

UNDERSTANDING UNITS AND SHIFTS IN TRANSLATION

Ahmedov Azimjon Ilkhomovich
teacher of Andijan State Institute of Foreign Languages
Kholikulova Hilola Ravshanbek Kizi
student of Andijan State Institute of Foreign
Languages Xoliqulovahilola01@gmail.com

Translation is a complex and nuanced task, requiring not just linguistic proficiency but also a deep understanding of cultural and contextual subtleties. Two crucial concepts in translation studies are "units" and "shifts". These concepts help translators navigate the intricate process of transferring meaning from one language to another.

Translation Units

A translation unit is the smallest segment of a text that can be translated as a whole. This could be a word, phrase, clause, sentence, or even a paragraph, depending on the context and the complexity of the text. Identifying the appropriate translation unit is essential because it influences how the meaning is conveyed in the target language.

Types of Translation Units:

1. **Word Level:** Individual words can sometimes serve as translation units, especially in technical or specialized texts where precision is critical.
2. **Phrase Level:** Common phrases or idiomatic expressions often require translation as units to preserve their meaning and connotations.
3. **Clause and Sentence Level:** In more complex texts, clauses or entire sentences might be treated as single units to maintain coherence and ensure the accuracy of the conveyed message.
4. **Paragraph Level:** Occasionally, a whole paragraph might be considered a translation unit, particularly in literary or highly contextual texts where the overall tone and style are crucial.

Choosing the appropriate translation unit depends on several factors, including the nature of the source text, the purpose of the translation, and the target audience's expectations.

Translation Shifts

Translation shifts refer to the changes that occur in the translation process when moving from the source language to the target language. These shifts are often necessary due to differences in linguistic structures, cultural nuances, or stylistic preferences between the two languages.

Types of Translation Shifts:

1. **Level Shifts:** These occur when a grammatical unit in the source language is translated into a different grammatical unit in the target language. For example, a verb in one language might be translated as a noun phrase in another.
2. **Category Shifts:** These involve changes in grammatical categories. They can be further divided into:
 - **Structure Shifts:** Changes in the syntax or sentence structure.
 - **Class Shifts:** Changes in word class, such as translating a noun into a verb.
 - **Unit Shifts:** Changes in the size of the translation unit, like translating a phrase into a single word.
3. **Intra-system Shifts:** These occur within the same system of grammar but involve changes in grammatical features, such as number, gender, or tense.
4. **Semantic Shifts:** Changes that affect the meaning of the text, often necessary to ensure the message is appropriately conveyed in the target language. This includes dealing with idiomatic expressions, cultural references, and connotations.

Examples of Translation Shifts:

- English to German: The English sentence "She is reading a book" might translate to "Sie liest ein Buch," where "is reading" (present continuous tense) shifts to "liest" (simple present tense) due to differences in aspect usage between English and German.

- English to Uzbek: The English phrase "He gave me a hand" (an idiomatic expression meaning "He helped me") might require a semantic shift to "U menga yordam berdi," which translates literally to "He gave me help," to preserve the idiomatic meaning.

The Importance of Units and Shifts

Understanding and applying the concepts of units and shifts is crucial for several reasons:

1. Accuracy: Ensuring that the translation accurately reflects the meaning, style, and intent of the source text.

2. Cultural Sensitivity: Adapting translations to fit cultural contexts and avoid misunderstandings or offensive content.

3. Readability: Producing translations that are natural and easy to read in the target language.

4. Consistency: Maintaining consistency in terminology and style throughout the translated text, which is particularly important in technical and specialized translations.

Conclusion

Translation is more than just substituting words from one language with words from another. It involves a careful analysis of translation units and an adept application of translation shifts to produce a text that is not only accurate but also culturally and contextually appropriate. By mastering these concepts, translators can ensure that their work communicates the intended message effectively and resonates with the target audience.

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