

Translating Nursery Rhymes from Sinhalese to English: With Special Reference to the Translation Strategies

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Abstract

This study delves into the significant role nursery rhymes play in children's development and focuses on the challenges faced by novice translators in rendering these verses into another language. The research aligns itself with Jones's (1989) conceptual framework, which delineates four levels of poetry translation: literal translation, approximation, adaptation, and imitation. These levels guide the exploration of the translation practices employed by novice translators. The investigation reveals that novice translators predominantly resort to literal translation and adaptation when tackling nursery rhymes. Literal translation involves a direct conversion of the source text, maintaining a word-for-word correspondence, while adaptation entails modifying the content to suit the cultural and linguistic context of the target language while preserving the essence of the original rhyme. The prevalence of these two strategies suggests that novice translators find it convenient either to adhere closely to the literal meaning of the source material or to creatively adapt it to fit the linguistic and cultural nuances of the target language. Understanding the challenges faced by novice translators in the translation of nursery rhymes is crucial for enhancing the quality of translated materials aimed at children. This research contributes to the broader discourse on translation strategies, shedding light on the specific nuances involved in the translation of poetic and culturally significant content for young audiences.

Keywords: Novice translators, nursery rhymes, Sinhalese to English, translation strategies.

Introduction

Nursery rhymes can be generally identified as verses, chants, poems, or short songs read, spoken, or sung to, or by small children to entertain or amuse them. These traditional poems, songs or rhymes that are passed down from generation to generation play an essential role in the language and behavioural development of children. Given the immeasurable importance of children being exposed to these types of poems and songs, nursery rhymes are considered a pivotal aspect of children's development (Danielson, 2000).

The history of nursery rhymes is not clearly defined. Usually, these verses are anonymous, although there are available works written by known authors. Numerous typical and familiar nursery rhymes are old and derived as part of a long oral tradition. Others first appeared as written works, although the authorship of these works is not always known. Although these rhymes can have different styles, subjects, tones, and themes, there are consistent features such as imagery that can be found in most nursery rhymes. Many are also marked by a rhythm and rhyme that makes them easy to remember. They include rhymes, lullabies, finger-plays, counting-out rhymes, riddles, games, songs, and ballads, among others. While some rhymes seem created purely to fascinate, others are moral and educational, including those intended to help

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children learn the alphabet and numbers. Many nursery rhymes have modifications in other languages, with similar rhymes appearing in different nations. Nursery rhymes remain a universal part of children's literature, often accompanied by illustrations designed to appeal to early readers. They are also passed from generation to generation as part of a shared oral culture.

Translation of nursery rhymes can be challenging for translators because they exhibit phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic linguistic features even though there are universal features. In order to find out the above-mentioned challenges this research has been carried out. The objective of this research project is to identify the strategies used in translating selected nursery rhymes from Sinhala to English. By considering nursery rhyme lyrics as poetry text, this research analyzes the equivalence of meaning and form and rhythm in nursery rhyme translation.

1. Literature review

Most children are interested in singing songs not only in their mother tongue but in any language mostly based on the rhythm since rather than the text the melody is interesting to the children. When considering translation, the translator should pay attention to both the meaning of the text and the rhythm. In 1981, Newmark mentioned that the translator needs to remember that the translation should contain the exact message from its' original language, and secondly, the translator needs to remember to set the target reader so that the translation's language is appropriate to the reader. According to Peter Newmark (1981) in his book *Approaches to Translation*, the translator should be able to translate the text naturally. Even if that means the translator changes the structure of the sentence or adds or erases one or more words into the translation. If necessary, the translator needs to look for synonyms or paraphrase the sentence for the text in order to make the whole text natural.

André Lefévere, a translation theorist, proposed methods of translating poetry and he considered the form, content, and aesthetic merits to be valuable elements within a unified content. A summary of these seven strategies of poetry translation is as follows: 1) phonemic translation reproduces the source language (SL) sound in the target language (TL); 2) literal translation is similar to word-for-word translation; 3) metrical translation reproduces the SL meter; 4) poetry into prose distorts the sense, communicative values, and syntax of the SL text; 5) rhymed translation attempts to transfer the rhyme of the SL poem into the poem in the TL; 6) blank verse translation ensures that the equivalents in the TL have meanings close to those of the original poem; 7) interpretation deals with versions, which occur when the substance of the SL text is retained but the form is changed, and imitations, which take place when the translator reproduces a poem of their own (Lefévere, 1975).

Nursery rhymes often contain wordplay, rhyming patterns, and cultural references that may not have direct equivalents in another language. Translators need to consider maintaining the rhythm, rhyme scheme, and overall meaning of the rhyme while adapting it to the target language's linguistic and cultural context. This linguistic untranslatability and cultural untranslatability were discussed by one of the prominent scholars, J.C. Catford in 1965. Catford believes that "The validity of the differentiation between linguistic and cultural untranslatability is questionable. According to him, linguistic untranslatability means "failure to find [that] a target language equivalent is due to differences between the source language and target language. Some examples of this type would be ambiguity, plays on words, etc..." (Catford, 1965, p. 98).

Jones (1989) outlines four distinct approaches to poetry translation: literal translation, approximation, adaptation, and imitation. A literal translation aims to faithfully convey the original meaning and poetic essence of the poem, although achieving this is often hindered by discrepancies in word sounds. Comparable to Nida's concept of formal equivalence, wherein both the form and content of the message are crucial, literal translation strives to mirror the various components of the source language in the target language. Newmark similarly advocates for literal translation, asserting that when equivalent-effect is achievable, word-for-word translation is not only the most effective but also the sole valid method in both communicative and semantic translation.

Another approach to poetry translation is approximation (Jones, 1989), where the translator remains faithful to certain elements of the original poem such as its sense, structure, and rhyme scheme, as noted by Jones. However, the translator also exercises some creative liberties to ensure a coherent translation. In contrast, adaptation involves a lesser degree of fidelity to the original text compared to approximation. Munday (2001) explains that adaptation involves modifying cultural references when a concept in the source culture does not exist in the target culture.

The next approach, Imitation, as described by Jones, involves creating a new poem in the target language with a theme inspired by the source language. Typically undertaken by poet-translators, this form of poetry translation allows for significant creative freedom. Johnson (cited in Jackson, 2011) views imitation as a poem loosely based on another poem, while Jackson (2011) references Dryden's perspective that translation requires the freedom to alter both sense and words, adapting them to the current context. Dryden suggests that the translator should draw only basic inspiration from the source text and use it as a foundation for their own creation. According to Dryden, imitation resembles free translation and is akin to adaptation (cited in Jackson, 2011). In imitation, the imitator is influenced by the original poem to craft a new piece while preserving its thematic essence. Thus, while the wording of the two poems may differ, they share the same underlying theme. Folkart (cited in Nouss, 2011) emphasizes the aesthetic viability of the results, stating that drawing a strict distinction between translation and imitation is unnecessary as long as the outcome is aesthetically pleasing. She also suggests that making the poem one's own is essential for successful imitation, highlighting the importance of creativity in the process (Folkart, 2007).

Jones asserts that approximation, adaptation, and imitation in poetry translation all acknowledge the existence of elements that are inherently untranslatable in poetic discourse. However, Nida and Taber (1982) posit that anything expressible in one language can be expressed in another, provided that the form is not crucial to the message. Contrarily, Nabokov (cited in Hatim & Mason, 1990) contends that only literal translation can truly convey the essence of a poem.

Expanding research beyond studies focused solely on specific language pairs such as Sinhala and English is essential. Exploring translations of nursery rhymes across a broader range of languages can provide valuable comparative insights into translation strategies, cultural adaptations, and linguistic challenges. By examining translations in various language pairs, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of how nursery rhymes are adapted and interpreted across different linguistic and cultural contexts. This approach can contribute to a more inclusive and diverse body of literature in the field of translation studies, offering valuable perspectives on the interplay between language, culture, and children's literature.

Pratama (2017), approaches nursery rhyme lyrics as poetry texts and examines the equivalence of meaning and form in rhymes. Meaning analysis involves specific procedures for assessing translation quality, while form analysis compares the original and translated versions, focusing on sound values. The findings reveal that most nursery rhymes are translated with less accuracy in terms of meaning equivalence. Additionally,

many auditory devices are omitted, and rhymes are often altered in the translated versions, indicating a lack of form equivalence. This research aims to contribute to song translation activities, particularly those targeting children as listeners.

Based on Persian and English, Ardakani, Lashkarian, and Sadeghzadeh (2015) have discussed the importance of allusions in literary texts. Furthermore, the study aimed to investigate the translator's selection of strategies for conveying meaning in the target language, and sought to evaluate the translation quality by identifying the strategies necessary for determining the function and implicit meaning of source text allusions and their transference into corresponding target language words and phrases. A key contribution of this research was the development of a new model for translators, providing them with tools to address challenges, particularly in translating allusions. Additionally, the study aimed to raise awareness among prospective translators regarding the importance of selecting appropriate strategies for achieving a more refined translation.

Studies focusing on translations of nursery rhymes, especially between Sinhala and English, are relatively scarce. Despite the abundance of theories addressing translation and nursery rhymes, there is a notable gap in empirical studies exploring this specific language pair. This scarcity highlights the need for further research in this area to enrich the understanding of the challenges and nuances involved in translating nursery rhymes between Sinhala and English. By conducting such studies, scholars can contribute valuable insights to the field of translation studies, particularly in the context of children's literature and bilingual education.

2. Methodology

This research adopts the conceptual framework delineated by Jones (1989), which categorizes poetry translation into four distinct levels: literal translation, approximation, adaptation, and imitation. These levels serve as the theoretical foundation for the study's exploration into the translation practices applied by novice translators. The corpus under investigation comprises translations of two nursery rhymes, and the researchers systematically employ these four translation strategies within the corpus.

Two well-known nursery rhymes were carefully chosen to provide translation tasks for novice translators enrolled in the Bachelors degree program in Translation Studies offered by the Department of Linguistics at the University of Kelaniya. These students are currently in their final year of study, indicating they have undergone comprehensive training in various aspects of translation, including literary translation. Six of twenty students enrolled in the program enthusiastically volunteered to participate in this translation task. Each student demonstrated their commitment to the translation process by submitting their translations for evaluation. The six participating students were divided into two groups to ensure a diverse range of experiences and perspectives. Three students were assigned to translate the first nursery rhyme (referred to as source text one), while the remaining three students were tasked with translating the second nursery rhyme (referred to as source text two).

The researchers have endeavored to implement the prevalent translation strategies employed by novice translators when translating nursery rhymes. By systematically applying the four identified strategies to the study's corpus, the researchers seek to discern patterns and frequencies of usage among novice translators. Furthermore, the study aims to elucidate the challenges and difficulties encountered by novice translators in the process of translating nursery rhymes. The utilization of the four translation levels provides a comprehensive framework for evaluating the nuances and intricacies inherent in the translation of poetic content, particularly within the context of nursery rhymes.

3. Analysis and discussion

The discussion in this paper focuses on the STs, their translations into English, and the strategies used by novice translators. It explores how nursery rhymes originally in Sinhalese are transformed into English, examining the choices and challenges faced by translators. The paper looks at how these novice translators navigate linguistic and cultural differences, aiming to convey the essence of the nursery rhymes. Additionally, it discusses the specific translation strategies employed, such as literal translation, approximation, adaptation, and imitation, providing insights into the methods chosen by novice translators in this particular context.

Table 1 – Source text I and translations

Source text I	Translation
මගේ පොඩි තාරා - පී පී ගැවෑ	<u>Translator 01</u> my little duckling - quack quack quack
හොට රතු පාටයි - ඇඟ සුදු පාටයි	ruby red beak and in - snowy white pack
අර අර ජේනා - සීතල වතුරේ	see that water - chill and cold
අත්තටු සලමින් - පින පින නැවෑ	flapped his wings - and swam in the pond
	<u>Translator 02</u>
/mage podi ʈa:ra - pi: pi: gæ:va:	my dear duckling - told quack quack
hotə raʈu pa:taj - ʃɛgə suʈu pa:taj	beak is red - body is white
arə arə pe:na - si:ʈalə vaʈure	playing with wings - in the cold water
aʈʈu salamin - pi:nə pi:nə næ:va:/	swam swam swam
	<u>Translator 03</u>
	my little duck said - quack quack quack...
	his little beak is - red red red ...
	white little body looks - nice nice nice ...
	swimming in that little pool - cool cool cool ...

Source Text (ST) I is a very popular nursery rhyme in the Sinhalese speaking community and it presents the story of a duckling, its shape, colour and how it bathes. The ST educates the children about the onomatopoeic sound the duckling makes in the specific speaking community (පී පී - /pi: pi:/) and introduces colours such as red (රතු - /raʈu/) and white (සුදු - /suʈu/). Similarly to create sound effects the source rhyme utilises repetition in instances such as අර අර (/arə arə /) and පින පින (/pi:nə pi:nə /).

The first translator shows signs of literal translation in order to convey the meaning as directly as possible. The Sinhalese onomatopoeic sound පි පි - /pi: pi:/ has been adapted as quack quack - /kwæk kwæk/ in accordance with the English onomatopoeic sounds. Similarly, the word රතු - /raʈu/ has been imitated as ruby red without using the direct equivalent red and සුදු - /suɖu/ has been imitated as snowy white without using the direct equivalent white. Here, the translator has intended to introduce new concepts, such as ruby and snow to the children and the utilisation of the term snowy white signifies that the translator understands the importance of using related concepts to the children. On the other hand, looking at the tense used in the ST and the Translated Text (TT), the translator has retained the tense (Past Tense) since the type of translation used by the translator is literal translation.

The second translator captures the charming and lively moment rather than considering the translation quality. The word /podi/ (පොඩි) means small, but the translator used the word "dear" which means endearment and affection. The simple description of the beak and body with the colours red and white onomatopoeic words like /kwæk/ and /swæm/ is used by the translator as repetitions. The word swam repeated three times implies the sequential progression. The translation technique used by the second translator could be identified as literal translation.

The third translator effectively conveys a charming and affectionate portrayal of a little duck through its use of repetition, vivid imagery, and a rhythmic structure. The use of "my little duck" establishes a personal and affectionate tone, suggesting a close relationship between the speaker and the duck. The repetition of "quack quack quack" reinforces the communicative aspect, portraying the duck expressing itself. The repetition of "red red red" emphasises the vivid colour of the duck's beak. The use of red and white colour imagery adds visual appeal and paints a clear picture of the duck's appearance. The repetition of "nice nice nice" emphasises the speaker's admiration for the duck's appearance. This repetition adds a rhythmic quality to the poem and underscores the speaker's positive feelings. The mention of the duck "swimming in that little pool" sets the scene, creating a visual image of the duck's activity. The use of "cool cool cool" not only describes the temperature of the water but also contributes to the overall mood and atmosphere. The poem follows a parallel structure, repeating the pattern of possessive pronoun + adjective + noun (e.g., "my little duck," "his little beak," "white little body"). This structure creates a sense of rhythm and cohesion in the poem. The intentional repetition of words ("quack," "red," "nice," "cool") adds a rhythmic and musical quality to the poem. This repetition serves to emphasise key elements and contributes to the overall flow. The consistent use of diminutive adjectives like "little" emphasises the small and endearing nature of the duck. This choice of language reinforces the tender and affectionate tone. The use of repeated sounds, such as the "quack" and the rhyming of "red" and "said," contributes to phonetic play, making the poem more engaging and enjoyable to read or hear. The translation technique used by the translator is adaptation.

Table 2 – Source text II and translations

Source Text II	Translation
<p>රන්වන් පාටයි සමනලයා රෝස මලේ පැණි බීලා ගියා ආයෙත් ඒවි ද ඒ සමනලයා මල්වල පැණි බොන්ටා</p> <p>/ranvan pa:taj samanajaja: ro:sa male: pæni bi:la gija: a:jeɟ e:viɟə e: samanajaja: malvələ pæni bonta:/</p>	<p><u>Translator 01</u> Little Golden Butterfly came to the rose and drank nectar he went dancing with his golden wings will he come again ?</p> <p><u>Translator 02</u> Golden Butterfly here you are did you find your yummy nectar ? roses will give you yummy nectar please come back will ya?</p> <p><u>Translator 03</u> Golden yellowish bumblebee sipping the honey of barberry will he come back to the bushery ? to kiss and sip again ?</p>

Second ST is also a very famous nursery rhyme. This imagery appears rich, incorporating natural elements like flowers and butterflies. The repetition, symbolism, and rhythmic qualities contribute to the poetic atmosphere, and the inclusion of an ambiguous line adds an intriguing dimension to the overall composition. The linguistic analysis highlights the careful selection of vocabulary, clear syntax, use of specific tenses, and the incorporation of rhetorical devices such as repetition and parallel structure. The text effectively employs linguistic elements to convey its poetic themes and create a distinctive linguistic and cultural ambience.

The first translator has personified the butterfly with the intention of enhancing its proximity to the target audience. Personification in sentences such as ‘he went dancing’, ‘with his golden wings’ and ‘will he come again?’ clearly show that the translator has intentionally done so. Even though the ST does not mention that the butterfly is ‘small’, the translator has added the word ‘little’ in the TT, as ‘Little Golden Butterfly’. The translation strategy that was occupied by the translator could be identified as imitation.

The second translator has also utilized imitation as the translation strategy. The ST's form has been recreated to encapsulate the ST's spirit and to be more appealing to the target audience, children. The translator has

used different words and expressions to transfer the meaning from the ST and has retained the rhythm and meter by ending every line with the sound ‘a’.

The third translator has used adaptation as the translation technique. The ST mentions a ‘butterfly’ while the translator has adapted the butterfly into a ‘bumblebee’. Similarly the ‘rose’ from which the butterfly sips nectar has been adapted as ‘barberry’. The translator has taken the liberty of changing certain names of the ST apt to the target culture. Even though the meaning deviates from the ST, the essence of the nursery rhyme has been retained.

Paying attention to the translation strategies utilised by the six translators of the two STs, the results could be shown as below.

Table 3 - Results

		Translation Strategy (Jones, 1989)
Source Text 01 /mage podi ʈa:ra: - pi: pi: gæ:va: hotə raʈu pa:taj - ægə suɖu pa:taj arə arə pɛ:na: - si:ʈalə vaʈure aʈʈtu salamin - pi:nə pi:nə næ:va:/	Translator 01	Literal Translation
	Translator 02	Literal Translation
	Translator 03	Adaptation
Source Text 02 /ranvan pa:taj samanajaja: ro:sa male: pæni bi:la gija: a:jeʈ e:viɖə e: samanajaja: malvələ pæni bonta:/	Translator 01	Imitation
	Translator 02	Imitation
	Translator 03	Adaptation

In accordance with the presented data, the translation strategies employed by the translators encompass Literal Translation, Adaptation, and Imitation, with the noteworthy absence of the utilization of the translation strategy Approximation by any translator. It is evident from the data that Literal Translation, Adaptation, and Imitation have been employed at comparable frequencies by the translators.

Specifically ST 01, it is observed that the predominant translation strategy is Literal Translation, while Adaptation is employed on a singular occasion. Conversely, in the context of ST 02, Imitation emerges as the preeminent translation strategy, with Adaptation being applied only once. This divergence in the application of translation strategies between the two source texts suggests a nuanced approach by the translators.

Notably, an intriguing pattern arises in the collective translation endeavors, wherein Literal Translation and Imitation emerge as the preferred strategies over Adaptation when rendering both ST 01 and ST 02 into English. This trend underscores the translators' inclination toward maintaining faithful adherence to the original text (Literal Translation) and incorporating stylistic elements similar to the source material (Imitation), as opposed to more extensive modifications characteristic of Adaptation. Such insights contribute to a nuanced understanding of the translators' decision-making processes and preferences in navigating the intricacies of rendering nursery rhymes from Sinhalese to English.

Conclusion

This research article delves into an investigation of the translation techniques employed by novice translators specifically when tasked with translating two nursery rhymes from Sinhalese, a language spoken primarily in Sri Lanka, into English. The study adopts a structured approach by utilizing the translation strategies delineated by Jones (1989). These strategies, namely Literal Translation, Adaptation, Approximation, and Imitation, provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing and categorizing the various approaches novice translators may take when faced with the task of translating literary works such as nursery rhymes. The investigation revealed that among the translation strategies employed by novice translators, Literal Translation and Adaptation emerged as the predominant approaches. Literal Translation, as observed, entails a straightforward conversion of the source text into the target language with minimal alteration, aiming to maintain a strict word-for-word correspondence. Novice translators who opt for Literal Translation prioritize fidelity to the original text's structure and wording, striving to reproduce the source language's syntax and vocabulary as closely as possible in the target language. On the contrary, Adaptation emerged as another prevalent strategy among novice translators. Adaptation involves modifying the content of the source text to better align with the cultural and linguistic context of the target language, while preserving the original rhyme's fundamental essence. When employing Adaptation, novice translators make deliberate adjustments to idiomatic expressions, cultural references, or linguistic nuances to ensure the translated text resonates effectively with the target audience. This strategy allows for greater flexibility and creativity in adapting the source material to suit the linguistic and cultural nuances of the target language, while still capturing the essence and intent of the original rhyme. The prevalence of Literal Translation and Adaptation suggests that novice translators found it convenient to either stick closely to the literal meaning of the source material or to adapt it creatively to fit the linguistic and cultural nuances of the target language. This insight into the translation strategies used by novices sheds light on their preferences and tendencies in the process of translating nursery rhymes from Sinhalese to English. Furthermore, the findings of this study may have broader implications for understanding how novice translators approach similar tasks in different linguistic and cultural contexts. By recognizing the prevalence of Literal Translation and Adaptation among novice translators in translating nursery rhymes from Sinhalese to English, researchers can gain insights into the broader trends and patterns in translation strategies employed by novice translators across different language pairs and genres. This understanding can inform future research and contribute to the development of effective training methodologies for novice translators working in diverse linguistic and cultural settings.

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