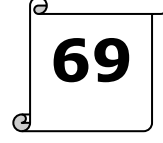


**Addressing Semantic Challenges in the Translation of Technical Terms:
A Study based on English to Tamil Translations of Sri Lankan Official Documents**

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Abstract

Translation of Official Documents in Legal translation is a specialized domain in translation studies that demands precision and responsibility, as even minor errors can lead to severe legal consequences. This significance arises from the necessity to convey the official information of a country accurately. Translating official documents from English to Tamil involves overcoming challenges such as unfamiliar terminology, the unavailability of synonyms in everyday language, Latin expressions, ambiguous meanings, emotional connotations, outdated terms, and the complexity of lengthy sentences. This study employs a comparative methodology, analyzing Tamil and English official documents and their translations. Data sources include personal experiences, secondary references, and discussion with experts. To address these challenges, the study highlights the importance of glossaries, consultations with subject matter experts, and the adoption of current, accurate terminology. These strategies ensure clarity and fidelity in translations, enabling the general public to comprehend official documents while maintaining the integrity of the source text. By systematically addressing the intricacies of official documents' translation, the research underscores the pivotal role of the translator in bridging linguistic and cultural divides within the legal domain.

Keywords: Legal translation, Official documents, Terminology, Glossaries, Subject matter expertise.

1.0 Introduction

Words form the foundation of language, and technical terms, particularly in legal contexts, represent a specialized vocabulary that underpins the communication of official and institutional ideas. Official terminology, a hallmark of legal language, embodies its technical nature and creates unique challenges in translation. While such characteristics are common across languages, each legal lexicon reflects the distinctiveness of its cultural and legal framework. The complexity of translating official documents arises from the interplay of linguistic, cultural, and legal systems, where terms often lack direct equivalents due to the unique socio-legal contexts of the source and target languages.

Official terminology emerges from and mirrors the legal systems it represents. This legal-cultural embeddedness leads to significant challenges in translation, as the legal concepts inherent in one language rarely align precisely with those of another. Such discrepancies highlight the semantic complexities inherent in translating Sri Lankan official documents from English to Tamil. These challenges fall under the broader category of legal translation, a highly specialized form of Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) translation. Legal translation focuses on enabling communication across legal systems, often requiring translators to navigate substantial lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic barriers.



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Wilss (1994) notes that while translation in LSP fields often transcends cultural boundaries, it also contains universal elements shaped by the cognitive and conceptual universality of human language. In the realm of legal translation, however, the unique and culture-specific dimensions of legal systems play a more pronounced role. Terms within legal discourse act as repositories of specialized knowledge, reflecting complex interrelations of concepts, properties, and actions (Sager 1998). These terms are entrenched in intricate cognitive structures, and their translation requires a deep understanding of the knowledge systems they represent.

Langacker's (2000) cognitive approach emphasizes that lexical items serve as flexible access points to broader conceptual frameworks, evoking meaning dynamically within specific contexts. Legal terms, therefore, operate as cognitive routines, activating relevant background knowledge and referencing multiple cognitive domains. This interconnectedness underscores the semantic challenges of translating technical terms, as meaning emerges not only from linguistic structures but also from the broader conceptual and legal frameworks they inhabit.

Intertextuality, a defining feature of legal concepts, further complicates translation. The meanings of legal terms are shaped by their interaction with other legal texts, including legislation and case law, making it improbable that terms in two different legal systems will align perfectly. As a result, equivalence in legal translation is rarely absolute, requiring translators to navigate semantic gaps and cultural nuances.

Translation strategies in this context range from foreignization, which retains the source language's conceptual framework, to domestication, which adapts the text to align with the target language's cultural and legal expectations (Venuti 1998). While domestication has historically dominated translation practices, particularly in technical fields, it risks obscuring the source language's legal nuances. As Kierzkowska (2002) argues, target-language-oriented equivalents can mislead readers into assuming legal concepts are identical across systems, potentially resulting in misinterpretation.

Sri Lankan official documents, rich in culturally and legally specific terminology, pose a unique challenge for translators working from English to Tamil. The translator must balance fidelity to the source text with the need for comprehensibility and functional equivalence in the target language. Given the influence of linguistic relativism (Sapir-Whorf hypothesis), where language shapes perception, translators must also contend with the difficulty of bridging distinct cognitive and cultural frameworks.

This study, therefore, explores the semantic challenges encountered in translating technical terms within Sri Lankan official documents. By analyzing translation strategies, cognitive frameworks, and linguistic equivalence, it seeks to provide insights into addressing the complexities inherent in this specialized form of translation.

2.0 Material and Methods

This research employs mixed methodology comprising both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to explore the challenges of legal translation. The quantitative aspect involves discussion with Government Translators to gather insights into practical translation experiences and challenges. The qualitative approach focuses on a detailed semantic analysis of documents and their translations, identifying errors and providing appropriate corrections. Each sentence is analyzed with suggested accurate translations, emphasizing precision and clarity. The study incorporates comparative and



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descriptive methods: the comparative method examines structural differences between English and Tamil in translation, while the descriptive method provides a thorough explanation of the findings. Primary data for the research was sourced from the Central Government of Sri Lanka, the Central Bank, and government departments in the Northern Province, as well as interviews with Government Translators. Secondary data was derived from research articles, journals, books, and other scholarly resources, enriching the study's theoretical foundation.

3.0 Results and Discussions

The Results and Discussion section focuses on identifying and analyzing specific issues in the translation of technical terms from English to Tamil within Sri Lankan official documents. Through a detailed examination of selected examples, this section highlights how omissions, misinterpretations, or inaccuracies in translation impact the clarity and accuracy of the target text. Each example is critically analyzed to reveal semantic discrepancies, structural differences, and contextual challenges faced by translators. The discussion elaborates on the strategies employed to address these shortcomings, such as revising translations using dynamic equivalence, paraphrasing, and recognized procedures. The analysis underscores the importance of preserving the source text's intended meaning while adapting the language to align with cultural and contextual nuances of the Tamil audience.

Example 01:

Source Text: Should have completed an active and satisfactory service period of five years (5) immediately prior to the date of promotion.

(Circular: Determination of Interim Provisions for the Service of Professions Supplementary to Medicine, No: 01-56/2019)

Target Text: பதிவியயர்வ திகதிக்கு கிட்டிய ஐந்து வருடத்திற்குள் (05) திருப்திகரமான சேவைக்காலத்தை பூர்த்தி செய்கிறதல்.

Revised Target Text: பதிவியயர்வ திகதிக்கு கிட்டிய ஐந்து வருடத்திற்குள் (05) செயல்திறன் மிக்க திருப்திகரமான சேவைக்காலத்தை பூர்த்தி செய்திருத்தல்.

The Tamil translation of the SL text failed to include the term 'active'. The translator rendered it as 'திருப்திகரமான சேவைக் காலத்தைப் பூர்த்தி செய்தல்' but it should have been translated as 'செயல்திறன்மிக்க திருப்திகரமான சேவைக் காலத்தைப் பூர்த்தி செய்தல்.' The term 'active' signifies a readiness to engage in physically energetic pursuits. While its synonyms include சுறுசுறுப்பான, செயல், and செய்வினை, the intended contextual meaning is செயல்திறன்மிக்க and ஆற்றல்மிக்க in the Tamil language. This conveys a sense of energetic work and interest in a specific matter. In English, 'active' functions as an adjective, but in the Tamil translation, the term was overlooked by the translator. The revised translation aligns more closely with the dynamic equivalence approach, aiming not only for the literal meaning of 'active' but also capturing its contextual and functional significance. According to Nida & Taber (1982, p.173), a quality translation preserves the meaning while potentially restructuring the form, as seen in the paraphrasing of 'active' as செயல்திறன்மிக்க in the revised text, consistent with the idea of restructuring to maintain the intended meaning.

Example 02:

Source Text:

5. During the Service period of (6) years in segment II “B”/Grade III.

(A) Have all increments been earned as at the prescribed date.

(Circular: Determination of Interim Provisions for the Service of Professions Supplementary to Medicine, No: 01-56/2019)

Target Text:



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II 'ஆ' பிரிவின்/ III தரத்தின் ஆறு (06) வருட தொடர்ச்சியான சேவைக் காலத்தினுள்,
(அ) சகல சம்பள ஏற்றங்களையும் உழைத்துப் பெற்றுள்ளீரா?.

Revised Target Text:

II 'ஆ' பிரிவின்/ III தரத்தின் ஆறு (06) வருட தொடர்ச்சியான சேவைக் காலத்தினுள்,
(அ) பரிந்துரைக்கப்பட்ட திகதியில் சகல சம்பள ஏற்றங்களையும் உழைத்துப் பெற்றுள்ளீரா?.

The above texts discuss an issue in translation. It points out that in the translation from one language to another, the phrase "prescribed date" was omitted. The significance of the term "prescribed date" is explained as "பரிந்துரைக்கப்பட்ட திகதி, நிர்ணயிக்கப்பட்ட திகதி" in Tamil, which translates to the date specified or decided upon officially. The translation failed to include the meaning of "prescribed date" which is crucial for understanding the intended message. Specifically, the passage suggests that the translation should have included the phrase "பரிந்துரைக்கப்பட்ட திகதி" to appropriately convey the concept of a date that has been officially prescribed or determined. The consequence of this omission, according to the passage, is that the target readers of the translated text are left without precise information about the specific details mentioned in the original document. In this case, the readers may miss out on understanding the exact facts related to the circulated information, as the omission of the term "prescribed date" in translation affects the overall clarity and accuracy of the content. At this point, the translator used Newmark's (1964, p. 89) Recognized Translation procedure in the revised target text. According to him, translators should typically use the official or generally accepted translation of any institutional term. If necessary, the translator can provide a gloss, indirectly expressing disagreement with the official version.

Example 03:

Source Text: Date of acquisition of the relevant proficiency level in the other official language:

(Circular: Determination of Interim Provisions for the Service of Professions Supplementary to Medicine, No: 01-56/2019)

Target Text: 8. அரசு மொழித் தேர்ச்சியை டுர்க்கி செய்க கிகதி.

Revised Target Text: 8.வேறு அரசுமொழியில் புலமைபெற்ற தேர்ச்சி மட்டம் பெற்றுக்கொள்ளப்பட்ட திகதி.

In the Source Language (SL), the expression 'in other official language' was excluded. The translation should convey the specific date of attainment and the proficiency level achieved in another official language, which, unfortunately, the translator failed to provide. Instead, the translated phrase reads as 'அரசுமொழித் தேர்ச்சியைப் பூர்த்தி செய்த திகதி' ('The date on which the official language proficiency was completed'). This discrepancy leads to confusion among the intended audience, as they question the nature of proficiency and the language in question. Therefore, translators must consider the contextual nuances of language-related details in all instances to avoid misinterpretation. This modification is consistent with Newmark's concept of paraphrasing (1964, p.83), which proposes that paraphrasing entails either expanding upon or elucidating the significance of a specific portion of the text. In this instance, the selection of contextually relevant terminology improves the overall excellence and faithfulness of the translation.

Example 04:

Source Text: We are passing through perhaps the most painful period of human civilization. I doubt if there is anybody who is unable to comprehend this reality. Nevertheless, we must make every effort to conquer these challenging times.

(Budget Speech – 2022, p.1)

Target Text: நாம் தற்பொழுது கடந்து சென்று கொண்டிருப்பது மனித நாகரீகத்தின் மிகவும் வேதனைமிக்க காலப்பகுதியொன்றினையாகும். இக்கசப்பான உண்மையினை உணர்ந்து



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கொள்ள முடியாதவர் எவரும் இருப்பாரெனநான் நினைக்கவில்லை. எவ்வாறாயினும், நாம் இந்த சவால் மிக்க காலத்தினை வெற்றிகரமாக எதிர்கொள்ள வேண்டியுள்ளது.

Revised Target Text: நாம் தற்பொழுது கடந்து சென்று கொண்டிருப்பது மனித நாகரீகத்தின் மிகவும் வேதனைமிக்க காலப்பகுதியொன்றினையாகும். இக்கசப்பான உண்மையினை உணர்ந்து கொள்ள முடியாதவர் எவரும் இருப்பாரெனநான் நினைக்கவில்லை. எவ்வாறாயினும், நாம் இந்த சவால் மிக்க காலத்தினை வெற்றிகொள்ள ஒவ்வொரு முயற்சியும் எடுக்க வேண்டும்.

The idea conveyed in the source text is about facing a challenging period in human civilization and the necessity of making efforts to overcome these challenging times. It expresses the recognition of the painful reality that everyone can comprehend, and despite the difficulty, it emphasizes the importance of making every effort to conquer these challenging times. In the translation of the source language (SL), the phrase "every effort" has been left out. The correct translation should be ஒவ்வொரு முயற்சியும் எடுக்கப்படல் வேண்டும். This omission may lead to a misunderstanding among TL readers. Newmark (1964, p.80) pointed out that a translator who prioritizes their readership may intentionally choose to under-translate, opting for more general terms to enhance clarity, simplicity, and occasionally brevity, even to the extent of omitting certain words during translation, however, A translator has to account for every SL word, not to translate it. Therefore, it is essential to provide appropriate translation for the clarity of the target reader.

Example 05:

Source: My father's election to the State Council in 1945 was a key political turning point for the RuhunuGiruwaya. To date, the land and the lives of the people of Ruhuna bears evidence of Mr.D.A. Rajapaksa's futuristic and visionary patriotism.

(Budget Speech, p.1)

Target Text: 1945 இல் எனது தந்தை அரச சட்டசபைக்கு தெரிவானது ருஹுணுகிருவாவின் அரசியல் மாற்றத்திற்கான திருப்பு முனையாக அமைந்தது. டி.ஏ.ராஜபக்ச அவர்கள் எதிர்காலத்துக்குரிய நாட்டுப் பற்றாளர் என்பதனை ருஹுணு மண்ணும் மக்களும் இன்றுவரை சான்று பகர்கின்றனர்.

Revised Target Text: 1945 இல் எனது தந்தை அரசசட்டசபைக்குதெரிவானது ருஹுணுகிருவாவின் அரசியல்மாற்றத்திற்கான திருப்புமுனையாக அமைந்தது. டி.ஏ. ராஜபக்சஅவர்கள் எதிர்காலத்துக்குரிய தூரநோக்குடைய நாட்டுப்பற்றாளர் என்பதனை ருஹுணுமண்ணும் மக்களும் இன்றுவரை சான்றுபகர்கின்றனர்.

The source text provides information about the significance of the speaker's father being elected to the State Council in 1945, marking a crucial political turning point for the *RuhunuGiruwaya*. It emphasizes Mr. D.A. Rajapaksa's futuristic and visionary patriotism, asserting that the land and lives of the people of Ruhuna still bear evidence of his impact. In the English sentence "Rajapaksa's futuristic and visionary patriotism" the term "Visionary" was omitted in the target language. It should be translated as தூரநோக்குடைய நாட்டுப்பற்றாளர் but it was translated as எதிர்காலத்துக்குரிய நாட்டுப் பற்றாளர். The discrepancy in translation is attributed to the use of Newmark's (1964, p.12) Literal Translation procedure, as mentioned in his work. Newmark suggests that translators should not be afraid of literal translation and can use a target language (TL) word that looks the same or nearly the same as the source language (SL) word.



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4.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, the discussion has highlighted the significant transformation in terminology mining. As experts in quickly locating the necessary information (Austermühl 2001: 102), translators have eagerly adopted new technological advancements, which have replaced traditional paper dictionaries as the preferred tool. However, it is important to note that both traditional and electronic tools are complementary to one another. The modern methods of terminology mining enhance not only translation speed but, more importantly, the quality of translations. These methods allow translators to improve the functionality of their translations by achieving a more natural, idiomatic style one that feels 'unmarked' and doesn't draw attention to itself as a translation.

This is especially important in inverse translations, where translators work in a language other than their mother tongue and are more susceptible to the influence of the source language. Furthermore, the new tools help translators use terminology familiar to experts, facilitating cross-cultural communication between professionals. These tools allow translators to identify conventional, widely recognized equivalents of legal terms that connect to pertinent legal knowledge structures. Consequently, this results in a more standardized translation with partially restored intertextual links.

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