



<https://doi.org/10.64211/oidaijsd190525>

Fostering Inter-cultural Understanding through Translations A Study of Japanese Literary Translations into Sinhala

Samanthika Lokugamage ^{1,*}, Udara Iroshini de Silva ²

¹ Department of Languages, Cultural Studies and Performing Arts,
International Center for Multidisciplinary Studies, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,
University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka.

² Department of Modern Languages, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka.

*Corresponding author: samanthika@sjp.ac.lk

© Author (s)

OIDA International Journal of Sustainable Development, Ontario International Development Agency, Canada.

ISSN 1923-6654 (print) ISSN 1923-6662 (online) www.oidaijsd.com

Also available at <https://www.ssm.com/index.cfm/en/oida-intl-journal-sustainable-dev/>

Abstract: Literary translations can directly cater to sustainable development by fostering intercultural understanding, tolerance, mutual respect and the cultural diversity of the speakers of both the source language and the target language. Intercultural understanding is a powerful means of promoting multiple SDGs like Quality Education (SDG4), Peace, Justice and Diversity. Global partnerships could be strengthened through various ways and literature is an incomparably effective and sophisticated medium to cultivate such understanding. Translating vocabulary and concepts specific to a certain culture or ethnic group is never an easy task as it involves deep knowledge and understanding of the source language as well as techniques of expressing it in the target language. How to translate cultural aspects of the source language without disturbing the natural flow of the story is a key factor when it comes to fiction. Translatorship has been seen as an individuation of collective schemes related to personal history, the collective history of the source culture, the collective history of the target culture, and their intersections. Further, it is highlighted that Translatorship can be redefined in terms of *habitus*. In this study, a few translated fictions by different translators from Japanese into Sinhala were studied focusing on references to food, clothes, festivals, and religious aspects. The study utilised a content analysis method, and it was captured that each translator has used a different translation method when rendering cultural aspects. Some had added in-text solutions like additions and paraphrasing, whereas some had used out-of-text solutions, i.e., a glossary to give extra cultural knowledge, without disturbing the natural flow of the story. Some had used typological cultural terms. Subsequent to analysis, it was observed that the existence and the identity of the translator emanating from the translated work differ depending on the methods they have adopted to translate cultural aspects. As a common factor in all the translated works analysed, it could be said that translators appear to play an extremely vital social role as cultural ambassadors since the translators in the analysed works have paid extra attention to unique aspects of Japanese culture and how best those factors could be translated into Sinhala in a way the readers could grasp a better understanding of those unique cultural aspects. All in all, it could be said that literary translations could play a major role in fostering inter-cultural understanding that promotes sustainable development and therefore more attention and focus should be given to research on methodologies and techniques utilized in translating cultural aspects.

Keywords: Cultural Ambassadors, Cultural Aspects, Intercultural Understanding, Translating, Translator Existence and Identity

Introduction

Literature is a powerful means of presenting human experiences, thoughts, ideas and feelings. Translation brings literature from around the world to diverse readers transcending linguistic and cultural boundaries. Therefore, it is just to say that literary translations foster intercultural understanding, tolerance and mutual respect. They help the reader to immerse themselves in the cultural diversity of both the source language (SL) and the target language (TL). Intercultural understanding is a multifaceted concept that encompasses the ability to recognise, respect, and appreciate cultural differences while fostering meaningful interactions across diverse communities. As such, intercultural understanding effectively promotes multiple SDGs like Quality Education (SDG 4), Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16) and Partnership for the Goals (SDG 17) as it advocates collaboration and inclusion of diversity. Intercultural understanding fosters inclusive learning environments, different worldviews, critical thinking approaches and knowledge systems which help promote Quality Education (SDG 4). When people understand and learn to appreciate different cultures it creates meaningful dialog between cultures thus laying the foundation for peaceful coexistence which is the core in Strengthening Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG16). The cultural understanding and sustainable collaborations between partners help navigate cultural barriers that might hinder effective global partnerships being formed and maintained (SDG 17). Literature is an effective and sophisticated means of promoting such understanding.

Shuttleworth & Cowie [1] acknowledge the fact that ‘translation is an incredibly broad notion which can be understood in many different ways’ thus demonstrating the fact that a single definition which can capture all dimensions is impossible. In fact, Hatim & Munday [2, p.6] refer to the ‘ambit of translation’ and define the same in 3 points, 1. ‘the process of transferring a written text from SL to TL, conducted by a translator, or translators, in a specific socio-cultural context, 2. the written product or the Target Text (TT), which results from that process and which functions in the socio-cultural context of the TL, 3. the cognitive, linguistic, visual, cultural and ideological phenomena which are an integral part of 1 and 2’. This demonstrates that translation is a complex process as it involves not only interlingual transfer that involves rendering meaning from a SL text into a TL, but also cultural and pragmatic dimensions embedded in the work, the translator’s role and the intricate processing behind it. Especially, translating a literary work brings into the translator’s table a plethora of vocabulary and concepts distinctive to a certain culture or ethnic group making it an extremely difficult task that involves a deep knowledge and understanding of the SL as well as deciphering techniques of expressing them in the TL. Translating such vocabulary and concepts without jeopardizing the natural flow of the story becomes crucial especially in fiction. Among many approaches to translation studies like linguistic (i.e., Nida E., Catford, J.), cultural and anthropological (i.e., Venuti, L., Lefevere, A., Bassnet, S.), cultural and descriptive (i.e., Toury, G., Holmes J.) and functional (i.e., Vermeer, H., Reiss, K.) and sociological (i.e., Bourdieu, P., Sapiro, G.), we streamlined this study with the sociology of translation approach based on Pierre Bourdieu’s conceptualization of ‘field’ and ‘*habitus*’ focusing on the agents of translation, ‘especially the translators themselves, rather than the text’ [3]. This is quite a novel approach applied into the field of translation studies during the past two decades. In line with this conceptualization, Meylaerts [4, pp.100-101] contends that “translatorship amounts to an individuation of collective schemes related to personal history, the collective history of the source culture, the collective history of the target culture, and their intersections” allowing us the possibility to redefine translatorship in terms of *habitus*.

In this study, we attempt to analyse a few translated fictions by different translators from Japanese into Sinhala focusing on references to cultural vocabulary and concepts such as food, clothes, festivals, and religious aspects in line with the classification proposed by Newmark [5] and to explore how the translators’ *habitus* has influenced each work.

Translation of Culture and the Translator’s *Habitus*

Translation is a complex process as it involves rendering not only a set of linguistic symbols, but also the cultural aspects that are embedded in the ST as well as the TT. Newmark putting forward general considerations governing translation of all cultural words, contends that the ultimate consideration should be recognition of the cultural achievements referred to in the ST and respect for all foreign countries and their cultures [5].

Dam & Zethsen [6] refer to the fact that even though many studies have concentrated on “translations (the products) and translating (the process), the translators themselves- the people who produce the translated texts and engage in the translation process- have attracted surprisingly little attention so far” [6, p.7]. The role played by the translator can and should not be underestimated as they serve as crucial agents in transferring literary works across cultures, shaping the reception and understanding of foreign literature [7]. As such, this study aligns itself with the sociological paradigm

Some Details of the Translators

Rather than focusing on the translation process as a single entity, here we focus on the techniques that are used in these translations with reference to how the translators themselves could be seen within the work they have done. In other words, we focus on the work as a holistic result of the *habitus* of the translators. Prior to the analysis, it is absolutely important to look at who the translators are. The following details were gathered by interviewing the translators.

The translator of Aluth *Auruddhata Omochi*, Kusuma Karunarathne has been to Japan for several long-term study programmes where she could study Japanese literature and culture. Her first encounter with the Japanese was with two Japanese officers who were affiliated to the embassy of Japan in Sri Lanka. Being a Sinhala lecturer at the University of Peradeniya, young Kusuma was assigned to teach Sinhala to these officials. She didn't know much about Japanese people or the country until she met these two officers. Consequently, this encounter with the Japanese led her to develop a passion towards Japan and its culture which spurred her to pursue higher studies in Japan. She has visited Japan several times and has stayed long-term for study purposes, where she got extensive exposure to Japanese literature and culture. She has introduced Japanese literature to Sinhala readers by writing several story books. Furthermore, she was involved in several intercultural awareness projects including a series of lectures introducing Sri Lanka and Sinhala literature to the Japanese.

Iromi Senarathna, Udara Iroshini de Silva, Samantha Lokugamage, and Sandamali Amarasiri Gunawardana have been teaching Japanese to Sri Lankan learners at Secondary and University level education as well as outside mainstream education for several decades. Each of them has participated in study tour programmes and teacher training programmes in Japan, where they were able to gain first-hand experience in both traditional and modern cultural aspects. Two of them have completed their MA and PhD in Japan in Japanese linguistics and Japanese language education, which has given them the opportunity to experience not only the linguistic landscape but also the lifestyle of contemporary Japan. As they had prior Japanese language knowledge before going to Japan, it was quite easy for them to understand Japan, Japanese culture and its people.

Dileep Chandralal is a Professor Emeritus at Okinawa University, who has been living in Japan for more than 40 years. He first went to Japan in 1983 for his MA in Linguistics. During this period, Japanese language education was not well established in Sri Lanka, and he faced considerable challenges initially. However, through considerable effort and enthusiasm, he successfully completed his MA in Japanese Linguistics and PhD in Cognitive Linguistics with a focus on Sinhala and published his first book, titled "Sinhala" with John Benjamin Publishing Company. He is also interested in sociolinguistics. He has been playing a key role in introducing Japanese culture to Sri Lanka and vice versa. Many Japanese individuals interested in Sri Lanka and its culture gravitated towards him making him a central figure in the Sri Lankan community in Japan.

Research Methodology

In this study we focused on cultural aspects and references translated in the three translations/adaptations, employing the content analysis method for data collection and analysis. In the first stage, we classified the cultural expressions into five categories, based on the classification put forward by Newmark [5]. After identifying all the cultural expressions in the three translations/adaptations, the second stage involved applying Newmark's [5] translation procedures at the sentence level.

Classification of Cultural Terms- Stage 1

Newmark's [5, p. 95] classification of cultural terms includes the following categories.

- (1) Ecology encompassing flora, fauna, winds, plains, hills.
- (2) Material culture including food, clothes, houses and towns, transport.
- (3) Social culture referring to work and leisure.
- (4) Organisations, Customs, Activities, Procedures, Concepts covering the political and administrative domains, religious and artistic domains.
- (5) Gestures and Habits.

We identified this classification as holistic and comprehensive, making it practically applicable to the analysis in the current study. Table 1 illustrates the number of cultural aspects and references falling into each category deciphered during the analysis. The following section quotes examples from the three translations/adaptations.

Table 1: Cultural Expressions

Name	Ecology	Material Culture	Social Culture	Organizations, Customs etc.	Gestures and Habits
<i>Aluth</i>	6	16	14	10	10
<i>Ekamath</i>	24	23	20	08	03
<i>Wal</i>	0	03	0	03	02

Ecology

E.g., (1) *Aluth* (p.11)

Japan rate 'kumo' kiyala kiyanne makuluwata. Eewageema walakulatath 'kumo' kiyana nama thamai pavichchikaranne

(In Japan 'kumo' means the spider. The cloud is also called 'kumo')

(2) *Aluth* (p.21)

Japan rate hadena 'kaki' kiyana gedi jathiyata ingrisiyen 'persimon' kiyana.

('Kaki' is the Japanese version of English persimmon.)

(3) *Ekamath* (p.45)

Mokada me sadde *Iwate fuji?* Kurakake kanda ahuwa.

(What's this noise Iwate Fuji? Asked Mt. Kurakake.)

Material Culture

E.g., (1) *Aluth* (p.13)

Yosaku hithuwa me rediwalin 'kimono' andum atakma mahanna puluwan kiyala. Japan rate aya issara andapu andumata 'kimono' kiyala kiyanne.

(Yosaku thought eight kimonos could be made with the material. The attire Japanese people wore in the past is called 'kimono')

(2) *Ekamath* (p.32)

Ithin me siduwima nisa kanda udarata rajadhaniye maligawa 'hakumayijo' hewath sudu sahal maligawa kiya prasiddhiyata pathwuna

(Therefore, because of this incident, the castle of the hilltop kingdom was popularly known as 'Hakumaijo': the castle of white rice.)

(3) *Ekamath* (p.107)

Achchi Momotarota kanna kibi dango guli hadala dunna.

(Grandma made Kibi dango dumplings for Momotaro to eat.)

(4) *Wal* (p.49)

Batakola thoppiya palandagath dadayakkaraya....

(The hunter who is wearing a bamboo leaf hat....)

(5) *Wal* (p.49)

Dadayakkaraya *undu bola* genawith thibini.

(The hunter had brought in *undu bola*.)

Social Culture

E.g., (1) *Aluth* (p.73)

Anthimedi putha ammath aragena kanda nagala gihin hondata hewana thiyana gahak yata amma bimin thiyala kiyanawa, “*okasan*” e kiyanne japan bhashawen ammata kiyana nama.

(Finally, the son climbed the hill carrying his mother, and kept her under a shady tree, and then said, “*okasan*”, that is the word which refers to mother in Japanese.)

(2) *Ekamath* (p.65)

Duwagena duwagena yanakotama ekaparatama athin *odo dewalayak* thiyenawa dakka.

(While he was on the run he saw an *odo* shrine far away.)

(3) *Wal* (p.22)

Mata *yen 2800ka* paduwak.

(I’ve lost 2800 yen)

(4) *Wal* (p.49)

Tokiyowata giya pasu owuhu *unu wathure basa na gathha*.

(They soaked through in hot water after going back to Tokyo.)

Organisations

E.g., (1) *Aluth* (p.12)

...*Yosaku* gedara gihin nana baldiyata bahala hondata unu wauthren nagaththa. Wathura baldiye hari tankiye hari bahala indala tika welawak indan naganna ekath Japan rate minissunge sirithak.

(Yosaku went home and had a hot bath in the bath tub. It is customary for the Japanese to have a bath immersing themselves sometime in the bath tub.)

(2) *Ekamath* (p.107)

Kibi dango guli kawama angata honda shakthiyak ena nisa.

(Since, eating *kibi dango* dumplings will bring you physical strength.)

Gestures

E.g., (1) *Aluth* (p.12)

Japan jathikayo hondata kalaguna salakanna danna aya. Kawuruhari udawwak kaloth dekata namila ekata sthuthi karanawa.

(The Japanese are a grateful people. If someone helps them, they will bow and show their gratitude.)

Furthermore, apart from the cultural word categories above, onomatopoeia (mimic words) was observed in the translations. Onomatopoeia represents a significant element in the Japanese language, frequently used across a wide

