

What is Translation?

Introduction

Translation is a human activity which enables human beings to exchange ideas and thoughts regardless of the different tongues used. It is part of the phenomenon of language, since originally, when humans spread over the earth, their languages differed and they needed a means through which people speaking a certain language (tongue) would interact with others who spoke a different language.

“Learning to speak means learning to translate” this statement by Octavio Paz shows that the activity of translation is a feature of man, as is the production of language. Translation has always allowed communication between different linguistic communities: the dissemination of new information (scientific, technical, literary...); the discovery of new literary genres (epics, comedy...) and the circulation of literary works (translated from Latin, Greek, other languages...) have contributed to the formation of taste and have made available various forms of knowledge.

In addition to being a means of communication, translation plays an important role in overcoming language barriers. It allows us to highlight the differences in lexical structure and syntactic structure between two languages and thus contributes to the learning of the foreign language.

Translation is present in everyday life. Although we pay little attention to it, we are confronted with translation every day. This is the case, for example, when assembling a piece of furniture. In this case, it is important to have an instruction manual available in the language you use. This allows you to assemble it quickly and correctly while taking advantage of all the information and advice given by the manufacturer. It could indeed be frustrating to buy a piece of furniture and not be able to assemble it because you don't understand the assembly instructions.

Translation allows people to learn about other cultures. Thoughts, meanings, and ideas can be shared through translation. We come to understand the principles, traditions, and values of other cultures and their accumulated wisdom. Translation opens the door to a vast amount of knowledge that would otherwise remain embedded and isolated from the rest of the world.

Translation can simply be defined as a process of rendering meaning, ideas, or messages of a text from one language to another. It demands accuracy, clarity and naturalness of meaning. This means that it is important to consider whether the readers of the target text accept equivalent information just like the readers of the source text do, or not.

Translation is as old as human civilization. Since the dawn of civilization, we, human beings, have been using language to translate our thoughts and ideas. We use a set of symbols or codes to communicate.

Some scholars define translation as an **art** and some others call it a **science**. It is called an art as all good translations are expressions of the creative urge of the translators. Likewise, it is a science in the sense that it necessitates complete knowledge of the structure and norms of the two languages concerned.

Translation is derived from a Latin word “trans- and latum”—together meaning “a carrying across” or “a bringing across. In other words, it means carrying across a message from one text to another, from one person to another and from one language (**source language= SL**) to a different language (**target language= TL**). The SL is defined as the language in which the original author of a message formulated

it, and the point of departure for translation (Nida, 1974) and the TL as the language into which a message is translated from the original or source language (Nida, 1974).

It is best seen as a communication process where the transfer of a message from one language into a new language takes place. Translation is a creative process of reproducing the meaning from the SL to the TL without causing any loss of the original message.

It is often thought that if one is a bilingual s/he can be a good translator, which is not the truth. People having good communicative and writing experiences in both the languages can be good translators.

Definitions of Translation

There are many definitions to translation. Some scholars stated that translation is a process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another (Catford, 1978).

One of the most prominent definitions of translation is stated by Newmark (1988, p. 5) who defines translation as “*rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text*”. This definition stresses on rendering meaning of the source language text into the target language text as what is intended by the author.

Hatim and Munday (2004: 6) define translation as “*the process of transferring a written text from source language (SL) to target language (TL)*”. In this definition they do not explicitly express that the object being transferred is meaning or message. They emphasize on translation as a process.

Nida and Taber (1982: 12), on the other hand, state that “*translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message*”. This definition is more comprehensive than the previous ones. Nida and Taber explicitly state that translation is closely related to the problems of languages, meaning, and equivalence.

Criteria for a Good Translation

A good translation is one that carries all the ideas of the original as well as its structural and cultural features. Massoud (1988) sets criteria for a good translation as follows:

A good translation is easily understood.

A good translation is fluent and smooth.

A good translation is idiomatic.

A good translation conveys, to some extent, the literary subtleties of the original.

A good translation distinguishes between the metaphorical and the literal.

A good translation reconstructs the cultural/historical context of the original.

A good translation makes explicit what is implicit in abbreviations, and in allusions to sayings, songs, and nursery rhymes.

A good translation will convey, as much as possible, the meaning of the original text (pp. 19-24).

Other criteria for a good translation may include:

The knowledge of the grammar of the source language plus the knowledge of vocabulary, as well as good understanding of the text to be translated.

The ability of the translator to reconstitute the given text (source-language text) into the target language.

The translation should capture the style or atmosphere of the original text; it should have all the ease of an original composition.

Denotative and Connotative Meanings in Translation

Chaer (1994:289) says that the lexical meaning refers to the real meaning of a word. It falls into two types of meaning.

1. Denotative Meaning

It is the literal and exact meaning of a word as found in a dictionary. It represents the objective (dictionary) relationship between a word and the reality to which it refers (Crystal, 1987:418). The denotation of a word is its direct, literal meaning as distinct from its connotation, which is its additional, suggested meaning, an implied or associated idea. Denotative meaning is also known by other terms, e.g. denotational meaning, denotation, propositional meaning and cognitive meaning.

In brief, the denotative meaning of a word is simply the commonly accepted meaning or the definition that you would find if you were to look up that word in a dictionary. For example:

- A **green** with fruit (**Green** apples are very tasty as well as healthy.)
التفاح الأخضر طعمه لذيذ وصحي أيضاً.
- **Green** with envy (Her fur coat makes me **green** with envy.)
معطفها الفرو يجعلني اشعر بالحسد
- Green olive زيتون اخضر
- Green bean فاصوليا خضراء
- Blueberry is very blue. التوت البري لونه ازرق غامق.

2. Connotative Meaning

It is the communicative power of a word by virtue of what it refers to (Leech, 1974:15). Yule (2006:57) defines the connotation as the meaning which appears by what the word suggests, or what we associate the word with, that goes beyond its formal definition. It is the conceptual and hidden meaning of a word. Connotation refers to a meaning that is implied by a word. Connotative meanings are often culturally conditioned. A word which has a positive connotation in one culture may actually have a negative connotation in another. For example: the word **dog**, as understood by most British people, has a positive connotation of friendship

and loyalty; whereas the equivalent in Arabic, is understood by most people in Arabic countries has negative association of dirt and inferiority.

- He was very **green** when he started working there. But he is a professional man now.

كان قليل الخبرة عندما بدأ بالعمل هناك، إلا أنه أصبح شخصاً متمرساً (ذو خبرة) الآن.

- Susie's father has died, she is very **blue**. توفي والد سوزي وهي حزينة جداً.

- He is a **chicken**. إنه جبان.

The difference between Denotative and Connotative Meanings

Bell (1991:98-99) makes a good distinction between denotative meaning and connotative meaning saying that “the first refers to meaning which is referential, objective and cognitive and, hence, the shared property of the speech community which uses the language of which the word or sentence forms a part. The second, in contrast, refers to meaning which is not referential but associational, subjective and affective. This kind of meaning, being personal, may or may not be shared by the community at large.” Connotative meaning poses greater difficulty to the translator than denotative meaning because it is variable according to historical period and culture. The wider the gap between the SL and the TL cultures, the more problematic the issue of translatability becomes. Denotation is when you mean what you say, literally. Connotation is created when you mean something else, something that might be initially hidden. The connotative meaning of a word is based on implication, or shared emotional association with a word. For example:

- My oldest brother was the **black sheep** in the family, he was arrested at sixteen.

كان أخي وصمة عار في العائلة. فقد اعتقل عندما كان في السادسة عشر من عمره.

- The parents gave some rules to their kids that were **black and white**.

وضع الابوان بعض القواعد لأبنائهم كانت ما بين الشدة واللين.

- His face went as **white as a sheet** when he saw a burglar at his house.

أصبح وجهه شاحباً عندما (ما ان) شاهد لصاً في منزله.

- He got **caught red-handed** stealing the jewelry.

ألقي القبض عليه متلبساً بالجرم المشهود وهو يسرق المجوهرات.

- My friend's face turned **beet red** when she was caught this morning singing in front of the mirror.

احمرّ وجه صديقتي خجلاً عندما فوجئت صباح هذا اليوم وهي تغني أمام المرأة.

Translation of Denotative and Connotative Meanings

Connotative meaning poses greater difficulty to the translator than denotative meaning because it is variable according to context and culture. The wider the gap between the SL and the TL cultures, the more problematic the issue of translatability becomes. A word may have a positive connotation in one language and a negative one in another. A white dove is an example to show that one word can have two different meanings, denotation and connotation. It either refers to the bird itself (denotation), or it is recognized metaphorically as meaning innocence, purity, tenderness, or peace. The Owl is a bird with a flat face and large eyes that hunts small mammals at night (denotative meaning). Its connotative meaning is that it is a symbol of wisdom in English, but it refers to bad omen in Arabic culture. On the contrary, the hoppoe represents the symbol of wisdom in Arabic, since its name is stated in the Holy Quran.

Ex. **White revolution** means in Arabic a peaceful, bloodless political coup that achieves targets without resorting to the use of violence. However, if violence is used, the revolution is called a **red revolution**.

Black death (الموت الأسود) (الطاعون)

Connotative meaning is one of the most challenging aspects in translation, especially between two different cultures such as English and Arabic. For example,

- He picked up a **stone**. التقط حجراً
- They **stoned** the woman last night رجموا المرأة بالحجارة بالأمس
- This comb has lost most of its **teeth**. فقد المشط أغلب أسنانه
- He was armed to his **teeth**. (كان يحمل الكثير من الأسلحة)

This means that understanding meaning of a word is not merely based on the referred object of the word. Sometimes, a translator also needs to give emotional reaction to the word. The reaction might be strong, weak, positive or negative. this kind of meaning is closely related to individual emotional reaction which, then, is named as connotative meaning. In other words, giving the meaning of a word is not merely from its concrete or abstract dimension, but it also involves the sender's emotional condition.

The Significance of Context in Translation

Translation may be seen as simple as conveying each word from one language to the other but it is much more complex. This is because the context can completely be changed due to a word, sentence or phrase. In English, the exact same word can have multiple meanings, and without context, a translator might easily choose the wrong interpretation.

Given that understanding is the foundation of translation, translation cannot be done without a deep understanding of context. So, what is a context? Yule (1996: 21) defines context as the physical environment in which a word is used. It is the circumstance or situation which influences the meaning of a text.

Generally speaking, context refers to all of the factors that can influence the meaning of a text. This includes, the cultural context, the linguistic context and the intention of the author. When translating a text, it is essential to take all of these factors into account in order to produce an accurate translation. The linguistic context is related to the language of the text, while the cultural is associated with the culture of the text. As for the intention of the author, it guides the translation process, whether it is meant to inform, entertain, persuade, or instruct. For example, if you want to translate a technical manual or a scientific text, you need it to be accurate and clear, if you want to translate a novel, you need to focus on the literary style and emotional depth, while if you will translate a tourist brochure, you have to follow a persuasive way. The importance of context in translation is the main reason why machine translation is often so inaccurate. While some of the most advanced machines try to take linguistic context into account, the linguistic and situational context of text is so nuanced, that a machine will inevitably fail to take into account the context. If the accuracy of your text is important, a human translation is therefore essential.

Types of Contexts

In order to produce truly accurate translations, it is necessary to consider the two types of contexts – linguistic and cultural.

Linguistic Context

Linguistic context refers to the connections between words in the text. This requires an understanding of the grammar and structure of the language and consideration of the word based on its relationship to other words in the text. This type of context is important because the meaning of a word can be changed depending on the other words around it.

- Take the word “**bark**,” for example. If you didn’t know its meanings, you might mistakenly translate it.

This tree has a thick **bark**.

The loud **bark** kept me awake all the night.

- The word “**bank**” will give you two different meanings according to the context in which it is used:

I kept my money in the **bank**.

These flowers generally grow on the river **banks**.

- Also, the word “**date**” can have at least 3 different meanings depending on context and can be used as a noun or verb.

- I’m going to eat a **date**
- Last night I went on a **date**
- That’s my **date** of birth

Cultural Context

A successful translation requires not only linguistic skills but also cultural understanding, as language is inseparable from the cultural context in which it is used. If the cultural context is lost in translation, this will cause misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Therefore, the role of cultural understanding in translation is very significant.

Culture and language are closely interrelated, and language is considered a product of culture. Language reflects the values, beliefs, customs, and traditions of the people who speak it. For example, some languages have words that are specific to their culture, and it is impossible to translate them into other languages without losing their original meaning. Thus, to understand a language fully, it is necessary to understand the cultural context in which it is used. Therefore, when translating, it is essential to consider the cultural context in which the source language was written or spoken, as it can affect the meaning of the text.

Furthermore, cultural differences can create challenges for translators, as they need to accurately convey the meaning of the source text while also ensuring that it is culturally appropriate for the target audience. A translator who lacks cultural understanding may translate a text literally, resulting in a distorted or inaccurate translation. Therefore, cultural understanding is vital for producing accurate and effective translations.

Translation Equivalence

Translation equivalence is an important concept of translation theory. The notion of equivalence is one of the most problematic and controversial areas in the field of Translation Theory. Finding translation equivalents is one of the core problems of the translation process. As Catford states, “the central problem of translation-practice is that of finding TL equivalents” (Catford, 1965, p. 21).

Since translation is a form of communication, it is so important to establish equivalence between the source text and the target text. Nida defines translation as “reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style.” (Nida, 1982, p. 12).

Simply defined, equivalence is the relationship between the ST and the TT. Its main goal is to produce a text in the TL that will have the same effect as the original text had on the receivers of the SL culture. In brief, translation equivalence is the similarity between a word (or expression) in one language and its translation in another.

Many translation scholars have elaborated on the close relationship between language, equivalence, culture and translation. Mona Baker, for example, acknowledges that equivalence is the first element to be taken into consideration by the translator. The role of translator is to recreate the author’s intention in the SL in such a way that enables the TL reader to understand it clearly.

Nida (1964) proposes two main types of equivalence. The first is the FORMAL equivalence, which is a source-language oriented. It focuses on the message itself, in both form and content. This type of equivalence tends to emphasize faithfulness to the lexical details and grammatical structure of the SL, and tries to remain as close to the original text as possible, without adding the translator’s ideas into the translation.

The second type of equivalence is the DYNAMIC equivalence, which is target-language oriented. It focuses on the ideas of the ST not its lexical details and grammatical structure. It attempts to create the original effect of the ST. The aim is to make the readers of the SL and TL understand the message in a similar way.

Importance of Translation Equivalence

As translation is a kind of communication, the principal task in translation is to establish equivalence of the original text in the target language. In other words, any translation involves a kind of equivalence between the source text and the target text; without equivalence, the translated text cannot be regarded as translation of the original text.

General Types of Equivalence

(1) Absolute equivalence:

Where it is easy to guess the equivalent expression of the ST in the TT because the idiom can be directly translated.

A friend in need is a friend indeed. الصديق وقت الضيق

Need is the mother of invention

الحاجة أم الاختراع

(2) Similar equivalence:

Where the translator should have at least knowledge on part of the idiom if not aware of the equivalent expression. For example:

عين

Eye Spring Spy, Lord

The naked truth Optical

(3) Different equivalence:

Where literal translation is unacceptable because it would not carry the same function of the expression and the idiom does not have a straight forward equivalence in the TL. For example:

To add insult to injury نزيد الطين بلة

Students should be aware that idioms are fixed expressions of a language; they cannot be translated or understood literally. They are meant to stand for something in a language. So, to reach the equivalence the best choice for a translator is to look for an equivalent expression, which has the same function in the TL.

She was sad deep down.

Translate the following:

dry cow	dry sound	dry book
dry bread	dry voice	dry humour
dry wine	dry country	dry run

Heavy rainfall Heavy rainfall ruined the match.	هطول (مطر) غزير خربت الامطار الغزيرة المباراة أو أدت الامطار الغزيرة الى تدمير المباراة
Heavy fog On the night of the accident, there was extremely poor visibility, due to heavy fog.	ضباب كثيف في ليلة الحادثة، كانت الرؤيا منعدمة تماماً بسبب الضباب الكثيف
Heavy losses He felt great sadness at her company's heavy losses.	خسائر فادحة شعر (اجتاحه) بحزن شديد إزاء الخسارة الفادحة التي لحقت بشركتها
Heavy sleeper You won't wake him - he's such a heavy sleeper.	نومه عميق لن تتمكني من إيقاظه - أنه ينام نوما عميقاً
Heavy sea <i>Bodies were rescued despite the heavy sea.</i>	بحر هائج تم انتشال الجثث برغم البحر الهائج
Heavy smoker <i>Sue has been a heavy smoker since senior school.</i>	مدمن تدخين لقد كانت سو مدمنة على التدخين ابان (منذ) المدرسة الثانوية
Heavy industry Many people in our city worked in heavy industry	صناعة ثقيلة عمل العديد من الأشخاص (الناس) في مدينتنا في الصناعة الثقيلة
Heavy traffic The breast of the cow	ازدحام خانق ضرع البقرة
The breast of the woman	ثدي المرأة

أتى على الأخضر واليابس = Destroy everything

My brother can become **a donkey** when he decides on something.

يصبح أخي شخصاً عنيداً عندما يصّر على شيء ما.

A pie in the sky = حلم ابليس بالجنة - حلم بعيد المنال

Kick the bucket = أعطاك عمره = انتقل الى رحمة الله = توفاه الله

Translation Methods

Translation method can be defined as being a way to transfer a text from the source language to the target language. There are several translation methods that may be chosen, depending on the aim of the translation. To choose the proper method, the translator should:

1. Analyze the SL message into simplest and structurally clearest forms;
2. Transfer the message;
3. Restructures the message in the TL to be understood by the target readers.

Many scholars have discussed translation methods. According to Newmark, 1988, p. 45), there are eight methods of translation.

1. Word-for word Translation

That child is intelligent.

ذكيًا يكون الطفل ذاك

This method of translation is often demonstrated as interlinear translation, with the TL immediately below the SL text. It takes the meaning of each word in isolation regardless of differences between both Arabic and English in grammar, word order, context, and special usage. Moreover, it focuses on the source language and the target should follow it step by step. It is used by novice translators because they find it seems a very easy way to translate. However, this method is very risky because it does not consider the target language and relies on the source language only. In addition, it does not take account of the grammars of both languages, namely when these two languages descend from two very different families such as English which is an Indo-European West Germanic language and Arabic which is a Semitic language. Furthermore, this method does not take both languages word order into account. This method also neglects the context which is very important to understand the meaning of a given sentence. Likewise, it ignores the metaphorical use of words which represents the culture of language. Finally, this method cannot find equivalents which do not exist in the target language. So, example (a) above can be corrected as: ذاك الطفل ذكي

2. Literal translation

This type of translation preserves the grammatical structures of the SL where they are translated into their nearest TL equivalents. Words are translated out of context paying no attention to their connotative meanings. The following example illustrates this point.

Let us shake hands... دعنا نتصافح بالأيدي

To throw dust in the eyes... يلقي التراب في العيون

He is living from hand to mouth... انه يعيش من اليد الى الفم

Hold your horses; we still have plenty of time... أمسك خيولك، لدينا الكثير من الوقت

This method of translation resembles the first one (**word-for-word translation**) in two main aspects:

- (a) It considers the source language word order.
- (b) It emphasizes on having the same kind and number of words.

However, it differs from it in two points:

- (a) It does not neglect context.
- (b) It finds metaphorical equivalents in the target language for metaphorical words in the source language.

3. Communicative Translation

This method of translation attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the original to be comprehensible to the target reader. It tries to create the effect of the SL on the TL reader. It is preferred by many translators because it resorts to concepts that are more familiar to the TL reader on cultural contexts. It is usually used for culturally specific idioms, proverbs or clichés where the translator replaces a SL word or concept with one that already exists in the TL. For some linguists, communicative translation 'is produced, when, in a given situation, the ST uses a SL expression standard for that situation. This method of translation is preferable for road signs, greetings, colloquial phrases and compliments.

Charity begins at home... الأقربون أولى بالمعروف.

Diamonds cut diamonds. لا يقل الحديد إلا الحديد

A fox is not taken twice in the same snare... لا يلدغ المؤمن من الجحر مرتين

Jack of all trades and master of none...

Still waters run deep...

Enough is as good as a feast..

Stages of Translation

As translation is considered an interpretation of a source text meaning to reproduce an equivalent text meaning in another language, the most important task for translation “lies in the preservation of ‘meaning’ across two different languages” (House, 1977: 25). To convey meaning, translators must take different decisions. So, the work of the translator is nothing but taking decisions. Decision making can be seen as a mental action which results in a good translation. A good translation is one that carries all the ideas of the original as well as its structural and cultural features. To produce such a kind of good translation, translators must be well aware of stages of translation.

Stages of Translation Process

There are three main stages, levels or steps for any translator who begins his/her work in the field of translation: analysis of the syntactic and semantic structures of the SL text; transfer from the SL to the TL; and restructuring the underlying form of the transferred text. Nida (1984: 99) maintains that the translator is working at all three levels at the same time so that s/he would be able to get both the underlying and the surface meanings of the text. These stages are as follows:

1. Analysis of the ST

The first phase of the translation process consists of reading the text. The reading act, first, falls under the competence of psychology, because it concerns our perception. When a person reads, his brain deals with many functions in such rapid sequences that everything seems to be happening simultaneously. Simply reading a text is, in itself, an act of translation. Novice translators as well as student translators are advised to master the basic reading comprehension skills. They should read for gist and main ideas, read for details and identify the meaning of new words and expressions using one or more components of the structural analysis clause; prefixes, suffixes, roots, word order, punctuation, sentence pattern, etc. They should identify the writer’s style: literary, scientific, technical, informative, persuasive, argumentative, etc. They should also identify the language level used in the text: standard, slang,

etc. The translator should be concerned with how deep he should go in the analysis of the SL structure. From a theoretical standpoint, the translator is advised to go to the deepest abstract meanings of structures to be able to obtain the propositions. S/he should go into the deep structures of texts.

Accordingly, it can be found that there are three major steps in the process of translation. Firstly, a translator needs to discover the meaning of the message in the source language (there is a text to be translated). After the translator gets the meaning, the process of determining the meaning that related to the communicated is needed. Finally, a translator needs to re-explain or re-express the meaning (the message) in target language using the translation equivalent.

In this stage, translators are advised to do the following:

- Identify beginnings and endings of ideas in the text and the relationships between these ideas.
- Identify the "accurate" meaning that fits into the context;
- Identify the structure in the Target Language that "best" represents the original;
- Identify transitions between ideas and the "best" connectors in the target language that represent the original.

Besides, translation scholars argue that the **processes of analyzing** a translation may consist of:

- (a) Analyzing grammatical relationship between constituent parts.
- (b) Identify the meanings of the semantic units.
- (c) Finding the connotative meanings of the text.

2. Transfer of Meaning into the TL

Translation is simply defined as the process of transferring message or meaning from source language to target language. As languages use their components in different manners to compose texts, the situation is even made more difficult when cultural factors are involved in the transfer process. It is noted that cultural elements are more resistant to translation than linguistic

ones. The active task of the translator, then, starts at this stage. The translator has to sense the cultural elements embedded in the text and consider them in the transfer.

Though the translator is advised to consider the original text, at least, at paragraph level in her/his analysis, s/he should also look into the meanings of individual items because they are used to construct sentences which are used to compose texts. The translator needs to study the words so that s/he would be able to recompose the original meaning. Many lexical items have multiple meanings according to different contexts. For this reason the translator is required to establish which meaning s/he is dealing with in a particular setting.

3. Recomposition of the ST

The role of the translator at this level is to transform the text from its underlying level (transfer stage) to text composition. At this stage the translator uses his/her skill and theoretical knowledge. The translator should know how the TL employs its vocabulary to form natural appropriate sentences. A natural structure in the TL does not mean that it should be grammatical only, but also it should not look strange to the receptors (even if it is grammatical).

Notice how the word 'أبيض' is translated in the following text:

فرفع إبراهيم الحجاب عن وجهها الأبيض وعينيها السوداءوين:

Ibrahim lifted the veil away from her beautiful shiny face and dark eyes.

If the word 'أبيض' is translated literally, it will mean 'pale' or 'scared'. 'White' is not the right word to use in this context. One rarely refers to skin as being a certain color.

The translator, then, has to transfer the text according to the following steps:

- Use correct word order as used in the target language.
- Use correct sentence structures as used in the target language.
- Transmit the ideas of the text in a clear, accurate and natural way in the target language.
- Rephrase certain sentences to convey the overall meaning translated;
- Make changes to the text as a whole to give it a sense of the original without distorting the original ideas.