DegreeLive

BA English Honours | Semester V | Calicut University

Translation in Praxis

Course Code: ENG5FS112 • Module 3 Notes

Module III: Translations from English to Malayalam

1. The Praxis of English-to-Malayalam Literary Translation

Translating world literature from English into Malayalam has a rich, illustrious history in Kerala, from early colonial translations of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* to modern master translations of Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, and Gabriel García Márquez. Translating from English to Malayalam requires acute sensitivity to register, tone, and cultural transposition.

2. Translating Poetry: Lyricism, Rhythm & Metaphor

- **William Wordsworth: "Daffodils" (I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud):**
  Wordsworth's iconic Romantic lyric captures the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility. Translating "Daffodils" into Malayalam presents immediate ecological and aesthetic challenges: daffodils are temperate European alpine flowers completely unfamiliar to traditional Kerala landscapes. The translator must choose between retaining "ഡാഫോഡിൽസ്" (foreignization) or substituting an indigenous golden blossom like "കണികൊന്ന" (domestication). Furthermore, rendering Wordsworth's iambic tetrameter into natural Malayalam poetic rhythms demands lyrical restraint to avoid archaic bombast.
- **Robert Frost: "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening":**
  Frost's deceptively simple masterpiece operates through tight formal discipline: four rubaiyat stanzas (aaba rhyme scheme), understated diction, and a profound philosophical undercurrent of mortality and moral obligation ("And miles to go before I sleep"). Translating this into Malayalam requires capturing the quiet, hypnotic rhythm of falling snow and the dark forest without inflating Frost's pristine, conversational English into verbose Sanskritized prose.
- **Wole Soyinka: "Telephone Conversation":**
  Nigerian Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka's biting satirical poem dramatizes a Black African intellectual attempting to rent an apartment from a white British landlady over the telephone. The landlady bluntly asks: "HOW DARK?... ARE YOU LIGHT OR VERY DARK?" Soyinka responds with brilliant, mocking scientific precision ("West African sepia", "brunette"). Translating this poem into Malayalam requires capturing racial indignation, biting irony, and sophisticated verbal fencing without losing the explosive sociopolitical critique of colonial racism.

3. Translating Prose, Fiction & Drama

- **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: "We Should All Be Feminists" (Prose):**
  Adichie's celebrated essay presents contemporary feminist discourse in an intimate, accessible, storytelling voice. Translating her Nigerian personal anecdotes and systemic critiques into Malayalam requires avoiding sterile, dry academic terminology, ensuring that terms like "gender", "patriarchy", and "agency" resonate with emotional clarity and conversational vitality for Malayalam readers.
- **Ernest Hemingway: "A Day's Wait" (Fiction):**
  Hemingway's poignant short story is an exemplary showcase of his minimalist "Iceberg Theory." A nine-year-old boy, suffering from influenza with a fever of 102 degrees, spends an entire day heroically preparing to die in silence, not realizing that his fever was measured in Fahrenheit while the French doctor spoke of Celsius (where 44 degrees is fatal). Translating Hemingway requires reproducing short,

declarative sentences, stripped of adjectival clutter, letting the poignant dramatic irony emerge from unsaid subtexts.

- **Cedric Mount: "The Never-Never Nest" (Drama):**
  A witty one-act satirical comedy exploring the pitfalls of hire-purchase consumerism. Jack and Jill furnish a luxurious suburban home entirely on installment credit ("the never-never"), owning only a fraction of their furniture. Translating drama demands spoken performability: dialogue must sound like natural, spontaneous Malayalam speech that actors can comfortably vocalize on stage.

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

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1. Theoretical Paradigms in Translation Studies

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Morphology	Analytic with few inflections; relies on	Highly agglutinative; extensive nominal case	De-agglutination into prepositions or

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	prepositions.	suffixes and postpositions.	compounding; avoiding clunky phrasing.
Passive Voice	Natural, frequent in formal, scientific, and journalistic registers.	Periphrastic passive with "peduka" (ഒപ്പടുക); often sounds awkward or alien.	Converting passive English sentences into natural active Malayalam constructions.
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

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Intersemiotic Translation	Semiotics (Jakobson)	The transmutation of verbal linguistic signs into non-verbal sign systems (e.g., adapting a novel into a film, stage play, or musical score).
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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 3 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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