Translation: Definition, Types, and Process

1. Definition of Translation

Translation is commonly defined as the transfer of meaning from a source language (SL) to a target language (TL). It is not merely the replacement of words but a complex cognitive and cultural activity that involves conveying the intended meaning, tone, and function of the source text while adapting it to the norms of the target language. Translation serves as a bridge between languages and cultures, enabling communication, knowledge transfer, and cultural exchange (Munday, 2016; Baker, 2011). According to Eugene Nida (1964), translation can be approached through two main equivalence models:

- **Formal Equivalence** focuses on the exact linguistic form and content of the source text.
- **Dynamic Equivalence** emphasizes eliciting the same response or effect in the target audience as in the source audience.

Peter Newmark (1988) adds another perspective: translation can be semantic, aiming at precise meaning and form, or communicative, prioritizing readability and audience understanding.
Christine Durieux and Marianne Lederer, following the Interpretive Theory of Translation (ITT), stress that translation is an interpretive and decision-driven process. It involves understanding the sense of the text beyond literal words and reformulating it creatively to suit the target audience while maintaining its communicative effect (Durieux, 2009; Lederer, 1994).

2. Types of Translation

Translation can be classified in various ways depending on the medium, purpose, or method.
2.1 Based on Medium

- **Written Translation:** Involves translating written texts such as books, articles, contracts, and manuals.
- **Oral Translation (Interpretation):** Involves translating spoken language, either **simultaneously**, **consecutively**, or in whispering interpretation.

2.2 Based on Purpose or Text Type

- **Literary Translation:** Includes novels, poetry, and essays. Requires attention to style, tone, rhythm, and literary devices.
- **Scientific, Technical, or Specialized Translation:** Involves technical, scientific, legal, or medical texts. Prioritizes accuracy, terminology, clarity, and precision.
- **Audiovisual Translation:** Includes subtitling, dubbing, and media translation, requiring adaptation for timing, cultural references, and audience reception.
- **Transcreation:** A modern approach, especially in advertising or creative texts, where the translator adapts the text creatively to preserve effect, humor, or emotional impact rather than literal meaning.

2.3 Based on Strategy / Approach

- **Literal Translation:** Word-for-word translation, often suitable for technical texts but may fail in literary or culturally rich content.

- **Free Translation:** Focuses on **meaning and effect**, often rephrasing extensively for the target audience.
- **Semantic vs Communicative Translation (Newmark):** Semantic retains original structure; communicative adapts to target readers.
- **Formal vs Dynamic Equivalence (Nida):** Formal aims at linguistic fidelity; dynamic aims at equivalent impact.

3. The Translation Process

The translation process is a structured, cognitive, and decision-driven activity that occurs in stages. While different scholars describe it differently, integrating Durieux, Lederer, and the interpretive theory yields a comprehensive model:

3.1 Comprehension
The translator first reads or listens to the source text and fully grasps its meaning, context, style, intention, and subtext. This stage involves more than understanding words: the translator interprets emotions, implications, and the communicative purpose of the text (Lederer, 1994).

3.2 Deverbalization
Once comprehension is achieved, the translator temporarily detaches from the source-language form. The focus shifts from words to the sense, meaning, and function of the text. This mental abstraction allows the translator to avoid literal or misleading translations (Seleskovitch & Lederer, 1984).

3.3 Reformulation
The translator then expresses the meaning in the target language, adapting vocabulary, grammar, and style while preserving the intended effect. Creative decisions are made here to balance fidelity to the original with readability, cultural appropriateness, and communicative function (Durieux, 2009).

3.4 Revision and Proofreading
After initial translation, the text is reviewed for accuracy, coherence, and style. Terminology, cultural references, tone, and technical correctness are checked. This may involve iterative adjustments, especially in specialized or literary texts.

3.5 Decision-Making
Durieux emphasizes that translation involves constant decisions at every stage, influenced by:
- Linguistic and semantic factors
- Cultural and pragmatic factors
- Audience expectations and purpose of the translation
- Constraints such as time, medium, and text type

Translation is thus a dynamic, context-sensitive, and iterative process, requiring not only linguistic skill but also cognitive and cultural judgment.

Conclusion

Translation is a complex activity that combines linguistic knowledge, cultural awareness, and cognitive skill. It is not just the transfer of words but the interpretation of meaning, followed by creative reformulation. Understanding its definitions, types, and process helps translators make informed decisions, adapt texts effectively, and achieve the desired communicative impact.

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