

Investigation of the challenges of translating military terms from English to Tamil

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the common challenges faced by the undergraduates in Department of Translation Studies, University of Jaffna in translating military terms from English to Tamil. To achieve the objective, the researcher selected a sample of (20) undergraduates in Department of Translation Studies from University of Jaffna, and they were administered an English to Tamil translation test, containing 20 sentences, reveal that most common challenges confronted by passed-out graduates are terminological knowledge due to the limited experiences and subject knowledge in the military field. It shows the need for more attention on military translation in academic institutions in Sri Lanka. According to the identified challenges, a number of recommendations are suggested together with the need for military translation as a course unit in the Translation Studies in Sri Lanka to generate translators with sufficient terminological and subject knowledge concerning the military sector to socio – economic development through cultural studies.

Key words: *Academic institutions, socio-economic development, military field, military translation*

1. Introduction

Generally, translation is a process of transferring the one language text into target language text. Here, a written document or an idea is converting from one language into another language by a translator. People seek to acquire knowledge, cultural aspects, and attitudes of another individual or society to develop and achieve progress through translation. Consequently, the sector of translation has become a significant field in the contemporary world.

Newmark (1988) indicates that, Translation is neither a theory nor science, but it is a group of knowledge. In the earliest period, translation was mainly applied for spreading religions all over the world and later it spread to other fields like literature, technology, law and so on. Accordingly, technical translation is one of the highly specialized translation genres. Kingscott

(2002) mentions that, it comprises a broad sector and 90% of global translations come under it.

Al-Harahesheh (2013) emphasizes that, military translation means the translation of different documents related to the military field. As per the investigation concerned with the translation of military terms, it should be aware that they are different from other kinds of terms. The translator has to encounter many challenges during the process of translation. Such challenges make military translation one of the most difficulties of technical translation. The researcher has found that translators, graduates, and undergraduates of translation studies face many challenges and barriers when translating English military texts, especially when rendering them into Tamil. However, there is no any research article published in Sri Lanka, addressing the challenges of translating translating military terms from English to Tamil and the techniques or strategies to overcome those challenges. Accordingly, this study attempts to identify the common challenges encountered by graduates in Translation studies when translating military texts from English to Tamil.

The present study will assist to identify the challenges of translating military terms from English to Tamil. Furthermore, it shows the ways to overcome such challenges that can be useful when translating military texts from English to Tamil. Accordingly, it will facilitate Sri Lankan translators and Translation studies undergraduates to produce most efficient military translation works within the country.

2. Literature review

Commonly, translation is a process of converting a written document or an idea from source language to target language. Foster (1958) indicates, translation can be identified as the act performed by the translator. It means the translation is a communication process that takes place between two languages.

Newmark (1991) suggests that, translation is a craft consisting of the attempts to replace a written message or a statement in one language with a message or statement in another language.

Catford (1965) claim, translation is a process of substituting a source language text with its equivalent in the target language. It indicates translation as a process that replaces the most accurate meaning of a text extended in source language in target language.

According to the purpose translation, translation can be categorized into two types such as literary translation and Non-literary translation. The main objective of a literary translation is

to entertain the target language community. Non-literary translation is the process of transferring non-literary works from one language to another language with the intention of sharing knowledge with the target language community. According to the Gotti (2006), Non-literary translation comprises of two main categories namely, general translation and specialized translation. General translation is the translation of documents that do not belong to any specific type or do not belong to any type. Specialized translation refers to the translation process materials and document that belongs to highly specialized field and are translated to a particular group of people. Therefore, technical translation plays a vital role in specialized translation (Williams & Chesterman 2002).

Newmark (1988) mentioned that technical translation is one part of specialized translation and it makes technical translation differ from other forms of translation. He further indicates that, terminology is the most powerful factor when it comes to the most technical translation. In addition to the Newmark, Williams (2002) claims technical translation covers the translation of many kinds of specialized texts in science and technology or other disciplines namely economics, medicine, and law and so on. Therefore, these texts needed a high level of subject knowledge and a mastery of the relevant terminology.

Byrne (2009) indicates, the translation of technical terms has been one of the prominent fields of study in the translation sector since the early years of the 20th century. After the World War 1, technology became more prominent than any other field. As a result, technical terms in various fields have been applied.

According to Al – Imaian (2014), military translation is a type of technical translation requiring the translator to choose the most appropriate equivalent in the target language text to provide the most accurate meaning denoted by the source language.

Al –Kaabi (2008) claims that, the origin of military translation dates to the 20th century with the advent of new technology especially, new weapons, tools and military equipment. In that period, most of the countries were in a competition to be the supreme nation. At their competition, they understood that military power is the best method to be the most powerful nation in the world. Accordingly, new weapons and advanced military tools were invented in many powerful nations. Which created a massive global weapons market to import and export weapons. This created impossible to ignore the significance of military translation.

According to Al Ali (2017) military translation can be identified as a threshold between life and death for the people working in the military field. To know how to use a weapon, one needs

to be familiar with the instructions on how to operate it properly, most equipment are composed in English and when targeting t other language it requires a person with enough competence to render the terms to the most appropriate equivalences.

3. Research methods

This part includes a review of methods applied by the researcher in the present study. A qualitative method was adopted in this research. The participants of this study include undergraduates of Department of Translation Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Jaffna, who have both theoretical and practical knowledge in the translation field.

The researcher applied a translation test as the method of collecting data. The purpose of this test was to identify the challenges in translating military terms from English to Tamil. The translation test includes twenty English sentences based on the common military list of the European Union published in the official journal of the European Union in 2020 and the participants of this study were given one week (7 days) to translate the given English sentences into Tamil.

The participants were allowed to use any sources to do the test. The original document in English covered all three forces like Army, Navy and Air force in the European Union. The selected text contains equipment covered by Council common position 2008/944/CFSP defining common rules governing the control of exports of military technology and equipment.

4. Results and Discussions

By applying thematic analysis, data were analyzed. In the process of analyzing data, the text results were carefully read and compared with the original translation and military glossaries, and marked the challenges faced by the participants of Department of Translation studies. The observed difficulties were marked as challenges and divided into following categories as:

1. Ambiguity
2. Non-equivalence
3. Terminology
4. Subject knowledge

The identified challenges were discussed with related to the definitions introduced by various academic proceeding.

Non-equivalence is identified as one of the challenges in translating military terms from English to Tamil. Commonly, Non-equivalence occurs due to the cultural differences between two languages. Non-equivalence at a word level takes place when the target language has no

direct equivalent for a word which occurs in the source text. In military translation, Non-equivalence takes place due to the disparities between military technologies and different language traditions between two language communities.

All the participants have translated sentence number (11) Non-equivalently. Therefore, it is compulsory to focus on the Non-equivalent matters in the particular sentence.

“Aero-engines designed or modified for military use which have been certified by civil aviation authorities of one or more European Union member states or Wassennar Arrangements participating states for use in “civil aircraft”, or specifically designed components therefor;”

In this sentence, the words *Aero-engines*, *Civil Aviation Authorities*, *Wassennar Arrangements*, and *Civil Craft* are the technical terms. *Aero- engines* is the the power component of an aircraft propulsion system, *Civil Aviation Authority* is the statutory body that regulates and oversees all aspects of civil aviation within the territory of a country and air space above it, *Wassennar Arrangements* is an export control regime within 41 participating states that promotes transparency of national export control regimes on conventional aims and dual use goods and technologies, *Civil aircraft* is domestic or foreign government owned air craft operated for commercial purposes.

Some of these terms are already included in English Dictionaries and English military glossaries. To the word “*air craft*” participants used விமானம், ஆகாய விமானம், வானூர்திப் பொறி, விமான எஞ்சின், எயார் கிராப்ட். However, the exact equivalent applied in the target text is “*வான் இயந்திரம்*”. It is hard to identify a specific Tamil terms for “*Wassenaar Arrangements*”. The participants of this study have directly translated the term into Tamil as “*வாசெனார் ஏற்பாடு*”. However, the Tamil text applied this term as “*ஏற்றுமதிக் கட்டுப்பாடுகள். “இராணுவ பயன்பாட்டிற்காக வடிவமைக்கப்பட்ட அல்லது மாற்றியமைக்கப்பட்ட ஏரோ என்ஜின்கள், ஒன்று அல்லது ஒன்றுக்கு மேற்பட்ட ஐரோப்பிய ஒன்றியத்தி் உறுப்பு நாடுகளின் சிவில் விமானப் போக்குவரத்து அதிகாரிகளினால் சான்றுபடுத்தப்பட்டவை அல்லது “சிவில் விமானங்களில்” பயன்படுத்துவதற்காக வாசெனார் ஏற்பாட்டில் பங்கேற்கும் மாநிலங்கள் அல்லது அதற்கென பிரத்தியேகமாக வடிவமைக்கப்பட்ட பாகங்கள்.” (participant number – 13)*

“ஒன்று அல்லது ஒன்றுக்கு மேலான உள்நாட்டு வான் போக்குவரத்து அதிகாரிகளினால் ஐரோப்பிய ஒன்றியத்தின் உறுப்பு நாடுகளினால் உள்நாட்டு விமானப் போக்குவரத்து உபயோகத்திற்காக அத்தாட்சிப்படுத்தப்பட்ட இராணுவ நோக்கங்களுக்காக சிறப்பாக வடிவமைக்கப்பட்ட அல்லது மாற்றப்பட்ட ஆகாய இயந்திரங்கள் அல்லது அதற்காக சிறப்பாக வடிவமைக்கப்பட்ட கருவிகள்”.

(participant number – 07)

These two translations never provide the intended meaning of the English sentence and make the target readers unable to grab the sense. Which means there is no direct equivalent for the terms aero-engines, wassennar arrangements? Therefore, it is obvious that Non-equivalence can be a challenge in translating military terms from English to Tamil.

When analyzing the result of the translation test, the study identified that the participants have been confronted with ambiguity. Therefore, this is another linguistic challenge confronted by undergraduates of Translation Studies during the process of translating military terms from English to Tamil.

Crystal (1988) claims, ambiguity takes place at two levels such as structural ambiguity and lexical ambiguity. Structural ambiguity explains to the situation in which a sentence may have a different meaning and lexical ambiguity arises when a word has more than one generally accepted meaning. Ambiguity creates the audience confused and totally changes the meaning intended by the author. Out of these two varieties of ambiguity, lexical ambiguity has taken place in the given translation text.

“Ground vehicles and components thereof, specially designed or modified for military use”.

The participants confronted ambiguity when they rendered the term “Ground vehicle” into Tamil. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, “Ground” is surface of the earth or of a piece of land. It denotes several meaning in Tamil as நிலம், தரை, மண், பரப்பு, இடம், மைதானம். Among these synonyms all the participants except participant number 7, 3,4 and 10 have used the word “மைதான வாகனங்கள்” and the remaining participants except participant number 5 have overcome the challenge of ambiguity in this sentence by using correct Tamil form that provides the exact meaning expressed in the English term.

“இராணுவ பயன்பாட்டிற்காக விசேடமாக வடிவமைக்கப்பட்ட அல்லது மாற்றியமைக்கப்பட்ட மைதான வாகனங்கள் மற்றும் அதன் பாகங்கள்”. (Participant number 7)

“இராணுவ பயன்பாட்டிற்காக விசேடமாக வடிவமைக்கப்பட்ட அல்லது மாற்றியமைக்கப்பட்ட நில வாகனங்கள் மற்றும் அதன் பாகங்கள்”. (Participant number 5)

The appropriate Tamil term for “Ground” in this context is “தரைவழி”. In this sentence, it talks about the vehicles that are specially designed and modified for the military purposes to use on top of the earth’s surface. “மைதான வாகனங்கள்” does not carry a gravity as the term “தரைவழி” does. As a result, an ambiguity makes the target readers or audience confused.

Terminology is another linguistic barrier faced by undergraduates of Translation Studies when translating military terms from English to Tamil. Mastery of relevant terminology is one of the main requirements for a successful technical translation. Further, subject knowledge plays an important role in distinguishing the military terms with contextual meaning among other common terminologies. All the sentences that were given to the translation test were comprised with technical terminologies related to the military field. In addition, the researcher found that most of the participants have encountered difficulties when rendering those technical terms from English to Tamil.

All the participants confronted terminological difficulties in more than ten sentences make it one of the most common challenges in translating military terms from English to Tamil. Terminologies related to the military field are highly important. Each participant has a terminological difficulty in the 15th and 17th sentences. Therefore, the researcher will consider on the said sentences respectively to analyze the terminological issues.

“Air Independent Propulsion” allows a submerged submarine to operate its propulsion system, without access to atmospheric oxygen, for a longer time than the batteries would have otherwise allowed”.

When translating the above sentence, every participants has failed to render the terms such as *“Air Independent Propulsion”*, *“Propulsion system”* into their appropriate Tamil term instead of giving the appropriate terminology as “வளிச் சுயாதீன உந்துவிசை” and “உந்துவிசை முறைமை” respectively. They have translated these terms into Tamil as “காற்றுச் சுதந்திர தள்ளுதல்”, “தள்ளும் அமைப்பு” respectively.

“காற்றுச் சுதந்திர தள்ளுதல்” பெற்றறிகள் அனுமதி வழங்குவதை விட அதிக நேரம் வளிமண்டல ஓட்சிசனை அணுகாது மேற்கொள்ள நீரில் நீர்மூழ்கிக்கப்பல் அதன் தள்ளும் அமைப்பினை செயற்படுத்துவதற்கு அனுமதி வழங்கும்”. (Participant number -7)

In military translation, most equivalents and standard terms must be used to communicate its appropriate meaning. However, the participants do not denote the accurate meaning intended by its English text. Further, *“Air Independent Propulsion”* means any marine propulsion technology that allows a non-nuclear submarine to operate without access to atmosphere oxygen. Therefore, it is a regular military system having a specific name. Therefore, the translators cannot replace the source language name with various other terms in target language and must be specific when translating the names of military equivalents. The exact translation of this sentence will be,

“வளிச் சுயாதீன உந்துவிசை” மின்கலங்கள் அனுதிப்பதை விட நீண்டநேரம் வளிமண்டல ஓட்சிசனை அணுகாமல் செயற்படுத்துவதற்கு நீரில் மூழ்கிய நீர்மூழ்கிக் கப்பல் அதன் உந்துவிசை முறைமையை செயற்படுத்துவதற்கு அனுமதியளிக்கும்”.

Meanwhile, “*Active Signature Control*” is a specified signature based detection is one of the most common techniques used to address software threats at the military system. When translating this sentence, every participant has failed to render the term into its appropriate Tamil term. Instead of giving the appropriate terminology as “ஆற்றல்மிக்க கையொப்பக் கட்டுப்பாடுகள்” they have translated the term as “செயலில் கையெழுத்து கட்டுப்பாடு”.

As mentioned earlier, in military translation most appropriate equivalent must be used to communicate its inherent meaning. The results of the participants do not denote the accurate meaning intended by its English term.

Further, “*Cyber Incident Response*” when translating this term into Tamil, none of the participants were able to convey the appropriate Tamil terminology for the term. “*Cyber Incident Response*” means, the process of exchanging necessary information on a cyber-security incident with individuals or organizations responsible for conducting or coordinating to address the cyber security incident. The participants have translated is as “சைபர் எதிர்பாராத பதில்” “இணைய எதிர்பாராத பிரதிபலிப்பு”. However, the appropriate Tamil term for above mentioned term will be “இணைய பாதுகாப்பு எதிர்ச்செயல்” according to the considered Tamil translation.

When analyzing subject knowledge as a challenges faced by the participants, the researcher will focus on 3rd and 5th sentences as of the given translation test.

“*Iron powder (CAS 7439-89-6) with particle size of 3 mm or less produced by reduction of iron oxide with hydrogen*”.

In the above sentence, CAS reflects a unique numerical identifier assigned by the chemical abstract services also referred as CAS registry number. These numbers are generally serial numbers with a check digit. The registry maintained by CAS is an authoritative collection of disclosed chemical substance information in the scientific literature.

In this case the translator of the considered Tamil document used (சீஏஎஸ் எண் 7439-89-6) as it in the English version without translating the intended meaning of the abbreviation. This is one of the techniques usually apply in the translation field. Further, this unique number does not have the equivalent in Tamil language. Moreover, the Tamil translator has given a brief footnote for the considered number in the end of the page itself.

All the participants of this translation test have confused with this number and they did not apply any techniques as the Tamil translator had applied. Instead of the technique, they have produced the number as (CAS 7439-89-6) as mentioned in the source text.

Therefore, it is brings to focus that those participants were lack in subject knowledge regarding the scientific or chemical identifiers. The translators should know that there are specific numbers for chemicals.

According to the result, out of 20 translated sentences were identified with technical problems suggesting that every participant has found terminological difficulties in more than 13 sentences. Meanwhile, lack of subject knowledge has become a decisive challenge for the participants. Non-equivalence and ambiguity have occurred on fever occasions as non-equivalence in 09 sentences out of the total.

5. Conclusion

It is obvious that military translation creates a huge contribution to the betterment of military field . The objective of this study was to investigate the most common challenges faced by the undergraduate Translation studies students in University of Jaffna. When translating military terms from English to Tamil, the study revealed that the most common challenge was the lack of terminological knowledge, subject knowledge and experience in the military sector. It further identified that there is not enough attention on military related terms and expressions in Translation Studies in Sri Lanka. Due to the connections between military related subject knowledge, it identified that person to perform well in military translation or to overcome challenges regarding military terminologies during the testing process, the participants faced problems of Non –equivalence and ambiguity as a result of the insufficient knowledge regarding English and Tamil military terms. Undergraduates do not have a clear idea about linguistic and non-linguistic strategies to overcome the difficulties faced in the military translation.

This study provides several suggestions to enhance the military translation among university undergraduates who are following Translation studies. First of all, it is more important to refer glossaries when translating military documents. In addition, there is a requirement to focus on technical translation in Sri Lanka. Further, there is a need for resources related to the military translation. Therefore, they will help to produce high quality military translation in Sri Lanka. Additionally, the institution related to the Translation studies and military sector should encourage learners to produce researches, glossaries addressing the military translation. In

conclusion, above said steps will contribute to reduce challenges Faced in translation of military contexts and developing the quality of translation.

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