Chapter 1
Introduction

In this world of globalization, it becomes extremely important to know and understand other people, as global communication plays a vital role in international understanding. Communication includes culture. If people know the culture of other people, it helps them communicate better with each other. Also people need to give and take in this period of globalization.

Knowledge of foreign language(s) and culture(s) has become a necessity in the present situation. Further, language and culture are interwoven. In this context, study of proverbs proves very useful and important, as they reflect the culture and the way of life of the people speaking a particular language. Through the study of proverbs of a particular society, one can know about their religious beliefs, customs, rituals, kinship terms, etc. They describe the weltanschauung of the people. The proverbs belonging to the languages, which do not belong to the same linguistic group like German and Telugu naturally differ in their weltanschauung. Translation of German proverbs into Telugu, helps the Telugu learners of German understand and appreciate the cultural differences and similarities. It also helps German Indologists interested in studying the Telugu culture.

Further, very few works have been done involving German and Telugu languages. Meenakshi Reddy has compiled a German-English-Telugu trilingual dictionary in 2011. M.W. Carr has translated some of the Telugu proverbs into English and other European languages in his book ‘A collection of Telugu proverbs – Translated, Illustrated and Explained’, published in 1988. Of late many students from the Telugu speaking regions are going for higher studies to Germany. Some are even working there in different sectors. Slowly the Telugu diaspora is also making its presence in Germany. Therefore, there is a need for more works to be taken up involving German and Telugu languages.
As a German language teacher and also as a native Telugu speaker, I would like to take up this study and contribute to the few existing works involving German and Telugu languages. The Telugu learners of German often would find the cultural component of German difficult to comprehend and to relate to their own culture. This motivated me to undertake this study and produce some material to be of use to such learners.

1.1 General Introduction to Proverbs:

This chapter deals with various definitions of proverbs given by different scholars and some explanations about their origin and usage. It also discusses the importance of proverbs as rhetorical devices and their usage by psychologists, psychiatrists and others.

According to Kindstrand (1978) & Russo (1983) "the definition of a proverb has caused scholars from many disciplines much chagrin over the centuries. Many attempts at definition have been made from Aristotle to the present time, ranging from philosophical considerations to cut-and-dry lexicographical definitions" (in Mieder, 2004:1).

Mieder (1985: 119) has defined the proverb as "a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form and which is handed down from generation to generation".

He also points to some proverbs which refer to the definition of proverbs, for example: “Proverbs are the children of experience,” “Proverbs are the wisdom of the streets,” and “Proverbs are true words.” "Proverbs obviously contain a lot of common sense, experience, wisdom, and truth, and as such they represent ready-made traditional strategies in oral speech acts and writings from high literature to the mass media" (ibid: 3-4.)

Mollanazar (2001: 53) has defined the proverb as "a unit of meaning in a specific context through which the speaker and hearer arrive at the same meaning."

Norrick (1985:78) has proposed the following definition for the proverb: “The proverb is a traditional, conversational, didactic genre with general meaning, a potential free conversational turn, preferably with figurative meaning.”

Proverbs are short, concise, succinct, popular expressions, which contain wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views of our forefathers and which are still in use today to articulate some recognized truth or shrewd observation about human life. They are generally used very
effectively as an advice or as a warning in matters related to practical aspects of life. All types of people, whether illiterate or literate, rural or urban folk, find them very effective in any inter-cultural or intra-cultural communication, both in supporting or refuting any argument. They are used according to the situation and occasion. They ease communication.

Proverbs are known for their great sense of humor, jest, exaggeration and very artistic use of words or sounds. Use of metaphor, antithesis, parallelism, alliteration, rhyme makes them very appealing pieces of verbal art. They have been basically preserved by oral tradition and the origin is generally difficult to trace. Once an expression becomes a proverb, it becomes part of popular wisdom and the users are no longer interested in its origin. In fact, they were long before a part of oral tradition before they found their expression in print.

For a long time philologists, folklorists and cultural historians are busy with tracing the origin, history, dissemination and meaning of individual proverbs and their variants. They are also looking at how proverbs were used in different historical periods. Proverbs reflect the attitudes, mentality or worldview of various social classes at different periods of time. Folklorists and cultural historians are also interested in studying the proverbs that belong to a particular group or that can be grouped under a theme – for e.g. proverbs pertaining to gender issues, marriage etc. They are also interested in the content of proverbs, i.e. what cultural realia are contained in individual proverbs and how they differ from culture to culture in proverbs that might mean the same.

Proverbs are used as most effective rhetorical devices in politics. Adolf Hitler used proverbs in his book Mein Kampf to advocate the military and deadly goals of Nazism. Winston S. Churchill employed proverbs in his speeches and letters to convince the British people and the rest of the world that Nazi Germany had to be overcome by all means (in Mieder and Bryan, 1997). Proverbs are widely used in political speeches by almost all the politicians in India. Sometimes even if they fail to recollect the appropriate proverb, they say “as the proverb ……” and try to take a dig at their political opponents or relate it to the “speech context”.

Mieder (2004), states that proverbs have also been studied and used by social psychologists to help people deal with various behavioral problems including alcohol or drug addiction. He adds that psychologists and psychiatrists have long been interested in proverbs for testing intelligence, attitudes, aptitudes, and various mental illnesses. Also proverbs have been used as teaching tools for centuries to teach moral values and social skills.
In her book titled *American Proverbs about Women*, published in 2012, writes Lois Kerchen that

“Proverbs are difficult to define. While much has been written on what a proverb is, it is more important to understand what a proverb does. A proverb is a short homely statement that teaches a lesson or gives practical advice. There is generally a matter of rhyme and meter to consider and a binary structure that presents a problem in the first half and solves it in the second half. Usually, proverbs contain humor, but that humor, particularly when the subject is women can be bitter, satirical, even macabre.”

She says that the proverbs have been written or said from a male perspective and they expose male chauvinism. Further, she adds that proverbs have been used by modern psychologists to test for personality traits, attitude, schizophrenia, depression, abstracting function, cerebral disease, and cognition, as proverbs are indicators of societal norms.

Talking about the impact of proverbs, she quotes what Charlotte Sophia Burne wrote in *The Handbook of Folklore*: “The morality of a people, what they think is good or evil, what they advise and what they condemn, who is respectable and whose conduct is unacceptable, this can be found in their proverbs and popular sayings”.

Though proverbs differ from language to language according to the social and cultural background of the people, one can still find many universal proverbs in different languages. This can be because of the universal truths about human behavior and thinking. Some of the examples are given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German</th>
<th>English</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Es ist nicht alles Gold, was glänzt.</td>
<td>All that glitters is not gold.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ende gut alles gut.</td>
<td>All is well that ends well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reden ist Silber, Schweigen ist Gold.</td>
<td>Speech is silver, silence is golden.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irren ist menschlich</td>
<td>To err is human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgenstunde hat Gold im Mund.</td>
<td>Early bird catches the worm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeit ist Geld.</td>
<td>Time is money.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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According to Brenda E. F. Beck, Christian missionaries have compiled extensive handbooks of proverbs in many languages in the nineteenth century, as they perceived that the knowledge of proverbs would help them to present Christian ideas more forcefully to the natives of the respective languages.

**The origin of proverbs**

Regarding the origins of the proverbs Mieder (2004), the famous paremiologist, states that:

Proverbs, like riddles, jokes, or fairy tales, do not fall out of the sky and neither are they products of a mythical soul of the folk. Instead they are always coined by an individual either intentionally or unintentionally, as expressed in Lord John Russell’s well-known one-line proverb definition that has taken on a proverbial status of sorts:

'A proverb is the wit of one and the wisdom of many'.

He also explains how a statement can turn into a proverb. He believes that if the statement contains an element of truth or wisdom, and if it exhibits one or more proverbial markers, it might “catch on” and be used first in a small family circle, and subsequently in a village, a city, a region, a country, a continent, and eventually the world. The global spread of proverbs is not a pipe dream, since certain ancient proverbs have in fact spread into many parts of the world. Today, with the incredible power of the mass media, a newly formulated proverb-like statement might become a bona fide proverb relatively quickly by way of the radio, television, and print media. As with verbal folklore in general, the original statement might well be varied a bit as it gets picked up and becomes ever more an anonymous proverb whose wording, structure, style, and metaphor are such that it is memorable.

Furthermore, Mieder (ibid: 10-13) mentions that it is usually quite difficult to trace the origin and history of a proverb in a particular language. So, studying European languages he
proposes four sources for the distribution of European proverbs. Of course he clarifies this point that similar issues have occurred in the dissemination of proverbs in Asian, African, and other linguistic and cultural groups.

These four sources are outlined below:

1. There is no doubt that a considerable corpus of common European proverbs can be traced back to classical times (Greek and Roman antiquity). Since they were loan translated from the same sources, they exist in the many languages of Europe in identical forms. Little wonder then that an exact equivalent of the classical proverb “Where there is smoke, there is fire” can be found in 54 European languages. [In Telugu the proverb is “nippu leenidee poga raadu”]

2. A second source of proverbs for the entire European continent and beyond is the Bible, whose proverbs date back to classical antiquity and early wisdom literature. As a widely translated book, the Bible had a major influence on the distribution of common proverbs since the various translators were dealing with the same texts. Several dozen biblical proverbs are thus current in identical wordings in many European languages, even though speakers might not remember that they are employing proverbs from the Bible.

3. The third source for common European proverbs is Medieval Latin. It must not be forgotten that the Latin language of the Middle Ages had the status of a lingua franca, and as such it developed new proverbs that cannot be traced back to classical times. Many Medieval Latin proverbs in their exact translations have spread to European languages, and they certainly belong to some of the most popular proverbs today. A well-known example is: “Crows will not pick out crows’ eyes”.

4. The fourth source for common European proverbs reverses the historical move of proverbs from Europe to the United States. They are modern texts that have been disseminated since the middle of the twentieth century throughout Europe by means of the mass media. A few American proverbs that are already spreading across the European continent either in the new lingua franca of English or in new loan translations are “A picture is worth a thousand words,” “It takes two to tango,” and “Garbage in, garbage out” (from the world of computers). In his book “Proverbs speak louder than words”, Wolfgang Mieder quotes how Willy Brandt, the renowned German politician changed the famous American proverb “What’s good for General Motors is good for America” (Coined by Charles Erwin Wilson, the then president of General Motors, on 15th January 1953 during a Senate hearing) through
loan translation to fit the European context. In his speech on November 18, 1971 Willy Brandt loan translated the above proverb as “What is good for Europe is good for United States” (English translation as given by Mieder)

The language used in proverbs is sometimes archaic and epigrammatic, or just a play of words. But to be a popular piece of public consciousness, proverbs have to be beautiful. That is what makes them different from aphorisms (short phrases that say something true or wise) or adages (well known phrases that express a general truth about people or the world). As proverbs are pre-formulated and pre-fabricated generalized statements and as they are preserved in their old form of language and style, they provide the missing links in the study of development of any language, which is constantly evolving and changing. They also record and reveal thought process, values, moral and ethical standards of any society. Proverbs touch upon all aspects of human life. Furthermore, in a non-literate society they serve as rules of conduct, and basic wisdom to be adhered to by the future generations. That is why study of proverbs is not only limited to linguists, but is also a matter of investigation for anthropologists, folklorists, philologists and people from other professions.

Proverbs are based on a nation’s unique cultural background. Human culture has much in common, but also has much in difference. The differences of the traditional customs, religions, historical stories, literature works and so on among languages make proverbs culture-specific and thus differ from language to language.

T.V. Ramanarasaiah quotes the following about proverbs in his book “Telugu Saametalu”:

The Germans say “Judge a country by the quality of the proverbs”

The French say “Judge a man by his favourite proverbs”

The Russians say “There is no proverb without its grain of truth”

Proverbs are often referred to as the smallest piece of literature. A large number of proverbs express basic characteristics of human beings metaphorically or allegorically; and human-nature being same, proverbs of all the languages have many similarities even though they may differ in their formal components.

The definition of proverbs may be summarized as “sentences of the folk which contain the essence of their wisdom and experience.”

Further, proverbs with all their characteristics are different from all other units of translation and therefore it is interesting to study them as an object of translation. Archer Taylor says that problems in the study of proverbs are attractive because they involve a small mass of
comparatively accessible material. Hence, I would like to begin my research with the following objectives.

1.2 Objectives

The objectives of this research are:

1. To translate German proverbs into Telugu.
2. To analyze the cultural problems that crop up in any translation from German into Telugu in general and in translation of proverbs in particular.
3. To evaluate the strategies suggested by different scholars for translation of proverbs.
4. To suggest solutions wherever possible to the cultural problems that arise in the translation of proverbs from German into Telugu.
5. To suggest alternatives to the existing strategies wherever it is necessary for translation of proverbs in general.

1.3 Methodology

The German proverbs to be translated into Telugu have been collected from published sources and also from proverb collections available on the internet.

First the translation of the cultural elements is examined, as proverbs contain a lot of cultural elements. Three translations are chosen as case studies for this purpose – Telugu translations of 17 German stories of Grimm brothers, German translation of the Telugu short story ‘paDava prayaanam’ written by Palgummi Padmaraju, and a Telugu translation of the German novel ‘Das fliegende Klassenzimmer’.

Then the selected German proverbs are translated. Initially seven proverbs which are very specific to German culture are translated into Telugu, followed by other proverbs. Different strategies proposed by scholars for translation of problems have been reduced into three main strategies – literal strategy, close/partial equivalent or conceptual equivalent strategy and paraphrase strategy. After translating each proverb, the strategy that is used in translating it is identified. And wherever possible multiple translations of the given proverb are given. Similarities and differences in the cultural elements of the German proverb and its translations are also explained after the translation of each proverb. Further, German proverbs and their translations cited by Meenakshi Reddy in her German-English-Telugu trilingual dictionary and M.W. Carr in his book ‘A collection of Telugu proverbs – Translated, Illustrated and Explained’ are discussed and additional
translations, wherever possible are cited. For each translation, appropriate strategy has been identified.

Finally, on the basis of the translation of all the 69 proverbs, strategies suggested by different scholars for translation of proverbs have been evaluated and a new strategy has been added.

1.3 Conclusion

There are several definitions of proverbs. Proverbs are short, concise, succinct, popular expressions, which contain wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views of the people, speaking a particular language. They record and reveal thought process, values, moral and ethical standards of any society and touch upon all aspects of human life. In a non-literate society they serve as rules of conduct, and basic wisdom to be adhered to by the future generations. They are also known for their great sense of humor, jest, exaggeration and very artistic use of words or sounds. Use of metaphor, antithesis, parallelism, alliteration, rhyme makes them very appealing pieces of verbal art. The definition of proverbs may be summarized as “sentences of the folk which contain the essence of their wisdom and experience.” Normally, it is very difficult to trace their origin. As regards European proverbs, Wolfgang Mieder says that Greek and Roman Classics, Bible and Medieval Latin are the sources. Proverbs are often referred to as the smallest pieces of literature. A large number of proverbs express basic characteristics of human beings metaphorically or allegorically; and human-nature being same, proverbs of all the languages have many similarities even though they may differ in their formal components. Proverbs with all their characteristics are different from all other units of translation and therefore will be interesting to translate them and to suggest solutions to the cultural problems that arise in the process translation.