

TRANSLATIONS AND THEATRICAL ADAPTATIONS OF GREEK PLAYS IN  
SRI LANKA FROM 1990 TO 2005 FOR THE SINHALA READERS AND  
(MULTI-ETHNIC) AUDIENCE <sup>i</sup>

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**Abstract**

Despite the historical relationship between Sri Lanka and Greece via the ancient Silk Road on the sea, the classical Greek play has been introduced to monolingual Sinhala audiences only since the mid-twentieth century. This paper examines the play texts and cross-cultural performances of ancient Greek dramas in Sri Lanka between 1990- 2005. This paper also analyses effective theatrical practices and textual modification of the Greek plays in Sinhala, which are adapted by local academics and practitioners for different intentions. Furthermore, it examines enculturation, adaptation and translation effectiveness in the examples to provide a theoretical introduction to the translation and theatrical adaptation projects in the future.

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## Introduction

This paper provides textual and performance analyses of the translations and adaptations of Ancient Greek plays in Sinhala in Sri Lanka between 1990 and 2005 to find an effective cross-cultural practice for this performance exchange. Academic disciplines such as drama and theatre performance, classical studies, translation studies, cultural studies, and literature studies differently interpret the work of translation or a cultural adaptation of a Greek play for a 'host' culture on their perspectives. This investigation responds to that performance practice on the perspectives of cross-cultural performance work as well as a translation of a Western canonical literature in another culture. As a limitation, though, the texts and the performances of classical Greek play presented in Sinhala in the mainstream of Sri Lanka are mostly covered, a slight possibility exists that there are some amateur productions are not discussed here. This work also only discusses the transportation of English translation of Greek play texts in to Sinhala language.

Despite the historical relationship between Sri Lanka and Greece through merchant sailors and monks,<sup>ii</sup> Greek plays have been introduced (or was possibly re-introduced) through the English language after Sri Lanka's exposure to British colonialism (1815-1948).<sup>iii</sup> However, Greek cross-cultural theatre history in the Sinhala theatre main stream started from *Sagathaya*, an adaptation of Aristophanes' *Clouds*, performed by Henri Jayasena in 1957, based on Douglas Amarasekara's script, *Eththa Kumakda* ( De Mel 1987: 53). There are ten publications in the Sinhala language of Greek play texts including two translations of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. In addition, eleven theatre productions of Greek plays were staged including five productions of *Oedipus Rex* up to 2005. Most of these translations are either literal translations or just text adaptations rather cross-cultural adaptations.

One idea of an approach to a translation is that based on the principle of "complete equivalence", which is thought to ensure the accuracy of a translation (Heylen 1993: 2). However, "complete equivalence" could be more difficult when transporting a text between two very different cultural contexts of Western and non-Western, as well as the time period of ancient and modern. In addition, it needs more consideration when transposing for monolingual (or mono-cultural) readers of a 'different culture'.

The general assumption for any translation is that it is destined to fail the original in some way, and have therefore traditionally been accorded a low academic status (Heylen 1993: 2). Even so, Greek play translations in Sinhala from English language texts have increased for academic purposes in Sri Lankan education.

Despite the majority of Greek play translations in Sinhala being translated from English language translations, Sinhala translations become the first exposure for monolingual readers in Sri Lanka. Also, most of the Sinhala translations considered in this paper are motivated for introducing a Greek play text for monolingual readers rather than a performance intended

process for theatre spectators. These translations take a “secondary” position, as they are translations of translations.

*Foley states:*

*Every contemporary performance of a Greek tragedy must be an adaptation of sorts, since it involves translation of the language of the original and confronts a profound ignorance of the music, dance, and theatrical context that conditioned its first presentation. This impediment removes the barrier of language and theatrical convention faced. (1999:4)*

It is useful to consider which modifications are appropriate for Sri Lankan cross-cultural performances of Greek plays by reading through existing translations. However, there are no simple answers or models, but an evaluation of previous Greek play texts in Sinhala could deliver some suggestions for future translations or adaptations of Greek plays into Sinhala.

Nine of Greek plays in publication in Sinhala and one unpublished text were presented to the Sinhala community readers until 2005. The majority of Greek plays in Sinhala were translated by Ariyawansa Ranaweera including two versions of *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*; Sinhala translations of Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound* (*Prometheus Bandana*) in 1993, Euripides’ *Trojan Women* (*Trojan Geheanu*) published in 2001 and Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonnas* (*Kolonnas hi Oedipus*) in 2004. Seebal Jayakodi translated Euripides’ *Medea*, in 1996 and she translated *Hippolytus* in 1998. In addition, Aileen Siriwardana translated Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* in 2004. The surviving satyr, Sophocles’ *Trackers*, was translated in 1967 as *Berahada*, the play was produced in 1967 and 1999. The text was first published in 1991. In 1996, Walter Marasinghe translated Aristophanes’ comedy, *Frogs*, as *Mahacharaya* with a full text in Sinhala, but it remains unpublished. Sunanda Mahendra, adapted part of Aristophanes’ *Clouds* for his original Sinhala play, *Socrates* in 1990. This play referred to *Clouds* to reproduce the life and death of Socrates in Greece in the fifth century BCE. Moreover, lines or stanzas of Greek plays were translated into Sinhala for different purposes. For example, Kamani Jayasekara, published *Sthri Wirodi* in 2002, a based on several lines, characters and ideas of Aristophanes’ and Euripides’ plays. In addition, she translated a few lines of Aristophanes’ plays for her publication in Sinhala, *Greeka Natyakaru Aristophanes*, that introduces and evaluates Aristophanes’ plays for students and general readers in 2004.

In most cases, translators had followed previous translation styles or find an appropriate structure for synchronizing a cross-cultural work. In other circumstances, mostly for academic purposes, some of these texts have been transposed as a direct translation rather than an adaptation.

### Translations of Greek plays for Sinhala readers

Existing Greek play texts in Sinhala are invariably translated from English. Perhaps the Sinhala translations of Greek plays are limited by the knowledge derived from the English language and therefore, the Sinhala translations of Greek plays can be considered as ‘second

generation' creations (or third). A further concern about analysing Greek play translations into the Sinhala language is that translators, except Jayewardene who adapted Sophocles' *Trackers*, do not indicate the sources or the name of the translator/ adaptor of their English language source. Thus, it was very difficult to identify that which modifications have been added to the Sinhala version of the play with respect to the English language source text.

The experts in the particular culture could criticize many of translators, who do not have cultural knowledge of specific norms and expressions represented in the particular source text. Translations of Greek plays by practitioners in any other field have a risk of being challenged by experts in the field such as classical studies and cultural studies in Sri Lanka. In spite of few, most of classical Greek play translators are experts in other subject area than recognized as experts in classical studies, or cultural studies, and never being professional translators. They learn themselves throughout their experience in the translation tasks and through criticisms (if available) to maintain cultural norms and importance of expressions. Also, it is inevitable to compare a translation, if any other translation of the particular text is available.

I will start with Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* as it has been translated five times (until 2005 ) which sets a record for it as the most translated or adapted Greek play in Sinhala. *Oedipus Rex* is based on a unique plot about a noble king driven by his fearful destiny in which he had unknowingly killed his father and then married his mother so his children are half-brothers and half-sisters. Shelagh Goonewardene mentions the production of *Oedipus Rex*, produced by students of the Tower Hall Theatre Foundation in 1981 as the first production of the Greek tragedy in Sinhala by Sophocles (Goonewardene 1994: 96). This student production was directed by Subhash Udgata, who was an expert from the National School of Drama in New Delhi, and the theatre text was based on a Sinhala translation by Chandi Goonatileke from a Penguin English edition (Goonewardene 1994: 96-98). However, this claim to being the first production is contradicted by another workshop production of *Oedipus Rex* in Sinhala that was performed prior to the Tower Hall Theatre Foundation production, which was also performed by a workshop of students of Lionel Wendt Ranga Shilpa Shalaika in 1975 as *Sagathaya* (De Mel 1987: 53). Yet another production of *Oedipus Rex* was produced by an amateur theatre group called Little Theatre Group in English in 1962 (Goonethilleke 1994: 493). However, translations used in these productions are not available even in unpublished versions to identify their modifications. Nonetheless, a publication of *Oedipus Rex* was foremost among translations, published by Siri Ediriweera in 1973. It was republished as an academic publication for the University of Sri Jayewardenepura in 1988. After 1990, there were three productions of *Oedipus Rex* in Sinhala based on two translations: those of Siri Ediriweera translated in 1973 and Ariyawansa Ranaweera's in 1990. There is a revised version of *Oedipus Rex* by Ariyawansa Ranaweera in 2004, which is a modification to his earlier version of 1990.

I set Siri Ediriweera's translation as an initiative to this comparative study. Ediriweera's work is prominent in many ways as it carries the main structure of Greek play style in addition to which as the first university approved text for the *Oedipus Rex*. As a main highlight of Ediriweera's translation, the choric parts in Sinhala were divided into two sections as *strophe* and *anti-strophe*, as choral odes were split in the ancient Greek tragedies (Walton 1991: 174). This is the only translation, which has used this formation in any publication. A survey of the classical Greek play translations texts in Sinhala reveals that they have either taken a blank verse style or created lyrical and poetic language. In The language style of Ediriweera's translation of *Oedipus Rex* uses a combination of blank verse and songs to structure the play. His choric parts are adapted on short and rhythmic structures in comparison with Ranaweera's work.

වර්තන ගීතය 01

ගායකයෝ :

සෙත් සිරි දෙන සදා

ඇපලෝ දෙවිඳු වසනා

ඩෙල්පි දේව මැදුරේ

ගැයෙයි දේව ගීතා

කුමක්දෝ ඉන් තිබස් වැසි වූ

සතවෙත ගෙනො දේව අනාවැකි

මනුලෝ සතහට සියලු වපත් හිඳි

සදා සරණවන දෙවිඳුහි ඇපලෝ

පවසනු මැන දැන් දේව මුවෙන් ඔබේ

අප වෙනුවෙන් ඇති දේව නියෝගය

(Ediriweera's translation 1988: 3-4)

Ranaweera, who has the account for the most translation works of the Classical Greek plays than any translator did, considers that his translations will exist until an improved translation is done by a bilingual expert of both Greek and Sinhala languages (Ranaweera 2001: Preface). So, he revised his some texts for the other editions, which are mostly noticeable in this translation edition for the *Oedipus Rex*. For example, some lines of the English translation were probably misinterpreted in Ranaweera's first translation. Specifically, when Oedipus tells the chorus about his message to Teiresias, he says,

Oedipus: I have not overlooked it. I have sent for him- It was a Creon's advice- twice I have sent for him, and am much surprised he is not already here. (Watling 1974: 33)

The line that indicates 'twice' is vital for the plot, and this is missed in the first translation. Moreover, some cultural concepts such as mortal man and his relationship to the gods (Mikalson 1991: 29-32) were changed in the first translation.

අ: නායක ට ඇපලෝ දෙව්ඳුන්ගෙ නෙත් දෙකින් ලොව දැකියි.

අප පුජකතුමා තෙරේසියාස්

අප සොයා වෙහෙසෙන කරුණා

දැනගෙන හැකිවනු නියතයි ඔහුගෙන්.

ඊඩිපස් : ඒ ගැන දැනටම කටයුතු කළෙමි

ක්‍රෙයොන් ද මට ඔය උපදෙස් දුන්නෙහිය

දන්වා යැවුවෙමි කැඳවාගෙන එන්න ඔහු

වරක් නොව දෙවරක්ම දුතයන් යැවුවෙමි

එහෙත් පුදුමයක් ඔහු පැමිණියේ නැහැ තවමත්

(Ranaweera's translation 2004: 50)

Ranaweera's second translation differed from the first mainly through the language style and advances of translation techniques that represented more cultural customs. He also corrected several important phrases and words he had omitted in the first edition. In addition, in the second translation, Ranaweera contributes more stage directions. Though, the original manuscripts do not contain stage directions, number of English translations inserts stage direction for the convenience of their readers. I assume that Ranaweera follows the same motivation as many English translators of the classical Greek play texts to ease the readability of the Sri Lankan monolingual/monoculture readers.

(තීබයේ රජ මැදුර ඉදිරිපිට මීටි දොරකි. වේදිකාව මැඳ ගලින් නිමවන ලද දෙව් සුරුවමක් වෙයි.)

අර්ධ - නර සත්වයා විසින් ඇසු පැනයට පිළිතුරු දී ඊඩිපස් රට පාලනය කිරීමට භාර ගෙන සැහෙන කලකි. ඒ අතර දුර්භිෂයකින් තීබය වෙළාගෙන ඇත. පුජකයින් සමූහයක් හා පිහිට ඉල්ලන්නන් සමූහයක් බිදුණු මුහුණින් පැමිණෙති. පැමිණ ලොම් රෙදි එතු අතු රිකිලි අල්තාරය මත තබති.

දොරටුව විවෘත වෙයි. ආරක්ෂක හටයින් සමග 'ඊඩිපස් රජ පැමිණේ. ඔහු උදාරමිය. මද' නොන්ඩියක් පමණක් ඇතග සෙමෙන් තම වැසියන් දෙස බලයි.)

ඊඩිපස් :

කැඩීමස් වංශයෙහි අලුත් ලේ නහරන දුවන  
 දරුවනි  
 වැඳ' වැටෙමින් වැතිරෙමින් මා පුදසුන අසල  
 කුමක් ද මේ කරනා ආයාචනය  
 නුවර අළලා පැතිරෙයි කපුරු තුවරලා  
 පිළිස්සී නැගෙන දූමය  
 මළවුන් නිසාවෙන් නගන දුක් අඳෝනා  
 පැතිරෙයි හැම අත  
 පිහිටට කෙනෙකු නැත්දැයි නැගෙයි හඬ' දොර දොර  
 නොකඩවා  
 තතු දැනගන්න පණිවිඩකරුවකු නොවිවා  
 පැමිණියෙමි මා ම ඔබ වෙත  
 දැනිති ඔබ මා කවුරුන්දැයි  
 මම වෙමි ලොව පසිඳු ඊඩිපස්

(Ranaweera's translation 2004: 37)

*Antigone* is a 'middle tragedy' representing the strong female character of Antigone, the one of the daughters of Oedipus, facing a tragic destiny because Oedipus killed his father and married his mother. Ariyawansa Ranaweera has a second edition of *Antigone* in Sinhala similar to the *Oedipus Rex* translation. Perhaps, the second version arose because Ranaweera needed to reconsider the translation when *Antigone* was recommended as an academic textbook in the Sri Lankan curriculum. In the first publication, Ranaweera mentioned that the motivation for the translation was to present the spirit of a brilliant manuscript to Sinhala readers rather than a more literal translation (Sophocles 1991:7). Except for the contextual meaning of some words, the language structure exhibits significant changes in the second translation. These language changes can be seen in the 'choric odes', which are more lyrical than in the first version.

අත්වැල :

අහෝ මේ නම් මහා චිලියකි  
 පතිත වෙයි හිරු කිරණ හැම අත

තීබයේ සත් මහ දොරටු මත  
 පතිත වී දස අතම දිසුලන  
 මෙවන් චිලියක් නොවිණි මන් පෙර  
 අහස රන්වන් තියුලු වූ නෙත  
 රාත්තිරී ගනඳුරු නසාලන  
 ඩර්ස් ගංදිය මත වැතිරගෙන  
 නැවත නැවතත් සදන පිලිබිඹු

(Ranaweera's translation 2004: 236)

In contrast, the same lines of the first version were created as follows:

(තීබස් ඥාණවෘත්තියන්ගෙන් සැදී අත්වැල් කණ්ඩායම වේදිකාවට පිවිසෙති)

අත්වැල් කණ්ඩායම :

අපගේ පුරවර නැසීමට ආ පර සතුරු සේනා නසා  
 පළවා දැමූ මහ තිරු රඳුට ජය වේවා ඩර්ස්  
 ගඟ දිය මත උදා වුණු අරුණ සැරදේවා  
 සතුරු බල මුච්චි දහස් ගණනින් පිරිවරා අවුදිත්  
 රුදුරු වදනෙන් බැණ නගා ගෙන අප වටා සරමීන්  
 ගොදුර වට කොට වටව කොටනා සකුණයකු චිලසින්  
 (Ranaweera's translation 1991: 14)

The modes of expression for these verses represent most of the first translation of *Antigone*. But general readers could understand these, as they are of familiar poetic and prose styles. However, it is interesting that one of the verses in the first translation below has not been changed in the second version of Ranaweera's because it was established and quoted in academic texts in Sri Lanka.

අත්වැල:

සකල ලෝ කුස සරා බැලුවද  
 ඇද්ද ප්‍රේමය සදිසි බලයක්.  
 කොයි කවර බලයක් ඇතත් ලොව



හිස් නමයි ප්‍රේමය ඉදිරියේ  
 නාත්පස මිහිතලය වසමින්  
 සිදු කුසෙහි මැද වුවද හිඳිමින්  
 පැහැපතැති මුහුණක බැල්ම තුළ  
 රැක ඉදන් සැගවී බලාගෙන  
 ගනියි වසගෙට දෙවී නරන් සැම (...).

(Ranweera's translation 1991: 43)

The language and translation style of Ranaweera's first *Oedipus Raja* and *Antigony* translations have continued in his other translations, *Prometheus Bandana* and *Trojan Gaheanu*. Despite the fact that *Prometheus Bandana*, a translation of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, was the only Sinhala language publication of a Greek play by Aeschylus at the time, the text has not been fully produced in the Sinhala theatre. This may be because the plot of *Prometheus Bound* does not support for dramatic action and choreographic expectations of a modern audience.

Similarly, Ranaweera's translation of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*<sup>iv</sup>, *Colonus hi Oedipus*, which is one of the plays of the Three Theban plays,<sup>v</sup> has not been produced until 2006, and remains as a literal translation as *Prometheus Bandana* (*Prometheus Bound*). Despite the fact that three separate plays: *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, were written at different times, they become a unity as a story of one family in Thebes<sup>vi</sup>. The language style of the translation is less lyrical and uses prose unlike Ranaweera's other translations because he may intend to introduce the particular play without much changing the expression from the English translation.

Euripides' *Medea* and *Hippolytus* have many similarities in the stories with popular two stories/legends of Sri Lanka. Though it is not highlighted, the similarity of the stories of the two cultures could be the one of possible inspiration of the translator Seebal Jayakodi for her selections.

*Medea* is a notable Greek tragedy by Euripides and represents a powerful female character. The plot of *Medea* is about the revenge of Medea, who has been betrayed by her husband Jason. Jason expects to marry a new princess for a royal legacy, and discards Medea who takes revenge on the new wife and her father. The murder of the new bride takes place with the sending of a poisoned wedding dress. Then, Medea kills her own children to hurt Jason. The saga of *Medea* has much similarity to the Sinhala legend of *Kuweanie*. Kuweanie was an indigenous queen<sup>vii</sup> in ancient Sri Lanka, who was betrayed by her husband Vijaya. He was a prince from another country and took the kingdom of ancient Sri Lanka with the support of Kuweani, who killed her relatives for him as Medea did for Jason. Kuweani faces

the same destiny as Medea when she was betrayed and banished with their son and daughter by Vijaya. The local legend of Kuweani has been transformed to a variety of theatre styles<sup>viii</sup> in Sri Lanka including *Nadagam*, *Nurthi*, and a mix of realistic and non-realistic theatre styles. Despite the similarities in both stories, the translation of *Medea* by Jayakodi did not draw on folk theatre style or modern theatre styles in Sri Lanka. Still the translation could be justified as introducing a Greek play to a different culture or showing universality of the story/characters/actions, or comparing many similarities of cultural references in both cultures.<sup>ix</sup>

A translation of Euripides *Hippolytus* by Seebal Jayakodi has transposed the text as happened with *Medea*. The story of *Hippolytus* shows similarities to the pre-life of Buddha Gotham.<sup>x</sup> Hippolytus is the son of Theseus who worships the virgin goddess Artemis. Theseus is away from home, and his young bride Phaedra, the stepmother of Hippolytus, falls in love with Hippolytus and tries to conceal her sentiment. Hippolytus rejects her and is very angry about her betrayal of his father. Phaedra commits suicide leaving a suicide note to her husband. The letter is to convince her husband, and falsely accuses Hippolytus for violating her. The local story, *Mahapaduma Jathakaya*, from the Buddhist literature has close parallels to *Hippolytus*. Mahapaduma who is the son of a king in a previous birth of Buddha Gotham, was killed by his father, and his stepmother seeks revenge for the rejection of her love. The local story has been translated and produced with a modification of the *Nadagam* theatre style by Ediriweera Sarachchandra in his original, *Lomahansa*. Nevertheless, Jayakodi translated *Hippolytus* without cultural modification to the Sri Lankan story as she did with *Medea*. Also Jayakodi did not mention that the importance of the play is that Hippolytus is the only surviving text` which shows death on stage which Greeks did not usually do as a theatre practice. The language style of *Hippolytus* is the same as her earlier translation.

හෙදිය : කුමක්ද ඔබ ඊළඟට කියන්නට හදන්නේ?  
 මේක නම් පිස්සුවක්, දරුවට  
 වනශෙහි චිලිමහන් පෙදෙසෙහි  
 කැලේ සිව්පාවුන් දඩයම් කරන්නට  
 මුල දී ඔබ බියගුල වුනාල  
 දැන් වියළි වැලි මාවතක  
 සිටින අශ්වයෙකුටත්  
 ඇත්තටමල අනාගත වක්තෘ කෙනෙකුට  
 දුෂ්කරම කටයුත්ත මෙයයිල අනුමාන කරන්නට  
 ඔබේ දෙපසින් සිට ඔබව ගෙනයන්නේ

කුමන දෙවියන්ද  
 ප්‍රකෘති සිතිය ඉවත්කර පහර දෙනවා ඔබටමට  
 ඊඩා : කුමක් ද මා කරන්නේ ?  
 මා මං මුලා වී ඇවිදිනවාද ?  
 මාගේ සිත මගෙන් ඇත් වී ගිහිත්  
 කොහේදල කොහේද ? මා උමතුටෙලා සිටින්නේ  
 දෙවියන් මා ස්පර්ශ කළේ පිස්සුවෙන්,  
 අහෝ මගේ ශෝකය  
 දයාබර සෙවිකාවල මගේ වේලය නැවත දෙන්නට  
 මට ලැප්පයි සිතන්නට  
 කුමක් ද මා කීවේ කියලා  
 මගේ මුහුණ වසන්නල  
 මගේ දූෂිත් කදුළු වැගිරෙනවා  
 මම ලැප්පවෙන් රත්වෙලා  
 හිවැරදි සිත තුළට  
 කටුක වේදනාව ආපසු එනවා  
 එමෙන්මල කටුක වේදනාව අඩු නොවී  
 උමතු බව ඉතිරිවෙලා  
 එය ඉතා හොඳයි  
 කිසිවක් නොදැනීම ඉන්පසුව මරණයට පත්වෙව්

(Jayakodi's translation 1998: 32-33)

The above lines of *Hippolytus* can be found in Jayasekara's *Sthri Wirodu* that recreated a story from one incident of Aristophanes' *Frogs*, and several parts of Euripides' plays.

සේවිකාව: ට්‍රොයිසන් පුරයේ තිසියස් රජුගේ බිරිඳ කොයිතරම් අසරණ වී ඇත්ද ?  
 මේක නම් හොඳ ජේනයක් අහන්ඩම අවශ්‍ය දෙයක්ග මොන  
 දෙයියොද මෙයාගෙ ඔලුව අවුල් කරල තියෙන්නෙ ?

ඊඩා: අනේ දෙවියනේ මට අනුකම්පා කරන්නද මොනවද මම කළේ ? හරි සිහියෙන් මම කොයිතරම් අතට ගමන් කළාද ? මට පිස්සු හැඳිලා හිටියෙ. බලවත් දෙවියනේ මට ශාප කරලා මොනවද මම කරන්නේද මට මොනව වෙයිද ? කරුණාකර මගේ මුහුණ වසන්න මට ලැජ්ජයි මම මොනවා කිව්වද කියලා හිතන්නවත්. ආයින් කඳුලුකඩා හැලෙනවග මගේ මුහුණ විලියෙන් රතුවෙලා. හරි සිහියෙන් සිටින එක වෙදනාවක් ඒත් සිහිය විකෘතිවීම වාවන්ඩ බැහැ. හොඳම දේ මේ කිසිවක් ගැන හිතන්නේ නැතිව මැරීම යන එකයි.

(Jayasekara's translation 2002: 42)

However, the language styles of Jayasekara's translation are different to Jayakodi's translation. Jayasekara was presenting the concept of Euripides' plays by using her own creation and in prose rather than poetic language. In contrast, Jayakodi has followed previous translation styles such as those used for *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone* by Ranaweera. Comparing the lyrical and dialogue parts of *Medea* and *Hippolytus* with the dialogue and lyrical parts of Ranaweera's early translation shows that both language structures are similar. Moreover, *Medea* and *Hippolytus* have not been produced for the Sinhala audience until 2006.

It is interesting to note that the female translator, Seebal Jayakodi, translated Greek tragedies like *Medea* and *Hippolytus*, which present powerful (or complex) female characters. Moreover, *Antigone* also represents a powerful female character and this production was produced by a female director Somalatha Subasingha, with the character of Antigone performed by her daughter, Kushalya Fernando. Certainly, there is a correlation between the translator's and director's feminist intentions and their selections of s. Similarities between local legends and foreign ones would be effective for *Medea* and *Hippolytus*.

Aileen Siriwardana translates *Philoctetes* from English translations of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*. *Philoctetes* is one of the surviving tragedies, which do not have as many tragic incidents in the plot as other ancient Greek tragedies. According to the translator, the main intention of the translation was to introduce a Greek to the Sinhala readers and students who study Greek play as a subject in Western Classical Culture in Sri Lankan universities. Siriwardana has<sup>xi</sup> used prose throughout her translation, even the choric songs of the have considerable structural changes.

ගායක පිරිස :

මේ මනිහා කොහේ ඉන්නවා අත් ද?

අසරණයා.

නෙයොප්ටොලමස් :

වැඩිය දුර වෙන්න බැග කොර ගහගහ

යන්න ඇති කන්න මොකුත් සොයාගෙන  
 එන්න. කියන හැටියට නම්ල ඔහු ගේ  
 කරදරයට පිහිට වෙන්න කිසිවෙකු නැතුව,  
 ඔහු වේදනා විඳිමින් ම දුන්නෙන් හා  
 ඊතලවලින් දඩයම් කරමින් පවත් වෙන්නේ.

ගායක පිරිස :

නිසැකයෙන් ම දුක්බර දිවියකි  
 මනිසෙක් මෙයල සත්‍යයක් ම ය.  
 මනුෂ්‍යයෙක් නැත කතා කරන්නටල  
 තනිවම පාවිච්චි ඉතින්  
 වේදනා විඳ දරාගන්නට  
 පිහිටවන්නට නොමැත කිසිවෙක්ල  
 මෙවන් දුක් රාශියක් උසුලා  
 සිටින ඔහුගේ  
 සිහිවිකල් වන්නට ද ඉඩ ඇත.

(Siriwardana's translation 2004:27).

Siriwardana also uses borrowed words from English for her translation. In one English to Sinhala example, words such as 'sir' or 'sire' or 'lord' have been translated into Sinhala as 'උතුමාණෙනි' (Uthumanani) or 'මහත්මයාණෙනි' (Mahathmayanani) or 'ස්වාමිනි'(Suwamini). However, Siriwardana translates the meaning into Sinhala simply as 'සරී' (sir) using a loan word from the English language when Neoptolemus addresses Odysseus.

නෙයොප්ටොලමස් :

ඔඩිසියස් සරී  
 චිතරම් දුර බලන්න යන්න ඔහු නෑග ඔබ  
 විස්තර කරන විදියේ ගුණාවක් තියෙනවා.

ඔඩිසියස් :

ඔබ සිටින තැනට ඉහළින් ද ? පහළින් ද ?

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(Siriwardana's translation 2004:18).

In general, a translation from English to Sinhala needs to consider language structure of both languages. The syntactic structure of the Sinhala language is subject, object and verb (SOV), which contrasts to the syntactic structure of English, which is subject, verb and object (SVO) (Balagalla 1995: 163). It is obvious that the differentiation of word sequence give different interpretations to the actual meaning of the translation. The order of words has been changed in the Sinhala text to express the verbal meaning and rhythm of the language. Poetic mixed language structure was the key factor that is applied in the majority translations of Greek plays. Therefore, the grammatical word order in the Sinhala language is changed to create a poetic word order. For example some chorus lines have been changed in a different syntactic structure, which is verb, object and subject, (VOS). Hence, it is notable that these translations retain meaning but do not correspond to the order of the Sinhala language structure.

### **Adaptations of the Greek plays in Sinhala**

Choosing ancient Greek theatre for an Asian audience may not transcend the limits of culture because both have similar theatre conventions between realistic and non-realistic. Scholars and practitioners in non-Western countries in South-East Asia and in South Asian countries, such as China, Japan and India, attempt to illustrate similarities between Greek theatre style and their own indigenous theatre styles. As Foley says the use of mask, dance, music, ritual, and poetry in Eastern and other world theatre traditions not only overlaps with that of Greek tragedy, but offers an opportunity to bring to life those aspects of ancient play that are alien to the tradition of Western nineteenth-century realism (1999: 2). It can be seen in some case studies, like Luo Chan's Greek play adaptation in China, that similarities are maintained such as an open-space theatre with three sides surrounded by the audience, two fixed doors for entrances and exits, and the use of exaggerated facial expressions and speech, singing and music common to Greek theatre and traditional Chinese *Xiqi* (Tain 2006: 253). This process hypothesizes common theatrical elements from cultural conventions, encompassing acting, music and dance styles that some non-Western (and some Western) theatre directors expect to encourage excitement and enthusiasm through experimenting with theatre similarities and differences in synchronizing conventions. In addition, transposing a play from one culture to another culture suggests sharing and borrowing from the original context of the play but it also suggests the possibility of re-interpretation. Because of differences between cultures and times, most of the literal translations and theatrical adaptations to Sri Lanka require some sort of cultural adaptation. As Linda Hutcheon argues, in transfers from a telling to a performance mode, differences of philosophy, religion, national culture, gender, or race can create gaps that need filling by dramaturgical considerations that are as likely to be kinetic and physical as linguistic (2006: 150).

The production named *Trojan Kanthawo* showed noticeable changes to vary the translation and allow a modern interpretation of war and war victims. This is an example of

how a Greek tragedy is received by the contemporary world that it permits a political response to irresolvable, extreme situations without being crudely topical (Foley 1999:3). Darmasiri Bandaranayaka and Ananda Wakkumbura using Ranaweera's translation *Trojan Geheanu* created the production text. Ranaweera's translation followed his literal translation techniques and intentions, and uses poetic language styles. The stage adaptation was modified to emphasize the director's intentions, therefore, some textual lines were edited and language style changed for general readers. The changes can be obviously seen in the example from the following lines of *Trojan Geheanu* by Ranaweera (2001), which compare with the subsequent example from the theatre version of *Trojan Kanthawo* that modified the translation to be simple and more lyrical.

හෙකඩේ: ඔසොවපල්ලා නුඹලාගේ හිස් අව දූලි මතින්  
නුඹලා දකින්නේ අප දන්නා ට්‍රෝජ රාජ්‍යය නොවේ  
රාජ රාජ මැතිදුන් මියගොස් පරලොව ගොස් හමාරය  
දැන් ඉතින් විඳ දරා ගනිල්ලා පුඵ පුඵවන් විඳියකට  
(Ranaweera 2001: 10)

හෙකඩේ: අවාසනාවන්ත ගැහැණිය! වැතිර හිඳිනා අව දූලි මත,  
ඔසොවන්න ඔබේ හිස ගෙල කෙලින් තබාගෙන,  
පොළෝ තලයෙන් උඩට,  
කොහිද දැන් මතුවට තවත් ට්‍රෝජ නුවරක්?  
මිය ගොසිනි එය සඳහටම.  
එසේ නම්කියනු මැන තවදුරටත්  
කෙලෙස රැජිනක් වෙමී ද මම මෙහි?  
වෙනස් වී ඇත අපේ දෛවය  
එබැවින් විඳ දරා ගනු මැනව ඔබේ ඉරණම.  
(Bandaranayake and Wakkubura's adaptation 2000: 5)

Rathnasri Wijesingha, a leading Sri Lankan songwriter, replaced the chorus songs of the *Trojan Kanthawo* production later with lyrics. The most notable modification of the theatre version of *Trojan Kanthawo* however was that it applied contemporary images of war by using modern armed vehicles and soldiers although the is set in an ancient world. Wijegunasingha writes:

*The remarkable success of Bandaranayka's production is due not only to the fact that it powerfully conveys the essential content of Euripides' work, but also because the staging satisfactorily accomplishes the difficult task of generating in the minds of the spectators the mood and atmosphere contained in the original play.*

*This success is due in large measure to the fact that Bandaranayka has been sensitive to something that had to be taken into consideration if a like the *The Trojan Women*, which belongs to the Western classical tradition of drama, was to be successfully staged in a country like Sri Lanka. (Wijegunasingha 2000: 4)*

*Berahanda* was another famous Greek play adapted in 1967 by Bandula Jayawardana and also edited and produced again in 1998 by Lucian Bulathsinghela. The manuscript of *Berahanda* was based on the *Traker (Ichneutae)* by Greek dramatist Sophocles in the sixth century B.C.E. The *Traker* or *Ichneutae* is the only surviving satyr play by Sophocles found at Oxyrhynchus in Egypt in 1907 as 400 lines of what was probably about 800 lines in length. There are several English versions of *Ichneutae* that completed and recreated missing lines based on Greek Myths. The *Berahanda* adaptation was based on R.L. Green's translation into English (Jayawardana 2004: 22). According to Jayawardana, the appropriateness of the original text for structural changes in different cultural contexts was the motivation for the selection (Jayawardana, 2004: 8). *Berahada* adapts the story of the god Hermes, who steals Apollo's cows and who makes the lyre when he was seven day old. The play is appropriate for Sinhala culture because characters show cultural similarities. The god Apollo might be adapted to the sun god (*Hiru Devi*) and satyrs to local devils *Gopalu yakku*<sup>xii</sup>. Hermes was translated as *Panchasica*, who is a musician and a god of India, and described in Buddhist stories. Those adaptations contributed significant structural changes to *Berahanda* that are relevant to Sri Lankan audiences. Most of the English translations of *Ichneutae* begin with the epilogue by Apollo. However, Jayawardana recreates extra lines as a prologue, or *Nandi*<sup>xiii</sup> in a Sanskrit, for the *Berahanda*, which describes the plot and performances of Greek sailors to the Sri Lankan audience. In Jayawardana's opening, the Greek sailors describe the style of the play, name of the author, and the intended modifications for an audience from a different culture.

ශ්‍රීක වෙළඳ පිරිස ( සත් දෙනෙක් ) පැමිණ ගායනය කරති.

සමිඳු සිඳුහත් ගොයුම් ගොත් මුනි - නැමඳු' නිති කල සදා බැතියෙන්

මිලිඳු නරනිඳු' නග''ා සේසත් - රජය කළ ගන්ධාර දේසෙන්

මුහුඳු පස් කර කතර පසු කර - පැමිණි ලක වෙළඳ'ාම ඊසියෙන්

වෙළඳු වෙමු අපි යවන ජාතික සරන - රට රට බොහෝ වෙනසෙන්

කරන් අවසන් සියලු ගනුදෙනු - යන්ට සැරසී ඉතා රැවියෙන්:තව\*



වෙළඳ' නායකයා :

තව විස්තර වුවමනා නැතැ දැන් ඉතින්  
 අපි අප ඉදිරියේ ඉන්න මේ උත්තමයිනිට  
 අපේ නාට්‍යය රග' දක්වමුග මිත්‍රවරුනිල  
 (අනික් වෙළඳුන් අමතමින් )  
 අපි රග' දක්වන්නට තෙරා ගෙන තියෙන්නෙ  
 අපේ ම ශ්‍රීක සැටර් වර්ගයේ නාට්‍යයක් වන  
 ඉක්කෙවුටා ඉ නාට්‍යයග ලක්වාසීන් සඳ'නා  
 මම ඒක බෙර හඬ' කියලා නම් කළා(...)

(Jayawardana's adaptation 2004: 27-28)

The language structure consists of Sri Lankan folk song style and prose. In the beginning, the play introduces the story in folk song style.<sup>xiv</sup> Some lyrics were based on commonly used folk song melodies such as *thunsarana*<sup>xv</sup> and *thovil kawi*<sup>xvi</sup>. The new production applied a symbolic and simple set design. However, the characters of *Gopalu Yakku* (Satyrs) wore half-masks so that the director could mix the performers' identity and gender as a dramatic technic for employing both male and female actors for the characters of sailors and *Gopalu Yakku*.

Similarly, Aristophanes' *Frogs* was structurally changed to *Mahacharya*.<sup>xvii</sup> The characters of the play were adapted into local characters. In order to take an esteemed poet from Hades, the God Dionysius<sup>xviii</sup> starts a journey to Hades with his slave. Dionysius is changed to the local god Sukra.<sup>xix</sup> In addition, local scholars replaced the two great poets, Aeschylus and Euripides. However, the scholars were not specified as those who live in Sri Lanka, and their characters were created as stereotypes from different Western and Eastern cultures. The simplicity of the dialogue form of the play was similar to *Berahada*. Even so, the lyrical quality was less pronounced and instead ordinary spoken Sinhala was used with dramatic irony.

තො :

ඒක හරි ලේසියි. මෙහාට වරෙන් යෙර්ධයොලඉස්සරහට වෙයන්. (හරි ගස්සමමින් ) හඬල්පාරවල් දෙක තුන වදින කොට ඇහෙයි හොඳ' සංගීතයක්,වැඩේ පහසු වෙන්නි.

ශබ්ද :

(සංතෝෂයෙන්) සංගීතයක්

තො :

ඔව් ඔව් දිය මැඩියෝ. හරිම අගෙයි.

ශබ්ද :

අපුරුද්ද හොඳ'යි චිහෙනං මට මුල අල්ලලා දෙනවා ( සංගීතය ඇසෙන්නට වෙයි. )

(දෙදෙන තාලයට අනුව ඔරුව පදියි. )

(පසු බිමින් ඇසෙන දිය මැඩී ගීතය)

බ්‍රෙකෙකෙ කෙක්ස් කොවැක්ස් කොවැක්ස් රැරැ

අපි වෙමු සංගීත මණ්ඩුකයෝ අප වාසේ ම ගොතොරුද වතුරු

හරි මධුර යි අප ගයනා ගීයේ පිහිනා යන චීට මතුපිට වතුරුරැරැ

වැහිළුට රැට අප ප්‍රීති ගීත ගයනා වූ කලකට සංතෝෂයේ ගීතරැරැ

කර්ණ රසායන වේ අප ගී හඬ කර්ණ රසායන වේ

බ්‍රෙකෙකෙ කෙක්ස් (...).

( Marasinghe's adaptation 1999: 6)

It is ironic that although the entire play was adapted to Sinhala culture, the sound of the *Frogs* was retained an English sound, “brackers brackers” and this differs in sound in the Sinhala language such as ‘bauka bakas, baka bakas’. In addition, *Mahacharya* uses several loan-words from the English Language such as ‘fcd,s uEka’(jolly man), ‘wevsjhsirA’ (adviser), and ‘fvd,rA’ (dollar).

The common theatrical elements of both Greek tragedies and comedies in Sinhala use simple and symbolic set designs except with *Trojan Kanthawo*. The simplicity of set design would be ideal to transport the production with mobile theatre groups as usually happens in the Sri Lankan mainstream theatre. Face painting or prosthetic make-up was applied in every Greek dramatic production in Sinhala excluding *Berahanda*, a new production, which used half-masks.

It was obvious that the productions of *Oedipus Rex* in Sinhala after 1990 also used ancient settings with some modifications. Most productions commonly referred to colorful costumes, a symbolic set, and contemporary music. Instead of using Greek theatre masks, all productions favored the application of character make-up designs. However, Rathnayaka's production added extra theatre elements to the beginning and ending of the theatrical production. The begins with the action of the chorus, which carries fire torches to light some special torches in the set, while accompanied by tragic theme music from percussion and

wind instruments with a female singing. The end of the production was also modified, and dramatized to show the banishment of the Oedipus character. Oedipus walks away from the stage through the seated audience. These modifications emphasized the feeling of tragedy at the end of the performance, and brought the audience into the mood gradually after the modified beginning. The beginning of *Berahanda* and Rathnayaka's production of *Oedipus* can have been prompted new interpretations for the audiences because the extra acts of those productions may give an opportunity to the audience for preparing the mood or follow the director's interpretation before they watch the action of the original unfolding.

Mostly, Greek comedies and a satyr adaptation in Sinhala have proved that they can be adapted into new theatrical structures and local cultural contexts. This kind of practice mirrors some features of both *non-syncretic*, which is local theatre tradition, become a dominant during the integration with a Western story, and *transcultural theatre* in order to transcend culture-specific codification for reaching a more universal human condition (Lo and Gilbert 2002:35-38). However, Greek tragedies in Sinhala have not been as successfully adapted as comedies or re-created as comparable to Chinese adaptations of *Hebei Benagzi*<sup>xx</sup> by Luo Jinin (Tian 2006: 252) or any adaptation of Shakespearean work in Nadagam theatre<sup>xxi</sup> in the early Sri Lankan stage. However, in any position, transposing a play text should be successful if translators are motivated by the staging of the text or have visualized the text during the translations.

### **Conclusion**

Though it is hard to theorized, there are some patterns can be seen as intentions for transposition of classical Greek plays to Sri Lanka. For example: 1) to introduce a new play text, as study materials; 2) to have a cultural capital (in the concept of Marx and Bourdieu) through working with a canonical play; 3) due to socio-political motivations — some directors want to select curtain classical Greek plays to indicate the current socio-political practice of the country which is similarly represented in the historical context; 4) inspirations due to the canonical theatrical convention; 5) to do a better translation/performance than the previous creative work; and 6) academic interests.

The majority of translations of tragedies show no major changes in language styles and there are no noticeable cultural modifications in the last decade of Sinhala translations of Greek tragedies except for the theatre adaptation of *Trojan Kanthawo*. It is apparent that most translators intend to preserve the cultural context of the original and introduce this cultural text to Sinhala readers. In some cases, it appears to be useful to translate an ancient Greek theatre text both ways for Sinhala-speaking readers and/or audiences for different purposes.

Most translations use poetic structure rather than the folk song style of Sri Lanka, which consists of four lines that produce a rhythm and structure in the verse. In addition, the language styles of translated tragedies refer to literary language in most cases. However, Sinhala adaptations of Greek comedies contrast with translations of tragedies in language

style and the degree of cultural shifts. Comedies are adapted to the local Sri Lankan cultural context more commonly by characters and local concepts. Those adaptations apply lyrical language styles from both Western and non-Western theatre. They use a combination of free style lyrical, Sri Lankan folk song structure, and literary language and contemporary speaking Sinhala as effective elements for comedies although these might be applied with some modifications, to the tragedies.

The theatre process of the *Trojan Kanthawo* showed an effective way, with both a literal translation and theatre version, in which to present an ancient Greek play to both readers and audiences in Sri Lanka. Perhaps, the process would be ideal if one could create two different contexts for different readers, who have varying degrees of knowledge and understanding of ancient Greek play, and it is beneficial to modify the text for a cultural requirement and the director's intention to develop the significance of a production.

In my view, Greek plays are "disempowered" in Sri Lankan cultural space though they are considered as being canonicals. Despite the universality of human experiences, beliefs, customs, historical backgrounds, characters' relationships to each other do not function in another culture at a different time. Hence, for performances, practitioners/adopters need to consider more strategies to close the gap, whether they are working on a translated script or working through an adaptation processes.

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## Notes;

<sup>i</sup> This paper is mainly driven from the thesis awarded Master of Arts by Research degree conducted at the Latrobe University, Australia. (Dandeniya 2007).

<sup>ii</sup> Ancient Sri Lanka was a popular trade junction for sea merchants from the West and the Far East. Roman writers such as Onesicritus, Eratosthenes, Strabo and Pliny wrote about the country (Mendis 1965: 116-121).

<sup>iii</sup> Greek language was a subject in the Sri Lankan education curriculum during the British colonial period.

<sup>iv</sup> The plot of the *Oedipus at Colonus* begins with Oedipus, a banished king of Thebes coming to Athens. In the play, Oedipus cursed his sons, who will fight each other, and who voice the need for his banishment. In addition, Oedipus, who became a powerful human spirit after a long time of suffering, gives his power to Athens and its people since it protected his daughters from their relatives who wished to take them away by force following a prophecy.

<sup>v</sup> *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, were written at different times, they become a unity as a story of one family in Thebes. *Antigone* is one of Sophocles' earlier plays. *Oedipus at Colonus* was probably written between *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*. More accepted is that this was written towards the last years of his life..

<sup>vi</sup> Known as the Three Theban Plays (not a trilogy),

<sup>vii</sup> *Yakksha*: the indigenous people who lived in Sri Lanka but they had been conquered after Vijaya became a rural of the country.

<sup>viii</sup> For example, a popular production and modern interpretation of *Kuweanie* by Henry Jayaseana

<sup>ix</sup> Medea is always seen as a barbarian being non-Greek and Euripides stresses this in many ways in the play, Similarly, though Kuweni is the native of Lanka, she is neglected as a barbarian in the Sri Lankan history started from victories Vijaya, who is the outsider but later consider as a starter of the nation according to the historical records of Mhahawansha

<sup>x</sup> There were five hundred and fifty five stories written that describe the pre-life of Buddha Gotham in the Buddhist literature as *Pansiya Panas Jathakaya*.

<sup>xii</sup> *Gopalu yakku* refer to local devils for cattle or cows.

<sup>xiii</sup> The starting part of the traditional Sanskrit play.

<sup>xiv</sup> Most of Sinhala folk songs were structured as synchronizing the rhythmic sound of beginning or end words in each line.

<sup>xv</sup> A Buddhist chant

<sup>xvi</sup> Folk songs used during some ritualistic occasions for devil dance or local god.

<sup>xvii</sup> Professors

<sup>xviii</sup> The god for wine and who was honored in Greek festivals.

<sup>xix</sup> The king of gods in Buddhist literature.

<sup>xx</sup> A traditional theatre style in China

<sup>xxi</sup> *Nadagam* theatre is moderate in that it is grounded in some Indian folk performance styles related to the Sanskrit dramatic performance style (Sarachchandra 1999: 158-160).