

TITLE TRANSLATION : A CASE STUDY OF JAPANESE TRANSLATION OF BOLLYWOOD FILM TITLES

TANU DIWAKAR

Research Scholar, working under the supervision of *Dr. Anushree*,
CJS, SLL&CS, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi-110067:
tanudiwakar.jnu@gmail.com

Abstract :

Bollywood film industry is one of the largest film industries in terms of production in the world. Since Bollywood films are made in Hindi language, they are required to be dubbed or/and subtitled in foreign languages for their release in foreign countries. One of the important parts during this process is translation of the title. It is a crucial step because the title gives the first impression of a film. In this research paper, how the titles of Hindi films are translated in Japan, a country where Bollywood films are being released and relished for several decades now, has been discussed. A comparative analysis between the titles of Hindi films and their Japanese versions would be drawn. A total number of 18 film titles and their translations have been taken as a sample in this study. In order to examine these titles and how they have been translated, the method of content analysis has been applied.

Keywords :

Title translation, Bollywood films, Japanese translation, Cultural reference

Introduction :

Translation is not only an art but also a craft. Whether it is the translation of a text or an audiovisual product, one of the important parts during this process is translation of the title. The title is an indispensable element of a film because it provides the first impression of the given film. It is basically summarizing the entire film into a single or a few words. It introduces the theme of the film and enables the audience to get an idea as to what that film is going to be about. At the same time, it makes the audience curious enough to watch the film. When it comes to translating the title of a film, the translator should keep in mind what a film is and what could possibly be the primary functions of a title. The Chinese scholar Wang Ke has written a seminar paper titled *On English Film Title Translation from the Perspective of Skopos Theory* in which he defines film as “a particular art with both artistic and commercial values” (Wang, 2016, pp. 14). Hence, a film is an expression of art on celluloid which is also produced with a commercial purpose. Given that a film–title is the topic or heading of a film, its title must be translated in a way that gives a sneak peek into the film. For monetary gain, it should also spark the audience’s interest and bring them into movie theaters. Furthermore, the title of a film is supposed to be handled more delicately than the dialogues during language transfer. Peter Newmark, the famous scholar of translation studies, writes emphasizing upon the translation of title, “The title should sound attractive, allusive, suggestive, even if it is a proper name, and should usually bear some relation to the original, if only for identification” (Newmark 1988: 56). The title should be lucrative as well as closer to the original title. Therefore, translators are often in a dilemma whether to domesticate the film title to attract more audience or leave it untranslated, in the foreign language to give it an exotic touch.

Maintaining a fine balance between explaining the theme of the film and arising audiences' curiosity towards the film is not an easy task. Because there are linguistic as well as cultural elements at play. Film–title is often laden with cultural connotations. It may have historical, political, religious or literary references that require the knowledge of cultural background. It could be difficult for foreign audiences to guess the theme of film if they come across titles such as *Panipat*, *Mughal–E–Azam*, *Rajneeti*, *Jai Santoshi Maa*, *Devdas* etc. whereas it will ring a bell the moment a Hindi speaker hear any of these names. For example, *Rajneeti* cannot simply be translated as 'Politics' because the term has acquired a negative connotation in Hindi and a Hindi speaker would instantly guess the theme. Similarly, the battle of Panipat is famous and every Indian is aware of it. But a westerner or even a Japanese may not have heard of the name of this place and therefore they cannot put two and two together to imagine that it would be a period film. There is always a cultural background to every language and linguistic elements cannot be looked at separately dismissing their inherent cultural connotations.

Due to globalization, the entire world has turned into a single village. It has accelerated the cultural exchange between countries. Film is one such cultural entity which is widely circulated because it is not only a piece of entertainment but also a form of art which reflects the society and culture it is produced in. Bollywood film industry is one of the largest film industries in terms of production. It represents Indian culture in the world. It has a full–fledged market in the American continent, Europe as well as in Asia. Recently Japan has emerged as a country where Bollywood films are highly appreciated. However, the export of Hindi films to Japan is not a new phenomenon. History of the release of the first Bollywood film in Japan goes back to the 1950's (Matsuoka, 2006, pp. 246). Since Bollywood films are made in Hindi language, they are required to be dubbed or/and subtitled in Japanese languages for their release in Japan. This study deals with one part of this process of film translation – the title translation.

Research Objective :

The aim of this research is to examine the titles of Bollywood films and their respective Japanese translations. This paper attempts to find out how the language transfer of Hindi film titles has been done in Japanese language and which strategies have been used for it.

Research Methodology :

The method of content analysis has been applied in this research. A sample of 18 Bollywood film titles and their Japanese versions have been selected for the study. Out of these, most of the samples are collected from a research paper titled *Nihon ni okeru indo eiga no kiseki* (日におけるインド映画の軌跡) by the Japanese scholar Tamaki Matsuoka. Few titles of the Bollywood films that are recently released in Japan are collected from internet sources, mainly IMDb. They have been thoroughly examined using an analytical approach.

Theoretical Framework :

There are a number of translation strategies that can be utilized particularly in case of title translation. The most common strategies used for the translation of film titles can broadly be divided into three basic categories – Literal Translation, Free Translation and Transliteration (Bai, 2018, pp. 123).

- ▶ **Literal Translation** – As the name suggests, in this strategy source language (SL) text is translated into target language (TL) text on the basis of its literal meaning. Some scholars also call it direct translation because a text is directly translated without paying any attention to the implied meanings or undertones. It is a word-for-word translation, where each word of the source text (ST) is

replaced by an equivalent word in the TL while retaining the grammatical structure of SL as much as possible (Newmark, 1988, pp. 70).

- **Free Translation** – It is basically a sense-for-sense translation. Here, transferring the actual meaning or the sense of ST is considered more important than displaying loyalty towards ST. It is a TL oriented strategy and hence, it focuses on conveying the message to the target audience. Maintaining the linguistic structure or word-order is secondary (Bai, 2018, pp. 123). There are several sub-strategies under free translation such as functional equivalent, cultural equivalent, reduction, expansion etc. Therefore it can also be called ‘reinterpretation’ or ‘transcreation’ depending on the way free translation has been conducted.

- **Transliteration** – Transliteration is a method of language transfer where ST is simply transcribed into TL based on its pronunciation. The word is not translated from one language into another but it is written in TL alphabets as it originally sounds. “If the name has been known by the audience or has important historical value, or better able to convey the exotic amorous feelings, this method is employed” (Munday, 2009, pp. 236). Transliteration is mostly used for title translation of movies when a proper noun appears.

Data Collection :

For the data collection, the details of 18 Bollywood films and their titles under which they were released in Japan are listed up in table no. 1. The data has been arranged in ascending order as per their date of release in Japan starting from the oldest film to the latest film. The film titles and their translations are written in a combination

of Hindi (Devanagari) and Japanese scripts (Hiragana, Katakana & Kanji). However, in the running text including the discussion, a transliteration has been used for the sake of readability. The list starts with *Aan*, the first Indian film which also happens to be a Bollywood film, which was released in Japan in 1954. The last film to be included in this list is a Hindi blockbuster film *Andhadhun* released in Japan in 2019, before COVID pandemic. It has been attempted to include every variety of film from *Masala* films to new-age experimental films in between.

Table No. – 1.
Bollywood Film Titles & Their Japanese Versions

Sl. No.	Original Title	Japanese Version	Year of Release in Japan	Employed Strategy
1.	आन	アーン	1954	Transliteration
2.	भूमिका	ミュージカル女優	1982	Free Translation
3.	दो बीघा ज़मीन	2エーカー土地	1988	Literal Translation
4.	सलाम बॉम्बे	サラーム ボンベイ	1989	Transliteration
5.	शतरंज के खिलाड़ी	チェスをする人	1992	Literal Translation
6.	जो जीता वही सिकंदर	勝者アルキサンダー	1993	Literal Translation
7.	श्री 420	詐欺師	1997	Literal Translation
8.	मेरा नाम जोकर	私はピエロ	1998	Literal Translation
9.	Mr. India	Mr.インディア	1998	Transliteration
10.	दिल वाले दुल्हनियाँ ले जाएँगे	シャルクカーンのDDLJ ラ ブゲット大作戦	1999	Free Translation
11.	हम दिल दे चुके सनम	ニモラ -心のままに	2000	Free Translation
12.	कुछकुछ- होता है	何かが起きている	2004	Literal Translation
13.	3 Idiots	きつとうまくいく	2013	Free Translation
14.	एक था टाइगर	タイガー 伝説のスパイ	2013	Combination
15.	इंग्लिश विंग्लिश	マダムインニューヨーク	2014	Free Translation
16.	PK	この男に、常識は通じない	2016	Combination
17.	बजरंगी भाईजान	小さな迷子 おじさんと、 バジュランギ	2019	Combination
18.	अंधाधुन	盲目のメロディ インド式殺 人狂騒曲	2019	Literal Translation

Source: Information for Sl. No. 1 to 14 have been extracted from the appendix of *Nihon ni okeru indo eiga no kiseki* (日におけるインド映画の軌跡) (Matsuoka, 2006, pp. 102–116) and Sl. No. 15 to 18 have been taken from online database IMDb.com

Data Analysis & Discussion :

In this section of the research paper, the collected data is discussed as follows :

In example 1, the Bollywood film *Aan* is listed. The title is a Hindi term which has a similar meaning as 'dignity' in English. However, there is a hint of pride attached to the meaning. It is a cultural word for which finding a substitute would have been difficult, but not impossible in Japanese. In the Japanese version of the film title, the term has simply been transliterated into Japanese using Katakana as (アーン). This method cannot be considered successful here because the Japanese version has failed to convey its meaning.

In Example 2, the original title is *Bhūmika* which can roughly be translated as 'role' in English. It is a perfect name for the film because it summarizes the plot of the film while providing it with a philosophical note. The film is centered on a woman protagonist who becomes a famous actress, therefore the various *Bhūmika* or 'role' she plays on the screen. It also tells her life-journey and how she keeps changing her role from a wife facing domestic abuse, a rebellious daughter to a popular but lonely megastar. The title is translated in Japanese as *Myūjīkaru Joyū* (ミュージカル女優) which literally means 'musical actress'. The technique of free translation is used here. The translation is successful because unlike in India, having several songs in a film is not common in Japan and therefore it was considered a musical film where the lead actress was shown to be dancing every now and then. On top of that, the film is about a female actor, thus the Japanese version is justified.

In example 3, *Do Bigha Zamin*, is based on one of the poems written by Rabindranath Tagore. *Bigha* is a parameter for the measurement of land in Hindi. 2 *Bigha* equals 1.2 acres and not 2 acres. But the film was translated as *2 Acres Land*

for its international screening in the UK. It can clearly be seen that the Japanese version *2 Eka Tochi* (二エーカー土地) which means '2 acre land' is a translation from its English title. Those days, it was quite common for a Bollywood film to reach other countries after it has won some awards in the UK and the US. Another point is that the Japanese use *Tsubo* for measuring land which equals to only 3.3 square meters, way smaller than acres. Therefore, the literal translation method can be considered successful in this situation because the translation is able to convey the theme of the film even though it is mathematically wrong.

In example 4, the film title *Salaam Bombay* is transliterated in Japanese as it is (サラーム ボンベイ). Here, Bombay, being the name of a famous city or a proper noun, cannot be translated but transliterated. On the other hand, *Salaam* is a Hindi term which means salutation. There are similar words in Japanese, but it was left untranslated because the English title had retained the terms as they were.

In example 5 is again a literary adaptation of Prem Chand's story by the same name *Shatranj Ke Khiladi* which means 'The Chess players'. The film revolves around two nobles and their obsession with the game of chess. There are signs of British imperialism and spinelessness of Indian rulers in the backdrop and how noblemen care more about entertaining themselves than securing their land or the people. In its Japanese translation, the translator has literally translated the title as *Chesu Wo Suru Hito* (チェスをする人) which can be understood as 'the people who play chess' and it works well if compared with the original title.

In example 6, the Hindi title is *Jo Jeeta Wohi Sikandar* in which can be understood as 'whoever wins is Alexander (*Sikandar*)'. The title fits the film because it is about a careless college student who keeps fooling around and due to some events he finally decides to do something productive, enters into a sports tournament and wins it. *Sikandar* is the name by which Alexander the Great was

known in India as well as in Persia. *Sikandar* has become a cultural term and it is used to symbolize someone who is undefeated, a born winner with majestic personality. The title has been translated in Japanese using the method of literal translation as *Shōsha Arukusanda* (勝者アルキサンダー). It means 'the winner Alexander' which gives the hint that the film is going to be about Alexander and his winning. Although Alexander was a legendary figure of world history, the connotation *Sikandar* has in India cannot be compared with how Alexander is known to the Japanese. Therefore, perhaps the reinterpretation would have been better.

In example 7, *Shree 420* has been translated into Japanese as *Sagishi* (詐欺師) using the strategy of free translation. The story of the film revolves around a protagonist who keeps cheating on people. In Hindi, *420* is not a number but an adjective which is used to refer to swindlers or people involved in frauds. The addition of *Shree* enhances its meaning and therefore it can be understood as a fraudster who is so good at his job that he should get a medal for it. Even the Japanese version *Sagishi* is equivalent to the Hindi term *420*, as both mean 'swindler'. However, the cultural meaning of *Shree* has been lost in translation.

In example 8, *Mera Naam Joker* has been literally translated in Japanese as *Watashi Ha Piero* (私はピエロ). The meaning is exactly the same and it can be understood as 'My name is Clown' or 'I am clown'. There is no change in meaning

The next example no. 9 is the Bollywood film *Mr. India* which has been transliterated in Japanese as it is (Mr. インディア). It is a science fiction film that revolves around a person who comes across a wrist band and whenever he puts it on he becomes invisible. He fights off the antagonist wearing that band, in invisible mode and when asked his name, he calls himself Mr. India. India is referred to as *indo* in Japan. But during the title translation it has been transliterated which is the right decision taken by the translator. Because Mr. India acts as a proper name in

this film and hence cannot be translated.

In example 10, *Dil Wale Dulhaniyan Le Jayenge*, popularly known as *DDLJ* in short, has been listed up. The film was released in Japan under the title *Sha Rukku Kan No DDLJ* (シャルクカーンのDDLJ). It can be taken as a marketing strategy. Shah Rukh Khan (SRK) starrer movie *Raju Ban Gaya Gentleman* was already a box-office success in Japan, so the film distributor wanted to sell the film by SRK's popularity. Therefore, the film title has been remodeled as 'Shah Rukh Khan's DDLJ' to attract a crowd. The strategy of free translation is used to trans-create a new tagline *Rabu Getto Daisakusen* (ラブゲット大作戦) which means 'the mission for getting love' and it is added to the main title. It would not be wrong to say that the subtitle certainly reflects the contents of the film.

In example 11, *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* is about a girl who has a lover but she is married to someone else against her will. The husband takes her to reunite her with her lover. Seeing the husband's selfless attitude and sacrifice, she feels obliged to come back to her husband. The title, loosely translated as 'I've given you my heart, my love', provides a gist of the movie how the female protagonist eventually falls in love with her husband. Like it has already been mentioned, Bollywood films are famous for their songs and dance performances. Therefore, *Nimora* (ニモラ) – one of the most popular songs of the film which is a dance number – has been kept as the Japanese title. Furthermore, *Kokoro No Ma* (心のままに) which means 'as you wish' is added as a tagline using free translation. The subtitle symbolizes the husband's intention of fulfilling her wife's wish (of being with her lover). In my opinion, it is a perfect translation.

In example 12, *Kuchh-Kuchh Hota Hai* has been translated as *Nani Kaga Okite Iru* (何かが起きている) in Japanese. It is a literal translation which fits right in this case because the expression 'something is happening' conveys the same sense in

Japanese. However, the researcher feels that there were rooms for bringing out some creativity.

In example 13, *3 Idiots* tells the story of three idiots – the three best friends. One out of the three friends– the protagonist, encourages the other two to do idiotic activities of challenging the social norms and live a carefree, successful and happy life. The Japanese version has taken up the title of its most popular song ‘All is Well’ which translates into Japanese as *Kitto Umaku Iku* (きつとうまくいく) as its title. It is a free translation method used for commercial purposes because half of the audience comes to the movie theatre for Bollywood songs.

In example 14, *Ek Tha Tiger* has been translated into Japanese as *Taiga-Densetsu No Supai* (タイガー 伝説のスパイ) which can be written in English as ‘Tiger – the legendary spy’. It is a wonderful transcreation because the significant term of the original title ‘Tiger’, the name of the protagonist, has been given importance and retained using transliteration. At the same time, the theme of the movie (film is about a famous spy and his dangerous mission) is also successfully put together as subtitles. Last but not the least, Hindi term *Ek Tha* is used while narrating legends and hence bringing in the term ‘legend’ into the translation version makes complete sense.

In example 15, *English Vinglish*, one of the highest grossing Bollywood films in Japan, is translated into Japanese as *Madamu in Neuyōku* (マダムインニューヨーク). The Japanese version means ‘Madam in New York’. The Hindi title drops a hint about the plot of the film because it is about a housewife’s journey of learning English and how it changes people’s perspective towards her. In India, speaking English is considered a status–symbol and people who cannot speak English are looked down upon. The female protagonist does not know the English language and often gets insulted even by her family members. Later on she goes to New York city

and enrolls in an English speaking course. As an Asian country, even in Japan, the situation of judging people by their fluency in English language is quite similar to India. Therefore, this movie was extremely appreciated by Japanese housewives. Coming back to the translation part, two rhyming words also known as partially duplicated terms such as *'English-Vinglish'*, *'Chai-Shai'* etc. are commonly used in Hindi. But the Japanese language does not have the same trend. Therefore, the translator used free translation to create a new title *'Madam in New York'*. It is also based on the narrative of the film as it is after all a film about a woman who goes to New York and finds respect to become a *'madam'*.

In example 16, *PK* has remain untranslated and written in roman letters even in the Japanese version of the film. It had been a perfect strategy since *PK* is the name of the protagonist and therefore cannot be replaced with anything else. However, the problem arises because, going by the pronunciation, *Peeke* is a Hindi term which refers to *'someone who is drunk'*. It is a cultural term and the connotation has been lost in the process of language transfer due to transliteration. A tagline *Kono Hito Ha Shōjiki Ha Tsūjinai* (この男に、常識は通じない) which implies that *'this person doesn't have any common sense'* has been added for clarification in the Japanese version. It is an attempt to recover the loss by giving a glimpse of the film in subtitle.

In example 17, *Bajrangji Bhaijaan* is the Hindi title which again includes a proper name *Bajrangji*, the name by which the protagonist of this film is called by. *Bhaijaan* is the honorific for addressing a brother. This is a story of a person named *Bhaijaan* and he reunites a lost child with her family facing many hurdles. In the Japanese version it has been translated as *Chīsana Maigo, Ojisan to Bajurangi* (小さな迷子 おじさんと、バジュランギ) which can be roughly translated as *'the lost child, Uncle Bajrangji'*. For this title translation, opposite to the Japanese trend, free

translation has been used instead of transliteration. Although the term *Bhaijaan* has been retained in the new Japanese title. But in place of *Bhaijaan*, (the term is used to address a 'brother'), *Ojisan* (Japanese term for addressing an uncle) is used. This was done perhaps because of the age gap between the protagonist and the child. The child is supposed to address a person in his 30's as uncle. The contradiction arises because, in the Hindi film, the child also calls him 'Bajrangi Bhaijaan'.

In the last example, *Andhadhun* is mentioned. It is a suspense and thriller film which revolves around a piano artist who pretends to be blind. A series of events, or more like mishaps, occurs and the story takes a completely unexpected turn. In Hindi *Andhadhun* could mean 'in blind rage' or 'non-stop' and the title is suitable for the film because so many unexpected things are going on and they happen so swiftly, back to back in the film. However, it has been translated in Japanese literally as *Mōmoku No Merodi* (盲目のメロディ インド式殺人狂騒曲) which means 'blind melody'. Here, the translator seems to have split the title into two parts (*Andha* and *dhun*) and then literally translated them. Although the film is about a musician and therefore 'melody' can be a related term, the title is completely misinterpreted.

Result :

After closer examination of the collected data from Bollywood film titles and their Japanese translation, it has been observed that the strategy of free translation is the most used technique of translation for film-titles. Out of 18 cases, literal translation has been used in seven cases, free translation has been used in five cases, whereas transliteration is used three times. Apart from this, a combination of free translation and transliteration has been used in three cases. Therefore, free

translation has been used eight times in total. The method of literal translation seems to be successful in most cases, but sometimes, it has failed to capture the original nuance such as in *Jo Jeeta Wohi Sikandar* and *Andhadhun*. Perhaps free translation would have been a more suitable approach. Free translation usually works well, but in situations like *3 Idiots*, where the translator resolves on making the title of a film–song as the title of the film, there is room for improvement. Wherever a proper noun is involved, translators seem to prefer transliteration so as to maintain the loyalty with the original title may not always be enough. The translator's call to transliterate *Aan* has not served the translation purpose. Because, the Japanese audience would not know what it means. Even the cases where the title has Indian proper names, just transliteration feels incomplete. In such situations, a combination of transliteration and free translation is perfect because the fidelity towards the original title is maintained, at the same time the obligation towards the target audience (to explain the theme) is also fulfilled. *Ek Tha Tiger* and *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* are the best examples where translation strategies have been successfully employed.

Conclusion :

It can be concluded that the selection of strategy depends on various things such as the original title, theme or plot of the film, the presence of proper nouns, the commercial value, stardom of the casted actors etc. A strategy that is employed for the successful translation of a certain film may not work for every film and it varies from case to case. Another important point is that there would be cases where no matter how hard translators try to convey the meaning and original nuance of the film, some amount of loss in translation would occur. It is inevitable. Because language cannot be separated from its culture and the presence of cultural elements would always complicate the process of translation.

It is important to mention the limitations of this study. Only 18 samples have been taken into account for the research, which cannot be considered enough to make a generalized statement. Therefore, further research on the same topic with more data is required so that the condition of film translation can be improved and cultural exchange can be accelerated. Future research may involve working on specific aspects of the title translation such as informative, aesthetic and commercial aspects. There aren't many research papers on audiovisual translation focusing on Hindi to Japanese translation. Therefore, the possibilities are endless.

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