Semotactic Features in Translation

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1. Introduction

The term translation has been defined loosely to cover intra and inter lingual interpretation of verbal messages. Brislin (1976:1) defines translation as the process by which thoughts and ideas are transferred from the source language ⅲthe target language. According lo Ray(1976:92) translation means the transference of meaning from one language to another. Translation for Seleskovitch (1976:92) is often considered as a code-switching operation implying that a sequence of symbols from one language is replaced by a sequence of symbols in another entailing the transference of SL meaning in the RL symbols.

Newmark (1982:7) defines translation as a craft which attempts to replace a written message and/ or statement in another language.

For Nida (l974:11) translation is not a transference of meaning from one language to another; it is concerned with reproducing in the RL the closest natural equivalent of the SL in terms of meaning and style.

This paper is an attempt to shed light on the semantic and syntactic features to be considered in translating a text. Those two types of features work together to create a cohesive and coherent text in the source language. To transfer this text into the target language, the translator needs preserving its meaning and its syntactic features. The paper supplies several examples to verify its hypothesis.

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السمات النحوية والدلالية في الترجمة

الدكتور منذر منهل

كلية اللغات

خلاصة البحث

عند صياغة نص فى اللغة الانكليزية أو العربية يؤخذ بنظر الاعتبار السمات النحوية والدلالية لذلك النص. السمات النحوية لتجعل النص صحيح نحوياً Grammatical والسمات الدلالية لتجعل النص ذا معنى acceptable/ Meaningful عند ترجمة هذا النص من اللغة الاصل Source language الى اللغة الهدف Target language.

على المترجم ان يهتم بكلا النوعين من السمات لان من اهم واجبات المترجم هو الامانة فى الترجمة fidelity ومن شروط هذه الامانة الترجمية ان يحتفظ النص المترجم بذات

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المعنـى فـى اللغـة الاصـل لان الترجمـة باحـد تعريفاتهـا هـى نقـل للمعنـى. وان يحـتفظ الـنص المترجم بالسمات النحوية التى تتوافق بين اللغتين المترجم منها والمترجم اليها. فلا يحول مثلا الاسم الى فعل او الفعل الى اسم ولا يحول الفعل المتعدى الى لازم وبالعكس خاصـة وان اللغـات الانسانية تشترك عموماً ببعض المكونات اللغوية والنحوية.

استعرض البحث بعض تعاريف الترجمة وعلاقة الترجمة بعلم الدلالـة والنحـو ثم قدم عـدد من الجمل الانكليزية وترجمتها بـالوعى لسـماتها الدلاليـة والنحويـة. ينتهى البحث بالاستنتاجات وقائمة المراجع.

2. Translatability versus Untranslatability

This question has been discussed by many linguists and philologists. House (1977:25) describes in detail certain formal features that can not be directly translated, for example, puns, metalanguage, and certain types of literary illusions.

Irman (1970:61) takes a more optimistic view on translatability because all languages are presumably built up from the same elementary units and all appear to have many of the same rhetorical devices such as irony and hyperbole.

Guttinger (1963:65) points out that philologists generally contend that translation is impossible, whereas authors of books on translation are not only pleased but also anxious to have their works translated.

The question of translatability has too often been discussed in terms of absolute rather than relative equivalence. If one is to insist that translation must involve no less information whatsoever, then not only translation but all communication is impossible. No communication whether intralingual, interlingual or intersemiotics can occur without some loss of information. Hence, the fact that some loss occurs in translation should not be surprising, nor should it constitute a basis for questioning the legitimacyof translation.(See Brislin, 1976:63).

Nida (1976:98) agrees with the view that interlingual communication is always possible despite many differences in linguistic structure and cultural features. His argument is based on two factors: (1) semantic similarities between languages due to the common core of human experience; and (2) fundamental similarities in the syntactic structure of languages.

Though Jakobson (1959:238) believes that all cognitive experience and its classification is translatable; he states that poetry by definition is untranslatable. Al-Najjar |1984:24) adds that net only poetry is

untranslatable, sociodialectal features of two distant cultures such as Arabic and English resist translation. There are also instances of stylistic untranslatability.

3. Translation and Meaning

Semantics (the science that studies meaning) has not been able, till now, to offer an answer to every question related to aspects of meaning. Meaning is subject to continual changes because of certain linguistic ant extralingnistic factors, such as changes in the various aspects of life: including customs, social organization and structures, scientific progress, etc.

Meaning has been tackled from different angles by different scholars. Mentalists think of meaning in terms of concepts or ideas; Saussaure's notion of the linguistic sign is an example of such approach. Bloomfield (of the Behaviorism) analyses meaning of a linguistic form in terms of the situation in which the speaker utters, and the response it calls forth in the receiver or listener, i.e. the relation between the stimulus and response. Then Bloomfield excludes the study of meaning from linguistic studies unit "we are able to use science in describing the meaning of any item"

Katz and Fodor limit the scope of meaning to sense relations only; they exclude the context of situation or the non-linguistic world of experience, i.e. they concentrate on sentence meaning rather than utterance meaning. Meaning for Firth is the total network of formal (linguistic) a n d contextual relations that a linguistic item has or enters into (llyas, 1989:44).

The above arguments which shows the size of the problematic area of meaning is certainly reflected in translation since translation means the transference of meaning from one language to another; or as Al-Najjar (91984:21) says that the principal problems of translation are problems of meaning. Translation should be based on a theory of meaning, which would be helpful in analyzing (the source text and selecting the appropriate equivalents.

4. Grammar and Semantics in Translation

Grammar and semantics in translation work together to produce an acceptable sentence or as Chomsky calls it a well-formed sentence. Consider the following sentences:

*1**. The book ate the sandwitch.**
 *2**. The boy are playing outside.**

  Sentence (I) is grammatically correct but semantically odd, because the verb (eat) has the semantic feature ⊦ [+animate] ǀ, that is it needs an animate subject, carrying the feature ǀ+ animate] like man, boy, dog, cat, whereas its subject in the sentence has the feature ǀ- animate] . Hence, the sentence is unacceptable not because of grammar, but because of meaning.

Sentence (2) is not semantically but syntactically incorrect since there is no agreement, i.e. concord between the verb and its subject. Moreover, grammar affects the meaning of a sentence or as Nida and Taber (1969:34) state "grammar does carry meaning", John hit Tom and Tom hit John, for example, have different meanings due to the different grammatical functions which are determined by the order of the same lexical items. Consider the following sentences:

3. Did you answer the question?
4. You did answer the question.

Although have the same lexical items, they carry different semantic interpretations determined by grammar. The above examples make it clear that the meaning of a text is not only determined by the meaning of the lexical items compose it, but also by the syntactic features of these lexical items, i.e. grammatical meaning, a fact which is to be taken in consideration in translation.

4.1 Syntactic Features

     The essence of translation lies in the preservation of meaning in its two main facets, lexical and meaning and grammatical meaning. As far as grammar is concerned, the translator must analyze the syntactic construction in which a lexical item occurs. Consider the following sentences:

A. They put him in the <u>corner</u>.
B. He tried to <u>corner</u> her.
C. He never gets the <u>points</u> of the story.
D. He will <u>point</u> it out.

The meaning of the lexical items corner, point, in (a and c) are quite different from the meanings of the same lexical items in (b and d) because of their syntactic functions, i.e. they are nouns in (a and c) while they are verbs in (b and d). Thus, the translator must translate

these lexical items depending on their grammatical meanings not their lexical meanings.

Grammatical meaning is not only determined by the change in the part of speech of the lexical items; sometimes a lexical item with the same part of speech in two different contexts gives two distinct meanings. The following examples taken from Nida & Taber (1969:57) clarify this point.

E. It is a <u>fox.</u>

F. He is a <u>fox.</u>

G. She will <u>fox</u> him.

The lexical item <u>fox</u> in the sentences (e and f) is of the same part of speech, i.e. noun, but in sentence (g) it has a different meaning from its meaning in (f). The translator depends on the grammar (the pronoun (it) to understand that fox in (e) is a special type of animal (ثعلب), whereas <u>fox</u> in (f) which is also a noun, is used metaphorically to refer to a person. The personal pronoun (he) at the beginning of the sentence forces us to give this sense (شخص ماكر)**.**

The same lexical item fox in (g) is a verb as it comes after a modal auxiliary with the meaning deceives.

Most English verbs can be used transitively and intransitively, a point which the translator has to take into account of in translation since the verb in these two syntactic functions has two different meanings. See the following examples:

H. He <u>runs</u> quickly.

I. He <u>runs</u> the factory.

The intransitive verb run in h has a different meaning from the transitive verb ***run*** in i. They are **(يركض)** and (يدير) respectively.
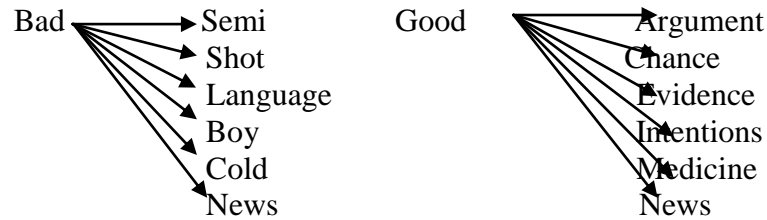
To sum up, grammar itself in many cases determines the right meaning of the lexical item, that is, the syntactic features determined by the position, the lexical item occupies in a sentence noun, transitive verb, intransitive verb. These syntactic features the translator must take into account in translation.

4.2 Semantic Features

Besides the syntactic features, the semantic features are to be specified and underlined in translation. There are two main types of lexical relations: syntagmatic and paradigmatic; in this paper, the former one will be discussed in the following section.

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Nida & Taber (1969:65) state that the specific meaning of a lexical item marked by the interaction of that lexical item with the meanings of other lexical items in its environment. If the lexical item (A) is found in the context of the item (B) it means that only one sense of (A) will fit in that context.

The meanings of good and bad, for instance, in the following expressions are determined by the next Lexical items with which they collocate. See the following figure.

Bad ⟶ Semi   Good   Argument
        Shot   Chance
        Language   Evidence
        Boy   Intentions
        Cold   Medicine
        News   News

It is worthy to mention that the semantic features are more complex and numerous than the syntactic features, though they interact to determine the specific meanings of the text to be translated. This can be clearly seen in the following examples

1. He will head the delegation.
2. The hat fits his head.
3. She bought a head of cabbage.
4. He is the head of the department.

The meaning of the lexical item <u>head</u> in sentence 1 is clearly distinguished from the other sentences by its syntactic features, in that, it is used as a verb which can be clearly distinguished by the modal (will) preceding (it) and the direct object (the delegation) following it. Thus, it is translated into (يترأس. <u>Head</u> in each of the other sentences (2,3,4) is a noun and its meaning is to be determined not by its syntactic features but by its semantic features i.e. the environment or the context in which it occurs since in the three sentences we have nouns.

In sentence 2, <u>head</u> is used in its common sense, i.e., the head of human beings and this is understood from the preceding personal pronoun (his). The meaning of <u>head</u> in sentence 3 is understood by its collocation with cabbage as a concrete noun referring to an animate object. As for sentence 4, <u>head</u> is an example of what is called semantic

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extension, that is, a lexical item is assigned a new meaning derived from its original denotative. (See Al-Najjar, 1997:9). Moreover, <u>head</u> in English is an example of polysemy (one word with several, related meanings). Thus, <u>head</u> as a polysimous word collocates in English with different nouns to get several related meanings. Such expressions are translated into Arabic by claque or loan translation (Ibid).

5. Conclusion.
Both syntactic and semantic features are to be considered in translating each lexical item. The two types of features greatly affect the meaning of words in the given text. Syntactic features include, for instance, the syntactic category of the word, its order in the sentence. Semantic features include both syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations. The paper has shed light on their importance in determining the meaning of words in the text to be translated.

6. References.

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