

## Semantic equivalents in the process of Translation

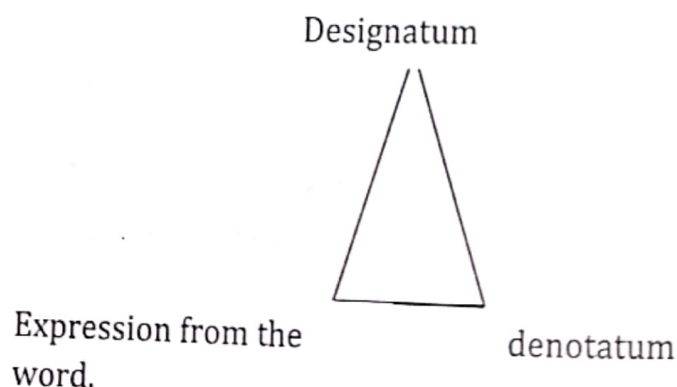
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Semantics is a branch of linguistics. It can be looked at from different points of view. This study focuses on the semantic equivalents in the process of translation from a linguistic point of view.

The objective of this study is to consider the issues in identifying the semantic equivalents of translation because a word may have different shades of meaning depending on the context.

The aspect of semantics in linguistics can be divided into two subheadings: Logical semantics and Lexical semantics. Logical semantics is concerned with matters such as sense, reference, presupposition and implications whereas lexical semantics deals with the analysis of words and meanings as well as relations between the words themselves.

Although there are words with similar meanings their usage is subject to what is called the *range of application in semantics*. In this process a particular class of different types of objects is related to a particular word. This aspect which is known as (referent) denotation deals with the class of different types of objects with which the particular word is concerned. This includes events, feelings, ideas, actions, concepts institution etc.



It can be demonstrated as follows.

“*Koduntamil*” is a dialect of Tamil which consists of grammatical and idiomatic irregularities. Nida categorizes the study of meaning into semantics, syntactics and pragmatics. He declares that semantics deals with the relationships of symbols to referents. At the same time words have to be rearranged in accordance with a hierarchical structure. Pragmatics deals with the relations of symbols to behaviour. In communicative translation words are as significant as their implications. Thus a semantic translation is out of time and local space because it is ephemeral and rooted in its context. The translator has difficulty identifying equivalents of culture-bound, situation-bound and context-bound words.

In the case of idioms and phrases the translator has to convey not the words but their function. A phrase always has a direct link to the social behavioral pattern of the language so that the translator has to address the problems of equivalents.

**KEYWORDS:** semantic translation, logical semantics, lexical semantics, idioms, and phrases.

### Introduction

Translation is mainly a means of communication between two different linguistics communities. Translating is probably the most complex type of event yet produced in the evolution of the cosmos. “Translating is a unique discipline which has developed over the centuries into a wonderful branch of knowledge that is constantly involved in the mighty task of unifying humanity into one.

*Translation is like going to another country* said an English scholar. Translation is an art which has to be learnt with devotion. It can also be classified as science which needs a systematic study. Translation is an essential skill and depends largely on a series of disciplines, for example, linguistics, cultural anthropology, philology, psychology and theories of communication.

The process of translation is controlled by linguistic, contextual and cultural limits. Every language is defined within a defined structure the complexity and its identity is correlated to the problems of translation.

At the lexical level the rhythmic alliterative, and onomatopoeic aspects can be considered as hurdles. Literary translators have to encounter the lexical problems of puns, equivocations, and idioms. Most of the lexical problems are concerned with equivalents. There are four types of equivalents such as one to one, one to many, many to one, one to none. Whenever and wherever equivalents are not available translators use such techniques as borrowing and transliteration.

The structural problem which is not manifest in one's mother tongue confronts one in a second language. Language is for talking about something, not something to talk about.

The purpose of language is to communicate with others. It is to be presented in a precise, explicit and rigorous form. A native speaker knows the facts about the language intuitively. The translator must be knowledgeable about the structural, morphological, syntactical and semantic aspects of the languages concerned. Syntactical and semantic aspects play an important role in the process of translation. Syntactics deals with the grammatical structure of language. As such a translator cannot engage in translation without having a profound knowledge about the structural aspects of language. Nevertheless it is not obligatory to maintain or preserve the structural elements to transfer semantic content of a language. There is nothing sacred about such features as sentence length or phrase structure patterns.

Syntactic pattern in English is unique in which words are organized to make meaningful sentences. In practice a second language learner will have difficulty with specific features of English linguistic structure if the syntactic structure of English differs from those of their first language.

Tamil is an ancient Dravidian language which originated in the third century BC. Tamil has, ever since its inception, had two distinct usages known as *SeyyulValakku* (literary usage) and *UlakaValaku* (spoken usage).

Tamil has a rich grammatical tradition which can be traced back to *Tholkapiyar* who dealt with almost all aspects of the linguistic system. The syntactic tradition of Tamil recognizes phonology, morphology, syntax and trichotomy.



This study deals with the problems encountered between English and Tamil syntactical differences. Therefore the translator must be proficient in both languages related to the linguistic aspects particularly in syntactic features.

### **The objective of the research**

The study is concerned about the semantic equivalents in the process of translation. The aim of the research is to evaluate the students' skills in translation and to identify the problems faced by the students while translating English sentences into Tamil. Moreover, it helps to make the students to become good translators and also good communicators in English and Tamil.

### **Limitation of the research**

This study is undertaken to identify the problems of translating English to Tamil structural aspects. This includes a comparison of the parts of speech: articles, nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs; subject, object, predicate; phrases, clauses, direct and indirect speech, active and passive voice, deep structure and surface structure; formation and structure etc. of both Tamil and English.

### **Methodology**

Comparative methodology is applied in this study to match semantic equivalents. The questionnaire consists of pronouns, their inflected forms as well as demonstratives in English for identifying the problems faced by students morphological level. It includes 25 simple sentences in English for identifying translating problems at syntactic level.

The questionnaire was given to 25 students, both males and females, who belong to the Department of Translation Studies. The collected data were analyzed in accordance with the theory of translation propounded by Nida and Tabor. ( 1964)

### **Research problem**

Problems occur at syntactic level when students attempt a proper reconstruction or restructure in the target language.

Non-native speakers of a language cannot express themselves both in writing and orally as flawlessly as a native speaker. The reason for this drawback is the difference between the languages at syntactic level.

There is a wide range of choices open to the translator at morphological level but there is little choice at syntactic level because the structure of a language has to be preserved rigidly.

### **Literature review**

Some researches have been carried out about the syntactical differences between any two specific languages. *Tamil syntax: new perspectives* by R. Kothandaraman is a case in point. He deals with different elements of Tamil syntax including compilers in Tamil syntax, relative clauses and particle nouns in Tamil, new perspectives, syntax in demonstratives in Tamil, and frozen predicates in Tamil etc.

*Translating English sentences into Tamil by P.G students: problems and perspectives* by R. Saranya, CAS in Linguistics Annamalai University, illustrates how complex is the process of translation where various facets of language interact in certain ways. The choice of accurate equivalents and the task of tackling the structural differences between the two languages pose a stark hurdle to be overcome.

*Problems of Translation* by..... deals with three types of problems to a great extent: linguistic, cultural and contextual.

Christophar Candiln in his comment about the acquisition of a particular language argues about the development of the interlanguage syntax which is constrained by three factors: general organizing principles to all languages, influence of mother tongue and the target language and the exploratory process of learners cognition.

Although many studies have been carried out on this subject no studies have been carried out in respect of the Students of Translation Studies at the University of Jaffna. This researcher ventures into their problems and solutions.

## Meaning of the term language

Language is necessary for a display of human personality in its individual, social, national aspects. It is also a means of communication for one's ideas sentiments, aspirations, and emotions.

Moreover, linguistics includes phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. A language student has to focus on its source, vocabulary, etymology and coinage of new words and their modifications. Modifications of the word can be compared to the changes in a national currency. Words which may be scientific and dialectical in nature are used for polite expressions, private conversations and public communication.

In South-East Asia *Centamil* has well-defined grammatical boundaries and is free from irregularities whereas *Koduntamil* is a Tamil consisting of grammatical, and idiomatic irregularities.

Syntactics is not merely the study of the relationship of symbol to symbol or adding up symbols. Words have to be arranged and structured in a hierarchical order. Pragmatics deals with the relations of symbols to behaviour. The usage of the words in a language is determined by the non-linguistic context.

According to New Mark a semantic translation tries to recreate the correct flavor and tone of the original word. A word becomes sacred both in form and content.

In a communicative translation words are as significant as their implications. Thus a semantic translation is out of time and local space because it is ephemeral and rooted in its context. A semantic translation tries to preserve its author's idiolect and his peculiar form of expressions in preference to the spirit of the source or emotive meaning (connotative and referential meaning) and the denotative dictionary meaning of the target language. The significance of a word in a sentence depends on its structure which is expected to comply with the overall cultural and textual context of the sentence. It also emphasizes the relationship of signs to its reference which is unlimited in its variety.



In the case of translation of idioms and phrases, the translator has to convey the function of the phrase and not the words. Always a phrase has a direct link to the social behavioral pattern of the language so that the translator has to face the task of identifying cultural equivalents relevant to a particular situation.

### **Semantic equivalents in the process of translation.**

Semantics can be looked at from different points of view. This paper deals with the linguistic point of view of translation. Semantics is treated as a branch and structure of linguistics.

This study addresses the problems faced by translators in identifying semantic equivalents required in translation. A word may have different meanings depending on the context. Comparative and descriptive methodology are used to analyze the contextual issues in relation to the usage of words.

In the absence of idiomatic expressions equivalent to those in the SL corresponding expressions can be substituted in the TL. Corresponding expressions should reflect the role they play in the SL, not its linguistic elements.

Lexical and grammatical items are replaced to arrive at expressive identity between SL and TL. The significance of certain words is considered only in their cultural context. Certain semantically interchangeable sentences may carry the same information but produce different aesthetic effects. English terminology is greater than in any other language. For that reason it poses a formidable challenge in translation. The translator has to choose various alternatives. There are numerous metaphors based on nature and culture: animals, birds, trees, community etc. Failure to convey precisely the figurative meaning of such an expressions would lead to mistranslation or misinterpretation.

According to Nida an essential part of the communicative translation is derived from the central meaning of the word which continues to be an active force. Once the central meaning which provides the basis for the extension of some componential quality is lost, the figure of speech also loses its force; because its strength relies on the relationship established between the central

or core meaning and the extension to natural meaning. Nida talks about the approach which insists that the real meaning of a word can be equated in some manner with the mindset associated with the symbol. Later on the idea of an “orthographic” word having a fixed meaning was replaced by the idea of a functional definition of meaning in which a word acquires meaning through its context and can produce varying responses according to culture.

There is a wide range of vocabulary including a large number of synonyms in both languages in the form of homonyms. A homonym is a word that is spelt like another word (or pronounced like it) but which has a different meaning, for example *can* meaning ‘be able’ and *can* meaning ‘put something in a container’. It is a challenging task for the translator to translate a literary text from an oriental language like Tamil into a Western language such as English.

### **Denotation and Connotation**

The translator has to take into account the important semantic areas such as connotation, denotation, and implication while translating literary texts from classical Tamil which flourished centuries ago. Connotation is considered a secondary meaning connected with the denotative sense of a word or expression. According to the Oxford Dictionary connotation is an idea expressed by a word in addition to its main meaning. The connotative meaning of a word depends on the context. If the translator focuses on the literal meaning of the word she loses its significance. *Kootanchoru*, which appears in *PonniyinChelvanby* Kalki R. Krishnamoorthy, is such a cultural term that could pose a challenge to the translator.

#### **Connotation**

If the translator is unable to translate a word or phrase with its connotative meaning he can transliterate it to show its connotative cultural meaning to some extent.

#### **Denotation**

This refers to the primary meaning of a word as defined in a dictionary. For example here is a Tamil sentence:



இரவில் மலரும் பூக்களின் இனிய மணம் அபூர்வ சுகமயக்கத்தை உண்டாக்கியது. This line can be translated as:

*The sweet fragrance of flowers in bloom at night created a strange healthy dizziness. The word dizziness, however, does not reflect the effect of smell implied in the SL.*

### Implication

This projects an intended meaning that is not expressed by the speaker or writer. For example, suppose a girl asks her lover whether he will protect her if she marries him; he replies that he only knows how to make a garland and sing devotional songs. He adds that he does not know how to bear arms and be a fighter. His reply implies that he is only a devotee and not a fighter. Such an English translation implies that the courage expected by the girl is not displayed by the boyfriend. Implication is an intended meaning which is not communicated by the writer or speaker. The relationship between two statements of a conditional antecedent and the consequent is intended in this kind of language.

The above example leads to many implications. This refers to the state of affairs that prevailed during the Chola Regime. The translator should find out the intended meaning of the writer or speaker based on the existing circumstances.

### Symbol and Referent

A symbol represents something else. The term "referent" indicates the object identified by the symbol. Tamil words *sandanam* and *vibhuthi* are known to symbolize religious affiliations of *Vaishnavism* and *Saivism* respectively. Hence the translator should know minute minute differences between both these religions so as to avoid any misinterpretation or mistranslation of a text. Certain colours symbolize religious individuals and some religious songs serve as cultural symbols. Such symbols and referents play an important role in the translation of the text. The translator should take advantage of those symbols and referents.

### **Synonym, Antonym and Hyponym.**

Synonym is a word or expression that has the same or nearly the same meaning as another in the same language. Antonym is a word which has an opposite meaning of a word in that language. Hyponym denotes the different names by which a person is called (identified). But each name has its own significance in a particular context. The translator may give an explanation against each name in his translation and use the technique of adaptation. For example, the word *pulugu* in Tamil is an equivalent of *fib* in English. The word *lie* has a number of synonyms; each of them is so different in meaning that no replacement is possible. *Pulugu* in Tamil becomes a harmless lie in English. The word *lie* is synonymous with the Tamil word *poi*.

### **Ambiguity**

Linguistic ambiguity is just another challenge faced by the translator. Catford refers to the difficulties encountered in cultural and linguistic spheres. He mentions the linguistic untranslatability where the formal feature of the SL won't have a corresponding texture in the TL.

### **Example: In SL puns**

The ambiguity could be grammatical or lexical. Lexical ambiguity arises from the homonymy or polysemy of the word. In this case the translator has to choose the accurate equivalents in the TL according to the context. But in culture-bound words like idioms and puns the translator has to identify the corresponding idiomatic expressions in the TL so as to maintain the significance of the word in the SL. According to Nida an utterance may carry meanings in isolation; the translator should comprehend the overlapping of grammatical structure depending on the contextual background and avoid any ambiguity. For example, the Tamil word டுதுடு is ambiguous as it stands for both *religion* and *violent nature of an elephant in rut*. There is no such ambiguity in English where *religion* stands for *religion* itself. The art of punning in Tamil is lost in translation into English. According to Baker translation is possible by study of a meaning in its usage in the communicative situation and not by the linguistic system.

### **Collocations, fixed expressions and idioms**



Collocation refers to a combination of words for a language which happens more frequently. Peter New mark says that a collocation is an element of system in the lexis of a language. It may be syntagmatic or horizontal as a common structure or pragmatic or vertical consisting of words belonging to the same semantic field which may be substituted for each other or a semantic opposite. Such words become collocations only when they are arranged syntagmatically.

According to New mark collocations are the lexical “not grammatical” tramlines of the language. If there is a corresponding collocation in the TL, the translator must use these codes. They may be factual or extra linguistic. He must be conversant with the codes in order to follow or flout them.

மனிதர்கள் பொல்லாதவர்கள், பொய்யும் புனை சமத்துவதுமே அவர்களது வேலை

The translator has not been able to translate the collocation பொய்யும் புனை சமத்துவதும் owing to the fact that it is a culture-bound collocation. He has simply replaced it with: *Men are prone to lie and cheat*. This could be considered an equivalent to the original.

### Words and lexemes

Words and lexemes are either translatable or intraslatable depending on the nature and the knowledge of the translator. The word lexeme refers to a lexical unit such as a phrase, word, or stem. A word that cannot be translated is termed as a lexical gap. There is no one to one equivalence between SL and TL. The translator attempts to compensate this lap by resorting to techniques like adaptation, borrowing, calque, paraphrasing etc. Adaptation amounts to a preening of translation where the translator replaces a word with cultural connotation in SL with the corresponding word of cultural connotation in the TL. For example the phrase *படைவீரர்நினைவுதினம்* has been translated not as Veterans Day or Remembrance Day but as *cenotaph*.

Borrowing is another procedure where the translator borrows certain words or expressions from the SL and reproduce them in the TL. This is called



transliteration which is usually indicated in *italics*. Historical novels in Tamil contain a lot of cultural terms. A literal translation of such terms could rob them of their significance. The translator should do his best to retain their cultural character. For example, titles conferred on former kings in the olden times are usually transliterated into the TL. Specific names of certain trees and flowers are reproduced in the same manner despite the existence of their botanical names. Certain Tamil traditional food items are also transliterated. Both அரிசி and சோறு are translated into English as rice, wherein the cultural difference between அரிசி and சோறு is lost in translation into English.

### Calque

Calque is a type of borrowing where the structure or words taken from the SL through a literal translation by breaking an expression into its individual elements and thereafter putting them in a word for word translation in the TL. For example, பூமண்டலசக்கரவர்த்தி is translated into English as *emperor of the world* which amounts to a little bit of exaggeration. Similarly Tamil traditional foods like புளிக்கறி, சோளமா பணியாரம் may be literally translated as *tamarind curry* and *snacks made of corn flour* respectively. Such literal translations deprive those foods of their delicacy.

### Compensation

It is a translation procedure where the translator overcomes lack of equivalents in the TL by replacing these aspects with other elements or forms in the SL. For instance, in the case of *folk dance* in a celebration where the dancer is possessed by a deity the translator could use the colour imagery. He could say the dancers adorn their rack with garlands made of red flowers which is well known to everybody.

### Paraphrasing

It is a translation procedure where the translator replaces a word in the SL by a group of words or an expression in the TL.

Techniques of translation is further dealt with in the following examples:

Three people were travelling by sea, two of them in a small vessel and the third in another big vessel. A cyclone hit the small vessel which was about to be toppled. The other fellow travelling alone in the big vessel curses his companions as in Tamil: போகட்டும்போய்தொலையட்டும்அந்த  
 .....sandalkolaokarangaludan.

### **Conclusion**

Language is necessary for a display of human personality in its individual, social, national aspects. It is also a means of communication for one's ideas sentiments, aspirations, and emotions.

Semantics can be looked at from different points of view. Semantics is treated as a branch or structure of linguistics. A word may have different meanings depending on the context. The aspect of semantics in linguistics can be divided into two subheads: logical semantics and lexical semantics. Logical semantics is concerned with matters such as sense, reference, presupposition and implications whereas lexical semantics analyzes the meaning of words and relations between the words themselves. An ideal translator should do his best to focus on all these aspects.

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