

Intercultural Aspects in Translations: Some Experiences in Translating From German into Sinhala

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The human language is a rich and complex system that has an unbounded connection with the society and culture. As one culture differs from another, various differences occur in ways of expression. That makes the translation a challenging operation. Translation is an activity where the meaning and the idea of a text in one language is transferred to the target language. One deals with meaning of whole phrases, sentences and paragraphs and not isolated words. It is a well known that engaging in word-to-word translation is futile effort.

The aim of this paper is to present some experiences gathered in translating German short stories into Sinhala. A selection of short stories from the German author Wolfgang Borchert, who wrote about post war society in Germany after the Second World War were translated. The short stories were directly translated from German into Sinhala without the interferences of a filter language.

It was observed that very few difficulties occurred, when translating these short stories as long as the socio-cultural aspects were taken into consideration, although there are differences in the two cultures of the speech communities.

As German and Sinhala represent two different societies and cultures, one is confronted with many language and semantic variations, mainly due to different life styles and attitudes, which are not familiar to Sri Lankans. Problems occur with regard to same aspects, which are important to the total meaning of the text, like idioms, metaphors and proverbs. Eventhough translator's level of language knowledge may be high, one faces difficulties in translating, if he/she is not familiar with finer points of the language.

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