

Translating the Movie Experience: An Analysis of the Screen Translation of the Malayalam Movie Manichithrathazhu

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Abstract – Translation has brought the world and cultures of the world closer. The mass media, whether it is print or electronic, have benefited a lot from the act of translation. Screen translation or audiovisual translation, as the translation of products displayed via screen is known, includes movies, games, DVDs etc. Audiovisual translation involves diverse challenges when compared to the translation of works in print. This paper analyses the subtitles of the movie Manichithrathazhu (The Ornate Lock) with special focus on the song 'pazhama thamizh pattizhayum'. Manichithrathazhu is a classic Malayalam psychological thriller released in the year 1993. The song was chosen as it occurs at a crucial juncture of the movie. Horror and humour constitute the dominant moods of the movie. The translation horror is supported by background music while the translation of the latter is context specific and dependent on the source language.

Keywords– Audiovisual Translation, Manichithrathazhu, Humour, Song, Culture

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Globalization has opened the doors of opportunities for people of various professions. Every area of human activity has experienced a change due to liberalization and technological advancement. One such field that has witnessed a sea change due to globalization is cinema. It has become a cultural product with great significance. Movies from remote nations in the least known languages travel across the world due to the latest technologies available. The best and recent example would be S. S. Rajamouli's Bahubali 1 and 2. The movie had a worldwide release and won praises from media across the world. The movie was originally made in Telugu, an Indian language with only seventy-five million speakers. The movie traveled around the world on the wings of audiovisual translation.

Audiovisual translation rose into prominence only in the twenty-first century. According to Delia Chairó, Audiovisual translation is one of several overlapping umbrella terms that include 'media translation', 'multimedia translation', 'multimodal translation' and 'screen translation'. These different terms all set out to cover the interlingual transfer of verbal language when it is transmitted and accessed both visually and acoustically, usually, but not necessarily, through some kind of electronic device.

It allowed movies, serials etc. to travel across the world. The two widespread modes of audiovisual translation are dubbing and subtitling. Dubbing uses 'acoustic channel' to translate while subtitling is 'visual and involves a written translation that is superimposed on to the screen' (141).

India is a multilingual nation with more than twenty languages with official language status. The Indian movie industry is big enough with movies coming out in twenty-five languages, including regional dialect like Bhojpuri. Indian movies are nowadays released in China and Russia along with USA and Canada. The movies are either dubbed or subtitled in the language of the target audience.

Translating a work in print into another language and audiovisual translation has to be treated differently as they present a different set of challenges and opportunities. As Chairó points out,

Conversely, products for the screen (i.e. films, TV series and serials, sitcoms, documentaries, etc.) are completely audiovisual in nature. This means that they function simultaneously on two different levels. Screen products (from this point onwards SP) are polysemiotic; in other words, they are

made up of numerous codes that interact to produce a single effect (142).

She presents the polysemiotic nature of screen products through the diagram given below,

	Visual	Acoustic
Non-verbal	Scenery, Lighting, Costumes, Props, Etc. Also: Gesture, Facial Expressions; Body Movement, Etc.	Music, Background Noise, Sound Effects, Etc. Also: Laughter; Crying; Humming; Body Sounds (Breathing; Coughing, Et
Verbal	Street Signs, Shop Signs; Written Realia (Newspapers; Letters; Headlines; Notes, Etc.)	Dialogues; Song lyrics; Poems, Etc.

The polysemiotic nature of 'screen products' can make the act of audiovisual translation either via dubbing or subtitling a complex task. Subtitling, according to Gottlieb, is 'the rendering in a different language of verbal messages in filmic media, in the shape of one or more lines of written text presented on the screen in sync with the original written message (Gottlieb 2001b: 87).

This paper looks at the subtitling of the movie Manichitrathazhu with special reference to the subtitles of the songs. The movie was directed by Fazil. The story was written by Madu Muttom. The movie was released in 1993. The movie was remade in Tamil, Kannada, Bengali, and Hindi. All remakes were commercially successful.

The plot of the movie revolves around the young couple Ganga and Nakulan. Ganga (Shobana) and Nakulan (Suresh Gopi), arrives at the Nakulan's ancestral home/tharavadu called Madampalli. Many superstitions are associated with the tharavadu. Therefore, Nakulan's uncle Thampi (Nedumudi Venu) is against Nakulan's decision to stay at the Madampilli house. But educated Nakulan goes against his wish begins to live there. Nakulan's aunt narrates the stories associated with the Madampilli house to Ganga. Sankaran Thampi, the karanavar who lived in the tharavadu more than hundred years ago brought in a dancer, Nagavalli, from Tamil Nadu as his concubine. Nagavalli had a lover, Ramanathan. Ramanathan, also a dancer, came in search of Nagavalli and started to live in a house near the tharavadu. Sanakaran Thampi murders Nagavalli when he learns about their affair. On Durgashtami day, Nagavalli returned as a blood-

thirsty spirit to kill Sankaran Thampi. Sankaran Thampi controls the spirit of Nagavalli with some mantras. He locked up the spirit of Nagavalli with the help of some sorcerers. Her spirit was locked up in a southern section at the tharavadu (Thekkini) by putting the talisman over the lock of Thekkini. Sankaran Thampi committed suicide later. His spirit too was locked up in the same Thekkini, by means of an ornate enchanted lock called *Manichitrathazhu*.

Curious Ganga manages to unlock the Thekkini with the help of Alli, Nakulan's cousin. She finds ancient valuables such as jewelry, musical instruments etc. She also sees the picture of Nagavalli and Sankaran Thampi. Nakulan's uncle Thampi becomes when he learns about the unlocking of Thekkini. Strange events unleash at Madampilli house with Nakulan's relatives and Ganga getting attacked by the 'spirit of Nagavalli'. They try to seal the Thekkini again but is scared away by Nagavalli. Inmates of the house report seeing a woman clad in white sari wearing anklets. Nakulan suspects Sreedevi, Thampi uncle's daughter behind these unnatural events. He calls his friend Dr. Sunny to treat Sreedevi. Dr. Sunny soon finds out that the mental patient is not Sreedevi but Ganga. His inquiry unveils Ganga's past and the reasons for the multiple personality disorder which torments her. Madampilli house with its strange superstitions associated with it evokes the painful memories of childhood in Ganga. A well-known tantric Pullattuparambil Brahmadattan Namboothiripad is consulted by Nakulan's Uncle. The Tantric and the doctor turns out to old acquaintances and the tantric is full of praise for the Doctor. The movie ends with Dr. Sunny curing Ganga's illness with Tantric's assistance.

The movie was a psychological thriller. Its remake into four Indian languages endorses its success. The four version in four languages portrayed the story in a manner which suited the target audience's cultural context. The subtitled Malayalam movie gives non-Malayali's an opportunity to understand the original.

The movie, though a psychological thriller, does not ignore the element of humor. The audience has moments of hearty laughter throughout. Moments of tension are interspersed with comic scenes. Songs have an important role in the movie as they are used to convey the mood of the characters and also to unveil the plot. The song, 'Pazham thamizh pattizhayum..' is a metaphorical narration of the life of Ganga. Subtitling this song without the loss of meaning is a difficult task. Subtitling is a complex kind of translation as it has a lot of limitation. In the case of the translation of a text in print, the author is not constrained either by space or word count. But in the case of subtitling,

...apart from translating the dialogue and overcoming the linguistic problems of translation

when dealing only with the written texts, the translation must be adjusted to the space provided for the space provided for the subtitle and to the time speakers are seen on screen.... In the translation for both dubbing and subtitling coherence between image and sound must be maintained (109-110)

The song 'Pazham thamizh pattizhayum...' is important as it is combined with the plot. The song has a rhyme and is suggestive of the musicality of the lyrics. The subtitle does not translate the rhyme.

The translation misleads the audience by introducing elements which are not there in the song.

Malayalam song	Subtitle (movie)	Subtitle by the present researcher
Pazham tamizh paattizhayum shruthiyil pazhayoru thamburu thengi Manichitra thaazhinullil veruthe nilavara maina mayangi	In the songs of times gone by There was an old man There was a bird dozing Inside a historical room Filled with a lot of Sorrowful memories of love	In the <i>sruti</i> of an ancient Tamil song An old tempura was mourning In the mysterious chamber with ornate lock a Maina was sleeping
Sarasa sundharee mani nee Alasamaayura ngiyo Kanavuneythar aathmaraagam mizhikalil polinjuvo Viralil ninnum vazhuthi veenu virasamaayora adhi thaalam	O beauty! are you lost In those memories A soulful tune is reflected as a dream in your eyes The song of parting is here Even the veena is silent	O beauty! Are u In a balmy sleep Was the soulful song weaved by dreams lost in waking The fingers played A dull adi thaala
Viraha gaanam vithumbi nilkkum veena polum mounamaay...(2) Vidhurayaame e veenapoovin ithalarinja nombaram	The song of parting is here Even the veena is silent The song of parting is here Even the veena is	Strings of veena strained by separation Has become silent Petals alone knows the Pain of the bereaved fallen-flower Sighs heard

Kanmathilum kaarirulum kandarinja vingalukal	silent The eyes and the heart felt The same kind of darkenss	by The stone walls and darkness
Kulirinullil swayamirangi kadha menanja paingilee (2) Swaramurangu m naavilenthe varimaranna pallavi Manjurayum raavarayil maamalaraay nee pozhinju.	The bird entered the trap and locked itself And has forgotten the lines In her song Chose to melt away like Frozen dreams	the bird trapped herself in the story weaved by herself And forgot the lines of the song in the chamber of cold night you were a fallen flower

The song captures the agony of Ganga and Nagavalli. Nagavalli trapped in the *Thekkini* and Ganga trapped in the story of Nagavalli. The old Tampuru is translated as the old man. The subtitle struggles to convey even the practical meaning of the song. The poetry is left untranslated. Many of the lines in subtitle fail to make sense. The last two lines exemplify this. Two lines are left untranslated and instead given the translation of succeeding two lines. The feeling pain which marks the song lost in translation. The image of the sorrowful fallen flower and veena are not conveyed. The song evokes the feeling of pain and it uses the image of musical instruments, especially stringed instruments – suggesting strain-to evoke the pain in the listeners. The subtitle fails to convey this.

Another instance of error in subtitling occurs at the beginning. Nakulan's Chittappan, Unnithan who is fond of Aksharasloka game sings a song. Aksharasloka competition begins with one of the participants reciting a four-line stanza or *sloka*. The next participant has to recite another *sloka* starting with the first letter of its third line. The person who fails to sing the *sloka* will be out of the game. Unnithan who is fond of this game stops by a group of people who play this game under the Banyan tree near the pond. He has to sing a song beginning with the Malayalam letter 'ṭh' 'Tha'. He begins the *sloka* which means 'the alarm which sounds at the sunrise without being set by anyone'. The Malayalam phrase equivalent to 'setting alarm clock' literally means 'give the key to the alarm'. Unnithan, as he knows in his subconscious mind that he has left the key at the Madampilly house,

recites it as 'Without taking key' instead of reciting 'without giving key'. This humor is lost because the constraints of space and time do not permit the explication of the context of the Aksharasloka game. As Unnithan approaches the participants of the game, Vaidyar tells him that another participant was given 'pa'. The reference is to the Malayalam alphabet 'pa', which also puns with Malayalam word for mat –'paai' which becomes 'pa' in colloquial usage. Unnithan amusingly asks the Vaidyar, 'did he sleep over it'. He wants to know whether the participant was able to recite a sloka beginning with 'pa'. This particular scene is exemplified humor lost in subtitling.

Audiovisual media unlike print media- except comics and cartoons- can make use of images to convey the sense. The viewer can depend on the visuals and sounds along with subtitles to understand the movie. But, as the mentioned examples suggest, sometimes the source language and culture impose some barriers which are too difficult to overcome. The song and the *sloka* discussed in the paper are examples of impenetrable barriers. The soulful song sung by Dr.Sunny in the movie is capable of making the audience feel the agony of Nagavalli and the conflicting personality of the unknown mental patient. The subtitles would give the readers a summary of the plot. The experience of watching a movie will be lost.

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