

## Translation and Interpretation of Kinship Terms: An Evaluative Study

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### **Abstract:**

Translation is an activity of transfer of text from one language to another; no two languages or translations are alike as there are certain linguistic, cultural, stylistic and readability aspects. Even closely related languages are culturally unique entities. Despite being aware of this fact, the bounden duty of the translator is to attempt to provide or bring in the equivalence while translating; and interpret properly. One of the key issues of translation is translating and interpreting the kinship terms. Unless the translator is sentient of both the languages and cultures, it is very difficult to translate and interpret them. The present paper “Translation and Interpretation of Kinship Terms: An Evaluative Study” with reference to *The Shadow Lines* of Amitav Ghosh and its Telugu translation *Chayarekhalu* delves into the translation and interpretation of kinship terms; strategies adopted by the translator while translating these terms and its impact on the understanding of the plot of the target text by the target reader.

**Key words:** Translation, Interpretation, Kinship, Target text

### **Introduction:**

Translation is like a double edged sword, the translator has to navigate through the source text, take the message of the source text and at the same time make it readable for the target reader. It broadly involves in changing the essence and meaning of the source text into the target language. According to Gayatri Spivak, “the task of the translator is to facilitate love between the original and its shadow” (1993: 181). The translator should understand the source text and should surrender to it in order to produce the best possible translation. In the process of translation, language of the translation matters a lot in general and linguistic aspects like translation of nouns, kinship terms, culture specific terms in particular. One of the important things to be looked into is the translation of kinship terms into the target

language. Kinship terms are those which help the community to identify the individuals in group through some relationship. Well before taking up the task of translation, the translator should pay attention to such terms and understand the relationships used in the source text and how they can be translated appropriately into the target language. Wrong choice of kinship terms in the target language may lead to confusion in understanding the plot of the story. With this background an evaluative study is taken up to assess the translation and interpretation of the kinship terms with special reference to *The Shadow Lines* and its Telugu translation *Chayarekhalu*.

*The Shadow Lines* (1988) is a novel by Amitav Ghosh, a well-known novelist of contemporary Indian English fiction. *The Circle of Reason* (1986) was his first novel with which he became popular and for the second novel itself i.e. *The Shadow Lines*, he received Sahitya Akademi Award in 1989. Ghosh chooses very different themes in his novels and is known for his style of writing and language. The broad canvas of his writings embraces various issues ranging from society, history, anthropology to culture, politics, ecology etc. *The Shadow Lines* is one such novel in which Amitav Ghosh links the private lives of the individuals with the history and public events. This novel has been translated into many Indian languages. *Chayarekhalu* is the Telugu translation of *The Shadow Lines* which was translated by Dr. R. Anantha Padmanabha Rao. It was published by Sahitya Akademi in 1997 and received best translation award by Sahitya Akademi in 2000.

### **Methodology:**

Comparative textual analysis method is adopted to evaluate the translation and interpretation of the kinship terms. Both source and target texts i.e. *The Shadow Lines* and *Chayarekhalu* are studied thoroughly. After a through reading of both the texts, major kinship terms or the passages consisting of kinship terms have been identified and compared with translation. Further, the translated kinship terms are analysed to find out whether they are fitting in the target language and what kind of strategies are followed by the translator while translating the kinship terms. The kinship terms in the source text with meaning and the translated terms with meaning are presented in the tabular form for better comparative understanding.

### Translation and Interpretation of Kinship Terms

After the careful study of the source text, it is observed that the original author uses native kinship terms like *tha'mma*, *thakuma*, *kaku*, *mashi*, *meshamoshai* and *jethamoshai* etc with an intention to familiarize and immerse the reader in the Bengali language and culture. Though the novel is written in English, it is set in Bengali milieu and the writer's affinity to the characters is revealed in retaining these terms and introducing the readers to these relationships. This is an attempt at foreignization within the ST itself. This however makes the task of the translator tough. To translate such relationship and kinship terms of Bengali language into Telugu, the translator should be familiar with the terms and surrender to the text. In the words of Gayatri Spivak, "Translation is the most intimate act of reading. I surrender to the text when I translate" (1993: 180). She argues that the translator should be able to talk about the most intimate things in the language and the translator should surrender to the text. To quote her, "The translator must surrender to the text. She must solicit the text to show the limits of its language, because that rhetorical aspect will point at the silence of the absolute fraying of language that the text wards off, in its special manner" (ibid: 183). Let us now look into the textual excerpts of source text containing the kinship terms and their translations.

The kinship term 'Meshamoshai' (TSL: 34) is translated as *ṣaḍḍakulu* (CR: 56) in the target language. 'Meshamoshai' is a Bengali term for addressing the relationship 'uncle'. But, it is translated as *ṣaḍḍakulu* which means 'co-brother'. It should have been translated as '*cinnānna/ cinnāyana / bābayeri*' to give the equivalent relationship in Telugu, but not as *ṣaḍḍakulu* (co-brother).

In another context, "As for my father, he was mystified by the Saheb's conversation with my mother" (TSL: 41) is translated as *doragāru māṭlāḍaḍam mā nāyanammanu digbhrāṁṭilō muṁcettiṁdi* (CR: 65). Here, in the source text the kinship term 'mother' is translated as *nāyanamma* which means 'grandmother' but it should have been translated as *amma*. By translating like this, the translator has given a wrong translation of relationship.

In the extract, "Why are you staring at her like that? My mother said. Go and talk to her" (TSL: 43) is translated as *eṁḍukalā tēripāra cūstunnāv? vellī āmetō māṭlāḍu aṁḍi āme?* (CR: 69). The translation does not mention specifically who is being referred to, as the translator uses the pronoun '*āme*' (she). There are three clauses with the reporting clause intervening between the two main clauses. In the translation, we find the pronominal 'her'

missing in the first clause and reference to the missing pronominal ‘her’ made in the third clause. Interpretation of pronominal co-referentiality would demand exactly the opposite. Had the pronominal ‘her’ (*āme*) been not missing in the Telugu version, it would have sufficed without it being mentioned in the third clause. It should have been translated as: *āmevaipu emḍukalā tēripāra cūstunnāv? veḷḷi māṭlāḍu aṃdi ma amma.*

The kinship term in the phrase “Tridib Kaku” (TSL: 44) is translated as *tridiv pedanānna* (CR: 70). As per the narration, character Tridib is the younger brother of narrator’s father, therefore, addressed as ‘*kaku*’. ‘*Kaku*’ would refer only to ‘father’s younger brother’. However, in the Telugu translation, ‘*kaku*’ is addressed as *pedanānna* (father’s elder brother). It should have been translated as *bābāyi* (father’s younger brother) to convey the same meaning of the source text.

The passage, “The same one that Robi’s mother and your mother and your uncle Alan ducked into on their way back from Mill Lane, when one of those huge high- Calibre bombs exploded on Solent Road...” (TSL: 55) is translated as *ravi talli, mī amma, mī bābāyi alen mil saṃdulōnuṃḍi vastū sōleṃṭu rōḍḍupai pedda bāmbu pēlinappuḍu akkaḍa dāgāru* (CR: 87). This particular incident is a conversation between the narrator and Nick Price, one of the main characters in the novel. Here, the narrator makes a reference to ‘uncle Alan’. ‘Uncle’ in English is a neutral term between various kinship terms in Telugu such as *māma* (maternal uncle), *pedanānna* (father’s elder brother), *bābāyi* (father’s younger brother). The translator unfortunately picked a wrong lexical equivalent *bābāyi* (father’s younger brother) instead of *māma/ māmayya* (maternal uncle) because as per the plot ‘uncle Alan’ happens to be Mrs. Price’s (Nick’s mother) brother. One word in SL may have multiple referents in TL where each one of these are realised as a separate lexical entities. For example, Uncle (English) has *bābāyi, pedanānna, māmayya* as Telugu equivalents. ‘Brother’ has *anna* and *thammudu*, ‘grandparents’ has both maternal and paternal grandparents as equivalents in Telugu.

Yet another example of kinship term translation can be observed in “That was when your uncle lived here! I said. Your uncle Alan. / My uncle? He said in surprise. Did he live here?” (TSL: 101) which is translated as *adi mī bābāyi alen yikkaḍa uṃṭunnaṭuvamṭi māṭa annānu. mā bābāyi ! āyana yikkaḍa uṃḍēvārā?* (CR: 155). According to the narration, ‘Alan’ (Alan Price) is the brother of Mrs. Price and he is ‘maternal uncle’ to Nick (son of Mrs. Price). Hence, terms should have been translated into Telugu as *māmayya*, but the translator has translated it as *bābāyi*, which means ‘father’s younger brother’. When the same relationship

term ‘uncle’ occurred in source text *The Shadow Lines* in page number 101 also, it is translated *bābāyi* (CR: 156).

The other relationship terms like ‘grand parents’ (TSL: 121), ‘mashi’ (TSL: 197) and brother (TSL: 243) are interpreted and translated wrongly as *muttāta muttavva* (great grandparents) (CR: 187), *bāmma* (father’s mother) (CR: 300 & 311) and *tammuḍu* (younger brother) (CR: 370) respectively. But, the translator should have translated ‘grandparents’ as *tāta nāyanammalu*, ‘mashi’ as *peddamma* and ‘brother’ as *anna* according to the story line of the ST i.e. *The Shadow Lines*.

However, another kinship term ‘Jethamoshai’ (father’s elder brother) (TSL: 126) is referred to *jatāmośāyi* (CR: 193) in the TT which is not there in the target culture and relationship. Hence, this kind of translation puts the target reader in confusion. All the above mentioned kinship terms and their interpretations are mentioned in the tabular form to understand better.

**Table No. 1. Source and Translated Kinship Terms**

| Sl. No. | Source Text<br>(meaning)                       | Target Text<br>(meaning)                                  |
|---------|--|---|
| 1.      | <i>Meshamoshai</i><br>(uncle)                  | <i>ṣaḍḍakulu</i><br>(co-brother/ wife’s sister’s husband) |
| 2.      | Mother<br>(mother)                             | <i>nāyanamma</i><br>(grandmother)                         |
| 3.      | <i>Kaku</i><br>(father’s younger brother)      | <i>pedanānna</i><br>(father’s elder brother)              |
| 4.      | Uncle<br>(according to plot ‘maternal uncle’)  | <i>bābāyi</i><br>(paternal uncle)                         |
| 5.      | Grandparents                                   | <i>muttāta muttavva</i><br>(great grandparents)           |
| 6.      | <i>Mashi</i><br>(aunt)                         | <i>bāmma</i><br>(grandmother)                             |
| 7.      | Brother<br>(according to plot ‘elder brother’) | <i>tammuḍu</i><br>(younger brother)                       |
| 8.      | <i>Jethamoshai</i><br>(father’s elder brother) | <i>Jatāmośāyi</i><br>(nativized)                          |

**Conclusion:**

From the above excerpts and the table of the translated kinship terms, it is understood that the translator could not comprehend the relationships mentioned in the source text i.e. *The Shadow Lines*. In many parts of the translated text, we can observe mistranslation and misinterpretation of kinship terms by the translator with which the reader does not understand the sequence of the novel and in turn leading to confusion in understanding the theme of the novel. Though the translator tried to translate and give the equivalence in target language, he failed to translate and interpret them properly even in the cases where there are equivalents available.

According to Newmark “understanding the text requires both general and close reading. General reading gives the gist or the core meaning for which one has to refer to the sources like a dictionary, an encyclopaedia etc. to understand the concept. Close reading helps in understanding the words both in and out of the context. For example, finding equivalents for the acronyms etc of the ST words and the context in which the ST author used” (1988: 11). Therefore, the translator should read the text to understand the intention of the ST. Though ST and TT describe the same incidents like war and concepts like nationalism etc. with the same facts, the type of language used will be distinct in each of these texts. Hence while translating, the translator must be very careful in each and every notion, idea and concept of the ST. Connotations in the literary text must also be understood thoroughly by the translator before he sets on to translate. In this case, the translator could have retained the Bengali kinship terms to familiarize Telugu readers to the native flavour. Instead the translator chose to provide equivalent kinship terms in Telugu. However, the irony is that the translator has at times rendered wrong translations resulting in citing of wrong relationships. This in turn results in misinterpretation the plot of the novel.

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