

ISSUES IN TRANSLATING ELLIPSIS WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE TAMIL CLASSICAL CANKAM PURANANURU POEM – 191

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Preliminaries

The present paper analyses the problems and possibilities of translating the Tamil Classical *Cankam Puram* poem into English. The act of translating a Classical work of art is a means of understanding an age-old culture, a distant author and an invaluable document of custom and heritage. Putting such a utilitarian task into an objective test would certainly contribute for the successful accomplishment of the process in the further attempts. In the course of study the source language poem has been analysed with particular focus on lexical and syntactic problems of translation. The study is a comparative analysis of three different translations of the *cankam purananuru* poem, as rendered by A. K. Ramanujan, P. N. Appuswami and M. L. Thangappa. The critical study would account for the variations in each of the translated version in the light of standard techniques, procedures, principles and theories of translation as propounded by Eugene Nida and Peter Newmark. The effort has been attempted via assessing the similarities and differences among the three different translations of the Tamil poem from the *Purananuru* 'four hundred public poems' anthology.

As far as the English rendering of the *cankam* poems is concerned, there have been a number of translations from time to time. Ever since 1957, there have been nearly fifty six English versions of *cankam* poetry of which five are exclusively of *cankam puram* poems. The first, K. Kailasapathy's *Tamil Heroic Poetry*, was published in 1968. The most recent translator of *cankam* poems is Vaidehi Herbert, an NRI in the United States of America. She published her translations of *puram* poems in 2015. Though it is sixty eight years since the first English translation of the *cankam* poetry was published, there have been very few critical analyses and reviews of the great work. At this juncture the

present attempt to critically analyse the multiple English versions of the *puram* poem would be a fruitful and timely task.

Generally there is no single method of translation. It depends upon the range of text types, their corresponding translation criteria and the variables involved. In some cases group translation improves the chances of success. Similarly multiple translations of the same text contribute to the theory of interpretation significantly. In this way translation gives an idea of framework of techniques, principles, restricted rules and hints for translating texts or criticizing translations. Anyhow the so called principles and procedures cannot be predicted before beginning to translate a work of art. The fact is that a number of translation rules are only in the unconscious competence of the translator.

For a systematic discussion, the present article has been divided into three sections. In the first section the full text of the SL poem has been given followed by the English translations. Then in the second section, the resemblance and variation among the translations have been highlighted and commented upon with illustrative examples. Lastly in the third section, the most successful and least successful areas in the making of the three translations have been discussed parallelly with models. The effective and appreciable aspects of the rendering have been discussed in detail with suitable contextual examples. Wherever Tamil words or phrases are needed to be quoted, they are given along with the transliteration and translation of the same.

According to Nida "the translator, besides the knowledge of the content, must have also knowledge of the subtleties of meaning, emotive value of words and the stylistic features that add to the flavour and the feel of the message. The translator should have the same empathic spirit which the author had and the capacity to impersonate the demeanour, speech and ways of the author with the utmost verisimilitude (50)".

The Nature of Cankam Puram Poems

Among the eight *cankam* anthologies, *é\Sôà ñ purananuru* 'four hundred public poems' and *T¾tñl Tj ç pathitru pathu* 'an anthology of poems in praise of Chera Kings' are *puram* poems. They are concerned with the life outside family, kings, wars, and the greatness of places, the generosity of rulers, ethics and the philosophies of scholars. While *Pathitru pathu* is limited to the glory of Chera kings in hundred and eight verses, *Purananuru* consists of an assortment of themes in three hundred and ninety seven poems. Of the original four hundred poems, two have been lost and one poem is there without several lines.

The Puram Conventions

The *puram* poems have been categorised by the Tolkappiyam and by the colophons according to the *¾ûQ tinai* 'poetic situation' and within each *tinai*, according to the *çû\ turai* 'poetic theme'. The *tinai*s of *puram* poems are seven

according to the Tolkappiyam. They are: ùYf° Vetci 'cattle raid and recovery of cattle', Yg° Vanci 'invasion', F ÆÛ] ulinai 'siege and defence of fort', çmÛT tumpai 'pitched battle', YôÛL vakai 'victory', Lôg° kanci 'transience' and TôPôi patan 'praise of kings'. These *tinai*s have eight to twenty one *turai*s which are relevant to them. The total number of *turai* is 138.

A large number of *puram* poems are concerned with the praise of kings. Such poems belong to the category called TôPôi ¾ÛQ patan *tinai* 'praise of kings' in which a bard asks a king for a gift. They often tell of a king's valour in battle, describing the sad condition of his enemies, his enemies' wives or his enemies' lands. Some poems in this category describe the wilderness the bard has had in order to arrive at the king's palace or camp; then they speak of the sufferings of the bard, his family and they end with an appeal for a gift. Often they include passages that relate the beauty or extraordinary fertility of the king's land etc.

Another common way of praising a king is to contrast his cruelty towards his enemies with his generosity towards suppliants and others dependent on him. In Tamil, a king is often praised by saying that he is unaffected by bad omens, a theme whose purport is that the king's greatness and sacred power are so extraordinary that the disposition of other sacred powers makes no difference to him or his kingdom.

Tinai

Tinai is a class of nouns based on human and nonhuman distinction. It is a procedure to be followed in a domestic or public context as found in Tamil literary conventions and *Turai* means a branch.

What makes poetry translations so unique is the simultaneous importance given to the form and substance of poetry. The success of translation of poetry lies in the rendering of these two elements as closely as possible to the SL poem. The following is an analysis of the *Purananuru* poem.

An Analysis of the Tamil Cankam Poem

Purananuru Poem: 191.

Vôi ã TX BL, SûW CX BâRp
 Vôéá B, Vo? G] Å] î ¾o BÂu,
 Uôi P Gu UÛ] ÅÛVôâ, UdLð m çWmÅ] o;
 Vôu Li PÛ] Vo Gu CÛ[Vi m; úYkRò m
 Buñ AÅkç APe, V ùLôsÛLf
 Nôuú\ôo TXo, Vôu Yôi m F úW

¾ÛQ: ùTôçÅVp çÛ\ : ùTôì i ùUôÆd Lôg°
 (úLôl ùTi gúNôZu YPd, ì kRòð úZf ùNu\ Æ°WôkÛRVôúW, 'úLhám LôXm TXYóúXó? SûW
 èUdá CpÛXVóúXó? Gu\ Nôuú\ôodá AYô Tô¼Vç.)

The English Translations

| AKR | PNA | MLT |
|--|---|------------------------------|
| Why My Hair is Not Gray | The Secret of Youth | Without Worries |
| If you ask me how it is | 'Your years are many we've heard, | 'How is it that |
| that I'm so full of years | Yet not a hair of your head is grey, grey hair | you have no |
| and yet my hair is not gray, | What's your secret?' You ask me. - ripe old age?' | even at this |
| | My noble wife and all my children | you ask me. |
| it's because | Are greatly learned and full of wisdom; | Let me tell you: |
| my wife is virtuous, | My servants anticipate every wish of mine; | My wife is a gem of |
| my children are mature; | My king does no evil at all; | a woman. |
| | | |
| younger men wish | But protects all his subjects evermore. | My sons and daughters |
| what I wish, | I have companions in plenty | are full of virtue. |
| and the king only protects, | In the village where I live, | My household servants |
| doesn't do what shouldn't | Men who are wide in their learning, | are quick to read my mind |
| be done. | With their passions all quenched, And with humility and modesty in | My country is protected |
| Moreover, my town | all their ways. | by a king |
| has several noble men, wise and self-possessed. | Purananuru-191: | who commits no |
| | -PICIRANTAI | wrong. |
| Picirantaiyar | | And my native village |
| Purananuru 191 | | -Pisirandaiyar |
| | | PURANANURU 191 |

Pisirantaiyar has written the poem. Once he goes to King Kopperunchozhan to sing a song in praise of his glory and to receive gifts. The scholars in the court inform him of the King's death. The poet becomes sad. While the poet is in a desperate mood, the scholars surprisingly enquire about the poet's black hairs despite his old age. Hence Pisirantaiyar says that his hairs have not gone grey as he has got the virtuous wife and children; the younger men around obey him sincerely. The King in his land does not harm his subjects but protects them and also there are many principled and self-controlled elder men of profound knowledge in the town where the poet lives. Thus he is leading a contented life with the result that his hair remains black at this old age.

The *cankam* poem briefly describes five categories of people who are the integral part of the society at large. They are, an individual, a couple, family, society and generation. Thus the following section deals with the rendering of the above mentioned Lexical items and why the translators have variously used certain equivalents for them.

The Principle of Contextual Consistency

With regard to the translation of Lexical items, Peter Newmark in *A Textbook of Translation* (32) remarks: 'the chief difficulties in translating are lexical, not grammatical, i.e. words, collocations, fixed phrases and idioms. Most nouns, verbs and adjectives can

be used figuratively and therefore can have figurative meanings - the more common the word, the more contagious and accessible the figurative meanings'.

The contextual consistency points to the necessity of looking at the meaning of a particular word or phrase or structure in the given context than in isolation. It is possible that the translator has fixed meanings of particular word or phrase or structure in his mind and tends to apply that meaning without taking into account the actual meaning in that particular context. Such an attempt at verbal consistency would result in mistranslation because words derive their meanings from the context. Therefore contextual consistency has priority over verbal consistency.

The poem - 191 is a representation of a section of the Tamil people in the *cankam* age. It subtly describes the characteristics and qualities of the people. In the poem a hierarchical order of people and their personal nature have been described one by one. They are, Uôî P Gu Uû] Å *maanda yen manaivi* 'my honoured wife' , UdLs *makkal* 'children', Cû[Vo *izhaiyar* 'young men' and úYkRu *veindhan* 'king'. The following table shows how the translators have differed in employing the suitable equivalents in their translations.

Table 1

| S.No | SL | AKR | PNA | MLT |
|------|--------|-------------|----------|--------------------|
| 1 | | virtuous | noble | a gem of a woman |
| 2 | Uû] Å | wife | wife | wife |
| 3 | UdLs | children | children | sons and daughters |
| 4 | Cû[Vo | younger men | servants | servants |
| 5 | úYkRu | king | king | king |

As pointed above, in the Source Language Text, there are some words which have more than one meaning. This presents a problem to the

translator. He has to choose only that meaning which suits the context. This principle of observing the Contextual consistency can be investigated in the present study. Thus the SL word, UdLs *makkal* can mean either (1) people in general or (2) one's children / sons and daughters. Similarly the Tamil words, Cû [Vo *izhaiyar* can mean either (1) a young person or (2) a servant and UôîP *maanda* can mean (1) honoured or (2) dead. The words, uôî P *maanda* 'honoured', Uû] Å *manaivi* 'wife' and úYkRu *veindhan* 'king' have been contextually translated as 'virtuous', 'wife' and 'king' respectively by AKR, PNA and MLT, because these words have not posed any problem to the translators.

Since one of the objectives of the present study is to account for the changes and differences in the three translations, it is essential here to analyse and find out why the translators have differed in their translations.

As far as the translation of the lexical item, UdLs *makkal* is concerned, all the three translators have rightly chosen either 'children' or 'sons and daughters'. None of them has rendered it as 'people' which will not be suitable here. AKR and PNA have translated UdLs *makkal* as 'children' whereas MLT has translated it by 'sons and daughters'. When we analyse these two terms 'children' is neutral in gender and is more generic. However, it may suggest 'very small children'.

The general perception is that the term 'children' is mostly supposed to refer to 'young ones'. But the Oxford Advanced Learners' dictionary defines 'children' as 'a young human who is not yet an adult' and also 'a son or daughter of any age'. However, the connotative meaning associated with 'children' viz. non-adults could be very well avoided. This is perhaps the reason why MLT has preferred 'sons and daughters' which is more likely to fit into the context of an old man having no grey hairs.

Next the SL lexical item, CŪ [Vo *izhaiyar* has been rendered in two different ways. Accordingly AKR has translated it as 'younger men' while PNA and MLT have translated the same as 'servants'. The issue here is why the Tamil word, CŪ[Vo *izhaiyar* has been rendered as 'servants' by both PNA and MLT in their respective TL versions.

There is a Source language synonym for CŪ [Vo viz. ஏவலம் - ஸம்பாடல் குறையுதகு ழுடைய ஸம்பாடல் குறைய அழகுற ஸம்பாடல் yeivaler 'a like-minded fellow at one's beck and call – able to grasp the likelihood of his master's intention for performing the duties'. This particular meaning of the availability of obedient and intelligent servants around the old man with black hair suits the context better.

Due to the semantic change over the temporal dimension, the word has lost one of the two meanings now. As a result, in the present context the Tamil word, CŪ [Vo *izhaiyar* generally means 'people who are young in age' and the meaning of servant has disappeared. Somehow translating CŪ [Vo *izhaiyar* as either 'young men' or 'servant' does not affect the overall message of the poem. The translators, PNA and MLT have correctly taken note of the diachronic change in the meaning of CŪ [Vo *izhaiyar* and have gone by the meaning that could apply in the *cankam* era.

Then, there is an instance of ellipsis in the concluding part of the poem. It is, Buñ, AĀkç, APe, V ùLôsŪLf Nôuú\ôo *aantru, avindhu, attangiya kolkaich cantror* 'the principled elder men who are full of profound knowledge and self-controlled to the core'. The Tamil words, Buñ, AĀkç, APe, V are elliptical. They have compressed ideas. The implied items need be brought out explicitly for the benefit of the reader of a translation. The left out words can be recovered easily by the SL reader in the original text. Thus the corresponding section studies whether the translators have filled out in their rendering, the elliptical words, omitted in the source language text.

Translation of Ellipsis

Ellipsis means deliberate omission of a word or of words which are readily implied by the context. It is an artful and arresting means of securing economy of expression.

The concise descriptive phrase delineates the typical nature of the elderly men who lived in the *cankam* age. The phrase reads as:

Buñ AĀkç APe, V ùLôsŪLf
A A A A
Nôuú\ôo TXo, Vôu Yôï m F úW

Here the Tamil word, Buñ – LpÅ Oô] j ¾p Buñ which means, 'a person who has deep and wide learning'. The ellipsis – in learning – needs be brought out in the translation. Otherwise it will be unclear as to what he is wide or deep in.

Then, AÅkç – I kç éXeLu[ëm LhãdúLôl TôL ûYj ç ùLôl â. It means, 'a person who has controlled all the five senses'. The verb, AÅkç 'controlled' does not have the 'object' here, the 'object' is all the five senses viz. seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. The senses are the gateway for sensual pleasures. The great people are those who keep their senses under check and control. If the elliptical object is not mentioned in the translation the reader would not know it. So the translator is expected to expand the elliptical phrase.

APe_v - T½V úYi ¼V EVokúRôÅPm T½kç. This means 'one who humbles himself before great people' and also rendering it merely as 'one who lowers himself would not be clear'.

The table which is given below crystallises how the three translators have reacted to the SL ellipses. It contains the source language text and the three different translations. Of the three versions, PNA's rendering is highlighted so as to mark how the translator has tried to fill up the SL ellipses.

Table 3

| S.No | SL | AKR | PNA | MLT |
|------|--|--|---|---|
| 1 | Buñ, AÅkç, APe _v ùLôsùLf Nôuú\ôo | Noble men, wise and Self - possessed. | Men who are wide in their learning, with their passions all quenched, And with humility and modesty in all their ways. | Elder men of profound learning, wisdom and humility. |

Filling out elliptical expressions is very important in translation. The SL readers due to their proficiency in their mother tongue would obviously fill in the missing terms, grammatical units and grasp the meaning from the syntactic or semotactic markers. Though ellipsis occurs in all languages the particular structures which permit such omitted words are by no means identical from language to language. Accordingly an expression almost obligatorily elliptical in one language may not be permitted in another. Thus it is the work of the translator to explicate the meaning in the TL.

Thus these three words, Buñ, *aantru*, AÅkç *avindhu* and APe_v *attangiya* do in fact carry a larger semantic map. The implied lexical items are part of that. Accordingly, it would not be possible to translate them by single words. Expanding the phrase so as to include the implied elements is quite obligatory. It does not matter if more number of words has to be used to render what is apparently a single word in the SLT. Trying to impose restrictions in terms of number of words is a feature of the Formal Correspondence method. Employing the freedom to choose any number of words so as to be closer to the actual meaning specified is a characteristic of the Dynamic Equivalent method. Here PNA alone has taken full cognisance of the elliptical nature of the phrase and has brought out the implicit elements explicitly. The other translator,

particularly AKR's choice of single words such as noble, wise, do not convey the full gamut of the meaning. Since the translator has attempted to be as brief as the original, the highlight of the poem could not be expressed effectively in his translation. If a non-native reader happens to go through the English version, he may not be in a position to grasp the intensity of the ideal way of life of the *cankam* men,

According to Nida formal equivalence is source-oriented; it attempts to translate word for word. In that, the sentence boundaries are respected. Nouns are translated by nouns, verbs by verbs, adjectives by adjectives and so on. Form has priority over meaning. As a result, the translation may not be clear. It usually contains unnatural, unclear and even misleading expressions. Therefore Nida prefers the dynamic equivalence. Here the translation is reader-oriented. It attempts to translate sense for sense. Sentence boundaries are not respected. Idioms and ellipses are translated in such a way that the reader understands the intended meaning. The reader of a translation is expected to get the same effect which the source produced on its readers. Thus the translation is clear. As Susan Bassnett rightly remarks, "equivalence in translation, then, should not be approached as a search for sameness, since sameness cannot exist between two TL versions of the same text, let alone between the SL and the TL version." PNA has taken some effort to bring out the meaning of the ellipses. With the long descriptive phrases as illustrated in the table above, the translator's attempt is appreciable. He has increased the sentence length to elaborate on the ellipses.

In this way, Mildred L. Larson, in his book *Meaning – Based Translation: A Guide to Cross – Language Equivalence* views; "the chunks of experience embodied in lexemes will inevitably differ from each other which rules out any neat correspondences at the lexical level between the languages. Translation, then, consists of studying the lexicon, grammatical structure, communication situation and cultural context of the source language text, analysing it in order to determine its meaning and then reconstructing this same meaning using the lexicon and grammatical structure which are appropriate in the receptor language and its cultural context (P. 3)".

Conclusion

The Classical *Cankam Puram* poem has had a lot of poetic features. They must be properly and carefully analysed in determining precisely what sort of style or form a translator should follow in the making of the readable translation of the *cankam* Tamil poem. Through the above analysis, it is observed that the translators have used various techniques for bringing out the message of the SL poem meaningfully.

Though there is no such thing as a perfect or ideal translation, there are satisfactory and good translations. A good translator is the one who is never satisfied but is always trying to improve his means of expression and he is also conscious that each language has its own inimitable genius. If the translator keeps too closely to the grammar and the words of the original language, then his translation may run the risk of becoming unnatural, ambiguous and may even render wrong meaning. He should have a clear

knowledge, verified facts, appropriate language and acceptable usage. A good translation is creative, intuitive, inspired, spontaneous, free and natural. A sensitive translator should prepare himself to tackle both linguistic and extra-linguistic problems at all levels. His translation along with the content of the original should also carry its cultural canvass. It must be, like the original, a contribution to the reading audience.

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