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BA English Honours | Semester V | Calicut University

# Translation in Praxis

Course Code: ENG5FS112 • Module 1 Notes

# Module I: Introduction to Translation

## 1. Defining Translation: Etymology, Nature & Scope

Translation is one of humanity's oldest and most consequential communicative acts. The English word *translation* derives etymologically from the Latin *translatum* (the supine of *transferre*), literally meaning "to carry across." In Indian linguistic traditions, translation is denoted by rich Sanskrit roots: *Anuvada* (speaking after, repeating, or following in discourse), *Bhashantara* (shifting into another language), and *Rupantara* (transformation of form). These distinct etymologies highlight that while Western traditions historically emphasized the transfer of an invariant core meaning across boundaries, Indian traditions viewed translation as an ongoing, living interpretive retelling.

In our multilingual society, translation is not a luxury; it is the vital foundation of democratic governance, judiciary proceedings, national literature, scientific knowledge exchange, and cultural survival. Through translation, disparate linguistic communities engage in dialogic communion, bridging cultural divides without extinguishing regional diversity.

## 2. Roman Jakobson: The Tripartite Typology of Translation

In his seminal 1959 essay *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation*, Russian-American linguist Roman Jakobson codified a foundational tripartite classification of translation that expanded the discipline beyond verbal texts:

- **Intralingual Translation (Rewording):** An interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the *same language*. Examples include paraphrasing archaic poetry into modern prose, summarizing a medical report for a layperson, or translating Shakespearean English into contemporary vernacular English.
- **Interlingual Translation (Translation Proper):** An interpretation of verbal signs by means of some *other language*. This is the traditional domain of translation studies—translating an English text into Malayalam, or a Spanish novel into German. Jakobson emphasizes that on the level of interlingual translation, there is ordinarily no full equivalence between code-units; translation requires creative substitution and functional re-articulation.
- **Intersemiotic Translation (Transmutation):** An interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of *non-verbal sign systems*. Examples include adapting a written novel into a feature film, translating a poem into an expressive classical dance (e.g., Kathakali or Bharatanatyam), or painting a canvas inspired by a musical symphony.

## 3. Eugene A. Nida: The Scientific Translation Process

American linguist and translation theorist Eugene A. Nida revolutionized mid-twentieth-century translation theory by proposing a rigorous three-stage psycholinguistic model of the translation process in *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (1969):

1. **Analysis (Decoding):** The translator does not jump immediately into translating surface words. First, the translator systematically dissects the Source Language (SL) text into its simplest, underlying "kernel sentences," analyzing grammatical relationships, lexical referential meanings, and emotive connotations.

2. **Transfer:** The analyzed kernel message is transferred across linguistic boundaries within the translator's bilingual cognitive consciousness, transitioning from the source language conceptual framework into the target language framework.
3. **Restructuring (Recoding):** The transferred material is rebuilt into the Target Language (TL) surface structure, ensuring that the final output sounds natural, idiomatic, and stylistically appropriate for the target audience.

## 4. Contrastive Linguistic Analysis: English vs. Malayalam

Translating between English (a Germanic Indo-European language) and Malayalam (a South Dravidian language) presents profound structural divergences that demand acute contrastive linguistic awareness:

- **Word Order and Sentence Typology:**
  - English is strictly a **Subject-Verb-Object (SVO)**, head-initial language: `The teacher (S) praised (V) the student (O).`
  - Malayalam is predominantly a **Subject-Object-Verb (SOV)**, head-final language: അധ്യാപകൻ `(S)` വിദ്യാർത്ഥിയെ `(O)` പ്രശംസിച്ചു `(V)`. When translating complex English sentences with multiple subordinate clauses, the translator must fundamentally invert the clause hierarchy to ensure natural Malayalam syntax.
- **Morphological Agglutination:**
  - English is an analytic language where grammatical relationships are mediated through separate prepositions: `in the house`, `to the school`, `with a knife`.
  - Malayalam is a highly agglutinative language where grammatical cases and postpositions are suffixed directly onto nominal stems: വീട്ടിൽ `(veettil)`, സ്കൂളിലേക്ക് `(schoolilekku)`, കത്തികൊണ്ട് `(katthikondu)`.
- **Passive Voice Conventions:** English formal and academic discourse relies heavily on passive constructions (e.g., `The decision was taken by the committee`). Direct literal translation of passives into Malayalam using the auxiliary verb *peduka* (തീരുമാനം കമ്മിറ്റിയാൽ എടുക്കപ്പെട്ടു) sounds unnatural and bureaucratic. A skilled translator converts such passive constructions into natural active Malayalam clauses (കമ്മിറ്റി ആ തീരുമാനമെടുത്തു).

## Advanced Translation Hermeneutics, Contrastive Linguistics & Translatability (Extension Phase 1)

In contemporary translation studies, descriptive translation science, and intercultural pragmatics, analyzing Module 1 requires synthesizing theoretical hermeneutics with rigorous contrastive linguistic analysis between English (Indo-European) and Malayalam (Dravidian). Translation is not a mechanical substitution of words from a dictionary; it is a complex cross-cultural communicative act that negotiates divergent syntactic structures, sociolinguistic registers, and culturally bound epistemologies.

### 1. Theoretical Paradigms in Translation Studies

Translation scholars and practitioner theorists navigate foundational debates within Module 1:

- **Equivalence and the Illusion of Sameness:** Eugene Nida challenged the classical dichotomy of "literal vs. free" translation by introducing *Formal Equivalence* (focusing on fidelity to source grammatical form and lexical structure) and *Dynamic Equivalence* (aiming to elicit the same emotional and cognitive response from target readers as the original text elicited from its source audience). In

modern functional translation (Hans Vermeer's *Skopos Theory*), the purpose (skopos) of the translation determines the translation strategy.

- **Domestication versus Foreignization (Lawrence Venuti):** In *The Translator's Invisibility* (1995), Venuti critiques the Anglo-American tradition of "domestication"—violently erasing the foreignness of the source text to produce a smooth, transparent read. Venuti advocates for *foreignization*—deliberately retaining cultural realia, syntactic friction, and foreign linguistic textures to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the source culture.
- **Polysystem Theory & Descriptive Translation Studies (Gideon Toury):** Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury demonstrate that translated literature does not exist in a vacuum; it occupies a specific position within the target culture's literary "polysystem." When a literature is young or in crisis, translations occupy a primary, innovative position, revitalizing the literary landscape.

## 2. Contrastive Typological Matrix: English vs. Malayalam

A structured comparative assessment delineates linguistic divergence between English and Malayalam in Module 1:

| Linguistic Level | English Structure (Indo-European) | Malayalam Structure (Dravidian) | Translational Translation Challenge & Strategy |
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| **Cultural Realia** | Individualistic, temperate seasonal references (snow, daffodils, church bells). | Feudal kinship (ammavan, chettan), tropical ecology (monsoon, paddy), ritual arts. | Cultural substitution, descriptive glossing, borrowing with contextual explanation. |

## 3. Glossary of Translation Studies & Contrastive Linguistics

| Translation Term | Disciplinary Domain | Standard Theoretical Definition & Application |
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| **Thick Translation** | Postcolonial Hermeneutics | Kwame Anthony Appiah's concept of contextualizing translations with rich footnotes, glossaries, and commentary to respect the cultural depth of marginalized literatures. |
| **False Friends (Faux Amis)** | Lexicography | Words in two languages that look or sound similar but carry drastically different meanings, leading to frequent translational blunders. |

### 4. Rigorous Bilingual Translation Protocol (English-Malayalam)

Professional translation execution across Module 1 adheres to a structured four-phase workflow:

- **Phase 1: Source Text Deconstruction (Decoding):** Performing deep grammatical parsing, thematic analysis, tone identification, and highlighting culture-specific realia and idioms.
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