

Chapter 1 Form and Meaning

What is translation?

Translation, by dictionary definition, consists of changing from one state or form to another, to turn into one's own or another's language (The Merriam-Webster Dictionary 1974). Translation is basically a change of form. When we speak of the form of a language, we are referring to the actual words, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, etc., which are spoken or written.

These forms are referred to as the surface structure of a language. It is the structural part of language which is actually seen in print or heard in speech. In translation the form of the source language is replaced by the form of the receptor (target) language. But how is this change accomplished? What determines the choices of form in the translation?

The purpose of this text is to show that translation consists of transferring the meaning of the source language into the receptor language. This is done by going from the form of the first language to the form of a second language by way of semantic structure. It is meaning which is being transferred and must be held constant. Only the form changes. The form from which the translation is made will be called the SOURCE LANGUAGE and the form into which it is to be changed will be called the RECEPTOR LANGUAGE. Translation, then, consists of studying the lexicon, grammatical structure, communication situation, and cultural context of the source language text, analyzing it in order to determine its meaning, and then reconstructing this same meaning using the lexicon and grammatical structure which are appropriate in the RECEPTOR LANGUAGE and its cultural context. The process may be diagrammed as shown in Display 1.1. Let us look at an example. Assume that we are translating the Spanish sentence "Tengo sueño," into the Aguaruna language of Peru. This Spanish form consists of the verb form teng- 'have', the suffix - 'first person', and the word sueño 'sleep.' The combination means that "a person, the speaker, is in the state of being sleepy." To convey this same meaning in Aguaruna one would use "Kajang pujawai,"

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RECEPTOR LANGUAGE

SOURCE LANGUAGE

Text to be translated

Translation

Even if one is able to make an adequate translation without detailed analysis, it should be of interest to all translators to study the process of translating by Semantic analysis.

It is relatively easy to handle the transfer for simple sentences used in everyday conversation.

For example, one easily learns such differences as the following:

English: What is your name?

Discover the meaning

Re-express the meaning

MEANING

Spanish:

Como se llama? (literally "how yourself you-call?")

Display 1.1

which consists of the noun *kaja*- 'sleep' the suffix-*ng* 'my, and the verb *puja* 'live' with the suffix-withird person indicative'. A very literal translation of the Spanish into English would be "I have sleep, and of the Aguaruna "My sleep lives. Neither of these would be a good English translation. The appropriate English translation would be "I am sleepy." (I first person, 'am 'be', and an adjective sleepy). The three languages use different grammatical forms and different lexical selections to signal the same meaning (see Display 1.2).

RL

RL I am sleepy

Tengo sueño

Kajang pulowai

Aguaruna: Amesh waltoa?

(literally "you-doubt who-are-you?") It is not simply a matter of different word choices, but of different grammatical structures as well. We expect greetings to have varying forms. But notice the following additional example of the forms used to express the meaning that a person, who is the speaker, possesses money": English uses I have money, Japanese and Latin use forms which literally say to me there is money, Arabic and Russian use for us which literally say with me there is money and Aguaruna and Turkish use forms which say my money exists.

Translators will almost never have problems with these common expressions. They hardly think about the fact that the grammatical form and the lexical choices are so different. But as they move into unfamiliar material or into higher levels of syntactic structure with complicated sentences and discourses, there is a tendency for choices of lexical items and grammatical forms in the receptor language to be unduly influenced by the lexical items and grammatical forms of the source language. The result will be forms which sound strange and "foreign" to speakers of the receptor language. For example, a German speaker may say in English, "The child has fever, it is ill." instead of "The child has a fever, he/she is ill," because of the influence of the German, "Das Kind hat Fieber, es ist krank." In English there needs to be an article, a, before fever, and child is referred to by a masculine or feminine pronoun rather than the neuter pronoun, it.

We are familiar with the kinds of mistakes non-native speakers of a language make. If analyzed, these errors almost always reflect the lexical and grammatical forms of the person's mother tongue. He has translated literally the form from his own language (the source language) and, therefore, his speech in the receptor language is unnatural. For example, a brochure used in an advertisement for tourists in Belem, Brazil says, "We glad to you an unforgettable trip by fantastie Marajó Island," meaning "We offer you an unforgettable

Person (speaker) is in stare of being sleepy

Display 1.2

It is true that persons who know both the SOURCE LANGUAGE and the RECEPTOR LANGUAGE well can often make the transfer from one form to the other very rapidly, without thinking about the semantic structure overtly. However, for complicated texts, and when the translators may not be equally fluent in the two languages (if they are mother tongue speakers of only one), the study of the principles to be presented here will enable them to make a more adequate translation.

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trip to fantastic Marajo Island." In another place the brochure says, "Beyond all those things, enjoy of delicious that your proper mind can create. Marajó is inspiration, meaning "And above all, enjoy the delights which your own mind will create. Marajo will inspire you." A look at the Portuguese on the other side of the brochure shows that the unnatural English was the result of following the form of the Portuguese source language in making the English receptor language translation. Todo effective translation one inust discover the meaning of the source language and use receptor language forms which express this meaning in a natural way,

It is the purpose of this book to familiarize the reader with the basic linguistic and sociolinguistic factors involved in translating a text from a SOURCE LANGUAGE into a second language, i.e., the RECEPTOR LANGUAGE, and to give them enough practice in the translation process for the development of skills in cross-language transfer. The underlying premise upon which the book is based is that the best translation is the one which (1) uses the normal language forms of the receptor language, (2) communicates, as much as possible, to the receptor language speakers the same meaning that was understood by the speakers of the source language, and (3) maintains the dynamics of the original source language text. Maintaining the "dynamics of the original source text means that the translation is presented in such a way that it will, hopefully, evoke the same response as the source text attempted to evoke. Characteristics of language which affect translation

There are certain characteristics of languages which have a very direct bearing on principles of translation. First, let us look at the characteristics of meaning components. Meaning components are "packaged into lexical items, but they are "packaged differently in one language than in another. In most languages there is a meaning component of plurality, for example the English-s. This often occurs in the grammar as a suffix on the nouns or verbs or both. In Aguaruna, however, plurality is a component of the verb stem itself and cannot be separated out for many of the more common verbs. If the actor is singular, the first form will be used, if plural, the second

Form and Meaning A study of any dictionary will indicate the amazing "packaging" of meaning components in lexical items. In Otomi (Mexico), one single word means watch sheep by night. All of those components are in a single lexical item. In Vietnamese, there is a word which means someone leaves to go somewhere and something happens at home so that he has to go back home. Many times a single word in the source language will need to be translated by several words. For example, a projector was called the thing that shows pictures on the wall by the Chipaya of Bolivia

Second, it is characteristic of languages that the same meaning component will occur in several surface structure lexical items (forms). In English, the word sheep occurs. However, the words lamb, ram, and we also include the meaning sheep. They include the additional meaning components of young (in lamb), adult and male (in ram), and adult and female (in ewe). In Huambisa (Peru), lamb would need to be translated by sheep its child," ram by sheep big." and ewe by sheep its woman."

Third, it is further characteristic of languages that one form will be used to represent several alternative meanings. This again is obvious from looking in any good dictionary. For example,

the Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary gives fifty-four meanings for the English word run. Most words have more than one meaning. There will be a primary meaning the one which usually comes to mind when the word is said in isolation - and secondary meanings - the additional meanings which a word has in context with other words. In English, we can say the boy runs, using run in its primary meaning. We can also say the motor runs, the river runs, and his nose runs, using run in secondary senses, i.e., with different meanings. But notice the following comparison with Spanish. Motors and noses do not run in all languages. ENGLISH
SPANISH

The boy runs. The motor runs. The clock runs.

El niño corre (runs). El motor funciona (functions), El reloj anda (walks).

1. tupikaw he runs

2. pishale

they run

His nose runs.

Su nariz chorrea (drips)

1. eletut

he sits

2. pekemisen

they sit

1. wew

he went

2. shiaku

they went

This principle is not limited to lexical items for it is also true that the same grammatical pattern may express several quite different meanings. For example, the English possessive phrase my house may mean the house I own, "the house I rent," "the house I live in,"

OVERVIEW OF THE TRANSLATION TASK "the house I built," or "the house for which I drew up the plans, "Only the larger context determines the meaning. Notice the following possessive phrases and the variety of meanings:

Form and Meaning Compare also the following uses of by:

John was stopped by the policeman John stopped by the bookstand.

my car

ownership

my brother

kinship

my foot

part-whole (part of my body) actor-activity (I sing)

In the first, by is used to signal the meaning that the policeman is the agent of the action. In the second, by signals that the bookstand is the location.

In the Acholi language of Sudan, the word oto has various meanings depending on the words with which it occurs. Notice the following:

my singing

my book

ownership or authorship (the book I own, or, the book I wrote)

Latin *ato*.

The child is dead.

my village

residence (the village where I live)

Agulu *ofo*.

The pot is broken.

my train

use the train 1 ride on)

Mac *olo*.

The fire is gone out.

Whole sentences may also have several functions. A question form may be used for an onquestion. For example, the question "Mary, why don't you wash the dishes?" has the form of a question, and may in some context be asking for information, but it is often used with the meaning of command or suggestion, rather than a real question. It is then a rhetorical question. (The matter of translating questions will be discussed in chapter 22.) A simple English sentence like "He made the bed," may mean either "He made (as a carpenter would make) the bed." or "He put the sheets, blanket, and pillow in neat order on the bed."

Just as words have primary and secondary meanings, so grammatical markers have their primary function and often have other secondary functions. The preposition *on* is used in English to signal a variety of meanings. Compare the following uses of *on* with the corresponding form used in Spanish.

We have seen that one form may express a variety of meanings. On the other hand, another characteristic of languages is that a single meaning may be expressed in a variety of forms. For example, the meaning "the cat is black" may be expressed by the following: the cat is black, the black cat, and the cat, which is black, depending on how that meaning relates to other meanings. In addition, the meanings of "Is this place taken?" "Is there anyone sitting here?" and "May I sit here?" are essentially the same. The speaker is indicating a desire to sit in a certain seat. In Pidgin, the meaning "He gave me a book" stays essentially the same whether one says "amigivine wanpela buk long mi" or "em i givim mi wanpela buk." Also, the meaning is essentially the same in the following English sentences (example from K.L. Pike):

Juan encontró un libro *en* (on) el suelo,

John encontró un libro *sobre/de* (about) matemáticas.

John found a book *on* the floor. John found a book *on* mathematics John found a book *on* Tuesday. John found a book *on* sale.

Juan encontró un libro *el* (the) martes. Juan encontró un libro *a* (at) la venta (*en rebaja*, *en barstillo*).

Others blamed John because of the difficulty. Others blamed John for the difficulty. Others blamed the difficulty on John. Others said John was responsible for the difficulty Others accused John of being responsible for the difficulty.

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The goal of a translator should be to produce a receptor language text (a translation) which is idiomatic: that is, one which has the same meaning as the source language but is expressed in the natural form of the receptor Language. The meaning, not the form, is retained.

The following is a literal translation of a story first told in the Quiché language of Guatemala (Fox 1959:174):

It is said that being one man not from here, not know where the his or the he comes where. One day these things he walks in a plantation or in them the coastlands, he saw his appear ance one little necklace, or he thought that a little necklace the very pretty thrown on the ground in the road. He took the necklace this he threw in his mouth for its cause that coming the one person another to his bchindness, for his that wor he encounters the one the following this way in his bekindness, not he knows and thar the necklace the he threw in his mouth this one snake and the man this one died right now because not he knows his appearance the snake or that the he ate this not this a necklace only probably this snake.

Now compare the above with the following less literal translation of the same story:

We have seen that even within a single language there are a great variety of ways in which form expresses meaning. Only when a form is being used in its primary meaning or function is there a one-to-one correlation between form and meaning. The other meanings are secondary meanings or figurative meanings. Words have these extended meanings and in the same way grammatical forms have extended usages (secondary and figurative functions).

This characteristic of skewing," that is, the diversity or the lack of one-to-one correlation between form and meaning, is the basic reason that translation is a complicated task. If there were no skewing, then all lexical items and all grammatical forms would have only one meaning, and a literal word-for-word and grammatical structure-forgrammatical structure translation would be possible. But the fact is that a language is a complex set of skewed relationships between meaning (semantics) and form (lexicon and grammar). Each language has its own distinctive forms for representing the meaning. Therefore, in translation the same meaning may have to be expressed in another language by a very different form. To translate the form of one language literally according to the corresponding form in another language would often change the meaning, or at least result in a form which is unnatural in the second language. Meaning must, therefore, have priority over form in translation. It is meaning which is to be carried over from the source language to the receptor language, not the linguistic forms. For example, to translate the English phrase he is cold hearted, i.e., his heart is cold (meaning "he is unfeeling, has no emotional sympathy") literally into Mambila (Nigeria) would be understood to mean he is peaceful not quick-tempered, and if translated literally into Cinyanja (Zambia), it would mean he is afraid (Barnwell 1980:12). In this case, it is not a secondary meaning but a figurative meaning which is causing the difference.

Unless the source language and the receptor language are closely related languages, from the same language family, it is not likely that there will be much correspondence of form between the source text and the translation. The nature of language is that each language uses different forms and these forms have secondary and figurative meanings which add further

compliantions. A "word-for-word" translation which follows closely the form of the source language is called a literal translation. A literal translation is useful if one is studying the structure of the source text as in an interlinear translation, but a literal translation does not communicate the meaning of the source text. It is generally no more than a string of words intended to help someone read a text in its original language. It is unnatural and hard to understand, and may even be quite meaningless, or give a wrong meaning in the receptor language. It can hardly be called a translation

It is said that there once was a manor from here, and I do not know his town or where he came from), who one day was walking in a plantation for in the coastlands). He saw a little necklace, or rather, what he thought was a very pretty little necklace, lying on the road. He grabbed this necklace and threw it into his mouth because there was someone coming along behind him, and he did not want the other person to see it. Well, he did not know that the necklace which he threw into his mouth was really a snake. The man died in short order, because he did not recognize from its appearance that it was a snake. He did not loow thar what he had put in his mouth was not a necklace, but rather a snake.

In the first, each Quiché word was replaced by the nearest English equivalent. The result was nonsense. In the second translation, the natural forms of English lexicon and grammar were used to express the meaning of the Quiché story. Below the story is again rewritten in a more idiomatic English style:

I'm told that there once was a stranger from some other town who was walking in a plantation along the coast. As he walked

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along he suddenly saw a wry pretty little necklace lwng on the road. He snatched up the necklace and threw it into his mouth because there was another person walking behind him and he didn't want him to see the necklace. The stranger didn't know that the necklace was really a snake. He died inmediately. He died because he didn't realize that it was a Snake; he didn't know he put a snake into his mouth, rather than a necklace.

6. I came; I saw, I conquered.

I came, saw, and conquered. 7. Two weeks later he came.

After two weeks he came. 8. There is a table in the book.

There is a book on the table. 9. The young man had a Greek grammar book stolen.

A Greek grammar book was stolen from the young man. 10. He was awakened by a thunderclap.

A thunderclap awakened him.

Anything which can be said in one language can be said in another. It is possible to translate. The goal of the translator is to keep the meaning constant. Wherever necessary, the receptor language form should be changed in order that the source language meaning not be distorted. Since a meaning expressed by a particular form in one language may be expressed by quite a different form in another language, it is often necessary to change the form when translating.

B. List as many grammatical forms as you can which realize the same meaning as the one

given below. Then put the same meaning into a language other than English in as many forms as you can.

Ex. the cat is black

the black cat the cat, which is black

EXERCISES -- Form and Meaning

A. Identifying change of meaning versus change of form. Some of the following pairs of sentences differ in their form. Some differ in meaning. Indicate if the primary change is in the form or in the meaning,

1. the water jug 2. John bought a car 3. a hot day 4. mother's long blue dress 5. Peter's house

Ex. They robbed the old man.

The old man was robbed by them.

Answer: Change of form 1. The students like to study semantics.

The students like studying semantics. 2. I bought a pair of horseshoes.

I bought a pair of leather shoes. 3. He saw the bird.

She heard the cat. 4. Phillip went walking

Phillip took a walk 5. Go to bed.

I want you to go to bed.

C. All of the following have the same grammatical form. With the change of lexical items, there is a change of meaning which is signaled by that lexical item, apart from the referential meaning of the word itself. What meaning is signaled in each of the following possessive phrases? Answer by restating. How can that meaning best be expressed in another language which you speak?

Ex. the man's car - the man owns the car

the man's eye - the eye is part of the man 1. the doctor's office 2. the doctor's patient 3. the doctor's book

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4. the doctor's brother 5. the doctor's hand 6. the doctor's house

12. (a) In my opinion, the government is doing well and making many improvements in the country. But there are many people who do not agree that this is so. (b) Opinions are divided concerning the government. Some

say they are doing well and making many improvements in the country. Others do not agree.

D. (Adapted from Barnwell 1986:24 -5.) For each pair of sentences, state whether the two sentences are (1) the same in meaning or (2) different in meaning.

1. (a) It rained all night.

(b) Rain fell all night.

2. (a) There is a book on the table.

(b) There is a table in the book.

3. (a) John was very surprised when he heard the news.

(b) The news very much amazed John when he heard it.

4. (a) It was a hot day.

(b) The day was hot.

5. (a) Peter's house.

(b) The house that belongs to Peter.

6. (a) He remained silent.

(b) He did not say anything.

7. (a) I bought cloth to make Mary a new dress.

(b) I bought a new dress for Mary.

8. (a) I bought vegetables in the market.

(b) I bought tomatoes and onions in the market.

9. (a) My parents are well. .

(b) My mother and father are well.

10. (a) John is ill; he has a bad case of malaria.

(b) John is very ill indeed.

11. (a) There are four rooms in the house.

(b) The house has four rooms and a kitchen at the back.