted in the works of translation in the Sinhala and English languages from several viewpoints and it is expected to discuss the possibility of producing a faithful translation with special reference to literary translations.

The comparative method has been used to conduct this research and both qualitative and quantitative data have been used to analyze the variations more systematically and vividly such as syntactic, lexical, semantic and cultural variations. Both colloquial and standard varieties of the Sinhala language are used and some particular idiosyncratic features of each language have been pointed out.

The results show that the English and Sinhala languages are structured upon two different systems and their syntactic patterns differ to a considerable extent. Also cultural variations seem to affect literary translation to a greater part and finding equivalences appear to be a failing theory as

language particulars like idioms, connotations and terms related to culture, religion and habits are idiosyncratic and peculiar to the system. They have to be handled differently and cannot be incorporated in a general theory. At the same time, they bring to focus the untranslatable nature of certain aspects of human experience as expressed in a given language.

**Key words:** translation, syntactic variation, lexical and semantic variations, cultural variations, the untranslatable

## **Introduction**

*'No matter how eloquently a dog may bark, he cannot tell you that his parents were poor but honest'* (Russell,1992:201)

Language is a social phenomenon which is uniquely shared by humans. What is known as 'language' is not a mere mode of communication. Every living being has a narrow or broader method of communication, but that itself cannot be called 'a language'. Language is designed with linguistic features and language lives in the minds and tongues of its users. Human language does not confine itself to one form and content. Today more than three thousand languages have sprung up and they show marked differences from one to the other. This linguistic diversity across the nations has paved the way to think of 'language' more broadly than ever before in modern times. Unlike in good old days, language related activities are widespread and language plays a vital role in promoting human understanding.

The primitive communicative ways of making sounds and signs transformed into systematic speech sounds and regularized writing systems gained course over the course of time. This language took many shapes due to geographical, political, social and religious factors and this left room for a large number of languages to emerge all over with various linguistic diversities. The work of translation springs out of such a situation where man has to make linguistic choices among those different languages according to their needs. Today translation has become the most important unifying force

and it plays a crucial role in human understanding and better communication. The following quotation of Marcel Van Dijk (Krishnaswamy et al, 1992:236) suggests that translation fades away the language barrier and builds up links across the linguistic world.

*“The tower of Babel never will be built, because we now know that the sky has no limits: the stratagem of the confusion of languages is thus no longer necessary. All languages are worthy of respect, and translation permits men to communicate better and thus to understand each other better”*

### **Definition**

It is worth clarifying the term ‘translation’ as it denotes some key aspects which help to observe the works of translation more broadly. The term ‘trans’ has the meaning of ‘across’ or ‘moving from one to another’. Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary (1987) defines the term as follows;

- translate
1. If you translate something that someone has said or written
    - 1.1. You say it or write it in a different language
    - 1.2. You express it in a different way, using a different system, alphabet, etc.

*e.g. The temperature is sixteen degrees centigrade or, if you translate into Fahrenheit, sixty degrees*
  2. If you translate something such as an idea you express it in a different way, for example by putting the idea into practice
  3. If you translate a remark, gesture, action, etc. in a particular way, you decide this is what it means.
 

*e.g. I gave him what I hoped would be translated as a thoughtful look.*

- translation
1. A translation is a piece of writing or speech that has been translated from a different language
  2. Translation is the translating of speech or writing from one language to another
  3. Translation is also the expressing of something in a different way.

*e.g. The novel cannot survive translation into film.*

J.C. Catford (1965) defines translation as "*the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)*"

E.Tanke, the head of translation at Siemen's definition of translation is quoted (1992) as below.

*"Transfer of a text from a source language into a text in the target language, the objective being a perfect equivalence of meaning between the two texts"*

These definitions suggest of equality, uniformity and balance which is expected in a translation from SL (source language) to TL (Target language). Yet, contrary to the theories and definitions, a 'perfect equivalence' seems something unreachable in some contexts, especially in literary translations. Every particular language comprises of thoughts, beliefs, cultures, manners & habits of its people. The 'taste' of language is something which is shared by the native speakers who possess that language. Therefore it is worth questioning whether a 'true copy' translation can be worked out or achieved.

## **Objectives**

Therefore, this study is aimed at searching out some of the linguistic differences and similarities visible in translation between the Sinhala and English languages and to identify the deficiencies encountered in translations of these two languages. Also it is expected to search about the possibility of a linguistic and cultural translatability in relation to the notion of a 'faithful' translation with special reference to literary translation.

## **Scope and methodology**

Linguistic variations can be categorized into several major parts as phonetic, lexical, morphological, syntactic and semantic variations. But this study is restricted only to morphological, systactic and semantic variations in Sinhala and English. Also this study is more prone to investigate the literary

translations than other translation genre-categories such as technical translations, scientific translations and legal translations.

The methodology utilized in this study is the comparative method. The two languages Sinhala and English are used as the two objects of comparison and they are compared based on the structure, phraseology, semantic content and culture. Both qualitative and quantitative data are used to analyze the objective. Qualitative data are collected through observations. Further some data are collected through the informal interviews and discussions.

### **Comparative analysis of Sinhala and English translation involvement**

Translation techniques vary in a number of ways depending on the nature of work such as word-to-word, sense-to-sense, idiomatic, communicative, faithful and free translation and adaptation. Types of translations also vary as technical, religious, scientific, legal and literary translations.

#### **1. Syntactic variations**

Syntactic variations among languages are not something novel that we need to keep a major emphasis on as it is a natural tendency to have such variations. Whether we expect or not, differences among languages already exist and what is needed in a work of translation is to have a clear-cut understanding about the structure of the particular languages. In the case here, English has the SVO structure whereas Sinhala shares the SOV structure underlying it. A translator who is manipulating these two languages should possess a sound knowledge about the structures. He should be equipped with the knowledge of standard and colloquial usages of the language and the grammar which governs that language. Therefore a translation from Sinhala to English or vice versa is a transformation of the Sinhala language structure into the English language structure and the other way round. Following examples may distinguish the variations.

- i. මේ අයගෙන් බාලම කවුද ?  
\*(of them-the youngest-who?)  
Who is the youngest of them?

- ii. මේ මනුෂ්‍යලෝකයට දිව්‍යලෝකය ඉතා දුර ය.  
\*(this-world of humans-the God’s world-very distant)  
Gods’ world is very distant from this world of humans
- iii. උඹේ සොහොයුරා මෙහෙ එන තේන බවක් කලින් මට දන්වන්නට ඕනෑ.  
(Your brother-here-coming or not coming-in time-to me-let know-it-your-duty)  
You must let me know in time, whether your brother will come here or not.
- iv. ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ ප්‍රතිපත්ති කාර්ය සඳහා උද්ධමනය මැනීමේ ක්‍රම කීපයක් සංගණන හා සංඛ්‍යාලේඛණන දෙපාර්තමේන්තුව ඉදිරිපත්කර ඇති නමුත් ඒ සඳහා පාවිච්චි කරනුයේ කොළඹ පාරිභෝගිකයන්ගේ මිල දර්ශකය යි.  
\*( in Sri Lanka-policy purposes-for-inflation-measuring methods- several census and statistics Department-having introduced-but-for that-use-Colombo consumer price index)  
Colombo consumer price index is used to measure the inflation of policy purposes in Sri Lanka despite the methods introduced by the department of census and statistics

When going through these translations, a clear understanding can be gained about the differences in structures between the two languages. The context of use, the type of language expressed, the tense, mood, case, subject verb agreement and the construction type of the phrase or clause as whether simple complex, active, passive, substantive, imperative, nominal, adverbial or adjectival should be taken in to consideration before delving into the translation.

**Some basic differences in syntax**

e.g. Behavior of adverbs – In Sinhala, most of the time, the adverb precedes the verb where as in English the adverb follows the verb most of the time.

- e.g. i) මම වේගයෙන් දුවගෙන ආවා.  
I came running fastly.
- ii) ඒට වඩා හොඳින් මේ කටයුත්ත කරන්නට තිබුණා.  
He could have done this better.

But, it is noteworthy that the similar patterns are apparent in the syntactic behavior. Several types of sentence patterns are listed below. Language patterns play a major role in producing a successful translation and therefore a comprehensive knowledge about the parts of speech, especially of verbs is essential. The following chart points out some of the similarities and dissimilarities of the usage of verbs in Sinhala and English through in translation works.

Type	Sinhala	English	Translation	Explanation
Sentences with causative verbs	කරවනවා	Make others do	<p>i. The man <u>makes</u> the elephants <u>pull</u> the lumbers  මිනිසා ඇතුන් ලවා ඒ දඬු අද්දවයි</p> <p>But it is also possible to say it as follows</p> <p>ii. The mother <u>walks</u> the child (the mother <u>causes</u> the child to walk)  මව දරුවා ඇවිද්දවයි</p>	<p>In English, causative verbs are indicated by the particular verb itself or by using the verb 'make' or 'cause' whereas in Sinhala 'ව' is inserted.</p>
Sentences with reduplication		Reduplication of them is not common as in Sinhala	<p>හෙමින් හෙමින් - slowly  මල්ලී මල්ලී - brother  හොඳ හොඳ - good  යනවා යනවා - go</p> <p>Instead of reduplication, in English, 'very' can be used</p>	<p>Reduplication is common in Sinhala and it is rarely used in English. Past participles are doubled to show the continuations of an action.</p>

			බලබලා seeing	
Continu ous verbs	කරමින් සිටිද්දී කරන විට	While doing When doing	i. <u>while</u> bathing in the river, I was carried away by a huge flood ගඟේ නාමින් සිටිත්දී මාව ලොකු ගවතුරකට අහුච්ඡා ii. I got a little bit late <u>when</u> going to the city නුවරට යන විට මම මදක් ප්‍රමාද උනා	
Words used to recite what others said	ලු/වේවි  ලු/විආත  ලු/...මින් පවතී	It is said/will It is said/past(do ne) It is said/present	Future i. <u>It is said</u> that he will go (or is going) abroad tomorrow මහු හෙට විදෙස්ගත වෙනවාලු  past i. <u>At that very</u> <u>instant</u> , they have fallen down the mountain ඒ ක්ෂණයෙහිම ඔවුන් කන්දෙන් පහළට පෙරලී ඇත.	This 'ලු' can be used to indicate past, present and future.



			<p>present  <u>it is said</u> that no one else is able to do this                  ඔහු හැර අන් කිසිවෙක් මෙය කිරීමට නොපොහොසත් වූ.</p>	
Words of emphasis	ම ම ම	'Self'  When  Indication of time	<p>i. ඒකම ඔනෙ කිවුවා                  Wanted that <u>very</u> thing</p> <p>ii. ම ම ඒක කරන්නම්                  I <u>myself</u> will do it</p> <p>iii. දෙයක් දුන්නාම අරගෙන වරෙන්                  bring <u>when</u> something is given</p> <p>i. හෙටම - tomorrow <u>itself</u>                  ii. උදේම - <u>early</u> in the morning                  iii. කලින්ම - early                  iv. වෙලාවටම - <u>just</u> on time</p>	Usage of 'ම' in Sinhala varies. The examples show expression-changes of the translations according to the nature of the languages.
Involuntary and voluntary	අ - නවා	Intentional	i. ම වීශාල පහරක් වැදෙනවා A <u>great</u> blow	English has one form to express an action done

y verbs	ඒ - නවා	Unintentional	strikes me  ii. ඔහු මට වැරෙන් පහරක් එල්ල කරනවා He strikes me hardly  iii. මම ඇඟිල්ල කපා ගත්තා I <u>cut</u> my finger iv. මගේ ඇඟිල්ල කැපුනා I <u>cut</u> my finger	intentionally or happened unintentionally whereas in Sinhala two forms can be seen.  But in some occasions two different verbs can be seen as shown in the examples.
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**2. The untranslatable**

Some expressions and terms are impossible to translate due to certain differences. Languages do not contain deficiencies. Languages are created in the mind of its speakers and it is restricted to that particular society. Most of the time, languages particular like idioms and expression are shared by its native speakers only. Especially when the cultures differ from one to another to various degrees, finding equivalents for a translation is not an easy task.

e.g. *Are you nuts?* } Only the sentence can be taken and a word- to-  
*Off his nuts* } impossible

In such case what is expressed through the word 'nut' is not used in that general sense.

අප්පට සිරි! ,Four runs!  
 මලකෙළියයි! දෙයියන්ටම ඔප්පුවෙච්චාවේ!  
 මහින්ද රජපක්ෂ ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ කී වෙනි ජනාධිපතිවරයා ද?

**Lexical variations and semantic variations**

Words play a significant role in translation. In some cases, the meaning of the entire phrase or the clause lies individually in one word connotation.

Therefore in a work of translation, more weight is laid upon words. A separate genre of translation known as word-to-word translation is practiced in relevant instances. In such a translation, the source language word order is preserved and the words are translated by their most common meaning. Cultural words are translated literally. The main use of this method is either to understand the mechanics of the source language or to construct a difficult text as pre-translation process. Lexical variations are mostly apparent when the particular two languages are different and distant cultures. They can be either across the countries or across the region of the same country.

e.g. i) the use of the term ‘*say when*’ by English people.  
 ii) the concept of ‘*summer camp*’ and ‘*summer house*’  
 iii) the use of the term ‘අවරයි දැවරයි තුන්අවරයි’ or the term used in the dialect of Uva province such as සාක්කුලය (පැවිල්ල), බිරන් (වැහිවලා), ඇටබගච්චි (කදහිරුරැස්), අමන්වීම (මං මුළාවීම) are foreign to other users who are not aware of that dialect even though living in the same country. Therefore, a translator may encounter problems in translating such words unless he does not know the exact meaning of particular words which are culture-bound.

e.g. උන්දැ අද පාන්දර නැති උනා.

i) *She died today morning.*

ii) *She is lost by today morning.*

Here ‘උන්දැ’ is now a colloquial word to refer to ‘she’ according to the context. The word ‘නැතිඋනා’ has two meanings. The formal sense is ‘lost’ whereas in the Sinhala society, it is also referred to as ‘died’. So such a sentence should be translated after examining the context. Thus it could be either ‘she died today morning’ or ‘she is lost by today morning’. Sometimes, the sense of the word is understood through the exclamations.

e.g. අප්පා - *father*                      අප්පා! – ‘*alas!*’, ‘*ah!*’  
 අන්ක - *look*                              අන්ක! – ‘*see!*’

Several factors are significant when studying the lexical usage.

- i. Meaning of the word cannot be kept or understood isolated.
- ii. One word may have several connotations, meanings and usages.
- iii. Words vary according to dialectical and register variation irrespective of culture and society.

### Cultural variations

Language operates in the society. In a translation, what is expected is not a mere transformation of the code but an exchange of social interaction which helps to understand things easily and better. That is why translation is said to be a democratization of knowledge. Therefore when dealing with the semantic identification, the context and the background of the usage of that language is significant. It is known as the 'context of situation'.

In a translation, cultural variation seems to be the most difficult part where the translator is lost between two worlds. The context of the text, use of the vocabulary, the rhythm and tone and the content is visibly or invisibly related to the culture. In such instances, he or she has to find an equivalence which replaces the nearest notion. (Then, the question of a 'faithful' translation arises). Otherwise he is able to use the same terms and expressions and use the footnotes to explain them. But this may sometimes break the reader's interest and concentration.

Cultural variation is mostly apparent in literary translations.

i) අඩවන් නුවන් ඉදුවර ගැනකතා කල  
කවි බස මියෙන කලි යුගයක් ළඳා කල  
මේ හිරු මියෙද නව හිරු පායන දවස  
වැලපෙමි සබඳ නුඹ නැතියෙන් මා අසල

This Sinhala poem cannot be translated into English in that very sense, without harming its beauty of the selection and arrangement of words, tone, intonation and rhythm and such a translation may not make the reader 'feel' the real sense of it.

e.g.

i. *Shall I compare thee to a summer's day* (William Shakespeare)

The concept of 'summer' is distant to the Sinhala reader and therefore the message.

ii. *Sweetest love I don't go  
for the weariness of thee* (William Shakespeare)

iii. *I came to say goodbye to all of you*

Here it implies not the general sense of 'greeting' but something beyond that; departure of someone either for a long time or forever. So these types of expressions are culture-bound.

- iv. *It seems to me, you lit your life  
Like a candle in the wind* (Elton  
John)

The connotative meaning of this kind of concept is shared by both the English and Sinhala societies without any cultural barrier. 'Life as a candle' is explained even in Buddhism. Therefore the notion of uncertainty and fragility of life is expressed in this. Without harming the original text, it can be translated in to Sinhala as follows.

- v. The term 'කුරුළු පාලුව'

This refers to a special area of a paddy field which is dedicated to birds to have paddy freely. This concept implies of 'dhana' (arms giving) practiced by Buddhist and it indicates the harmony of the ancient Sri Lankan farmers with animals and nature.

Therefore, these kinds of examples show that translation stops at one point in literary translations as culture is intransferable.

### Conclusion

*"Translation is like a woman; if beautiful, it cannot be faithful  
and  
if faithful, it cannot be beautiful"*

(Anon1891:126)

The problem of making a delicate and faithful translation is confronted by many and various factors affect this as discussed throughout this article. The question of whether a theory can be constructed of translation is still a doubt. Nevertheless, a theory of translation is, in fact, a theory about comparing languages. Three operations can be sorted out in translation.



As apparent throughout this study, there's no 'the' method to translate texts of various sorts. The findings show that it depends basically on the following criteria.

1. Context of situation
2. Culture and social habits
3. Pattern of the language structure
4. Syntactic variations
5. Lexical and semantic variations
6. Discourse features of the SL(style, tone and mode of the original text)

Therefore, in a work of translation, all these criteria should be taken into consideration. As this study reveals, cultural variations seems to be a challenging thing in Sinhala-English translations. Syntax doesn't become a major barrier if the translator has a sound knowledge about both languages.

Even the lexical and semantic variations are apparent to be a part of culture. Therefore, sometimes a translator has to become a transcreator in order to erase this cultural and semantic gap. So he has to use his intuition, imagination and creativity which suits to the core of the TL. The work of translation is individual and it is impossible to construct a theory of translation. Therefore, the best method to deal with translation is to find a closest natural equivalent to the message of the source language, first in meaning and second in style.

## **References**

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