



# A Study of Tamil Fixed Expressions in Lakshmi Holmström's Translation of Salma's இரண்டாம் ஜாமங்களின் கதை *Iranṭām jāmaṅkaḷiṇ katai*

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## ABSTRACT

Translating fixed expressions such as idioms and set phrases, can be quite challenging due to their unique characteristics. They often carry cultural nuances. A fixed expression in one language might not have a direct equivalent in another. Salma's use of fixed expressions in இரண்டாம் ஜாமங்களின் கதை *Iranṭām jāmaṅkaḷiṇ katai* is masterfully conveyed by Lakshmi Holmström in her translation of the novel as *The Hour Past Midnight*. The paper analyses and compares how Lakshmi Holmström has translated fixed expressions in Salma's novel, using Mona Baker's strategies to deal with them.

**Key words:** phrase, form, structure, paraphrasing, fixed

Fixed expressions in a language have a specific meaning that cannot be altered. Mona Baker, in her work *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*, discusses fixed expressions as part of her broader analysis of translation challenges. In the words of Mona Baker, "They are frozen patterns of language which allow little or no variation in form" (63). She also differentiates fixed expressions from idioms, noting that they often have transparent meanings, unlike idioms. She highlights that fixed expressions, including idioms, collocations, and set phrases, pose particular difficulties. She has proposed four strategies to deal with the idioms and the fixed expressions as follows;

1. Using an idiom of similar meaning and form
2. Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form
3. Translation by paraphrase
4. Translation by omission

Tamil is a language, rich in fixed expressions that add depth and meaning to the language. தலை தூக்கியது *Talai tūkkiyatu* is a fixed expression that means something has emerged. It is often used to describe the emotions or desires of a person. It does not stand for its literal meaning "raising the head". In *Iranṭām Jāmaṅkaḷiṇ Katai*, Rabia feels happy that she is going out that day. It is expressed as "ராபியாவுக்கு சந்தோஷம் தலை தூக்கியது" *Rāpiyāvukku cantōṣam talai tūkkiyatu* (Salma 21). It means Rabia's joy has been raised. But its literal meaning that its head has raised does not give intended meaning in English. Lakshmi Holmström translates the line using Mona Baker's paraphrasing technique. Her translation reads, "Rabia felt a spurt of joy" (04). She does not follow the line-by-line translation, instead, she gives the phrase with the same meaning. The phrase "spurt of joy" suggests the meaning that her joy has gushed out suddenly. Newmark calls this as communicative translation where the line-by-line is not followed. He says, "In communicative translation, the translator is trying to produce the same effect on the readership of the translation as was obtained on the readership of the original" (Newmark 39).

நாவு துடித்தது *Nāvu tuṭittatu* is a predominantly used expression among Tamil people. Its literal meaning is tongue twitched or trembled. But, the expression really means the sense of wanting to express something but holding back. One such expression is used by Salma when she conveys Ahamed's emotion. He feels an urge to tell Rabia and Madina the things he knew. However, he controls himself from expressing as he wants to show off his intelligence. In *Iraṇṭām Jāmaṅkaḷiṇ Katai*, the line appears as “அஹமதுவுக்கு தனக்குத் தெரிந்த விஷயத்தை இவர்களிடம் சொல்லியே ஆக வேண்டுமென நாவு துடித்தது” *Ahamatuvukku taṇakkut terinta viṣayattai ivarkaḷiṇam colliyē āka vēṇṭumeṇa nāvu tuṭittatu* (29). This line captures how he is holding himself back from telling them the things he knew. This phrase is brought with Baker's technique of 'Using an idiom of similar meaning and form'. Holmström's translation presents it as “his tongue twitched” (11). Here the translator uses a phrase that carries a similar meaning and form. In reality, no such idiom or fixed expression is available in English. Holmström borrows this expression from the Tamil language. Though this phrase is new to the target readers, there is no difficulty in understanding the meaning, since the following line acts as a syntactic clue to grasp its meaning- “... his tongue twitched, as if it were determined of its own accord, to tell them what he knew” (11).

எடுத்தோம் கவுத்தோம் *Eṭuttōm kavuttōm* is a popular expression in Tamil. It is often used to describe a person who is rushing into something without much forethought, only to find himself facing the consequences. Its literal meaning ‘we took it up and overturned it’ does not fully capture the intended meaning. The phrase goes beyond the literal to imply acting hastily without forethought. In the novel, *Iraṇṭām Jāmaṅkaḷiṇ Katai*, Sohra questions her husband's hurry in arranging a match for her sister, Firdous, warning him “எடுத்தோம் கவுத்தோமுன்னு” *Eṭuttōm kavuttōmunṇu* (36). She feels that the marriage might lead to regret, since the bride is fair, whereas the groom is not. The expression she uses here conveys Sohra's caution about the differences between the bride and groom and the potential consequences of hasty decisions. This phrase is translated with the strategy of paraphrasing by Lakshmi Holmström. Her rendition comes as “without a worry” (18). Here she avoids word-for-word translation and captures the essence of the phrase rather than its surface structure. This approach enriches the readability.

கண்ணுக்கெட்டும் தூரம் வரை *Kaṇṇukkeṭṭum tūram varai* is an often used expression by Tamil people to mean that something is far-reaching at the edge of visibility. It is literally translated as “as far as the eye can see”. The phrase is fixed because changing any part of it would alter its meaning. In the source text, the expression appears in the line as “கண்ணுக்கெட்டும் தூரம் வரைக்கும் துளிமேகங்கூட இல்லாமல் பளிச்சென்றிருந்தது வானம்” *Kaṇṇukkeṭṭum tūram varaikkum tuḷimēkaṅkūṭa illāmal palicceṇṇiruntatu vāṇam* (49). It is translated by Holmström as “The sky stretched away to the horizon, absolutely clear; there wasn't even a speck of cloud to be seen” (31). She gives the phrase “to the horizon” for the Tamil expression. This can be brought under Mona Baker's strategy of ‘Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form’. “To the horizon” is a fixed expression from the English language. It literally refers to the distant line where the earth and sky appear to meet. It symbolizes the farthest point visible to the eye. Both expressions from Tamil and English describe a distant point. Holmström's translation is good since it captures the imagery that resonates with the Tamil phrase.

தொட்டு பொட்டு வைத்து கொள்ளலாம் *Tottu poṭṭu vaittu koḷḷalām* is a Tamil fixed phrase, used humorously to comment on someone with dark skin. It implies that someone's skin is so dark that it could be touched and used as a black dot on the forehead. In the source text, Amina thinks about his father's dark complexion and mentally expresses the phrase, “கனி ராவுத்தரின் நிறம் தொட்டுப் பொட்டு வைத்துக் கொள்ளலாம் போல ஒரு கருப்பு” *Kaṇi rāvuttariṇ niram tottu poṭṭu vaittuk koḷḷalām pōla oru karuppu* (56). This phrase has a set of structure and meaning that cannot be altered and thus is considered a fixed expression. In English translation, it has been brought by Lakshmi Holmström as “Her father, Kani Rowther, was so dark-complexioned, you could have touched him and used your finger to make a black pottu” (38). This can be brought under Mona Baker's strategy of ‘Translation by Paraphrase’. Holmström clarifies the phrase by adding the sensory details “touched him and used your finger”. She also explains it precisely by suggesting the colour black, linking it to her father's dark complexion. Her approach of adding specific details conveys the original phrase's meaning and imagery.

### Summation

In this paper, it is analysed the translation of selected Tamil fixed expressions in Lakshmi Holmström's English renderings. Holmström's translation strategies, including paraphrasing, bringing idioms of similar meaning and form, and using idioms with similar meaning but dissimilar form in English maintain the essence of the original Tamil expressions while making them accessible to the English-speaking readers. Her choice of strategies reflects her sensitivity to the nuances of both the source and target languages.

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