

SOME LEXICAL AND GRAMMATICAL PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATION -- A CASE STUDY FROM SINHALA

HEMA WEERAKOON

Arthur Waley makes the following comment on translation:

"Except in the rare case of plain, concrete statements such as 'the cat caught the mouse' there are seldom sentences that have exact word equivalents in another language. It becomes a question of choosing between various approximations. I have always found that it was I and not the text that had to do the talking."

Arthur Waley's description of methods covers a wide range of areas. As regards his own poetry the question can well be asked as to whether this is in fact translated poetry. This is very much a cultural transit from one language to another. It may even be called the transit of an "emotive" or "emotional" situation from one language to another. Consider the two lines of Robert Frost:

"I have promises to keep
And miles to go before I sleep."

Frankly simple though this looks, it would be impossible to get this into Sinhala or any other language. This is so, despite the fact that the whole poem looks so susceptible to efficient translation. Sinhala folk poetry or a Pali sutra can present the same difficulty.

The task of the translator is no easy one. It is beset with problems of various kinds, because problems are inherent in the very nature of the translation exercise. What do we do when we translate? We get the message from the source text and reproduce it in the target language. This seems quite simple. But only a person who has tried his hand at translation knows that this exercise is fraught with difficulties. Of course, an experienced translator who has a good knowledge of the source language and the target language as well as familiarity with the subject matter he is translating will have much less problems to face than an inexperienced translator whose knowledge of the two languages leaves much to be desired. Therefore it is imperative that the translator should be able to handle both source and target languages with ease and fluency.

The translator has to produce the closest equivalent to the source language message in terms of meaning and style. The relative importance of meaning and style varies according to the type of translation