

UNDERSTANDING THE PALI SUTTAS VIA ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS: TRANSLATORS' MISUNDERSTANDING OF PALI GRAMMAR AND IDIOM

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Translation is an attempt to communicate the meaning of a text written in one language to the readers of another, so it is possible that the translators mistranslate the idiom and grammar of the source language. The sacred texts of many religions including Buddhism have been translated into English and some modern languages such as Sinhalese, Chinese, and Tibetan. The Pali *Tipitaka* has been translated into English by renowned Pali scholars in the old days. The translators have to handle two different languages: one, the source language, the other, the target language. Though their works could be considered brilliant as a whole, they also contain some questionable places. These have been discussed by several scholars in the field. Steven Collins's "*The Discourse on what is Primary (Aggañña Sutta)*": *an annotated translation*" published in the *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 21 (4) in 1993 and E.W. Burlingame's translation on Buddhist Legends in three volumes are examples. The aim of this paper is to examine some problems found in the translations of the *Majjhima Nikaya*. The following is an example. The sentence "*bhoto Gotamassa sã jantã dīṭṭhānugatim āpajjati*" has been translated by Ven. Nanamoli as: "Do these people follow the implication of Master Gotama's view?" And I.B. Honer translates it: "These people emulate the views of the honoured Gotama" (MLS 1:22). The *Majjhima Nikaya Aṭṭhakathā* glosses it: "These people have the same view, opinion, outlook as Master Gotama". However, it makes better sense in this context if we identify *dīṭṭha* not as a *sandhi* form of *dīṭṭhi*, but as the past participle of *√disa*, and take the phrase to mean "following what they have seen of him," *i.e.* his example. This meaning is clearly expected when this phrase appears at SN ii.203, AN i.126, AN iii.108, and 251,422. These types of examples clearly show that understanding Pali suttas only through their current English translations can be misleading as they fail to convey the actual meaning of the Pali phrases. Therefore, those who intend to have a proper grasp of the Pali suttas should read and understand the original Pali text, without totally depending on their English translations.