

KEY TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES (PART 02)

In this lecture, you are going to explore some fundamental techniques that translators use when transferring meaning from a source language to a target language. These techniques are expansion, reduction, compensation, and restructuring, and they are essential for achieving translations that are both faithful to the original text and natural in the target language.

1- Expansion: الترجمة بالإضافة

Also known as **amplification**, **expansion** happens when the translator adds words or phrases that are not explicitly stated in the source text but are necessary in the target text for clarity or naturalness. Why do they do this? Well, every language encodes meaning differently, and sometimes the target language requires more information to convey what is implicit in the source.

Example:

Consider the English sentence: “*He shrugged.*” If we translate this literally into Arabic, it might be unclear or feel abrupt. So, it can be expanded into “هَزَّ كَتْفِيهِ بِلا مِبَالاةً”—he shrugged carelessly—which adds a nuance that the target language needs to fully convey the intended meaning.

Vinay and Darbelnet, back in 1958, classified this as an oblique translation technique, meaning it departs from literal word-for-word translation to preserve meaning. Newmark also emphasizes this in his 1988 textbook, noting that expansion is crucial when the source text implies ideas that the target text would otherwise fail to convey.

2- Reduction: الترجمة بالحذف

Reduction, also called **Omission**, is almost the opposite of expansion. Reduction involves removing elements from the source text that are redundant or unnecessary in the target language. Some languages are naturally more concise, and often, certain words in the source are already implied in the target.

Example:

Take the sentence “*She whispered softly.*” In English, the adverb *softly* is required to describe the whisper. But in Arabic, simply the verb “هَمَسَتْ” conveys the same idea, because whispering already implies softness.

Reduction helps maintain naturalness and avoids redundancy, and it is particularly important in literary translation, where excessive literalness can disrupt flow and rhythm. As House (2015) points out, reduction is also essential in spoken language and dialogue, where brevity can improve comprehension and readability.

3- Compensation: التعويض

Compensation is a technique used when the translator cannot convey a stylistic, cultural, or rhetorical element exactly where it appears in the source text. Instead, the translator restores or recreates it elsewhere in the target text. Why is this necessary? Because some features—puns, humor, idioms, or rhyme—simply cannot be transferred literally without losing their effect.

Examples:

While the English language only has one way of saying ‘you’, French has both ‘tu’ (informal) and ‘vous’ (formal). By making specific word choices elsewhere in the text, the translator can compensate for the loss of nuance.

Another example about the English language that only has one way to indicate “plural”, Arabic has ‘المتى’ and ‘الجمع’. So the translator has to add the number or the word two to express the same idea.

Newmark emphasizes that compensation allows translators to retain the expressive force of the original, and Chaume (2012) shows how crucial this is in all forms of translation, including audiovisual translation.

4- Restructuring: إعادة التركيب

Finally, restructuring, sometimes referred to as transposition. Restructuring involves changing the grammatical or syntactic structure of the sentence to make it sound natural in the target language. It can involve reordering clauses, changing word classes, or reformulating phrases.

Example:

The English sentence: “After finishing the work, he left” may be translated into Arabic as “غادر بعد أن أنهى العمل”. The meaning is preserved, but the structure is adapted to fit Arabic syntax.

Vinay and Darbelnet classify this as transposition, while Newmark highlights that restructuring is essential to maintain textual coherence and stylistic flow, especially in literature and formal writing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, these four techniques—expansion, reduction, compensation, and restructuring—are tools that translators use to bridge the gap between languages. They help ensure that the target text is faithful to the source, but also readable, natural, and culturally appropriate. Translation is not just about words; it’s about meaning, style, and effect. As Vinay and Darbelnet (1958/1995), Newmark (1988), House (2015), and Chaume (2012) all argue, a good translation is the result of careful choices and creative problem-solving.

References:

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