Translation and Non-Isomorphism of Lexicons.

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Introduction

Translating from one language into another is not merely a skill but an art. Moreover, different languages have different concentrations of vocabulary depending on the culture, geographical location and the world view of the people. Consequently, mismatching of lexical systems between two languages (L1 and L2) often occur. Such "non-isomorphism of lexicons" is often the cause of difficulties in translation, particularly at the lexical or word level.

Definition of Translation

Linguists define the act of translating between a source language (L1) and a target language (L2) as the "replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent material in another language."

Translation is "the act of communicating the same meaning explicit or implicit in a second language as was communicated in the first.

Translation then, is always performed in a given direction, either from a source language (SL) into a target

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language (TL) or vice versa. In making a translation, the central problem is in finding TL translation equivalents. This need not be a word to word "equivalence". Presumably, the "judge" of such translation equivalence is a bi-lingual who is adept and fluent in both languages (SL and TL).

According to Robert Lado (1961, p. 261), the ability to translate is not merely a skill, but rather, "an art" where special talent and training is required.

In making a translation, it is essential to study the lexicon, grammatical structure, communication situation, and cultural context of the source language text, analyzing it in order to determine its meaning, and then reproducing this same meaning using the lexicon and grammatical structures which are appropriate in the target language and its cultural context.

Diagrammatically, this can be illustrated as follows:
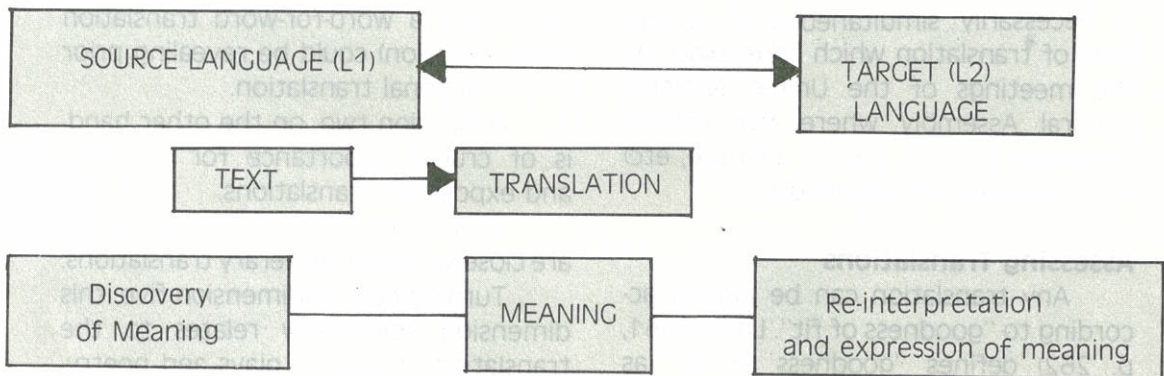
To be effective in translating then, one has to gauge the meaning of the source language and use receptor language forms which reinterprets this meaning in a natural way.

The goal of the translator is to produce a target language text (a translation) which is idiomatic. The meaning, rather than the form, is translated.

Types of Translations

The activity referred to as translation can be categorized into two main types: "written translation and live translation". The former is performed by a translator and the latter by an interpreter.

Written translation deals with graphic symbols while live translation deals with phonic representation.

In either case, the translation can be from L1 to L2 and vice versa. Moreover, the interpreter and translator can be one and the same person. Regarding written translation, however, it is possible to sub-categorize it further. Lado divides this into FACTUAL TRANSLATION a precise translation involving great clarity versus LITERARY TRANSLATION (translation more akin to that of a work of art.)

Factual translation is the type that is most often encountered in today's modern business community and involves

the factual translation of letters, articles, and other expository written material. Literary translation, on the other hand, involves literary translation of precise poetry, drama, and the like. This type of translation is obviously not intended as a factual translation but rather as a literary work in itself.

Live translation, on the other hand, involves an interpreter translating the words of a speaker. Since the memory span of the average human being has limitations (and also for reasons relating to accuracy), this type of live translation is necessarily simultaneous. It is this type of translation which takes place at the meetings of the United Nation's General Assembly where five official languages (English, French, Chinese, etc) are translated simultaneously.

Assessing Translations

Any translation can be judged according to "goodness of fit". Lado (1961, p. 262) defines "goodness of fit" as "the degree to which it (the translation) reproduces the original material."

Obviously, fine distinctions are involved here. It is one thing to talk about "goodness of fit"; it is quite a different matter to translate as such and to assign grades to translation. According to Lado, it involves applying "goodness of fit" to one of the following five aspects of translation according to the type of translation being done.

1. "the letters and patterns of the original"

2. "the meaning of the original at the sentence level"

3. "the connotation of the original for its readers applied to the readers (now) of the translation"

4. "the original as the readers under-

stand it plus the flavour of the original language and culture for the readers of the translation who are aware they are reading a translation"

5. "the original in artistic effect rather than in detail, but keeping at the same time, the form, as in the translation of opera or to metre and rhyme as in the case of poetry"

Looking now at each of these dimensions in turn, the first dimension is not important for literary or scientific translations. However, this dimension could be useful in teaching a second language (L2) where a word-for-word translation (upon occasion) could be revealing prior to a functional translation.

Dimension two, on the other hand, is of crucial importance for scientific and expository translations.

Dimensions three and four, however, are closely related to literary translations.

Turning now to dimension five, this dimension specifically relates to the translation of operas, plays and poetry. Naturally, one has to refrain from "overdoing it" and therefore crossing the boundary between achieving an artistic effect and producing a bad translation (that is, going too far from the original work.).

Testing the Ability to Translate

In testing the ability to translate, the general technique is to use a "performance test" of translation since it is usually regarded as the most valid and practical technique in assessing the actual ability to translate.

It is generally accepted that translating from the native language (L1) to a foreign language (L2) is more difficult than from a foreign language to the native language.

Moreover, translating a piece of work on paper is quite different from an oral interpretation. In testing the ability to translate, therefore, Lado has suggested the following format for a thorough test of a student's ability to translate both written work and orally from L1 to L2 and vice versa.

WRITTEN TRANSLATION
L1 to L2 - various styles
L2 to L1 - various styles

CONSECUTIVE INTERPRETING (ORAL)
L1 to L2 - various fields
L2 to L1 - various fields

SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETING (ORAL)
L1 to L2 - various fields
L2 to L1 - various fields

Needless to say, all of the above skills cover a wide area and there are few people who are equally proficient in all areas of translation. In fact, translators often encounter problems in translating. It is to such translation difficulties that we now turn.

Difficulties in Translation Due to Cultural Mismatch

Different languages have different concentrations of vocabulary depending on the culture, geographical location and the world view of the people.

A common example is that involving eskimoes and their cultural/lexical interpretation of the concept of snow. Whereas in societies where snow is merely a feature of winter and relatively unimportant to every-day survival, snow is very important in eskimo society.

Consequently, English only has one lexical item for snow in contrast to eskimo society where there are several words for different "types" of snow depending on its state (hard, soft, melted snow, and so on).

Linguists refer to the mismatching of lexical systems between two languages (L1 and L2) as the "non-isomorphism of lexicons". This mismatching is often the cause of difficulties in translation, particularly at the lexical or word level.

Non-isomorphism of lexicons is attributable to three main types of mismatching : mismatching of reference; mismatching of semantic sets; and cultural mismatching of lexical items.

Mismatching of Reference

Each lexical item or word has "reference", either to a thing, event or attribute. The ability to "interact" with the "thing" enables native speakers of the language to interpret the meaning of a lexical item. Languages (both L1 and L2) divide the meaning of lexical items differently and arbitrarily. Compare the following English and French lexical "equivalents".

French	MOUTON	
English	MUTTON	SHEEP

Note that French uses "mouton" for both the animal "sheep" and its meat (mutton) whereas English distinguishes between the two in its lexical system.

The numerous lexical items of a language represent a large network of interrelated meanings called a "cognitive network".

Another common mismatching of reference between L1 and L2 involves division of the colour spectrum such as the following comparison of English and Thai colours.

English	RED		MAROON	
Thai	LIUDNOK	DAENG	LIADMU	
English	BLUE	AQUA		TURQUOISE
Thai	Namgan	FA		

In the above reference to "red" is narrower in scope than Thai which distinguishes between "red" and "bird blood red" (a brighter shade of red).

Mismatching of Lexical Sets

As mentioned above, the numerous lexical items of a language represent a large network of interrelated meanings called a "cognitive network". The lexical items may be related to each other in many ways. For example, words which refer to parts of the body may have no meaning components in common but are related to one another since they occur together when people talk about this particular subject (such as the parts of the body).

Another example of such "common" lexical sets are "kinship terms". Compare the following English and Thai lexical equivalents relating to the offspring.

English	BROTHER		SISTER	
Thai	PičaY	NɔŋcaY	PIsǎo	Nɔŋsǎo

As shown in the above comparison, English "divides" this offspring relationship into two different ways in contrast to Thai which divides it into four different ways. English only distinguishes between gender in this relationship whereas Thai distinguishes along the lines of both gender and age. Such differences do not mean that translation between L1 and L2 is not possible. Rather, the translator must be "creative" and "flexible" in translating between L1 and L2.

Moreover, different languages have different concentrations of vocabulary depending on the culture, geographical location, and world view of the people.

In translating between L1 and L2, therefore, the translator will be dealing

with concepts in the two systems of L1 and L2. He will need to partition and label a particular area of reality or experience differently. In his attempts to find the equivalents between L1 and L2, the item in the real world must be found. It is only then that the translator can find and identify the proper (best fit) lexical items or words to use to refer to it; that is, to "translate".

In the actual process of translating then, the concept of "non isomorphism" involves a matter of degree rather than a yes/no situation. ◻■

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ความงาม

ฉีกว่อมีชายอัปลักษณ์คนหนึ่ง วันหนึ่งบิดาของชายอัปลักษณ์ออกไปข้างนอก และได้พบกับซางตวอผู้เป็นชายหนุ่มรูปงาม ซึ่งเป็นที่ร่ำลือกระฉ่อนไปทั่ว เมื่อกลับมาถึงบ้าน บิดาของชายอัปลักษณ์ก็พูดกับเพื่อนบ้านใกล้เคียงว่า "เจ้าหนุ่มซางตวอนั่นน่ะหรือ สู้เจ้าลูก ชายที่บ้านของข้าไม่ได้เลย"

ที่จริงแล้วชายอัปลักษณ์บุตรของเขา มีรูปร่างหน้าตาที่อัปลักษณ์จริงๆ และเจ้าหนุ่ม ซางตวอก็เป็นชายหนุ่มรูปงามจริงๆ การที่บิดาคนนี้รู้สึกว่าชายรูปงามที่เป็นคนอื่นเทียบกับ บุตรอัปลักษณ์ของตนไม่ได้นี้เป็นเพราะอคติความลำเอียงนั้นเอง