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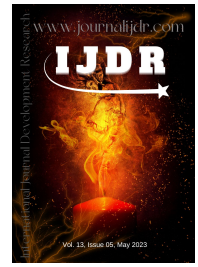
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## THIRUKKURAL TRANSLATIONS: A SACRED TEXT FROM THE TOWN OF PEACOCKS –MAYILÂPÛR INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

Translating a literary text is a challenging task, mainly when there is a great social distance between the involved languages. Aiming at a further translation of the sacred poetic Indian text named Thirukkural into Portuguese language, this study had the purpose of collecting some previous data about the existing translations of it, such as: what languages, which style (prose or verse), how many translations in English. The work was mainly based on the chronologic study of Rajagaram (1730-2015). Besides the obtained results, we concluded that, in adopting the approach of 'micro-translation', in which the translation represents the meaning as well the goal, the most suitable form for translating this text can be in prose, whereas the fidelity is welcome.

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## INTRODUCTION

*Thirukkural* is a great holywork, shortly named as Kural, written in the classical Indian language called Tamil. Its authority is commonly attributed to Valluvar, also known as Thiruvalluvar. Although it is difficult to precise the exact date, there is some consensus that it was composed approximately in the 5<sup>th</sup>. Century CE. *Thirukkural* is an Indian noble poetic work, considered one of the most important literary text in the world due to its universality thematic based on the three aims of conventional life: Virtue, Wealth and Love. This triple combination embodies a great religious-philosophy system that can enable us to the deepest purposes of our lives. Since *Thirukkural* is one of the first works of the ancient Tamil language, it is an important opportunity to open the roots to appreciate this indigenous antiquity, rendering the attention of the translation field of classical and modern languages since decades. The Christian missionaries firstly translated it into Latin in the 18<sup>th</sup>. Century. At the present, *Thirukkural* has been translated in different languages around the world, such as, Latin, English, German, Hindi, and many others. For further research purposes of translation it from English to Portuguese language, the focus of this study is set on the translation in English. Because of this, some questions can come in this research, for example: which are the languages of existing *Thirukkural*'s translations? How many translations are there in English? Are there translations in Italian, Spanish and mainly in Portuguese? Which are the literary styles used in such English translations (verse or prose)?

It is important to highlight that, this study is mainly grounded on the thoughts posed by Walter Benjamin that all languages are equally important, whereas our role as linguists is pious, neutral and non-transgressive, and the task of the translators should be as loyal as possible to the original version. In this thought, there is a recommendation that poetry should be translated in a very close approach to the original.

Due to this, in order to translate a literary text, we believe it is necessary fidelity as a guide. Thus, considering that the original text of *Thirukkural* was written in verses of two lines called *Kural*, the main purpose of this review paper is mapping these different languages, verifying the translations in English and their styles. In order to follow such aim, this paper introduces a table of the translations of *Thirukkural* in various languages, following with the literary style applied in English translations.

### *Thirukkural*– An Apple of Gold in a Network Silver

"No translation can convey an idea of its charming effect." (POPE, 1886)

V.R.R. Dikshita (1949, p.3) states that "Thirukkural of Tiruvalluvar is the pride of South India", and the masterpiece of Tamil Literature. Although there are not data with precision, it was probably written between A.D. 800 and 1000 (POPE, 2003) by Tiruvalluvar, or shortly named Valluvar. *Thirukkural* was divided into three parts, or books:

Virtue (Aram), Wealth (Porul) and Love (Kâma). The first part/book is composed by 38 chapters; the second by 70 chapters; and the third by 25 chapters. Although Tiruvalluvar is considered the Tamil Master of the sentences, the style he used in *Thirukkural* is not archaic. According to traditions, he was a weaver, but he does not write as a priest. The name *Kural* is given to this poet because of the form of short stanzas used in the text. His work is the only poem which consists of 133 chapters with 10 couplets, in a total number of 2,660 lines. *Kural* is a refined couplet metre, “as being the shortest species of stanza in the Tamil language” (POPE, 2003, p. xxvi). His brilliant composition is such that we can agree with Pope when he affirms that no translation could convey his style and the effect of *Thirukkural*. Below we can notice how this literary construction is set:

The selection of the most difficult metre in the language – one permitting no deviations from strict rule and requiring such wonderful condensation – for a long work, showed that the author intended to expend upon it his utmost of power, and to make it a ‘possession for ever’ a ‘delight of many generations. (POPE, 2003. p. vi.)

Therefore, *Thirukkural* has indeed been admired for many generations through the translations that have been developed around the world, as showing the metaphorical epigraph, an apple of gold in a network silver. According to presented in the introduction section of this study, our challenge is to peel this apple of gold, starting by mapping the languages of this network of translations using Rajaram (2015) chronology study of the existing translations of *Thirukkural*, from 1730 to 2015. From such work, it was also possible to research the English translations and verify if such translators used prose or verse forms.

### The Data Analysis and Findings

According to Rajaram, the first translation of *Thirukkural* was in Latin, in 1730 by Costanzo Beschi, offering the translation of the two first parts. Although he notes that, there is a previous translation in Malayalam, written in 1595<sup>1</sup> by an unknown writer. In 1794, N.E. Kindersley translated some chapters in English. After some efforts by earlier English translators, the Canadian scholar George Uglow Pope presented his complete translation of *Thirukkural* in 1886. Thus, revisiting the main questions of this study (which/ how many languages, and how many in English), translations of *Thirukkural* there are, and based on Rajaram’s work, the table below portrays a compilation of the different languages of *Thirukkural* translations from the period of 1730 to 2015.

**Table 1. Translations Languages of *Thirukkural***

Language	No. Translations	Languages	No. Translations
1 English	54	16 Fiji	2
2 Telugo	12	17 Urdu	2
3 Hindi	08	18 Orya	2
4 French	08	19 Dutch	1
5 German	06	20 Czech	1
6 Malayalan	05	21 Arabi	1
7 Kannada	04	22 Chinese	1
8 Latin	04	23 Swedish	1
9 Gujarati	04	24 Assamese	1
10 Malay	04	25 Sourashtra	1
11 Sanskrit	04	26 Japanese	1
12 Bengali	02	27 Rajasthami	1
13 Polish	02	28 Punjabi	1
14 Sinhalese	02	29 Konkami	1
15 Russian	02	30 Finnish	1

The table above displays the 138 existing translations of *Thirukkural* written in 30 different, classical and modern, Indian and non-Indian languages. We can notice that, from the total of 138, there is an

<sup>1</sup>This translation was published in the bulletin of the Rama Varma Research Institute, vol.VI, Pt.II; vol.VIII,Pt.,Vol.IX,Pt.I in 1938,1940, 1941. (R.G. RAJARAM, 2015).

expressive number of 54 translations into English; followed by Telugo in a total of 12; Hindi and French 08; German 06; Malayalan 05; among other languages in a number of 04 and 01 translations. According to one of the aims of this study, as outlined in the introduction, these findings indicate that there is a lack of translations in Italian, Spanish and Portuguese languages, and such fact reinforces the importance of these languages’ translations.

**Table 2. English Translations and forms of *Thirukkural***

Year	Verse - Author	Year	Prose - Author
1974	Nathaniel Edward Kindersley	1840	William Henry Drew
1872	Charles E. Grover	1885	F.W. Ellis & John Lazarus
1873	Edward Jewitt Robinson	1915	T. Thirunavukarasu
1886	George Uglow Pope	1916	V.V. S. Arijar
1926	A.Mathavaiyarh	1935	B.Rajagopalachari
1946	S.M. Michael	1942	M.S. PumalingamPilai
1954	I.D. Thangaswam	1949	V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar
1962	K.M. Balasubramaniam	1950	M.R. Rajagopala Aiyangar
1967	V. Chinnarajan	1953	A. Chakrabarti
1968	Emmons & White	1965	T. Muthuswamy
1968	Yogi Suddanantha Bharathi	1969	G. Vanmikanatham
1969	Kasturi Srinivasam	2004	O.R. Krishnaswami
1982	S.M. Diaz	2009	M.Rajaram
1987	P.S. Sundaram	2015	A.Rajaram Sankarashramam
1988	K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar		
2001	C.R. Sundar		
2009	M. Rajaram		

This result presents a number of 17 English translations in verse and 13 in prose, whereas they can be in a more close or open approach. Here, it is worth to repoint some principle we considered of translation theory and practice where “scholars recommend close translation for poetry”. (MOHANTY, 2006, p.20). Taking this into account, it is possible to say that, if the translator wishes to take an ‘echo effect’ from the original, the best way for translate a huge work of poetry such as *Thirukkural*, can be in the prose form. Even great translators as Rev Pope, reported such limitations dealing to verse form, saying:

I thought it best to try to give a metrical translation, Tamil scholar will see that I have tried to reproduce even the rhythm in many cases, but I could not retain the inimitable grace, condensation, and point of the original. (POPE, 2003, xiv).

**Table 3. English translations mixed forms of *Thirukkural***

Year	Mixed – Verse And Prose – Authors
1812	Francis Whyte Ellis
1998	J. Narayanasamy

Nevertheless, there are previous translators that, for some reason, produced both forms, prose and verse, as indicates the table 3 above. What suggests a huge effort of translation work for both styles and approaches.

**Table 4. English Translation of *Thirukkural* after 2015**

Year	Verse - Author	Year	Prose – Author
2019	Pattir M. Bhoopathi	2018	Madurai Babaraj
2021	J.S. Amantha Krishnam	2019	R. Jayaprakasam

Finally, since the Rajaram’s research presents the translations of *Thirukkural* from 1730 to 2015, we took a trace of the English translations until the present, and we realized that there are 02 translations, one in 2019 and other in 2021 as shows table 4 above.

### Final Remarks

In summary, we have presented in this paper, a previous study conducted towards the sacred work of *Thirukkural*. According to tradition and scholars, the weaver Tiruvalluvar Nayannar wrote this

work approximately in 500 CE. This humble and great poet was born in Mayilâpur, the called 'town of peacocks' in the South of India, and is conventionally considered the master of Tamil language.

Since the fact that, for further research's purposes, we are interested on the state-of-art of *Thirukkural*'s translations, this study presents a survey about the different languages *Thirukkural* has been translated all around the world. Following this pursuit, it was possible to verify that there are more than one hundred versions in thirty Indian and non-Indian languages, and around thirty versions in English, in both forms of verse and prose. From this amount, we realized that, there is not any translation in Portuguese language, reinforcing the need of such work. Although we found that, there are both verse and prose styles of translations, based on the principles (BENJAMIN, 2000; MOHANTY, 2006) that our purposes as translator, mainly on literary texts, should be the fidelity of the original, we also confirm our thought that a good approach for translating *Thirukkural* is in prose. Such is the basis upon which we support our ideas for the translation of such a great work as *Thirukkural*.

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