

The Challenges of Gender Classification in the Tamil Grammar in Sinhala and Tamil Translations

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Translation raises various kinds of problems, grammatical issues being one such. This paper outlines the Tamil grammatical gender problem involved in Sinhala and Tamil translations. According to the Tamil grammatical tradition, all of the nouns are divided into two main categories - rational (*uyarthinai*) and irrational (*abarinai*). Human male and female nouns belong to the *uyarthinai* category. Non-human living-beings and non-living things belong to the *abarinai* category. There are five genders in Tamil language, which are based on the above rational and irrational categories. *Uyarthinai* nouns are classified as human male singular gender (*anpal*), human female singular gender (*penpal*) and human plural gender (*palar pal*). *Abarinai* nouns are classified as gender of singular non-human living-being and thing (*onran pal*), and as gender of plural non-human living beings and things (*palavin pal*). The Sinhala grammatical tradition has another gender classification as masculine (*purusa linga*), feminine (*stbree linga*) and neuter (*napunsaka linga*) based on living beings (*saprana vaci*) and non-living things (*aprana vaci*) categories. This makes a translation problem when one translates a Sinhala text into Tamil and a Tamil text into Sinhala. According to Tamil grammatical tradition, non-human living-beings and non-living things are in the same category. This is completely different from the Sinhala grammatical tradition. In this paper, these translation problems are discussed and how to solve those problems in a correct way are described.

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