

A Bourdieusian Analysis of the Translator's Strategic Decisions in *Senkottan*

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ABSTRACT

The study addresses a significant lacuna in translation studies by applying Bourdieu's sociological framework, specifically the concept of field, habitus and capital, to the underexplored field of Sri Lankan literary translation. While Bourdieusian analysis has been influential, its application remains predominantly centred on Western and dominant language literary fields. Guided by Bourdieu's sociology, the present study explores the translator's strategic agency in Malinda Seneviratne's English translation of Masimbula's best-selling Sinhala novel, Senkottan. The study addresses two research questions: (1) What strategic decisions does the translator employ when rendering the text from Sinhala to English? (2) How do the translator's capital, habitus and field influence their strategic decisions in the translation? Using a qualitative methodological approach, the study offers a comparative-textual analysis of the Sinhala novel and its English translation, which is informed by information obtained from a semi-structured interview with the translator. The research identifies two main strategic decisions: 1) use of Sri Lankan English and 2) para-textual elements, while demonstrating how Seneviratne's capital accumulated through his career as a poet and a translator, legitimises his strategic choices. Seneviratne's habitus, shaped by bilingual upbringing and ideological stance, directly influenced his selection of source text. The findings reveal that, within the peripheral Sri Lankan literary field, translators can employ local capital to resist the assimilative pressure of global literary markets. By extending the sociological lenses of Bourdieu's theory into non-Western South-Asian contexts, the study contributes to translation studies by highlighting the translation practices emerging from multilingual peripheral literary fields.

Keywords: Bourdieu's Sociology; Senkottan; Translator's Strategy; Malinda Seneviratne; Sri Lankan English

INTRODUCTION

Translation, in its most comprehensive understanding, is not merely the transmission of linguistic signs between languages, but a complex and ideologically shaped practice situated within cultural, social and political contexts. Following the 'Cultural Turn' (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1998), it is increasingly recognised as a process shaped by socio-cultural frameworks and the power dynamics inherent in the act of translation.

This cultural perspective has been further enriched by sociological approaches to translation—most notably Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital, which emphasise the translator's agency as socially situated. He underscores that individuals' positions within specific social fields shape their choices, and this applies to literary translation; the translator's background, experiences, ideological stance, and dynamics of the literary fields influence the translation process, especially translation strategies. Inghilleri (2005) and J.-M.

Gouanvic (2005) confirm this idea by acknowledging that translation is not only governed by textual factors, but by the social and institutional contexts embedded in the translator's agency.

The sociological thrust increasingly evident in translation studies appears to be missing a Bourdieusian flavour with regard to Sri Lankan literature. Most studies focus on Western or dominant language contexts, where translators often occupy relatively privileged positions within the literary field (Venuti, 1995). In contrast, the Sri Lankan literary field operates under postcolonial and multilingual conditions in which Sinhala and Tamil hold peripheral status relative to hegemonic languages. This peripheral status shapes translators' habitus and imposes structural constraints on their institutional capital, influencing their choice of representing or suppressing the source culture. As Bourdieu (1993) himself states, the positions of the agents within the social field depend on the distribution and volume of different forms of capital, all deeply rooted in specific socio-historical contexts. This emphasises the significance of applying Bourdieusian sociological perspective to the Sri Lankan translation literary field, which is marked by unique postcolonial conditions and multilingual power relations.

Tymoczko (2007) states that translation theory needs to go beyond Eurocentric paradigms to engage with the power imbalances and colonial legacies that shape non-Western contexts. While Bourdieusian approaches have been applied to literary translation, they remain largely concentrated in Western settings, and Sri Lankan literary translation has received limited sociological attention. Although some studies have examined translators' strategies in the Sri Lankan context, they have largely focused on textual or linguistic aspects. None have addressed how translators' social positioning informs their translation decisions within a Bourdieusian framework, nor have they combined textual analysis with empirical data. As a result, the relationship between translation decisions and the translator's position within the field remains underexplored. Addressing the gap, the present study links micro-level textual decisions with macro-level social structures by examining how the translator's social position, educational background, and institutional affiliations shape his strategic decisions.

The analysis focuses on the Sinhala novel *Senkottan* by Mahinda Prasad Masimbula and its English translation by Malinda Seneviratne, a prominent Sri Lankan poet, journalist and translator. Unlike many literary translations where the translator remains invisible, Seneviratne's work exhibits a visible and active engagement with both source and target cultures. These decisions are not arbitrary; rather, they are socially and symbolically motivated, shaped by the translator's habitus, capital and the dynamics of the Sri Lankan literary field. *Senkottan* thus serves as a compelling case for a Bourdieusian sociological analysis, treating translation not as mere textual reproduction, but as a socially situated act that reveals translator agency.

The study addresses two research questions: 1) What strategic decisions does the translator employ when rendering the text from Sinhala to English? and 2) How do the translator's capital, habitus and the field influence the translator's strategic decisions in the translation? By examining the English translation of *Senkottan* through the Bourdieusian perspective, along with translator interviews, the study extends sociological translation studies into Sri Lankan contexts, demonstrating how literary texts from South Asian nations can both embrace and adapt Bourdieusian theory in ways that challenge its Eurocentric assumptions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

PREVIOUS LITERATURE ON SOCIO-TRANSLATION STUDIES

James Holmes first brought the sociological perspective into translation studies in his essay, *'The Name and Nature of Translation Studies'* in the 1970s. According to him, "Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) is concerned with the description of how translation works in the receiver's socio-cultural situation, and greater focus on how translation works in the receiver's socio-cultural situation (or—less felicitous but more accurate, since it is a valid area of translation studies as well as of sociology—socio-translation studies)" (Holmes, 2000, p.177). Expanding Holmes, Gideon Toury elaborates on this concept in *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (1995), stressing the need for cultural and social aspects in translation, arguing that the expectations and ideas of the target culture often drive translation rules and practices. Accordingly, translators have to operate within a social context, which determines both the sufficiency of their work and the role they are anticipated to fulfil within a specific socio-cultural framework (Toury, 1995). Mona Baker (2006) similarly echoes this in her research on narrative theory within the context of translation. She asserts that translators do not operate in isolation but are 'participants in the narratives of the communities to which they belong or in which they work'.

Socio-translation studies have experienced a 'sociological turn' in recent years (Merkle, 2008) with major sociological theories such as the Reflexive Sociology of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, Social Systems Theory of Niklas Luhmann and Actor Network Theory (ANT) of German theorists Bruno Latour and Michel Callon. Bourdieu's Reflexive Sociology has been cited as one of the most influential sociological theories by scholars in the field of socio-translation studies. In contrast to Systems Theory of Luhmann or Actor Network Theory of Latour, Bourdieu emphasises individual practices within less specific social structures, highlighting conflict and change (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). His Reflexive Sociology challenges the production of knowledge, offering tools for comprehending inequality and promoting social criticism. Scholars have argued that the earlier frameworks, such as Polysystem Theory and DTS, have tended to overlook the role of institutions and social practices in shaping translation as a cultural and symbolic act. J. M. Gouanvic (1997) states that Bourdieu's theory is a more comprehensive tool for examining translation as a socially embedded practice since it better captures the complexities of cultural production.

Daniel Simeoni, in his article *'The Pivotal Status of the Translator's Habitus'* (1998), introduced Bourdieu's term 'habitus' into translation studies. He attempted to reinterpret the existing Polysystem theory in translation studies by integrating Bourdieu's idea of habitus. Bassnett and Lefevere (1998), in *'Constructing Cultures'*, examined the role of cultural capital in the translation of classical texts with reference to 'Aeneid' by Virgil (p.42). However, J.-M. Gouanvic (2005) criticizes Simeoni for not fully integrating the idea of habitus and its link to the 'field' in Bourdieu's theory. In response to this intellectual moment, publishing companies such as St. Jerome and John Benjamins released essay collections, *Translation and Identity* (2006) and *Constructing a Sociology of Translation* (2007), that further solidified the sociological turn in translation studies.

Several scholars have applied Bourdieu's concepts to different translation contexts, demonstrating how translators' positions within specific literary fields shape their translation strategies. Yeğenoğlu (2003) explores the translator's postcolonial habitus in Turkish literature, focusing on the dual consciousness experienced by translators who mediate between Ottoman

heritage and Western modernity. Extending this Bourdieusian perspective into Arabic literary translation, Tarek Shamma (2009) applied Bourdieu's field theory, examining how translators deal with the tensions between Islamic cultural heritage and Western literary dominance. He argues that Arab translators accumulate symbolic capital through their resistant or assimilative strategies, depending on where they stand in the field of power. These studies demonstrate how Bourdieu's key concepts provide analytical tools for understanding the sociocultural positioning of translators in different translation fields.

PREVIOUS LITERATURE ON TRANSLATOR'S STRATEGY

Translation strategies in literary translation have been conceptualised and categorised in various ways by scholars. Early models, such as that of Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), identified seven strategies to account for how translators deal with linguistic and cultural differences between the source text (ST) and the target text (TT). Similarly, Newmark (1988) proposed several translation procedures highlighting semantic accuracy and communicative clarity. However, subsequent scholarship questioned the limitations of such predominantly linguistic approaches. Venuti (1995), for example, emphasised the ideological dimension of translation, arguing that fluent, domesticated translations in Anglo-American contexts often render the translator 'invisible' and suppress foreign cultural differences. He highlighted the notion of domestication and foreignization, referring to the degree to which a translation either retains the foreignness of the source text or adapts it to the cultural norms of the target audience. Expanding the scope of analysis, Chesterman (1997) conceptualised a broader framework that categorises translation strategies into syntactic, semantic and pragmatic strategies, emphasising the translator's decision-making process and contextual factors shaping translation choices. Hence, these perspectives demonstrate that translation strategies cannot be understood solely as linguistic procedures but must be examined in relation to the cultural, ideological and contextual dimensions of translation.

Building on these theoretical perspectives, several empirical studies have examined how translators employ different strategies within specific socio-cultural contexts. Xu (2012) demonstrates how Jeffrey C. Kinkley enhances translator visibility through two main techniques: (1) Using Congwen's reputation as a legitimate Chinese writer and (2) Using footnotes and endnotes. He uses in-text explanations to make the meanings of culturally embedded Chinese terms explicit. He also provides endnotes to offer additional cultural and linguistic information for both general and scholarly readers. Another study conducted by Muwafi (2021) demonstrates how the use of para-textual material to gain cultural, social, economic, and symbolic advantages helps protect the translator's beliefs and enhances their standing in the field. He emphasises that translation is an activity situated within a social space and conducted by translating agents—both individuals and organisations—continuously striving to accumulate the capital at stake in the field.

Recent studies on literary translation in the Sri Lankan context have examined the use of different strategies. Chandrasiri (2022) highlights the use of Sri Lankan English (SLE) as an effective strategy for preserving the cultural and linguistic meanings of culturally rich Sri Lankan novels, with reference to *Madol Doova*. Similarly, Gamage and Makangila (2020), in their study on 'Village in the Jungle' by Leonard Woolf, suggest the efficacy of domestication as a successful translation strategy which enhances accessibility for target readers. While these studies identify key translation strategies, they largely focus on textual outcomes and fail to capture the broader socio-cultural positioning of translators that shapes their strategic decisions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

FIELD AND TRANSLATION

Bourdieu (1993) introduces the field as 'a distinct social realm governed by its own principles and operations' (p.162), organised hierarchically with dominant and subordinate agents competing for resources and recognition. In the translation field, this competition is shaped by specific norms rather than occurring in a neutral space. Agents such as translators and publishers operate in power struggles to legitimise their choices.

Wolf and Fukari (2006, 2007) extends Bourdieu's notion of field by incorporating Homi Bhabha's concept of the third space, positioning translation as a mediating act between fields within an intermediary zone. The translation process, as 'a cross-cultural event' (Snell-Hornby, 2006, p. 39), occurs not in isolation but in the interrelation of multiple fields, where power dynamics and domain-specific conventions influence translation decisions (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

HABITUS AND TRANSLATION

Bourdieu's habitus theory has generated interest in agent-oriented translation studies due to the need to analyse translators and interpreters as social and cultural agents in the production and reproduction of textual and discursive practices (Inghilleri, 2005). Simeoni (1998, p.1) first applied the term 'habitus' to translation studies, where he described it as 'a culturally pre-structured and structuring agent mediating cultural artefacts in the course of transfer' (Simeoni, 1998). Simeoni links Bourdieu's habitus with Toury's translational norms (1995), arguing that research should focus on 'translational habitus' instead of translational norms. This concept allows for fine-grained analyses of the socio-cognitive emergence of translating skills and their outcomes, particularly at the micro-level of stylistic variation. Lexical, grammatical, and rhetorical decisions of translators are determined by their translational habitus, which can be interpreted as the actualisation of translational norms. The advantage of translational habitus is its double-dimensional feature: as a 'structured mechanism' and a 'structuring mechanism'. This helps reveal the decisions of translators based on textual evidence while highlighting the broader social, cultural and ideological implications shaping those decisions.

CAPITAL AND TRANSLATION

Bourdieu's concept of capital offers a useful framework to analyse power relations in the field of translation studies. He describes the field as 'a multi-dimensional space of positions' where the relationship of individuals and institutions is influenced by the distribution and accumulation of diverse forms of capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.241). Capital is considered 'accumulated labour', and exists in economic, cultural, social and symbolic forms (Bourdieu, 1986), which establish the impact, recognition and status of actors (translators in this case). Economic capital, in the form of financial resources, enables translators to access opportunities. Cultural capital, typically obtained through formal qualifications, while social capital is developed through network and social exchange, can, once recognised within the field, be transformed into symbolic capital that enhances a translator's prestige. Access is dependent on the 'admission fee'— the requirement of acquiring adequate capital for entry (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992)—which enables translators

to strategically accumulate economic, cultural and social capital to enhance their skills and secure their positions in the field.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study adopts a qualitative and comparative research design, guided by Pierre Bourdieu's sociological framework, which is particularly appropriate for in-depth and contextualised exploration of translators' strategic decisions shaped by their capital, habitus and the position in Sri Lanka's unique postcolonial literary field. In this study, strategic decisions are understood as purposeful decisions taken by the translator to solve linguistic and cultural problems during the translation.

A single case study approach was selected since it enables the exploration of the complex relationship between individual agency and the larger social and cultural structures in which it works. The choice of *Senkottan* as the primary case was guided by theoretical sampling and purposive selection (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003), especially since it speaks to Bourdieusian agency in a peripheral context. The novel holds significant symbolic capital in the Sri Lankan literary field, receiving multiple awards including 'State Literary Award for The Best Novel -2012', 'Vidyodya Award for The Best Novel-2012', 'Godage Literary Award for the best Novel-2012' and nominated for the 'Swarna Pustaka Award for The Best Novel in 2012'. Its English translation received the H.A.I. Goonatilake Prize for Literary Translation in 2020, providing an exemplary context in which the translator's agency is both visible and publicly acknowledged.

DATA COLLECTION

Primary textual data were collected through a comparative reading of the Sinhala novel *Senkottan* and its English translation. Particular attention was given to Seneviratne's treatment of culture-specific references, including social practices, culturally bound words and context-dependent expressions that pose challenges due to the absence of direct equivalents in the target language, as these elements often pose translation challenges that require strategic decisions (Newmark, 1988; Peng & Abdul Rahman, 2025). These items are particularly significant as they require the translator to actively negotiate the meaning, making strategic decisions more visible, and providing a productive site for examining how such decisions are shaped by sociological factors. A total of 110 culture-specific terms were identified based on their cultural embeddedness and lack of direct equivalence, informed by Newmark's (1988) cultural categorisation, including references to social culture, material culture, institutions and ecology. The selection prioritised instances that reveal different ways of mediating between the ST and TT.

Extra-textual data were collected by a semi-structured interview with the translator, Malinda Seneviratne, to explore his reflections on translation decisions. The translator's personal and professional trajectory, perceptions of his role in the Sri Lankan literary field, his choices in translating culture-specific terms and use of paratextual elements were addressed during the interview. The interview was recorded with the translator's consent. Follow-up clarification was sought via email when additional explanation was required regarding particular translation decisions discussed during the interview.

Secondary data were collected through journal articles, books, and relevant media articles discussing the translator's work and position within the literary field.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis consists of two stages.

The first stage involved identifying the strategic decisions employed by the translator when rendering culture-specific terms, identified in the data collection process, from Sinhala to English. This was conducted through close comparative reading of the ST and TT, and drawing insights from the interview data. A database of examples was created to organise the identified instances systematically. The analysis focused on examining how these culture-specific expressions were translated and how the translator mediated between the ST and TT. The examples were subsequently grouped according to the translation decisions observed in the translation, such as the use of SLE and the employment of paratextual elements.

The second stage involved applying Bourdieusian concepts of capital, habitus and field to interpret the socio-cultural factors influencing Seneviratne's strategic decisions. Field analysis explored the structural characteristics of the Sri Lankan literary field and the power relations within the field. The concept of habitus was used to explore the influence of the translator's ideological stance on his selection of the text and translation decisions. Capital analysis examined how the resources of the translator influenced his agency and the legitimacy of his translational decisions.

This integrated approach allowed the study to connect micro-level textual strategies with macro-level social structures and individual dispositions, providing a comprehensive understanding of the translator's agency.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The translator's informed consent was obtained with full disclosure of the research aims. Despite the translator being a public figure, his approval was taken before citing any statements from the interview. The study adheres to the ethical principles of respect, integrity and accuracy in representation as outlined by the British Educational Research Association, 2018 (BERA, 2018).

DISCUSSION

USE OF SRI LANKAN ENGLISH (SLE)

The analysis shows that the use of SLE is one of the most consistent strategies used in translating culture-specific terms from Sinhala to English. SLE is a distinct variety of world English that is shaped by the linguistic and cultural hybridity of Sri Lanka, incorporating elements of Sinhala and Tamil into English. As Gunasekera (2005) states, this strategy aligns with the growing recognition of English as a global language that surpasses its colonial roots to accommodate diverse cultural identities.

In the translation of *Senkottan*, the use of SLE serves to emphasise the cultural and social realities of Sri Lanka, presenting the reader with an authentic portrayal of the source culture. This strategy aligns with the perspective of Nagodawithana (2017), who asserts that translation involves the interplay between two languages and their respective cultures. By adopting the norms of the original language and integrating them into the translation, Seneviratne achieves a dynamic

interplay between the source and target cultures. This approach preserves the integrity of the original text while contributing to the broader discourse on World English by demonstrating how English can be adapted to serve the needs of local cultures.

TABLE 1. Use of SLE

Translation in TT (Page Number)	Meaning in English	Meaning in Sinhala
Radicol (48)	Radical	Radikalwaadee, Wiplawawadee
Siree Paada (83)	Adam's Peak	Sree pada
Kutu-kutu-fying (69)	Murmuring	Kutu kutu ganawa
Dhobi (39)	A Launderer	Redi nanda
It was like an arecanut caught in a giraya, caught between the twin blades of the nutcracker. (68)	Caught between a rock and a hard place	Girayata asu una puwak gediya waage
Have you accidentally eaten amu? (127)	Implies that someone has acted recklessly, foolishly, or out of character, as if under the influence of something. - <i>What's gotten into you?</i> or <i>Are you out of your mind?</i>	Amu kawilada?
She sleeps like the goddess Paththini (63)	Suggests someone was mischievous or troublesome from the very beginning	Paththini amma wage
Cornered Girl (53)	The girl who has come of age/ who has attained puberty	Wadiwiya Pamini gahanu Lamaya

The above table shows that Seneviratne frequently uses lexical deviations from standard English to maintain the cultural specificity and authenticity in the linguistic expressions. As argued by scholars such as Innes (2000), Postcolonial writers and translators strategically employ linguistic hybridity to bridge local and international readerships while preserving cultural specificity. Seneviratne uses the term '*Kutu-kutu-fying*', which is widely recognised in the spoken English register of SLE as an act of murmuring secretly. He explained, '*this term is a widely popular colloquial expression in SLE, especially among the Colombo English-speaking community*'. This choice reflects Seneviratne's effort to incorporate culturally specific linguistic elements into the text, rather than using standardised English terms.

The translation of the expression "*Amu Kavilada?*" illustrates the use of SLE to preserve culturally embedded meanings. The phrase is typically used in the Sinhala language in a context where someone is acting irrationally, strangely, or out of control. '*Amu*' refers to a traditional belief or superstition, often implying that a person has been influenced by some negative or irrational force. By translating the phrase as '*Have you accidentally eaten amu?*', Seneviratne retains the culturally specific concept rather than replacing it with a domesticated expression such as '*Have you gone crazy?*'. This interpretation is reinforced by Seneviratne during the interview, where he mentioned, "*It's sad to exploit the cultural essence by using equivalent phrases in standardised English. For untranslatable terms, I used localised versions of English to keep authenticity intact*". He stated that those elements were deliberately chosen to allow readers to immerse themselves in the socio-cultural landscape of Sri Lanka, offering a glimpse into the lived experience of the characters. This strategy allows the target readers to encounter the cultural logic underlying the original expression rather than assimilating it into familiar English idioms.

USE OF PARA-TEXTS

The second significant strategy is the use of para-textual elements to mediate between cultures, such as peri-text and epi-text. Genette, who first introduced the concept of para-text, defines, 'Around the text, in the space of the same volume, like the title or the preface, and sometimes inserted into the interstices of the text, like the titles of chapters or certain notes; I will call peritext this first spatial category' (Genette, 1991, p.264). Seneviratne uses peri-texts as one of his main strategies, frequently resorting to in-text notes and out-of-text notes.

TABLE 2. Use of para-texts

Borrowed Term (Page Number)	In-text Explanation
Koth Rajaya (12)	The pinnacle of the dagoba
Atamastana (15)	The eight sacred places of veneration
Sadu Sadu (15)	Raised their voices in acceptance and affirmation
Udamaluwa (16)	The uppermost enclosure of the sacred Bo tree
Paramitas (27)	Perfections
Ithipiso Gathaawa (64)	Recalling the exceptional attributes of the Buddha
Bana Shaalawa (167)	A place for the Bikkhus to deliver sermons
Aavasa (167)	Residence of Bikkhus
Wine Mahattaya (110)	The tailor who had a sewing machine
Rassige Awwa (22)	Pre-dusk glow of that evening
A Kotahaluwa (26)	A girl reaching puberty
Wellawa (24)	Where his wife, Malma Ridee, was stacking clothes while feeding the fire.
Hulaththa (49)	The coconut-leaf torch
Ilapatha (67)	A broom made of ekels
Ayanna (108)	The first letter of the Alphabet

The above table shows the borrowed terms which do not have direct equivalents in English. To address this cultural gap, Seneviratne adopts in-text notes to facilitate the immediate understanding of the reader. This strategy is particularly evident when translating religious terminology associated with Buddhism and socio-cultural terms deeply rooted in Sri Lankan culture, ensuring that their original connotations are accessible to readers unfamiliar with these traditions. For example, the Buddhist term 'Upasaka' is transliterated with an accompanying explanatory note of 'devotees steadfast in faith'. Seneviratne explains that even though there is an English equivalent for the word "devotee, the Sinhala term 'Upasaka' generally evokes the image of an elderly devotee, and therefore, he has to borrow the term from the ST in order to convey the cultural nuances of the term. Similarly, he borrowed terms such as 'Koth Rjaya' (the pinnacle of a dagoba) and 'Sadu-Sadu' (oral expression of acceptance and affirmation) with in-text explanations, preserving the ritualistic distinctiveness of Buddhist culture.

A similar strategy is used when translating socio-cultural terms such as "Kotahalu", 'Ilapatha' and 'Wellawa', all deeply rooted in rural Sri Lankan life. 'Ilapatha', typically made of ekel sticks or midribs of coconut leaves, functions as a traditional broom used in rural Sri Lanka, even at the present. Even though it could translate as 'broom', this would ignore its handmade origin and local materiality, which are culturally significant.

As endnotes, Seneviratne employs a glossary to help the reader understand the cultural expressions which need more clarification and cannot be included in in-text notes. It contains 145 words and alludes to historical, cultural, social and religious aspects of the source culture. His choice of using a glossary, instead of footnotes, is based on two reasons: (1) Using excessive

footnotes can disrupt the narrative flow, interrupting the reading experience of the readers, and (2) Readers who are keen on exploring the cultural context in greater depth can refer to the glossary at their own discretion, without compromising the pace of the story. He explained, “*I used a glossary instead of footnotes because excessive footnotes interrupt the reading experience. A glossary lets the reader understand the text without constant interruption, and those who want a deeper explanation can always check it*”. For example, ‘*Hulaththa*’ has been transliterated using in-text notes as ‘*The coconut-leaf torch*’ and as ‘*Torch typically made of gathered coconut leaves, dipped in oil*’ in the glossary. This dual approach ensures that essential information is included in the text for immediate understanding, while additional information is provided for the deeper understanding of the interested readers.

Another interesting aspect of the glossary is that Seneviratne avoids giving too much information about cultural terms, for he believes he is not an anthropologist whose task is to provide information elaborately on historical and cultural aspects. Instead, his goal is to provide readers with the essential cultural information that is needed to understand the storyline of the narrative. This is evident in glossary terms such as ‘*Govigama*’ and ‘*kili*’, translated as ‘*farmer cast*’ and ‘*impurities*’ respectively. Therefore, Seneviratne’s strategy of employing para-texts ensures that cultural and linguistic nuances of the source text are negotiated and presented in an accessible manner in the transactional space he has created.

THE INFLUENCE OF CAPITAL, HABITUS AND THE FIELD ON THE TRANSLATOR’S STRATEGIC DECISIONS

While the previous sections identify the textual strategies employed in the translation, the following discussion interprets these strategic decisions through Bourdieu’s sociological framework of capital, field and habitus in order to understand the socio-cultural forces shaping the translator’s choices.

INFLUENCE OF CAPITAL

Capital encompasses not only the power and recognition but also the social and intellectual resources determining an individual’s position within the field and shaping their capacity for action. Exploring the trajectories, types and accumulation of capital by Malinda Seneviratne is crucial to determining the mechanism behind the translation strategies adopted.

Symbolic capital, understood as the prestige and recognition associated with the literary field, plays a decisive role in shaping translation strategies. In literary translation, it functions not merely as accumulated honour but as a form of authority that enables certain translation choices. Seneviratne’s substantial symbolic capital established through his recognition as a poet, journalist, translator and literary critic, significantly shaped his translation decisions in *Senkottan*. Moreover, institutional recognitions, such as major awards, contribute to this capital by publicly validating his competence and authority. His awards, including the Gratian Prize (2013) for poetry and H.A.I. Goonatilake Prize (2011) for Literary Translation granted him strategic freedom that may not be available to a less established translator. For example, his use of SLE in *Senkottan* can be identified as a strategic choice supported by his symbolic capital. Such a deviation from dominant linguistic norms in the global literary field is accepted when undertaken by a translator whose authority is already established. In contrast, a translator with limited symbolic capital may face great pressure to conform to standard forms.

Similarly, Seneviratne draws on the symbolic capital of the source text author, Masimbula, in order to reinforce both the cultural authenticity and legitimacy of the translation. Strategically, Seneviratne preserves the narrative voice of Masimbula by retaining colloquial Sinhala terms and culture-specific metaphors using SLE. For example, the phrases '*spreading wildfire across the village*', '*melted as Vendaru brought the fire close*', and the address '*Podino*' maintain the tone of the original narrative. Rather than domesticating the text, Seneviratne ensures that the symbolic capital of the source text author is carried into the translation. This interpretation is also reflected in the translator's explanation during the interview, where he stated: "*This is the author's work, not mine. My role is simply to mediate between cultures and convey the original story as faithfully as possible*". This approach reflects how symbolic capital operates as a decisive force in shaping choices, allowing Seneviratne to align his work with the prestige and authority of the ST and the author.

The strategic decisions have been greatly influenced by the cultural capital accumulated by the translator. His cultural capital is deeply entrenched in his familial background and early exposure to intellectual and artistic discourse. Seneviratne was raised in an environment enriched with literary and critical thought. His mother, as an English literature teacher and his father, a poet and a civil servant with Marxist leanings, nurtured his creativity and linguistic expertise. This intellectual atmosphere and his bilingual upbringing in Sinhala and English allowed Seneviratne to develop linguistic and cultural fluency that would later shape his creative and translation pursuits. His cultural capital facilitates his ability to employ SLE and paratextual elements in the translation while preserving culturally embedded meanings from the ST. This aligns with Bourdieu's (1986) assertion that family plays a significant role in the early accumulation of cultural capital.

Seneviratne's academic trajectory reflects his institutionalised cultural capital, acquired from attending prestigious universities such as Harvard, Cornell, Southern California and Peradeniya. According to Bourdieu (1986), institutionalised cultural capital provides legitimacy and authority that surpass personal characteristics, allowing individuals to exert influence in intellectual and professional domains. His engagement with such prestigious institutions has significantly shaped his intellectual development and enhanced his authority within the literary field, evident in his strategic choices of SLE and paratextual elements. His academic engagement in sociology further deepens his sensitivity to social hierarchies and ideological structures represented in *Senkottan*.

Seneviratne frequently preserves the cultural integrity of the ST, particularly through his treatment of culture-specific expressions related to caste oppression and social hierarchy. In several instances, Seneviratne employs vocabulary that foregrounds the socio-political implications embedded in the original narrative rather than neutralising them through domesticated English expressions. In instances where the characters face social oppression, Seneviratne chooses the vocabulary which draws attention to the gravity of caste oppression. For example, he deliberately uses '*contamination*' instead of a neutral term such as 'mix of impurities', preserving the ideological weight. From the Bourdieusian perspective, such decisions can be understood as reflecting the translator's embodied cultural capital, which shapes the cognitive and aesthetic dispositions through which individuals interpret cultural texts (Bourdieu, 1986). In this sense, Seneviratne's ideological orientation has influenced his preference for preserving the socio-cultural intensity of the original narrative.

This interpretation is supported by Seneviratne's explanation during the interview, where he noted that he was strongly influenced by the poetry of Pablo Neruda during his undergraduate years at Harvard University, describing it as a turning point in his intellectual and creative trajectory. Neruda's politically engaged poetry, which foregrounds themes of oppression and social injustice, appears to resonate with Seneviratne's ideological sensibilities. Such influence can be interpreted as a part of the translator's embodied cultural capital, which shapes his translation approach in *Senkottan*. This influence is also visible in his treatment of metaphorical language. As a novel that exposes a deeply entrenched caste system in Sri Lanka, *Senkottan* contains numerous scenes depicting social oppression. Seneviratne's use of unfiltered depictions of caste oppression and emotionally charged vocabulary shaped by SLE reflects an approach shaped by his sociological sensibilities. For example, when *Veerappuli Henaya* is deeply hurt by the castigation of a higher caste woman, he retains the powerful source text metaphor and translates it as '*a sharp stab of pain burnt through Veerappuli Henaya's heart when he suddenly noticed that Malmaa Ridee's eyes were suddenly moist*', employing the rich emotional imagery of the source text. '*The sharp stab of pain*' is a powerful and evocative metaphor that amplifies emotional suffering. It is not a typical expression of English, but reflects the translator's strategic use of SLE to retain the stylistic and cultural texture of ST, influenced by his embodied cultural capital.

Seneviratne's expertise as a renowned poet has further strengthened his cultural capital and enabled deviation from strict equivalence in poetry. Since Sri Lankan Sinhala folk poems are deeply rooted in cultural imagery, structured by a four-line format, mid and end lines rhyme, the translation becomes particularly challenging. Instead of strictly following the original metric pattern, he translates the stanzas in free verse, allowing the TT to maintain its semantic depth while ensuring the accessibility for English readers.

TABLE 3. Poetry Translation

ST	TT
<i>Lola sithin sith dahasin raja karana</i>	<i>Showering benevolence on one and all</i>
<i>Mula nowee satha hata setha salasawana</i>	<i>Like the full moon through the clouds to be</i>
<i>Wala gaben paayana pun sada lesina</i>	<i>The great dagoba rises from the ground</i>
<i>Bala boomiyen maha dagoba badin</i>	<i>Untrammelled joy in all directions, casting</i>

In the above example, the ST stanza presents rhythmic and visual imagery associated with Buddhist culture, especially the word '*dagoba*'. Seneviratne keeps the culturally charged word '*dagoba*'. The reconstructed rhythm and poetic imagery help maintain the aesthetic sensibility of the source poem. This strategic decision shows how Seneviratne uses his accumulated capital as a poet to navigate between fidelity to ST and creative adaptation.

While economic capital is often an important factor in literary production, its influence appears limited in this particular translation. His strategies, such as frequent use of SLE and the retention of culture-specific terms through para-texts, suggest a prioritisation of cultural authenticity rather than market-oriented domestication. Such choices indicate that the translation is not primarily driven by commercial considerations or the expectations of international publishing markets. This interpretation is reinforced by Seneviratne's explanation: "*I never consider economic benefits, market or any pressure from publishers. If I'm not moved by any work, I won't take it on. I translate only when I truly love the work*". His multifaceted career across journalism, poetry, translation and institutional roles further supports the possibility that economic considerations exerted relatively limited influence on his strategic decisions.

INFLUENCE OF FIELD

Bourdieu refers to the field as ‘a *field of struggle*’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), where subordinate literatures such as Sri Lankan literature have to struggle to gain prestige in the global literature. Translation flows are asymmetrical, focusing heavily on Western cultural output while limiting the literature from less dominant regions (Munday, 2001; Venuti, 1995). In the US, translations secure only 3% of all the books published in the USA (University of Rochester, 2018), with French, Spanish and German making up 45% of translations published in the US (Rutherford et al., 2024). Sinhala language is not in UNESCO's top fifty original languages translated into English (2019). In this context, *Senkottan*, as a Sri Lankan novel, has to compete with unequal distributions of cultural capital. Even though *Senkottan* occupies a prominent place in the Sri Lankan literary field, once it is translated into English, it enters the Western field of translation, resulting in a diminution of its capital compared to works of established Western cultures. Therefore, the position of the text in the global field is determined by the cultural capital it brings and how it aligns with the expectations of the target culture.

In Anglo-American and other dominant markets, publishers often prioritise fluency and reader accessibility, discouraging the retention of localised lexical items or frequent use of glossaries (Venuti, 1995). The historical dominance of Euro-American literary gatekeepers is now being challenged due to the question of its impact on literary representation. The shifting of the geopolitical alignment of Sri Lanka with non-Western powerhouses such as China and India resulted in Western literary approval losing its former significance (Ranasinha, 2016), which will create new global networks and regional literary markets. The shift in the literary field has critically impacted translations, particularly texts such as *Senkottan*. Since the Western approval is no longer considered the sole measure of success, translators are less pressured to domesticate Sri Lankan literature. It creates a unique space where translators can leverage local capital to resist the assimilative pressures of the global translation field. *Senkottan* exists in a smaller literary market, where translators' cultural and symbolic capital gives them more freedom to preserve their Sri Lankan identity without adopting it to Western expectations, ensuring resistance to imperialism, which is evident in the strategies—the use of SLE and para-texts. This suggests that even though the peripheral fields are affected by global cultural hierarchies, they can offer translators greater ideological space to resist assimilation.

However, the economic field, along with the market influence, also plays a critical role in the literary field in Sri Lanka, influenced by profitability. This creates ‘*the poor-quality translations from Sinhala and Tamil into other languages and the small number of good translations*’ (Freeman & Seneviratne, 2013). The cultural capital of the translator and the symbolic capital of the ST insulate the translated version from market influence. Seneviratne's choices, particularly the use of SLE and epi-texts, highlighting the award-winning status, place the book within this competitive space, despite the structural challenges faced by Sri Lankan literature in the global translation field.

INFLUENCE OF HABITUS

In Bourdieu's framework, a translator's habitus not only shapes the approach to the act of translation but also informs strategic decisions such as the selection of the ST. Defined by Bourdieu (1992), habitus is an individual's internalised system of social structures, expressed through dispositions, which serves as a bridge between subjectivism and objectivism. The process of acquiring these structures is continuous, shaped by the interplay between structure and agency

throughout an individual's life. As a result of collective experience, social identity is developed along with one's own perception of the world. Closely related to cultural capital, habitus embodies external wealth converted into an integral part of a *person* (Bourdieu, 1986).

Seneviratne's habitus, influenced by his educational background, intellectual engagements and his social trajectory and is shaped through his engagement with Sri Lankan cultural discourse and writing for decades, directly influences his translation selections, especially the selection of the ST. His selection of translating the novel is a result of his habitus-driven translation choice, influenced by two factors: 1) the recognition or the symbolic capital of the novel, which enhances its significance within the literary and cultural landscape. 2) the alignment of its themes with his personal values.

Recognition of *Senkottan* as the 'number one best-selling novel of Sri Lanka' significantly shaped the reception and recognition of the TT within the source and target literary fields. The novel received multiple awards, positioning it as a landmark in the Sri Lankan literary field. Professor Rohana Seneviratne, in his interview with *'The Morning'*, mentioned that Seneviratne's selection of ST was crucial to the success of the translation, emphasising that *'the strength of the original text was a significant point of the success of the translation'* (Seneviratne, 2021). Even Seneviratne acknowledged *'The novel's popularity helped the translation achieve success to a significant extent. However, I believe I also did a good job during the translation.* This recognition highlights the strategic engagement of the translator selecting the ST, influenced by his habitus.

The novel aligns with Seneviratne's worldview and personal values, resulting in his habitus: *"I am a father and a human being first, and only then a translator. I cried when I read the book—it deeply moved me"*. This emotional connection reveals his belief in the profound humanitarian narrative presented in the story, which resonates with his own values. Hence, his background as a sociologist played a vital role in selecting the text.

Moreover, his engagement with English and Sinhala literary circles, along with his perception of social realities, enables him to use crucial frameworks such as SLE to mediate the text to the English-speaking audiences in Sri Lanka and the globe. Since the exploration of social issues in the novel resonates with his sociological background, he retains the culturally embedded expressions and emotionally charged vocabulary to reinforce his commitment to bringing narratives of human struggle into the global space. This illustrates how his habitus mediates both the choice of the ST and the translation choices employed.

CONCLUSION

The study innovatively applied Bourdieu's sociological framework to the underexplored field of Sri Lankan literary translation, emphasising how translator agency is shaped by the interplay of habitus, capital and field within a peripheral, multilingual, South Asian context. The study extends Bourdieu's theory beyond its Western application, highlighting how symbolic and cultural capital can play within Sri Lanka's peripheral literary field, especially through his strategic use of SLE and para-textual elements. The translator's habitus, shaped by his upbringing and ideologies, further influenced the translation strategies as well as the selection of the source text. The empirical insights from the translator interview reveal how he preserves the source culture values over the expectations of the target culture or market demands, which highlights his ideology shaped by his cultural capital and habitus.

The research focuses on a single case study in order to provide a detailed and contextually grounded examination of translator agency within a specific literary and socio-cultural setting. While this approach offers an in-depth exploration of the relationship between textual strategies and the translator's socio-cultural positioning, it limits the extent to which the findings can be generalised to all Sri Lankan translations. Future research could build on this study by exploring multiple texts and insights from multiple Sri Lankan translators in order to explore variations of translation strategies, differences in the accumulation of capital and the diverse ways in which translators negotiate the constraints of the literary field.

Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus and field were formulated with European literary fields in mind, often assuming centralised institutions and stable hierarchies, which is different from Sri Lanka's postcolonial, multilingual literary landscapes with shifting geopolitical alliances. Focusing on a Sinhala to English translation, this study shows a deviation from the Eurocentric bias of sociological translation studies, especially within a peripheral context. His framework in South Asian postcolonial contexts shows translation as a space for asserting cultural autonomy, where translators use their local knowledge and resources to fight against epistemic erasure. Therefore, the study on 'Senkottan' underscores that engaging with peripheral literatures is significant as they are the spaces where power dynamics, identity and resistance are continually negotiated.

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