

# Translating the Mising *Kabaans* and its Untranslatable Aspects

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**Abstract:** The indigenous Mising *Kabaan* or the songs of lamentations are the expressions of sorrows and grief, commonly sung by a deserted lover at the time of death or separation. These are sung solely by women only to achieve consolation while in the field or fishing or weaving, however in the modern times it is widely sung by all genders. Translation of these folk songs from the source language to the target language are slightly difficult due to the cultural and linguistical barriers.

**Keywords:** Mising, *Kabaan*, women, source language, target language, translation.

## INTRODUCTION

The origin and the lifestyle of the Mising tribe are being woven through the oral tradition. In the distant past, along with the other clustered groups of the Mongoloid people, the Misings migrated from the Tibetan Plateau and fragmented in groups into the hills of the Siang Valley, presently named as Arunachal Pradesh, in the eastern Himalayan region of India. It is immensely engrossing that the folksongs emerge spontaneously in the mind and soul of the Mising indigenous people that even when ploughing or fishing, the songs are sung especially when women get together and weave. Although translating these Mising women folk songs to English, the target language is a challenging endeavour.

Translation according to Dr. Johnson involves the process of “change into another language, retaining the sense” which is indeed the basic objective. A. H. Smith suggests that “to translate is to change into another language retaining as much of the sense as one can”. Although, Catford defines translation from the linguistic point of view, “Translation may be defined as the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent material in another language”. He empathetically asserts that “the central problem of translation-practice is that of finding translation

equivalence”. The translation involves the rendering of a source language (SL) text into the target language (TL) so as to ensure that ‘the surface meaning of the two will be approximately similar’ and ‘the structures of the SL will be preserved as closely as possible but not so closely that the TL structures will be seriously distorted’.

The English word “translation” derives from the Latin word ‘translatio’, which comes from “trans”, “across” and ferre, “to carry” or “to bring” (-latio in turn coming from *latus*, the past participle of *ferre*). Thus, ‘translatio’ is “a carrying across” or “a bringing across”, in this case, of a text from one language to another.

Oftentimes, difficulties are encountered in translating from one source language to the target language. When such difficulties are encountered by the translator, the whole issue of the translatability of the text is raised. Catford distinguishes two types of untranslatability, which he terms as linguistic and cultural. On the linguistic level, untranslatability occurs when there is no lexical or syntactical substitute in the TL for an SL item. So, the Mising word *Aidune* is linguistically untranslatable, because the word involves structures that do not exist in English. He argues that linguistic untranslatability is due to differences in the SL and the TL, whereas cultural untranslatability is due to the absence in the TL culture of a relevant situational feature for the SL text. Catford feels that the term is largely present in the lexis of many languages and although it may be relatable to different political situations. The problem here is that the reader will have a concept of the term based on his or her own cultural context and will apply that particularised view accordingly. Therefore, if culture is perceived as dynamic, then the terminology of social structuring must be dynamic as well. Moreover, the semiotic study of culture not only considers culture functioning as a system of signs, but emphasizes that

‘the very relation of culture to the sign and to signification comprises one of its basic typological features’. Interestingly, Catford begins from varied premises and invalidates his own category of cultural untranslatability because he hardly considers the dynamic nature of language and culture. In regard to his exemplification, cultural untranslatability must be actually implied in any process of translation as language is the primary modelling system within a culture.

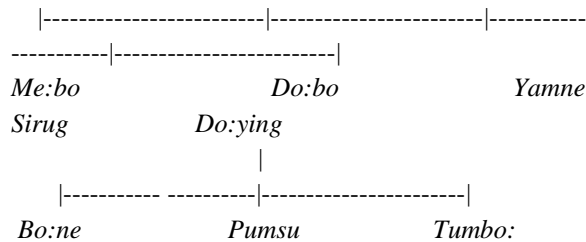
This research paper ascends explicitly on translating the missing women folk songs through the oral literature traditions and its untranslatable aspects.

### DISCUSSION

The Mising oral tradition seems to be particularly rich in the field of songs and other poetic compositions. Apparently, this may be due to the fact that the items of such genres are the most frequently performed and to the fact that they are most promptly available from generation to generation. This tribe particularly after their migration from the hills have shared relations with the people of the plains on various levels.

The *Kabaans* are the songs of lamenting one’s sadness for separation, death or any distancing from the partner. They focus on such themes as misfortune or an unhappy event, the loss of a loved ones life’s miseries and so on. These songs are sung only by women when alone in the fields harvesting or fishing in the river. The *Kabaans* are classified into categories based on their slight varying meanings, such as

*Kabaan*



*Me:bo Kabaan* indicates the sorrows and worries of losing love prematurely. The meaning of ‘*me:bo*’ in Mising language is youth.

*Do:bo Kabaan* signifies the older age group of people but usually an unmarried person. Hence, this group comprises songs of lamentation of the aged group of

the community. Some authors consider this variety as a synonym of ‘*Me:bo*’.

*Bo:ne Kabaan* signifies the lamentation of non-union of a lover with her beloved. It expresses the yearning which can never be achieved in life. Once there is loss of love either due to death or separation before union of the couple, the lover no longer desires to marry in life. She spends time all alone throughout life. The recollection brings forth tears to the person in the memory of her lover.

*Tumbo: Kabaan*, the word ‘*Tumbo*’ means widower. Hence, the *Kabaans* which are sung by a widow recollecting her short and happy married life are known as *Tumbo Kabaan*.

*Pumsu Kabaan*: This *Kabaan* is sung usually in old age remembering their happy days of the past. The meaning of the word ‘*Pumsu*’ is a conjugal life. These are songs to express happy recollections of the past. These songs also express how the wave of time has been gradually depriving them of those happy days and crippling them day by day. In general exemplifications, the weeping in extreme happiness is expressed through these songs.

*Yamne Kabaan* are the songs of grief expressed by a bride during her marriage ceremony. These songs are usually the feeling of her separation from her parents and relatives or the feeling of apprehension of adjustment with her new family.

*Do:ying Kabaan* are narrative songs based on gallantry or tragic events of some deserted lovers.

One such instance, its translation and the untranslatable aspects are as follows,

*Komjing lokkebo: reyyo lokkebo:*

- Since the days of early childhood like a frail grasshopper (Translation to English)

Here, the Mising word *reyyo* is untranslatable to English. In the Mising language, the word means the way or path that is made out of bamboo or wood to reach an elevated area of the platform of the house but exactly cannot be called a staircase. This is found in every Mising home of a village because the homes are

built at a raised area for the protection from flood or any wild animals. So as per Catford's theory, the Mising word *reyyo* is linguistically and culturally untranslatable, because the SL (Source language) word involves structures that do not exist in the TL (Target language) culture which is English.

*Pitpa: lokkebo: jeyangko: lokkebo:*

- And the days of all innocence and unaware of the hurdles (Translation to English)

This line of the *Kabaan* is translatable from the SL to the TL without any eruption of problems. Although there are vast differences culturally.

*Oinom alige ka:lige sutagai*

- O dear, it was just the beginning (Translation to English)

*Oinom angabe kangabo: sutagai*

- O dear, it was only when we could glance at each other (Translation to English)

In these two lines as translated with the theories applied by Catford, the words *alige ka:lige* and *angabe kangabo:* are an onomatopoeia for 'just beginning to see' and 'closely touch' respectively. So, as per Catford's theory, these words are linguistically not existent in the TL because there is no lexical or syntactical substitute in the TL for the SL words.

*Oiya de:pinem pidman bosutai*

- Darling, I playfully scampered with you (Translation to English)

*Oinom de:pongem po:man bosutai*

- O dear, I made sand castles for you (Translation to English)

*Oinom dongkunko giman bosutai*

- O dear, we ran along with the rising sun (Translation to English)

*Sibio dongkungko giman bosutai*

- Walked together at the twinkling nights (Translation to English)

This *Kabaan* is a song of lamentation where the female weeps that since the very early childhood, she and

lover has been loving each other even though their age was quite tender like a frail grasshopper, when they were hurdled to even walk by the *reyyo* and were absolutely unaware of the materialistic hurdles of the worldly pleasures. She laments that it was just the beginning when they made sand castles, ran along the rising sun and walked together on the twinkling nights. Ultimately, she recollects the sweet and pleasant memories she treasured with her lover which can no more be relieved as her lover has left the world.

Another *Kabaan* more specifically, *Bo:ne Kabaan* is as follows,

*Kinsng ya:melo: nokke asindem*

- If I have known your heart earlier (Translation from English)

*Oi ngo semmipe singagoi ma:ya:pe*

- O dear! I wish I would have already died (Translation to English)

*Kinseg po:yamelo nokke menamdem*

- Before knowing your actual fake feelings (Translation to English)

*Oi ngo semmipe siango ma:ya:pc*

- O dear! I wish I have died (Translation to English)

*Menam kalasin okope sebikan*

- I think deeply why have you done this to me (Translation to English)

*Birdug ni:tomem okkompe mobikan*

- You have sung so many songs of love for me (Translation to English)

*Si:ko Ka:ma:ne lambe bilampe*

- Still, why have you left me? (Translation to English)

*Oi:ngom gimo:dung longe lo:tu:pe*

- O dear! You have loved me falsely all these long (Translation to English)

Through this *Kabaan*, like always the singer solitarily sings out her pain and agony all by herself, consoling

herself to fade away the decaying and sweet memories in the field or beside the river, away from the rest of the people.

The *Pumsu Kabaan* is sung usually in old age remembering their happy days of the past. Some of the same are as follows,

*Oiya nenganc neyi negane*

- O dear! The stubborn creepers have engulfed you today (Translation to English)

*Oi nom nengane ngantid bomdune:*

- O dear! The adamant vines have swamped you slowly (Translation to English)

*Kinpong suyya: mil ka: pong suyya: mil*

- If I would have known and seen (Translation to English)

*Oinom po: yate yadbom momangai*

- O dear! I would not have let you fly away with the wave of time (Translation to English)

*Silo: yayang yampo: ya: yane*

- Today and tomorrow's waving time (Translation to English)

*Po: lo lokarke kartid dakkune:*

- For forever, I am moving towards the end of life (Translation to English)

Through this *Kabaan*, the mourner laments that the negative feelings personified as the creepers and vines have engulfed and swamped his love for her slowly. She regrets that she failed to perceive and know it earlier. She laments that if she would have known it earlier then she would not have let him change along with the wave of time. Although she is fed up with this separation and laments that she wants to die leaving this world forever.

As similar to the previous *Kabaans*, this also has few developing loops in the process of translation. The word *Nengane* is the name for a creeper which forms extremely dense vines, not easily removable, which is mostly found in the deep intense forest of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. There is no absolute name for this

structure in English. Therefore, according to Catford's theory, the Missing word *Nengane* is linguistically and culturally untranslatable, because the SL (Source language) word involves structures that do not exist in the TL (Target language) culture which is English.

*Me: bo Kabaan* indicates the sorrows and worries of losing love prematurely. Such an example of *Kabaan* is as follows,

*Gumin so: yinme lutome suge: la*

- Evoking the *Gumin so: yinme* Lords (Translation to English)

*Se: di me: lome suteme suge: la*

- Evoking the *Se: di me: lo:* Gods (Translation to English)

*Do: nyi Po: lo ke ka: sang dokkebong*

- Evoking the *Do: nyi Po: lo* (Translation to English)

*Nomme lekorem korsang bosutagai*

- I have softly loved you and dreamt of you (Translation to English)

*Lujo: laluppe lubo suge: la*

- We have always played together (Translation to English)

*Naiye negnpe nganbo: sutugai*

- We have always meandered together (Translation to English)

*So: ri riki: ke ma: teng ma: te: do:*

- Till the unending roads (Translation to English)

*Ma: tor Kamape me: bo sutungai*

- Without any conditions I fell in love (Translation to English)

*Biyar ancngko re: go ru: yido:*

- Just when we began to know closely (Translation to English)

*Anne lekope gimanoi bosudo: d*

- Introduced you to my mother (Translation to English)

*Asin a:puga ngokke menamnom*

- My heart is completely occupied with your love (Translation to English)

*Sibung kereng retide bomkine*

- But now you are buried in the sands of time (Translation to English)

This *Kabaan* is one the most sensational and heart melting *Kabaans* in the cultural history of the Mising tribe. Through these folk songs, the female laments and wails her love for her prematurely departed lover. She evokes the celestial beings like the *Gumin so:yin*, *Se:di me:lo* and *Do:nyi Po:lo*: and laments about her deep love for her lover she absolutely carried in her heart. She recollects the past memories of the sweet walks, the way they played and she always dreamed of their unification. She weeps that she even introduced him to her mother. Her last line of the *Kabaan* signifies the premature death of her lover.

Interestingly, this *Kabaan* signifies the presence of religious beliefs in the lives of the tribe as she first evokes the celestial beings who have witnessed her true and intense love for her lover. The socio-cultural aspect of burying the dead in the customs of the tribe can be highlighted from this folk song.

Moreover, while translating this *Kabaan*, there were few words which were untranslatable from the SL to the TL which is again because of the linguistic and cultural variations. For instance, the Mising word, *So:ri riki:ke* which means the extremely thin cloud-like thing in the sky which seems to have no ending. This word has no particular word in the TL which is English. With this it can be understood according to Catford's theory that the Mising word *So:ri riki:ke* is linguistically and culturally untranslatable, because the SL (Source language) word involves structures that have no existence in the TL (Target language) culture which is English.

#### CONCLUSION

The attention of the translator and the main focus of several theories of translation are mainly the problems of translation. This is the area which bridges the gap between the theorist and the practitioners of translation. The problems that are encountered are described in order to provide some insights into the area. They differ widely from language to language,

text to text and even author to author. The arising problems of translators are many and varied. The linguistic and cultural variations are the major problems of translation which are highly encountered while translating the *Kabaans* abruptly consisting of non-existing words of the SL (source language) in the TL (target language). Throughout the translation, developing loops in the structures of the SL and the TL are encountered. According to the great translator Catford's theory, most of the SL words are linguistically and culturally untranslatable, because the SL (Source language) words involve structures that have no existence in the TL (Target language) culture which is English.

Concludingly, translating the *Kabaans* or the Mising women folk songs through witnessing the oral traditions and identifying the untranslatable aspects has been a great way to learn more deeply about the significance of the language and culture of the Mising tribe. This tribe distinctly holds the rare culture of the lamentations solely by the women folk, however modernity has generalised for all genders.

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