

## COMMON TRANSLATION ERRORS MADE BY UNDERGRADUATES WHEN TRANSLATING FROM TAMIL TO ENGLISH

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### **Abstract**

Translation has been identified as a challenging task. It is even more difficult for the students whose proficiency level is low in the target language (TL). In addition translation is a two way process which requires adequate proficiency in both Source Language (SL) and Target Language (TL). Thus this study is an analysis of the common translation errors made by undergraduates when translating from Tamil to English. The objective of the study is to find out the translation errors made by trilingual undergraduates of South Eastern University of Sri Lanka, when translating from Tamil to English. For the purpose of collecting data, students were given four different types of short passages in Tamil to be translated into English. The sample comprised of 24 undergraduates reading for a special degree in Trilingual studies in the department of Languages in Faculty of Arts and Culture at South Eastern University of Sri Lanka. Accordingly 7 students from 2<sup>nd</sup> year, 14 students from 3<sup>rd</sup> year and 3 students from 4<sup>th</sup> year were selected for this study. Quantitative and descriptive methods were used to analyse the data. The findings of the study indicated that low proficiency level of students in English language is a major cause for the translation errors because students struggle to translate due to their inability to produce grammatically correct sentences. In addition difference between SL and TL is also identified as a challenge that hinder the process of translation. Moreover linguistic errors and translation errors have been identified as the most frequent errors students make when translating. Eventually recommendations in the light of findings are also discussed in this paper which will help the students overcome the common translation errors.

**Key Words:** Source Language (SL), Target Language (TL), Linguistic errors, Translational errors.

### **Introduction**

The definition of translation changes from time to time as its scope keeps on expanding. The general understanding of translation refers to the process of transferring texts from one language to the other. According to Peter Newmark “translation is a craft in the attempt to replace a written message and or statement in one language by the same message and/or statement in another language. Translation, as a process, is always uni-directional, meaning that it is always performed in a given direction ‘ from’ a source language (henceforth abbreviated) into a target language (Rachmadie et. al., 1999:2). The act of translation which was seen as a purely linguistic phenomenon before 1970s began to be seen as a

primary aspect of human life. This is evident from the words of Susan Bassnetta “Once perceived as a marginal activity, translation began to be seen as a fundamental act of human exchange” (Bassnetta, 2001). To put it simply, the fact that Muslims wear western clothes itself is a translation of Muslims to Western culture. Thus in the present world every act of human exchange is a translation.

Translation is becoming a popular field in the modern world as there is a great demand for translators in the job market. Unlike past, many universities and private educational institutes offer degrees and diplomas in translation studies at present. Similarly there is a great tendency among the students to become experts in translation studies because there are ample job opportunities available for translators and it is a highly paid job. However excelling in the field of translation is not as easy as the desire to learn it due to various reasons which will be explored in this article.

Translation requires fluency in two languages. The translator is expected to be fluent in source language (SL) as well as target language (TL) in order to produce a good translation. Since no two languages are structurally same, the translator has to consider the differences between the SL and TL when translating. Moreover translator has to be aware of the kind of translation he/ she is dealing with. For example if the translation involves translating a non-literary text like newspaper, the translator has to focus on formal equivalence or word-to-word translation. But if the translation involves translating literary texts such as poems or novels, then the translator has to consider many aspects such as dominant ideology of the SL culture and TL culture, cultural differences/gap between the two cultures, purpose of the translation, expectations of the target readers and etc.

This research is aimed at identifying the common errors students make when translating texts from Tamil to English. This study is based on the undergraduates reading for special degree in trilingual studies at South Eastern University of Sri Lanka. The Faculty of Arts and Culture in South Eastern University of Sri Lanka, offers a degree in trilingual studies. The students who are specializing in Trilingual studies have “Theory and practice of translation” as a part of their degree. When they attempt to translate from Tamil to English, they encounter many obstacles. Thus this study is an attempt to analyse the errors made by students when translating. A study of this nature will be highly beneficial for these students as this study identified the errors and provided timely remedies to overcome the errors.

### **Research problem and objective.**

The main research objective is to find out the translation errors made by students when translating from Tamil to English. Trilingual undergraduates from South Eastern University of Sri Lanka make more translation errors. What are the sources of errors?

### **Literature Review**

Translation studies is becoming a demanding and popular field of study. As a result of its significance, many researches have been done in this field focusing on various aspects of translation. For the purpose of this study, research done in different parts of the world in different languages have been analysed. Though there are contextual and linguistic differences between researches, many errors identified are common across all the contexts. This research analysed the errors students make in doing literary translation from Tamil to English in the context of South Eastern University of Sri Lanka.

Before analysing the errors, it is important to identify different types of translation. Roman Jakobson (, a key translation theorist has identified three types of translation:

1. Intra-lingual translation or rewording- is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language.  
E.g. celibate- a person who does not marry
2. Interlingual translation or translation proper- is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language.  
E.g. From English to Tamil
3. Intersemiotic translation or transmutation is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems  
E.g. When Tchaikovsky composed the Romeo and Juliet, he actually performed inter semiotic translation: he 'translated' Shakespeare's play from the linguistic code into a musical one.

Wongranu (2017) has found out that the frequent translation errors made by the students were syntactic errors, semantic errors and miscellaneous errors. His research was based on Thai students who were majoring in English. Apart from the linguistic errors, he identified low confidence, carelessness and anxiety as the causes for the translation **ERRORS**. Similarly grammatical differences between the SL and TL has been identified as the frequent error made by Indonesian students when translating from English (Tandikombong, Haryanto Atmowardoyo and Sukardi Weda, 2016). Translation requires fluency in both SL and TL. However the biggest problem with the students is that they lack fluency either in SL or TL. Since there is structural difference between SL and TL, students make errors when they try to generalize the grammar rules in one language to the other irrespective of the structural differences. As a result of this they end up translating ungrammatically or meaninglessly.

Another research conducted among Vietnamese students reveal that translation errors occur due to wrong lexical and syntactic choices made by the translator. Moreover additions, omissions, distorted meanings and inaccurate renditions of lexical items contribute to the translation errors (Kim Cúc,2018). There are ample amount of research done and the findings of these research highlight on the grammatical errors, syntactic errors, semantic errors and miscellaneous errors made by students. But

these types of errors mostly occur when doing translation with non-literary texts. In terms of literary translation there are high chances for more translation errors other than the linguistic and grammatical errors as literary texts deal with different ideology and cultures. Eugene Nida, a key translation theoretician gives emphasis on the importance of correspondence or equivalence when doing literary translation. When doing literary translation more focus should be given in conveying the exact meaning in such a way that will make the fact that it is a translation. In other words the translation should sound natural in the target language.

Another interesting research found out that translation errors occur when translators try to go for formal equivalence / word to word translation when translating culturally specific texts (Mososp, 1989). This is an important aspect because the general understanding of translation mostly emphasizes either on word to word or sense to sense translation. But sometimes focus should be given to the cultural aspect in order to convey the intended meaning depending on the target audience.

Moreover another researcher Pym has identified totally different set of translation errors which include lack of comprehension, misuse of time, inappropriateness to readership, language, pragmatics, culture, Over-translation, under translation, discursive or semantic inadequacy. (Pym, 1992). This is to say that the quality of translation is also affected by non-linguistic factors. This type of errors occur either when translators omit or add things that are not in the source text.

### **Research Methodology**

All the 24 undergraduates reading for a special degree in Trilingual studies in the department of Languages in Faculty of Arts and Culture at South Eastern University of Sri Lanka have been selected. Accordingly 7 students from 2nd year, 14 students from 3<sup>rd</sup> year and 3 students from 4<sup>th</sup> year were selected for this study.

### **Research instrument**

For the purpose of collecting data, students were given four different types of short passages in Tamil to be translated into English. Quantitative and descriptive methods were used to analyse the data.

### **Findings and discussion**

According to the analysis of the data, the translation errors can be divided into three division: linguistic errors, Translation errors and miscellaneous errors.

#### **1. Low proficiency level in English language**

Low proficiency level in English language has been identified as the major source of translation error. All the students fail in conveying the intended meaning of the source text in the translation not because of their inability to translate but due to lack of fluency in English. Students were given different types

of text in English and Tamil. With regard to their translation from English to Tamil, 80% of the students produced a good translation in Tamil. But when they were given Tamil texts to be translated into English, no student translated it correctly, rather many grammatical errors have been found. This use of wrong grammar is what makes the translation wrong. Thus it is an indication of the students' low proficiency level in English. Translation is a two-way process which requires considerable proficiency level in both source Language (SL) and target language (TL). Moreover for a good translation to be produced, the translator has to be more fluent in TL than SL. Thus in this context, lack of fluency in English plays a great impact on translation.

#### 2. Difference between SL and TL.

This has been identified as a hindrance to translation. Tamil and English languages are different in terms of structure, syntax, grammar and etc. when students attempt to generalize grammar rules in Tamil language when translating a Tamil text to English, they end up producing ungrammatical translation. Thus 100% of the students make translation errors due to the difference between Tamil and English languages and over generalization of grammar rules of one language to another.

#### 3. Linguistic errors

Linguistic errors occur due to the lack in the proficiency of the translator. Linguistic errors involve grammatical mistakes, punctuations, collocations, idioms and so forth. (Newmark, 2003). The following chart clearly illustrates the frequency of linguistic errors made by students.

Table-1 Number of linguistic errors made by students.

Error	Frequency (number)
1. Punctuation	126
2. Capitalization	276
3. Use of articles.	280
4. Spelling	318
5. Tense	368
6. Lexical choice	112
7. Singular-plural form	189
8. Prepositions	116

According to the table students make more errors in tense and less errors in punctuation when translating.

#### 4. Translational errors

Translational errors occur due to awkward expressions, distorted meaning, additions and omissions. Students have the tendency to omit items when they find it difficult to translate. The following are some of the examples of translational errors taken from the translation of students.

i. Awkward expression:-

படிப்பதற்கு புத்தகத்தை விரித்தால் போதும் புகையால் வடியும் கண்ணீர் அந்தப் புத்தகத்தை மூடி வைக்கும்

Translation- Tears which comes because of smoke make them to close their books.

ii. Distorted meaning:-

திடீரென முதலை ரூபமெடுத்து வாயைப் பிளந்து அப்பாவையும் அவனையும் விழுங்கப் பார்க்கும்

Translation:- shoes open its mouth / shoe got crocodile shape.

iii. Additions:-

மல்லிகை மலராய் பள்ளிக் கூடத்துக்குப் போக கொள்ளை ஆசை

Translation- I like to go to school as white as snow / like white flower/ I desire more to go to school with Jasmin flower.

iv. Omissions:-

எதிரி துரத்திக் கொண்டு வந்தாலும் வீடு தீப்பற்றி எரிந்தாலும் உயிரைக் காக்க பின்புறமாக ஓடுவதற்கு வாசல் கிடையாது

Translation- Whatever happens there is only one way to escape.

5. Miscellaneous errors

The errors which cannot be categorized as linguistic errors or syntactic error are included under miscellaneous errors. This type of errors consisted of misspelling, under-translation and unnatural translation.

(Table 2- Miscellaneous errors)

Miscellaneous error	Frequency(number)
Misspelling	623
Under-translation	210
Unnatural translation	116

**Conclusion**

The fact that translation is a difficult task is undeniable. However there is a great tendency among students to become translators as it is a lucrative profession one can take up. In order to cater to the needs of the job market, translation has been incorporated as a course unit for the undergraduates who specialize in trilingual studies. These students have this course component in all three languages: English, Sinhala and Tamil. Thus mastering the skills of translation is the need of the hour. Thus the study of this nature will be helpful for the students.

Students make comparatively less errors when translating from English to Tamil because they do not have problem in expressing something in Tamil. Yet they make more errors when translating from Tamil to English. This is an indication to say that students make errors due to lack of proficiency in English language. Therefore timely measures should be taken to improve the students' proficiency level in English because it is a serious issue and translation practice can be given only after rectifying this. In addition structural difference between Tamil and English has been identified as a source of error because students have the tendency to generalize the grammar rules of one language to another when translating. As a result of this they end up in ungrammatical translation. Moreover students seem to make errors in capitalization, punctuation, lexical choice, spelling, use of articles, tense and etc. All these errors can be avoided if the students can improve their English knowledge. Thus this study will be beneficial as it identifies the problems and provides timely solution to overcome these problems.

### **Recommendations**

Most of the translation errors occur due to students' low proficiency level in English. Therefore measures should be taken to increase the proficiency level of students in English language. Thus this will enable students to produce grammatically correct sentences, which is an important requirement to produce a good translation in this context.

Students should be given adequate translation practice in variety of texts. Through practice the frequency of translation errors can be minimised,

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