

Observations on the Linguistic Issues of Translating Official Documents in Local Government Institutions – A Study Based on Monthly Minutes of Pradhesiya Sabha, Rattota

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Abstract: Translation is a kind of skill involving a process of rendering meaning, ideas or messages of a text from one language to another language. Sri Lanka is a multilingual country where Sinhala and Tamil languages are recognized as national and official languages and English is a link language. Converting Sri Lanka into a bilingual country is essential to make reconciliation and implement all important official decisions. Sri Lanka is a multilingual country however; it is not in a position to offer satisfactory service in both languages mostly it does in Sinhala. Further, government institutions in Sri Lanka do not have sufficient translation service in Tamil language. Therefore, the main concern of this study is to understand the official languages policy by ensuring a better effective and efficient translation service to the institution by establishing an enabling environment that facilitates proper implementation of official languages policy. The study will analyse the challenges encountered by the researcher comparing the source text “මහ සභා වාර්තාව රත්තොට ප්‍රාදේශීය සභාව 2018 දෙසැම්බර් මාසය” with target text “பொதுச் சபை அறிக்கை டிசம்பர் மாதம் 2018”. Comparative and descriptive analyses are applied by the researcher in order to investigate the problems encountered during the translation process and how the challenges are met by applying appropriate techniques, strategies and guidelines. Finally, this study will provide guidance to the students of translation studies and official document translators.

Keywords: translation, language, multilingual country, official languages, official documents

Introduction: Language is fundamental to human communication and it is a key marker of identity of a person. Languages are significant to peace reconciliation and unity in a multiple society like Sri Lanka. In present contemporary social, economic, and political practice everywhere, language goes much beyond its basic applicable scopes. In this regard Sri Lanka is no exception. Sub section 12(2) of section 12 of Chapter III of the 1978 Constitution of Sri Lanka clearly states that “No citizen shall be discriminated against on the grounds of race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinions, place of birth or any such grounds”.

In this context, this is a crucial time to seriously consider the political developmental position of language in imagining the future of the country. Tamils have been living with Sinhalese for many centuries but, the Tamil language was not given its due place. The second mistake was that the government allowed the standard of English language to deteriorate in our educational system. Every person should have the opportunity to learn English as a life skill, but in Sri Lanka trilingual policy is essential one. It is not an isolated policy but an internal part of overall strategy to transform Sri Lanka into a morally, economically, and globally successful country. Therefore, language skills constitute an important aspect of transforming our country into a knowledge hub in the Asian region. Since the establishment of the Official Language Commission oratory commitment to confirm Tamil language rights notwithstanding practical implementation has been entirely lacking. Sri Lanka has a multiracial society. Translation between three official languages is very important in a Sri Lanka. Nowadays, translation plays a vital role in bringing together the society by improving the understanding among the people. In my point of view, translation is the activity of interpreting the meaning of a text in one language, the source text, the production, in another, target language, of an equivalent text, the target text or translation. Translation between Sinhala and Tamil is very desirable, especially

in the current context to develop a good relation between the two main cultural groups of Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka there are many kinds of materials that need to be prepared in all three official languages.

The main concern of this study is to investigate the linguistic problems regarding the translation of official documents from Sinhala to Tamil based on the monthly minutes of Pradhesiya Sabha, Rattota. Such translations should be carried out according to a scheduled process and it requires strict precision to keep one and only proper meaning of the original. Minutes is an administrative necessity and the most official form of communicating the works of an institution and narrating certain events in broadly presentable manner. This text provides reliable data which can be used in the planning and decision making process, therefore the translation must ensure fidelity to the original in the process of translation.

Importance of the study: Rattota is a town located in Matale District, Central Province, Sri Lanka. It is a Sinhala-speaking majority area with a significant number of Tamil-speaking minority presences. Though a multi ethnic region, the Rattota Pradhesiya Sabha is not in a position to offer full-fledged services in Tamil as it does in Sinhala. The Pradhesiya Sabha serves a Sinhala majority population. All correspondence carried out by the institution is in Sinhala. The majority of local representatives on the Pradhesiya Sabha, including its chairman, is Sinhala- speaking. Further, almost the entire staff of the Pradhesiya Sabha office is Sinhala speakers and the working language is Sinhala. There are only 4 Tamil speaking public representatives in the office. They are able to communicate in Sinhala or they use intermediaries. However, they are expecting the documents related to the office with Tamil translation. Most Tamil speakers who come to the office for various reasons can present their case in Sinhala. All the documents in the office are in Sinhala and despite a majority of representatives being from Tamil- speaking background no demands have been received for these to be made available in Tamil or for other services to be provided in Tamil. If someone who cannot converse in Sinhala, they come to the office accompanied by someone who can. Alternatively, the office itself finds someone who can interpret for them. As in Pradhesiya Sabha informal systems are becoming institutionalized in a context where the official languages legislation has not been put into practice with any degree of seriousness. Therefore, it is also found that nobody in the Pradhesiya sabha office had an understanding of the specific requirements of the official languages policy.

Limitations of the study

1. The study covers only the monthly minutes of the institution, not any other documents related to the institution.
2. Certain documents which could shed light on the background of the issue were not accessible so that their confidentiality, institutional practices and security purposes could not be ascertained.
3. Difficulties appeared in finding equivalents and structuring the style of writing. This created the challenge of ensuring the accuracy of the translation.
4. Factors such as text style, terminology, morphological features, grammatical structures and constructions used syntax, communications strategies and overall stylistic features created challenges in translation.

Data Analysis

Sentence Structure

Sentence structure is the way its words are arranged in. Every language has a particular sentence structure and each uses a specific combination of independent and dependent clauses

to help make sure that one's sentences are strong, informational and most importantly they make sense.

In this study structural differences between Sinhala and Tamil languages are taken into account. Sinhala and Tamil languages have same sentence structure which is (SVO) subject-object-verb. Therefore translation between Sinhala and Tamil is not much difficult. However, the different sentence structures like compound and complex sentences have created some problems to the translator to connect the content of the sentence.

Standard sentence structure

The source text is written in passive form. The passive voice is used when a person wants to emphasize the action and object of a sentence rather than subject. In minutes writing passive phrases are very useful when we want to avoid identifying somebody.

Due to the passive form, it makes the writing worthy, standard and it can be easily understood by the readers. When translating this kind of writings the translator must try to convey the source text meaning exactly in the passive form of target language to give worth and standard to the translation to achieve the basic purpose of the translation.

Terminologies of minutes

Terminology is a general word for the group of specialised words or meanings relating to a particular field. For a successful minutes translation it is necessary to be acquainted with the meeting minutes' terminologies related minutes of meeting in both source language and target language.

The following terms are mostly used in the source text and its translation

Table 1 – Terminologies of minutes

terminologies in Source text	terminologies in target text
න්‍යාය පත්‍රය	நிகழ்ச்சி நிரல்
යෝජනා කරම්	பிரேரிக்கின்றேன்
සීරීර් කරම්	ஆமோதிக்கின்றேன்
සම්මත විය	ஏற்றுக்கொள்ளப்பட்டன
ඒකමතිකව	ஏகமனதாக
විශේෂ නිවේදන	விசேட அறிவித்தல்கள்
ලදීර්පත් තීරීම	முன்வைத்தல்
යෝජනා	பிரேரணைகள்
ප්‍රකාශ කරන ලදී	தெரிவிக்கப்பட்டன

Dealing with Designations

A designation is a description, name, or title that is given to someone or something. There are a lot of designation of persons' used in the source text to mention status, occupation and title of a person. When we translate designation of a person we have to use specific accepted term to mention the title of a person.

Table 2 – Designation Reference

persons' designation in source text	persons' designation in target text
සහාපති	தலைவர்
ප්‍රාදේශීය සහා මන්ත්‍රී	பிரதேச சபை உறுப்பினர்
ලේකම්	செயலாளர்
පරිගණක ක්‍රියාකාරී	கணினி இயக்குனர்
කළමනාකරණ සහකාර	முகாமைத்துவ உதவியாளர்
කාර්යාල කාර්ය සහකාර	அலுவலக உதவியாளர்
රියදුරු	சாரதி
ආදානනාගාර ක්‍රියාකරු	தகனச்சாலை இயக்குனர்

සෞඛ්‍ය කමිකරු	சுகாதார ஊழியர்
මුරකරු	காவலாளி

Dealing with Honorific title.

An honorific title or way of talking is used to show respect or honour to someone in formal situation. In Sinhala language it is almost all the time compulsory for the speaker or writer to observe the importance of the subject and the object of the sentences. Sinhalese use a vast collection of honorifics to use male gender and female gender specifically. However, in Tamil language we cannot see these honorific titles which separate male gender and female gender. We use one common honorific title for both genders. This issue created some challenges in the translation process. In the present study the researcher observed the following honorific titles. There is no honorific title for female gender in Tamil. We use common honorific title for both genders in Tamil. Therefore the translator omitted the female gender honorific terms which is used in the source text and applied common honorific for both gender in the target text as follow:

Table 3 – Honorific titles

Sinhala (from the source text)		Tamil language	
Male Gender	Female Gender	Male Gender	Female Gender
මන්ත්‍රීතුමා	මන්ත්‍රීතුමිය	உறுப்பினர்	
ලේකම්තුමා	ලේකම්තුමිය	செயலாளர்	
කියාකරු	කියාකාරිණිය	இயக்குனர்	
කොමසාරිස්තුමා	කොමසාරිස්තුමිය	ஆளுனர்	

Dealing with foreign words

Due to the linguistic borrowing languages are changed. The influence of loan words effect on the phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics of a language. When we consider the history of Sinhala, mainly Sanskrit, Pali, Tamil Dutch, Portuguese and English have contributed many loan words in Sinhala. Spoken Sinhala has made less or no restrictions in this regard. Further literary Sinhala tends to avoid using direct loan words by finding substitutes for them from another donor language. Bilingual native speakers of Sinhala adopt these loan words differently. Following loan words are identified in the study. The researcher encountered barriers to retaining the equivalent meaning in the target language.

However, in Tamil also we use these terms in our everyday life but in written form of Tamil we use standard terms instead of loan words.

In the source text there are some paragraphs which contain speeches of Pradhesiya Sabha members they have used loan words while they speak. However in Tamil translation the researcher used standard terms.

Table 4 –Foreign words

Sinhala word	English word	Tamil word
ඉංජිනේරු	Engineer	பொறியியலாளர்
ගැසට්	Gazette	வர்த்தமானி
රෙගුලාසි	Regulation	சுற்றுநிபந்தம்
වවුචර්	voucher	உறுதிச்சீட்டு
බිල්	Bill	பற்றுச்சீட்டு
ටැංකි	Tank	தாங்கி
ඔට්	seat	ஆசனம்

Dealing with common words in Sinhala and Tamil.

There are a lot of common words shared between Tamil and Sinhala. Study through the source text the researcher has identified many common lexicons which are used among the people of Sinhala and Tamil however, there is a little different in such word's pronunciation. They are considered as borrowed from Tamil language. Sinhalese use these words in their daily routine.

Table 5 – Common words in Sinhala and Tamil

Sinhala words (From the source text)	Tamil word	Sinhala words (From the source text)	Tamil word
සම්බන්ධ	சம்பந்தம்	හානුව	பாஷை
කුලිය	கூலி	කේතලය	கேத்தல்
සේවාව	சேவை	කාර්යාලය	காரியாலயம்
භූමිය	பூமி	ශාලාව	சாலை
ආදායම්	ஆதாயம்	ඉඩම	இடம்

Dealing with Sanskrit words.

Sinhala language is blessed with the vast number of words in Sanskrit. Sinhala people use Sanskrit words unconsciously in their general communication. Tamil language also influenced by Sanskrit. Anyhow the use of Sanskrit words in written and spoken form is very rare in Tamil. In this study the translator has found some Sanskrit words which brought some challenges during the translation process. However the researcher has selected standard Tamil form to convey the meaning.

Table 6 – Sanskrit words in Sinhala

Sanskrit words	Sinhala word	Tamil form
தோஷம்	දෝශය	கோளாறு
மஹா	මහ	பொது
ஹிந்து	හින්දු	இந்து
ஆயர்வேதம்	ආයුර්වේද	ஆயர்வேதம்
ஸ்தானம்	ස්තාන	இடம்

Dealing with multiple equivalence

Generally, a translation equivalent is a corresponding word or expression in another. Translation equivalence is the similarity between a word in one language and its translation in another language. This similarity results from overlapping range of references.

Further, a word of a source text has different equivalents in target language. It is the translator's duty to select appropriate word according to the text type and concept.

In the present study the translator has found more than two equivalents for a word of the source text. However, the researcher applied relevant term according to the text type and purpose of the text.

Table 7 – Multiple equivalence in target language

Source Language term	Target Language equivalents	
	option 1	option 2
පක්ෂ විපක්ෂ	கட்சி, எதிர்	ஆளும், எதிர்
පසුගිය වාර්තාව	முன்னைய அறிக்கை	கடந்த அறிக்கை
අස්තමේන්තුව	குத்துமதிப்பு	மதிப்பீடு
කාර්මි කදෝශය	தொழில்நுட்ப தோஷம்	தொழில்நுட்ப கோளாறு

විභාග නඩුවක්	வழக்கு பரீட்சை	வழக்கு விசாரணை
යෝජනාව	யோசனை	பிரேரணை
පෙර පාසල	முன் பாடசாலை	ஆரம்ப பாடசாலை
කසල කළමනාකරණය	குப்பை முகாமைத்துவம்	கழிவு முகாமைத்துவம்
හෙළබොජුන් හල	தேசிய உணவு நிலையம்	அம்மாச்சி
ආකාරය	முறை	விதம்
කාර්ය මණ්ඩලය	காரியாலய குழு	அலுவலக குழாம்

When considering the above table there are two equivalent options in target language for a word in the source text. However the minute is an academic style of writing we have to apply standard equivalents in target language. The researcher selected option 2 in the table for the translation so that gives standard structure worthy to the translation.

Dealing with numerical values.

In Tamil language we use number before a word or a noun, but in Sinhala language they use numbers after a word or a noun. When dealing with translation of numerical values a translator must be very familiar with different numerical methods applied in different language.

Table 8 – Numerical reference

Numerical values in source language	Numerical values in target language
අක්කර ½	½ ஏக்கர்
මාස 6	6 மாதங்கள்
අවුරුදු 6	6 வருடங்கள்
පුස්තක 4	4 நூல்கங்கள்
මුල් ළමාවිය සංවර්ධන මධ්‍යස්ථාන 2	2 முன்பள்ளி அபிவிருத்தி மத்திய நிலையங்கள்

Representing person's name.

A name can be broken down into three parts name, middle name, family name or surname. The name and middle name are usually given at birth while the surname depends upon a person's parents and the surnames used to change only due to factors like religious, marital status etc. Generally a name first followed by surname. In some situations there is a trend of writing the name with initials in the middle for a lady it would be ideally her name followed by her surname, adding initials is subjective. The changes depend according to the married women with or without husband's name.

However in Sinhala language surname followed by the name and the title of the name always come at the end, but in Tamil we write title of the name first and name followed by the surname.

Table 9 – Representing person's name

English form	Tamil form (TT)	Sinhala form (ST)
Mr.A.S.P.Savior	திரு.ஏ.எஸ்.பி.சேவியர்	ඒ.එස්.පී.සේවියර් මහතා
Mrs.K.G.Chandrani	திருமதி.கே.ஜி.சந்திராணி	කේ.ජී.චන්ද්‍රාණි මහත්මිය
Priest.Monk.Dhamasidhi	மதகுரு.தேரர்.தம்மசித்தி	පූජ්‍ය.ධම්මසිද්ධි හිමි
Miss.D.N.Rathnayake	செல்வி.டி.என்.ரத்தினாயக்க	ඩී.එන්.රත්නායක

Dealing with affiliates

An affiliate is a word phrase which is connected with words. It is a combination of two words. It forms a close connection with another word which emphasizes the same meaning.

The source text contained some affiliates which are:

Table 10 – Affiliates of Sinhala and Tamil

Source Text	Target Text
ඉඩම්කඩම්	நிலம்
පොත්පත්	புத்தகங்கள்
කළකර	மலையக பிரதேசம்
දුලාදරුවන්	சிறுவர்கள், குழந்தைகள்
පුවත්පත්	பத்திரிக்கை

Conclusion: In this global world translation plays a significant role in conveying messages from one language to another. Translators transfer information from one language to another language in order to make a successful communication. For a successful communication translators must overcome all the problems which they will face during the translation process because translation is the matter of mixing two cultures, two languages therefore translators need to know grammar, terminologies, general knowledge, common sense, and strategies for appropriate translation. The study title ‘**Observations on the Linguistic issues of Translating Official Documents in Local Government Institutions – Based on minutes of Pradhesiya Sabha, Rattota**’ has been analysed. The study focused in ground of “A minutes provides reliable data which can be used in planning and decision making process, therefore translation must maintain fidelity to the original in the process of official documents translation” as a hypothesis. Hypothesis has been proved through the analysis part. In translation of official documents the translator must pay more attention to the fidelity of source text. This study focused of translating minutes of a government institution as an official document from Sinhala to Tamil. This minutes is very helpful tool for recording activities, planning and decision making purposes. Therefore the translator must give more priority to the source text and the target text must be faithful to the original. There is no room for emotions and ambiguity in official document translation. It has extensive meaning in short text.

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