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## Bridge over Cultures: A Translation Analysis of Gender and Linguistic Equivalence in Sai Brahmanandham Gorthi's 'Athanu'

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### Abstract

This paper explores the intricate process of translating the Telugu short story *Athanu* into English (*He*). As both the researcher and the translator, the author examines the challenges of navigating linguistic, idiomatic, and cultural gaps between the Source Language (SL) and the Target Language (TL). Through a systematic analysis of ten selected text samples, the paper demonstrates the necessity of prioritising communicative equivalence over strict literal translation to preserve the emotional depth and socio-cultural nuances of the original narrative.

### 1. Introduction

The short story *Athanu*, authored by Sai Brahmanandham Gorthi, serves as a poignant exploration of gender identity and marital constraints within a modern Indian context. The plot unfolds during an aeroplane journey where Uthpala, a medical doctor, interacts with a persistent co-passenger. Their conversation gradually reveals Uthpala's internal conflict: despite her husband's outward "niceness" and wealth, his male chauvinism has prevented her from practising medicine in the USA. This narrative provides a rich field for translation studies, particularly regarding how culture-specific concepts and gendered power dynamics are منتقل (transferred) across linguistic boundaries.

### 2. Methodological Challenges: The Three Pillars of Translation

The translation process encountered three primary categories of difficulty. Linguistic Problems: Specifically, the "lack of equivalents" for specific Telugu terms and the presence of words with "more than one equivalent" in English. Idiomatic/Usage Problems: Translating colloquialisms and regional metaphors that lose their essence in literal translation. Cultural Problems: Bridging the gap for concepts deeply rooted in Indian tradition and social structures.

### 3. Qualitative Analysis of Text Samples

The following samples illustrate the application of communicative and "sense-for-sense" translation strategies to overcome the aforementioned hurdles.

Text 1. SLT: "Excuse me..." okkasaari vulikkipadi choosindhi. Yedhurugaa muppaiyella yuvakudu navvuthoo kanipinchaadu.



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TLT: “Excuse me...” he said. She startled at first and looked at him. A thirty-year-old young man smiled at her.

Analysis: The translator utilised communicative equivalence to capture the suddenness of the intervention and provide a vivid picture of the interaction within the cabin.

Text 2. SLT: “Meeku...” *antoo aame medalo mangalasootraalu choosi aagipoyaadu.*

TLT: “Have you got...” he stopped asking her after looking at the thread of marriage (*sootraalu*) in her neck.

Analysis: This is an informative sentence where the visual of the *mangalasootram* replaces the need for verbal confirmation of marital status. The translation prioritises the target reader’s comprehension of the cultural symbol.

Text 3. SLT: *Kaasepatiki airhostess wachi, “Are you doctor Uthpala...could you please help us...” ani adigindhi.*

TLT: After some time, the airhostess arrived and asked, “Are you doctor Utpala? Could you please help us?”

Analysis: A complex sentence providing essential plot information. The translator maintains the originality of the content while ensuring the urgency of the medical situation is felt in the TL.

Text 4. SLT: *O kshnamaagi athane malli annaadu. “Indialo medicine yekkada chadivaaru...yee batch?”*

TLT: He asked her again after a minute, “Where have you studied medicine in India? Which batch do you belong to?”

Analysis: By combining a statement and an interrogative, the translator successfully brings the source context of social inquiry into the TL.

Text 5. SLT: *Dabbu soukaryaannisthundhi kaani sukhaanni ivvadhu, mukyanga mansuki. Samaajamlo aadavaalla paatra maaindhi. Inthakumundhu tharaalaki pillani kane yentram. Prasthutam vyapaara yentramaga promote ayyindhi.*

TLT: Money may give comforts but not happiness, particularly to the conscience. The role of ladies changed in society. She was a machine that produced babies for the old generation, but she has been promoted as a business machine now.

Analysis: This philosophical passage uses sense-for-sense translation to convey the harsh critique of the commodification of women.

Text 6. SLT: *Shtree yantrika jeevithaaniki inkaa purushude yejamaani.*

TLT: Man has been the owner of the mechanical life being led by women even today.



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Analysis: The translator succeeds in bringing the proprietor-property metaphor into the TL, highlighting the persistent patriarchal control.

Text 7. SLT: *Anthavaraku mukthasariga javaabichina Utpalaki okkasaari dhukham thannukuvachindhi.*

TLT: Utpala grieved at once. She had been speaking to him very briefly until that moment.

Analysis: This descriptive sentence focuses on the shift in Uthpala's emotional state, using communicative equivalence to interpret her mental condition.

Text 8. SLT: *"Ledhandi aayena chaala manchivaaru. Nanneppudu pallethu maata analedhu. Nene vundaleka vellipothunnaanu".*

TLT: "No, he is a nice person. He has not spoken anything ill about me. I am unable to stay there, and therefore I am going away".

Analysis: The phrase "*pallethu maata*" (not a single harsh word) is translated via sense-for-sense to reflect the husband's superficial kindness, which masks his deeper control.

Text 9. SLT: *Memu chadhivina chaduvu niswaardhamuga prajalaki vupayogapadaalani Medicine chadivetappudu maa cheta pramaanam cheyisthaaru.*

TLT: We had been taken oath when we were studying Medicine that the education we studied should give selfless service to the people.

Analysis: This text emphasizes Uthpala's professional identity and moral obligation, which contrasts with her domestic restrictions.

Text 10. SLT: *"Athanu nijangaa manchivaade... kaani magaadu. Mee andharilaantivaadu..."*

TLT: "He is really good, but he is a man, just like you all..."

Analysis: The final sample encapsulates the crux of the story. The translator captures the gendered nuance where "being a man" (*magaadu*) carries a weight of cultural entitlement that transcends individual "goodness."

#### 4. Cultural and Idiomatic Nuances

A significant portion of the translation's success relies on handling culture-specific words:

*Mangalasostram*: Not merely a necklace, but a "thread of marriage" signifying lifelong companionship. *Pellisambhandham*: Translated as a marriage proposal mediated through families. *Katnam*: Handled carefully as it carries multiple meanings (neck vs. official notification), though contextually linked to Uthpala's physical presence. *Vadhina*: A kinship term (brother's wife) that carries specific social expectations of care. *Pallethumaata*: Idiomatically translated to indicate an absence of verbal abuse.



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## 5. Conclusion

The analysis of *Athanu* demonstrates that translation is not merely a linguistic substitution but a cultural re-interpretation. The researcher found that while semantic equivalence provides the skeletal structure, communicative equivalence provides the soul of the translation. By moving beyond literal constraints, the translator was able to convey the subtle "male chauvinistic attitude" that serves as the story's antagonist.

The study concludes that for stories dealing with sensitive social themes—such as the gender difference and professional stifling depicted here—the translator must act as a cultural mediator. Success in translation is measured by the target reader's ability to not only understand the words but to feel the "degree of difference" in the protagonist's emotional landscape. Future translators of Telugu literature are encouraged to adopt a "sense-for-sense" approach when dealing with idiomatic expressions like *chanthaadantha* (unending list) or *porapachalu* (differences of opinion), as these are the elements that preserve the authentic flavour of the Source Language.

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