

# **The practice of Translation: Problems and procedures in social sciences**

Subathini Ramesh

## **1.1 Introduction**

“Social Sciences” is a covering term for all those disciplines that deal with human being not as an individual but as a social and cultural aspects and implications. Also known as behavioural sciences, it includes disciplines like sociology, anthropology, folklore, psychology, economics ,commerce and management, geography, political science, linguistics, law, education, defence studies, archaeology and culture, communication and journalism, social medicine and community health, international relations, population science and all other allied subjects which have relation to social order. In contemporary times, social science research is as relevant to the rich and developed nations as it is to the poor and underdeveloped and developing nations.

In the present age of information explosion it assumes a significant role, with enormous capacity for dissemination of information and knowledge at both national and international level. In that sense then, translation in general and technical translation in particular, is not only an important tool for transmission of scientific and technical knowledge across geographical and linguistic barriers but also helps in better understanding of our surroundings besides promoting the development of science and technology.

This effort is devoted to the study of the need for translation of scientific and technical texts particularly the social science texts, the problems and procedures involved in translation of these texts and the lack of proper management and coordinated organization of scientific and technical translations and translation tools.

## **1.2 The Nature of Translation : Social Sciences**

The nature of social science text to be translated could be of two types:

- (i) Creation and of exchange of information of research purposes.
- (ii) The use of this knowledge for practical application, advertising, for trade and commerce etc., by scientists and technologists.

Therefore , the social science documents to be translated could be of different nature such as research papers, dissertations, theses, monographs, text books, pamphlets, catalogues, manuals, handbooks, brochures, advertisements, and other sales materials etc . Each one of these will have its own characteristic features of subject, content, language, purpose, and style. All these different types of documents need different kinds of approaches and treatments at the hands of a technical translator.

Social science processes concepts and terminologies are much more vague and culture-specific, in comparison to their counterparts in physical and natural sciences, and therefore, quite often seem untranslatable or are actually difficult to translate. Translation of social science texts may not be as creative as translating literature, but it is nonetheless difficult as it requires a sound knowledge of the subject and its related fields, besides an intimate knowledge of the two languages and the culture they represent. Translation activity here is not only a bilingual activity but bicultural as well.

Although the primary concern of a technical translation is transfer of information, and this process necessities an element of creativity, to create an equivalent text in the target language with its distinct structures, semantics, pragmatics and style etc. Technical writing can be distinguished by its content, subject matter, type of language and purpose. While the content is necessarily technical, language may have a greater frequency of technical terms. The purpose is practical – transfer of information. The technical translator, however does not have to be content with mere a mere transference of information but should be able to communicate efficiently the same and create a similar effect in the target language.

With the realization of importance of science and technology in the development of a nation, technical translation has assumed a greater significance all over the world. Science and technology in recent times is being used as an instrument for the

attainment of national goals and for serving the mankind at large.

### **1.3 Various Levels of Translation**

The process of transformation involves simultaneous working at various levels both linguistic and extra linguistic or situational . At the linguistic level it involves replacement at the graphic, morphological, syntactic and semantic etc. At the situation level it involves matching of the cultural, geographical and historical, milieu and the concepts of the two languages. Problems related to translation in general, and technical translation in general , and technical translations of social sciences in particular circulate around these levels and units. Different goe-historical political and socio-economic development of languages result in the emergence of concepts and ideas that are difficult to translate accurately into another language. These socio-economic and cultural peculiarities and distinctiveness are witnessed much more in social science terms than the terminology of physical and natural sciences

A translation event involves “who”, “what”, “whom” and “how”, which means who does a translation respect, the original author or the translator? What does the author want to convey? In other words, what is the content and what its nature of research findings are or what a teacher’s instruction manual is, information relevant for sales material, etc. How accurately is it transferred? Who is it meant for a social scientist, a planner, a student or a layman? The message or the information that the original author writes for various readers varies, depending upon the user and the purpose. The manner of communicating the information by the author to the intended reader is again determined by the author’s academic and socio-cultural background, the reader or the receiver of the message and his/her academic level and the purpose that it is intended to achieve. All these factors put together determine the “how” of a translated text, that is the language, the style, etc. An ideal translation is one that should read like the original, in both content and style.

Technical language is a kind of specialized language as far as its vocabulary and syntax are concerned. Every discipline has a specialized vocabulary which is technical. Even the words are often taken from the general language, they have some specialized and restricted senses. Sometimes the technical term may be used in different fields, each having a specialized restricted meaning besides sharing some

general meanings. Specialization in scientific and technical terminology is a continuous process. While the grammar of a language is close-ended, vocabulary is open-ended. Neologism of languages results in the creation of new terms every day or in the old terms getting new dimensions of use, or meaning or both. New words come into the language, some old words become obsolete or go out of use. Old words acquire some new extensions of meaning or the meanings are restricted.

Generally, in all scientific languages, technical terms are created by (1) borrowing (2) adaptation (3) extension or metaphorization and (4) coining. Quite often a technical term is borrowed from classical languages, or from a widely spoken language or an international language or a language of the industrially developed nation(s). English draws many technical terms from Latin and Greek. Similarly, our languages have many technical terms directly borrowed from Sanskrit, Perso-Arabic sources or from English. Words like radio, telephone, cinema, film station, school, bank, rail, budget, although borrowed from English have become a part and parcel of Indian languages in general. Some of these terms are borrowed along with the material and politico-economic culture. Some of these loan words assimilated in the language adapting to its phonological, morphological and grammatical systems.

Technical terms are also created by adding additional senses or meanings to an already existing word, on the basis of notional or conceptual similarity or by metaphorization, such as blood bank, eye bank, kidney bank etc. Sometimes technical concept alone is borrowed rather than the actual term and a new term is coined to express the concept.

While standardization and internationalization is the guiding mission of some international agencies is the guiding mission of some international Agencies like UNESCO, UNO and terminological banks there is an increasing trend in many languages of "enriching" their language by coining words from native languages.

Technical terms are also formed by way of abstraction or extensions from general language. An example of abstraction is the terms hill and mountain in geography. In general language these are relative words and quite often used as synonyms but not so in geography, where the terms are defined in terms of their projection above ground level. A hillock, hill and mountain are measured in terms of their ascending height respectively.



What should be the units of translation? Does scientific translation involve replacing words, or sentences or paragraphs or the entire discourse, the text as a whole. With the whole text in mind a technical translator has to work at various levels – the lexical, grammatical, syntactic and semantic and situational levels simultaneously

### **1.3.1 Lexical Level**

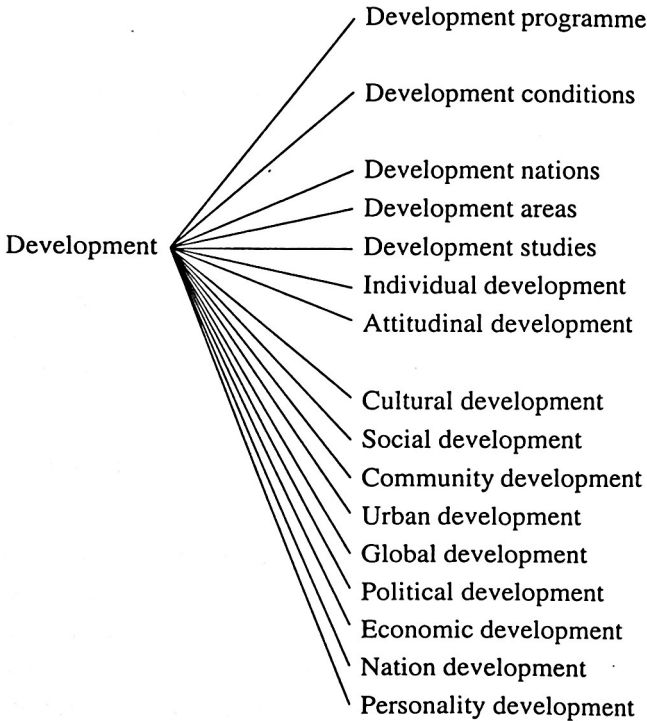
The problems related to the lexical level are mainly those of matching words, phrases, idioms or idiomatic phrases or proverbs. Finding translation equivalents of source language words, or concepts need not always be easy. The lexical problems in translation are mainly of three types:

(i) one to one (ii) one to many and vice versa (iii) one to none correspondences.

Most of the technical terms in general and social sciences in particular, are words drawn from general and language. A technical term generally represents a concept and preferably a single concept. "One term single concept" formula is an ideal strategy but unfortunately it is not the rule, more so in social sciences. Finding one-to-one correspondent equivalent of a source language concept in target language is often difficult, if not possible. Equivalent however does not mean identical. This is a rare possibility across cultures.

Polysemy and homonymy are two important features of all languages and are directly related to this phenomena. Usually in a given situation, only one of the meanings remains functionally relevant. The problem arises when more than one potential meaning of a word has functional relevance in a given situation or context. Again if a source language item has many equivalents in target language – all near equivalents, the translator has to choose the relevant one.

The term development is both a process and condition. The term which are a broad one partially shared by various disciplines, but not exactly in the same sense. The following usages of the term indicate the domain of its application and the variation in meanings :



The different listings of the use of the term is illustrative though not exhaustive. While photographers “develop a film”, musician and artists “develop a theme”, mathematicians and chemists “develop an equation and a formula” respectively. Psychologists who study the human behaviour call this process development. In geography “development” may refer a spatial environment. Temporary changes may be referred to as developmental by historians. For the economist the term refers to economic growth, and in sociology and political science it refers to the change in social order and political systems, respectively.

Similarly the term integration is a concept being used in political science, sociology and economics denoting a kind of system but the systems are not identical in all these disciplines .

In political science , integration is associated with federalism, in sociology with cultural communicative and functional systems and in economics it refers to the

abilition of discriminating factors and inclusiveness of market economy. This type of polysemy of technical terms across various disciplines poses a problem for a translator, because each language is a part of distinct historical, geographical and linguistic culture and technical term is a member of a cultural conceptual structure as well as an integral part of the discipline. It is very likely that the target language has different words for these different concepts which may vary in quality and definition as well.

Ethic terms are most culture – specific. British and American concept of “black”, its denotation and connotation is not the same as in south Africa or Asia. Even the concept of ethnic and culture are perceived differently from language to language and culture to culture. The word “family” is being used differently in general language, anthropology, sociology, linguistics and biology. Similarly the terms “institution” “philosophy” etc. are used different fields of social sciences.

Social sciences deal with human behaviour which is dynamic. Therefore, as compared to the physical or natural sciences, social sciences terms and concepts appear a little vague and ambiguous. Vagueness- related phenomena like terminologized expressions can cause problems. Terms like assets, property, income, earnings, money, profit, interest, bonds, share, stock etc, are vague and highly inclusive terms and problematic in translation because these terms sometimes shift from general to technical sense and vice-versa, within the same text.

Language due to different physical historical and socio- cultural reasons showed different kinds of lexical gaps, thus subscribing to the problem of one to none correspondence. A source language item may not have an equivalent in the target language, if the extra-linguistic reality that the word designates is missing in the target culture. For example, we all know that the Eskimos have a number of words for different kinds of snow. It is natural that in a region where there is no snowfall, the language of the region may not have equivalents for all the Eskimo related to snow. It likely that the language spoken in the desert regions where there is no snow fall, may not have all these term or any term for snow.

Languages being ‘culture-specific’ each one of them has some distinct phonological, grammatical syntactic and semantic features. This is specifically true of social science concepts than of physical and natural sciences. Same notional reality

is perceived differently cultures and languages they represent . Individual's relationship with the society and the nation are previewed differently by language giving rise to two different concepts of mothernation and fathernation, and motherland and fatherland. The British and Indians share the concept of motherland, Americans and Germans refer to their nation as fatherland. Although both these terms denote the same extra linguistic reality, selection of different terms however reflect the peculiar world view of the cultures they represent . These culture-specific notional differences are more evident in the spheres of flora and fauna , weights and measures , time systems, food systems and food technologies, dress and ornaments, greetings and address systems , ritual discourses, etc.

### **1.3.2 Grammatical Level**

At the grammatical level , a translator is expected to have a thorough knowledge of the grammatical rules of the target Language (TL). In fact, a translator does not have to know the grammar of the language for just the sake of it , he should be well versed in comparative grammar of the two languages involved in translation and the similarities and dissimilarities in them . The translator should be able to distinguish between the obligatory and the optional forms in TL.

Grammatical differences between two languages can be of various types, depending on the languages, their relationship and the distance – both physical as well as cognitive. Cognate languages may not differ much grammatically although it also depends on the physical distance between the linguistic regions. Languages belonging to different language families but sharing geographical regions may some features due to the process of convergence.

The major differences between two languages are related to different gender , number, derivational systems, honorifics, tenses etc. One of the major grammatical differences between languages is their gender systems . Languages have different gender systems- grammatical and natural , etc . Some languages have a two-way gender system- masculine and feminine , and other have three genders- masculine, feminine and neuter,. Hindi and some other Indo- Aryan languages have a two-way pattern with a grammatical gender. A number of words in Hindi have natural sex distinctions but for others it is arbitrary, and therefore, quite confusing, for a non-

Andi speaker and a translator. Dravidian languages have different gender systems, compared with Hindi and its sister languages. These differences across languages are not necessarily because they belong to different families, although this is a determining factor.

Forms of address and honorifics also differ from language to language. While English does not distinguish between familiar and polite 'you'. Indian languages have at least two to three distinctions, and these are all grammatical. The same is the case with honorifics.

Languages differ in terms of tense and aspect as well. Most languages are accustomed to three basic tenses- present, past and future with some tenses of relative time- past perfect, future perfect, etc. Some languages are peculiar with a series of temporal gradations of either past or future of both. In terms of their range they vary from a few minutes to a year and a more, such as past time of "a few minutes ago" or "earlier in the day" etc. These temporal aspects have a bearing on the grammar and sentence structure as a whole.

The nature of the grammatical differences between a pair of languages varies from language to language. A comparative and contrastive analysis of the grammars of the two languages, is essential before a translator ventures to take up the job of translating. These grammatical differences pose problems to the translator as it not only involves analysis of the differences but also finding accurate or proper and approximate correspondences in the target language, for effective transfer of the message.

### **3 Syntactical Level**

Vocabulary, syntax and style are the main distinguishing features of scientific or technical language, although this display of variation depends on the nature of the scientific text, whether it is a text book, research book, monograph, manual or advertisement, etc. There however is no place for sentimentality in technical texts, which are marked by nominal and terse sentences and impersonal styles.

Translation of scientific texts poses several problems due to the inherent differences of languages. At the syntactic level languages differ mainly on the basis of the construction of clauses and sentences and the word order. English has subject-

verb-object (SVO) word order. Most of the Indian languages and Sinhala have subject-object-verb (SOV) order. A translator needs to take these peculiar features of the languages, both Source Language (SL) and TL into consideration, while switching over from one language to the other. One thing is very clear, that is, the translator must follow the word order of the target language with all its peculiarities. This may be easier if the language has one obligatory word order, but in languages with a number of optional word orders, a translator would be faced with the problem of choosing the appropriate word order from the seemingly identical or optional patterns. The subtle distinctions in the patterns of word order presupposes an intimate, active and long association with the language.

Generally technical language syntax is characterized by simple, short, and unambiguous sentences and less complicated clause structures. In spite of these positive features of technical texts the translation would pose problems if a concept is alien to the target language or due to the absence of appropriate symbol in TL for the SL concepts. In that case the translator will have to stretch the language to explain to SL concept and to make the message communicable. This may involve the lengthening of the TL sentence by adding one or more clauses or sentences in the target language. While translating literary texts translators quite often adopt in the TL, the SL term or concept. In technical translation, however this procedure may hamper the transfer of information, readability and comprehension of the TL text. In technical translation concepts need to be transferred into the TL without any ambiguity, which sometimes necessitates longer descriptions of the concept in the text itself. Of course providing the reader with the glossary of such untranslatable terms and concepts with their cultural notes, by way of an appendix or footnotes would go a long way in clarifying the ambiguities.

The translator should avoid ambiguity and distortion of meaning. In this process of removing the translator should guard against over translation. Over translation may sometimes bring in an element of the translator's personal views, i.e. his excessive knowledge of the subject may indirectly influence the translation and it may amount to interference on the part of translator. It is as dangerous as ambiguity or under translation. In translation, the length of the TL sentence should be measured in terms of the language itself, with its syntactic and stylistic peculiarities. Sometimes

a SL sentence may require to be cut into several sentences in TL in order to communicate the message, which in turn may result in redundancy. While redundancy guard against misinterpretation and inaccuracy, it varies from language to language and for different purposes and registers.

Passivization is another feature of technical language syntax, if the language has a passive form. That some languages have no passivization is a well-known fact. Translation between these two types of languages, one with passivization and other without it, poses problems of style in translation. Should the translated text be faithful to the SL style or the TL style, is a hard decision to make. If the translator is faithful to the SL style, readability of the translated work is effected. This is precisely the reason, why some scholars would advocate the sacrifice of "accuracy" for readability and intelligibility. The translated text should read as origin of the TL syntax.

#### **1.4 Style**

Style is another important aspect of technical translation. No linguistic form is absolutely controlled by the concepts the author wants to express. In languages there are alternative ways of putting these messages into words and the choice among these alternatives need not necessarily be always based on strict linguistic norms. Style is primarily a matter of personal attitudes, viewpoints, choices and also certain social-cultural literary and scientific traditions that author or a sender of a message shares with the speakers of the language and the community at large. Under such circumstances, it is sometimes difficult to provide stylistically acceptable alternatives of the source language in the target language.

Although social science texts share the technical language style of the specialty and formality with other physical and natural science, yet the fact is that social science concepts are not as standardized and transparent as the physical and natural sciences and their terminology. Social sciences largely derived their terminologies from the general language with all its features of dynamism, etc. It is erroneously believed that language has no place for metaphors and idioms, etc. Metaphors very often play an important role in concept formation and are handy tools for technical term creation or coinage of technical terms in various languages. Processes of metaphor formation are culture-specific based on the speakers perceptions of certain realities

their notional systems and world view, etc. should the translated text reflect the style of the original author or that of the translator?

Whatever subject the translator may working on, he will have to consider the factors like who is the translation intended for and what degree of specialist knowledge the reader is expected to have or what does he need to know. Depending on the content of the reader and the purpose, the translator needs to decide on the style and register, formal-informal; official –unofficial; written-colloquial, etc, and to maintain this register constantly throughout the text. For instance, the language and the style of a theoretical text or of a research paper are bound to be different from that of advertising or marketing or that of an instruction manual. They display variation of the scientific style at various levels-lexical, syntactic and stylistic.

Within the technical language several styles are possible- a formal style for theoretical and research sciences, and an informal and casual style for advertising and marketing, and so on. Instruction manuals are marked by imperative forms of syntax. Translation is not only concerned with the transfer of information but this is a communication process. Whatever style the translator may employ, it should be able to establish communication and the translation text should read as the original in both content and style. Translation should avoid ambiguity and distortion of meaning.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

In concluding, social science literature available in English and other foreign languages on the one hand, and between our languages on the other is necessary to keep our social scientists well informed about the developments all over the world and within the different regions of the country, as well as open up information channels. Social scientists lack of proficiency in foreign languages and other our languages is another reason in favour of translation of social science texts. Therefore it is necessary to make this knowledge available to them at least the translated versions and thereby keep them informed of the developments in various fields.

Scientific and technical translations help in generating information and development of the subject. Frankly in speaking, it is not always possible to have all the social science literature translated into one or all the major languages of science



and education at any given point of time, as there will always be a gap between the original research and its rendering in other language or languages, since the original research does not wait for any translation. However a good deal of this body of text is translated on selected basis , with an exclusive eye on its relevance for national goal and their utility in furthering our developmental pursuits. These translations and the information they generate may be useful for:

1. Our social scientists, planners, policy-makers, social activists, students etc.
2. Wide dissemination of social science research and promotion of scientific temperament and awareness.
3. The promotion of social science materials for higher education through mother tongue media. With the increasing emphasis on mother tongue medium of education at all levels, translation of social science texts becomes imperative as the lack of materials in our vernacular languages is the primary obstacle in the implementation of mother tongue medium of instruction at the higher levels in our country.
4. The development and promotion of economic, and social growth, trade and commerce and better management of these systems.
5. A better understanding of our socio-cultural and economic systems that would enable people solve socio-political and cultural problems and promote a sense of universal brother-hood.

## References

1. Newmark, Peter. 1981. Approaches to Translation, Oxford; pergamon press
2. Nida, E.A & Taber, C.R 1974. The Theory and Practice of Translation, Leiden: Brill
3. Sartori, Giovanni . ed. 1984. Social Science Concepts, Sage publication, New Delhi.
4. Savori, T. H. 1968. The Art of Translation, London: Cape.
5. Glossary of Technical Terms in Sociology, Social Anthropology, Social Psychology (English- Tamil ), Dept. of Official Languages, 1986.
6. Glossary of Geography, (English- Tamil) Dept. of Official Languages, 1956.
7. Glossary of History Administrative Terms (English-Tamil), Dept. of Official Languages, 1960.
8. Glossary of History & Archaeology (English- Tamil), Dept. of Official Languages, 1970.
9. Glossary of Civics and Government Terms in Tamil, Dept. of Official Languages- 1953.
10. Glossary of Cluster Words, (English-Tamil), Dept. of Official Languages, 1970.
11. Technical Terms in Social Sciences (English-Tamil), Dept. of Official Languages, 1961.