



Travails and Thrills of Translating Kollywood Comedian Santhanam's Similes and Dialogues into English by Robert Gnanamony.S.

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Kollywood principal comedian Santhanam has carved an inimitable niche for himself in the movies with his chastising dialogues. Any elite theatre-goer would agree that Santhanam has a refreshingly different brand of humour, the like of which is rather rare in the Kollywood films. Taking always the role of a common man in films, Santhanam lays bare the ills that beset our society with a specially crafted comic dialogue sprinkled with fresh phrases, metaphors and similes.

The author of this paper wishes to add that translating a text is an art; it invariably evokes a passionate response. Unless the translator falls in love with a text, he or she cannot profitably translate a text. The translator needs to have a good terminology data bank, without which it is difficult to launch the translation.

Translating Santhanam's comic dialogues is not easy. Since the author of this paper is quite familiar with Tamil and the target language namely English, the difficulty is brought to a minimum. Since the exact word by word translation is not possible from one language into another, the present author has attempted to translate meaning of the actor's words, especially his catchy phrases and similes. Many a time the author has to rely on to his wits and savvy to render Santhanam's dialogue into English. Care has been taken to ransack and use every single English nuance in rendering the comedian's dialogues. And also effort has been made to emulate the original humorous, colloquial and native style of the actor's discourse. Attempt has been made to convey the overtones of meaning associated with the actor's dialogues.

Santhanam has done a good number of characters on the stage as a comedian. Comedy is inborn in him and is in his DNA; it's his forte as well. His style of comedy is distinctly different from that of Soori, Vivek and Vadivel. His is a distinct brand of humour.

Firstly the actor's dialogue is given in the transliteration form and that is followed by the author's translation of the highlighted portion. In the 2013 action-masala Tamil film, **Pattathu**



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Yanai (The Crowning Elephant), directed by Boopathy Pandian with Vishal Krishna and Aishwarya Arjun in the lead roles, Santhanam is Vishal's Man Friday. Santhanam's role is that of *Samaiyal Chanakiyan*¹ The Chanakya² of Cooking. Vishal speaks, *Petty niraiya kasu koduthalum sari, chatty neria kasu koduthalum sari . . .* This is translated as "whether you offer me a box full of currency notes or a pot full of shingling coins. . . ."

Santhanam looks at one of his buddies in the movie and says, *Thempi thanai viluntha thengai mathiri thalai vaichukittu. . .* This is translated as "Hi, you younger brother, your head looks like a ripe old free fallen coconut fruit". This brand new simile compares the guy's head with a free-fallen coconut fruit.

Santhanam never spares anyone on the screen. In the same movie, he looks at the villain and says, *Moonchiyai parunga, anaincha aduppu mathiri. . .* This is translated as "Look at his face; it looks like a burnt-out country oven". The dark and ugly face of the villain is likened to a country oven. The reader knows that this is also an interesting simile.

Again Santhanam making a reference to the villain, says, *Idi viluntha panai maram mathiri karuppa nappathu perodu iruppanai. . .* This is translated as "That goon, like a black and heavy-trunked blasted Palmyra with his forty cronies. . . Once again this is a freshly crafted simile.

There is some sort of competition among Santhanam's cronies to keep the photo of Santhanam's father. Seeing this, Santhanam says, *Allalukku mattivaipatharku avar enna Nayantharava*³? This is translated as "Hi friends, is my father's photo as attractive as the photo of the sensational actress Nayanthara to be kept by every single one of you?"

Looking at one of his fellow actors, Santhanam says, *Panni kuttikku baniyan potta mathiri oru uruvam, athilai nahaichuvai varai. . .* This is translated as "The irony is though you look like piglets wearing a banyan, you still poke fun at the other!"

Carried away in enormous sadness at seeing his beloved father's photograph thrown in the corporation stinking dustbin, Santhanam weeps aloud saying, *Ellorum kulainthaiyaithan kuppai thottiila poduvanga, ana ungala poi kuppai thottiyila pottuirukangalei?* Though it is customary for people to throw away their unwanted babies in the corporation dustbin, these guys have thrown my precious father's photo mindlessly in the dustbin! Santhanam takes a whip and chastises the foolish societal custom at least in some part of our country.



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In the movie in order to impress upon his colleagues, Santhanam browbeats, *Samayal Chanakiyan*. I've translated this phrase as, "I'm Chanakya of Cooking!" It may be remembered that Chanakya is a household name in India, who was a very clever politician.

Encountering the villain of the same movie, Santhanam pokes fun at his appearance, *Yaruda ivan, colour Xerox edutha Godzilla mathiri irukkan?* This is translated as, "Who is this guy that looks like the Colour Xerox of Godzilla?" This is a beautiful fresh simile coined for the first time.

Digging deep at the foolish practices of the guys in the same movie, Santhanam says, *Ammavirku heart attack innale, evanunga family doctorukku missed call than koduppanunga!* My translation goes as follows "It's the irony of ironies that these guys give only a missed call to their family doctor even when their mother suffers from cardiac arrest".

The second movie I've taken up for translation exercise is **Theeya Velai Sheyyanum Kumaru!** (**You've to Work like a Blazing Fire, Kumaru!**) a 2013 Tamil romantic comedy produced and directed by Sundar C starring Siddharth, Hansika Motvani and Santhanam.

In this movie Santhanam is a Man Friday to the hero Siddharth. He gives a piece of advice to his friend, the hero: *Thengai venumna thennai maram yerithan akanum, Kumaroo!* "If you want a coconut fruit, you need to climb a coconut tree, Kumaroo!" Readers may note that this not only said in fun but also said in earnest and this is a wise-saying that contains a practical truth.

Seeing a good number of young girls converging at a particular point, Santhanam pokes fun at their clamour for freebies: *Free top up innu chonna pothumae, top-ai odaachittu vanthiruveengalei!* "The moment you hear free top-up, you'll come rushing in like a flash flood breaking all barriers!" This is no doubt a dig at the Tamilnadu Government's practices of offering freebies to the common man and the struggles people take to receive them during festival days like Deewali, and Pongal. Though said in fun, Santhanam whips at the practices of the politicians of both the Dravidian Parties.

Giving a practical clue to the hero as to where he could possibly find his prospective charming lady, Santhanam says, *Wine shop varama painkal irukkalam, aana, coffee shop varama, ponnungal irukka mattanga!* This is translated as, "There may be boys who may not have visited a wine shop, but there may not be any woman who does not have visited a coffee shop!"

Seeing the long face of his friend, may be spited by his beloved, Santhanam comments, "*Athu than moonchi coil le mattina kosu mathiri churungi poyirukkei!* My translation goes as follows:



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“I see, that’s why your face is shrunk like a mosquito on a mosquito coil!” This is a beautiful simile comparing a long face to a shrunken mosquito.

In the same movie, Santhanam tells the hero that if the latter follows the romance-instructions given by him, then the boy and the girl will cling to each other. Listen to his words, *Atharkappuram, kai eanthi pokira sambar pottalam mathiri, pirikkavae mudiyathu*. It is translated as, “And then, the boy and the girl will stick to each other and will never be separated like a tightly-held plastic sachet holding sambar!” The simile Santhanam uses is fresh and is not used anywhere in human parleys.

It’s common knowledge that sensational tit-bits spread like wildfire; this is very true when the tit-bits happen to be from the movie world. Santhanam whispers something into his friend’s ears and says, *Nan chonna visayam madras eye mathiri summa sallannu paravanum*. The reader knows that the eye ailment Madras Eye passes from one person to another like a forest flame without any interruption. My translation goes as follows: “The secret I confided into your ears should spread like wildfire”. It is a common simile, yet interesting.

Santhanam is not happy on certain issues; in his absence from home for a day, things have gone awry; he expresses his displeasure to his crony: *Oru nal nan oorile illa, puthu cherrupai nai kadichamathiri avvalavu damage panniyiurukka*. I made an attempt to translate this as, “I was not on station for a day; in the gap, you have made everything topsy-turvy just as a dog-bitten brand new footwear”.

On another occasion, Santhanam asks his companion, *Koottam kootturatharku, nee enna kurangu vithaiya kattru?* It is translated as, “Are you showing monkey tricks to gather a crowd?”

Sometimes Santhanam uses alliteration too to the joy of the listener. Here is an instance; *Vella rajavo, karuppu rajavo, yuvan sankar rajavo!* It is translated as, “I just don’t care whether the guy is a soft skinned raja, or dark-skinned raja or Yuvansankar raja!. The reader may remember that Yuvansankar Raja is a popular dark-skinned Music Director in Kollywood.

Santhanam sometimes slips into using postmodern similes too. He reprimands his companion saying, *epothumae motion mathiri pinnale pokathe, urine mathiri munnal pokanumpa!* The simile may not be pleasing to all; yet here is the translation: “Hi, dear, never go anytime behind like loose motion from the scrotum, go always front like the piping urine!”



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Santhanam's expressions are very pungent. Hear this, *Nagoor biriyani ulunthurpettai therunaikku kedaikkanumnu iruntha, yaralum mattamudiyathu!* The translation of this goes as follows: "If Ullunthurpettai street dog is destined to taste Nagoor Biriyani, who can prevent it"?

Santhanam expresses his displeasure when one of his cronies does not understand him fully. Expressing his irritation, Santhanam says, *Intha moonu kilo moonchikku, ethu chonnam puriyathu!* My attempted translation is this, "This guy with a three kilo heavy face will never understand anything"!

Sometimes Santhanam makes a scathing attack on a person's physical appearance. Here's an instance: *Ivanukku thumbikkai mattum than korai!* This is translated as, "What is missing from this guy's face is the elephant trunk"!

Actor-Director Mathubala is always a butt of ridicule in the hands of Santhanam; in the movie, Santhanam uses a beautiful metaphor, *Pencil mama!* My translation is, "Hei, Uncle Pencil!"

On another occasion, looking at Mathubala again and Santhanam reprimands him saying, *Dei, kathi pasthada, suthi police nikkuthu.* My translation is this, "Hei, don't speak aloud; police are around". Care has been taken to retain the alliteration as much as possible.

Looking at his downcast crony, Santhanam says, *Unakku enna, liver aada fail aachu; love thanae fail aachu!* It is translated as, "Hei, dear, why do you look so downcast? Your liver is not failed; only your love affair has failed".

Santhanam digs at women in another context; he says, *Penuganl ellam raw mathiri. Namathan thanniya oothi dilute pannikanum.* This new simile is translated as "Women are like liquor; it's our job to dilute it with water".

Santhanam is at his best in attacking actor-comedian Madhubala. Santhanam relishes the comments that he makes at this classic actor. On all occasions, Madubala is powerless before the loose-tongued Santhanam. Here are a couple of dialogues from a 2012 Tamil romantic film **Neethanae En Ponvasantham (Honey, You Alone Are My Golden Spring!)** with Jeeva in lead role and Samantha acting opposite to him. The film was directed by Gautham Menon. Santhanam is Jeeva's Man Friday. Making a scathing attack on Madhubala, Santhanam says, *Theenji pona kovanam mathiri irunthukittu bin lden range ikku plan poduringalo!* This is translated as, "Hei, you look like a worn-out groin cloth; but you plan out to the high range of Bin Laden⁴."



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Another simile with a tinge of newness goes as follows: *Paaru meesayia thalayianai vachkittu paeikku paen paatha pei payale!* This scathing attack on his opponent is translated as follows: “Hei, you despicable demon, lying on the moustache like a pillow and searching for lice on the she-demon!”

A couple of dialogues from **Kanna Laddu Thinna Aasaiya! (Hei, Dear, Would You Like to Eat Laddu?)** It's a 2013 Tamil romantic comedy film directed by Manikandan. It stars Santhanam, Srinivasan, Sethu and Vishakha Singh. The film marked Santhanam's venture into film production. Santhanam and Power Star Srinivasan are on the comic role. Power Srinivasan is a big toothed comedian. Looking at the Power Sreenivasan's teeth, Santhanam cracks a joke, *Intha pallai vaichu pattanni illa, paarankallae chappidalam.* It's translated as follows: “With the mega-size of your teeth, you can not only eat fried gram of any type, but also the black granite!”

In a fresh simile, Santhanam brings together sand-lorries that do not have brakes and fathers of boys that do not like to have their sons to have friends. Hear his dialogue, *Machchan, manal lorry iku brake pidikaathu; friendskal appankalukku pidikkathu.* The translation goes as follows: “Cousin, dear, sand-lorries do not have/like brakes; in the same way, fathers of boys do not like friends for their sons.” I have also tried to make another piece of translation for this Santhanam-slang, “It's not surprising that no father likes his son to have friends just as city-run sand-lorries do not have brakes!” This is just to express the travails of translating Santhanam's slangy comic track.

A woman known to Santhanam gives a positive stroke to Santhanam for making her silent husband to be a chatty-husband. In his characteristic manner, Santhanam sarcastically retorts, *Nadikaikal nahaikadai thiranthuvachchamathiri, unga purushan vaayai thirunthu vaichchaen innu cholreengalae!* The translation of this goes as follows, “I'm terribly surprised to hear you saying that I opened your husband's mouth, just as the actresses open jewellery shops!” It may be remembered in Tamilnadu and Kerala, most of the big jewellery shops hook in actresses to open their new shops.

Yet another fresh simile is here. In the same movie, when Santhanam sees his rival coming formally with music, gifts and other paraphernalia for the hand of a girl, for whom Santhanam has a soft corner, he comments, *Ennathan melathalathuden nee vanthalam, corporation kakkusukku aayuthapoojai pannrathumathirithan!* This pungent dialogue is translated as follows” Hei, even though you visit us with drums, pipe music and precious gifts, it's like performing Ayuthappooja to the corporation public toilet!” Readers may know that Ayuthappooja is done soon after Saraswathipooja by the Hindus to their devices, equipment and machinery



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after cleaning everything. Nobody in his normal senses will perform Ayuthapooja to a public toilet as this stinking place will ever be stinking in our over-populated country, where public toilets are seldom kept clean.

Santhanam has to take a glass of sour milk. His face suddenly changes. He looks at the person who has given it to him and says, *Aen, gurunatha, ithu unn firstnightla meencha pala, ippadi pullikkuthu?* It is translated as, "Great Master, is it the left-over milk⁵ on your first night? It tastes so horrible!"

In order to make an impression upon his lady-love, Santhanam takes yoga lessons at the woman's house and he is taught yoga exercises by the woman's uncle. One of the poses is standing upside down. Standing on his head, Santhanam asks his Yoga Master, *Aen gurunatha, ennai kaluvi thodaichi unda mathiri kavilthupottirukingalae! Why?* I've made an attempt to translate this simile, "Master, master, why do you keep me upside down like a newly-washed semi-barrel?" It is customary in India that soon after a family or community function, big brass and aluminum vessels are neatly washed and kept face down. The simile Santhanam uses is fresh and apt.

In Santhanam's girl-friend's house there is a half-baked music master. Santhanam soliloquizes, *Dei, sangeetha chakravaorthy, un annan makal mattum ennakku kidaikalai, nee chetthada!* An attempt is made to translate this contemptuous and sarcastic comic statement; "Hei, Music Maestro, if I do not get your elder brother's daughter, you're dead!"

Seeing that there is a stiff competition among Santhanam's close friends for a cute girl, Santhanam decides to withdraw from the competition, *Aamanda vayasana, dye adichukalam, aana vayasu ponnukkaha, friendsukal ellam adichukakudathu machchan! Athan, VRS vaankikkalam innu irukkaen!* "You're absolutely right. If you're getting old, you can use dye for your hair; but friends should not die for a woman! That's why I'm planning to get VRS from the competition." It may be remembered that there is a pun on the word "dye" and "die" in the translation; this is actually intended by Santhanam; this kind of pun is not normally possible in the Tamil slang and parleys; but it is possible in English.

Carried away by one of his friend's generosity on a Monday morning, Santhanam tells his cronies, *Innikku Monday illaida, machchan day!* This is translated as, "It's not a Monday, friends! It's a Machchan/Cousin's Day!" "Machchan day could not be translated comfortably.



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Power Srinivasan always gets a brutal buff from Santhanam. Here is one. Seeing Santhanam donating blood in a hospital,

Power Srinivasan: Raththamada koduthukittuirukkeai!

Santhanam: Pinnaei enna, nurseikku muththamada koduthukittirukkaen!

This dialogue is translated as

Power Srinivasan: Are you donating blood, my friend?

Santhanam: What else you think I do? Am I giving a kiss to the nurse?

At one stage, the cronies of Santhanam devise a plan to bring in Chimpu, the cine-actor. Santhanam retorts, *Dei, intha Chimbu enna order kodutha cake—aada!* My translation goes as follows: “Hei, is the actor Chimbu the pre-ordered cake in a bakery?”

Power Srinivasan waxes eloquence on a woman he is interested in. Santhanam wants to put an end to his babbling. He cuts him short saying, *Dei ippadiae paesikittiruntha, oosiyai eduthu un nakkilae kuththiduvaen!* The translation of this goes as follows: “Hei, if you go on waxing eloquence without stopping, in no time I’ll prick your tongue with a sharp needle”.

Seeing secretly exchanging auspicious plates between two consenting parties for a wedding alliance, Santhanam feels left out. He expresses his displeasure to Power Srinivasan, saying, *Ennada, Billa padathilae rahasiyama petty mathira mathiri, rahasiyama thattu mathireengalo?* This is translated as, “Hullo, what’s this? You seem to secretly exchange wedding plates just as Billa exchanges boxes in the Rajini starring movie, **Billa!**” The word, “Thattu” is translated as “wedding plate”, for it is that it means.

In the next movie **Alex Pandian** too there are some freshly-created similes. Directed by Suraj, it’s a Karthy—Anushka Shetty 2013 movie, where Santhanam plays a key role. He has a tough time to keep his sisters under check. In one scene, his sisters ask him whether he suspects them. He answers, *Illeamma, nnama ellaam orea cookerla ventha iddlinga; ungalai poi santheakapaduvana?* It’s translated as, “Sisters dear, we are like the iddlies cooked in a single iddli cooker; should I ever suspect you?”

The reader finds a piece of worldly wisdom in the following remonstrations of Santhanam to his sisters: *Onnu mathiram therinchukunga; ponnum pori urundaiym onnu; rendaiyumea pathirama pathukannum; aethavathu aachu, poni aahathunga!* This is translated as, “Sisters, have this in



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your mind always; a woman and a *pori* ball are very similar; both have to be handled with care; otherwise, they lose their saleable value.

Karthy in the movie is a thorn in Santhanam's flesh. Seeing that Karthy has no idea of leaving Santhanam's house, he tells Karthy, *Naan onnu chollattuma; chonthakaranga juram mathiri; vantha orea naalila poidanum; manchkamalai maathiri maasakanakkila thangakoodathu*. I have made an attempt to translate this. Here it goes, "Shall I say one thing? Relatives are like viral fever; they should leave within a day; they shouldn't tarry for long like jaundice!" The two similes in Santhanam's parley are fresh and new. The similes also carry worldly wisdom.

Santhanam expresses his anguish at seeing his three sisters moving around loosely with Karthy. In a soliloquy, he expresses his sadness, *Enga appan entha moodila, peththu pottano, moonum moraikettu chuththuthunga!* This is translated as, "I do not know in which mood my father copulated my mother; all my three sisters are roaming around without any check like jungle cats. I coined the simile "jungle cats" to faithfully render Santhanam's anguish in to English.

Santhanam's worldly wisdom comes out in the following freshly crafted simile. In a soliloquy, he says, *Thangachikal kooda piranthittalae annan aantha mathiri; thoongakoodathu!* The translation of this simile goes as follows: "If you're born with sisters, you shouldn't sleep like the nightly creatures the bats!"

As a result of a foolish act, Santhanam's back is badly bruised. Karthy is responsible for this hardship; yet Karthy innocently asks Santhanam why the latter is lying in the open space. Santhanam answers, *Naan kaathu vaanagavada veliyilea vanthu paduthukittiyirukkaen! Odampu theencha thosai mathiri mannodu manna otti poyirukku; koncham alakka thookki poi ullae padukka vaid!* This is translated as, "Alas, do you think I'm lying on the open space to get fresh breeze? My body is like a burnt-out dhosa glued to the soil; lift me up gently and deposit me on my bed softly.

Santhanam is awfully surprised to see Karthy being oil-massaged by his three sisters and mother. He's shell-shocked; he is asking them using a freshly-created simile, *Enna ellorum kumki yanaii kulipatturamathiri kulipattikirunga!* This remonstrance is translated as, "Hullo, why do you bathe him like the mahouts bathing a kumki⁶ elephant?"

To conclude, Santhanam's simile-packed dialogues are not easy to translate as they are expressed mostly in localisms and slangs. Yet, since this paper-writer is familiar with the localisms and slangs and also somewhat well-versed in English, he has satisfactorily rendered the translations



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without sacrificing much of the original flavor. Any sincere attempt to translate the popular comedian's dialogues into English will not only help the translator get joy in the linguistic exercise but also help the person to hone up his or her skill in translation and also creativity.

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Neethanae En Ponvasantham. DVD. Directed by Gautham Menon. Released on 14 December 2012

Pattathu Yaanai. DVD. Directed by Boopathy Pandian. Released on 26 July 2013

Theeya Velai Seyyanum Kumaru. DVD. Directed by Sundar C. Released on 26 June, 2013.

Notes

¹ From this time onwards, Santhanam's dialogues will be put in italics.

² Chanakya was an Indian Teacher, Philosopher, Economist, Jurist and Royal Adviser. He authored the ancient Indian Political Treatise, **Arthashastra**.

³ Nayanthara is a sensational South Indian cine actress with a glamorous face.

⁴ Bin Laden is Osama bin Laden, who masterminded the twin tower blast in New York on 9-11-2001. He destroyed the twin towers by hijacking passenger jets. His hijackers rammed jetliners into each of the New York City's World Trade Centre. These mighty towers stood as part of the New York City's skyline from 1970 to 2001.

⁵ Sharing a glass of hot milk between the newly-wedded partners is a convention in Tamilnadu. Invariably, the entire milk in the glass is not sipped; there may be something left behind as the couple normally does not show any interest on drinks and eatables on that memorable evening.

⁶ Kumki is the Tamil name for the captive, trained Indian elephants. These are mostly used for taming and training of newly captured wild elephants and also to drive away wild elephants that stray into human settlements. They are also used for the purpose of breeding.