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## Examining Translators' Experiences in Translating Grade 4 Geography Concepts from English to Tshivenda

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### ABSTRACT

Translation of educational materials from English into indigenous African languages such as Tshivenda presents significant challenges, particularly concerning non-equivalence and cultural disparities. This qualitative study examines translators' experiences in translating Grade 4 Geography concepts from English to Tshivenda. Anchored by Skopos theory and the scan and balance framework, the research adopts an interpretivist paradigm and a phenomenological design. Five expert translators participated and were selected through purposive sampling. Data collection included translation tasks and semi-structured interviews, which were analysed using thematic and inductive analysis. The findings reveal pervasive cultural and terminological challenges stemming from differences between English and Tshivenda, compounded by insufficient resources and time-intensive translation processes. The translators navigated these challenges with adaptive problem-solving approaches like using dictionaries, internet searches, and consultations with experts, as well as by achieving equivalence through translation strategies such as paraphrasing, cultural substitution, loan words, general words, and coining, guided by systematic strategy selection based on the intended purposes of the translations. This study contributes to the understanding of the nuanced dynamics of translation in educational contexts, highlighting the need for improved resources and collaborative efforts among translators. By enhancing translation practices in indigenous languages, this research endeavours to support better educational outcomes and preserve linguistic diversity.

**Keywords:** Cultural Translation Challenges; Translation Strategies; Grade 4 Geography Concepts; Tshivenda Language; Skopos Theory; Linguistic Diversity; Indigenous Languages

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Background of the Study

Translation is the act of conveying significance from one language to another<sup>[1]</sup>. It is difficult for translators to attain equivalence, which refers to the connection between words or phrases in multiple languages that carry the same meaning<sup>[2, 3]</sup>. Non-equivalence arises when the target language (TL) lacks an equivalent for a word or expression found in the source language (SL)<sup>[4, 5]</sup>. This discrepancy is a result of cultural disparities that can lead to misconceptions and misinterpretations of the original text<sup>[6, 7]</sup>. Given these challenges, this study argues that it is crucial to examine the experiences of Tshivenda translators when dealing with non-equivalence in the translation of Geography terms into Tshivenda to develop effective strategies for language development in teaching and learning. Hence, this study aims to examine translators' experiences in translating Grade 4 Geography concepts from English into Tshivenda. Grade 4 Geography was selected due to its critical role in South Africa's educational transition from mother tongue to English as the sole Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) in the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4–6). In South Africa, Home Languages are as LoLT at the Foundation Phase, Grades R-3<sup>[8]</sup>. This shift can challenge Tshivenda-speaking learners, as research indicates that learning in a non-native language can impede comprehension and academic performance<sup>[9]</sup>. The cultural diversity and challenges associated with translation have contributed to the lack of Grade 4 Geography textbooks and other educational materials in Tshivenda and other minority languages, which has sparked the researchers' interest in this study.

Several studies have examined translation challenges faced by translators and interpreters across various contexts, highlighting both linguistic and cultural hurdles. A study by Cappelli<sup>[10]</sup> examined the experiences of translators and interpreters in wartime, uncovering difficulties in bridging cultural and linguistic gaps. Similarly, Ningrum et al.<sup>[11]</sup> investigated how professional translators manage the translation of academic texts, noting lexical and sociolinguistic challenges and the impact of machine translation (MT) and AI tools, with varied attitudes towards these technologies. Another study by March<sup>[12]</sup> analysed how prisoner-writers function as translators, using their writing to depict the carceral experience to

non-prisoner readers. She argued that prisoner writing acts as a form of translation, with prisoner-writers using diegetic translators within their narratives to convey the realities of prison life, thereby establishing authority and credibility and offering valuable insights into prison life. Likewise, Gu<sup>[13]</sup> identified the challenges faced by translators of Japanese trauma/post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) novels, including difficulties in capturing the nuanced depiction of trauma and PTSD in the original text while ensuring the translation remains readable and relatable for the target audience. Moreover, the translators often found themselves emotionally affected by the traumatic content they were translating.

However, in South Africa, there have been few studies examining this phenomenon, with little scrutiny and documentation of translators' experiences, particularly in Tshivenda. Tshivenda, despite its official status, remains one of the minority languages in the country. It is spoken by approximately 1.2 million people spread across all nine provinces of South Africa<sup>[14]</sup>, with the majority of speakers concentrated in the Limpopo province, specifically in the Vhembe district, formerly known as Venda. Mashamba<sup>[15]</sup> and Musyoka and Ileri<sup>[7]</sup> observed that translators who work between languages with distinct cultural backgrounds often encounter non-equivalence issues at the word level, necessitating effective strategies to address these challenges. Tran<sup>[16]</sup> found that cultural substitution and paraphrasing were effective strategies for resolving non-equivalence issues, while Wijayanti and Mirahayuni<sup>[17]</sup> discovered that finding the closest equivalent words in a novel is challenging due to cultural differences between languages.

Despite extensive research on translation challenges and strategies across various contexts, there remains a gap in the literature regarding understanding the experiences and perspectives of translators working with indigenous African languages, particularly in the context of educational material. Previous studies have primarily focused on general translation challenges, professional translators, and translation in unique contexts like wartime, health, finance, or trauma narratives, to mention a few. However, there is limited research on the experiences of translators and how they handle non-equivalence when translating specialised educational content, such as Grade 4 Geography concepts, from English into Tshivenda.

Addressing this gap, from the perspective of translators,

is crucial for developing effective translation strategies that enhance the quality of educational materials in indigenous languages, thus supporting better learning outcomes and preserving linguistic diversity. Hence, this study aims to fill this gap, guided by the following research questions:

- What are the experiences of Tshivenda translators regarding the translation of Grade 4 Geography concepts from English into Tshivenda?
- What translation strategies do Tshivenda translators employ in the process of translating Grade 4 Geography concepts from English into Tshivenda?

## 1.2. Theoretical Foundation

This research is anchored theoretically by Skopos theory and the scan and balance framework to identify challenges faced by English-to-Tshivenda translators when translating Grade 4 Geography concepts.

The Skopos theory, introduced by Vermeer<sup>[18]</sup>, emphasises the purpose of a translation as the primary determinant of its effectiveness, diverging from traditional equivalence-based approaches that prioritise fidelity to the source text. This theory posits that every translation must serve a specific function within its cultural context, necessitating adaptations that enhance cultural relevance and comprehension for the target audience. Nord<sup>[19]</sup> further develops this framework with her “Function plus Loyalty” approach, which balances the target text’s purpose with a commitment to the source text’s integrity. In educational contexts, particularly in translating Grade 4 Geography concepts, Skopos theory is crucial. It guides translators to modify content to be accessible, relevant, and pedagogically effective, ensuring that learners can engage with and understand complex ideas effectively. This approach underscores the necessity of adapting content to be both culturally relevant and understandable, prioritising the educational objectives of the target text and fulfilling its role in the learners’ academic development. By focusing on the functionality of the target text and aligning the translation process with the intended use in the target culture, Skopos theory provides a robust theoretical framework for research in translation studies<sup>[20]</sup>.

Similarly, the scan and balance framework, proposed by Mambambo<sup>[21]</sup>, complements Skopos theory by offering a more granular approach to the translation process. This framework views translation as a dynamic process involving

the scanning of both the source and target languages and cultures to find suitable linguistic and conceptual matches. The “balance” aspect emphasises the need to maintain equilibrium between the original meaning and the cultural appropriateness of the translated text. In this study, the framework guided translators in their quest for Tshivenda words or phrases that could effectively convey the meanings of English Geographic terms. This approach was particularly valuable in identifying culturally resonant equivalents that would be both understandable and accurate for Tshivenda-speaking learners.

By integrating these two theories, the research framework ensures that the translation process is both purposeful and methodologically sound. Skopos theory provides the overarching goal of ensuring that the translation serves its educational purpose, while the scan and balance framework offers a detailed methodology for achieving this goal. Together, they require translators to carefully analyse meanings, usage, styles, and cultural nuances, ensuring that the final text is not only linguistically accurate but also culturally and contextually appropriate. Having established the theoretical foundations, it is crucial to examine the concepts of equivalence and non-equivalence in translation.

## 1.3. Equivalence and Non-Equivalence in Translation

To ensure precise and appropriate communication in translation, achieving equivalence is key. This concept, central in translation theory, aims to replicate the source material’s impact on readers as closely as possible<sup>[17, 22]</sup>. According to Reiß and Vermeer<sup>[23]</sup>, equivalence means the target text serves the same communication function as the source text in both societies. However, due to non-equivalence, achieving this can be challenging, especially at the word level<sup>[4]</sup>. Translators face difficulties due to cultural influences on languages<sup>[24]</sup>. Below are Baker’s<sup>[4]</sup> reasons for non-equivalence at the word level:

### *Culture-specific concepts*

These are encountered when a word in the source text expresses a concept that is utterly foreign to the target culture. The concepts could be concrete or abstract; they could be linked to a religious doctrine, a social practice, or even a specific variety of food.

*The SL concept is not lexicalised in the TL*

Non-equivalence also occurs when a word in the SL reflects a concept that is understood in the target culture but has not been lexicalised or ‘assigned’ a word in the TL. As Baker<sup>[4]</sup> shows, despite its obvious meaning, the term *savoury* (a salty or spicy dish or food that does not taste sweet) has no equivalent in several languages.

*The SL word is semantically complex*

One of the most prevalent challenges during the translation process is when a word in the SL has a complicated semantic meaning. Words do not have to be morphologically complex to be semantically complex. According to Baker, a single morpheme word can sometimes convey a more sophisticated mix of meanings than a complete phrase.

*The source and target languages make different distinctions in meaning*

The TL may have more or fewer meaning variations than the SL. What one language considers to be a significant distinction based on its importance, another language may not.

*The TL lacks a superordinate*

In the TL, there may be hyponyms but no generic term (known as a superordinate).

*The TL lacks a specific term (hyponym)*

Languages usually have generic words (superordinates) but no specific ones (hyponyms) because each language distinguishes only those meaning distinctions that seem relevant to its specific environment. When a translation from the source to the TL is needed, it becomes a factor that complicates the task at hand.

*Differences in physical or interpersonal perspective*

Physical perspective may be more important in one language than another. Physical perspective refers to where things or people are in relation to one another or to a location, as represented in word pairs like *come/go*, *take/bring*, *arrive/depart*, and so on. Perspectives can also incorporate the relationship between discourse participants (tenor). For example, depending on who is giving to whom, the Japanese language has six equivalents for the word ‘give’.

*Differences in expressive meaning*

A term in the TL might have the same proportional meaning as a word in the SL, but its expressive meaning might be distinct. Baker further argues that even if the difference is small or nuanced, it might still be enough to make translation difficult in a particular situation. In addition, it is

frequently much simpler to add emotion than to remove it. Differences in expressive meaning are often more challenging to deal with when the equivalent in the TL is emotionally loaded to a greater degree than the item in the SL. This is common with topics that deal with delicate subjects like religion, politics, and sexuality—for example, words such as ‘homosexual’ and ‘homosexuality’.

*Difference in form*

Frequently, a specific form in the source text may lack a direct counterpart in the TL. This is particularly evident with certain prefixes and suffixes in English, which convey various meanings but are not easily translatable into other languages. As per Baker<sup>[4]</sup>, English has numerous word pairs like *employer/employee*, *trainer/trainee*, and *payer/payee*. Accordingly, it commonly employs suffixes such as *-ish* (e.g., *boyish*, *hellish*, *greenish*) and *-able* (e.g., *conceivable*, *retrievable*, *drinkable*). However, these linguistic elements may not have direct equivalents in other languages. For example, Arabic does not have a ready mechanism for producing such forms, so they are frequently replaced by an appropriate paraphrase instead. This replacement varies according to the meaning that the forms are intended to convey, such as *retrievable* being translated as *can be retrieved* and *drinkable* being translated as *suitable for drinking*.

*Differences in frequency and purpose of using specific forms*

Even though a given form does not have a direct equivalent in the TL, there may be a distinction in the context in which it is employed or the reason for its use. For example, if every *-ing* in English were translated into the TL, the resulting style would be awkward and unnatural. Therefore, the continuous *-ing* form for binding clauses is used in English at a far higher frequency than in other languages that have counterparts for it.

*The use of a loan word in the source text*

Incorporating loan words in the source text poses a difficulty for translation purposes. Furthermore, Baker observes that once a word or expression is adopted from another language, it becomes unpredictable and uncontrollable in terms of its evolution and possible semantic shifts.

Because of non-equivalence, modifications are needed to address gaps when there is no TL equivalent for an SL word or concept. Kashgary<sup>[2]</sup> notes that untranslatability can occur at the lexical level due to language disparities.

Achieving textual similarity may require sacrificing word-level equivalence for alternative terms. It is impractical to label a term ‘untranslatable’ merely because it cannot be conveyed precisely, as translation techniques can address this<sup>[25]</sup>. This paper focuses on the experiences of Tshivenda translators in translating Grade 4 Geography concepts from English into Tshivenda. It aims to examine the challenges, experiences, and strategies employed by these professionals during the translation process.

#### 1.4. Translation Strategies

The approaches used by translators to deal with non-equivalence are known as translation strategies. Their implementation guarantees the production of a high-quality translation that is easily comprehensible in the TL<sup>[26]</sup>. Variations in non-equivalence offer the possibility of utilising a range of methods<sup>[4]</sup>. These methodologies may be either straightforward or challenging to implement. Experts in the field, like Baker<sup>[4]</sup>, Newmark<sup>[25]</sup>, and others, have suggested translation strategies to tackle non-equivalence at the lexical level.

##### *Translation by a more general word*

As per Baker<sup>[4]</sup>, this approach is widely used for handling diverse non-equivalences, particularly in relation to propositional significance. Furthermore, it operates in most, if not all, languages owing to the universal structure of semantic domains. Tran<sup>[16]</sup> contends that the risk of losing meaning is a constant concern when employing this method. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the translator to mitigate such loss to ensure that the intended audience comprehends the text accurately.

##### *Translation by a more neutral/less expressive word*

In relation to this technique, translators might opt to use a word that is either more or less vivid, depending on the SL’s varying degrees of expressiveness, which can pose a greater difficulty<sup>[27]</sup>.

##### *Translation using a loan word or loan word plus an explanation*

According to Baker<sup>[4]</sup>, this tactic is commonly employed when dealing with culturally unique objects, modern concepts, and fashionable expressions. Furthermore, if a word is frequently used in the text, it is advisable to elucidate it after borrowing it. Once explained, the borrowed word can be used independently, and the reader will comprehend

it without getting sidetracked by lengthy clarifications<sup>[4]</sup>. Additionally, Tran<sup>[16]</sup> states that this technique is an exceptional way of utilising loanwords to attain a particular artistic objective.

##### *Translation by paraphrasing using a related word*

Baker<sup>[4]</sup> suggests this strategy for translating deeply ingrained ideas in the SL into the TL with different expressions. It is useful when the source text has an unusually frequent expression that is not typical in the TL. This method ensures accurate translations. In contrast, Tran<sup>[16]</sup> takes a cautious stance, noting its precision but also potential issues. The main concern highlighted by Tran<sup>[16]</sup> is the potential for the TL text to become lengthy.

##### *Translation by omission*

According to Baker<sup>[4]</sup>, omission pertains to the act of excluding a word or words while translating from the SL text. However, it does not imply haphazardly eliminating words or phrases from the translated text; instead, it is applied when the significance is already suitably conveyed in the TL text without rendering that specific element, and readers are not encumbered by an unnecessary explanation<sup>[4]</sup>.

##### *Cultural equivalence*

In certain contexts, the cultural substitution process is particularly effective when dealing with idiomatic expressions, proverbs, and other culturally specific terms that do not have direct equivalents in the TL. By using cultural substitutions, translators can convey the intended meaning of the source text while also preserving its cultural nuances and references. However, it is important to note that cultural substitutions should be used with caution as they may not always accurately reflect the original meaning of the source text. Therefore, translators must have a deep understanding of the cultural context and linguistic nuances of both the source and target languages to ensure the accuracy and effectiveness of their translations.

Scholars like Newmark<sup>[25]</sup> and Baker<sup>[4]</sup> tend to show a preference for certain translation methods, including cultural substitution, paraphrasing, loan words, and the use of general terms. Newmark<sup>[25]</sup> suggests that a translator should not hesitate to provide a preface and explanatory notes when translating a significant work, particularly if accuracy is at risk due to the economy of the translation or the obscurity of the text. Having explored the translation strategies, the next section reviews and analyses the literature on transla-

tion practices, revealing diverse approaches and strategies employed across different contexts.

### 1.5. Perspectives on the Application of Translation Strategies

The literature on translation strategies reveals diverse approaches and strategies across various contexts, highlighting both global and local perspectives. Researchers have examined translation through different lenses, focusing on specific types of text, cultural elements, and challenges faced by translators. To begin with, Al-Khalafat and Haider<sup>[28]</sup> conducted a corpus-assisted study that focused on the translation of culture-bound expressions found in the speeches of King Abdullah II of Jordan. Their research utilised a parallel corpus to examine the various strategies employed in translating these expressions. The study identified deletion, addition, substitution, and transliteration as the predominant methods used to handle these cultural elements during translation.

In addition, in the educational context, Junining and Kusuma<sup>[29]</sup> explored translation strategies for news articles among English education students at Brawijaya University. They classified these strategies according to Baker's taxonomy. The study found that students utilised all eight strategies, with the predominant ones being translation using more general words (95%) and paraphrasing with related terms (75%). The least frequently employed strategy was translation by illustration, utilised by only 31% of the students. Similarly, focusing on media and film, Hashemian and Arezi<sup>[30]</sup> conducted research analysing the translation strategies employed in two American films, *Mean Girls* and *Bring It On*. Their study revealed that the most frequently utilised strategy was omission. This research underscored the difficulties faced in translating idiomatic expressions, often due to the absence of direct equivalents in the target language.

Moreover, Farkhan<sup>[31]</sup> examined the translation of Islamic terms from Indonesian to English. The research revealed that translators predominantly employed several strategies: preservation (borrowing terms as they are), addition (providing descriptive notes or explanations), globalisation (using generic terms that are globally understandable), and localisation (adapting terms to fit the cultural context of the target audience). The study indicated that the selection of these strategies was influenced by a foreignisation ideology, aiming to maintain the authenticity of the original text.

However, this approach occasionally led to distortions in the intended meaning of the Islamic terms during translation. On the other hand, Elnaili<sup>[32]</sup> explored the use of domestication and foreignisation strategies in translating *The Arabian Nights*. The study concluded that successful translation often requires a balance between these two approaches. Elnaili suggested that cultural equivalence is best achieved when the form is domesticated while the content is foreignised.

Furthermore, Jia and Liu<sup>[33]</sup> focused on translation strategies within the context of cross-border e-commerce, highlighting the importance of Skopos theory. The study discussed how cultural and contextual factors influence the choice of translation methods to enhance the effectiveness of product descriptions. Likewise, Zhao<sup>[34]</sup> analysed the subtitle translation of *Kung Fu Panda 2* using the adaptation and selection theory. This research explored how translators choose strategies for effective cross-language communication, emphasising the importance of adapting translations to fit cultural contexts while maintaining the original meaning. Zhao concluded that successful subtitle translation requires a high degree of holistic adaptation and selection. Another study by Minhui<sup>[35]</sup> examined the role of translators' agency in translating *Une Vie de Boy* into English. This study highlighted that translators are not mere conduits but active agents whose identities and decisions significantly shape the translation process. Minhui's research underscored the complexities of translating cultural nuances and stressed the importance of understanding the translator's background in interpreting their strategies.

In a similar vein, Sun<sup>[36]</sup> examined translation methodologies for financial English in *The Wolf of Wall Street*, giving suggestions for tackling issues such as terminology complexity and confidentiality. Also, Rustandi et al.<sup>[37]</sup> investigated translation problems at the lexical, grammatical, and cultural levels and proposed techniques such as borrowing and substitution. Correspondingly, Premasari and Widodo<sup>[38]</sup> investigated idiomatic expression translation techniques in *Edensor*, revealing challenges as well as methods such as similar-meaning translation. In the same way, Cozma<sup>[39]</sup> addressed the issue of translatability between English and Romanian, focusing on methods and strategies that are target-oriented, such as borrowing and adaptation.

Mafela<sup>[40]</sup> focused on word borrowing in Tshivenda language studies, highlighting the need to preserve African

languages. He also encourages borrowing from the same language family, i.e., borrowing from sister African languages such as Sepedi, Xitsonga, isiNdebele, and isiZulu, to mention a few. Likewise, Malindi<sup>[26]</sup> discussed non-equivalence in isiZulu translations, noting tactics such as borrowing and paraphrasing. Nthambeleni<sup>[41]</sup> critiqued word adoption in dictionaries, arguing for communicative translation and paraphrasing. Analogously, Nengovhela<sup>[42]</sup> recommended utilising culturally relevant terms and paraphrasing to improve English–Tshivenda idiom translations.

The literature review above has examined specific types of texts, including culture-bound expressions in political speeches, news articles, films, Islamic terms, literary works, cross-border e-commerce product descriptions, subtitles, novels, financial English, and idiomatic expressions. The studies utilised various taxonomies and theories, such as Baker’s taxonomy, Skopos theory, and adaptation and selection theory, and the concept of translators’ agency, to analyse translation strategies and their effectiveness in different contexts. The review also highlights that these studies focused on specific language pairs, such as English–Arabic, English–Indonesian, English–Romanian, and English–Tshivenda.

Collectively, these studies provide a comprehensive understanding of translation strategies, highlighting the complexity and context-specific nature of translation work. They reveal the need for a balanced approach that considers cultural nuances and the active role of translators in effectively conveying meaning across languages. However, there is a notable gap in research on the experiences of translators and how they handle non-equivalence when translating specialised educational content, such as Grade 4 Geography concepts, from English into Tshivenda. Addressing this gap, the current study aims to examine translators’ experiences of translating Grade 4 Geography concepts from English to Tshivenda, thereby contributing to improved translation practices in educational contexts and enriching the broader field of translation studies. The research methods employed for this study are described in the following section.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This section outlines the research methods and analytical approaches employed to investigate translators’ ex-

periences of translating Grade 4 Geography concepts from English to Tshivenda. By specifying the materials used and the methodology followed, we provide a comprehensive understanding of how the study was conducted and how the findings were derived.

### 2.1. Methods

The study employed a combination of research methods to thoroughly understand the phenomenon of translating Grade 4 Geography concepts from English into Tshivenda. An interpretivist paradigm was adopted to examine how cultural factors influence human behaviour, focusing on attitudes, values, and beliefs<sup>[43]</sup>. Concurrently, a phenomenological study design was utilised to depict the phenomenon authentically, devoid of preconceptions or biases, aiming for an in-depth exploration of participants’ experiences<sup>[44]</sup>. This approach allowed the researchers to delve into the essence of the subject matter, capturing participants’ perspectives and opinions from their natural environment. Moreover, the study employed a qualitative research style, emphasising narrative exploration of participants’ ideas, emotions, and experiences, providing insight into underlying motivations<sup>[45]</sup>. Through this methodology, the researchers portrayed a comprehensive view of the topic, amplifying participants’ voices and elucidating the intricacies of their behaviour. The following section details the selection process and composition of the study’s participants

### 2.2. Participants

The study involved five expert Tshivenda language translators, selected through purposive sampling, to provide comprehensive insights. The participants are professional Tshivenda language translators, certified by the South African Translators Institute (SATI), and work in government institutions such as the Tshivenda National Lexicography Unit (TNLU), Translation Unit (TU), Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB), National Language Body (NLB), and Department of Sport, Arts and Culture (DSAC). The group consisted of two female and three male translators. In terms of age distribution, two participants are 30–35 years, one is 45–50 years, one is 50–55 years, and one is 55–60 years. In terms of qualifications, three participants hold master’s degrees, while the remaining two have bachelor’s

degrees. Their translation experience vary, with two having 15 or more years of experience, another two having between 10 and 15 years, and one having 1 to 5 years of experience. Due to the small sample size, the findings are specific to this group and not generalisable to a larger population. This limitation is inherent in qualitative research, where the focus is on gaining in-depth insights from a specific group rather than

making broad generalisations. Nonetheless, the participants' advanced degrees and extensive professional experience ensure credible and reliable insights into Tshivenda translation strategies and challenges. We stopped data collection after realising that we were getting repeated responses, which was an indication of data saturation (**Table 1**).

**Table 1.** Characteristics of participants<sup>[46]</sup>.

Participant #	Gender	Age Group	Highest Qualification	Years of Translation	Coding
Participant 1	Male	55–60 yrs.	Master's degree	15+ yrs.	TM1
Participant 2	Male	30–35 yrs.	Degree	10–15 yrs.	TM2
Participant 3	Female	50–51 yrs.	Master's degree	15+ yrs.	TF3
Participant 4	Female	30–35 yrs.	Degree	1–5 yrs.	TF4
Participant 5	Male	40–45 yrs.	Degree	10–15 yrs.	TM5

### 2.3. Data Collection Method

The first step involved selecting 100 Geography concepts from an English Grade 4 textbook, which were then translated into Tshivenda by the five professional translators. Following the translation task, the researchers employed face-to-face semi-structured interviews for data collection, as suggested by Kumar<sup>[47]</sup>, to comprehensively elucidate participants' views and effectively achieve the study's objectives. This method was chosen for its flexibility and ability to provide an in-depth understanding of the translators' experiences and perspectives. Furthermore, the interviews were guided by a pre-defined question plan to ensure consistency while allowing for elaboration where necessary. The interview questions focused on the difficulties faced during the translation process and the methods used to address these challenges, enabling the collection of rich qualitative data. Additionally, the researchers collected data using an audio recorder and pen and paper. The audio recorder was chosen for its ability to capture detailed responses during the interviews, ensuring accuracy and allowing the researchers to focus on the conversation without the distraction of extensive notetaking. Moreover, written notes were also made to capture key points during the interviews. These instruments were chosen to facilitate thorough data collection and to provide a reliable basis for subsequent analysis. In the next section, we detail the methods used to examine the gathered data.

### 2.4. Data Analysis

The study utilised both inductive and thematic approaches to examine the gathered data, drawing on Saldaña's<sup>[48]</sup> assertion that thematic analysis allows for the identification of categories arising from the data. Meanwhile, inductive analysis, as emphasised by Nieuwenhuis<sup>[49]</sup>, involves the evaluator or researcher deriving concepts, themes, or a model through interpretive readings of the raw data. The analysis diligently adhered to the five stages of the thematic matrix for analysing qualitative interview data, as suggested by Kuckartz<sup>[50]</sup>. The researchers began by thoroughly reading through all the collected data multiple times to gain a deep understanding of its content and context. Next, a coding framework was constructed by creating primary categories that directly corresponded to the research questions. The data were coded using the established primary categories. Each piece of data was carefully assigned to the relevant category. The coded data were analysed by extracting text excerpts from the primary categories. These excerpts were then inductively assigned to create subcategories, allowing for a more detailed understanding. The next section outlines the measures taken to ensure the study adhered to ethical standards.

### 2.5. Ethics

First, the study obtained permission from the University Research Ethics Committee and Tshivenda language practitioners to protect participants from harm. Informed



consent was secured by providing clear information about the research, and participants signed consent forms. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed, ensuring personal information was not recorded or linked to responses. Furthermore, participants were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary and without monetary remuneration. Finally, data was securely encoded and stored, with access restricted to the researchers. The subsequent section deals with the results of the study.

### 3. Results

This section provides a comprehensive analysis of the findings and presents them based on the research questions. It offers insights into the experiences of Tshivenda translators regarding the translation of Grade 4 Geography concepts from English into Tshivenda. Additionally, it details the specific translation strategies they employed in navigating through these challenges, shedding light on the methods used to achieve equivalence and cultural relevance in the translated materials.

#### 3.1. Research Question 1: What Are the Experiences of Tshivenda Translators Regarding the Translation of Grade 4 Geography Concepts from English into Tshivenda?

The experiences of Tshivenda translators in translating Grade 4 Geography concepts from English into Tshivenda revealed several significant challenges. These challenges were categorised under the primary category or theme of “Translation challenges”, which included subcategories such as non-equivalence, cultural disparities, and resource insufficiency. The analysis of Tshivenda translators’ experiences revealed three primary arguments: cultural and terminological challenges, resource limitations, and time and effort in translation.

##### 3.1.1. Cultural and Terminological Challenges

The translators frequently encountered difficulties related to non-equivalence caused by cultural disparities and the absence of corresponding geographical terminology in Tshivenda. This aligns with Skopos theory, which emphasises the importance of the target text’s purpose. For instance, TM1 reported difficulties with non-equivalence caused by

cultural differences, stating that “The translation of these terms was challenging. I had to deal with obstacles like non-equivalence brought on by cultural differences and others.” In addition, TM2 elaborated on this challenge, noting the absence of certain geographical terms in Tshivenda and reported that “I ran into issues such as a lack of geographical terminology in Tshivenda. Most of the terms were not lexicalised. Some were cultural notions that did not exist in Tshivenda.”

Furthermore, TF3 noted that some terms were general or related to other fields, such as commerce and agriculture, complicating the translation process due to their multiple meanings. Likewise, TF4 echoed these sentiments, emphasising the difficulty of translating culture-specific words and the absence of lexicalised concepts in Tshivenda, and said that “Problem encountered was culture-specific words, source language concepts aren’t lexicalised, the target language lacks specific terms, the target language lacks superordinate.” TM5 also highlighted the challenge of finding culturally unique words, which often required devising custom translation techniques, stating that “Finding words unique to a culture can be tough. They were not in Tshivenda’s vocabulary. Because some of the vocabularies were not in the dictionary, I had to devise my own techniques to deal with or translate it.” These responses underline the complex interplay between language, culture, and translation. The absence of direct equivalents in Tshivenda, especially for culturally specific concepts, posed a significant barrier, making it difficult for translators to convey the intended meaning accurately.

##### 3.1.2. Resource Limitations

Another significant theme that emerged was the insufficiency and poor quality of existing resources. To begin with, TM2 criticised the limited availability and quality of Tshivenda dictionaries: “Because of lack of dictionaries. There are not many Tshivenda dictionaries and even fewer poor Internet dictionaries.” Similarly, TM5 shared comparable frustrations, emphasising the inadequacy of existing resources by stating “To help me create new words, I also used the Internet to look up definitions. To find equivalent terminology, I also examined English and Tshivenda dictionaries; however, most of the terms were missing.” Moreover, TM1 pointed out the challenges related to resource sharing and the lack of terminology banks, mentioning “Other choices included speaking with

geographic experts such as subject-matter experts and other translators working for various organizations.” Additionally, TF3 mentioned the substandard quality of available resources, which often required consultations with other translators, saying “I used the Internet to verify the terms in relation to the subject concerned, consulted other language practitioners and a subject specialist.” Therefore, these comments highlight the critical need for improved resources and collaboration among Tshivenda translators. The lack of comprehensive dictionaries and reliable online resources significantly hindered the translation process, necessitating the development of alternative strategies to address these gaps.

### 3.1.3. Time and Effort in Translation

The substantial amount of time and effort required to complete translations was another recurring theme. The inadequacy of resources often led to extended translation times. For example, TM1, TM2, and TF3 each reported that it took them three days to complete the translation task. TM1 noted, “It took me three days to translate these terms. The reason for this was that the majority of the terminology were not available in Tshivenda, even in dictionaries.” TM2 echoed this, stating, “I finished the translation in three days. Because of lack of dictionaries. There are not many Tshivenda dictionaries and even fewer poor Internet dictionaries.” On the other hand, TM5 completed the translation in a single day, attributing the shorter time to being able to dedicate all their attention to the task: “Since I had no other translation job to attend to at the time, I gave this task my whole attention and finished it in a single day. I would estimate that it took between 7 and 10 hours.” Accordingly, these responses illustrate the varying time commitments required depending on the resources available and the specific challenges encountered. The extended time required by most translators underscores the need for more comprehensive tools and resources to facilitate a more efficient translation process.

## 3.2. Research Question 2: What Translation Strategies Do Tshivenda Translators Employ in the Process of Translating Grade 4 Geography Concepts from English into Tshivenda?

The strategies employed by Tshivenda translators to address the challenges of translating Grade 4 Geography

concepts were categorised under the primary category/theme of “Translation Strategies”, with the following subcategories/subthemes: adaptive problem-solving approaches, achieving equivalence, and systematic strategy selection.

### 3.2.1. Adaptive Problem-Solving Approaches

To address the translation challenges, translators employed various adaptive strategies, guided by the scan and balance framework. Translators employed various adaptive strategies to navigate the challenges they faced. TM1 combined the use of Tshivenda and English dictionaries, internet searches, and consultations with experts: “I used Tshivenda and English text dictionaries to answer the problems. Where there was no equivalent term, I translated the terms using translation techniques. I also used the Internet to gain a definition and a good knowledge of the terms’ meanings so that I could translate them appropriately.” TM2 relied on paraphrasing, loan word translation, and compounding, emphasising the importance of dictionaries: “I employed translation procedures to overcome the difficulties I encountered. Paraphrasing, loanword translation, and other strategies are examples. I also used compounding to create new words.” TF3 focused on verifying terms online and consulting with language practitioners and subject specialists: “I used the Internet to verify the terms in relation to the subject concerned, consulted other language practitioners and a subject specialist.” TF4 employed a combination of general words, loan words, cultural substitution, and paraphrasing to address the lack of lexicalised terms in Tshivenda: “I employed the following strategies to solve the above problems of non-equivalence: I used a more general word or superordinate. In most cases, I utilised the loan word.” TM5 highlighted the use of term construction techniques like compounding and borrowing, supported by paraphrasing and the use of dictionaries and the internet: “I overcome the obstacles by employing strategies and term construction techniques like compounding and borrowing. My ability to deal with non-equivalence was also aided by paraphrase.” These strategies underscore the resourcefulness and adaptability of Tshivenda translators in addressing the complex challenges of translating specialised terminology, as emphasised by the scan and balance framework.

### 3.2.2. Achieving Equivalence

Achieving translation equivalence was a critical goal for the translators, who employed various strategies to ensure accuracy and cultural relevance. TM1 and TM2 both emphasised the use of cultural substitution and borrowing words to achieve equivalence. TM1 noted “Apart from that, I paraphrased most of the terminology. For me, paraphrasing is the most efficient approach for translating phrases that aren’t in your native language.” Similarly, TM2 added, “Cultural substitution, borrowed words, paraphrases, and other techniques. I also substituted terms with related and broad words.”

TF3 consulted terminology lists and sought input from language practitioners to achieve equivalence, sometimes coining new equivalents when necessary: “Referred to the terminology lists available and consulted with other language practitioners where transliteration and coining of some equivalents.” TF4 identified loan words and paraphrasing as particularly effective strategies: “The translation strategy which best helped to solve the problem was the use of loan words and paraphrasing.” TM5 also emphasised the use of general or superordinate words, with occasional borrowing: “I also used cultural substitution and translation by using general words or superordinate. In some instances, I used borrowing, which is also known as loan words.” These strategies were crucial for ensuring that the translations were accurate and culturally appropriate, aligning with Skopos theory’s focus on the purpose and cultural relevance of the translation.

### 3.2.3. Systematic Strategy Selection

The translators followed a systematic approach to selecting strategies, guided by both Skopos theory and the scan and balance framework. TM1 described his process of identifying the nature of the translation problem and selecting the best approach for each term, explaining “Firstly, I determine the nature of the translation problem. After I have identified the issue, I will look for the best approach to translate the term.” Likewise, TM2 emphasised the importance of understanding the purpose of the assigned terms to determine the appropriate strategy, stating “The purpose of the terms that have been assigned to me. It becomes easier to translate if I comprehend the aim.”

TF3 relied on the internet for subject-related definitions and considered both scientific and general meanings:

“I check the meaning relevant to the subject. I relied on the Internet for relevant subject definitions since there were no definitions provided for the terms.” TF4 examined both the semantic meaning and linguistic systems of the terms before deciding on a strategy: “Before deciding on a strategy, I look at the semantic meaning of the word or concepts. I also check on the linguistic systems.” TM5 determined the purpose of the translation, preferring paraphrasing over transliteration for clearer descriptions: “The goal. Before a translator can begin translating, the purpose must be determined. I first inquire about the function which you have provided.” This systematic approach ensured that the chosen strategies were well-suited to the specific challenges encountered, allowing for a more effective translation process that aligns with the theoretical frameworks guiding the study.

## 4. Discussion

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and strategies of Tshivenda translators in translating Grade 4 Geography concepts from English into Tshivenda. The challenges encountered by the translators buttress the notion of the complex nature of translation, particularly when dealing with non-equivalence due to cultural disparities and the absence of corresponding terminology in the target language.

The difficulties faced by the translators, such as the non-existence of specific geographical terms in Tshivenda and the multiple meanings of certain words, reflect broader issues in the field of translation studies. These challenges are consistent with broader concerns highlighted in translation studies. For instance, Baker<sup>[4]</sup> and Munday<sup>[51]</sup> discuss the significant impact of cultural and linguistic differences on the process of translation between two different languages, which aligns with the cultural disparities and terminology gaps identified in this study. Makamu<sup>[52]</sup> also emphasises similar challenges in translating minority languages, highlighting the difficulty in finding equivalent terms due to cultural differences.

The resource-related challenges reported by the translators, including the limited availability and poor quality of Tshivenda dictionaries and online resources, emphasise the need for improved translation tools and resources, as highlighted by Pym<sup>[53]</sup> and Ng<sup>[54]</sup>. The absence of terminology banks and the reluctance to share resources among individual

translators point to systemic issues within the translation community that need to be addressed. These findings align with those of other studies that have identified similar resource constraints in the translation of minority languages<sup>[55, 56]</sup>.

The strategies employed by the translators to overcome these challenges demonstrate their resourcefulness and adaptability. The use of paraphrasing, loan word translation, transliteration, compounding, and cultural substitution indicates a nuanced understanding of both source and target languages. These strategies align with established translation strategies discussed by Newmark<sup>[25]</sup> and Nida and Taber<sup>[57]</sup>, who emphasise achieving equivalence and maintaining the intended meaning of the source text. Ezzati<sup>[58]</sup> and Baker<sup>[4]</sup> also support the use of such adaptive strategies to address non-equivalence and cultural differences. The participants' reliance on internet searches and consultations with subject-matter experts highlights the importance of a multifaceted approach, which Nguyen and Ngo<sup>[59]</sup> found to significantly enhance translation quality by reducing errors. This study extends these findings by showing how translators leverage the internet to overcome linguistic limitations in the Tshivenda context.

The preference for paraphrasing and cultural substitution reflects practical considerations in conveying meaning accurately and effectively. This preference underscores the importance of flexibility and creativity in translation, particularly when dealing with languages that have limited resources and terminology, such as Tshivenda. The strategy selection process, which involves identifying the nature of the translation problem and understanding the purpose of the assigned terms, highlights the translators' methodological approach and their commitment to producing high-quality translations, and the application of the two theoretical frameworks adopted in this study, namely, Skopos theory and the scan and balance framework. Płońska<sup>[60]</sup> also discusses the importance of flexibility and creativity in translation, particularly for languages with limited resources, and this study reinforces Płońska's argument by demonstrating how Tshivenda translators prioritise strategies that best convey the intended meaning within the constraints of their linguistic resources.

Beyond identifying challenges and strategies, the study makes significant contributions to the field of translation studies. It highlights the need for developing comprehensive

translation resources and tools specifically for Tshivenda and other minority languages. This finding aligns with the calls for better resource development made by Pym<sup>[53]</sup> and Venuti<sup>[55]</sup>. By providing specific insights into the resource needs of Tshivenda translators, the study adds a targeted perspective to the broader discourse on improving translation practices for minority languages.

The study also has practical implications for translation training programmes. By emphasising the importance of cultural competence, resourcefulness, and adaptability, the findings support Sun's<sup>[61]</sup> recommendations for comprehensive training programmes that equip translators to handle non-equivalence and terminology gaps effectively. Additionally, the study advocates for collaborative efforts within the translation community, echoing the findings of Shomoossi<sup>[62]</sup> and Douglas and Craig<sup>[63]</sup> on the benefits of cooperation among translators and experts in the field in which translation services are rendered. By promoting resource sharing and collaboration, the study suggests pathways to enhance the quality and efficiency of translations.

## 5. Conclusions

This study delved into the intricate landscape of translating Grade 4 Geography concepts from English into Tshivenda, revealing profound insights into the challenges faced by translators and the strategies they employed from their perspective. Cultural disparities and the absence of specific geographical terms in Tshivenda emerged as primary obstacles, compounded by inadequate resources and time constraints. The translators demonstrated resilience and adaptability through innovative approaches such as paraphrasing, borrowing, and cultural substitution, aligning with Skopos theory and the scan and balance framework. These findings underscore the complexity of translation work, particularly in educational contexts requiring accuracy and cultural relevance so as not to mislead the target readers. Practical implications include the urgent need for improved translation resources tailored to minority languages and comprehensive training programmes that emphasise cultural competence and collaborative practices among translators and experts in the field in which translation services are rendered. By addressing these challenges and leveraging effective strategies, the study contributes towards enhancing the quality

and accessibility of educational materials in indigenous languages, thereby promoting linguistic diversity, supporting better learning outcomes, and reducing injustices that come with exclusion. Further research could focus on developing specialised translation tools and resources tailored specifically to indigenous African languages. This includes expanding terminology banks, enhancing online dictionaries, and exploring the integration of machine translation technologies with human expertise to facilitate more accurate and efficient translations.

## Author Contributions

Conceptualization, T.M.; methodology, T.M.; validation, I.P.M.; formal analysis, T.M.; investigation, T.M.; resources, T.M.; data curation, T.M.; writing—original draft preparation, T.M.; writing—review and editing, M.L.K. and I.P.M.; visualization, T.M.; supervision, M.L.K. and I.P.M.; project administration, T.M. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Institutional Review Board (or Ethics Committee) of Tshwane University of Technology (protocol code FCRE/APL/STD/2021/16 and date of approval 27 May 2021).

## Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

## Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical restrictions. Access to the data may be granted upon reasonable request and with approval from the relevant institutional ethics board.

## Conflicts of Interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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