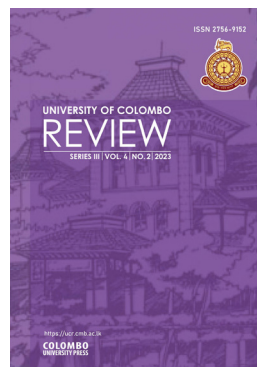


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(Re)Wording War: Re-narration of a positive Sri Lanka in the 61st Independence Day Speech by President Mahinda Rajapaksa

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ABSTRACT

In the field of politics, translation inherently connects with activism. When a government translates itself for local and international audiences, translation becomes an act of re-narration aimed to reconfigure a reality desired by the country. Taking Sinhala as the Source Language, and English as the Target language, this research uses the narrative theory of translation as re-narration to analyze the President's address to the nation at the 61st Independence Day Celebrations of Sri Lanka in 2009. Both the inter-lingual translation from Sinhala to English, and the inter-semiotic translation from spoken to printed text are analyzed. The context of Sri Lanka in 2009 is critical in terms of the 'victory' for the Sri Lankan forces in the fight against the LTTE, as well as the international attention for the war and the allegations made against human rights violations by the army. It can be argued that then President Mahinda Rajapaksa uses the Independence Day Celebrations as a platform to narrate a positive image of Sri Lanka by referring to the humanitarian aspect of the war and the governmental forces. The findings imply how activism via translation operates from administrative levels to outside (i.e., those who are not involved in administrative work), how certain ideas are omitted, added, and at times deliberately mistranslated to manipulate a positive reconfiguration of Sri Lanka, and how communicative equivalence may render certain nuanced use of language untranslatable. Further, it shows the lapses that occur in inter-semiotic translation, especially when a speech is accompanied by supporting oratory, visual elements.


KEYWORDS:

Inter-lingual translation; Inter-semiotic translation; Omission; Reconfiguration; Re-narration

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Introduction

The Context surrounding the 2009 Independence Day Speech and the importance of its Translation

It can be said that translation is neither an exchange between words, nor is it completely apolitical. Any act of translation involves a choice that resonates with private and public agendas of translators. This becomes evident when translation occurs in the political field. Translation means to shift from one language to another and one can agree with the argument that “[t]o shift from one language to another is, by definition, to alter the forms” (Sarosi-Mardirosz, 2014, p.160). In a highly inflammable field as politics, such alterations bear consequences. As Schäffner (2008, p.3) correctly points out, in the political field “[p]oliticians react to statements by other politicians as they were presented to them in translation. Political scientists and other experts often debate the potential political consequences of (the translation of) a statement”.

By the beginning of 2009, Sri Lanka was in the throes of a politically sensitive situation. The country was at the last stages of a thirty year long civil war with the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), and there was a lot of national and international attention directed at Sri Lanka. The armed conflict was steeped in debates surrounding the safeguarding or violation of human rights, with the international community being divided on whether to support the militarized approach or to question it (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

The civil war was the result of protracted ethnic discrimination and prejudice against the Tamils as a minority ethnic group, soon after independence and especially following the Sinhala Only Act of 1956 (Rawat, 2012).¹

Socio-political tensions festered for a long time. Specifically, for the Tamil youth in the North and the East, the discrimination they faced in the fields of education, workplaces, and many other aspects of life were catalysts to join together in a movement for self-governance in the North (Rawat, 2012). The LTTE was founded in 1976 (Rawat, 2012), and was initially mainly a youth-led movement by the Tamils living in the North and the Eastern parts of Sri Lanka against the structural violence they were facing at the time. However, the war that started around the 1980s had over time developed into a full-scale war with the LTTE, with several peace discussions and treaties failing to fulfil the much needed goal for peace along the way.

Following his presidential election victory in 2005, Mahinda Rajapaksa had vowed to support the Sri Lankan military forces through an armed war against the

¹ One could say, therefore, that ironically the initial embers under the fire for this ethnic conflict is also a language-based issue, which makes the context of the civil war and talks of a second independence (this time from a separatist terrorist group) quite interesting as a research area.

LTTE; a ‘war for peace’ that he referred to as the ‘Humanitarian Mission’ (Official Governmental News Portal, 2009). By 2009 there was positive hope of defeating the LTTE and in fact, on 18th May 2009, the war came to an end (Rawat, 2012). As it will be argued in this article, President Mahinda Rajapaksa’s speech at the 61st Independence Day Celebrations in 2009 (hereafter ‘referred to as Independence Day Celebration’) is critical therefore, not just for a local audience, but also for the international, as he used this platform to re-configure a ‘positive’ image of Sri Lanka amidst the international criticism and scrutiny explained above. The Independence Day Celebration address thus carries nuances of ideological manipulation catering to a state agenda. These ideas in the speech can be categorized as mainly to serving three purposes:

- Narrative configuration of humanitarian conduct.
- Communicating ideas of inclusivity and national unity, as well as the approaching victory over terrorism.
- Presenting the country as confident, sovereign, and strong in front of an international audience.

The Independence Day Celebration also saw the presence of a considerable international audience – the ambassadors, high commissioners, and members of the foreign media. The translation/interpretation of the speech from Sinhala to English for the foreign delegates was a sensitive and measured process, especially given the above circumstances.

Against this backdrop, this article explores how re-narration is used in translating the presidential address at the Independence Day Celebration from Sinhala to English, to re-configure a positive reality of Sri Lanka. To this end, Mona Baker’s ‘Translation as Re-narration’ (2014), i.e., the narrative theory of translation, provides the theoretical framework of the research. Baker (2014) says that our access to reality is filtered by our narratives, and that they not only mediate our access to reality but also participate in configuring that reality. When such narratives are ‘translated’, this act of translation can then be identified as ‘re-narration’. Baker (2014) says that translation constructs rather than represent events. Re-narration in narrative theory hence looks at “how individuals and institutes configure and circulate the narratives that make up our world” (Baker, 2014, p.159). As explained above, the Independence Day Celebration speech is a narrative about the country’s situation at the time. It is a mediated narrative that works with a particular agenda in mind, i.e., to present a positive image of Sri Lanka. The English translation of the speech then becomes a re-narration of the President’s speech in Sinhala, enabling the use of this theoretical framework for analysis.

The article examines the use of inter-lingual translation and inter-semiotic translation. Inter-lingual translation involves the translation between languages, where the ideas in one language are linguistically put into another language. Inter-

semiotic translation happens between two mediums or semiotic codes; for example, from text to image, or from image to text, or from numbers to letters. Under inter-lingual translation, the article focuses on the ideas that are omitted in the English translation, the signs of untranslatability, and how certain words are changed in order to re-narrate ‘positive’ ideas. Under inter-semiotic translation, the article examines the crucial elements of ‘spoken’ information that gets lost when ‘printed’ and how the absence of such elements affect the re-narration of the speech.

In this article, the Source Language is Sinhala and the Target Language is English. The Sinhala speech was downloaded in video format (Gajadeera Arachchi, 2012), and a Sinhala transcript was made while listening to the video. When referring to the Sinhala speech in this article, the textual data is from my own transcription of the video. This was because of the unavailability of a Sinhala transcript, and also to make sure that no word from the original speech lost. However, the whole transcription is not used and only the excerpts referred to in the article are analyzed. In my transcription, three dots (...) indicate a short pause and three dashes (---) indicate a long pause. The English translation of the speech was downloaded from the archive of the Official Government News Portal of Sri Lanka (Official Governmental News Portal, 2009). In analyzing the speech, to clearly indicate the different choice of words (if any) between the translations, I provide my own translation of the original phrases from the speech where necessary. These appear in an italicized format.

The speech is used to analyze the activist nuances and translation of: a) Narrative configuration of a positive image of Sri Lanka, b) Counter-narrative for the international allegations of human rights violations by the army, and c) Indication of confidence regarding the victory, national unity and independence. Throughout this article, ‘activism’ in relation to translation refers to Harding’s definition of translation as an act of activist politics in relation to how a particular translation may “challenge and undermine” existing narratives by “making alternative narrative connections, and by including and re-weighting details...” (2011, p. 58).

The research first looks at inter-lingual translation from Sinhala to English and will then look at the aspects of inter-semiotic translation present in the speech from spoken to documented narrative. It should also be disclaimed that this research, while acknowledging the possible presence of a teleprompter which provides written cues of the speech, does not focus on this aspect in terms of inter-semiotic translation. The reason for this is the focus on ‘activist’ elements in the translation of a speech from spoken Sinhala to written, documented (i.e., available as a textual document) English for a ‘foreign’ audience, and not the sole act of translation.

Most of the existing research takes an out-to-inward perspective, where an outside group translates the texts of a governmental/administrational body (Harding, 2011; Schäffner, 2008; Tymoczko, 2000). In reality, this is not always the case. This article argues that activism in translation and interpretation can occur in-to-outward

as well. Especially in instances of state-level events with international delegates, the speeches and the agendas are framed in a way that put the state's interests in its best light.

On the other hand, there is very limited work done on the translation and activism practices in Sri Lanka. The country has passed several critical turning points throughout history, and as a non-English speaking country, how Sri Lanka translates herself to the international provides an interesting context to research.

Inter-lingual Translation

Critics argue that translation is used in shaping a geopolitical agenda (Baker, 2013; Harding, 2011; Tymoczko, 2000). Translation becomes an activist political action whereby it creates “narratives that challenge and undermine official accounts by re-characterizing key actors, making alternative narrative connections, and by including and re-weighting details, elements, and temporary narrators missing from official stories” (Harding, 2011, p. 58). The geopolitical agenda of Rajapaksa's speech works with the idea of presenting a ‘positive’ Sri Lanka amidst war. The speech is in Sinhala, and it can also be observed that its style changes from formal, to colloquial, familiar speech. The translation of the speech, on the other hand, is in formal language. While the English translation of the President's speech appears to remain as faithful to the original as possible, some ideas that the President refers to are omitted in the translation.

Example I : “අප අද... ජාතික කොඩිය එසවුයේ... ශ්‍රී ලාංකික අප සැම හදවතින් ප්‍රාර්ථනා කළ... එක්සේසත් කරනු ලබන... මාතෘභූමිය මත බව... මම... මහත් අභිමානයෙන් යුතුව... ජාතිය හමුවේ ප්‍රකාශ කරනවා” (Gajadeera Arachchi, 2012) (emphasis added).

Transliteration : “apa ada...jathika kodiya esavuye...shri lankika apa sama, hadawathin prarthana kala...eksesath karanu labana... mathrubhumiya matha bawa...mama...mahath abhimanayen yuthuwa...jathiya hamuwe prakasha karanawa”

Translation : “I announce with pride that we have raised the National Flag today over a motherland that is being united in keeping with the heart felt wishes and prayers of our people” (Official Governmental News Portal, 2009) (emphasis added).

This excerpt is from the beginning of the speech. Rajapaksa starts his speech by acknowledging and situating the national identity, i.e., ‘Sri Lankan’. However, this phrase is not present in the English translation of the speech, as can be observed in Example I. Further, the idea of announcing ‘before the nation’ has also been omitted. While this could be in order to keep the speech more formal and on point, in the context of the Independence Day Celebration, the omitted words are of importance.

Could this have been translated more accurately while retaining the formality of the speech? I believe it would have been possible. For instance, could be translated as below:

Translation : *I proudly announce before the nation, that today we have raised the national flag over a united motherland prayed for and wished for by all of us Sri Lankans.*

Rajapaksa's emphasis on a 'Sri Lankan' identity can be re-narrated in this manner, also creating a lasting effect by placing the word at the end of the phrase.

The idea of 'us Sri Lankans' serve two political purposes in the context of the speech. On one hand, it invokes the national identity. On the other hand, the phrase shows that 'freedom' was wished for by all Sri Lankans. For a country facing criticism for taking military action, it is important for the President to imply that "all of us Sri Lankans" wished for freedom. This objective is what Harding mentions as "re-weighting details" (2011, p. 58). The word "our" in the English translation does not suffice for the idea of national importance that is connoted by the Sinhala term in the speech. The other omitted section which means "announce before the nation" is also important for this same reason. Typically, a statement or opinion or any other message that is made 'before' a certain gathering carries weight and is also an acknowledgement of that gathering. In certain contexts, especially in Asian countries, when the President or a similar leader of the state speaks to the public, this act is called 'addressing the nation' (Williams and Zenger, 2007). Placed as such, the omission of this phrase downplays the significance given at the start of the speech. Both phrases narrate a Sri Lankan 'reality', which does not get translated or re-narrated when omitted.

Although unrelated to translation, the use of the Sinhala term for 'united', which is highlighted in the Sinhala text, is noteworthy and warrants discussion. The idea of unification signaled by the word in bold in Example I can be argued to carry subtle political connotations. 'Unification' of 'kingdoms' is a deed associated with the King in Sri Lankan political history, and the ability to unify is often seen as the ultimate merit of the King. Rajapaksa's use of this term as highlighted in Example I may be an underlying remark of associating himself with the image of 'King', which was a metaphor that was used throughout his political career.

The above example is also one that highlights the translator's or interpreter's agency and choice. Baker (2013) argues that while the accepted belief is of translators and interpreters as neutral and impartial, in activist spaces this is not so as they are highly political. Baker (2013) :

Numerous real-life examples, on the other hand, continue to attest to the fact that translators and interpreters are not apolitical, that many hold strong beliefs about the rights and wrongs of (political) events in which they find themselves involved professionally. (p. 23)

Baker further argues that translators and interpreters use their narratives “to extend narrative space and narrative opportunities for resistance and to empower voices made invisible by the global power of English and the politics of language” (2013, p. 23). In the Sri Lankan context of 2009, this argument applies to the state agenda in re-narrating a positive image of Sri Lanka to attempt to counter the international criticism associated with the allegations of breaches in human rights. The following example can be used to further analyze such attempts.

Example II : “ඒ සමගම... ඇතැම් අන්තර්ජාතික ආයතන... අපේ රට අසමත් රාජ්‍යක් බවට පත්වෙලා තියෙනවයි කියලා පෙන්වා දීමට පටන්ගත්තු නිසා... ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ උපන් අප සියලු දෙනා, ස්වකීය මාතෘභූමියට උරුම කරමින් තිබෙන ඒ අවාසනාවන්ත ඉරණම හමුවේ දැඩිලෙස වේදනාවට පත්වුනා ඔවුන් හදවතින් හඩාවැටුනා” (Gajadeera Arachchi, 2012).

Transliteration : “e samagama...atham antharjathika ayathana...ape rata asamath rajyak bawata pathwela thiyanaawayi kiyala penwa deemata patangaththu nisa...shri lankawe upan apa siyalu dena, swakeeya mathrubhumiyata uruma karamin thibena e awasanawantha iranama hamuwe dadilesa, wedanawata pathwuna. owun hadawathin handa watuna”

Translation : “Together with this, some international institutions sought to show our country as a failed State, which pained the hearts and minds of all of us at the unfortunate fate that was sought to be bestowed on the land of our birth” (Official Governmental News Portal, 2009).

For ease of analysis, given below is my own translation of the original phrase:

Translation : *Along with this...as some international organizations started to show our country as a failed state... all of us born in Sri Lanka felt deeply hurt in face of the unfortunate fate that was happening to our own motherland. They broke down in their hearts.*

This instance of removing the ‘Sri Lankan’ phrase from the official translation could be read as an instance of activist re-narration, as it creates ambiguity. Is it ‘all of (us)’ Sri Lankans? Is it ‘all of (us)’ Asians? The ambiguity of the term seems to suggest the idea that everyone who saw the plight of Sri Lanka felt this way. Since, as I have argued, Rajapaksa is subtly trying to re-configure a reality of war as the last, unavoidable resort for freedom and peace, re-narration of this phrase as “all of us” in the translation above marks a simple, yet strategic choice.

Apart from the omissions described above, the official translation of the speech also had an instance of significant addition of new information.

- Example III** : “ඒ ගමනේදී කිව යුතු දේ කියන්න, කළ යුතු දේ කරන්න පැකිලෙන්න එපා. මිත්‍රවරුනි, අපේ නගරවල දිස්වෙන දැවැන්ත දැන්වීම පුවරු වලින් අපේ සංවර්ධනයේ ප්‍රමාණය පිළිබිඹු වෙනවයි කියල මං විශ්වාස කරන්නේ නෑ.” (Gajadeera Arachchi, 2012)
- Transliteration : E gamanedi kawa yuthu de kiyanna, kala yuthu de karanna parkilenna epa. Mithrawaruni, ape nagarawala diswena daewentha danweem pawuru walin ape sanwardhanaye pramaanaya pilibimbu wenawayi kiyala man wishwaasa karanne ne.
- Translation : “In that march ahead, should we hesitate to say what has to be said? No. Should we hesitate to do what needs doing? No. Or else, would it be possible for us to bring about a Sri Lanka that is free of terrorism? In overcoming the challenges of the future too, we shall work in the same manner” (Official Governmental News Portal, 2009) (Emphasis added).

The underlined utterances are not in the original speech. The translator has added this phrase in the English translation. Rajapaksa is referring to the future of the country towards the latter part of the speech. This conveys a strong sense of nationality, and narrates an image of Sri Lanka as an unwavering state. Rajapaksa hints that the international reactions would not halt the “march” of the country. In the English translation, the translator adds a phrase that grounds the need to have such a stance. Sri Lanka portrayed the image of a stubborn country defying all the international suggestions for non-military means of peace. Through this added phrase, the translator shows that without being ‘stubborn’ and without saying “what has to be said”, Sri Lanka would not be able to achieve freedom. This shows an inter-lingual addition in translation.

Perhaps the most important point for translation is when Rajapaksa speaks about the Sri Lankan armed forces. With one stone, he kills two birds via the following phrase:

- Example IV** : “අහිංසක දෙමළ ජනතාවට හිරිහැර වීමට ඉඩ නෙතබා ඉතාම පරිස්සමින් ක්‍රස්තවාදයට එරෙහිව පමණක් සටන ගෙනයාමට අපේ රණවිරුවන් සමත් වුණා” (Gajadeera Arachchi, 2012).
- Transliteration : “Ahinsaka demala janathawata hirihara wimata ida nothaba- -ithama parissamin...thrasthawadayata erehiwa pamanak— satana perata gena yamata ape rana wiruwan samath wuna”
- Translation : “Our troops were able to carry forward the battle against terror with great care so as not to cause harassment to the innocent Tamil people” (Official Governmental News Portal, 2009) (Emphasis added).

The original phrase could have been translated more accurately as follows:

Translation : *Our troops were able to carry forward the battle only against terrorism, without causing any harassment to the innocent Tamil people.*

This is the comment in the speech where Rajapaksa narrates the idea of ‘humanitarian war’ and denies the human rights violations allegations regarding the army. In the original speech, it can be observed that this is a very measured, carefully constructed phrase. The translation conveys the idea of “not causing harassment to the innocent Tamil people” in a sufficient manner. Yet, there is one shortcoming. The translation does not convey that the battle was carried forward ‘only against terrorism’. Instead, it coins the idea as a “battle against terror”. The translation focuses more on re-narrating the idea of not harming the Tamil people. The phrase has achieved communicative equivalence, but it can be seen that equivalence does not suffice in communicating crucial ideas.

These instances show how some ideas are omitted, and some ideas altered in re-narrating the speech, as such individual narratives have “both local and international functions” (Baker, 2014, p. 160). Further, as per the narrative theory, these instances reflect selective appropriation, “where some elements of the experience are excluded, and others privileged” (Baker, 2014, p. 167). One can identify both positive and negative effects of such omissions and alterations. Nevertheless, there are noticeable instances of untranslatability as well. Most of the untranslatable elements involve the nuanced use of language.

Example V : “දුටුගමුණු ගජබා විජයබා වැනි රජවරු පිළිබඳවත් අපි අද නැවත කතා කරන්නවා නේද?” (Gajadeera Arachchi, 2012).

Transliteration : “...dutugamunu, gajaba, wijayabawanirajawarupilibandawath... api ada... nawatha katha karanawa neda?”

Translation : “At the same time are we also reminded today of the bravery, national pride and patriotism that was seen in our great kings such as Dutugemunu, Gajaba and Vijayabahu” (Official Governmental News Portal, 2009) (Emphasis added).

The original phrase is a rhetorical question, which the translation has changed into a statement. For instance, the original phrase could have been translated as:

Translation : *Aren't we talking once again about kings like Dutugemunu, Gajaba, Wijayaba today?*

Schäffner (2008) argues that in translation, the best one may aspire to would be to achieve communicative equivalence. However, I argue that, while equivalence does make translation/interpretation closer to its source text, it does not always fulfill activist expectations. For instance, in the above example, although equivalence is present, the underlying nuances of this rhetorical question are lost, and are

untranslatable. The nuance of the original is connected with this backstory: three of the regiments of the army are named as “Gemunu”, “Gajaba”, and “Vijayaba”, after three ancient Sri Lankan kings. This rhetorical question invokes the idea that Sri Lanka is now speaking of these heroic kings again - that in the soldiers, these heroes are alive. Further, as per many stories that are told about these kings, they are known for respecting their enemies. Historical documents show that King Dutugemunu even built a monument to commemorate Elara – a Tamil king who fought against him (Rutnam, 1981). For a local audience, the rhetorical question is a subtle manipulation of speech to reconfigure the troops in such a ‘righteous’ spirit. However, if directly translated as a rhetorical question, the international audience would feel a sense of being left out, as they are not familiar with these backstories. The translator has made a choice for damage control, by replacing the specific rhetoric with a general statement. In doing so, the nuances of the speech are left untranslatable. According to Doerr (2008), translation/interpretation becomes an act of translating democracy, discussing how activism is involved in creating a linguistically inclusive space for discussion, by translating/interpreting ideas that are in a foreign language. What is notable in the role of translation during the Independence Day Celebration is that perhaps hidden beneath the ‘democratic’ accessibility created with the English translation of the speech, it is also a well-crafted act of political propaganda of re-narrating a very specific (i.e., a ‘positive’ and ‘humanitarian’) image of Sri Lanka.

Further, there are several cases of mistranslation that need to be mentioned.

Example VI : “අපගේ මව්බිමට දරාගත නොහැකි වූ ඒ අවාසනාවන්ත ඉරණමට අවසානයේදී අපි අභියෝග කරා”(Gajadeera Arachchi, 2012).

Transliteration : “apage mavubimata daragatha nohaki wu e awasanawantha iranamata, awasanayedi api abhiyoga kara”

Translation : “We were finally challenged by this unfortunate fate that our great motherland could no more bear” (Official Governmental News Portal, 2009) (Emphasis added).

The original phrase narrates the idea that Sri Lanka challenged terrorism, with a seeming attempt to shed positive light on the country as one that is capable of taking up challenges. However, the English translation turns the active voice to passive, where it shows that Sri Lanka *was challenged* to a point where it became too much for the country.

For example, the original phrase could have been translated as follows:

Translation : *In the end, we challenged this unfortunate fate which our motherland could not bear.*

Nevertheless, it is also possible to read this mistranslation as a subtle, calculated ‘positive’ mistranslation. When analyzing the English phrase in the light of the debate and controversy surrounding Sri Lanka engaging in war, the passive voice

may have been employed to help counter the ‘decision to engage in a militarized armed movement as a ‘necessary decision’, and not a decision which was taken on a whim, merely to challenge international pressures as implied in international media. This mistranslation, if deliberate, also implies that the country was *led to a war*, and not that the country led a war.

For example, Ibrahim (2015) focuses on the mistranslations of Bashar-al Assad’s speeches and interviews, where Assad’s ideas get warped and twisted in translations, in a way that creates a negative image of Syria and Assad himself as a leader. While this indicates a negative outcome of mistranslation, the above example related to Rajapaksa’s speech gives instances that can be argued as moments where ‘deliberate’ mistranslations are used to re-narrate an idea catering towards state political frameworks.

Overall, the Sinhala-English inter-lingual translation can be stated to carry relatively the same gist as the original, despite the lack of nuances, as well as the omissions. The analysis of the inter-lingual translation of Rajapaksa’s speech during the Independence Day Celebration indicates conscious linguistic choices in word order, use of metaphor, and omission of certain words with a political agenda in mind. The removal of certain phrases, especially the word ‘Sri Lankan’ in examples I and II indicate how collective national identities are removed in the English translation of the speech, in order to create a global collective. The ambiguity associated with ‘our’ and ‘all of us’ in these two examples respectively suggest that the use of these phrases were to connect with the audience, including the international audience within the in-group belonging to ‘our’ and ‘all of us’. This links therefore with Tymoczko’s argument that “[t]exts must be chosen for translation with political goals in view” (2000, p. 41).

However, while the inter-lingual translation appears to work considerably in terms of re-narrating an image that serves state national agendas, this same attempt at re-narration seems to be challenged by the challenges associated with the inter-semiotic features. These are discussed in the next section.

Inter-semiotic Translation

Ibrahim (2015) says that pragmatic failure where the translator/interpreter fails to understand the socio-cultural context of the speech leads to missing out on the nuances of language. When converting a spoken text to a printed paper, there are several oratory features that get lost. When looking at Mahinda Rajapaksa as a speaker, some of these losses can downplay the intended ‘power’ of the speech. In the inter-semiotic translation of the 2009 speech, there are two main lapses – the speaker’s ‘act’ of speaking, and the live setting in which the speech is delivered and heard.

One key feature associated with Rajapaksa as a speaker is his use of silence, as well as the well-crafted flow of speech. Rajapaksa's 'charisma' seems to rely mostly on his speech. The Independence Day Celebration speech was delivered in an emotionally charged manner, and it can be observed when listening that Rajapaksa links the language with oratory features. The speech mostly uses pauses. The speech is slow, and has a lot of breaks for emphasis.

Example VII : “අනුමුත්... පරාජය කළ නොහැකියැයි පුන පුනා කියපු බෙදුම්වාදී ත්‍රස්තවාදය... තව නොබෝ දිනකින්... සහමුලින්ම පරාජයට පත් කරන බව..., මට හොඳමම විස්වාසයි” (Gajadeera Arachchi, 2012).

Transliteration : “athamun...parajaya kala nohaki yayi punapuna kiyapu, bedumwadi thrasthawadaya...thawa nobo dinakin...sahamulinma parajayata path karana bawa..., mata hondatama wishwasayi”

Translation : “I am confident that in a few days we will decisively defeat the terrorist force that many repeatedly kept saying was invincible” (Official Governmental News Portal, 2009).

It can be seen that the original phrase has both long and short pauses as Rajapaksa makes this prediction. In the documented translation, this becomes one statement. The weighting of certain phrases add specific emphasis on particular elements and actors of the civil war context, and these get generalized in the English translation. Instances like these raise concerns in communicating and/or translating the ‘emotion’ of a speech through re-narration. While an on-set interpretation might give the ‘feeling’ associated with the speech, a document loses this ‘feeling’. Further, it can be argued that there is a private and subjective narration as well, as this oration carries a unique ‘Rajapaksa’ presence that the people at the time were largely influenced by. This too, seems to get lost when the spoken is transferred to the printed.

A demonstration of how the above English translation could have been written with a close reflection to the spoken text can be given as follows:

Translation : *I am confident...that in a few days...we will...decisively defeat...the terrorist force... that many repeatedly kept saying... was invincible.*

Perhaps if the documented English translation of the speech had a key to guide the reader through rhetorical features, the inter-semiotic translation could have remained more live in its oratory features. On the other hand, given the formality that an essay-like written speech provides, the decision to do away with literal representations of spoken emphasis could be to maintain an official presentation of a speech.

Another very important element of the 2009 speech is its live setting. Rajapaksa speaks from a glass-enclosed podium at Galle Face, where the country traditionally celebrates the Independence Day every year.² While Rajapaksa speaks, a background video shows different historical and political events of Sri Lanka. While the on-site audience sees and hears the speech against this backdrop, those who receive the translated document online receive only the textual re-presentation. The following phrases can be delved into to explain this further.

Example VIII : “ඒ වන විටත් 1818 දීත් 1848 දීත් අපේ ජනතාව විසින් බ්‍රිතාන්‍ය යටත්විජිත පාලනයට එරෙහිව සටන් කරමින් තිබුණා වීර කැපවෙමින් පොළ වීර පුරන්අප්පු අදී උදාරතර වීරයන් ඒ සටන් වලදී සිය ජීවිත පූජා කළා”(Gajadeera Arachchi, 2012).

Transliteration : E wana witath 1818 deeth 1848 deeth ape janathawa wisin brithaanya yatath wijitha paalanayata erehiwa satan karamin thibunaa. Weera Keeppetipola, Weera Puran Appu aadi udaarathara weerayan ee satan waladi siya diwi pooja kalaa.

Translation : “...our people had struggled against colonial rule in 1818 and 1848. Our great heroes such as Monaravila Keppetipola and Puran Appu had sacrificed their lives in these struggles” (Official Governmental News Portal, 2009).

When Rajapaksa refers to these historic battles, the video screen shows in black and white the 1818 and 1848 rebellions, where one can see the people rioting against British rulers, as well as how British colonial officers shoot the rioters. The historicized paralleling of the civil war with the anti-British riots of pre-Independence Sri Lanka appeals to the local audience in a very specific manner. Rajapaksa seems to indicate that ‘fighting’ the LTTE is a fight for independence in a manner similar to the battles fought against the colonizers. It is possible to read this as an activist translational strategy perhaps targeting the Sri Lankan diaspora, in an attempt to ‘remind’ them that this too is a fight that the people wish for. The statement also indicates that perhaps the soldiers are similar to the national heroes mentioned in his speech.

On the other hand, Rajapaksa consciously or unconsciously indicates that the LTTE is similar to the colonial powers who ruled with a policy of ‘divide and rule’. For an international audience (especially a British audience) both at the scene and even while reading the document, this could be quite an unsettling reminder

² However, one should also note that the 62nd Independence Day in 2010 was celebrated in Kandy, in the vicinity of the Temple of the Tooth Relic. This is another metaphoric strategy of the then government to connote Rajapaksa with a ‘kingly’ identity, following the end of the armed war in 2009. Perhaps there could be future research that looks into the setting- space and place, of the Independence Day Celebrations across time to analyze how they symbolically convey certain cached messages.

of the tense relationship between colonial Ceylon and Britain.³ One could argue that it serves the purpose of compelling such international delegations to distance themselves from sharing any similarities with the LTTE, and therefore in doing so, perhaps to support the country's decision to engage in armed conflict. These readings may appear far-fetched, but with the background videos surrounding the speech, it is hard to ignore such connotations. The inter-semiotic translation from speech to text takes away that added visual nuance, which may have lessened the accusatory tone it carries. In other parts of the speech as well, there are accompanying videos like this.

Example IX : “රනවිරුවන් අතේ උතුරට රැගෙන ගිය ජාතික කොඩිය අද උතුරේ ජනතාවගේ අතේ ලෙලඳෙනවා” (Gajadeera Arachchi, 2012).

Transliteration : “ranawiruwana athe...uthurata ragenā giya jathika kodya ada uthure janathawage athe leladenawa”

Translation : “The National Flag that our heroic troops took to the north flutters in the hands of the people of the north.” (Official Governmental News Portal, 2009)

The accompanying video in this instance shows the Sri Lankan troops helping the Tamil civilians, and also, it shows the Tamil people holding Sri Lankan flags, smiling. Especially in example IV discussed in the previous section, the visuals show Sri Lankan forces carrying Tamil children across borders to ‘safe’ spaces, along with visuals showing the LTTE using child soldiers. These visual elements play a crucial role in the agenda to reconfigure the ‘humanitarian’ role of the Sri Lankan troops, the ‘pride’ of the Sri Lankan nation, as well as to show the LTTE as a terrorist, separatist group. These pictures, in this time and context, are therefore worth a thousand words for the activist purpose of narrative reconfiguration of a positive Sri Lanka that this article focuses on. The re-narration of the country’s ‘image’ at the time was connected with different visual strategies to portray humanitarian acts of the government forces. The above examples of accompanying visuals with the speech hint at a similar strategy which was being used while addressing the national and international audience at the Independence Day Celebrations.

However, as already mentioned, the inter-semiotic exchange cannot use these visual elements, and this takes off some effect from the re-narration. While the original speech’s construction of reality is supported visually as well, the

³ The LTTE also worked with the idea of having a separate ‘country’ for the Tamils, with a separate administration. It is quite interesting how Rajapaksa’s speech draws parallels between this attempt to divide the country with the ‘divide and rule’ policy of the colonizer, against which the people at the time rebelled. The LTTE being a terrorist group, any indication of such parallelism is of course a serious accusation, but perhaps the speech is tailored to do so, as retaliation against the international audience’s indecisive nature regarding the armed conflict.

re-narration lacks these visual apparatuses. An audience that is not physically present to watch the speech is not exposed to this, which would affect the impact of the re-narration.

In a similar manner, the video clips accompany the President's speech from its start to end, enhancing the impact of the speech on the audience that is present. This can also be recognized as a challenge for the translator when printing the speech on paper, as the translation has to attempt a re-narration of the non-verbal elements as well, with effective target language usage. However, such an attempt does not seem to fulfil all the intended elements of re-narration in terms of the shift that happens from inter-lingual translation to inter-semiotic translation.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the 2009 Independence Day Celebration is a context rich with nuanced messages catering to a state political agenda during times of armed conflict. Mahinda Rajapaksa's presidential address was analyzed for its attempt at re-narrating 'positive' ideas of the country in line with this agenda. Tymoczko (2000) states that if one were to use translation as a space for political activism and engagement, then "[t]here should be a defined audience large enough to initiate and support cultural shifts" and that "[t]exts must be chosen for translation with political goals in view" (p. 41). The defined audience in this context is both the local, national audience as well as the international audience. Precisely, in terms of the goals of re-narration of a very specific and carefully configured image of Sri Lanka, it is possible to argue that the speech was more focused on appealing to the international audience. What the government wanted to achieve was international support, mainly within the discussions surrounding alleged war crimes committed during the armed conflict by the government forces.

This article examined the presidential address during the Independence Day Celebrations. Due to the above reasons, the speech was, as a text, formulated with obvious political goals catering to the government's need to present a positive image of the country. The inter-lingual features of translation support the interpretation of the speech that happens at the scene, and carries many overt features of translation as re-narration. The narrative theory of re-narration can be seen as used in reconfiguring a positive image of Sri Lanka in a 'fight against terrorism'.

In examining the re-narration of the Independence Day Celebration address, there are observable instances of omission, addition, untranslatability/mistranslation, as well as change of words to create positive ideas. It becomes clear that the re-narration is directed towards an international audience. While omission and mistranslation are believed to have negative impacts on a translation, this article shows that at times, such choices of omission, as well as mistranslation, could be

calculated and deliberate. The translation strategically uses as well as omits the use of terms associated with nationalist ideas, replacing them with words such as “all of us”, or “our people”. The use of such words is inclusive of the international audience also as part of the in-group suggested via ‘our’ and avoids exclusive biases towards any specific community. These omissions as well as strategic placement of words can also serve activist purposes. Especially in cases of re-narration, it becomes a manipulated feature for reconfiguration of one’s desired reality. The analysis of the inter-lingual translation from Sinhala to English also indicated instances where the translation has taken liberties in adding phrases that are not there in the source text (see Example III). This is evidence of how re-narration as a strategy in translation “constructs rather than represent events” (Baker, 2014, p. 159). The construction of the country as ‘united’ in its decision to counter terrorism and to remain un-swayed amidst international pressure adds to the ‘positivity’ that the re-narration via the inter-lingual translation attempts to construct.

The analysis also found that while communicative equivalence may translate/re-narrate an ‘idea’, it does not suffice to re-narrate the nuances as well as the activist elements present in an original narrative. This shows it is not only words that are untranslatable. It may be possible to translate the words, but the underlying nuances created by certain words may remain untranslatable. Especially in terms of the political history of the country, despite literal translations, an international audience unaware of the kings and the giants and other similar heroes may find it difficult to understand the nuanced metaphorical references in the speech (see Example V). The untranslatability of such nuanced phrases can hinder the activist intentions of re-narration.

Another important idea that the analysis in this article presents is that, when inter-semiotic translation occurs between *spoken* speech and *documentation* of the speech, crucial narrative features that shape the speech may get lost. Such losses, as discussed in this article, could dilute the impact of the speech to an audience that is unaware of the context. While translation mostly pays attention to linguistic features and form both in inter-lingual and inter-semiotic translations, it can be seen that other elements such as visual and video additions are also used to communicate additional information. The inability to ‘translate’ these accompanying features of a speech can therefore compromise the intended impact created by these visuals. The limitations of the inter-semiotic translation provides interesting insights into the indirect and often non-lingual elements that are linked in creating linguistic narratives of events. Hence, a key observation related to inter-semiotic translation is that it should pay attention not only to the mediums, but also to what additional, indirect elements exist between the mediums.

Therefore, the analysis of the extent to which inter-linguistic and inter-semiotic translation can contribute to the use of re-narration with activist intentions

seem to suggest that inter-lingual translation is a more feasible means of translation in relation to achieving activist ends. This questions whether equivalence can suffice for re-narrating and reconfiguring a specific reality via translation. However, the context of national celebrations will continue to carry inter-semiotic elements of translation as long as the question of 'live' settings remain. Therefore, future research may find it interesting to look deeply into the diverse uses of inter-semiotic translation, especially in this highly digitized world.

There is a short duration towards the end of the speech, where the President speaks in Tamil. The English version does not include a translation of this Tamil excerpt and due to my unfamiliarity with Tamil and because the article focuses on the Sinhala and English languages, I have not translated this section either. This could provide an interesting space for future research. Further, the article shows that activist political translation may occur from the political sphere to the outside, just as much as from outside translation groups. This is an area that has not been studied in-depth in terms of activist translation and could provide interesting insights.

Conflict of interest

The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

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