

The Importance of the Knowledge on Dialects for a Translator

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ABSTRACT

Translation is mostly referred to as the act of transforming the data of a source language in to a target language. In this process, the translator's knowledge on these two languages is of great significance since a minor change has the capacity to change the intended meaning of the original text. Furthermore it is important for a translation regardless of its category; science, technical, literary, legal or interpretation. In some instances literary translations may depict dialectal forms based on the context. Dialects are considered as an inseparable unit of a society which signifies slight differences of a language that can be noticed either regionally or socially. Though dialects create a trivial confusion in the speaker's or listener's mind it will not affect the meaning completely as dialects are always based on a language which the community uses already. A translator should be a keen observer of the dialects of the target and source languages as dialectal differences may create confusion in the meaning which the translator has wanted imply. Dialects are of two types and they are considered as regional and social dialects. A linguist can identify dialects in the branch of socio-linguistics and it is important for a translator to be aware of the difference which it can cause to a word. This article discusses the Sinhalese dialects which are prevailing in Sri Lanka and the importance of the knowledge on these dialects for a translator. On the other hand it will discuss the solutions for the problems which occur due to dialectal difference in meaning and the role of a translator who should be keen enough to search and study the dialects of the languages she/he is using.

Key words: Problems, Regional Dialects, Social dialects, Solutions, Translator

1. INTRODUCTION

Translation is generally considered as the act of transforming data of a source language to a target

language. Though the general interpretation on translation could be presented like this many of the translators and linguists have defined translation in various ways depending either on its function, subject area, etc. On the other hand "translation may be defined as follows: the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)" [1]. At this point the writer is giving priority to the process in defining the word 'translation' and understands it as replacing equivalent words from the source language to the target language.

Socio linguistics is one of the most important branches of linguistics which "focuses on the use of language, that is, how and why people employ language to do things" [2]. Moreover it is a well acclaimed fact that sociolinguistics is a branch of linguistics which paves the way for a broad area of research. On the other hand, this field of study involves the practical usage of language in a society. Dialects are one of the most important phenomena in the field of socio linguistics which denotes different representations of a language which is used in a particular society. Linguistic varieties which are distinguishable by their vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation are called as dialects and they "can be regarded as subdivisions of a particular language" or in other words "a language is a collection of mutually intelligible dialects" [3]. These statements prove the fact that a language is a collection of dialects which cannot be divided.

Dialects are mainly of two types and they are regional and social dialects. A regional dialect is a variation in speaking a language which is always associated with place and traveling throughout a wide geographical area where a language is spoken will enable to notice the differences in pronunciation, words and syntax. The number of regional dialects that are being used in a speech community will be decided by the vastness of the particular geographical area. In the early period, linguists used the terms

“geographical linguistics, linguistic geography” [4] to denote regional dialects since a word has not been coined until the emergence of socio linguistics to represent a variety a language which is based on a region/ place.

On the other hand a social dialect is a variety of language that reflects social variation in the usage of a language according to certain factors which are related to the social group such as education, occupation, income level, social class etc. In addition it is reasonable to state that the concept ‘subculture’ which is found in anthropology is somewhat connected to the notion of social dialects since a social dialect can only be emerged in a sub culture and this very fact even proves the connection between language and culture which is often discussed in linguistics.

2. ANALYSIS

Language is known to be a device which depicts ones society and culture very accurately. In translating data from one language to another, or simply, from a source language to a target language, one does not only provide equivalent forms or words but also tackles with two different cultures, societies and etc. Dialects, which are considered to be a variety of language which represents ones culture, subculture, locality and etc., play a vital role in a language and the speakers of that particular language. Mostly dialects occur in the spoken variety of a language and in an instance in which a language doesn’t have diglossia, or two different grammars in speaking and writing, it is obvious that it may occur either in their spoken or written variety. For an example, Charles Dickens in his writings has used dialectal differences. When considering translation and dialects it is quite obvious that literary translation is of major importance since it carries almost all the aspects of a society via language. In the typology of translation other than technical, legal, science, religious and etc. literary translation depicts more dialects. In the types of technical, legal, science and religious translations the translator should pay more attention not to use and dialectal forms, words, grammar and etc. since these documents should be presented or translated using the standard language or the variety of language which is used by the majority of that speaking community.

When regarding Sinhala, it is a well acclaimed fact that this particular language is a diglossic language which consists of two different varieties of grammar in speaking and writing. At this point one may notice that almost all the Sinhala educated people do not use the spoken

variety in writing important and standard documents and vice versa. However, in literature and creative writing Sinhala writers use both the varieties (High and Low) and in these instances one may find diglossic differences either regional or social. In writing novels, dramas, short stories, poetry and etc. Sinhala writers use the Spoken variety in conversations and written variety mostly in the paragraphs. In instances like this a translator may find differences in the use of language compared to the standard language and those differences may due to dialects like regional and social.

In Sinhala, one may find a number of regional and social dialects and it is the responsibility of the translator to figure out the meaning and the ways and means of translating those dialectal forms accurately. ‘Udarata, Pahatharata(Dakuna), Rathnapura, Sath Koralaya, Sathara Koralaya, Uva, Bibila and etc.’ can be taken as the regional dialects which are prevailing and these distinctions of language are created solely due to geographical reasons and boundaries. ‘Udarata and Pahatharata’ are the mostly used dialects by the Sinhala speakers and they are frequently used regardless of the place where they live, since most of the residents of these regions are currently living in the capital city. In the subject field of translation, dialects create confusion and for example:

Udarata Regional Dialcet (Up Country Regional Dialcet)

Relative Names

appacci

Whenever a translator comes across in an instance like this where the target language is English and the source language is Sinhala and the document or the literary piece of work is based on the up country language and culture. At this point the translator is provided only with the word ‘father’ and the regional differences in language will not be shown in this piece of work. Sometimes this particular difficulty will affect the intended meaning and create confusion in the readers mind.

aijandi

This particular term is used to denote the ‘elder brother’ and in the standard Sinhala, it is used as ‘aija.’ Dialectal terms like these are found more in literary texts and it is the responsibility of the translator to transform the message without creating any confusion or interrupting the intended meaning. At times like this a translator is

equipped with the solution of using end notes, special notes or describing the particular term where it occurs.

nændamma:

People who use the up country regional dialect uses this term to denote ‘aunt’ which is used as ‘nænda:’ in the standard language. On the other hand the word ‘nændamma:’ is equivalent to ‘mother in law’ in the standard language. In a situation like this the translator is faced with two problems and the first is understanding the correct meaning since the standard language gives one meaning and the up country regional dialect gives a meaning which does not go with the former. It is the duty of the translator to grab the accurate meaning which conforms to the context.

Verbs

It is a significant characteristic in the up country regional dialect that the speakers use ‘tə’ in the final position of all most every verb. For example

kərantə

In standard Sinhalese, speakers use ‘kəraṇṇə’ to denote the meaning ‘to do’ while the speakers from the upcountry apply a little change in the pronunciation which will not affect the meaning.

When a translator comes across a difficulty like this, then she/he has the only option of using the standard variety of language.

Southern (pahatharata) regional dialect

Relative Names

hici amma:

When paying attention to the southern regional dialect it is quite evident that they also use certain words which distinguish them from the other communities of the society. According to this example which is equivalent to ‘punci amma:’ in the standard language, which means ‘mother’s younger sister’ clearly depicts the difference in the usage. In an instance like this the translator can either use the standard language or provide special notes or end notes in the document.

ba:ppocci

This word which actually means ‘father’s younger brother’ is used as ‘ba:ppa’ in standard Sinhalese. If a translator’s knowledge on dialects is less and finds this particular term in a literary piece of work then she/he

will be confused. It is very beneficial for a translator to be aware of the dialects which are being used in the languages she/he uses.

Question form

It is quite significant in the southern dialect that most of its inhabitants use the form ‘æi’ at the end of a question word where a standard language speaker uses ‘də’.

kanəvæi

In standard Sinhala, speakers use ‘kanəvadə’ to raise the question ‘eating?’ but a native speaker of the southern region will use the above mentioned question word. At this point the translator has the only option of translating it according to the standard language though it cannot project the exact meaning. Likewise words like

Southern Dialect	Standard Language	Meaning
Makkæi	monəvadə	what?
innəvæi	innaavadə	there? (are you)

can be taken as examples from the southern dialect.

Apart from the regional dialects which are available in Sinhalese, social dialects also play an important role which is formed around a group of people and a subculture. Sinhala language has social dialects which are mostly formed based on an occupation. For example the languages used by paddy cultivators, farmers, fishermen etc. and language used by the subcultures are considered as social dialects. If a translator is provided with a text which has social dialects then it will be problematic and the only option will be to use the standard language. For example, in the social dialect which is used by the paddy cultivators,

Dialect	Standard Language	Meaning
Ambaruwa	harəka	Cow
æmbulə	kæ:mə	Food

one can find words like these.

On the other hand in the social dialect which is used by the fishermen in Sri Lanka one can find words like these.

Dialect	Standard Language	Meaning
dijəbə	gæmburu muhudə	Deep sea
vala:ləjə	pahədili muhudə	Sea (Calm)

Many instances like these can be provided for dialects

which are prevailing in Sri Lanka and it is quite important for a translator to be aware of these dialectal terms since they play a vital role in the social system.

3.CONCLUSION

To recapitulate, if a translator comes across with dialects then she/he can either use the standard language of that particular dialect or can use end notes, special notes or paragraphs which describe the meaning of the source text.

On the other hand, a translator can decide to translate by feeling or meaning. If an author intended to represent a character that is unintelligent, uneducated, happy, sad, coming from a different social class, sometimes a translator might be able to pick the equivalent dialectal representation from the target language. It is quite obvious that there are difficulties and problems in translating dialects and translators must attempt to find a way to

represent the dialectal forms without exaggerating or presenting a confusive meaning.

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