



A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON PERSON DEIXIS: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE CHALLENGE OF TRANSLATING SECOND PERSON DEIXIS IN SINHALA AND ENGLISH

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INTRODUCTION

Deixis is used in reference to a person, place or a time, in which context is a must to understand the meaning. It becomes meaningful only to the speaker and the hearer, and others in the speech situation or in the particular environment cannot understand the meaning conveyed through deixis. Thus, it becomes less or not comprehensible to others. Deixis falls under Pragmatics, which is one of the complex areas in Semantics. As Levinson (1983:54) says “The single most obvious way in which the relationship between language and context is reflected in the structure of languages themselves, is through the phenomenon of deixis”.

Translation in which there is a growing interest among other disciplines is also as complex as realizing the meanings conveyed through deixis. Translation basically implies, rendering a text or an idea in one language with the use of another. When deixis appears in the texts the translator faces immense difficulty and dilemmas as to how to deal with such deictic expressions. The task becomes more complex, when the translator has to comprehend the deictic term by his or herself and then make the target reader comprehend it in relation to context.

One could refer to many research in relation to deixis in a number of fields, which specifically focus on Linguistics and Philosophy such as Morris (1946), Peirce (1955), Searle (1969), Benveniste (1974), Hursserl (1978) Eco et al. (1988), Jakobson (1971) [1957], Silverstein (1976) Jespersen (1965) [1924], Fillmore (1997) and Hanks (1983), (1990). A very few were found in relation to translation such as Putra’s “A translation analysis of deixis in the Dream of Trespass novel by Fathimah Mernissi and its translation” (2014) and Juliari’s study on personal deixis and the reference of deixis used in English Translation of Al- Qur’an” (UMS 2007). Most of the research found in relation to translation were mere attempts to identify deixis in different texts. So, it is visible that there is a vacuum in the existing literature in relation to translation of deixis in Sinhala language, and the present research attempts to fill that research gap.

The aim of this study is to identify the use of person deixis (2nd person) in Sinhala and English languages and to investigate on the difficulties and dilemmas in translating them in different contexts. Thereby the research questions are: “What are the second person deixis in Sinhala and English languages?” and “What are the difficulties and dilemmas faced by translators in translating them?”. Thus, the researcher puts forward the hypothesis that “the difficulties faced by translators occur due to cultural differences in Sinhala and English”

METHODOLOGY

Initially a comparative study was conducted to identify 2nd person deixis in Sinhala and English languages. Later a worksheet was prepared with 10 Sinhala to English daily used utterances and 10 English to Sinhala utterances- which carry second person deixis. The deictic term was underlined, and the students were asked to pay attention to the underlined term when translating. The sample consisted of 25 Fourth year undergraduates in the Translation Honours degree programme, in the University of Kelaniya. Their answers were analyzed to identify how the translation of second person deixis is done. Then- structured interviews were conducted with those students to identify the difficulties they faced in the translation process. The data was subjected to a comparative qualitative content analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study revealed that there are a number of second person deictic expressions in the Sinhala language and those can be divided based on gender:

Masculine- *Obawahanse*:, *Obatuma*:, *Unna:nse*, *Tammunehe*, *Munnehe*, *Tamuse*, *Yushmata*:, *Metuma*

Feminine- *Obatumiya*, *Yushmatiya*, *Metumi*

Neutral - *Oya*:, *Oba*, *Umba*, *To*:, *Ohe*:, *Tamuse*, *Tama*:, *Tamun*

But in the English language there is only one second person deictic expression- deixis, 'you'.

While observing deixis, it was found that the use of second person deixis in Sinhala language is context bound when conveying meaning. It was also revealed that there are second person deictic expressions to mark respect, reverence, politeness, disrespect and insult. They are also connected with feelings and capable of showing the feelings of anger, friendship, closeness and intimacy.

- *Obawahanse*: - respect/ reverence
- *Obathuma*:/*obathumi*: - respect
- *Thamunnehe*/ *munnehe*/*ohe*: - intimacy/closeness in villages
- *Thamuse*/ *umba*/*tho*:/*thamun* - disrespect/insult/anger
- *Umba*/*thamuse* - friendship/closeness/anger
- *Oya*: - neutral/polite

It is noteworthy that '*umba/thamuse*' are used both to show intimacy, closeness and disrespect and insult. Whereas one could use '*oya*:' in both positive and negative situations. '*Obawahanse*:' is referred to Buddhist clergy. '*yushmatha*:' and '*yushmathiya*' is only used in Courts which implies 'you'.

While observing the translations of students, the following facts were identified. However, the researcher uses a selected set of sentences in this analysis as it is impossible to insert all the translations. When translating from Sinhala to English it was identified that, most of the time 'you' is used for source language terms:

Table 1- Using the available equivalent in Target Language

| Source Text | Translation |
|--|--|
| <i>Oya: dawalta ke:wada malli? Mama me:seta bedannada?</i> | <i>Tr 1-Did <u>you</u> have lunch malli? Shall I serve it to the table?</i> <i>Tr 2- <u>You</u> have lunch malli? Shall I serve it to the table?</i> |
| <i>Thota mama honda pa:damak ugannannam, aye horakan nokaranna</i> | <i>Tr 1-I will teach <u>you</u> a nice lesson so that you will never steal</i> <i>Tr 2- I will teach <u>you</u> a good lesson to not to steal again</i> |

Here it is seen that for the neutral second person '*oya*:' and impolite '*tho*:' all the students have used target second person deixis 'you', as there is no context bound equivalent in the target language.

Apart from that some additions are made to imply the meaning conveyed through the original text:

Table 2- Making additions to give meaning

| Source Text | Translation |
|---|--|
| <i>Obawahanse:</i> | <i><u>reverend</u> you</i> |
| <i>Obathuma:ge pemini:ma apita sathutak</i> | <i>we are glad to have you here <u>Sir</u></i> |

Here the student has identified that if the sentence is translated as “are you going to the pririwena” it does not give the idea that the hearer is a reverend. So to imply that, the addition ‘reverend’ is used. In the same way, instead of using “we are glad to have you” an addition is used to imply that the hearer is somebody to be regarded with respect.

When considering the English to Sinhala translation it was observed that almost all the translations were done according to context. Moreover, appropriate second person deictic expressions were used most of the time. Further, different options of the same deictic expression which give similar meanings are used by students for one source term:

Table 3- Use of different options of the same deixis

| Source Text | Translation |
|---|---|
| Appuha:mi aiye are you heading towards chena? | Tr1- Appuha:mi aiye <u>umba</u> he:natada yanne? Tr 2- Appuha:mi aiya <u>ohe:</u> he:nata yanawei? Tr3- Appuha:mi aiya he:natada yanne? (deixis omitted) |
| Are you mad? Please stop shouting at the little one | Tr 1- <u>Thota</u> pissuda? Podi eka:ta ke:gahana eka nawattapan Tr 2- <u>Umbata</u> pissuda? Oya podi lamayata ke: gahana eka nawattahan Tr 3- <u>Bota</u> pissuda? Podi daruwata sera karana eka nawattapan |

Here different options for the same target language deictic term are used which cannot be considered as mistakes. For eg: *umba, ohe:*, gives the same sense and ‘*thota, umbata, bota*’ gives the same sense. But it was seen that in rare instances it was found that the student has omitted the deictic terms as in ‘*appuhami aiya henatada yanne?*’, in which ‘you’ in the original is not translated, but still it does not harm the meaning.

Issues identified from the interview

When interviewing the students after the translation exercise, the students revealed that they faced following difficulties:

- The difficulty of rendering the same feeling/effect to the target audience
- It is fine in utterances, where one could use tone to indicate feelings, but how can one give the exact tone and feeling in the target text
- It is hard to translate without ample information about the context



CONCLUSIONS/ RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, it could be stated that when translating from Sinhala to English, the translator has to use the only available second person deixis “you”, but to convey the cultural meanings and meanings beyond the word level further, s/he could use some additions to the text or the other segments of the sentence can be translated in a way that hints at the meaning of the deictic expression. But if a translation is done from English to Sinhala, the translator could study the context in conveying the meaning and thereby select a suitable second person deictic word.

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