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## PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE OF TRANSLATION IN ARABIC

By  
DR. S.A. SHITTU

**Abstract**

*The paper intends to unfold the problems of methods and technicalities that hinder the success of Nigerian Arabic students in translating text from Arabic-English –Arabic. Therefore, opens its discussion with the kinds of Translation and meaning to be carefully observed in any translation job. It also highlights the four Ts of a translation Project coupled with the purpose of evaluation in a translation project .It emphasizes the role and the purpose of consultant in any translation project .Finally expatiates how initial and Final drafts are prepared in a translation project.*

**Introduction**

Translation, by Contemporary Dictionary's definition, literally consists of changing from one state or form to another to turn into one's own or another's language. While Larson, L Mildred further expatiates: "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 and sentences, paragraphs and so on which are spoken or written. The purpose of this paper 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 by way of semantic structure. When its meaning is being transferred and the following technicalities must be constantly held:

- (a) 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)
- (b) Translation, then, consists of studying the lexicon, grammatical structure, communication situation, 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.

**Characteristics of language which affect translation**

There are certain characteristics of languages, which have a very direct bearing on principles of translation. They are:

1. 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 for instance ; boy – boys ( ولد ) مسلمة-Muslims( مسلمة جمعهم )

2. It is characteristics 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 ewe also include of young (in lamb), adult and male (in ram), and adult: and female (in ewe). In Arabic غنم , كبش , خروف 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”. While Yoruba – *Agbo* and *Agutan* for only male and female respectively.

3. It is further characteristic of languages that one form will be used to represent several alternative meanings. For example, the reader’s Digest Great Encyclopedia Dictionary gives 54 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. For instance ( الدين ) in Arabic primarily means ‘the religion’ while at the secondary level denotes “the day of judgement”.

This principle is not limited to lexical item; it is also true that the same grammatical pattern may express several quite different meanings. For example, the English possessive phrase “my house”(بيتي) may mean “the house I own”. “The house I rent” “the house I live in and “the house I built” or “the house for which I drew up the plans”.

5. Whole sentences may also have several functions. A question form may be used for a nonquestion. e.g. Aishat, why don’t you wash the dishes? Has the form of a question, and may in the same context be asking for an information, but it is often used with the meaning of command (or suggestion), rather than real question. It is then a rhetorical question. We have seen that one form may express a variety of meanings. A single meaning may be expressed in a variety of forms. e.g. 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 meaning of and “may I sit there? are the same. The speaker is indicating a desire to sit on a certain seat. Is this place taken? Is there any one sitting here?

We have seen that even within a language there are 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.

This characteristic of “skewing,” that is the diversity or the lack of one –to-one correlation between forms 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 translation would be possible.

### Kinds of translation

We now examine kinds of translation which could be firstly categorized into two:

i. **Literal translation:** is otherwise known as form based translation. It attempts to follow the form of the source language.

ii. **Idiomatic translation:** is otherwise known as meaning based translation make every effort to communicate the meaning of source message to the receptor language. We have other kinds of translation which are meant for certain purposes such as :

**An interlinear translation:** is a completely literal translation. For some purposes, it is desirable to reproduce the linguistic features of the source text, as for example, in a linguistic study of that language. Although literal translations may be very useful for purposes related to the study of the source language, they are of little help to speakers of the source language text. Therefore, literal translation sounds like nonsense and has little communication value.

Unduly free translations: are not considered acceptable translations for most purposes. Translations are unduly free if they add extraneous information not in the source text, if they distort the facts of the historical and cultural setting of the source language text. Sometimes, unduly free translations are made for purposes of humor, or to bring about a special response from the receptor language speakers. However they are not acceptable as normal translation. For instance: an interpreter may interpret this phrase *الآن تسمعوا ما أقول* *الانتبهوا* could be translated thus: E! Listen are you deaf or asleep. The emphasis is on the reaction of those reading or learning it and the meaning is not necessarily the same as that of the source language.

In one translation; the source text said; *فرحت لما حضر إبراهيم و أحمد لأنهما أتوا بما لم نجد فحق* *(علينا أن نعرفهما* " I was glad when Ibrahim, Kasim and Ahmed arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. For they , refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition". It was also translated as follows; "It sure is good to see Ibrahim, Kasim and Ahmed They make up for your not being here. They are a big boost to both me and you all. Let us give him a big hand". Another translation said: I was glad when Ibrahim, Kasim and Ahmed arrived, because they kindled my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition let us give them a round of applause". The purpose of the translation was to make an ancient text seem contemporary, but the result is an unduly free translation.

In any translation, the translator's goal should be to reproduce in the receptor language a text, which communicates the same message as the source language but using the natural grammatical and lexical choices of the receptor language. Therefore, the goal of idiomatic translation is to reproduce the meaning of the source language (that is, the meaning intended by the original communicator.) in the natural form of the receptor language. However, there is always the danger of interference from the form of the source language. The study of many translations shows that in order to translate idiomatically a translator will need to make many adjustments in form.

### Kinds of Meaning

Translation, then, is communicating the same meaning in second language as was communicated in the first. But to do so adequately, one must be aware of the fact that there are various kinds of meaning. Not all of the meaning which is being communicated is stated overtly in the forms of the source language text. Discovering the meaning of the text to be translated includes; Consideration of both explicit and implicit information. We are to examine the importance of implicit and explicit meaning to the translator. People usually think of meaning as something that a word or sentence refers to. For example the word (تفاحة) Apple refers to the fruit produced by a certain tree. People know the meaning of Apple because they have seen an apple and learned to call it apple. This kind of meaning is called **Referential Meaning** – because the word refers to a certain thing, event, attribution, or relation which a person can perceive or imagine. If information is put together and expressed by a variety of combinations, as they are “packaged” into larger and larger units it is called **Organizational Meaning**. For instance, if the word apple has been referred to in the text and then apple is referred to again, and the fact that it is the same apple is part of the organizational meaning of the text. Certain information in that text may be the topic, other information commenting on the topic and some information may be more central to the message that is more important or more prominent. Therefore, organizational meaning puts the referential information together into a coherent text. Organizational meaning is signaled by deistic, repetition, groupings, and by many other features in the grammatical structure of a text.

**Situational Meaning:** is also crucial to the understanding of any text. The message is produced in a given communication situation. The relationship between the writer or speaker and the addressee will affect the communication where the communication takes place, when it takes place, the age, sex and social status of the speaker and hearer, the relationship between them, the presuppositions that each brings to the communication, the cultural background of the speaker, the addresses, and many other situational matters resulted into situational meaning. For example; The very same person may be referred to in various lexical items. A man named (Profs Said Malik, and Razaq 'Deremi Abubakre may be referred to by their first names as Sa'id, or Razaq, Professor Malik or former Head of Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies University of Ibadan or Abubakre former Dean of Arts University of Ilorin respectively depending on the situation. This choice carries the situation to be formal or informal.

A friend who refers to him as Sa'id as he greets him in the morning may later in the day call him Professor Malik when introducing him at a University seminar or meeting. Therefore, different lexical forms will be chosen to indicate situational meaning. Lastly, a text may be completely unintelligible to someone who does not know the culture in which the language is spoken because there is so much situational meaning may need to

be included in a more overt form if the same total meaning is to be communicated to the readers.

### **Steps in a Translation Project**

**Establishing the project for translation;** Before one considers the beginning of a translation project, there are number of matters, which need to be clearly understood by all who will be involved. They are known as Four Ts: **The text, The target, The team** and **The tools**, (i) The text is the source language document which is to be translated. ii. The target refers to the audience for whom is the translation being prepared iii. Team refers to the people who will be involved in the project. If a person is a competent speaker of both the source language and the receptor language, it means the project can be handled by a single person. But even so there should be others available for evaluation and consultation. Most translation projects require a team, a number of people who are going to contribute to the translation at some stage in the project. The working relationship between these people needs to be established before the project gets under way. It may, however, also change as the project moves along and as new factors come into focus. There are certain essentials to any translation project. Not all of these need to be found in one person. The team may consist of (a) co-translators, where one is sp cialist in the source language and the other is a specialist in the target language (b) a translator with capability to handle both source and receptor language matters and an advisor or consultant, or (c) a committee working together with specific responsibilities delegated to each one. The team may include the translator(s) a consultant, testers and reviewers, and technical people to do the typing and proof reading. iv. Tools refer to the written source materials, which will be used by the translators as helps. These include, in addition to the document to be translated, dictionaries, lexicons, grammar, cultural description and so on of both the source language and receptor language that are available. The team must request as much information available as possible while translating. All of these tools must be brought to the translation site in preparation for the project. Once the matters of the text, the target audience, and the team relationships are cared for, and the tools needed made available, the project is ready to begin.

The project will follow a series of steps, which include preparation, analysis transfer, initial draft, reworking the initial draft, testing, polishing, and preparing the manuscript for the publisher or final presentation.

**Exegesis** in translation job is used to be referred to the process of discovering the meaning of the source language text which is to be translated. It includes the preparation and analysis, which must be done before anything at all, can be written in the receptor language. The text must be understood completely. This is the process that takes place in moving from the source language form to the semantic structure, that is to the meaning of the text. The translator(s) should begin by reading the text several times,



then by reading other materials that may help in understanding the culture or language of the source text. As he reads, he will be looking for the author's purpose and the theme of the text. He will look for larger groupings or sections. He may want to outline the text. The purpose is to understand the text as a whole. It is this analysis shall involve resolving ambiguity, identifying implicit information, studying key words, interpreting figurative senses, recognizing when words are being used in a secondary sense, when grammatical structures are being used in a secondary function, etc. The goal of exegesis is to determine the meaning, which is to be communicated in the receptor language text.

**Transfer and Initial Draft** ; After a careful analysis of the source language text, the translator begins drafting piece by piece, section by section. The transfer results in the initial draft. In preparing this draft, the translator is transferring from the source language into the receptor language. As he does he must always keep his target audience in mind .

Before any extensive drafting can be done, the key terms must be determined. Every text has a set of words that are crucial to the content and correct communication of the theme. These need to be decided upon and may need to be checked with other speakers of the receptor language. There are two ways of approaching the transfer and initial draft. Some translators prefer to do a quick rough translation so that the material flows naturally. Then they go back and tighten up the details to be sure that there is no wrong information and no omissions or additions. In this way, the receptor language text is more apt to be in the natural style of the receptor language. Others prefer to prepare a proposition-like semantic draft, being sure that all the information are accounted for, and then reword it for naturalness; that is reword it in the idiomatic form of the receptor language this method leads to an idiomatic translation if careful work is done.

Initial drafts may be read several times before the team is satisfied after all the adjustments needed have been made, that no information is wrong or omitted, that the text communicates clearly in the receptor language and that the form chosen will communicate to the desired audience. While making and reworking this draft, the audience must be always kept in mind.

**Evaluation**; the purpose of evaluation is in three folds: Accuracy, clearness and naturalness. The questions to be answered are

- (1) Does the translation communicate the same meaning as the source language?
- (2) Does the audience for whom the translation is intended understand it clearly?
- (3) Is the form of the translation easy to read and natural to the receptor language especially agreed with grammar and style?

Those helping with the evaluation should be mother-tongue speakers of the receptor language.

The translator will want to have receptor language speakers read the text and then tell back what the text communicated to them. As they read, there will be parts that are hard to read or hard to understand. Anytime there is an indication of a problem in reading,

this should be noted for further checking. Questions need to be carefully formed so that they bring out the theme, the author's purpose, and the relevant facts of the text. Any wrong understanding should be noted and then check with others as well. It is best to have someone who has not worked on the translation, but knows both the source language and the receptor language, translate back from the receptor language into the source language without reference to the original source language text. Does the back translation carry the same information as the original source language text? Any difference will need to be checked further.

It is very important that sufficient time and effort be given to evaluation. Revised Draft After evaluation is carefully done; there will need to be a revised draft made on the basis of the feed back received. Those with whom the translators have checked may have suggested many rewordings that may have expressed misunderstanding and so on. The translation team now works through this material, honestly accepting the evaluation, and rewording the material accordingly. If any key words are changed, the text will need to be checked carefully for consistency in the change made. If some parts were hard for people to read, they may need to be made easier by more redundancy (or less redundancy in another language) by adding more information to clarify participants or theme, or whatever. How much re-drafting will be needed will vary depending on the results of the evaluation.

**Consultation:** In many translation projects, there are advisors or consultants who are willing to help the translator. The translator should note that, the consultant is interested in the Final Draft, which the translator had incorporated the suggestions made by other advisors who had checked the work with mother-tongue speakers for correctness and accuracy.

In conclusion,

The paper had shown the transferring the meaning of the source language into the receptor language by going from the form of the first language by way of semantic structure. Technicalities involved in translation were explicitly analyzed. Characteristics of language that affect translation were examined. Kinds of translation and meaning highlighted will assist the translator in his work. The systematical steps analyzed in any translation project in work shall lead any translator to a successful and fruitful effort.

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