ISSUES INVOLVED IN TRANSLATING METAPHORS IN SELECT WORKS OF ASHOKAMITRAN INTO ENGLISH

M.P. Rameez Fathimah
Ph.D Scholar,
Manonmaniam Sundaranar University,
Tirunelveli
rameez.fathimah@gmail.com

and

A. Nihamathullah
Head of the Department of English,
Sadakathullah Appa College,
Tirunelveli

ABSTRACT

Communication becomes effective and enjoyable when the literary endeavor elevates itself with a distinct style. Imagery is used in literature as a stylistic device which evokes sensory experiences. These devices are employed to decorate it with a distinguishing style, adding color and interest, awakening imagination. Metaphors are important images that load the expressions with aesthetic values, along with the expressive values. In the process of translation the stylistic peculiarities pertaining to the language of the original in the form of these metaphors has to be respected and an earnest attempt to reproduce it in the target language should be made. The present paper discusses the various rendering strategies adopted by Lakshmi Holmstrom and Kalyan Raman in transferring the imagery in the form of metaphors used by Ashokamitran while translating four of his important novels into English. *Vila malai podhil* and *Thanneer* have been translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom and *Manasarovar* and *Otran* by Kalyan Raman. These novels abound in metaphors which naturally pose translation difficulties as they are embedded in the linguistic and cultural background of the source language that they defy easy transfer into a foreign language.
Keywords: *style, imagery, metaphors, and translation difficulties.*

INTRODUCTION

Translating literary texts comparatively creates enormous difficulties for the translators as they are confronted with many stylistic devices that are characteristic of the original language, the culture and the author. The literary text messages are packed with aesthetic as well as expressive functions both of which should be duly looked into by the translator. According to Nida and Taber (12) " Translation consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language massage, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style." Though style is secondary to content, the translator is obliged to reproduce it in the TL text. First it becomes imperative for the translator to identify or recognize a stylistic feature in the text, second to look into the intention of the author behind the employment, third to study the essential

components and characteristics of the various style types, fourth to analyze at the strategies through which it could be transported to the new text, and fifth, the actual translation.

Ashokamitran who has a distinct style in the modern Tamil writing has contributed profusely to Tamil literature. He is distinguished as the most translated writer as well. Two of his novels *Thanneer,* (Water) and *Vila malai podhil* (Festival Evening) have been translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom and *Manasarovar* (Manasarovar) and *Otran* (Mole) by Kalyan Raman. Both of them are prolific translators with discrete niches in the field of translation. Though a writer engaged with urban life, Ashokamitran's works teem with metaphors. The present paper analyses the various strategies the translators have adopted in the translation of metaphors.

Metaphor is a rhetorical trope where a comparison is made implicitly between seemingly unrelated objects. It is created and conceptualized by experience, attitude and practices of people of particular cultures. They create collision by making sameness out of differences. According to Newmark metaphors describe an entity, event or quality more comprehensively and concisely and in a more complex way than is possible by using literal language. Explaining the purposes for which metaphors are introduced in a text Newmark (104). says, "The purpose of metaphor is basically twofold; its referential purpose is to describe a mental process or state, a concept, a person, an object, a quality or an action more comprehensively and concisely than is possible in literal or physical language; its pragmatic purpose, which is simultaneous, is to appeal to the senses, to interest, to clarify graphically, to please, to delight, to surprise". The first purpose is cognitive, the second aesthetic" He suggests seven procedures for translating metaphors (88-91) based on which the problems with metaphors are dealt with.

REPRODUCING THE SAME IMAGE IN THE TARGET LANGUAGE

This type of transfer is possible in places where the images are simple, bringing out comparisons between common, universal terms which are not culture specific. In *Thanneer,* Chaya, Jamuna's sister deserted her and moved to the hostel as she could not bear her sister's affair with Baskar Rao, the adulterer. Jamuna's attempts to bring her back home did not work out. Chaya's repeated refusal to her sister's request prompts Jamuna to compare her character to a stone,

"சாயா கல்நெஞ்சுக்காரி…." **(34)**

"*cāyā kal neńcukāri"*

"Chaya was **stone hearted**" (Water, 45)

When someone is not sympathetic their heart is compared to a stone in Tamil. The translator's job has become easier as English has an identical metaphor. The pitiless, unfeeling attitude of Jamuna is outlined by the metaphor. Certain basic human experiences and emotions, both negative and positive are universal and due to the unifying feature in the thought processes have created universal metaphors. These metaphors are found diffused through popular speech in different languages. In this case the translator has preserved the same metaphor. Newmark's views regarding preserving metaphors can be quoted here,

"Metaphor is the link between the expressive and aesthetic function. Through images it is also language's only link with four of the five senses: by producing tokens of smell, touch, sight as

well as the sound that language consists of. Metaphor connects the extra-linguistic reality with the world of the mind through language. Thus original metaphor being both an expressive and an aesthetic component has to be preserved intact in translation" (43).

REPLACING SOURCE LANGUAGE IMAGE WITH A DIFFERENT TL IMAGE

Owing to disparities in culture and religion in the set of languages involved in the translation process, the SL image may be completely new and incomprehensible for the TL readers. In such cases, the translator has used a different TL image which fulfills the function of the image to some extent. But the characteristics for which the original writer has chosen the image might be lost. In *Thanneer* the women waiting to fetch water advise Jamuna to stand in the queue.

"உன் தவலையை அந்த வரிசையிலேயே வச்சிட்டு…. நீயும் இப்படி

கொலு நில்லு" **(13)**

"*un tavalayai anta varicayila vacitu nīyum ippati kolu nillu*"

"Put your water pot ……….and stand in **procession** here…" (Water, 22)

The vehicle in the metaphor, கொலு *kolu* is translated as 'procession' which varies considerably in meaning. *kolu* is a festival celebrated for nine days by Hindus, particularly Brahmins, when dolls of deities of different colors and shapes are arranged in steps like shelves. Like the dolls and toys standing still in their places, the people standing in the queue to fill their pots wait for their turn which never comes. *Kolu* has religious and cultural flavours, but the translator's choice of the image procession is a deviant concept from *kolu*. In the first metaphor, the tenor 'people' stand still but the TL tenor, the 'people' move. Also here the translator has failed to transport the cultural colour of the term to the English audience though the intent of the original author is not to convey it. A short description about the term in a gloss or footnote would have furnished the dual purpose, first bringing the correct comparison and second familiarizing the local festival.

Animal metaphors are widely spread among languages to compare the qualities of humans to those of the animals either positive or negative. Abusive communication abounds in animal metaphors like fox, pig, bitch, chameleon, etc, as they are universally associated with inferior qualities. In *'thaneer'*, Jamuna's and Chaya's grandmother admonishes them for visiting their mother, after they had abandoned her. They are compared to dogs in the Tamil text as,

"ஊர் சுத்தப்போற நாய்களுக்கு வீடுகளில் என்ன வேலை?" **(100)**

"*ūr cutappora nāikalukku vītukalil yenna velai*"

What places do **bitches** who wander about the town…" (Water, 118)

In this context the SL word is நாய், *nāi* 'dog'a generic term that is replaced by a specific term, the female form of the species, bitch. The image in the TL not only is the feminine form of the SL metaphor but acts as an exact correspondence so commonly used in the TL. Bitch, literally meaning a female dog is a common slang term in the English language, especially used as a denigrating term applied to a person, commonly a woman. It often refers to someone who is

belligerent or unreasonable. Here complete fidelity to the original has not dictated the translator to go for 'dog' which would have resulted in an awkward reproduction.

REPLACING SOURCE LANGUAGE IMAGE WITH A STANDARD TL IMAGE

The values people attach to certain things in a language community create unique metaphors. Such things include gold, silver and precious stones. Though the same image is available in the other cultural domains, due to the custom and experience, a different image may fill up the function of the SL image. The assistant lecturer, the proposed groom for Sita in *vila malai podhil* is compared to the precious metal as,

"அந்த உதவி வரிவுரையாளர் மிகவும் **தங்கமானவர்**'…." (**108**)

"*anta utavi virivuraiyālar mikavum taṅkamānavar*"

"That assistant lecturer apparently was a **gem**" (Festival Evening, 56)

One with highly humane qualities is compared to தங்கம் *taṅkam* or **தங்கமானவர்** *taṅkamānavar* in Tamil as gold is considered the toppest in the hierarchy of valuables, the most precious metal. In the English culture the person with the same attributes is compared to a gem - the most precious stone. Also the word 'gem' has a denotative meaning referring to a person or thing held to be a perfect example, a treasure. So the selection of this slightly different word serves the context, an appropriate selection by the translator.

OMISSION OF METAPHOR

At some places it is the discretion of the translator, after careful consideration, to delete a metaphor, for reasons he or she thinks valid. This omission may result in losing the subtle characteristics of the vehicle for which it has been selected. Though Newmark recommends this as a strategy, he suggests that the deletion and the function of the metaphor should be compensated elsewhere in the text. When Jamuna's friend teacheramma lists out her daily chores in *Thanneer* she speaks with annoyance the duties she has to perform towards her husband. She says,

"அப்புறம் அந்த கிழக் **கோட்டானுக்கு** பலகாரம் பண்ணி வைக்கனும்"(**64**)

"*appuram anta kiḻa kottānukku palakāram panni vaikkanum*"

"At some stage I have to make some sweetmeats for the **old man**" (Water, 77)

Here கோட்டான் *koṭṭān* 'owl' refers to her husband who is a chronic TB patient, sleepless throughout nights. He coughs like a rock – horned owl, a nocturnal bird which gives a hooting call. The translator has replaced it with the general term 'man' with just the adjective 'old'. The persistent coughing, the annoyance, sleeplessness during nights are behind the comparison of the man with the exact image, 'owl'. This is a very appropriate selection by the author which at once evokes the visual and auditory senses. These nuances are completely lost in the translation. The translator has also not endeavored to fulfill the metaphor's function elsewhere in the text, as suggested by Newmark.

EXPLAINING THE TENOR IN THE METAPHOR

Due to his poverty குசேலன் **Kuchelan**, the literary figure grew so thin that his physique has become a metaphor for a skinny person. In *vila malai podhil*, during his journey to Hyderabad by flight, Sundar Raj says that the man who is expected to occupy the window seat could never cross past him seated on the aisle seat as the passage is too narrow, though he were a Kuchelan.

"அந்த பயணி குசேலனாக இருந்தாலும் என்னைக் கடந்து…" **(66)**

"*anta payani kucelanāka iruntālum yennai kaṭantu*"

"even if he were **as thin as Kuchela**, to squeeze past me" (Festival Evening, 12)

In the original there is the employment of the metaphor, comparing the passenger to *Kuchela*. The SL readers are already well informed of the figure *Kuchela*, his body frame, the literature which stores the information – all directing to an easy understanding of the metaphorical reference. But to the TL readers, this is an alien concept. The translator has focused on the purpose of the metaphor, by explaining the comparison, as 'as thin as *Kuchela*'. The literary figure is now introduced to the readers in respect of his thin nature and they could not get any idea about his literary background. It could also be analyzed in yet another perspective. The intention of the author in the choice of any word and a thorough knowledge of the cultural and literary background of the SL text are of vital importance to a translator to produce a dynamic and effective rendering. Here the metaphor may mean any of the attributes of *Kuchela*, his thin nature or his accumulated wisdom or his friendship with Krishna. But the translator's knowledge of the literature has directed him towards a judicious grasping of the intention of the author. The tenor in the metaphor is made explicit aiding the readers in better comprehension.

Sathyan Kumar in *Manasarovar* fondly remembers his lady love Ruksana while getting ready for his shot. He is reminded of her fascinating eyes. He compares her eyes to those of cats. Cat metaphors are quite common among poets for cats are associated with softness, fluffy texture, gleaming eyes, shifting eyes and brown eyes. The author's intention in the comparison is changed from the implicit to the explicit state.

"அவளுடைய கண்கள் பூனைக் கண்கள்" **(71)**

"*avaluṭaya kaṇkaḷ pūnai kaṇkaḷ*"

"She had a **cat's brown eyes**" (Manasarovar, 57)

There is a mention of only the பூனைக் கண்கள் *pūṉaikaṇkaḷ* in the Tamil comparison but the translator has brought forth the tenor in the comparison 'brown eyes', which the translator has interpreted from the metaphor, which could have been otherwise, the shining, gleaming, or shifting eyes too. But he has fixed the comparison to one attribute of the eyes and oriented the reader's comprehension.

TRANSLATION OF METAPHOR BY SIMILE RETAINING THE IMAGE

The best option to transfer a metaphor is to change it into a simile in translation as this is the obvious way of modifying the shock of the metaphor. Also the simile cues the readers towards the reason for the comparison, making it explicit which is otherwise implicit. Sometimes the context and the ordering of words may demand translating the metaphors by similes to make better

understanding, by simply adding 'like' or 'as'. Ashokamitran while narrating the consequences of the duel between him and Abie, a co-writer in *Otran* highlights the condition of his left arm comparing it to a piece of dead wood.

"நான் நடக்கும் போது என் இடதுகை நகர்த்த முடியாமல் கட்டையாக தொங்கியது" **(126)**

"*nān naṭakum potu yen iṭatu kayay nakarta muṭiyāmal kaṭṭayāka tonkiyatu*"

"I could not move my left arm which hung down **like a piece of deadwood**" (Mole, 97)

In the original his left arm is mentioned as a deadwood. *kaṭṭayāka* கட்டையாக is a metaphor but in the translation it is 'like a piece of dead wood', a simile.

TRANSFER FROM NONMETAPHOR TO METAPHOR

Apart from reflecting the distinctive style of the original author in the translation the translator at times stamps his own translating style in the translated work. It need not be and should not be very distinguishing, but can be oriented towards that of the author. He can exercise liberty to the extent that it does not mar the message or the form. The translators feel at times that the introduction of metaphors, similes, idioms or any other image in a particular context can assist them greatly to introduce the intention of the author to the TL readers. In such cases they opt for transfer from nonmetaphor to metaphors.

Sathyan Kumar in *Manasarovar* has very high opinion of Subbu the cameraman who shows extraordinary perfection in his vocation, but the pace of his work is always slow. He says,

"இவ்வளவு மெதுவாக வேலை செய்கிறானே…" **(8)**

"*ivvaḷavu metuvāka velai ceikirāne*"

"…but why does he **work at a snail's pace**?"(Manasarovar, 1)

The snail is known universally for slow movement and many idioms and metaphors are in use throughout the world comparing slow movements with that of snails. In the original there is a mention only about the slow nature of the work of Subbu with the adverb '*metuvāga மெதுவாக*', but the translator has employed the metaphor adding importance to the intensity of the adverb comparing it to a snail, as 'at a snail's pace', as animal metaphor is common among cultures and languages.

The main problem while translating a metaphor as Dagut points out is the fact that "since a metaphor in SL is, by definition, a semantic novelty, it can clearly have no existing "equivalence" in TL" (24). Another problem is of course that metaphors are language, and language is culture. So culture related metaphors obviously defy easy translation as they could be comprehended only with the knowledge of the cultural implications of the source language. Inspite of all these the translators have made every endeavor to retain the images of the original texts in the translated texts. It should be noted that these figures of speech determine the style of the author and the uniqueness of the language, which should be carried to the readers of a different culture, to enjoy the literary beauty, for translation functions much more as a cultural missionary enabling the people of the world to know about an alien culture through their own language.

Note:

(i) The symbols used in transliteration:

Tamil vowels	Symbols	Tamil consonants	Symbols
ஆ	*ā*	ஞ்	*ń*
ஈ	*ī*	ழ்	*ḻ*
ஊ	*ū*	ண்	*ṇ*
		ட்	*ṭ*
		ள்	*ḷ*

(ii) SL - Source Language, TL - Target Language

Works Cited

Ashokamitran. *Otran*. Nagercoil: Kalachuvadu Pathipagam, 1985.

---. *Thanneer*. Chennai: Kizhakku Pathippagam, 2005.

---.*Manasarovar*, Chennai: Kizhakku Pathippagam, 2006.

---.*Vila malai podhil*. Chennai: Kizhakku Pathippagam, 2009.

Dagut, M. B. "Can "Metaphor" Be Translated?" *Babel: International Journal of Translation,* 22, 1, 21-33, 1976. Web. 22 June. 2013.

Holmstrom Lakshmi, *trans*. *Thanneer* (*Water*) By Ashokamitran. New Delhi: Katha, 2001.

---. *Trans. Appavin Snehidhar (My Father's Friend and Other Stories)* By Ashokamitran. New Delhi: Sahithya Academy, 2002.

Newmark Peter. *A Textbook of Translation*. Prentice Hall, 1988.

---. *Approaches to Translation*. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1981.

Nida A. Eugene and Taber. *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1974.

Raman Kalyan. N, *trans. Otran (Mole)* By Ashokamitran. Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2005.

---. *trans. Manasarovar* By Ashokamitran. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2010.