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### **Case Study on Korean Folk Song Translations into Tamil Using Online Resources**

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#### **Abstract**

The translation of folk songs plays a crucial role in cultural exchange, preserving linguistic heritage while making traditional music accessible across languages. This study explores the effectiveness of online resources in translating Korean folk songs into Tamil, highlighting the linguistic and computational challenges involved. Given the structural and cultural differences between Korean and Tamil, direct machine translations often fail to capture poetic nuances, idiomatic expressions, and rhythmic integrity.

Translating Korean folk songs into Tamil fosters cultural exchange, enabling Tamil speakers to connect with Korea's rich musical heritage. Folk songs carry deep historical, emotional, and social meanings, reflecting the values and traditions of a community. By making these songs accessible in Tamil, the translation helps bridge linguistic and cultural gaps, promoting mutual appreciation between the two cultures.

Using a selection of well-known Korean folk songs, this research analyzes translations generated by tools such as Google and Bing Translators, Google Gemini and Chat GPT. A comparative evaluation is conducted between machine-generated outputs and human-corrected versions, focusing on semantic accuracy, fluency, and cultural adaptation. The study reveals that while online tools provide a basic lexical translation, they struggle with preserving poetic elements and metaphorical depth, often requiring significant human intervention.

Findings indicate that the current NLP models lack sufficient training data for Korean-Tamil translation, leading to inconsistencies in meaning and syntactic errors. This research suggests that enhancing AI-driven translation tools with culturally sensitive datasets and integrating human

post-editing can improve the quality of folk song translations. By addressing these gaps, this study contributes to the broader field of computational linguistics and machine-assisted literary translation.

**Keywords:**

Korean folk songs, Tamil translation, machine translation, online translation tools, cross-cultural communication, literary translation

**Introduction**

The translation of folk songs plays a crucial role in cultural exchange, preserving linguistic heritage while making traditional music accessible across languages. This study explores the effectiveness of online resources in translating Korean folk songs into Tamil, highlighting the linguistic and computational challenges involved. Given the structural and cultural differences between Korean and Tamil, direct machine translations often fail to capture poetic nuances, idiomatic expressions, and rhythmic integrity.

In recent years, Korean music, drama and culture have gained global popularity, including among Tamil speakers, due to the Hallyu (Korean Wave) phenomenon (Dhawan, 2017, Kanozia and Ganghariya, 2021). This growing interest has led to an increasing demand for Korean content, including folk songs, to be made accessible in Tamil. Translation serves as a crucial tool in this cultural exchange, allowing non-Korean speakers to engage with and appreciate the depth of Korean folk traditions (Anderson et al, 2014). However, folk song translation is complex, requiring the retention of meaning, poetic structure, and emotional depth while adapting to the target language's linguistic and cultural framework.

Tamil, like Korean, is an agglutinative language, meaning that it forms words by adding suffixes to a root word in a systematic manner. Each suffix generally carries a distinct grammatical meaning, such as tense, case, number, or gender, and these morphemes are added sequentially without altering the root word.

However, translating Korean folk songs into Tamil presents several linguistic and cultural challenges. Korean and Tamil belong to different language families—Korean is an isolate, while Tamil is a Dravidian language with its own intricate morphological system. Structural differences pose difficulties in preserving the original rhythm, poetic meter, and idiomatic expressions when translating directly. However, despite their morphological similarities, they differ significantly in syntax, phonetics, and semantics, making direct translation complex (Sankaravelayuthan, Vidyapeetham, 2020).

Additionally, folk songs often contain metaphorical language, cultural references, and phonetic rhythms (Yang et al, 1999). Machine translation tools, such as Google and Bing Translators, Gemini and Chat GPT, frequently struggle with these nuances, leading to translations that lose the essence of the original text. Issues such as incorrect syntactic structures, lack of contextual awareness, and misinterpretation of poetic elements highlight the limitations of automated tools in literary and lyrical translations.

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of online translation tools in converting Korean folk songs into Tamil. The key objectives include:

- Evaluating the accuracy and fluency of machine-generated translations.
- Identifying linguistic and cultural adaptation challenges in Korean-Tamil song translation.
- Assessing whether AI-driven translation tools can effectively retain poetic depth and cultural meaning.

By addressing these objectives, this research contributes to the broader field of computational linguistics and highlights the need for improved AI models that incorporate cultural sensitivity and poetic adaptation in translations.

## **Literature Review**

The translation of folk songs has been widely studied in the context of cultural preservation and linguistic adaptation. Folk songs encapsulate the history, emotions, and traditions of a community, making their translation particularly challenging due to the need to maintain poetic integrity while adapting to the target language's phonetic and semantic structures (Low, 2003).

Scholars have explored different methodologies for translating folk songs, including literal translation, adaptive translation, and phonetic approximation. Low (2005) proposed the "Pentathlon Principle" for song translation, emphasizing five key factors: sense, singability, rhythm, rhyme, and naturalness. These factors highlight the difficulties of translating music across languages while preserving its lyrical and rhythmic flow.

Phonetic and semantic challenges in folk song translation have also been examined, particularly in cases where languages have distinct phonological structures. According to Franzon (2008), translations must balance accuracy and artistic quality, often requiring creative liberties to maintain the song's original sentiment. Studies on Chinese and Japanese folk song translations into English reveal that phonetic mismatches often lead to the loss of meaning or forced modifications in melody (Susam-Sarajeva, 2006). These studies provide a foundation for examining Korean-Tamil folk song translation, where similar challenges arise due to linguistic differences.

Machine translation (MT) tools such as Google and Bing Translators, Gemini and Chat GPT among many others translators have revolutionized language accessibility, yet their effectiveness in translating non-Indo-European languages remains a subject of debate.

Studies on MT performance highlight the strengths and weaknesses of AI-driven translations, particularly in handling low-resource language pairs (Choi, 2005; Choi et al, 2017).

For instance, research by Koehn and Knowles (2017) indicates that MT systems excel in literal translation but struggle with idiomatic expressions, cultural references, and poetic elements. This limitation is particularly evident in lyrical translations, where rhyme schemes and rhythmic patterns are often lost. Neural Machine Translation (NMT) has improved accuracy by incorporating context, but challenges persist due to limited parallel corpora for non-mainstream languages like Tamil and Korean.

These findings emphasize the need for hybrid translation models that combine AI efficiency with human post-editing to enhance the quality of poetic and folk song translations.

## Methodology

The primary objective of this study is to assess the effectiveness of machine translation tools in translating Korean folk songs into Tamil while preserving poetic, cultural, and linguistic elements. The folk song "*Arirang*" was chosen as the primary case study due to its historical significance, poetic structure, and widespread popularity in Korea and beyond.

Folk songs are an essential part of a culture's oral tradition, preserving historical narratives, emotions, and societal values. Korean folk songs, such as *Arirang*, have played a significant role in expressing national identity, resilience, and collective experiences. These songs, often passed down through generations, serve as cultural bridges, allowing insights into Korea's linguistic and artistic heritage (Park, 2013).

The selection criteria for the song include:

- Historical Value: "Arirang" is recognized as an Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO, reflecting Korea's traditional themes of longing, resilience, and separation.
- Poetic Structure: The song follows a repetitive and rhythmic lyrical format, making it an ideal test case for evaluating phonetic and structural challenges in translation.
- Popularity: As one of the most well-known Korean folk songs, it provides accessible reference points for both native Korean speakers and translators.

To analyze the translation quality of Korean-Tamil machine translations, the study utilizes the following online tools:

- Google Translator
- Bing Translator
- Gemini (AI machine translation)
- Chat GPT (AI machine translation)

### Process of Data Collection

- The original Korean lyrics of "Arirang" were input into each translation tool.
- The Tamil outputs were recorded and compared against the original meaning and poetic structure.
- Additional human-corrected translations from bilingual experts were collected for comparison.

The translations were analyzed based on four key parameters:

- Accuracy: How well the meaning of the lyrics is retained.
- Fluency: Whether the Tamil output is grammatically correct and naturally readable.
- Cultural Adaptation: How well the metaphors, idioms, and emotions of the original song are conveyed in Tamil.
- Poetic Structure Preservation: The extent to which rhythm, repetition, and lyrical flow are maintained.

To further assess the translations, a comparative study between machine and human translations was conducted. Human translators evaluated ambiguities, misinterpretations, and unnatural phrases in machine-generated outputs.

The translation process was carried out in the following steps:

1. Inputting Korean Lyrics: The original text of "Arirang" was entered into Google Translator, Bing Translator, Gemini and Chat GPT.
2. Extracting Tamil Outputs: The machine-generated Tamil translations were documented.
3. Human Expert Review: Two bilingual (Korean and Tamil) experts analyzed the machine outputs for errors and suggested corrections.
4. Comparative Evaluation: Each version (machine-generated and human-corrected) was assessed based on semantic accuracy, fluency, and poetic integrity.

This structured approach allows for a systematic evaluation of the capabilities and limitations of online translation tools in handling Korean folk song translation into Tamil.

## Analysis and Discussion

This section presents a comparative analysis of machine translations of the Korean folk song "Arirang" into Tamil and English, evaluating their accuracy, fluency, cultural adaptation, and poetic structure.

Table 1 lists the translations of Arirang song by Google Translator, Bing Translator, Gemini and Chat GPT into Tamil.

<b>Google Translator</b> அரிராங், அரிராங், ஆராரியோ... அரிராங் கணவாய்க்குச் செல்லவும். என்னை கைவிட்டவன் நோய்வாய்ப்படுவதற்கு பத்து மைல்கள் கூட செல்ல வேண்டியதில்லை தெளிவான நீல வானத்தில் பல நட்சத்திரங்கள் உள்ளன. நம் மனதில் பல கனவுகள் இருக்கும்.	<b>Bing Translator</b> அரிரங், அரிரங், அராரியோ... அரிராங் கணவாய்க்குச் செல்லுங்கள். என்னைக் கைவிட்டவரே எனக்கு உடம்பு சரியில்லாமல் போக பத்து மைல் கூட ஆகாது நீல வானத்தில் பல நட்சத்திரங்கள் உள்ளன. நம் மனதில் பல கனவுகள் உள்ளன
<b>Gemini</b> ஆரிராங், ஆரிராங், ஆராரியோ... ஆரிராங் குன்றின் மீது செல்கியேன். என்னைத் துறந்து செல்பவர் பத்து மைல் கூடச் செல்ல முடியது, காலில் நோய் வரும் நீல வானில் நட்சத்திரங்கள் ஏராளம் நம் இதயங்களில் கனவுகள் ஏராளம்.	<b>Chat GPT</b> ஆரிராங், ஆரிராங், ஆராரியோ, ஆரிராங் கணவாயைத் தாண்டிச் செல்கிறேன். என்னை விட்டு செல்லும் என் நேசன், பத்து நில பயணிக்குமுன் கால்வலி அனடவார் நிலம் பரந்தவெளி நட்சத்திரம் நிறைந்ததே, நம் இதயம் கனவுகளால் நிறைந்ததே.

Table 1: Translations of Arirang song by online resources

Expert 1 is a researcher, and Expert 2 is an IT professional, both originally from Tamil Nadu and residing in Korea for several years, during which they have acquired proficiency in the Korean language. In contrast, the author, also from Tamil Nadu, has not lived in Korea and does not have formal training in the Korean language. The author relied on online resources to compare various translations. Expert 1's translation was obtained on March 11, 2025, Expert 2's translation on March 12, 2025, while the author's translation was completed on January 8, 2024. A comparative analysis of these translations is presented in Table 2.

<b>Korean version of the song</b>	<b>Expert 1's Translation</b>
아리랑 아리랑 아라리요	என்னுயிரே, என்னுயிரே, என்னுள்ளுயிரானவரே
아리랑 고개로 넘어간다 나를 버리고 가시는님은 십리도 못가서 발병난다 청청하늘엔 별도 많고 우리네 가슴엔 꿈도 많다	என் தனல கடந்து சென்றோரும் என்னை தவிர்த்து கடந்து சென்றோரும் பத்து காதம் கடக்குமுன்யை நோய்வாய்ப் படுவார் நீலநிற வானில் ஒளிரும் நட்சத்திரங்கள் போல் எண்ணற்ற கனவுகளை நம் இதயம் சுமந்து கொண்டிருக்கிறது.
<b>Expert 2's Translation</b> ஆரிரங் , ஆரிரங் , ஆராரியோ ஆரிரங் மலையைடு தாண்டி நான் போகிறேன். என்னைத் துறந்து செல்பவயர பத்தடி கூட நடக்க முடியாமல் நோயுற்று விழுவாரே! வானம் எத்தனை விண்மீன் சகாண்டயதா நம் உள்ளமும் அத்தனை கனவுகள் கொண்டதே!	<b>Author's Translation</b> ஆரிரங் , ஆரிரங் , ஆராரியோ ஆரிரங் /மலை/ கணவாய் வழியாய்ப் போகிறாய் என காதல் என்னைக் கைவிட்டுப் போகிறது தனியாய் பத்து காதம் நடப்பதற்கு முன் உன் கால்கள் நோகும் சதளிவானில் ஒளிரும் விண்மீன்கள் எத்தனையோ நம் இதயங்களில் கைவுகளும் எத்தனையோ!

Table 2: Human Translations of Arirang Song

Observations about each translation for certain aspects are provided in Appendix A.

## Key Findings

On accuracy aspect, Google Translator and Bing Translator provided a literal but often inaccurate translation, especially in Tamil. Gemini and Chat GPT maintained semantic accuracy better than Google Translator and Bing Translator. On fluency aspect, Gemini and Chat GPT's Tamil translation were the most fluent and naturally readable, despite minor deviations. Google and Bing Translator's Tamil output had structural awkwardness and unnatural phrasing. On Cultural Adaptation aspect, Numerical units (e.g., "li") were not translated properly into Tamil in any machine output. Gemini and Chat GPT performed best in preserving emotional undertones, while Google and Bing Translators lost some metaphorical depth. On poetic structure preservation, Gemini and Chat GPT's Tamil version retained some poetic flow. Google and Bing Translator's Tamil output lacked rhythm and felt mechanical. On structural differences aspect of languages, Korean follows Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) order, whereas Tamil also follows SOV but with different word compounding rules and case markers. Korean relies on postpositions, whereas Tamil uses case suffixes to indicate grammatical relationships. On Phonetic and Syntactic Challenges aspect, Korean has a limited number of vowel sounds, while Tamil has a richer vowel system, causing difficulties in phonetic mapping. The absence of honorifics in Tamil makes it difficult to translate Korean honorific expressions accurately.

However, the human expert translations evoke deep emotions. Other translations tend to be more literal and lose the poetic richness. The translation by the Tamil language expert preserves traditional Tamil distance measurements, such as பத்து காதம் (ten *kaadhams*) or பத்தடி (ten *adis*), instead of using unfamiliar or inaccurate units like miles. Notably, once ChatGPT was informed about *kaadham* as a unit of distance, it consistently incorporated this term in subsequent translations. It avoids direct word-for-word translations that may distort the meaning and cultural symbolism of the song. The phrasing is smooth and musical, making it sound more like a Tamil poem or folk song. The bilingual expert translations are the most accurate and culturally resonant version of the song though they are different. It preserves the emotional depth, poetic essence, and cultural richness of the original, making it the best translation compared to others.

This analysis highlights the challenges of translating Korean folk songs into Tamil using online tools. The linguistic and structural differences between Korean and Tamil contribute to errors in meaning, cultural references, and poetic elements.

- Machine translation struggles with idiomatic expressions and metaphorical depth.
- Poetic rhythm and repetition require human intervention for proper adaptation.
- Tools trained predominantly on Indo-European languages (such as English-French-German datasets) perform poorly on Korean-Tamil pairs due to a lack of high-quality parallel corpora.
- Post-editing by bilingual human experts is essential for accurate and culturally meaningful translations.

The study underscores the limitations of current NLP models in handling non-Indo-European language pairs, suggesting that AI-driven translation tools should incorporate cultural and poetic datasets for better performance. Future research could explore hybrid human-AI models to refine folk song translations.

Metaphors and cultural references often lack direct equivalents. For example, Arirang, Korea's most famous folk song, uses "crossing a mountain pass" as a metaphor for life's struggles, a concept that may require recontextualization in Tamil. Similarly, Korean onomatopoeic and rhythmic expressions may not have exact Tamil counterparts, necessitating poetic re-interpretation.

Studies in cross-cultural metaphor translation emphasize that faithful word-for-word translation is rarely effective, and cultural adaptation is necessary for lyrical works (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). This is especially relevant for folk songs, where emotion and rhythm must be retained in the target language.

The analysis of translations generated by Google and Bing Translators, Gemini, and Chat GPT, other online tools reveals distinct strengths and weaknesses. One of the primary advantages of these tools is their ability to provide quick and accessible translations, allowing users to understand the general meaning of Korean folk songs without requiring human intervention.

These tools have improved significantly in handling basic lexical translations, particularly for widely spoken languages. However, their effectiveness diminishes when dealing with languages that exhibit substantial structural and phonetic differences, such as Korean and Tamil.

Machine translation tools struggle with accurately preserving the poetic structure, emotional depth, and cultural context embedded within folk songs. For example, in the case of *Arirang*, the translation by Google and Bing Translators successfully conveys the literal meaning but fails to retain the lyrical quality and cultural sentiment. Gemini and Chat GPT, while offering better fluency, demonstrates inconsistencies in metaphorical interpretations and rhythm preservation.

Another common issue observed is the inability of online tools to account for polysemy—words with multiple meanings depending on context. Korean folk songs often use symbolic language that machine translation systems misinterpret. Additionally, phonetic mismatches between Korean and Tamil lead to difficulties in producing an aesthetically pleasing output. The mismatch in syllabic patterns further disrupts the natural flow of translated lyrics.

One can try lyric generator to create Tamil lyrics for an already existing folk song like this Korean *Arirang* depending on how it can handle the cultural and legal aspects which can be future study.

The primary reason for inaccurate translations between Korean and Tamil is the lack of robust training data for NLP models. Most current machine translation tools are optimized for English-centric translations, meaning that translations between two non-Indo-European languages often yield poor results. A dedicated Korean-Tamil parallel corpus, Incorporation of poetic and musical datasets, Syntax-aware translation models required to ensure linguistic accuracy. Current translation models treat all text equally, but folk songs require unique treatment. Developing AI with specialized settings for translating lyrical content would improve fidelity. Advancements in AI-based translations must incorporate contextual understanding, phonetic alignment, and culture-sensitive adaptations to ensure meaningful and aesthetically coherent translations. With a combination of AI-driven enhancements and human expertise, future translation tools can significantly improve the accessibility and preservation of folk songs across languages.

## Conclusion

This study explored the effectiveness of online translation tools in rendering Korean folk songs into Tamil, using *Arirang* as a case study. The analysis highlighted the linguistic, poetic, and cultural challenges associated with translating folk songs between two typologically distinct languages. Key findings revealed that while online machine translation tools such as Google and Bing Translators, Gemini, Chat GPT offer basic lexical translations, they struggle with preserving poetic elements, cultural nuances, and rhythmic structures. The need for significant human intervention in refining machine-generated translations underscores the limitations of current NLP models for Korean-Tamil translation. By integrating folk song translations into linguistic research, this study highlights the broader implications of computational approaches in preserving and disseminating intangible cultural heritage.



Future research should focus on improving AI-based translation models by incorporating culturally and phonetically aligned training data. Additionally, interdisciplinary approaches that combine linguistic expertise with deep learning techniques could lead to more accurate and poetic translations. Expanding the study to other genres of Korean and Tamil traditional music would further enrich the understanding of machine-assisted literary and musical translation. Ultimately, advancements in this area could significantly contribute to bridging linguistic and cultural gaps, fostering deeper cross-cultural appreciation and understanding.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Observations of Translations done online, Bilingual experts and author:**

#### **Google Translate (Korean to Tamil)**

- The Tamil translation misinterprets “Arirang Pass” as "அரிராங் கணவாய்க்குச் செல்லவும்", which does not convey a clear meaning.
- The phrase "The one who leaves me" is correctly translated as "என்னை நகவிட்டவன்" but lacks poetic flow.
- The phrase "will get sick" is translated literally instead of capturing the poetic essence of hardship.
- The numerical unit "li" (traditional Korean distance) is retained in the English version but completely lost in Tamil, causing a loss of cultural reference.
- Poetic essence and meaning are lost in the last two lines.

#### **Bing translator (Korean to Tamil)**

- The Tamil translation misinterprets “Arirang Pass” as "அரிராங் கணவாய்க்குச் செல்லுங்கள்", which does not convey a clear meaning.
- The phrase "The one who leaves me" is correctly translated as " என்னைக் கைவிட்டவரே " adheres somewhat to poetic flow.
- The phrase "will get sick" is translated literally instead of capturing the poetic essence of hardship.
- The numerical unit "li" (traditional Korean distance) is retained as in the English version as miles but completely lost in Tamil, causing a loss of cultural reference.
- Poetic essence and meaning are lost in the last two lines.

### Gemini (Korean to Tamil)

- The Tamil translation successfully conveys the rhythmic nature of the song while maintaining the emotional tone.
- The phrase "The one who leaves me" is correctly translated as "துறந்து செல்பவர் " but lacks poetic flow.
- The phrase "feet hurt" is well-adapted as "காலில் நோய் வரும்", which retains both literal and metaphorical depth.
- The numerical unit "li" (traditional Korean distance) is retained as in the English version as miles but completely lost in Tamil, causing a loss of cultural reference.
- Poetic essence and meaning are lost in the last two lines.

### Chat GPT (Korean to Tamil)

- The Tamil translation successfully conveys the rhythmic nature of the song while maintaining the emotional tone.
- The phrase "feet hurt" is well-adapted as "கால்கள் வலி கொள்ளும்", which retains both literal and metaphorical depth.
- The term " நேசன் " (friend) was added in Tamil, possibly to maintain rhythmic structure, but this alters the original meaning slightly.
- The numerical unit "li" (traditional Korean distance) is translated to traveler in Tamil causing a loss in translation.
- Poetic essence and meaning are lost in the last two lines.

### Expert 1's translation (Korean to Tamil)

- The Tamil translation successfully conveys the rhythmic nature of the song while maintaining the emotional tone changing the refrain words to suit the scenario.
- The background of singing this song is considered and translation is done, not word by word but conveys inner meaning to certain extent.
- The numerical unit "li" (traditional Korean distance) is converted to nearest unit in Tamil called *kaadham* though the distance is not equivalent without losing its cultural reference. (li = 0.5km; *kaadham* = 1.167km instead of using the mile = 1.609km)
- The phrase "feet hurt" is well-adapted as "நோய்வாய்ப் படுவார்", which retains both literal and metaphorical depth.
- The term " என்னுயிரே " (friend) was added in Tamil, to maintain rhythmic structure, though it alters the original meaning slightly.

### Expert 2's translation (Korean to Tamil)

- The Tamil translation successfully conveys the rhythmic nature of the song while maintaining the emotional tone with the same refrain.
- Word by word translation is not done but conveys inner meaning to certain extent.
- The numerical unit "li" (traditional Korean distance) is converted to common usage word பத்தடி meaning 10 feet instead of exact usage of the distance unit.
- The phrase “feet hurt” is well-adapted as “நோயுற்று விழுவாரே!”, which retains both literal and metaphorical depth.

### Explanation for Author's translation (Multiple Korean to English and then English to Tamil)

- Author tried to convey the rhythmic nature of the song though emotional tone is disclosed to certain extent.
- The background of singing this song is considered and translation is done.
- The numerical unit "li" (traditional Korean distance) is converted to nearest unit in Tamil called *kaadham* though the distance is not exactly equivalent without losing its cultural reference.
- The phrase “feet hurt” is adapted as it is “கால்கள் நோகும்”, using word by word translation.
- Last two lines are translated to have poetic form giving the exact Korean meaning in Tamil.