



## **Difficulties encountered by undergraduates in translating texts from German into first and second language**

D. M. H. Malpathika Danansooriya

Department of Modern Languages, University of Kelaniya  
malpathika.dmh@gmail.com

When acquiring a foreign language, the learner is confronted with new phonetic, phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic patterns which are totally different to the structures of learner's first language. Thus, the action of "translation" starts to occur automatically in the brain. The learner has the tendency to think in the first language and transfer the known linguistic patterns or vocabulary to the new structures of the foreign language. Therefore, the learners of a foreign language may encounter numerous linguistic and cultural differences they are not familiar with. This paper mainly focuses on difficulties encountered by the undergraduates of German as a foreign language with a sample of 13 students following the course unit on translating literary and non-literary texts from German to Sinhala and English of the Bachelor of Arts Honors Degree Program in German Studies at the University of Kelaniya. As the data collecting methods researcher analyzed the work submitted by the students during continuous assessments and class tests which also included group activities. Furthermore, face to face interviews with the lecturers in German, student performance analysis and classroom observations were conducted in order to gather data. During the data analysis it was revealed that the students have difficulties in translating long sentences, as they attempt to translate the texts word by word following the syntactic rules of their first or second language. Moreover, they encounter difficulties in translating idiomatic expressions, literary ironies, metaphors and proverbs from German into the target language. Lack of cultural competency was another main obstacle during the translation process. In conclusion, the study contributes to ascertain the common difficulties encountered by the undergraduates in translating from German into the target language and to develop teaching strategies that would lessen the difficulties faced by the students during the translation process.

