

# A Comparative Study of Translation Errors made by Odia ESL Learners

SASMITA KANUNGO

## Abstract

*The study investigates the types of errors made by the Odia ESL learners while performing the task of both direct translation i.e., from Odia (L1) to English (L2) and inverse translation, i.e. from English (L2) to Odia (L1). It will also make an attempt to find out whether the medium of instruction has to play a significant role in committing these errors or not. The data were gathered from 30 Odia ESL learners studying in Class X and who were divided into two groups of the equal number on the basis of the medium of instruction they had in their school. The participants were assigned the task of translating two passages (one from L1 to L2 & the other from L2 to L1). The study was conducted at two different educational institutions in Odisha. Participants had to write down the translation directly on the paper. The written data were analyzed thereafter by the researcher herself. The result of the analysis revealed that the medium of instruction has no role to play in committing the types of translation errors by the Odia ESL learners.*

**Keywords:** Direct Translation, Inverse Translation, Medium of Instruction, ESL Learners, Translation Errors.

## 1. Introduction

Making errors is the most natural thing and it is evidently attached to human beings. Ellis (1994) states that the error is a deviation from the norms of the standard language. The study of errors is important because it helps to find out the causes and sources of the error and to take necessary pedagogical precautions towards them. Analysis of error is not only important in the field of linguistics but also has a substantial

part to play in the field of translation. The quality of a translation can be assessed by looking at the presence or absence of the errors. The present paper will look into the types of translation errors committed by the Odia ESL learners while performing the direct translation and inverse translation. It will also observe the role of the medium of instruction behind committing these errors. A long-term general notion is that English medium students have a better hold of the language than the state board medium students. It has been advertised by the International School Agra (affiliated to CBSE), Agra, U.P. that by joining an English medium school, the student will start to think in English and he/she will eliminate the practice of thinking in one's native language and then translating it into English. This notion is prevalent not only in Odisha but also in other 29 states of India. The present study is only confined to the ESL learners of Odisha. It will look into the translation errors committed by both the English medium students and the Odia medium (state-board medium) students. Thus, the research questions addressed in the paper are:

1. What are the different types of translation errors committed by the English medium and Odia medium ESL learners?
2. Does the medium of instruction of the participants interfere in committing these errors?

## **2. Review of Literature**

In order to analyze learners' errors in a proper way, it is necessary to make a distinction between errors and mistakes. Corder (1964) states errors are deviations of some systems of language that the learner is making. Errors are systematic and it is due to the learners' still developing knowledge of the target language rule system. On the other hand, he said mistakes are deviations due to performance factors. They are typically random and are readily corrected by the learner when

his attention is drawn to them. The field of Error Analysis (EA) in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) was established in the 1970s by Corder and colleagues. It helps the teacher or the researcher to understand the learners' difficulties and also explains the causes of errors. According to (James 1998) errors are classified according to modality (whether learner's behaviour is receptive or productive), medium (spoken or written), and level (substance, text or discourse).

Concerning the translation errors; Hatim (2001) states that translation errors cannot be categorized into any fixed models. The causes of such errors are due to the lack of comprehension, or misuse of words (Wongranu 2017). Pym (1992) states that there are two types of translation errors: binary and non-binary errors. Binary errors are any errors that occur as incorrect translation. On the other hand, non-binary errors are those which are not completely wrong but may not be appropriate and can be improved. Binary errors indicate language competence whereas non-binary errors reflect translation competence (Wongranu 2017). Pojprasat (2007) is a detailed work on English to Thai and Thai to English translation. As per the findings of this work, translation errors can be categorized into three types: Semantic errors, Syntactic errors and Cultural errors. Mistranslated words, collocations or idioms were categorized as semantic errors. Mistranslated sentence structure or grammatical structures were termed as syntactic errors and those errors caused by the cultural differences of the two languages were categorized as cultural errors.

Du & Saeheaw (2020) aimed to develop an assessment framework based on error analysis and a translation grading system through identifying the most common and frequent errors committed by the Chinese students' translation work

into English. They categorized the errors found in their study into: text level errors, translation errors and substance errors.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

The study at hand is both qualitative and quantitative by nature. Qualitative in a way that it offers the description of different types of translation errors committed by the participants. It will also provide a quantitative description of the frequency of occurrence of these errors in the case of the participants' translation.

#### **3.2. Participants**

Participants of the study involved 30 Odia ESL learners from two different schools. All the participants belong to the class X. 15 students were selected from a reputed English medium School in Odisha, i.e. St. Joseph Girls' High School (affiliated to ICSE board), Cuttack, Odisha and the other 15 students were selected from Ravenshaw Collegiate School (affiliated to BSE, Odisha). The participants were selected on the basis of their percentile secured in the subject of English in the final exam of their previous academic year. Those students who had secured 55%-65% of marks in English were selected for the study. All the participants had average exposure to English besides their school time. They were being interviewed by the researcher regarding their exposure to the language before conducting the main study.

One important point should be mentioned here that the participants who belonged to the English medium school had a provision of taking Odia as a compulsory language course from standard I to X. They also had an alternative system that if students will choose Hindi as their language subject over Odia, still they have to learn Odia compulsorily for a period of 2 years.

### 3.3. Passages Selected for the Study

As the study will focus on both direct and inverse translation; two passages were selected to serve the purpose. One passage was in Odia and the participants had to translate it into English. The other passage was in English and the participants had to translate it into Odia. Each passage consisted of 250 words. Both the passage contained short sentences. The passages were selected from the participants' course books prescribed by the respective boards for class X. The reason behind selecting the passages from their coursebook was to hold on to topic familiarity. The participants have already completed the chapters in their course.

### 3.4. Procedure

The selected passages were given to the participants in printed versions with all the necessary instructions. All the participants were asked to follow the instructions and do the translation in the space provided below the passages. The participants were given 45 minutes to complete each task. The answers were analyzed by the researcher for further interpretations. Based on the observation of the collected data, the necessary statistical methods were employed in order to give a quantitative picture of the errors' frequency of occurrence and their percentiles.

## 4. Data Analysis

The errors found in the participants' translation were divided into two categories based on the nature of the error: 1. Syntactic Error and 2. Semantic Errors. Table 1 represents the different types of errors found in the translation of both passages.

Errors found in the passage (Odia-English)	Errors found in the passage (English-Odia)
1. Preposition (syntactic)	1. Malformation of Sentence (syntactic)

2. Determiner (syntactic)	2. Subject-Verb-Agreement. (syntactic)
3. Tense (syntactic)	3. Spelling (syntactic)
4. Spelling (syntactic)	4. Punctuation (syntactic)
5. Punctuation (syntactic)	5. Tense (syntactic)
6. Subject-Verb-Agreement. (syntactic)	6. Lexical Choice (semantic)
7. Lexical Choice (semantic)	7. Inversion of Meaning (semantic)
8. Inversion of Meaning (semantic)	8. Omission of Meaning (semantic)
9. Use of Ambiguous Word (semantic)	9. Use of Ambiguous words (semantic)
10. Omission of Meaning (semantic)	

Table1: Types of syntactic and semantic errors found in participants' translations.

#### 4.1. Errors Found in Odia-English Translation

First, let us discuss the errors found in the passage where participants had to translate from Odia to English. As shown in Table 1, 10 types of errors were found. These errors were committed by both the English and Odia medium students in their translation task. Each error category is exemplified and discussed in the table presented below followed by a statistical analysis of the same.

Preposition	<p>ST: ehi drusTi-<b>ru</b> bicAra kale izrAel -ra Adhunika Hibru bhAsA.....</p> <p>PT: if we think <b>in</b> this perspective, modern Hibru language <b>in</b> Izrael....</p> <p>CT: if we think <b>from</b> this perspective, the modern Hibru language <b>of</b> Izrael....</p>
Determiner	<p>ST: ingrezi bhAsA prabhaha-re Ama desa-re bhAsA paristhiti...</p> <p>PT: Due to 0 effect of the English language in our country the language situation...</p> <p>CT: Due to <b>the</b> effect of the English language, the language situation in our country...</p>
Tense	ST: prakruta-re AncaLika bhAsA <b>heuchi</b> janatA-ra prathama

## A Comparative Study of Translation Errors...

	<p>prayojana.</p> <p>PT: Actually, people <i>had the need</i> of language....</p> <p>CT: Actually, regional language is the first priority of people.</p>
Spelling	<p>ST: desa-ra khyudra siLpa-mananku banchAi rakhibA-ku hele...</p> <p>PT: To <i>susten</i> the small-scale industries of our country...</p> <p>CT: In order to <i>sustain</i> the small-scale industries of our country...</p>
Punctuation	<p>ST: sethipAin arthaniti khetra-re Gandhiji bidesi barjana kari...</p> <p>PT: For <i>this</i>- Gandhiji asked to reject the foreign products and...</p> <p>CT: That is why in the field of economics Gandhiji asked to reject the foreign and...</p>
Subject-Verb-Agreement	<p>ST: ehi gyAni loka-mananka-ra mAtrubhAsA prati abaheLA hela jAti pakhya-re ghor durbhAgya-ra kAraNa.</p> <p>PT: Negligence of mother tongue by these knowledgeable persons <i>are the</i> reason of misfortune of Odia people.</p> <p>CT: The negligence of these wise men towards their mother tongue <i>is the</i> reason of misfortune of the Odia clan.</p>
Lexical Choice	<p>ST: Ama desa-re bhAsA samasyA kahilA matre loka bujhanti hindi-ingreji <i>bibAda</i> katha.</p> <p>PT: In our country when we talk about the language issue, people generally understand the <i>rivalry</i> between Hindi &amp; English.</p> <p>CT: when we talk about the language problem in our country people generally think about the Hindi-English <i>controversy</i>.</p>
Inversion of Meaning	<p>ST: choTa-ku rakhyA karibA-ku hele baDa-ku bAraNa karibA-ku paDiba.</p> <p>PT: In order to protect the big we have to stop the small.</p> <p>CT: In order to protect the small, the big must be prohibited.</p>
Use of Confusing Word	<p>ST: choTa-ku rakhyA karibA-ku hele baDa-ku bAraNa karibA-ku paDiba.</p> <p>PT: To save the small first we have to baarr the big.</p> <p>CT: In order to protect the small, the big must be prohibited.</p>
Omission of Meaning	<p>ST: Gandhiji thik bujhipArile je ingrezi sikhyA sAsana-ra madhyama hoi rahithibA jAen...</p> <p>PT: Gandhiji correctly understood that till English will stay as a</p>

	medium of language of our education system...
--	---

Table 2: Examples of Errors found in Odia-English translation (ST=Source Text, PT= Participants' Translation, CT= Correct Translation)

The Table 2 presents examples of each category which are extracted from the participants' translation of the passage. In the syntactic category, errors related to prepositions had two subcategories; substitution and omission. The example given indicates the substitution of *in* instead of *from* and *of* respectively. In the case of determiners, also two subcategories were found; omission and addition. The example given above shows the omission of *the* in the sentence. As in Odia language determiners or articles doesn't exist, may be the participants have confusion regarding the usage of this category in the sentence. Participants, irrespective of their medium of instruction have committed lots of spelling errors and punctuation errors. The examples reveal it clearly. In the case of tense and Subject-Verb-Agreement, the errors indicate that the participants do not have a clear idea about the tense system and agreement structure of the target language. Table 3 shows how frequently these errors occurred in the participants' translations.

Syntactic & Semantic Errors	Frequency of Occurrence	Percentage
Preposition	93	14.37%
Determiners	89	13.75%
Tense	72	11.12%
Spelling	53	8.19%
Punctuation	37	5.71%
S-V-Agreement	18	2.78%
Lexical Choice	109	16.84%
Inversion of Meaning	86	13.29%

Use of Confusing Word	63	9.73%
Omission of meaning	27	4.17%
Total	647	99.9%

Table 3: The frequency of occurrence of overall types of errors found

The Table 3 clearly shows that in the case of syntactic errors the prepositional errors are the most frequent with 14.37% of occurrence. Similarly, in the case of semantic errors, the lexical choice category is the most frequent with 16.84% of occurrence. Determiners are the next frequently occurred errors among the other categories with 13.75%. Inversion of meaning category comes next with a percentage of 13.29. The statistics given above reveal that among the total number of errors i.e. 647, 362 are the total syntactic errors and 285 are total semantic errors. The present study aimed to find out the difference between the English medium and Odia medium students translation errors. Therefore, the graph below will present the difference between these two groups in respect of the frequency of the errors.

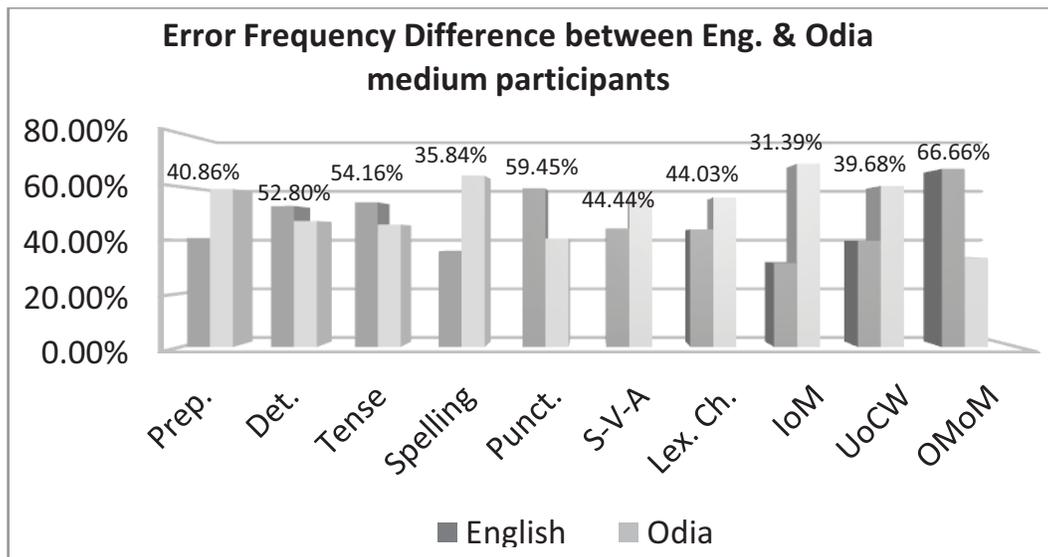


Illustration1: The error frequency difference between the two groups (prep.=preposition, Det.=Determiner, Punct.=Punctuation, S-V-A=Subject-Verb-Agreement, Lex.Ch.=Lexical Choice, IOM=Inversion of Meaning, UOCW=Use of Confusing Words, OMOM=Omission of Meaning)

The illustration above shows that in case of errors like Determiners and Punctuation the English medium participants have a greater percentage than the Odia medium, i.e. 52.80% and 59.45% respectively. Apart from these two categories, the Odia medium students have committed errors more frequently than the former group. In the case of the preposition errors, the frequency of occurrence is the highest at 59.13% for the Odia medium participants. The lexical choice category has 55.96% of frequency for the Odia medium and 44.03% for the English medium participants. Differences in other categories are clearly visible in the graph above.

#### 4.2. Errors Found in English-Odia Translation

We have already discussed the errors and their frequencies found in the Odia-English paragraph. Here, we will analyse the passage where participants had to translate from English-Odia. Errors found in the translation of this passage are exemplified below from the participants' translations.

Malformation of Sentences	<p>ST: Prayer is not mere exercise of words or of the ears.</p> <p>PT: prArthanA nA kebaLa shabda-ra byabahAra kimbA kAna-ra byabahAra.</p> <p>CT: prArthanA kebaLa shabda kimbA kAna-ra byAyAma nuhe.</p>
Subject-Verb-Agreement	<p>ST: We find it difficult to remain perpetually in communion with the Divine.</p> <p>PT: paramAtmA-nka saha joDi hoi <i>rahile</i> ama sakAse</p> <p>CT: paramAtmA-nka saha sadAsarbadA joDi hoi <i>rahibA</i> Ama pAin kasTa.</p>
Spelling	<p>ST: I am glad that you all want me to speak on the meaning and necessity of prayer.</p> <p>PT: prArthanA ra AbasyakatA ebang artha Bisaya-re kahuthibAru mu <i>garbAnita</i> mane karuchi.</p> <p>CT: mu garbAnvita je ApaNa-mAne mate prarthanA-ra artha ebang AbasyakatA bisaya-re kahibA-ku cAhAnti.</p>

Punctuation	<p>ST: I believe that prayer is the very soul and essence of religion.</p> <p>PT: mu biswAs kare je, prArthanA heuchi dhrama-ra AtmA.</p> <p>CT: mu biswAs kare je prArthanA heuchi dhrama-ra AtmA ebang sAra.</p>
Tense	<p>ST: He who has experienced the magic of prayer may do without food for days.</p> <p>PT: jie prArthanA-ra camatkAritA jANithilA se binA khAibA-re bahut dina rahithilA.</p> <p>CT: jie prArthanA=ra camatkAritA anubhaba kari-chi, se binA khAdya re bahut dinar ahi pAribe.</p>
Lexical Choice	<p>ST: I believe that prayer is the very soul and essence of religion.</p> <p>PT: mu biswAs kare je prArthanA heuchi dhrama-ra AtmA ebang <i>souandarjya</i>.</p> <p>CT: mu biswAs kare je prArthanA heuchi dhrama-ra AtmA ebang <i>sAra</i></p>
Inversion of Meaning	<p>ST: It is better in prayer to have a heart without words.</p> <p>PT: prArthanA-re hrudaya sahita shabda rahibA bhala.</p> <p>CT: prArthanA-re shabda byatita hrudaya rahibA bahut bhala.</p>
Omission of Meaning	<p>ST: Prayer is either petitional or an inward communion.</p> <p>PT: prArthanA eka agyAn kimbA sambAda hoipAre.</p> <p>CT: prArthanA eka anurodha kimbA Antarika aikikatA hoipAre.</p>
Use of Confusing Words	<p>ST: Whether by reason or by instinct or by superstition....</p> <p>PT: kouNasi kAraNa basatah hou bA <i>swabhAbasata</i> hou ba andhabiswas hou...</p> <p>CT: KouNasi kAraNa basatah hou kimbA <i>swabhAbik</i> hou abA andhabiswas hou...</p>

Table 4: Examples of Errors found in English-Odia Translation

The above examples are taken from the translation of the participants from both groups. In the syntactic category, the malformation of sentences occurred where participants have written ungrammatical or ill-structured sentences. The spelling errors are more frequent in this passage in comparison to the

Odia-English passage. Also, the number of confusing words is higher than in the previous passage. The subject-verb agreement had also become problematic for the participants while translating. The table below will show the frequency of occurrence for each error along with the percentage.

Syntactic & Semantic Errors	Frequency of Occurrence	Percentage
Malformation of Sentence	110	12.74%
Sub-Verb Agreement	99	11.47%
Spelling	92	10.66%
Punctuation	88	10.19%
Tense	81	9.38%
Lexical Choice	118	13.67%
Omission of meaning	89	10.31%
Inversion of Meaning	105	12.16%
Use of Confusing Word	81	9.38%
Total	863	99.9%

Table 5: The frequency of occurrence of overall types of errors found

The Table 5 shows that among all the errors found in the translation of this passage, the lexical choice category has occurred more frequently with 13.67%. Then malformation of sentences comes with a percentage of 12.74. Inversion of Meaning comes next with 12.16%. In comparison to the other passage here, participants have also frequently committed the agreement errors which have 11.47% of frequency. Spelling and punctuation errors are also occurred frequently in this passage rather than in the former one. The graph below will reveal the difference between the two groups in case of the occurrence of these errors.

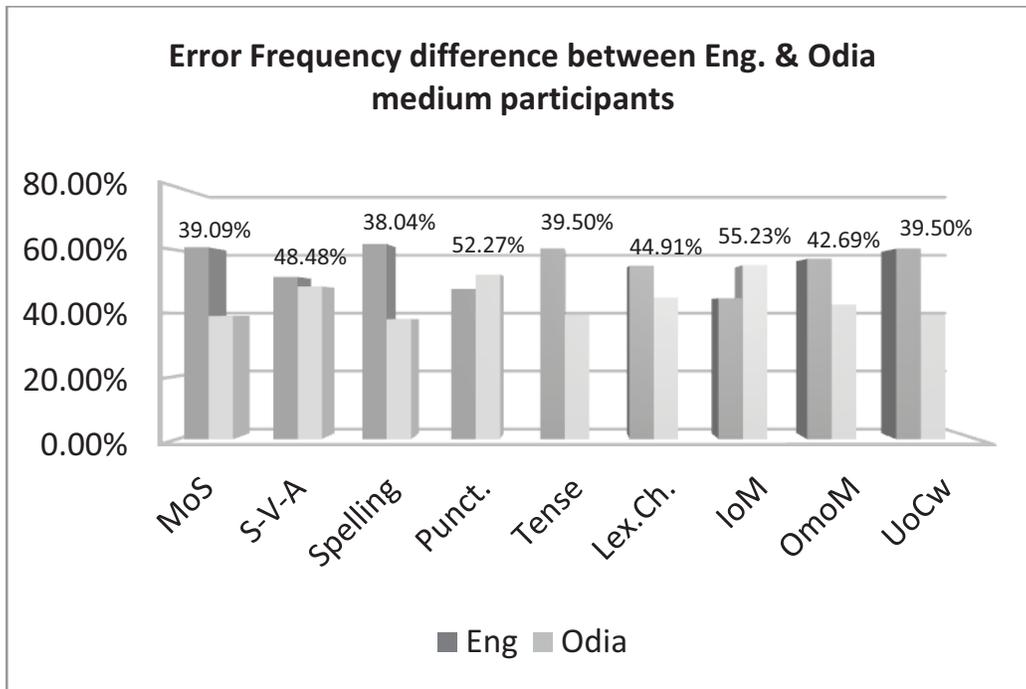


Illustration 2: The error frequency difference between the two groups. (MOS=Malformation of Sentences, S-V-A= Subject-Verb-Agreement, Punct.=Punctuation, Lex.Ch.=Lexical Choice, IOM=Inversion of Meaning, OMOM=Omission of Meaning, UOCW=Use of Confusing Words)

In the above statistical illustration, it is clear that in the case of the translation from English to Odia the percentage of error occurrence is higher in the English medium group. In case of malformation of sentences, spelling, tense and use of confusing words; the English medium group has the higher percentage of error occurrence, i.e., 60.90%, 61.95%, 60.49% and 60.49% respectively. While the Odia group has a higher percentage of error occurrence in punctuation and inversion of meaning, i.e., 52.27% and 55.23% respectively.

## 5. Findings, Conclusion and Suggestion

The qualitative analysis of the translation made by the participants of both the groups (English & Odia medium) revealed different types of syntactic and semantic errors committed by them. The overall categorization of these errors is presented in Table 1 above. Passage wise analysis of the

data revealed certain important points: 1. In the case of the Odia-English passage, the errors pertaining to determiner have two sub-categories; omission and addition. It may be due to the reason that Odia language does not contain the determiner category. In the case of English-Odia passage translation, this category does not exist. In the case of English-Odia translation, participants have many times wrongly formed the structure of the sentences. It showed their lack of knowledge regarding the structure of the sentences in the target language. In the case of semantic errors, often the participants have committed errors in choosing the correct lexical item in both Odia-English and English-Odia translation.

Secondly, the paper also aimed to find out the effect of the medium of instruction on the participants' translation. The quantitative analysis of the data revealed that participants in both groups have committed errors. One point to think further is that as per the analysis English medium group has committed a greater number of errors in translating from English to Odia while the Odia medium group had committed more errors in Odia-English translation. Illustration 2 clearly shows that while translating from English to Odia, the English medium group has committed spelling errors, inappropriate choice of lexical items, inversion of meaning and malformation of the sentence more frequently with a higher percentage. Similarly, while translating from Odia to English, the Odia medium group has committed preposition errors, inversion of meaning and wrong choice of lexical items more often which is displayed in Illustration 1.

Though the findings of the study indicate that the medium of instruction has the least role to play in committing translation errors in the case of Odia ESL learners, still at this point it cannot be generalized because the study is based upon a smaller number of participants. The findings of the present

study are still open to more exploration with a large group of participants before reaching any generalization. It will surely help the researchers in both translation and linguistics fields to make an in-depth study on the Odia ESL learners' translation in future.

Malmkjaer (2011) states, “translation is an activity that aims at conveying meaning or meanings of a given linguistic discourse from one language to another”. Researchers also have declared that there can be no absolute correspondence between languages; hence no perfect translation is possible. Since the study above presented the different types of translation errors committed by the learners of English medium and the medium prescribed by the state board, hence it is necessary to suggest certain changes that can help the learners as well as the trainers/teachers to understand the process of translation in a much effective way. As the paper is concerned with the students of school level, the role of the trainer/teacher becomes of primary importance at this level. His/her well understanding of the process will help the learners to enhance their skill of translation. A few steps can be taken from the trainer's perspective:

1. To make the students understand that the process of translation focuses primarily on meaning rather than on the grammatical form or structure of the sentence.

e.g., jAsmine ku barsA bhala lAge.

*(Jasmine-acc rain like feel.)*

If a student has translated the above sentence as “Jasmine like rain” instead of “Jasmine likes rain”, then he/she should not be given a zero number by the trainer. Even if he/she has omitted the third person inflexion mark, the meaning is conveyed properly. The skill of translation will be achieved when the meaning of the sentence will be conveyed properly from one language to the other.

2. L2 learners have restricted knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical form in comparison to the native speakers. In that case, asking them to find out the exact form and vocabulary in the target language becomes a burden on them. They must be allowed to think liberally and innovatively with the limited knowledge they have in the target language.
3. Cultural differences between the speakers or the languages also play a role in translating certain texts. Some descriptions become culture-specific at a certain point in time. The words used for those descriptions cannot be exactly translated to another language. The trainer/teacher has to make these points clear to the students.  
e.g jharaNa kuLu-kuLu nAda-re bohuchi. (Odia)  
*stream –sound of water –flowing*

The above sentence which is in the Odia language gives a description of the sound of a flowing stream. The word *kuLu-kuLu* here represents the sound. It is difficult to translate that sound into English or in any other language for that matter. These few points can be taken care of before teaching translation skills to the learners.

## References

- CORDER, STEPHEN PIT. 1967. The Significance of Learners' Errors. *IRAL*. 161-170.
- DU, W. & SAEHEAW, T. 2020. Errors in Translation: A Case Study of Chinese into English Translation. *Language Learning in Higher Education*. 10 (1). 129-142.
- ELLIS, R. 1994. Implicit/Explicit Knowledge and Language Pedagogy. *TESOL Quarterly*. 91-113.
- HATIM, B. 2001. *Teaching and Researching Translation*. Malaysia: Pearson Education.
- JAMES, C. 1998. *Errors in Language Learning and Use*. Hong Kong: Addison Wesley Longman Ltd.

- MALMKJAER, K. & Windle, K. (ed.). 2011. *The Oxford Handbook of Translation Studies*. Oxford: OUP.
- POJPRASAT, S. 2007. An Analysis of Translation Errors made by Mattayamsuksa 6 Students. *Unpublished Master's Thesis*. Bangkok: Srinakharinwirot University.
- PYM, A. 1992. Translation Error Analysis and the Interface with Language Teaching. Retrieved Online: [http://www.tinet.cat/~apym/on-line/training/1992\\_error.pdf](http://www.tinet.cat/~apym/on-line/training/1992_error.pdf).
- WONGRANU PATTANAPONG. 2017. Errors in Translation made by English major Students: A Study on Types and Causes. *Kasetsart Journal of Social Science*. 38 (2). 117-122.

### Note

The paper has followed the broad transcription rules throughout. Only the examples given in Section 5 (Findings, Conclusion & Suggestion) have followed a narrow transcription as it was necessary there.

\*\*\*

### Cite this Work:

KANUNGO, SASMITA. A Comparative Study of Translation Errors made by Odia ESL Learners. *Translation Today*, Vol. 15(2). 31-47. DOI: 10.46623/tt/2021.15.2.ar2