The Translator's Predicament:
A View of Linguistic, Cultural and Contextual Problems

Miss. Sheliyna Sivanesan
Lecturer (Probationary)
Department of Translation Studies
Faculty of Arts
University of Jaffna
Sri Lanka
ssheliyna@ymail.com

==

Abstract

A definition of translation cannot very easily be given. If we were to look the word up in a dictionary (Webster's Dictionary) we would see that translating means changing spoken or written words into another language. The translation activity is very old. It has been generated by the existence of more than one language on this planet and will continue to exist unless humankind came up with a unique language to communicate in. People who have never translated often assume that it is a purely mechanical process. The translator, proficient in both languages, simply has to substitute one word in the source language for an equivalent word in the target language. To some extent this is true, particularly for texts with specific and frequently repeated terminology such as machine manuals, and especially if those texts are being translated into a language related to one's own. There are several problems faced by the translator at linguistic level such as at phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics, cultural level-such as at idioms, proverbs, greetings etc., and contextual level for instance at Metonymy. Each and every problem of translation should be overcome in order to produce an effective translation. Therefore, the present paper aims at a view of Linguistic, Cultural and Contextual problems in the Art of Translation and at overcoming those problems using appropriate techniques and strategies.

Keywords: Translation, Predicament, Problems, Techniques, Strategies.

==
Language in India www.languageinindia.com**ISSN 1930-2940** **21:1 January 2021**
SheliynaSivanesan
The Translator's Predicament: A View of Linguistic, Cultural and Contextual Problems

1.0 Introduction

Throughout human history, translation has always facilitated and made inter-linguistic communication between nations possible. Obviously, linguistic, and cultural differences between languages worldwide may be viewed as a major obstacle in the way of communication. However, it goes without saying that translation has played an important role in minimizing this crucial problem of communication. It has also played a major role in the development of thoughts and dissemination of technology. It differs from interpreting in that it refers to the transfer of knowledge from a particular language into another in the form of a written text, while interpreting means the transfer of knowledge from a particular language into another in the form of an oral text, an issue which is beyond the scope of the present paper. This paper clearly analyzes the Linguistic, Contextual and Cultural Problems faced by a Translator while translating from English into Tamil or vice versa.

2.0 Translation is a Combination of Arts and Science

The word "Translate" is formed from the Latin "trans+latus", which means "Carried Across". Catford (1965: 20) points out that, "Translation is the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another language". In his definition, the most important thing is equivalent textual material. It is unclear in terms of the type of equivalence. Various scholars have recommended a collection of factors that a fine translation should take into consideration. For example, the French scholar, Dolet (1509-1546), suggests that, in order to produce an adequate translation, a translator should "avoid the tendency to translate word for word", since word for word translation, as Dolet (1509-1546) explains, "misinterprets the original content and spoils the beauty of its form". Furthermore, Tytler (1790) substantiates that in a good translation "the style and way of the exposition should be the same as in the original".

Being utilized as a means to act as a bridge between two cultures, translation seems to be a complicated and multi-faceted activity or phenomenon. According to Benjamin (1923), the twentieth century has been called the age of 'reproduction' or, as Jumplet (1923) points out 'the age of translation'; however, the constant debate as to whether translation is an Art or Science has a long history. Some scholars may argue that translation is a process of creative thinking; consequently, it is subjective and cannot be systematized by laws. In spite of the fact that

===
Language in India www.languageinindia.com**ISSN 1930-2940** **21:1 January 2021**
SheliynaSivanesan
The Translator's Predicament: A View of Linguistic, Cultural and Contextual Problems

translation currently plays a crucial role in the world's affair, it has always been considered as second-hand art.

Savory (1957:49) claims, "It would almost be true to say that there are no universally accepted principles of translation, because the only people qualified to formulate them have never agreed among themselves". Therefore, he does not seem to consider translation as a science. In crude terms, is translation an art? Is it a science? Is it a combination of art and science? Scholars and translators take different positions with regard to the concept of translation. Three broadly distinct camps can be distinguished in this respect.

At one end of the spectrum, there are scholars and translators who view translation as an art, claiming that what matters in translation is the possession of the relevant skill and the talent required for translating. At the other end of the spectrum come scholars and translators who believe that translation is a science, arguing that knowledge of the linguistic features of both the SL ant TL along with expertise of the translation theories are of paramount importance in translation. Other scholars and translators take a more reasonable view; they see translation as a mixture of art and science.

Most of the translators confirm that the translator needs to have the relevant skill and the talent pertinent to translation. At the same time, they affirm that the translator has also to be armed with the knowledge of the linguistic features of both the SL and TL alongside familiarity with the translation theories. They stress that the translator is required to adopt a translation strategy before embarking upon any translation project. All these together prove that translation is a combination of both art and science.

3.0 Problems Faced by the Translator while Translating from English into Tamil

Anyone who knows two languages to a certain extent can "translate" and by this means that anyone who knows two languages can put words from one language (The source language) into another one (The target language). Yet there is much more to translation than just the mere transferring of some words from the source language into the target language, and unfortunately many people do not recognize this. Translation is so much more and non-translators are often perplexed by this fact. Words are more than just meaning. Words convey emotions and cultural

===
Language in India www.languageinindia.com**ISSN 1930-2940 21:1 January 2021**
SheliynaSivanesan
The Translator's Predicament: A View of Linguistic, Cultural and Contextual Problems

concepts, which may exist in one language but not in another. Being able to read, speak and write a foreign language does not give anyone license to do translation work. Above all, professional translators know that they can always improve and polish their translation ability. Hence, problems that arise in translations can slow down translation speed of a professional translator. Such problems are categorized into three levels as
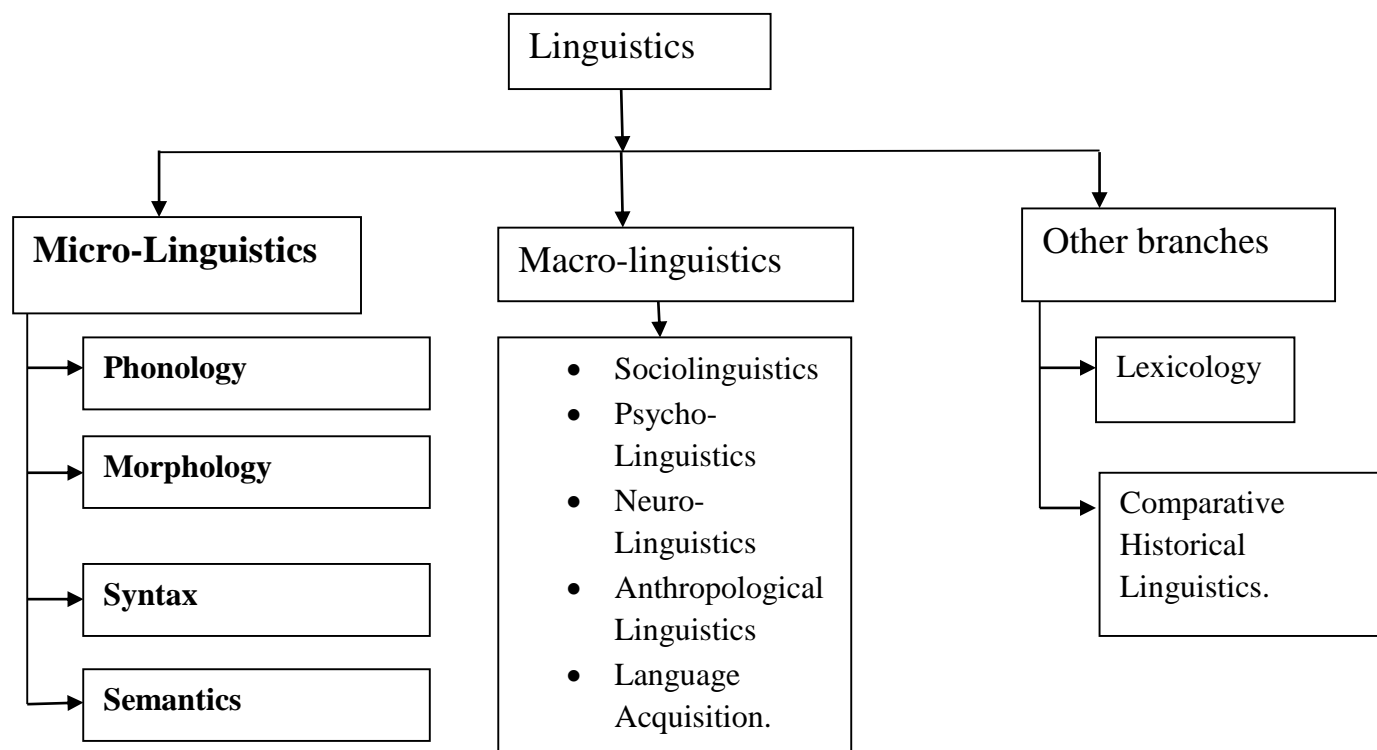
- Linguistic problems
- Cultural problems
- Contextual problems

Such problems can be overcome by the proper handling of techniques and strategies. Techniques are universally accepted and applied while strategies differ from translator to translator.

3.1. Linguistic Problems in Translation

Language and language elements are important for a translation. Linguistics is the scientific study of language in other words the subject matter of linguistics is language. Traditionally, linguistics studies a language as a formal system consisting of four main branches known as micro linguistics. They are:

- Phonology-The study of speech sound and their pattern
- Morphology –The study of words and words formation
- Syntax –The study of sentence structure
- Semantics-The study of meaning

==
Language in India www.languageinindia.com**ISSN 1930-2940 21:1 January 2021**
SheliynaSivanesan
The Translator's Predicament: A View of Linguistic, Cultural and Contextual Problems

```
                            ┌──────────────┐
                            │  Linguistics │
                            └──────────────┘
                ┌──────────────────┼──────────────────┐
    ┌───────────────────┐  ┌───────────────┐  ┌─────────────────┐
    │ Micro-Linguistics │  │Macro-linguistics│ │ Other branches │
    └───────────────────┘  └───────────────┘  └─────────────────┘
```

Micro-Linguistics
- **Phonology**
- **Morphology**
- **Syntax**
- **Semantics**

Macro-linguistics
- Sociolinguistics
- Psycho-Linguistics
- Neuro-Linguistics
- Anthropological Linguistics
- Language Acquisition.

Other branches
- Lexicology
- Comparative Historical Linguistics.

People define translation as the transference of something from one language to another. So, the translator should be aware of the source language and target language elements. The meanings of the words, phrases, and sentences should be probably understood, and then only the translation will be an appropriate production. According to Catford, in **Phonological Translation** the source language phonology is replaced by equivalent target language phonology. There are 3 ways to overcome the problems in phonological translation.

1) **Transliteration of Borrowed Lexical Units**-

    Transliteration is the process of rendering a word from the Alphabet of one language to another. It should be noted that Transliteration doesn't really render the words in a New Language but just in a new format. The translator would borrow it since there are no languages that exactly have same sounds. So, the translator would adjust the sound of the borrowed word into target language.

    For example, Dr.S.Eswaran mentioned in his book "மொழிபெயர்ப்பியல்" that, Proper Nouns like name of a Person, Place in one language should be rendered according to the sound system of the target language.

===
Language in India www.languageinindia.com**ISSN 1930-2940 21:1 January 2021**
SheliynaSivanesan
The Translator's Predicament: A View of Linguistic, Cultural and Contextual Problems

Entity	Transliteration (Tamil)	Transliteration (English)
Shakespeare	செகப்பிரியர்	*Sekappiriyar*
Tennyson	தேனீசன்	*Theneesan*
Socrates	சோக்ரதர்	*Sockrathar*
Maxi mular	மோக்ஷிமூலர்	*mokshimoolar*

2) **Plays on words which are phonologically similar.**

It means that a translator translates a word in source language into target language that has same sound. For example,

Entity	Transliteration (Tamil)
Vitamin	விட்டமின்
Plastic	பிளாஸ்ரிக்
Polythene	பொலித்தீன்
Newyork	நியூயோர்க்
Fax	∴ப(f)க்ஸ்

3) **Patterns of Form-Sound Style-** involving alliteration (the beginning of two or more stressed syllables of a word group by the same sound or combination of sounds) rhyme and acrostic arrangements. The three of them are almost the same as in play on words. The differences are only in the beginning sounds of words, the rhyme and the same sound in the beginning or the end of the words. For example,

Entity	Transliteration (English)	Patterns of Form-Sound Style
கட்டுமரம்	*Katumarm*	Catamaran
பந்தல்	*Pandal*	Pandhal
மூலிகைத்தண்ணீர்	*Muligaiththanni*	Mulligatawny

As mentioned above transliteration strategy is applied for the phonological problems but in a unique way according to their need. Therefore, most of the phonological problems can be overcome by the proper handling of techniques and strategies.

==
Language in India www.languageinindia.com**ISSN 1930-2940 21:1 January 2021**
SheliynaSivanesan
The Translator's Predicament: A View of Linguistic, Cultural and Contextual Problems

Morphological Problem arises due to the lack of equivalence in the target language for a particular word. Inadequacy of vocabulary is also a problem for the translator, especially for those who involve in translation with Tamil Language. Generally, there is an opinion that people and the scholars who love Tamil language want to preserve the Tamil language whereas English language has been developed by using the borrowed words from any languages. That's why there are plenty of words in English in various fields. For example, the word "plan, project, scheme and programme" in English are translated in Tamil as திட்டம் (*Thiddam*). But there are exceptional situations where Tamil has plenty of different meanings for a single term.

For Example,

Yesterday my **Uncle** reached London(Kinship Terminology).

Here the word **uncle** has several meanings in Tamil. It can be translated as

நேற்று எனது **மாமா/ சித்தப்பா/ பெரியப்பா** லண்டனை அடைந்தார்.

Likewise, some other words such as

Aunt-அத்தை(*Aththai*), மாமி(*Mame*), சித்தி(*Siththi*), பெரியம்மா(*Periyamma*)

Brother-அண்ணன்(*Annan*), தம்பி (*Thampi*)

Sister-அக்கா(*Akka*), தங்கை (*Thankai*) also can lead to problem in finding absolute equivalents. In such instances, the translator should read the whole text and should try to figure out the exact equivalent for the particular word. Further, there are instances where suffix-கள்*(-kal)* is added to singular word to give respect for the elders or famous people and it needs to be considered as a singular sentence. Further, He/ She is substituted by the word "அவர்(*Avar*)" to give respect to the great personalities.

For example-

He/Shevisited America.

அவர் அமெரிக்காவிற்கு விஜயம்செய்தார்.

These are some examples for morphological problems and the ways of overcoming such problems.

Another major area where linguistic problem arises is Syntax and Semantics.

==
Language in India www.languageinindia.com**ISSN 1930-2940** **21:1 January 2021**
SheliynaSivanesan
The Translator's Predicament: A View of Linguistic, Cultural and Contextual Problems

Syntax refers to the vocabulary and the rules of sentence formation of a language. These rules are called the grammar of language and they guide the construction of complicated expressions from terms and atomic sentences.Each language has its own syntax structure. Further, grammar of the source and target languages too differs. For example,

For English, Subject+Verb+Object

For Tamil, Subject+Object+Verb

As Tamil is an agglutinative language it is flexible to change the order of words to produce the same meaning but the same cannot be done with English language structure because if the order changed it could lead to the change of meaning.

For example,

The cat killed the rat.

பூனை எலியைக் கொன்றது.

But when it is translated as

எலியைப் பூனை கொன்றது.

கொன்றது பூனை எலியை

கொன்றது எலியைப் பூனை

also gives the same meaning. But the first translation is more suitable than others. Therefore, the translators should be aware of linguistic problems in order to produce an effective outcome.

3.2 Cultural Problems in Translation

Every group of people has a habit and culture. The culture is followed by those particular people for long. They acquire the culture from their own ancestors. Of course, with the time being they may change or alter some modes. Language is culture oriented. So,in translation also culture of source language and the culture of the target language may differ. The translator should consider these disparities while doing Translation. Sometimes it is necessary to give or reflect the culture of the target language to give a clear understanding. Cultural words should be replaced whenever necessary. Idioms, idiomatic phrases, and proverbs have to be carefully considered with the culture.

===
Language in India www.languageinindia.comISSN 1930-2940 21:1 January 2021
SheliynaSivanesan
The Translator's Predicament: A View of Linguistic, Cultural and Contextual Problems

For example, Idiom-This work is a **piece of cake**. Here a piece of cake cannot be translated literally. It should be translated as இந்தவேலை மிகவும் இலகுவானது **but not as** இந்த வேலை கேக்கின் ஒரு பகுதியாகும்.

Finding the appropriate equivalent is a problem that often faced by the translators. Likewise proverbs too may lead to difficulty in finding the exact equivalents.

Example 1, When in Rome do as Romans do carries the **equivalent** ஊரோடு ஒத்து வாழ். But those translators who are unaware of such idioms/proverbs might tend to translate as உரோமில் இருக்கும் போது உரோமானியர்கள் போல் செயற்படு. But it is a wrong translation. Therefore, finding the exact equivalent of idioms and proverbs is closely related to the text's language. Therefore, translators should have an adequate knowledge of the text.

Example 2: A Bird in the Hand is worth two in the Bush.
When it is translated literally, it carries the meaning as "புதரில் இருக்கும் இரண்டு பறவைகளை விட கையில் உள்ள ஒரு பறவையே போதும்", but the actual equivalent for the above proverb is "நாளைக்குக் கிடைக்கும் பலாப்பழத்தைவிட இன்றைக்குக் கிடைக்கும் களாப்பழம் மேல்".

Another Example:
"Warm welcome"- Due to the cold climate that often prevails in western countries this particular greeting is used by the people. But it is not suitable to translate it as "சூடானவரவேற்பு" because we are living in a tropical country. So, it is better to translate the implied contextual meaning of the text as **"நல்வரவு"**. A deep knowledge in culture of both source and target languages is a must for the translators. Proper approach in handling cultural equivalents can lead to a better understanding of the text.

3.3 Contextual Problems in Translation
Every text has a context. Before starting to do the translation, the translator has to comprehend the text within the context. Then only it will be meaningful. If the context is misunderstood the faithfulness to the original could not be achieved. First of all, the translator has to identify the style,

===
Language in India www.languageinindia.com**ISSN 1930-2940 21:1 January 2021**
SheliynaSivanesan
The Translator's Predicament: A View of Linguistic, Cultural and Contextual Problems

tone, subject and the most important thing is the background of the text. In order tomake the translation satisfactory the translator should take care of the context of the text in the source language. When the translator translatesinto the target language, he has to consider the context also.

For example,

The following **grounds** are stated by the lawyer.

பின்வரும் **காரணங்கள்** வழக்கறிஞரால் முன்வைக்கப்படுகின்றது. Here, the word ground carries the legal meaning as **"காரணங்கள்"** because the text is in a legal context. Generally, the word *ground* carries the Tamil equivalent as "", but it is not suitable for a legal text like the above. Another example is from metonymy. Metonymy is a figure of speech that replaces the name of a thing with the name of something else with which it is closely associated.

- He has **many mouths** to feed-அவனை நம்பி **பலபேர்** இருக்கின்றனர்.
- The **whole city** gathered-**ஊரே** திரண்டது
- The **best brains** of Europe could not solve the problem. It should be translated as ஐரோப்பாவின் **சிறந்தமேதைகளாலும்** அப்பிரச்சினைகளுக்குத் தீர்வுகாணமுடியவில்லை, but not as ஐரோப்பாவின் சிறந்த மூளைகளாலும் அப்பிரச்சினைக்குத் தீர்வுகாணமுடியவில்லை. Therefore, translators should have the contextual knowledge about the text they are dealing with.

Further, the Tamil word பச்சை**(pachchai)** carries different meaning in different context. For instance,

- பச்சைப் பிள்ளை-Very Young Child
- பச்சைத் தண்ணீர்-Cold Water
- பச்சை வயல்-Fertile Green Field
- பச்சை மரம்-Growing Tree
- பசசையான பேச்சு-Vulgar Words
- பச்சைப் புடவை-Green Saree

===
Language in India www.languageinindia.com**ISSN 1930-2940 21:1 January 2021**
SheliynaSivanesan
The Translator's Predicament: A View of Linguistic, Cultural and Contextual Problems

Accordingly, Contextual meaning can change the tenor of the writing. Therefore, it should be necessary to focus on context of the source text.

Conclusion

Translation is a demanding process that not everybody who knows two or more languages can master. A good translator loves languages and is totally dedicated to his/her job. This includes the desire to constantly improve one's linguistic knowledge and to deepen the knowledge of his specialized field(s). However, the analysis of "The Translators' Predicament" speaks in favour of translation problems encountered at linguistic, cultural, and contextual levels and it allows us to achieve a better understanding of the source text with the translation difficulties specific. Identifying our own text translation difficulties stimulate us to extend as much as possible our translational knowledge both in understanding and in terms of expression. Translators mostly do not consider that they came up with the best translation and they think that it can be improved every time when they look over it. Thus, the best solution for the translation problem is the translators should know how to handle the techniques and strategies appropriate for the particular problems and finally, they should master those languages.

==

References

- மொழிபெயர்ப்பியல்-முனைவர்.ச.ஈஸ்வரன், பாவை பப்ளிக்கேஷன்ஸ், சென்னை 600 014.
- Baker, M. (2002). In other words: A coursebook on translation. 9th ed. London: Routledge.
- Catford, J. C. (1965). A linguistic theory of translation. London: Oxford University Press.
- Newmark, P. (1988). A textbook of translation. London-New York: Prentice Hall.
- Nida, E. & Taber, C. (1969). The theory and practice of translation. Leiden: Brill.
- Savory.T.H.(1957). The Art of Translation. Jonathan Cape, London.

==

==
Language in India www.languageinindia.com**ISSN 1930-2940 21:1 January 2021**
SheliynaSivanesan
The Translator's Predicament: A View of Linguistic, Cultural and Contextual Problems