

Fidelity and Cultural Sensitivity in Bible Translation from English to Anāl Language

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ABSTRACT

Translation, a crucial tool for cross-cultural communication, poses ethical dilemmas that impact the accuracy and cultural relevance of the translated text. There is a constant tension between faithfully conveying the original message and adapting it to the target culture, more so in cases where the two cultures in question are markedly different from each other. This paper discusses the ethics of translation, focusing on the dual imperatives of fidelity and cultural sensitivity by examining selected Bible verses that have been translated from English into the Anāl Naga language. A qualitative and analytical approach has been used in the research methodology. The three versions, namely, source text in English, translated version in Anāl, and the literal meaning of the translation are studied and the differences are highlighted. Translation inaccuracy and misinterpretation is a common occurrence, and this issue has much greater implications in religious text translation, with mistranslations or inadequate translations holding the danger of being considered heretical or blasphemous. Understanding the translator's role and responsibilities can ultimately promote a more informed and ethical approach to translation practice. The paper explores how cultural nuances and context-specific meanings can be lost in translation, leading to potential misinterpretations. Additionally, the translator's own biases and cultural background can also influence the translation process. The paper discusses the importance of collaboration between translators and cultural experts to ensure accuracy and cultural relevance. The need for ongoing evaluation and revision of translated texts to address potential errors or inaccuracies is addressed. The paper suggests that fidelity and cultural sensitivity are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary aspects of ethical translation practice. In conclusion, it also proposes a framework

for balancing these competing demands, and aims to contribute to the development of best practices in translation, promoting a more informed and ethical approach to cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: Translation, Ethics, Cultural Sensitivity, Identity, Bible, Anāl Naga

INTRODUCTION

Translation is more than a mere substitution of words between the source and target language. It is a process that cannot function independently from cultural connotations and context-understanding. Translators must navigate theoretical and practical implications of this dichotomy to produce a high-quality translation that is both faithful to the source as well as acceptable to the target. A delicate balance between accuracy, cultural and spiritual understanding is required in the translation of religious texts. In addition to linguistic and literary nuances, the translator has to ensure that the intended theological doctrine is conveyed to the reader.

The Holy Bible, sacred book of the Christian community is known to be one of the most translated books to ever exist. According to Wycliffe Global Alliance's Global Scripture Access 2024 Report, the full Bible has been translated into 756 languages, approximately 10% of all known languages, and the New Testament into 1726 languages (WGA Statistical Report, 2024). It is important to remember that contrary to popular belief, the English version is not the original. The original scriptures were recorded by multiple authors mainly in Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament), with the exception of a few books in Aramaic.

The Anāl Bible is known as *Ithing Thimbu* in the native tongue and the complete version was first published in 2008 by The Bible Society of India. Translated from the RSV (Revised Standard Version) of the English Bible, it has 66 books in total. 39 of these belong to the *Pedinna Palu* (Old Testament) and 27 to the *Pedinna Hrin* (New Testament). *Pedinna Hrin* was published earlier in 1980.

For this research, the data is non-numerical, selecting four verses from the Bible, two from *Pedinna Hrin* and the remaining two from *Pedinna Palu*. Source text, translated version, and literal meaning of translation are given side-by-side. There are varying versions of the English Bible, and the

Anāl Bible (*Ithiing Thimbu*) was translated from the RSV (Revised Standard Version). To ensure a comparison of translations with higher levels of precision, the English verses selected for this study are also from the RSV. The research is qualitative and analytical in nature

FIDELITY IN TRANSLATION

Jakobson (1959) stated how translation could deprive a message of its original intent when the grammatical pattern of the two languages in question are different. Fidelity, the pursuit of accuracy and faithfulness to the original text, is a fundamental principle of translation. The translator's primary responsibility is to convey the intended meaning of the author, without addition, omission, or distortion (Nida, 1964). Fidelity ensures that the translated text remains true to the original, preserving the author's voice, tone, and intent. However, it can sometimes conflict with cultural sensitivity, as the literal translation of words or phrases may not convey the same meaning in the target culture.

ISSUES IN TRANSLATION OF RELIGIOUS TEXTS

The issues that arise in translating the Bible were discussed by Nida and classified into linguistic issues, sociolinguistic issues, canonicity, textual reliability, levels of language, degrees of literalness, and so on. He argues that the heavy weight of tradition often stifles a translator's creativity and obstructs a reader's comprehension. Phrases such as 'hallowed be Thy name' in English are actually a Semitic way of avoiding direct reference to God in the original Greek text (Baker, 2001).

Cultural sensitivity, the ability to adapt the translation to the target culture, is equally essential. Translations must consider the cultural context, idioms, and nuances of the target language to ensure that the text is understandable and relevant. The importance of a 'culture-filter' is brought up which is then related to the translator's capacity to mediate (Katan, 2009). Cultural sensitivity requires the translator to be aware of the cultural differences and to make informed decisions about how to convey the intended meaning in the target culture. However, cultural sensitivity can sometimes compromise fidelity, as the translator may need to modify the text to accommodate cultural differences.

In translating religious texts, onomatopoeic expressions are often ruled out as inappropriate to a dignified context, as they bear the equivalent of slang in many languages. Anachronisms are another means of violating the co-suitability of message and context, and despite being technically correct, they detract from the meaning of the text. For example, using the word 'iron oxide' instead of 'rust' in a Bible translation (Venuti, 2012). Although the two words basically refer to the same substance, usage of the scientific term in other settings has the capacity to offset the message. Language has always been culture-bound, and the need for the translator to know the cultural contexts of both source and target cultures in the process of translation is highly intensified by this (Bassnett, 2013).

In regards to translating religious texts, a study on how Islamic knowledge and concepts in the sacred text were interpreted, contextualized, and produced for the receiving culture in Korea was conducted. An examination of two Korean translations of the Qur'an for the receiving culture in the 1970s and 1990s showed recontextualization of the sacred text, particularly concerning the perspectives of believers in other religions and of women. Domesticating strategies, rather than foreignizing was used such as in changing the description of a man being 'superior' to being the 'guardian' of women (Choi & Kim, 2021).

The major issues of translation include an absence of corresponding lexis, differences in the sentence structure, and culture specific events or beliefs. Limitations in equivalence abound when there are rhythmic forms, puns or metaphors involved (Devi & Taishya, 2022). The Holy Bible is known for having a rhythmic structure in most books, a lyrical form that is similar to poetry. This rhythm can cause complexities during the process of translation into another language, especially one that does not share a similar linguistic structure with the source language.

TEXTUAL FIDELITY: ENGLISH TO ANĀL

The tension between fidelity and cultural sensitivity arises when the translator must choose between accuracy and adaptation. A literal translation may be faithful to the original text but may not convey the same meaning in the target culture. On the other hand, an adapted translation may be culturally sensitive but may compromise the accuracy of the original text. This tension is particularly evident in the translation of idioms, colloquialisms,

and cultural references that do not have direct equivalents in the target language. In other cases, slight discrepancies between the translated text in the target language and the source text can lead to a large difference in the way the text is interpreted. This is especially true in translations such as those of religious texts. To highlight this view, the selected four verses from the Bible are given below. There are three columns of scripture that will be analyzed. The first column is the original text in English, the second is the Anāl version that was translated. The third and most important column is a re-translation from Anāl back into English, proving that the initial translation (second column) lacks accuracy and fidelity to the first column.

SELECTED VERSES AND THEIR TRANSLATIONS

Eg.	Bible Chapter & Verse (RSV)	English Version	Anāl Translation	Re-translation from Anāl back into English
1	Proverbs 27:8	Like a bird that strays from its nest, is a man who strays from his home.	Vābū paṭhanu piive paha luluwng mi joso vain vadu paṭhanu paveka.	As a bird wanders from its nest, so also a man wanders from his place.
2	Isaiah 32:8	But he who is noble devises noble things, and by noble things he stands.	Tuto kolni thangni ki mibe kol am naki nung vāpasa mang, tuthal kolthang ki nung len rih ka.	But a noble person devises noble works, and stands on noble things.

3	1 Timothy 1:13	though I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted him; but I received mercy because I had acted norantly in unbelief,	Rowlsa tuwng panu pasinnu, cho pareelnu, tuthal ningjah tangnang tojoning amang nito nung piihlan khohka ido- tuwng ama nungki thin heng wng kapapa mang.	Though I formerly blasphemed, persecuted, and shamefully treated him, he considered me worthy of this ministry, for which I thank him.
4	Hebrews 13:17	Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account. Let them do this joyfully, and not sadly, for that would be of no advantage to you.	Alen hin thopunu iam hin pedo atokhin tuthal thang ahlu khin. Dahpa vadote, amahin tuwng nanghin ki athove hinto suh vapathā paje tuthal vanungtoh hinto vaphuwng hrang paje.	Obey your leaders and submit to them. For they watch over your souls, and must give an account of their works.

DIFFERENCE IN MEANING

In Eg. 1, replacement of the word ‘Like’ with ‘so also’ leads to a markedly different interpretation of the proverb. While the English version compares a man who strays from his home to a bird that strays from its nest, the literal meaning of the Anāl translation presents a declarative statement saying that a man leaves his home like a bird leaves its nest. It is no longer a derogatory comparison or a warning not to abandon one’s roots, but a mere statement of fact that sooner or later, everyone leaves home.

In Eg. 2 as well, the replacing of one preposition ‘by’ with ‘on’ shifts the importance of the act of doing noble things. The English version recognises the significance of noble acts as being the very foundation on which the

noble man is able to stand, while the Anāl translation observes how he stands ‘on’, and not ‘by virtue of’ noble acts.

Eg. 3 depicts a completely dissimilar statement from the original, after being translated into Anāl. In the English text, the speaker admits his wrongdoings and claims that God had mercy on him because he had acted ignorantly in unbelief. The translated version paints a different story with the speaker thanking God for considering him a worthy follower.

In Eg. 4, the last sentence is altogether missing in the translated version, and its preceding sentence also faces a change in meaning. The leaders, according to the English version, watch over the people’s souls to give an account of them to God. In the translation, the leaders do not account for the people, but themselves.

CULTURE-SHAPED TRANSLATION

The term ‘*luluwng*’ is used interchangeably to mean both ‘like’ and ‘so also’ in the Anāl tongue. The basic driving force of any culture is primarily their language, leading to the conclusion that linguistic translation discrepancies emerge from the basis of different cultures. Cultural sensitivity in the case of Eg.1 would refer to the knowledge that certain cultures employ words or phrases in ways that might appear unconventional to a foreign culture.

The lack of fidelity in the translations as shown in Eg.2 and Eg.3 do not originate from a culture-bound interpretation of the source text, but is rather a result of mistranslation stemming from issues with fluency and linguistic differences of the two languages. Furthermore, in Eg.3, during translation, the context of the preceding verse, i.e 12, has been taken into account instead of focusing on the 13th verse alone. In the English version of verse 12, the speaker offers his thanks for being considered faithful and being put into the ministry. This section has been added on to verse 13 in the Anāl rendition.

The translator’s omission of a whole sentence in Eg.4 is not replaced by additional sentences in either the preceding or following verses. The leaving out of manner of obedience (joyfully, not sadly) in the Anāl rendition, could be attributed to the translator’s perception that it was not essential to the main message. This omission does not affect the main message that the verse intends to convey, but it certainly classifies as an imperfect translation.

SUGGESTED FRAMEWORK FOR BALANCING FIDELITY AND CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

To deal with this tension, translators need to adopt a framework that balances fidelity and cultural sensitivity. The following principles effectively aid this navigation:

- a. Contextual understanding: A deep understanding of the cultural context of both the source and target languages is required.
- b. Cultural humility: Translators should recognize the limitations of their own cultural knowledge and be willing to adapt and learn. Continuous learning and professional development is highly encouraged to stay up-to-date with the latest translation theories and practices
- c. Transparency: Being transparent about translation decisions and providing explanations for any modifications made to the text is important.
- d. Collaboration: Translators should collaborate with cultural experts and reviewers to ensure that the translation is both accurate and culturally sensitive.
- e. Flexibility: Translators must be flexible and willing to make adjustments as needed to ensure that the translation meets the needs of the target audience.
- f. Respect for the source text: Translators should respect the source text and the author's intent, while also being sensitive to the needs of the target audience.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The study is not devoid of limitations, in that only 4 scripture verses in translation have been selected for comparison purposes. A larger sample will permit the observation of more cases lacking fidelity in translation. Cultural-sensitive translation is barely evident in the Anāl rendition, in regards to the selected samples. The most common reason for differences in meaning stem from the linguistic structure of English and Anāl, the two languages in question. Further research can address more issues that arise in cross-cultural translation, as well as examine the differences between the many English versions and their respective translations, apart from the Revised Standard Version that has been employed in the present study.

CONCLUSION

The ethics of translation require a delicate balance between fidelity and cultural sensitivity. Translators must navigate this tension to produce a high-quality translation that is both accurate and culturally relevant by adopting a framework that prioritizes contextual understanding, cultural humility, transparency, and collaboration.

There is a marked difference between ‘translating’ and ‘interpreting’, and in the case of religious texts, the latter is highly discouraged. Inserting personal views and commentary during translation could lead to the reproduced text being labelled blasphemous, or as tampering with God’s word.

Fidelity, a long-standing concept in translation studies, needs to be re-evaluated in light of cultural difference. As cultural differences can lead to conflicting values and beliefs, making it challenging to determine what constitutes “fidelity” in translation, a more nuanced understanding of fidelity is needed, one that takes into account the cultural context involved in translation. Constance B. West states that the problem in translation is like discharging a contracted debt, where one must pay not with the same money, but the same sum. (Nida, 1964).

In regards to the findings in the case of translating selected passages from the English (RSV) Bible to the Anāl *Ithiing Thimbu*, the analysis showed lack of fidelity as resulting more from omission and linguistic differences. The Anāl translations were not affected by considerations of cultural sensitivity as opposed to the Korean retranslation of the Qur’an, and reproduced literal equivalents as far as the linguistic structure permitted.

Translating religious or sacred texts between cultures that are markedly different requires constant reviewing to ensure that literalness or strict linguistic exactness to the source text does not interfere with the sacred tone or its reception by the target culture. Adhering to the suggested framework can enable translators to ensure that their translations meet the ethical standards of the profession, as well as the needs of the target audience.

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