

**Translation of Emotions and Typically French Contexts into
Sinhala: Analysis of the Sinhala Translation of Jean-Louis
Fournier’s Novel, *Où on va, papa?*¹(*Apikohedayannethaaththe?*²)**

Gunasekara, Niroshini

Department of Modern Languages, University of Kelaniya, Kelaniya

Introduction

Jean-Louis Fournier’s French novel, *Où on va, papa?* is autobiographical in the sense that it expresses the feelings of the author about his two sons who are both mentally handicapped. The novel won the Femina Award in 2008. In the opening chapter, Fournier says that the book was a gift for his two sons with whom he shared this difficult task of a life that was full of challenge. The book was an effort to immortalize the boys without which they would only be two photos in two identity cards of “invalid kids”.

Jean-Louis Fournier is a French humorist. The humor in the novel comes as a self-criticism of having engendered two handicapped children. The emotions expressed come from deep within. The expression is mixed with dark humor. The novel is presented in the first person narration. There are many passages that address the two sons directly using direct speech which has a poetic flow. Since scenes have been drawn from day to day experiences in France, there are many references to the realities of the contemporary French society and culture. The information is first hand and the feelings are sincere.

Research Problem

It is this novel that was translated into Sinhala by me, and was published in 2009. The two cultural circumstances being totally apart, the translation of the French context into the Sinhala context was a challenge. Umberto Eco (2007) as noted that if a loss takes place in translation, it happens mostly in jokes or in puns. Fournier’s text is rich with humor that has to be decoded with a subtle knowledge of the French language and its idioms.

¹Fournier, Jean-Louis. (2008) *Où on va, papa?* Edition Stock.

²Gunasekera, Niroshini (2009) *Api koheda yanne thaaththe?* Samayawardhana Publishers.

Understanding the author's thoughts and then reformulating them in a language that can be sometimes lacking in the equivalent expressions make a translator opt for the next best option because lexical connotations in two languages are never interchangeable to the fullest. So are the cultural situations. This was the case when translating Fournier's French novel.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of this research was to study how effectively French contexts could be translated into Sinhala. As the translator of this book, I have firsthand experience as to what strategies I had to use in communicating the original message in our mother tongue. However, this is not an effort to evaluate the translation, but a case study of how far certain feelings of one culture could be expressed in an effective manner in another faraway cultural context. The choice of the work is special in the sense that it contains emotions such as sorrow, regret, jealousy, anger and feeling of loss. The foreign reader could not appreciate the novel to its fullest if he does not capture these sentiments as felt by the reader of the original text.

Theoretical Considerations and Empirical Evidence

I have taken into consideration the two strategies, Domestication and Foreignization that a translator could use to communicate the original message. In the Domestication theory (Citation??), the translator tends to make foreign terms more understandable to his reader using the equivalent terms that are drawn from the local context. The term may not convey the exact meaning of the original but the reader gets an approximate idea about what it means. He is less burdened by foreign terms and explanations and feels comfortable in his reading. In the Foreignization, it's the opposite machinery that operates: the reader travels to the land of the source text: the intervention of the translator is more obvious. Reading experience might not be as smooth as in a domesticated translation and the traces will be more evident of the foreign context. Jean-René Ladmiral (1986) in his studies talked about "Source-Oriented" and "Target-Oriented" translations and we see Domestication as Target-Oriented and Foreignization as Source-Oriented.

Methodology

According to Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, "either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the

reader toward him. Or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author toward him³”. In my study, I have analyzed how far the Sinhala reader has been moved towards the original text and *vice versa*. I used examples from my Sinhala Translation of Fournier’s novel to show in which places the translator has to intervene directly to help the reader to understand the text better in a way that he captures the meaning of the source text to its fullest. The “Domesticating” and Foreignizing” strategies have been taken into consideration.

The Key Findings

The key findings of the analysis show that in translating a French novel into Sinhala, a translator is met with many challenges. The two cultures and the languages are far apart. The task of the translator becomes very complicated. When it comes to reformulating emotions, the challenge becomes even more promising. In the novel that I have chosen, self-pity, dark humor and the author’s love for his two handicapped children play the main roles. These are deep sentiments that have to be expressed in Sinhala which is a language that is totally different from that of France. The translator should gather the original meaning that the source author expresses. Then he has to model it to express in the target language. There have been many instances where an appropriate equivalent had to be found in Sinhala that maintains the mood of the original context.

Then there have been instances where idiomatic expressions and proverbs were used. These are the elements that come as the biggest challenge to the translator. These cannot be translated but equivalents in the target language have to be found.

There are also examples of interjections that cannot be translated into a foreign language. These too have to be replaced by equivalents of the language of translation. This compensation allows that there will be no loss taking place in the original expression.

If I refer once again to Umberto Eco who says that a translation should not *enrich* the source text to the extent that the foreign reader feels that he reads an original, my effort is also to show that certain elements had to be kept

³Translated by André Lefevere in *Translation, History, Culture. A Sourcebook*, edited by André Lefevere (London and New York, 1992), p. 149.

in their foreign flavor. This happens when typically French contexts are being discussed. Instead of replacing, for example, an administrative term in France by its equivalent in Sri Lanka, I tried to situate, by means of para text, the Sri Lankan reader, in the French context.

Conclusions

In conclusion, I would have shown how a French text could be translated into Sinhala using the methodologies of Domestication and Foreignization. The strategies that a translator could use to effectively convey the original message was taken into account. This will not give a judgment as to how good or bad a translation will appear. My interest was solely to be on the techniques used by a translator.

Keywords: Culture; Domestication; Equivalent; Foreignization

References

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1. Jean-René Ladmiral, in his studies (1986) (Reference needed)