



# Cultural Problems In Translation Of Elena Vanishing: A Memoir Into Tamil Context

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**Abstract:** This research article explores the challenges of cultural translation when rendering American literature into Tamil, with a focus on the memoir *Elena Vanishing: A Memoir* (2015) by Elena and Clara B. Dunkle. The study addresses the intricacies of translating cultural nuances from the source text, which reflects distinctive American cultural contexts, particularly in relation to beauty standards and diet culture. The article provides a comprehensive analysis of the cultural disparities between American and Tamil societies, highlighting how these differences impact the translation process.

Through a detailed examination of the source text's portrayal of beauty ideals and dietary practices, the research uncovers the unique cultural problems that arise when translating such concepts into the Tamil context. The study investigates how cultural diversity between American and Tamil languages affects the translation of cultural misconceptions and norms. By identifying and addressing these issues, the article reveals the novelty of the findings regarding cultural translation difficulties and offers insights into effective strategies for bridging cultural gaps. The research contributes to a deeper understanding of how cultural translation challenges can be managed to ensure accurate representation and comprehension in the target language.

Keywords: Literary translation, Cultural Problems, American Culture, Newmark, Nida and Strategies.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Literary translation can be the one of building bridges across the cultures. Translation is the key which helps to understand the unknown language and culture. Translating a text is not simple one, it's very complex to intrigue. The translator has to face many problems to give better translation. one of those problems are cultural issues. This research article analysis the cultural problems while translating American memoir, *Elena Vanishing: A Memoir* (2015) into Tamil context. It articulates the problems of cultural differences arise from both target language and source language. The main objective of the article is to discuss the general concepts of cultural translation and to analysis the findings from drawn data. This article highlights how the translator handled the cultural problem for better readability. It also emphasis the leading theories of cultural translation of Nida, and Newmark

## II. Significance of the Source Text

The selected work, *Elena Vanishing: A Memoir* spoke about the Elena's Anorexia problems in her teenage. This work depicts the real picture of anorexia and its struggles to overcome the disorder. This book particularly helps the readers to have understanding about eating disorder problems. This kind of self-help books helps the teenagers to understand about their misunderstanding about body shamming, and image-consciousness. Anorexia Nervosa is the underlying condition of being underweight by refusal of in taking the food and cutting the necessary calories a body needs in a day. Sometimes, these problems also misunderstood

in terms of dieting. This disorder has high fatal rate among other psychological disorders. This is the context of the source text.

### III. Research methodology

The researcher translates the source text into target text. The cultural untranslatability had been traced and collected as datum. Those datum are segregated into several categorized like cultural norms, diet culture, and other cultural words. The drawn datum had been analyzed in the perspectives of cultural translation theory.

### IV. Background Study

In his work, Newmark defines translation as "the process of conveying the meaning of a text into another language in a way that the researcher comprehends it." Anthony Pym, in his discussion of 'Cultural Translation,' draws from diverse perspectives, including social anthropology, where ethnographers describe foreign cultures; actor-network theory (translation sociology), which views interactions that form networks as translations; and sociologies of communication, which study interactions in fragmented societies, particularly those influenced by migration.

Bhabha's concept of Cultural Translation involves crossing cultural boundaries and highlighting the intermediary roles of translators. The cultural approach underscores the importance of culture in translation and the impact of translation on the receptor-language culture, treating it as independent literature rather than a mere copy of the original text. This perspective represents the 'Cultural Turn' in translation studies, a shift from viewing translation as text to understanding it as a cultural and political phenomenon.

In 1990, Bassnett and Lefevere adopted this 'Cultural Turn' to explore metaphorical aspects of translation, aligning with Even-Zohar's concepts of poly systems and translation norms from 1978. Proposed by Snell-Hornby and endorsed by Lefevere and Bassnett, the 'Cultural Turn' emphasizes the cultural effects of translations, suggesting that the "translation unit" should move from the text to the cultural context, thereby extending the descriptive paradigm to include cultural variables.

Cultural issues in translation are often challenging because languages reflect the unique customs, beliefs, and lifestyles of their speakers. Nida's theory responds to this challenge by focusing on receptor response — the idea that a successful translation should evoke a similar reaction in the target audience as the source text does in its own cultural context. This means the translator must consider how the target audience might perceive and understand various cultural elements and adjust them accordingly to maintain the intended emotional and intellectual impact.

One of the key principles in Nida's approach is to prioritize meaning over form. While it's tempting to stay close to the original linguistic structure, this often fails to convey the true cultural essence of the message. By focusing on meaning, translators can adapt expressions or references to align more closely with the target culture's context, thus enhancing the audience's comprehension. For example, idioms, metaphors, or cultural references unfamiliar to the target audience can be replaced with culturally relevant equivalents, ensuring the message remains clear and impactful.

Another strategy encouraged by Nida's theory is the use of cultural substitutions. When a cultural reference in the source text has no direct equivalent in the target language, a similar concept from the target culture can be used instead. This substitution respects the original's intent, offering the reader a relatable context that conveys the same emotional or cultural significance. In cases where no suitable equivalent exists, neutralization or generalization can be applied. Here, the translator uses a broader or more general term to ensure that the concept remains accessible to the target audience, even if some specificity is lost. For instances where unique cultural terms are integral to the text's meaning, explanatory notes may be added. These notes allow the translator to preserve the cultural authenticity of the original while helping the target audience understand the term's significance. By including brief explanations, the translator bridges the cultural gap, making the text both informative and accessible.

## V. Cultural Problems in Elena Vanishing: A Memoir

### 5.1 Cultural Norms and Beauty Standards:

Cultural norms and beauty standards play a significant role in shaping individuals' body image and self-esteem, often promoting a narrow definition of beauty that values slimness, youth, and specific physical features. Elena adopts these standards, leading her to believe that extreme thinness is necessary for beauty and worth, which worsens her eating disorder.

In Elena's memoir, she expresses her anxieties about her appearance and others' perceptions with statements like, "Is that true? No one has even looked at me. Do they think I'm fat? I don't have my makeup bag. I didn't get to check my makeup. What do they see?" These lines reveal her deep concerns about being judged based on societal beauty standards. Her worry about external validation is evident in her preoccupation with how others perceive her. Her fear of being deemed unattractive due to her body size is a common issue in cultures that equate thinness with value. Additionally, her concern about not having her makeup bag illustrates the pressure to meet beauty standards that emphasize a flawless appearance. Elena's question, "What do they see?" reflects her broader anxiety about how her overall appearance and by extension, her worth might be judged. This internalization of beauty ideals, which may be more pronounced in Western contexts, might require additional explanation for Tamil readers to fully understand its impact on the narrator.

### 5.2 Diet Culture:

The media's promotion of dieting, weight loss products, and fitness regimes reinforces the belief that thinner is better, which can lead to unhealthy eating patterns and an obsessive focus on weight control. In Elena's memoir, she reflects on her experience with a juice fast by saying, "My friends and I were doing a three-week juice fast, but I was the only one who made it. I think about the willpower I exhibited then and feel a glow of pride." This statement captures several facets of diet culture. It underscores the value placed on willpower and self-control, suggesting that adhering to a restrictive diet is seen as a virtuous act.

The pride Elena feels from completing the fast illustrates how dieting success is often viewed as a significant personal achievement, emphasizing determination and resilience over health. Additionally, her achievement in completing the fast while others did not introduces a competitive element, fostering a sense of superiority for those who succeed and inferiority for those who don't. This competitive aspect reinforces a cycle of judgment based on dieting success. The emphasis on willpower and pride rather than health benefits reveals that the motivation behind the juice fast may be more about appearance and self-discipline than actual well-being. Translating this passage into Tamil presents challenges, as the concept of diet culture as understood in Western contexts may not have a direct equivalent in Tamil culture. Terms like "willpower," "self-control," and "glow of pride" carry specific connotations that may not translate directly, requiring careful adaptation to convey the intended meaning to Tamil-speaking audiences.

In Tamil culture, fasting is typically associated with religious or spiritual purposes, rather than the motivations tied to diet culture. Translating the passage necessitates sensitivity to these cultural differences to maintain the original meaning. It is also crucial to convey the emotions of pride and achievement related to diet culture effectively in Tamil, while ensuring that these sentiments are understood within the appropriate cultural context. Here's the translation of the passage into Tamil while retaining its original meaning and context:

"Nānum eṅ naṅparkaḷum mūṅru vāra jūṣ Viratam ceytu koṅṅiruntōm, āṅāḷ nāṅ maṭṭumē atai ceytēṅ. Nāṅ appōtu velippaṭṭuttiya maṅa urutiyaip parri ninaittup pārkkirēṅ, perumaiyiṅ pirakācattai uṅarkirēṅ" ("என்னுடைய நண்பர்களும் நானும் மூன்று வார ஜூஸ் விரதம் மேற்கொண்டோம், ஆனால் அதை முடித்தது நான் மட்டும் தான். அப்போது நான் காட்டிய மனவலிமையை நினைத்தால், பெருமையோடு பிரகாசிக்கிறேன்.") In this translation, efforts are made to keep the emotional and cultural nuances as close to the original as possible. However, certain aspects of diet culture may still need additional context or explanation to fully resonate with Tamil-speaking audiences. Hence, Cultural misconceptions about eating disorders can hinder effective treatment and support. For instance, viewing anorexia as merely a quest for thinness rather than a complex psychological issue can be detrimental.

## VI. Cultural Specific words in Elena Vanishing: A Memoir into Tamil Context

According to Newmark, each language group possesses unique cultural traits because culture encompasses the lifestyle and expressions particular to the community that speaks the language. He introduced the concept of "Cultural words," which may be difficult for readers to understand. The translation of such terms depends on the specific context of the text, the needs of the audience, and the importance of the cultural word. Newmark classified cultural words into several categories: 1) Ecology: terms related to flora, fauna, landscapes, and natural features; 2) Material Culture: items such as food, clothing, architecture, and transportation; 3) Social Culture: aspects of work and leisure; 4) Organizations: customs, activities, and procedures; and 5) Gestures and Habits The selected cultural elements had been analyzed as follows:

### 6.1 Pure Borrowing:

Pure borrowing means an expression or a word is taken over purely into Target Language (TL) (without any changes). For instance, the words "Chips, French fries, pizzas, French toast pudding, Oreos, sandwich, nuggets" will be transliterated into Tamil. Due to western influence in India, target readers will understand the meaning of these cultural words.

Even though, according to Nida, footnotes has been given for better understanding. For instance, footnotes for the word 'sandwich' had been transliterated in Tamil and footnotes has given as (English Transliteration of footnotes) "Oru cāṇṭvic eṇṇatu onṇu allatu atarku mēṇṇaṇṇa vakai roṇṇikaḷ (tuṇṇuḷākkappaṇṇa roṇṇi allatu rōḷ pōṇṇavai) koṇṇa uṇṇavup poruḷākum, potuvāka iṇṇaici, cīs, kāykarikaḷ, cāskaḷ allatu spreṇṇkaḷ utpaṇṇa onṇu allatu atarku mēṇṇaṇṇa nirappukaḷ!" "ஒரு சாண்ட்விச் என்பது ஒன்று அல்லது அதற்கு மேற்பட்ட வகை ரொட்டிகள் (துண்டுகளாக்கப்பட்ட ரொட்டி அல்லது ரோல் போன்றவை) கொண்ட உணவுப் பொருளாகும், பொதுவாக இறைச்சி, சீஸ், காய்கறிகள், சாஸ்கள் அல்லது ஸ்ப்ரெட்கள் உட்பட ஒன்று அல்லது அதற்கு மேற்பட்ட நிரப்புகள்". it implies the meaning of "consisting of one or more types of bread (such as sliced bread or a roll) with one or more fillings, typically including meat, cheese, vegetables, sauces, or spreads."

### 6.2 Description

Description is a technique that provides an explanation or description of the form and function of a term from the source language into the target language. For instance, the word 'Lawn' means the grass area within the yard. A yard outside your house can be completely a lawn area. In Tamil translation, it will be given as meaning of yard which has grasses. Another word 'Ballet shoulder' which means the particular person has gesture of ballet dancers. Relatively, In Tamil translation, the meaning of the word will be briefly given in translated context.

## VII. Some selected strategies introduced by Newmark for dealing with cultural gap in this translation

### 7.1 Neutralization or Generalization

Neutralization is a kind of paraphrase at the level of word. If it is at higher level, it would be a paraphrase. When the SL item is generalized (neutralized) it is paraphrased with some culture free words. The word 'boarding school' means a school at which the students receive board and lodging during the school term. In the Tamil translation, the brief meaning of the boarding school had been given as Uṇṇaiviṇṇaṇṇa paḷḷi (உறைவிடப் பள்ளி). Stuffed animals mean a toy doll with an outer fabric sewn from a textile and stuffed with flexible material. In the translation of Tamil, the general meaning of stuffed animals is nothing but a toy. So, the equivalent of 'toy' had been given as 'pom'mai' (பொம்மை).

## 7.2 Explanation as footnote

The translator might provide additional information to the target language (TL) readers through footnotes. These explanations can appear at the bottom of the page, at the end of the chapter, or at the end of the book. For example, if the source text uses the term "peasant blouse," which refers to a specific type of informal top with features like a wide neck, short or puffed sleeves, and elastic or smocking at the waist, cuffs, and neckline, a footnote might be necessary. This is a style of Western clothing that is not common in Indian apparel. To clarify, a footnote might be included with a description such as:

"அகலமான கழுத்து, குட்டையான மற்றும் வீங்கிய அல்லது நீண்ட மற்றும் முழுகைகள் மற்றும் இடுப்பு, சுற்றுப்பட்டை மற்றும் கழுத்துப் பகுதியில் மீள்தன்மை கொண்ட முறைச்சாரா மேற்புறத்திற்கான அணியும் ஆடை."

"Akalamāna kaḷuttu, kuṭṭaiyāna marṛum vīṅkiya allatu nīṅṭa marṛum muḷu kaikaḷ marṛum iṭuppu, curruppaṭṭai marṛum kaḷuttup pakutiyil mīḷtanmai koṅṭa muṛaicārā mēṇṇurattirkāṇa aṇiyum āṭai."

This explanation translates to: "a garment with a wide neck, short, or puffed sleeves, or long and full sleeves, with elastic or smocking at the waist, cuffs, and neckline, known as a peasant blouse in western fashion."

## VIII. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research paper explores the general concepts of cultural translation as proposed by Anthony Pym, Peter Newmark, and Nida. It also examines the cultural challenges encountered when translating *Elena Vanishing: A Memoir* into Tamil. The analysis identifies cultural gaps through various theoretical perspectives and presents the findings. Although achieving a perfect cultural translation remains challenging, this study has aimed to provide a close approximation of the intended meaning. Where exact contextual meanings are lacking, supplementary information has been included in footnotes to aid understanding. Future research could further investigate the issues related to cultural discourse.

## IX. Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank University Grant Commission (UGC) for their generous support for providing JRF assistantship for the first author and helping in carrying out this research.

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