Chapter-IX
The Problems in My Translations
9.0 Translating Telugu Short Stories (Problems in my translations)

I have translated a few Telugu short stories and in this chapter I present a few problems I encountered in my mission. Translation of Telugu short fiction into English poses many problems. Dialect is one of the critical problems that a translator has to resolve. The translator's job becomes more challenging when dialect is liberally used in dialogues as well as in narration. The rural speech patterns with rich local images present an insurmountable barrier to the translator. There have been many attempts to translate the dialect into English—a task which was not always very successful. For this reason the urbanized vernacular fiction has widely been preferred by translators to the fiction with dialect. As already mentioned, the village-based stories abound in innumerable problems, since they contain many untranslatable expressions.

9.1 Son of the Soil:

*munnutinnamaniSi* is a Telugu short story by C.Devaputra. The writer employs typical *Rayalaseema* dialect in the dialogues and for the narration he uses 'standard' language. The protagonist of this pathetic story, Chennappa prefers to die in his land rather than migrating to town.

9.1.1 Translation of the title:

The very title of this story poses a problem. The title of a short story normally has the clue value and refers to the theme or central idea of the story. So while translating
the titles mere semantic translation may not carry the illocutionary force and effect of the original.

The title 'mannutinnamaniSi' (soil-eat-past-person) suggests the old man's association with the land at the pragmatic level and at the semantic level it refers to a person who has eaten the soil. In fact it is not an established collocation in SL. It is a creative modification of a popular expression 'mannutinnapaamu' which means the snake that has eaten soil and alludes to a sedentary and immovable nature. I have translated the title as 'Son of the Soil', which has no relation to the original title at semantic level. But it conveys the illocutionary force of the original. Newmark makes a proposition that "a Source language word should not be translated into a Target Language word which has another obvious one-to-one equivalent in the Source Language" (Newmark, 1981). 'Son of the Soil' has another equivalent in SL-'bhumi putruDu'. So the TL title does not pass the back translation test. However "well established collocations are the exceptions to this rule. Though the back translation test is useful, it is never decisive"(Newmark, 1981). It is interesting to observe that this story has been translated by different translators into Hindi and Kannada languages with titles-'bhumiputr' and 'manninamaga' respectively. Both titles confirm my choice of the English title. Though I have deviated from the original title, I have conveyed the sense in the TL title too.

9.1.2

Food items and their Preparation:

"sankaTi tinduwuraal" amTuu mogunni pilicimdi obulamma. (mannutinna maniSi 124)

"Come and eat sankati," Obulamma called her husband impatiently.
The original has a reference to food item 'sankaTi'. The English terms like pudding or porridge cannot be considered equivalents, as for instance raagi muddalu / sankaTi are morsels of cooked raagi flour. It is often eaten with groundnut chutney. This food item is not familiar to even a few SL readers, leave alone TL reader, as they are region specific. As I have no equivalent in TL, I retained the term in Italics. It would have been better if I had given a note. However the TL reader can make out that the term refers to food item from the context. Further the terseness of the original cannot be recreated in the TL. The vocative 'raa' has to be translated as a separate unit---'come'---in TL. I have employed more than three words in TL whereas it is terse in SL with only two words. The agglutinative nature of the SL makes it possible. But it may not be so in all occasions.

"appuDee cettiwaa vaṃTa, ippuDee kadaa esaru peDitiwi poyyi mimda!" (mannutinna maniSi 124)

"Have you finished cooking?" Getting up he said, "You have just begun it!" (Son of the Soil 54)

esaru is a process of cooking food i.e. boiling water to cook food. As I thought excessive description of the process might deviate the attention of the TL reader, I used a general term, 'cooking'. Further I failed to capture the dialectical variation that the writer used in SL. 'cettiwa' is variant of 'cestiwa' which means 'have you done or finished'. This is often used by unsophisticated SL speakers. Thus it also suggests the social status of the speaker in SL.
Night. It was time for food. (Son of the Soil 59)

In the SL the writer has used the word ‘taagee’ (drink) instead of ‘tinee’ (eat). The use of the word indicates the food habits and also suggests the poverty and social status of the family described in the story. Further ‘buvvalu’ is class term which only the poor use in this context. The social class sense has not been conveyed in TL. I have translated into a blanket term—‘food’.

‘muuTlu muuTlu senigittanaalu daanTloo poosi wacceedee, aakaasam dikku cuusukumTaa umDeedi.’ (mannutinna maniSi 125)

‘We dump bags of grains in to it and look at the sky for rains. (Son of the Soil 55)

Here I should have translated ‘sengaittnaalu’ of SL as ‘ground nut seeds’ in TL. I have used a general term ‘grains’ because it also suggests ‘seeds’ however it has no reference to ground nut. Further it is common in SL to repeat a word to suggest the quantity as ‘muuTlu muuTlu’. I have used the expression ‘dump bags of rains’ which carries the sense.

Obulamma bought water in a big brass container and gave it to him. (Son of the Soil 54)
For 'cembu' I thought of using 'a jug' in TL but I found it too sophisticated. In fact it does not signify its shape. 'Pot' cannot be the equivalent because it is made of earth. Hence I literally described the object as 'a big brass container'. I feel that this is an instance of inadequate translation, as 'container' does not carry any sense of shape. I should have used 'cembu' with a note.

9.1.3
Vocatives:
'rameesu gaaDu, sureesu gaaDu eeri? piluwu aa naayallanii'' annaaDu bhoojanam mumdu kuucumTuu. (mannutinna maniSi 124)

"Ramesh! Suresh! Where are those rascals? Call them," he told her as he sat down for food. (Son of the Soil 54)

It is common in SL to add 'gaaDu' to the proper nouns while calling or referring to young boys disparagingly as well as affectionately. 'nayaallu' is another expression which is abusive in SL at semantic level but in this context it is used as an endearment expression. 'gaaDu' is an opposite to the honorific vocative 'gaaru'. I have avoided 'gaaDu' in TL and also used the correct form of the proper nouns 'Ramesh' and 'Suresh' instead of 'ramesuu' and 'sureesu'. As a result the text in TL becomes more sophisticated, which is a deviation from the original. I should have at least used 'gaaDu' with a note to make it nearer to the original.

And I have translated 'nayaallu' as 'rascals' since it is also common in TL to use the term affectionately in this context.
“vaanaali, vaanekka, eemi teliviteTalunDaayi raa” (mannutinnamaniSi 131)

How intelligent these fellows are!” (Son of the Soil 58)

‘vaanaali vaanekka’ – are abusive expressions in SL at the surface level, but in fact they are intensifiers at the contextual level. It is difficult to bring the same sense precisely in TL. So I have avoided them in TL and merely used an exclamatory expression.

“emappaa raamacandraa!” (mannutinnamaniSi 126)

“Ramachandra” (Son of the Soil 56)

appaa- is a regional term of common respect. This has not been translated, as there is no equivalent in TL.

“eeraa , ideenaa raawaDamu?..” (mannutinnamaniSi 129)

“Oh, Ramachandra. Have you come just now?” (Son of the Soil 58)

‘eera’ – is a word used in calling an inferior but it is also a term of endearment as in this case. As it has no equivalent in TL I have used the proper noun instead.

“abbaa! anta kopamunTee eTlee aaDadaaniki?” (mannutinnamaniSi128)

“abba! How can a woman be so angry?” (Son of the Soil 58)
abba— is an interjection of grief or admiration—a common exclamation. The interjections like abbaa, ayyoo, areree etc. have no equivalents in TL. So as a last resort to overcome the difficulty I have transliterated them.

tandri mundariki potaanee 'pilli' amTee ‘myaaw’ amTaawu. eemTiki taatTi ceTTamta
jampu umDaawu. aa buumiloo eemannaa pamDutumdaa, enDutumada ani
juselleedaa? tomDaa bikkeelu guDlu peTTee buumuluu buumulee...” (mannutinna
maniSi 125)

“You become so meek when you face your father that you won’t say anything to him. What have you grown like a tall tree for? Can’t you convince him that nothing will grow in that land where only the chameleons lay their eggs?...” (Son of the Soil 55)

The SL idiom if translated literally does not carry the sense in TL. ‘You are like a cat before your father’ or ‘you mew like a cat before your father’ may give an altogether different sense for a TL reader. Hence I have translated it connotatively leaving out the comparison to a cat and it’s mewing.

I have left out the reference to palm tree and simply used ‘a tall tree’ as ‘palm’ only suggests the quality of tallness.

tomDaabikki is translated as ‘chameleon’ which changes its colours to match the colours around. But if it is translated back into SL it has a different term ‘oosarawelli’. In SL tomDaabikki is not a chameleon. The only resort was to use a scientific term. But I thought it would hamper the readability of the TL text so I used the word ‘chameleon’. Even the general term ‘lizard’ also fits here.
9.1.4

Idiomatic Expressions:

"eei! Eemee komcam nooru kaTTeesukoo." (mannutinna maniSi 126)

"Keep quiet." (Son of the Soil 55)

The idiomatic expression 'nooru kaTTeesukoo' literally means 'lock your mouth'. I have translated it at the pragmatic level as 'Keep quiet'. I thought of using 'keep your mouth shut' which is an idiomatic expression in TL but avoided because it would have been inappropriate for an illiterate rural folk to utter such an anglicised expression.

engili ceeyi kaDugeesukuni wacci bayaTa arugu meeda kuucunnaaDu. (mannutinna maniSi 126)

Ramachandra washed his hands and sat on the pial outside. (Son of the Soil 56)

The concept of 'engili' is unknown to TL readers. 'To taste' is not an equivalent to it. In this context it refers to his hand after having food. It is common in SL to use right hand to eat food. When one starts having food his hand is considered 'engili ceeyi'. It will be a great task to transfer this concept of 'engili' in to TL. Further I felt it was not all that important to the main story, and even the description of it wont have the effect of the SL, so I have translated it into a normal expression 'washed his hands'. However it is a classic example of untranslatability.

"...klaalimeeda kaalu eskooni batukutaaru "(mannutinna maniSi 131)

"...and live happily" (Son of the Soil 60)

Here the idiomatic expression 'kaalimeeda kalu wesukuni' literally means 'to keep one leg on the other', a posture, which suggests rest and relax. At the pragmatic level it suggests a happy state. Hence I used the ordinary expression.
The difficulty in accommodating the minutest tones of the original in TL is undeniable. My task was to see that all the regional and cultural essence is transferred into the Target Language without hampering its readability. Sustaining the spirit of the original is easier said than done. Further it is difficult to achieve total acceptability in translating a dialect. I have tried to keep close to the original and yet achieve readability.

9.2 The River Inside:

This is a Telugu short story by M.S. Satyanarayana Rao. I have selected it for its novel technique of narration, which is new to SL literature. The style reminds us of Kafka. The problems I faced in translating this story are not all that severe. The major problems I have found are linguistic rather than culture specific.

'naa emukala ceTTunu, ewaroo eDaariloop paatipeDutunnaaru. (lopali nadi 10)

Someone is burying my tree of bones in a desert. (The River Inside 73)

First I preferred 'skeleton' for 'emukala ceTTu' of SL. But as it has no reference to the tree, it didn’t carry the effect of SL expression. Next choice was 'skeleton tree' but even this sounded odd. The final option 'tree of bones' seems to be poetic and similar to that of SL.

'baapree! IppuDelaa?' (lopali nadi 10)

'What was to be done now?' (The River Inside 73)
First I tried to translate it as 'My God! What should be done now?' But it sounded more anglicised. So I preferred an expression without an expletive. I should have used the SL expression 'baapree' with a note.

'nee kosam paddenimidi wanamuulikalatoo oka leepam tayaaru ceesistaanu...
(lopalī nadi 10)

"I will prepare a balm for you from eighteen herbs..." (The River Inside 74)

Here wanamuulikalau in SL refers to medicinal herbs. As the context makes it clear I have merely used 'herbs'. Further the number 'paddenimidi' (eighteen) the writer refers in SL has an allusion to a popular herbal toothpaste commercial in SL. It reminds the SL readers of that advertisement. As the TL readers are not familiar with the ad, it remains only a number, eighteen. However it does not affect the main theme. Hence I have not given any note.

daaktar riSi ni takSanamee rammani abyartimcaanu. nijamgaa riSitulyuDu...
(lopalī nadi 10)

...and requested Dr. Rishi to come at once. He was really a Rishi.
(The River Inside 73)

Here 'riSi' means in SL as a saintly figure of noble character. Further the name of the character is also 'Rishi'. So the narrator comments that he was really a 'Rishi'. This is clear in SL but in TL I should have given a note. As such the translation does not make any sense to a TL reader who is not familiar to the term 'Rishi'. As the translation
is meant for Indian readers and the term is pan Indian and also a Sanskrit one, I have not given any note.

"ting...tong...ting..yuraTenSan pleej"

"yaatrikan kripaya dyaan dee"

"dayaceesi winamDi." (lopali nadi 11)

"Ting...Tong...Ting ...Your attention please..."

"yatrikan kripaya dhyan de" (The River Inside 77)

Here is the reference to the railway announcement at the station. The writer uses three languages in SL text itself as it is a common practice in Railway announcement. He uses the specific terminology that is often used in the announcements. Even the sounds that precede the ad are also given. I have retained the sounds and also the Hindi expression 'yarikan kripaya dyan dee' them in TL. Even if I translated it into TL it will be a repetition of 'your attention please'. And for that reason I have deleted the Telugu expression 'dayaceesi winamDi'.

"patrika kuuDaa emDipoyi'nadee'!" (lopali nadi 11)

Even the magazine was dry. (The River Inside 78)

‘monDi nadi’

KanDimci nadi’ (lopali nadi 11)

Trunk...only torso.

A severed river! (The River Inside 79)
Here the writer uses pun. In the expression ‘emDipooyi’nadi’ which means ‘dried up’ the writer separates ‘nadee with quotes which means ‘river’. In expressions ‘monDi nadi’ and ‘KanDimci nadi’ the writer separates ‘nadi’ form the rest of the word to signify the meaning ‘river’ also. Thus these expressions exploit the linguistic features of SL and create a unique effect on the SL readers. As it is not possible to recreate it in the TL, I have to be content with ordinary expressions. These are a few instances of untranslatability.

‘daani naalkala meedinumci amrutam olukutoomdi! oniki poyaanu.niluwella
kampimcipoyaanu. (lopaDi nadi 11)

From its tongue amritam flowed out. I shivered and trembled all over.

(The River Inside 81)

Here is the reference to ‘amruitam’ a drink of gods and goddesses in the Hindu mythology which makes them eternal. The term ‘ambrosia’ could have been used which means ‘food of the Gods’. But ‘amrutam’ is the drink that makes the Gods eternal. As there is no exact equivalent in TL I have retained it in TL. As the Indian readers are familiar with this Sanskrit expression I have not added a note.

9.3 Lady Karunakaram:

Lady Karunakaram is a Telugu short story by Chaganti Somayajulu, who is popularly called Chaso. This was first published in a magazine, Danka in March 1945. While translating this story I have encountered a few problems. The problem areas are, as usual, the familial relationships, myths and historical references, idiomatic and ironic expressions and the concept of pativrata.
It is a story of a woman, Sarada who is a flirt. But she helps her husband prosper and attain knighthood. The writer ironically compares her with mythological characters such as Kunti and Draupadi.

The title of the story 'leeDi karunaakaram' does not pose any problem as the SL title itself is in English. I have translated it as 'Lady Karunakaram'.

‘tummeda laanTi daani kallu niillatoo niDi eeDustuu umTee taTTukooleeka poyaaDu.
(leeDi karunaakaram 29)

Her eyes were like bees, filled with tears, as she sobbed- he could not bear it. *(Lady Karunakaram 71)*

Here the writer uses an image of bee to describe the beautiful eyes of Sarada who is weeping. In the SL it is common to compare the attractive eyes to bees. But in TL the image of bee does not suggest the beauty. But I have retained the image in TL.

“nannu kanakapu simhaasanam miida kuurcoobeDataaDee!” (leeDi karunaakaram 31)

“He would lavish wealth on me.” *(Lady Karunakaram 73)*

Here the idiomatic expression literally means 'to make one occupy the golden throne'. At the pragmatic level it suggests 'amassing wealth'. I have used an ordinary expression.

‘nuwwu tiragaDam tappaa, neenu cuuDaDam tappaa? amma!”
(leeDi karunaakaram 30)

“It is not your fault to have relations with him. But it's my fault to see that ...oh my god.” *(Lady Karunakaram 72)*

Here the idiom ‘tiragaDam’ literally means ‘to move with’ but it suggests ‘to have sexual affairs’. Hence I have translated it as ‘to have relations with him’. Further an
expletive ‘amma’ is used in SL. I have used a TL accepted idiom ‘oh my god’ as the man who utters these words is an educated person.

“tellaaritee pamDaga, naluguTLoo paDataamu. reepuṃDi aalaggee wellaṃDi” annadi atta gaaru.

“naluguTLoo kaadu. nalabai mandiloo paDamDi” ani pellaanni tiisuku poyaaDu. maama kikkurumanaleedu. saarada kaTTu guDDatoo moguDi wemTa wEL poooyimdi. (LeeDi karunaakaram 29)

“The next day is the festival. People talk ill of us. Stay till tomorrow and then leave as you wish,” said his mother in law.

“I don’t care whether four or forty people talk about you,” he took away his wife.

His father-in-law remained silent. Sarada went along with her husband as she was. (Lady Karunakaram 71-72)

The idiom ‘naluguTLoo paDataamu’ in SL literally means ‘to fall amidst four people’ but it suggests that the issue would be discussed and they would become unpopular. Sustaining the sense of the SL I have translated it as ‘people talk ill of us’. But in the consequent dialogues of Karunakarm there is reference to ‘four or forty people’. In TL it does not make any sense as I have not mentioned the reference to ‘four people’ in the preceding dialogue. ‘kikkurumanaledu’ means ‘to utter no word in a reply’. So I preferred the adjective ‘silent’.

sarada pillala talli awutuu cennapaTNam meediki wijrumbimcimdidi .daanidi sriikriSnadewaraayala waari wijayayaaTra. (LeeDi karunaakaram 31)
Despite being mother of children, Sarada went wild in Chennapatnam. Hers was the victory march of Sri Krishnadevaraya. *(Lady Karunakaram 74)*

Here is the reference to the King Krishnadevaraya who is known for his valour and victories. The writer sarcastically compares the amorous adventures of Sarada with the victory march of the king. I should have given a note on Sri Krishnadevaraya. But it is not necessary for Indian readers who are familiar with Indian history.

*saarada maha patiwrata! (leeDi karunaakaram 33)*

Sarada. A great woman of chastity! *(Lady Karunakaram 76)*

The story ends in a sarcastic proclamation that Sarada is a ‘patiwrata’. The concept of *patiwrata* is new to TL culture. I have used a term ‘chastity’ which only suggests the physical purity of a woman’s life. But in SL it even suggests loyalty and concern for one’s husband. Sita and Savitri are considered great *patiwratas* in the Hindu mythology. Savitri even fights with the god *Yama* and brings back her husband’s life. I think ‘a virtuous woman of chastity’ may also not carry the effect of the SL.

Further in the story there are references to *kunti* and *draupadi*. I have avoided any notes because all Indian readers know those epic characters from Mahabharata. I should have given notes for a TL reader who is not familiar with SL epics.
The following is the list of short stories I have translated from Telugu into English.

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