

# Gundert's Dictionary : In Text Creation and Text Translation

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## Abstract

*Translation is transcreation where a new text is created out of an existing one. A translator reads and interprets texts. In that sense it is not just replacing the words of one language with that of another. Translation goes beyond the level of word to word translation by answering the questions like for whom it is translated, when and why it is translated and for what purpose it is translated. Mutual compatibility of lexemes, the varieties of style, differences of contexts, social status of the author/translator/reader, the attitude and world view of the translator are also significant in the practice of translation.*

*Dictionary is an important tool in translation. Gundert's dictionary is an inevitable source of help for researchers who conduct studies in the history and socio-cultural practices of Malabar. The paper "Gundert's Dictionary : In Text Creation and Text Translation" studies how Gundert's dictionary facilitates as a "reference book" in the production and translation of various (research) texts in history and other such fields by taking William Logan's Malabar Manual as the prime focus.*

*In the preface to Malabar Manual William Logan himself records his indebtedness to Gundert. The importance of Logan's Dictionary is that, in translation it is more than a reference book.*

*Gundert dictionary assumes cardinal importance in the case of text creation and text translation. Malabar Manual is a meticulous work describing contemporary society, culture, politics, history, flora and fauna as well as the geography of Malabar. Gundert's dictionary assumes a similar role. For Gundert the word is not a synonymic indicator, rather it is a representation of lexical items apparently referring to different contexts. It is certain that the quest for the texts and documents mentioned in the Dictionary will provide a fillip to*

*socio-cultural studies in Kerala.*

*The vocabulary of Gundert's Dictionary, their contextual meanings, their denotative / connotative possibilities within the syntactic structure mark its supremacy in text creation and translation.*

Translation is a process of text transformation (Andrewskuty, 1997:213). Generally, it is conceived as a linguistic practice of changing a text into another. In that sense, lexicons which describe the semantic modes of use and the contexts of usage make the text and its translation scientific, objective and precise.

A popular and traditional notion is that translation is merely a word-centric language process. This approach gives predominance only to the first level of semantic possibilities. A lexeme, on the other hand, is an interacting discourse pattern of societal life, and a discourse marker of cultural awareness and multifarious interferences in a language community.

Mutual compatibility of lexemes, the varieties of style, differences of contexts, social statuses of the author/translator/reader in the target language, attitude and world view of the author are also of significance in the translation practice. The new approaches in translation often transcends the conventional concepts based on meaning alone.

The context of language use is a major factor in the act of translation. Translation is the reading and interpretation of texts.

Translation is a knotty problem in which the text and its translation seeks answers to the queries such as, For whom? When? Why? And what for?. It becomes evident that the attitudes, cultural background and views of the author, source language receiver, the translator and the target language receiver are very pertinent in the whole act of translation (*ibid.*213) Approaches considering the situation, context of language use make translation in its theoretical and practical concerns, a post modern discourse. This is the method

adopted in pragmatics.

Gundert's dictionary demands more research into the pragmatics and knowledge approaches of translation. The dictionary equally facilitates both writing and translation. The method of data collection, the nature of data, the semantic possibilities, necessary quotations, the etymology of words etc. had been the primary concern of Gundert in making the dictionary. Gundert's Dictionary surpasses, in this regard, all other existing dictionaries in Malayalam Language. Scaria Zacharia (1992) rightly points out that Gundert believed that the inclusion of each word in the dictionary must be based on the historical relation, the circulation and the frequency of regular language use.

Gundert has given an elaborate account of his efforts in making the dictionary. He collected words and quotes from different regions, from people belonging to different strata, from castes engaged in different professions as well as from official documents, prose literature and verse. He accepted lexemes from the local oral traditions, customs, historical events and legends. He even received lexemes belonging to languages which had been assimilated by Malayalam. This methodology is unfamiliar to most of contemporary dictionary makers even today.

Text means use. When the translator lacks the language sense to translate, he takes recourse to the ways of interpreting the lexeme. Here the lexicon becomes important, especially descriptive lexicons which, being word-centric, open a way of understanding use. Beyond that, the Gundert Dictionary explores contextual possibilities of the lexeme. According to Prabhakara Varrier (1999) 'bilingual dictionaries are useful in two ways: firstly, as a reference text for learning foreign languages and secondly, to accomplish translation.<sup>4</sup> Both the observations are pertinent in the case of Gundert's Dictionary. It is a reference text too, having the cardinal function of providing a knowledge text. For instance the word 'pengal' as illustrated in the dictionaries' written by Mathews, Neelakandan Nair and Varrier give its meaning as 'sister' which is very a limited

semantic sense.

hon. PI. *of penn*, sister, when spoken of or to by her brother. PI. *penganmar* M.R. Anarch (V.U. *pengalamar*)

The terms which are untranslatable and terms which do not yield to translation, thus posing problems in translation, can be easily translated or transformed using the Gundert dictionary. Gundert attempts the lexical description based on 'text context' and the knowledge system in his pioneering dictionary.

Andrewskutty (ibid.) observed that "it is an important task to find out words in the target language which are compatible in meaning and style to the source language. Special dictionaries which can be used in this regard need to be compiled?" Gundert's dictionary can be considered as a historic milestone in this direction. The Gundert dictionary was published in 1872. In the preface to the Malabar Manual published in 1887 Logan observes:

"... But the yield is in another sense a fertile one, and I have already in the text acknowledged my great indebtedness to Dr. Gundert for having in his admirable Malayalam Dictionary gathered a rich harvest of knowledge on a vast variety of topics treated of in this work. I believe that if one were to search the length and breadth of the Peninsula it would be difficult to select another area in which research is likely to yield a more abundant store of highly interesting and important information".

"There is hardly a page in this present work which in one way or other does not derive authority or enlightenment from Dr. Gundert's labours and scholarship".

Krishnan (2008), the Malayalam translator of Logan's 'Malabar Manual' also endorses this view. But he does not explain how the Gundert dictionary had helped him in a great way for his translation work of Malabar Manual. It can be presumed that the

translator is a great beneficiary than the author (Logan) himself. But he is silent in admitting this commitment anywhere in the bibliography or in the endnotes. It can be attributed to the fact that in earlier times the authors in Malayalam were really hesitant to acknowledge such indebtedness to great reference books such as dictionaries.

Manilal, translator of 'Hortus Malabaricus,' written by Van Reed, has emphasized the significance of Gundert's dictionary in his translation. 'It was very useful in my translation because Gundert had included explanations in English as well as the botanical names of plants which proved very useful. Sukumar Azheekkode had once remarked that the Gundert dictionary was immensely useful in the acquisition of English.

Sankunni Nair who wrote a critical study of the quotes in Gundert's Dictionary from *Payyannurpattu* before it was discovered from Germany, has acknowledged the invaluable contributions of the Dictionary.

Gundert dictionary assumes cardinal importance in the case of text creation and text translation. Malabar Manual is a meticulous work describing contemporary society, culture, politics, history, flora and fauna as well as the geography of Malabar. Gundert's dictionary assumes a similar role. For Gundert the word is not a synonymic indicator, rather it is a representation of lexical items apparently referring to different contexts. It is certain that the quest for the texts and documents mentioned in the Dictionary will provide a fillip to socio-cultural studies in Kerala.

The vocabulary of Gundert's Dictionary, their contextual meanings, their denotative / connotative possibilities within the syntactic structure mark its supremacy in text creation and translation. Words are primary units in translation. Word centric translation exercise have always had a dominant role in the history of translation. The meaning of a word is contextual.

Communicability of translation is achieved in supra-sentential units. It is interesting to note how Logan in his scholarly work takes immense benefit from Gundert's dictionary.

“An association of families formed a body corporate, as, for example, the *gramam* (village) among the *Brahmans*, the *tara* (foundation, street, Village) among the *Nayars*, the *Cheri* (assemblage, village, street) among the *Tiyar* (Cingalese, Islanders) and other foreigners”.

The social structure of Malayalees is formed from a conglomeration of families. For example, *gramam* (village) for *Brahmins*, *thara* for *Nairs* (*aadharasila*, *theruvu*, *gramam*), and *cheri* (*Kootlam*, *gramam*, *theru*) for *Thiyyars* (*singalar*, *dweepunivasikal*) and other foreigners, according to T V Krishnan. We may refer to Gundert's dictionary for the semantic field of the words *gramam*, *thara* and *cherri* as used in the Malabar Manual.

### 1. *Gramam*

1. Village, *grama otticheettu*, mortgage - deed of a village
2. Brahminical Colony, 64 *gramam* KU (where of 32 No of Perumpuzha)
3. Union, assemblage *hhoothagramam* Bhg. collection; esp scale in music *Gramangalkonda anandamamaru paadi*.

### 2. *Thara* TM (c. *tharavu*, fr. c. Te *tharu* to sink in)

1. Foundation {*Pallinu thara ittu* the tooth is forming) : the stone-rows of a house, the site of a house.
2. a mound, elevated ground; an altar, as *Poothara*, *Kalthara*, *Mannthara* VI; *aarattulhara*: for a marriage *chethiyadiccu puralhil engum naltharayiltu mezhukiyallo*. Anj; a mound raised at the

bottom of a tree, *nikumhhila aaltharameleril* AR, *arayalthara* etc. *aaltharamukaleri katliim eeltirikkum*. Sipu.

3. Ground (in T = *dhara*). *Ninne adaltharamel veezhhi* RC (= *kalam*). *Kalikkunna thara* stage : a small district, parish (now *desam*) *njan thanne tharakalkkokkeyum aale ayaccu* TR

Similar to *theru*, a village, quarter; chiefly *Nairthara*, but also *aandi* — *kammala* — *vettuva* - *palg*; country - places, *mofussil*, *can*.

4. nailing, rivetting (= *thareppu*) *thara pitikka*, to rivet, see. *Thari* 4

*tharakkar*      *tharakkeitu*

*tharakettuka*    *tharayuka*

### 3. **Tharavadu (tharapadu)**

1. a house, chiefly of nobleman 30 *tharavattunair* (under *porlathiri*), ancestral residence of land - owners. *Nayayi pirakkilum tharavalttil pirakkanam* prov.
2. family *tharavallukaran (tharavadi) thar av all upularthi tharavattumulhal*

### 4. **Cherri (C. Keri)**

1. assemblage, village street, *nalucherri* pay. 4 classes of Foreign colonists (Jews, Christians, Manicheans, etc) *anayacherri* (G. a cowherd village - division of an army. VI - N pr. As *thalasserri* etc.
2. (= *chekari*) husk and fibres of coconuts - false hair of women.

It is helpful to read the explanation of the terms *Brahmanan*, *Nair* and *Thiyyan* in the Gundert dictionary in this perspective.

1. **Brahmanan**

a brahmin. The 6 offices. *Shalkarmam* ascribed to them belong in Kerala only to the *acharyar*. The duties of the rest are thus enumerated *paaitam*, *samudayam*, *arangu*, *adukkala*, *ampalappadi*, *oorayma*. He who may perform all Br. ceremonies is called *uthama brahmanan*.

2. **Nair** (= *nayakan*)

1. A leader, Ulakudyanyan God (mpl)
2. hon. PI. *Nair* Lord; the sudras of Kerala (raised to the rank of Kshatriya by their intimate connection with the brahmins)
3. Soldiers of all castes - Trav. Kolatt. Tarn & Cochi are said to have each 3,50,000 Nayars - KU fern *nayaricci*, *nayaramma*; PI *nayanmar*.

3. **Theeyan** — M. *theevan* (Port. Fr. Tivcs)

Islander, the caste of the palm - cultivators and toddy-drawers, sugar makers etc.

The *eezhavar* are in fact the same caste and both are said to have come with the south-tree (*thengu*) from Ceylon KU - fern. *Theeyaihi* & *theeyappennu* TR *theeyaradiyayuUa keezjalhikal* TR; the caste rose in dignity by serving the English at Tellicherry. *Puthiya theeyaihi* a Tiyar-bridegroom.

This is the knowledge field of a sentence in Malabar Manual. The Interpretation of 'thara' and *tharavadu* by Logan is to be in conjunction with this read.

1. **TARA**

(Dravidian) = foundation, mound, ground, village, quarter. Similar to Tamil and Malayalam *teru*, Telugu *teruvu*, Canarese and Tulu *teruvu*. A Village. The same as *Desam* in the Malabar province.



Note: See Ur and Desam. This and not the desam was the true village of malabar, that is, it was the Nayar village or unit of organisation for civil purposes among the Nayars.

## 2. TARAVADU

From *tara* (q.v) and dravidian *padu* (= falling, falling into one's power, place, situation, rank, authority)

A house of a family

Note. Compare *pattam*. Gundert defines the term as a house chiefly of nobleman,

ancestral residence of landowners, a family. The term was applied only to the families of authority in the Nayar village. (Vol. 2 appendix CCXXXV)

2 the true village, that is the territorial unit of organisation for civil purposes, was the tara. The amsams as at present defined are a modern and very recent creation for administrative purposes, but *taras* and desams and the distinction that existed between them, take the enquirer back into ancient times and necessitate an investigation of the ancient system of Government. (Vol. p. 87)

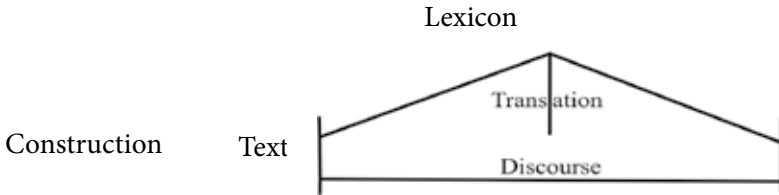
A thorough reading of this text reveals that this knowledge sphere is entirely based on the Gundert dictionary. Krishnan's translation (2008) makes it amply clear that a word-centric approach cannot successfully translate a knowledge-based text with its nuances, intrinsic meaning and style. At the same time, a historian well versed with Logan's narrative can easily transfer this knowledge into historical texts.

Kurup (1992) in his book describes the words *thara* and *tharavadu*.

"*tharavadu* was an administrative unit also... It was the largest part of a village (*gramam*) which was also an administrative unit for civil and military purposes under the Nayars. Perhaps *Paadu* 's transformed

form is *Vaadu* indicating the power and position of the *Nayars*. Gundert attributes the term to the traditional home of Lords and Land lords. In that sense *tharavadu* indicates those families which have dominant power in a *thara* or village. In medieval records of certain places there is mention of Brahmin families that wield such power as *tharavad!*

The narration of history draws a close parallel with the translation process. The importance of Gundert's dictionary in the construction and transfer of knowledge field is fully revealed only when the three parameters can be considered as a single discourse.



There are other morphemes and words referred to by Gundert in addition to the above terms which can broaden the knowledge-field under study. In this sense translation is also a supra sentential construct. We should restructure and redefine the concept that the unit of measurement in translation is solely the word. Translation is a text based activity. Sometimes it goes even beyond the text; sometimes it is intertextual.

One may be disappointed by referring to Gundert's dictionary merely for the meaning or the synonym of a word. This is not a guide book assisting the reader but a seminal reference text which locates the author, interpreter and translator in the knowledge-field. Gundert's dictionary is to be evaluated in this regard. The Second volume of the Malabar Manual classifies the flora and fauna, fishes, birds, butterflies, trees and mountains of Malabar. The descriptions are given along with their scientific names. Gundert's dictionary has been the primary reference for Logan while writing the Malabar Manual.

The Gundert Dictionary is not merely a reference text or guide book which assists reading but a text that provides objectivity to writing translation. In the process of translating ancient texts, manuscripts, official documents and the like, it is Gundert's Dictionary that is the chief source of reference. The Gundert Dictionary is a life-time and a rich mine of information in the construction of knowledge-texts, their translation, and interpretation.

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