

## THIRUKURAL KĀMATTHUPPĀL - MAURITIAN KREOL TRANSLATION

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### Background Note

Mauritian Kreol or Kreol Morisien has long been considered to be a patois, the term carrying negative connotations in colonial history. After several decades long struggle by non-governmental organisations like *Ledikasyon Pu Travayer*, (Mauritian Kreol for “Workers’ Education”), an independent association created in 1976 that brings together people to promote the mother tongues, Mauritian Kreol and Bhojpuri, through based multilingual education and the work of writers such as Dev Virahsawmy, known for having fought for the language recognition by the state and its use in schools and in institutions, Mauritian Kreol (spoken at home by 86.5 % out of 1.2 million people constituting the Mauritian Population) has been introduced as an optional language in primary schools in 2012. Starting from Grade One and gradually moving to Upper grades, Mauritian Kreol is offered to pupils aged between 5 and 11 who learn how to write in their mother tongue using a common orthography called *Grafi Larmoni* established by the Akademi Kreol Morisien( Mauritian Kreol Academy). In 2017, the first batch of pupils sat for the Primary School Achievement Certificate(PSAC) which acts as final examinations for Grade Six pupils.

Some 250 years after it was born, Mauritian Kreol has come a long way to be accepted as a language. In a paper entitled ‘The state of the Kreol Language today’, Mauritian writer Lindsey Collen states that “Kreol languages differ from all the other families in that they were created in a short time. They are born of a fracture, a total break, often a huge catastrophe, and not from a slow-moving continuum. And she goes on to narrate the birth of the Mauritian Kreol language, “The fracture causing the break in Mauritius was when people from East Africa, West Africa, Madagascar, Batavia, India were all hurled together to work as coachmen, dockers, loaders and helpers, carriers, labourers in the fields, skilled craftsmen, domestic workers, in Mauritius. The adults soon cobbled together a Pidgin. And the very first generation of children turned this Pidgin into a full fledged language, Mauritian Kreol...”

Several continuous efforts by writers, translators, editors and the free press have fuelled this movement in favour of Mauritian Kreol. *Collection Maurice* which is entering its 26th year, is a book edited by Rama Poonoosamy, and

published by Immedia with short stories of Mauritian authors in English, French and Mauritian Kreol. The book launch of this anthology is much anticipated event on the literary scene annually. Mauritian writer Dev Virahswamy whom we mentioned earlier has contributed a lot to enrich the language through his translations of Shakespeare, Shelley, Molière and other classics of world literature in Mauritian Kreol.

In 2018, *Ledikasyon Pu Travayer* organised a short story translation contest from any language into Mauritian Kreol. The contest which aimed at stimulating literary creation and also at having reading materials in MK for young adolescents who are starting their college journey and studying Mauritian Kreol in Grade 7 was a success. The free press both oral and written in general has also been supportive of the use of Mauritian Kreol along the years although much efforts still need to be done so that everyone can use the common orthography( Grafi Larmoni). *Le Mauricien*, a french daily founded in 1908 has an open column where people from the academical and non-academical world can express themselves in Mauritian Kreol under the title *Anou Koz Kreol*( Let us speak Kreol). As for the translation of Tamil into Mauritian Kreol, it is still in its early years. The *Aratthuppāl* and the *Porutpāl* were rendered into Mauritian Kreol in 2007 by Mauritian Barrister Rama Valayden. The book which was out of print has been re-edited last year. The author, in his humble opinion, omitted the *Kāmatthuppāl* because he thinks that it might have been inserted later or written by another author.

### **From Kāmatthuppāl to Lamur an Ekri: A journey From Tamil to Mauritian Kreol**

*How does one translate poems from one of the oldest languages in the world, Tamil, into the newly-born Mauritian Creole? This paper aims at addressing some of the challenges arising from this transport of words from one language to another, in our case, from the source language (Tamil) to the target language( Mauritian Creole).*

Why do we translate? Why do we spend our time carrying words from one language to another? Does the root latin word *traducere* not mean carry over? After we have answered this question, “why does translate become more difficult? Question, let us take up of how does one translate? How does one carry words from one literary shore to another without the poems losing meaning? “What are the hazards, the damages in transit, the secret paths, and the lucky bypasses?”, as A.K. Ramanujan puts it in his essay ‘On Translating a Tamil Poem’

The first challenge is the considerable gap between the number of words in Tamil and Mauritian Kreol. According to the Tamil Lexicon published by the University of Madras in 1939, Tamil language has 124 405 words whereas

Mauritian Kreol has 19 500 words based on the third edition of the monolingual dictionary, published by Diksioner Morisien, in 2019. Even though both figures which have been cited are not static as they keep evolving every year with new words coming in, this gap between the source language and the target language, it affects translation due to a constrained vocabulary in the latter. Also there are some Tamil words which cannot be translated directly as they do not have any equivalent in Mauritian Kreol. A few examples; *amirtham* in chapter 111, *parai* and *anitcha* flower in chapter 112. This limitation in vocabulary also implies that meaning of words, concepts, expressions are not carried out thoroughly. In chapter 114, when Thiruvalluvar is talking about the concept of மடல் ஏறுதல், i.e. Riding on a horse Palmyra stem/leaf horse and riding through town, it is something which is specific only to Tamil sangam literature and an unfamiliar concept to the Mauritian Kreol language and culture.

This brings us to the second challenge which is that of translating metaphors. A metaphor is a very important device in poetry used to evoke images in the mind of the reader and listener. To be able to translate a poem faithfully from the source language to the target language, one must be able to reconstitute these images as close as possible into the target language. John Dryden in his description of translation in 'The Dedication of Aeneas' captures this idea of translation describing it as "a kind of drawing after life.", "steering betwixt the two extremes of paraphrase and literal translation" and whose aim should be "to keep as near my author as I could, without losing all his graces, the most eminent of which are the beauty of his words..."

The following example illustrate this:

கண்ணும் கொளச் சேறி நெஞ்சே இவை என்னைத்  
தின்னும் அவர்க்காணல் உற்று. 1244

bat to lezel anvole mo leker,  
amenn mo lizye avek twa  
sinon zot pu fatig mwa  
avek sa yenn truv li la ( Karupudayyan and Ramen, 2018)

Like some of Ramanujan's other essays, 'On Translating a Tamil Poem' ends with a parable: So here it goes: "A Chinese emperor ordered a tunnel to be bored through a great mountain. The engineers decided that the best and quickest way to do it would be to begin work on both sides of the mountain, after precise measurements. If the measurements were precise enough, the two tunnels would meet in the middle, making a single one. 'But what happens if they don't meet?' asked the emperor. The counsellors, in their wisdom, answered, 'If they don't meet,

we will have two tunnels instead of one.’ So too, if the representation in another language is not close enough, but still succeeds in ‘carrying the poem’ in some sense, we will have two poems instead of one.”

The metaphor used in the Mauritian Kreol’s translation is that of the heart with wings flying to see the lover which is not present in the original but which translates the idea more faithfully. Bat to lezel anvole mo leker : Flutter your wings and fly o heart!

Despite the challenges that we face as translator, there are several things which actually help us reach the literary shores of the target language safely. Among these, there is one in particular which helped us during the translation of the Kāmatthuppāl from Tamil to Mauritian Kreol and that is the existence of universals. If universals do not exist, translation would have been impossible. Falling under the agam branch of poetry, Kāmatthuppāl speaks of universal love to which anyone can relate to in any language and culture.

To end, I would like to quote Mauritian writer and translator, Thiru Mootoomaren Sangeelee who wrote a paper entitled “Love in the Thirukkural” published in *Tiruvalluvar Tirunaal Malar* in 1964 :

“Love, pure love is, according to scriptures, a sacred thing, which cannot be stifled by any means, not even by venomous gossip or the well-meaning upbraidings of parents. The more it is attacked, the stronger it grows. ”

Translation also is like that. However strong the currents, words have to reach the literary shores of the target language albeit with some losses in transit.