



**TRANSLATIONAL STUDIES: ADDRESSING THE CULTURAL CONCERNS WHILE TRANSLATING  
REGIONAL TEXTS**

<p><b>Dr. G. VENKATA RAMANA</b> Associate Professor of English BVRIT, Narsapur, Hyderabad, Telangana.</p>
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### **Introduction**

The definition of “culture” as given in the Oxford dictionary is “the ideas, customs and social behavior of a particular person or society”. Translation means the conversion of something from one form or medium into another. Toury defines translation as, “an activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions” (Toury, 1978:200). Translators are always in a piquant situation when treating the cultural aspects in the source language (SL) and in adopting the appropriate techniques for conveying the message in the target language (TL). As Nida rightly points out, “the translation problems depend on the cultural and linguistic gap between the SL and TL (Nida, 1964:130).

### **Translation as Transcultural communication practice**

Newmark defines culture as, “the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression” (Newmark, 1988:94). Vermeer suggests that, “language is part of a culture”, (Vermeer, 1989:222). Both Newmark and Vermeer exhibit contrast views on culture and language,

despite the differences of opinions both the notions appear to be inseparable. Bassnett successfully interprets and go on to say that, “the heart within the body of culture” (Bassnett, 1980:13-14).

Language has its own cultural specific features which are tough to translate. This gives us a scope of impossibility to translate a text from a source language (SL) to target language (TL). Bassnett further points that, “the translator must tackle the SL text in such a way that the TL version will correspond to the SL version” (Bassnett, 1980:23).

Lotman’s theory states that, “no language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture; and no culture can exist which does not have at its center, the structure of natural language” (Lotman, 1978:211-232). Nida says the parallels in culture often provide a common understanding despite the lexical concerns (Nida, 1964:130). Thus, when translating, it is important to look for the connecting cord between different languages.

### **Strategies to address cultural concerns**



Language and culture are coexistent entities and are very important from the point of a translator. Newmark proposes two methods Transference and Componential Analysis (Newmark, 1988:96) for translating cultural words. As Newmark states that transference gives “Local colour”, i.e. to keep the cultural names and concepts. By using same cultural names and concepts the TL readers will be familiar with the SL’s culture, but this will limit the general readership’s comprehension. Newmark remarks Componential Analysis as, “the most accurate translation procedure, which excludes the culture and highlights the message” (Newmark, 1998:96).

Nida proposes Formal Equivalence and Dynamic Equivalence (Nida, 1964:129) to address the cultural concerns. Formal Equivalence always tries to be close to the SL, without adding the translator’s ideas and thoughts into the translation. This method works wonderfully in the literary translation where there is more word- for-word translation. Dynamic Equivalence is often called as thought-for -thought translation. A translation method in which the translator attempts to reflect the thought rather than word or forms. The criticism to the Dynamic Equivalence is that it does not transparently depend on the Source language (SL) and its tendency to promote multiple meanings in the Target Language (TL) takes it away from the SL.

According to Nida, a "Gloss Translation" (Nida, 1964:129) (a gloss is a translation or brief explanation of difficult terms, the explanation can appear in the margin,

between the lines or as a footnote) mostly characterizes Formal Equivalence where form and content are reproduced as faithfully as possible and the TL reader is able to "understand as much as he can of the customs, thought process, and the expressions" of the SL text (Nida, 1964:130).

### **Text classification**

Newmark takes Bühler's Functional theory of language as his theoretical basis. According to Bühler, language has three main functions: the expressive, the informative and the vocative. Every text exercises the three functions, but in different degrees, and the text is classified on their dominant function. The expressive function exhibits the mind of the speaker or the writer. Autobiographies, essays and personal correspondence are the examples of this function. The Informative texts principally convey information, for example, text book, technical report, scientific paper. The vocative expression is an expression of direct address where the identity of the person or object spoken is explicit. The vocative function of language is the readership, the addressee. The readers are expected to think, feel and act according to texts, for example, notices, publicity content, advertisements, persuasive writing.

The translator even before starting his translation, he should first ask himself a lot of questions- What kind of text am I referring to? Should I focus on the reader or the author? What is the gap between the reader of SL and TL?



Newmark suggests semantic and communicative translation to reduce the gap between the emphasis on SL and TL. Newmark's, "Semantic translation attempts to render as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language, allow the exact contextual meaning of the original" and "Communicative translation attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original" (Newmark, 1981, 112). The Semantic translation differs from being faithful to the SL, it won't claim cent percent fidelity to the SL text, but it does take into account the aesthetic value of the SL text. It is a kind of faithful translation with certain freedom where a translator can use his intuitive empathy with the original. The Communicative translation attempts to reproduce the exact contextual meaning of the SL text, but the priority is the TL reader. Therefore, semantic translation emphasizes on the TL text and culture.

In translation practice the expressive texts are dealt freely (translator enjoys the freedom) and informative texts very literally (translator has restrictions). Generally expressive texts are author-centered, and informative texts are reader-centered.

Generally, most texts require communicative translation rather than semantic translation, as the majority of the texts are informative and vocative. The original expression, where the manner is as important as the matter needs to be translated semantically. Autobiographies, private correspondence require semantic translation, since the original is more

important. The translator can use a single method or both the methods to get his desired Target text (TT).

From our general observation, we understand that Newmark differs from Nida mainly by proposing different methods for different texts, while Nida regards that the function of a message is of overwhelming importance in translation. Newmark emphasizes faithfulness to the author and reader and Nida stresses on readers' response.

### **The nature of the source text**

This Paper is based on the translation of a collection of short stories of Namini Subramanyam Naidu's "*Sinnabba Kathalu*". The writer has widespread patrons in Telugu; the flavor of his writing lies in the recollection and the portrayal of his childhood life and that too from the child's point of view. The greatest aspect of his writings is that it is served with the flavor of Rayalseema dialect. Here is an attempt to translate a work of regional dialect (Rayalseema dialect) into English at the same time to find equivalent to some of the dialectical patterns.

Namini's three books: *Patchani aaku Sakshiga*, *Sinnabba Kathalu*, *Mitturodi Kathalu* offer a unique window into the everyday, domestic life of a usual rural boy steeped in its own context, unfiltered by any sensibilities. In his stories, we are able to see ordinary moments in the lives of ordinary characters unfold from the inside out. We see men and women who struggle to survive



and understand the meaning of life in a culture startlingly different, yet glowing with universal glimpses of love, hate, jealousy, fear, sorrow, disappointment, regret, and bursts of insight into the human condition.

Translating a predominantly regional text into English has its own issues to address. Nevertheless, it is not an easy task to transfer a text steeped in one civilization into another. Particularly challenging from the translator's point of view is the use of culturally specific metaphors and allusions.

### Figures of speech

Simile: Simile is an expression comparing one thing with another, always including the words 'as' or 'like'.

*It's like a pig and peacock*, the expressions were the reality of Venkatalaxmi meets the dreams of the boy in relation to the story - *Our Venkatapuram's street dance*. This expression clearly shows the exaggerating attitude of the child.

Namini's use of simile is rare and the few used pose no significant problems in translation.

Allusions: Allusion is something that is said or written that intentionally makes you think of a particular thing or person.

The occurrence of allusions, however, is more challenging? Not only does the translator of Namini have to cope with the usual linguistic difficulties of translating

from a dialectical language, but one also has to handle different references and allusions.

*The moment my father comes to eating, he would change his face to the utter dismay of everyone. From Sangati, he would pick granule after granule and with great difficulty dip it in the curry and eat like a hen.*

For a person who doesn't know anything about Rayalseema, *Sangati* has been just a food, but it's the most common food found in every house of Rayalseema, Andhra Pradesh, normally taken in the morning. Regarding food habits, the very flavor behind a food or its significance is untranslatable to an audience who has never heard of it or tasted it. For instance, certain foods are prepared only during certain festivals, and such foods remind Indian readers of the season or some religious story. But an audience of a different culture does not experience this. So as a translator I need to give the clue to the reader about the season, time and place in relation to the food.

Synecdoche: Is a rhetorical trope, and similar to metonymy (a figure of speech in which a term that denotes one thing is used to refer to related thing), it uses a particular name to represent a class of people.

*I walked as if I was Buddha Bhagwan.*

Socio-cultural Problems: Words or expressions that contain culturally bound word(s) create certain problems. The socio-cultural problems exist in the phrases,



clauses, or sentences containing word(s) related to the four major cultural categories, namely: Ideas, Behavior, Product, and Ecology. The Ideas include belief, values, and institution; behavior includes customs or habits; Products include art, music, and artifacts, and Ecology includes flora, fauna, plains, winds, and weather.

*All my high school mates come in school uniform, but the blue gown and white blouse, has aptly suited Nagabasu. She just looks like a barbie doll in school uniform.*

*“Orey Sinnabba! Daily while going to the Venkatapuram High School you are coming to my temple and with great devotion you are putting vibhuthi on your forehead, do this for the next forty days.*

Some of the culture specific words, were explained in the footnote.

*Vibhuthi: Sacred white powder placed on the forehead*

*Mitturu: A person from Mittur.*

*Sangati: A dish made of millet flour and rice, common in Rayalseema areas of Andhra Pradesh.*

## Conclusion

After translating some of the short stories of Namini Subramanyam Naidu, I feel more than the readability, being faithful to the author, preserving his style is very much important. In this paper I have also discussed some of the approaches in translation, Nida's Formal and Dynamic

Equivalence and Newmark's Semantic, Communicative approach, Transference and Componential Analysis. In detail discussed translation as Transcultural communicative practice, some of the strategies to address cultural concerns, text classification, nature of the source text, and figures of speech. It is a great challenge dealing with a language that has a different feel and tone embedded more in culture than in literal meaning, but I hope that the cultural concerns are duly addressed and this helps in understanding translation methodology in a better way and provides a smooth transition to the rigorous translation practice.

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