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BA English Honours | Semester V | Calicut University

Translation in Praxis

Course Code: ENG5FS112 • Module 2 Notes

Module II: Translation: Methodology and Challenges

1. The Plurality of Translation Methodologies

Translation is not a monolithic activity; different textual genres require radically different translation methodologies, ethical commitments, and linguistic registers. A translator must calibrate their strategy based on the text's function and audience expectations.

2. Literary vs. Technical vs. Audiovisual Translation

- **Literary Translation:** Literary texts (poetry, drama, novels) are characterized by aesthetic polysemy, emotional connotation, musical rhythm, and figurative imagery. Literary translation demands creative transposition. The translator must recreate the source author's unique artistic voice, preserving metaphoric vitality, subtext, and stylistic nuances while respecting target language aesthetic traditions.
- **Technical and Scientific Translation:** Deals with user manuals, medical reports, engineering patents, and legal contracts. The overriding virtue is absolute precision, factual clarity, and terminological standardization. Ambiguity or figurative flourishing in a technical manual can lead to operational catastrophe. Technical translators rely on specialized glossaries, controlled languages, and computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools.
- **Audio-Visual Translation (AVT):** Translation for screens (subtitling and dubbing). Subtitling operates under severe spatio-temporal constraints: a maximum of two lines of 35–40 characters per line, adhering to reading speed parameters (12–17 characters per second) and synchronizing with visual cuts.

3. The Problem of Equivalence: Formal vs. Dynamic Equivalence

Eugene A. Nida dismantled the age-old debate over "literal vs. free" translation by establishing two distinct types of translational equivalence:

- **Formal Equivalence (Structural Fidelity):** Focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content. The translator attempts to reproduce the exact grammatical structures, sentence lengths, punctuation, and idioms of the original text. While valuable for scholarly academic editions or legal documents, formal equivalence often results in stiff, unnatural language that obscures meaning for general readers.
- **Dynamic / Functional Equivalence (Equivalent Effect):** Aims at complete naturalness of expression. The translator seeks to recreate the *equivalent effect* on the target reader that the original text produced on its source readers. For example, translating the biblical phrase "Lamb of God" for an Arctic Inuit community (where sheep are unknown) as "Seal of God" represents dynamic equivalence, preserving the theological concept of innocence and sacrifice within a culturally recognizable frame.

4. J.C. Catford: The Limits of Translatability

In *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* (1965), Scottish linguist J.C. Catford formulated the definitive taxonomy of **untranslatability**:

- **Linguistic Untranslatability:** Occurs when the source language possesses formal grammatical, syntactic, or phonetic features that have no equivalent in the target language. Classic examples include

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puns, homophonic wordplay, and poetry relying on specific sound symbolism (alliteration, rhyme schemes) that disintegrate when translated.

- **Cultural Untranslatability:** Occurs when a situational feature, social custom, institution, or physical object in the source culture is completely absent in the target culture. Translating culture-bound realia—such as Kerala's *Sadya*, *Thiruvathira*, or kinship terms like *Ammavan* (maternal uncle) into English—presents cultural untranslatability, requiring descriptive glosses, borrowing, or cultural approximation.

Advanced Translation Hermeneutics, Contrastive Linguistics & Translatability (Extension Phase 1)

In contemporary translation studies, descriptive translation science, and intercultural pragmatics, analyzing Module 2 requires synthesizing theoretical hermeneutics with rigorous contrastive linguistic analysis between English (Indo-European) and Malayalam (Dravidian). Translation is not a mechanical substitution of words from a dictionary; it is a complex cross-cultural communicative act that negotiates divergent syntactic structures, sociolinguistic registers, and culturally bound epistemologies.

1. Theoretical Paradigms in Translation Studies

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- **Domestication versus Foreignization (Lawrence Venuti):** In *The Translator's Invisibility* (1995), Venuti critiques the Anglo-American tradition of "domestication"—violently erasing the foreignness of the source text to produce a smooth, transparent read. Venuti advocates for *foreignization*—deliberately retaining cultural realia, syntactic friction, and foreign linguistic textures to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the source culture.
- **Polysystem Theory & Descriptive Translation Studies (Gideon Toury):** Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury demonstrate that translated literature does not exist in a vacuum; it occupies a specific position within the target culture's literary "polysystem." When a literature is young or in crisis, translations occupy a primary, innovative position, revitalizing the literary landscape.

2. Contrastive Typological Matrix: English vs. Malayalam

A structured comparative assessment delineates linguistic divergence between English and Malayalam in Module 2:

Linguistic Level	English Structure (Indo-European)	Malayalam Structure (Dravidian)	Translational Translation Challenge & Strategy
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Morphology	Analytic with few inflections; relies on prepositions.	Highly agglutinative; extensive nominal case suffixes and postpositions.	De-agglutination into prepositions or

Linguistic Level	English Structure (Indo-European)	Malayalam Structure (Dravidian)	Translational Translation Challenge & Strategy
			compounding; avoiding clunky phrasing.
Passive Voice	Natural, frequent in formal, scientific, and journalistic registers.	Periphrastic passive with "peduka" (ഒപ്പടുക); often sounds awkward or alien.	Converting passive English sentences into natural active Malayalam constructions.
Cultural Realia	Individualistic, temperate seasonal references (snow, daffodils, church bells).	Feudal kinship (ammavan, chettan), tropical ecology (monsoon, paddy), ritual arts.	Cultural substitution, descriptive glossing, borrowing with contextual explanation.

3. Glossary of Translation Studies & Contrastive Linguistics

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Intersemiotic Translation	Semiotics (Jakobson)	The transmutation of verbal linguistic signs into non-verbal sign systems (e.g., adapting a novel into a film, stage play, or musical score).
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Thick Translation	Postcolonial Hermeneutics	Kwame Anthony Appiah's concept of contextualizing translations with rich footnotes, glossaries, and commentary to respect the cultural depth of marginalized literatures.
False Friends (Faux Amis)	Lexicography	Words in two languages that look or sound similar but carry drastically different meanings, leading to frequent translational blunders.

4. Rigorous Bilingual Translation Protocol (English-Malayalam)

Professional translation execution across Module 2 adheres to a structured four-phase workflow:

- **Phase 1: Source Text Deconstruction (Decoding):** Performing deep grammatical parsing, thematic analysis, tone identification, and highlighting culture-specific realia and idioms.
- **Phase 2: Semantic Transfer & Contrastive Restructuring:** Mapping SVO English syntax to SOV Malayalam (or vice versa); deciding between dynamic equivalence and foreignization for cultural realia.

- **Phase 3: Target Text Drafting (Recoding):** Composing the initial translation with natural target language cadence, idiom, and grammatical harmony.
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