

Tips for translators and/or editors

Are you engaged in translation or editing? Or considering your first such project? Here are some tips you may find useful.

- After you have done the first round of translation, take a printout of the first few chapters.
- Look carefully at the first sentence, the first paragraph, the first page. Do they build up tempo and make a new reader want to keep reading? These first chapters are a good guide to the amount of work you will need to do as you go deeper into the manuscript, and the kind of places you will see as challenges.
- See if the plot proceeds well and satisfactorily. Do you as the editor/translator feel that your time and energy is being invested well in this particular project?
- Look for what makes the text special – is it the tone or the nuanced language? Is it metaphor or idiom or a special cadence? Is it something that lights up some special place inside the editor's/translator's mind? If yes, smile! Your job will involve catching this 'special' quality in the translation/editing.
- Read to yourself. See if the prose has rhythm and is easy on the ear. See if the pauses are right. If there is enough time to breathe naturally.
- Do the characters ring true? Finally it is the characters who will make or mar the translation. How well they grow, how well they take control of their lives, how well they bring the story to an end.
- Read for gender/caste/class. Is there any special knowledge you need to translate/edit satisfactorily? Is there any risk of offending by the reinforcing of socially repugnant stereotypes?
- Next read it aloud. Listen carefully. See if there is enough time to pause. See if the prose holds interest.
- Take some care on how poverty is presented. This is tricky in present times when it has gone out of fashion! But writers insist, and some of the greatest literature is still written around human predicaments and poverty. This is an important issue for Katha translators/editors. How do we give the details and yet not turn the reader away? How do we stay true to the original and yet not lapse into sentimentality and verbosity?

Now pay close attention to the language:

- Look carefully at the English used. Is it as quick as the original language used? As immediate and telling? Does it hold the attention of the reader?
- When there is emotion, do you catch it right or is the English sounding sentimental?
- Does the English change adequately depending on who is speaking, indicating age/ locale/class/caste etc?
- Does it swing nicely and well when the story goes from direct to indirect speech, from dialogue to description? [Remember that English as spoken in India does not have a register. But we need to see how we can compensate for this loss. Please do not try to use 'Saar' and epithets like that. These date the text and make it look awkward when printed. Keep to standard good English right through.]
- Is the English archaic? Is it idiomatic? Are the idioms used right and appropriate? Are the sentences varying in length? Do they create monotony because of the way the sentences all begin and end? Do you break the accepted grammatical rule once in a while? While this is fine, please do not overdo this.

- Do a style check. Are the commas and "..." in place?
- Check on the plot once again. The original catches our attention, keeps us riveted to the story. Does the English do the same?
- Check on the pace. Is the pace right? Does it match the original? Does it keep the reader of the English translation in mind?
- Does the movement match the original? Are there the right amount of swings to keep the reader interested - a slow pace juxtaposed against something that moves fast and abruptly. Or short broken sentences next to rambling ones that break the sentence length and structure.

Check how the characters come through.

- Do characters grow and hold interest, through the novel? Do they appear to be the same people they are in the original Tamil, or Marathi, or Bangla? Analyze their words and actions. Has anything changed in the editing of the translation?
- Look carefully at the voice of the speakers. Do the English words match the tone and nuance?

Get outsider comments on your translation and editing.

- Read out your translation to a friend or an intuitive relative. See if their attention seems to wander even as you read. Ask them to be as critical as possible.
- See if you can visit a college and maybe do a reading with some students. Something like this is essential – audience reaction will tell you if you are on the right track.

Now do one more round of serious editing, taking comments into consideration.

- The Katha way of editing can be kept in mind. The story not the word. Translating silences. Translating what lies behind the word, beyond the sentence. Catching the flavour and the inner logic/strength of the story.
- This stage is difficult. But need not necessarily be long winded. Within the first few pages, you will get into the rhythm of it, and then it should breeze along.
- Ideally you should be able to do one reading at this stage as if you are coming to it for the first time. As if you have bought the book and are a stranger to the story and its characters. [Try! It's not as difficult as it sounds!]

Go on to the next stage of editing!

Editing, Publishing, and Translation (dis)junctions: Lost in Translation April 7-8, 2006 University of California, Riverside

Many changes are made to works from manuscript form to published material. How is meaning translated from an author's original work to its published form. Possible topics include but are not limited to:

How does translating a work from its original language change its meaning?

How are early modern texts which are reprinted with modernized language and grammar affected by these changes?

How are these "updates" useful?

How do omissions, introductions, and informational footnotes affect students' reception of the work, and the work's integrity?

How are works affected by the inclusion of illustrations which are not original to the text?

In cases where there exists more than one authoritative version, how are differences reconciled in order to create one cohesive text suitable for publishing, and how does this affect the work as a whole? (i.e. Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*)

How do anthologies and compilations affect the reception of a single text?

Today's computer spell checkers make it easy to avoid embarrassing typographical errors. Grammar checkers may also help, although they do not always give the best advice. Neither can replace solid knowledge of grammar, punctuation, and spelling. It takes a human to catch and correct misused homonyms (it's vs. its, your vs. you're, etc.) or typos that coincidentally spell the wrong word correctly and your spell checker will not flag. Polish your style with guides such as *The Chicago Manual of Style*, and read Strunk & White's classic *Elements of Style* once a year.

Watch out for bad habits. You may like dashes, for example, but in many cases a colon would be a better choice if your dash introduces a sentence element. Commas or parentheses may be better for asides. But don't trade one bad habit for another. Too many expressions in parentheses break the continuity of your writing. And sprinkling quotation marks or italicized words throughout the text probably means you've chosen weak words that need this artificial emphasis.

Put each sentence on a diet. Take out the redundancy in both words and ideas. Substitute plain language for convoluted sentences that go on forever. Reading the text out loud will often help you recognize awkward constructions and overly long sentences. If you can't read a sentence with one breath, consider splitting it.

Is it acceptable for the translator to make changes to the text?

Literal word-for-word translation often results in a different meaning or nuance, or might be simply awkward or even laughable. Often, therefore, your translator will render the text quite freely so as to better convey the intended meaning. Moreover, languages reflect the cultures in which they are used. Your translator might make or suggest certain changes so that the translation 'works' better, omitting or adding material or rewriting the text so it is more suitable for the target audience. Although the final decision rests with you, the client – and you should make it clear to the translator how much freedom s/he has – your translator will often be able to offer sound advice based on a knowledge of both cultures so as to avoid communication breakdown caused by linguistic or cultural differences.

Did the dialogue include unnecessary profanity, too many sentence fragments, clichés, or too heavy a dialect?

Have your characters rambled on, chit-chatting away into banal obscurity?

A story should grab the reader's from the very first paragraph. Not all stories need to be spine-tinglers, which have you clutching the pages with a white-knuckled death grip. But they should all have some forward momentum, moving the reader through the story to find out what happens next.

Don't be afraid to cut whole sections out of your work. If there are any redundant scenes or descriptions, take them out, or perhaps rephrase them with stronger writing.

RATING A TRANSLATION

There are four units for rating a translation with 10 points for each. While reading a translation, please check for the quality of English, readability, lucidity, grammatical correctness, and spelling/typographical errors. See also whether the local flavour of the original language/region and story comes through in the translation. It should, and always does in a good, sensitive, evocative translation. Finally, rate the translation according to your overall impression and add up the total score.

Evaluation Criterion	Maximum Marks	Marks scored
Quality of English	10	
Readability	10	
Original Flavour	10	
Overall Impression	10	
TOTAL		

STICK TO ONE STYLE

When you take editing tests, most places aren't that concerned with your adherence to a specific style, be it Chicago or AP. What they want to see in the manuscript you copyedit, aside from your knowledge of syntax and spelling and grammar and parallel structure (every writer's biggest downfall, unless they've been copy editors!), is that you choose one style, and stick to it. If adjectival colour compounds are hyphenated in one place, hyphenate or delete the hyphens everywhere. Be consistent in the way you handle numbers and things like artistic terms. It doesn't matter if you know what Chicago or AP does with regard to capping or not capping these terms, or spelling or not spelling out numbers – it's that you show you understand what it means to carry out a style, *whatever* it is, consistently (or have a good reason for making an exception). No one really learns these styles by heart, nor is one expected to. Remember, the job is open book. If the magazine follows Chicago, you'll look these things up in Chicago and follow that style. People make way too big a deal about knowing one style or another. You could have probably just used AP style in this test, if that's what you knew. They're not testing knowledge of one style or another, but rather your awareness of choosing one style and sticking with it, that you understand the concept of following a style.