
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Translation Methods: A Comparison Study between Semantic and Communicative Translation

Emad Jasem Mohamed

English Department, College of Basic Education, University of Misan, Iraq

Corresponding Author: Emad Jasem Mohamed, **E-mail:** imad.jasim@uomisan.edu.iq

| ABSTRACT

Translation plays a key role in conveying the message from one Source Language (SL) to Target Language (TL). However, it does not necessarily refer to two different languages as translation is generally classified into three categories (intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic). Among the existing translation methods, two methods are intensively being compared and debated over: semantic and communicative translation. While the former has a connection to literal and free translation, the latter has been recently and popularly recognized for its importance in the field of translation. The semantic approach tends to preserve the author's language expression by giving utmost importance on its peculiar content and meaning. On the other hand, in the communicative approach, the translator has the freedom to remove obscurities, eliminate repetition and specify the general terms for the comprehension of the audience. Furthermore, translation is not as an easy task as it seems. Successful translation requires complicated multi-task practice that involves the application of various skills. Not to mention the impact of word concreteness and dominance on translation efficiency as well as the continuous improvement in proficiency that all bilinguals need to cope with. Although the two approaches function differently, there are some cases when the application of both methods is required. This is especially true in translating texts where both the "form" and "content" are equally important. In conclusion, the connection and the bond between culture and language cannot be underestimated as they are closely intertwined with each other. In the process of translation, where three main important players (author, translator and receiver) from various cultural backgrounds are involved, no matter how the mediator tries to translate the Source Language to Target Language (either semantically or communicatively), loss of message during the process is inevitable.

| KEYWORDS

Translation Methods, Semantic Translation, Communicative Translation, Source Language, Target Language

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1. Introduction

Translation is a process of conveying meaning or information from one language to another. For Nida, translation is a means of reproducing the receptor language from the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, taking the meaning into utmost consideration and secondly in terms of style. However, for Newmark, translation is a craft consisting of the attempt to replace a written message or statement in one language with the same message or statement in another language (Fengling, 2017). These standpoints reflect major contradictory perceptions between Nida, who emphasizes equivalence, information, meaning and styles and Newmark, who pays more attention to meaning and text.

Furthermore, translation is used for a wide range of purposes. It is used for instructions issued by exporting companies, for tourist publicity, for official documents such as treaties and contracts, and for reports, journals, articles and textbooks in conveying information (Newman). For translators, two factors are significantly considered. First, to relay the translated text and its style in accordance with the writer's ideas. Second, to translate the source text into the receiver's understandable culture and language. The world of translation history has revolved around the literal and free translation approach. That is, concepts are relayed to the target language by literally translating them word-by-word without considering any other factor. However, such a translation

method often fails to take into account that not all texts or text users are the same. Not all texts are as 'serious' as the Bible, nor are all texts 'pragmatic', such as marriage certificates or medicine bottle instructions. From the first century BC to the beginning of the 19th century, many writers favored the Tree translation: the spirit not the letter; the sense not the words; the message instead of the form (Newman 1988). Later on, during the 19th century, cultural anthropology suggested language was completely a product of culture. In the 1960s, Eugene Nida made a stand criticizing the norm in the translation process by stating that translation modes can be categorized into two main approaches: formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence tries to remain as close to the original text as possible without any addition of ideas and thoughts from the translator. For formal equivalence, the more literal the translation is, the less danger there is un corrupting the original message (Shakernia, 2013). Dynamic equivalence, on the other hand, is an approach to translation in which the original language is translated "thought for thought" and not "word for word" like formal equivalence. Furthermore, Jakobson (1950/2000) justified that translation can be categorized into three different forms. First is the intralingual translation – translation of the same language which may involve rewording or paraphrasing. Second is the interlingual translation – the translation from one language to another. Lastly, the intersemiotic translation – the translation of the verbal sign by a non-verbal sign such as music or image. It is important to note that although this paper tends to scrutinize the two famous methods in the translation process, generally, translation studies encompass various disciplines, as shown in the following illustration (Hatim & Munday, 2004):

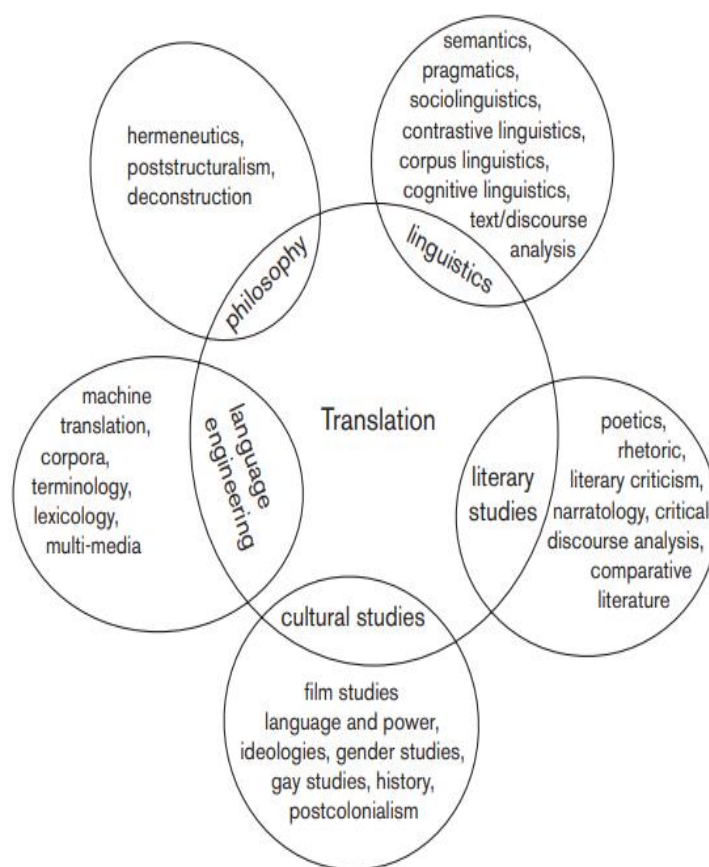


Figure 1: Areas covered by the translation study (Hatim & Munday, 2004)

2. Connection Between Culture and Translation

Language and culture are two aspects that are closely intertwined. Culture as the way of life and all its manifestation is peculiar to a community that uses specific language as their means of expression. Through language, we can distinguish one culture from the other. Moreover, language provides the key to fully understanding various culture and their literature. It has been recognized that languages themselves cannot be fully understood unless they are associated with the context of the culture where they are embedded (Mahadi & Jafari, 2012). Generally speaking, language is more than just mere words and sentences. As Wardaugh (2002) had defined it, it is:

"A knowledge of rules and principles and of the ways of saying and doing things with sounds, words and sentences rather than just knowledge of specific sounds, words and sentences."

Furthermore, he highlighted its relationship to culture as he added:

"The culture of a people finds reflection in the language they employ: because they value certain things and do them in a certain way; they come to use their language in ways that reflect what they value and what they do."

The same language may exist between two different cultures; however, it may be used to refer to different concepts in an entirely different context. Hence, as a mediator or translator, it is of utmost importance to have knowledge and background in these two cultures to be able to relay or translate the message precisely.

3. The Translation Process

For some, translation may seem an easy task. However, it cannot be underestimated as it requires complicated multi-task practice that involves the application of various skills. The translator's job is to mediate between two parties, and his main task is to eliminate misunderstandings. His ultimate responsibility is neither to the reader nor to the writer but to the truth (Newmark, 1988). The following are the process usually employed by translators to successfully relay the intended message to the target audience.

3.1 Identification of the units of translation

Translation unit can be referred to as the smallest unit of SL, which has an equivalent in TL. It is a term used to refer to the linguistic level at which Source Text (ST) is recodified in Target Language (Shuttleworth & Cowie, 1997). According to Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), the unit of translation is "the smallest segment of utterance whose signs are linked in such a way that they should not be translated individually". They also refer to this as the lexicological unit and the unit of thought. Below is an example of translations for the Spanish word *brote* (Hatim & Munday, 2004) in the Oxford Spanish bilingual dictionary:

brote m
a (botanical) shoot; **echar brotes** to sprout, put out shoots
b (of rebellion, violence) outbreak
c (of an illness) outbreak

We can observe that in sense 'c' *brote* refers to 'illness' sense with the corresponding translation *outbreak*. Its translation is the same as sense 'b', except that it refers to rebellion and violence. Meanwhile, sense 'a' describes the botanical sense with the translation shoot (of a plant), and the two-word unit (**echar brotes**) may be translated to sprout or put out shoots. This example clearly illustrates how the translational units may differ for an individual word across languages.

4. Analysis of the text (from the translator's point of view)

The next step in any translation job is for the translator to understand what the text or the phrase is all about and analyze it from his point of view. This process requires both general and close reading. General reading or comprehension helps the translator get the gist or the subject of the Source Text (ST). In most cases, to successfully translate a highly technical type of text, it also needs a technical person or at least a person with some knowledge of the subject to do the job. This is to ensure that the conciseness and the intention of the text are preserved and relayed in the manner it is intended to. On the other hand, close reading is needed to identify the correct meaning of any challenging text. Whenever some things do not make good sense in their context, it has to be looked up for the translator to relay the message correctly. In translating a poem, it is unlikely advisable to translate a sentence or two if you have not read the first two or three paragraphs. Before translating a sentence or a line, there are some preliminary works that need to be done and that include understanding the whole context or poem first or else you may eventually find yourself wasting your time putting a wrong construction on a whole paragraph.

5. Determine the scale of formality

Various texts can be written in various styles and formalities. Newman provided the following example of typical levels of formality:

<i>Officialese</i>	The consumption of any nutriment whatsoever is categorically prohibited in this establishment.
<i>Official</i>	The consumption of nutriment is prohibited.
<i>Formal</i>	Tou are requested not to consume food in this establishment
<i>Neutral</i>	Eating is not allowed here

<i>Informal</i>	Please don't eat here
<i>Colloquial</i>	You can't feed your face here.
<i>Slang</i>	Lay off the nosh
<i>Taboo</i>	Lay off the fucking nosh.

5.1 Attitude Assessment

Furthermore, Newman also emphasized the importance of assessing the attitude and standards of the writer. What is the quality of his writing, his standards pertaining to the context, or what are the standards that are generally accepted in his culture? In some cases, there can be a thin line between negative and positive opinions, and it is important for the translator to determine which side the writer favors. For example, the use of the word "Regime" can be neutral in French, but in English, this implies a negative impression.

During the translation process, the translator may consciously or unconsciously form decisions that impact the way the messages are translated. As Vinay & Darbelnet (1995) had added:

In the process of translating, translators establish relationships between specific manifestations of two linguistic systems, one which has already been expressed and is therefore given, and the other which is still potential and adaptable. Translators are thus faced with a fixed starting point, and as they read the message, they form in their minds an impression of the target they want to reach."

It may sound simple, but behind every translating task, complicated processes are involved in language translation. Not to mention the requirement of abiding by certain regulations, adequate knowledge and experience in both Source Language (SL) and Target Language (TL). In a study conducted by Obdrzalkova (2016), she assessed the difficult aspects encountered by the translators. Her results showed that among the difficulties listed and mentioned by the respondents, style and terminology were perceived as the most difficult aspects they had to deal with in both directions. The issue of style was associated with the translators' concern about producing a natural-sounding text. This was worrisome for most L1 translators (First Language). However, for L2 translators (Second Language), terminology or lexical accuracy bother them more.

6. Semantic Translation

Semantic translation works almost the same as a literal translation. It is committed to analyzing the meaning of words and sentences in the source language, producing a translation that is semantically and syntactically close to the source language. It tends to preserve the original culture restricting any changes in a local expression of the source language. Lui (2004) argued that semantic translation is a kind of art since it fully demonstrates the expression of language in an objective and precise way. Newmark (1988) further claimed that semantic translation is suitable for 'expressive' texts translation where the specific language of the speaker is as important as the content. This is primarily because semantic translation intends to illustrate every detail of the source text's contextual meaning by maintaining its characteristics and expressions. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of the content and form as it attempts to recreate the exact tone and flavor of the original text. Because semantic translation strives to maintain the distinguishing features of the source language, it illustrates the writer's thought-process in the best way (Shi, 2014). Although, in most cases, translators try to translate word-for-word, loss of meaning is still inevitable (Hatim, 2001).

6.1 Challenges in Using Semantic Translation

The distinguishing feature of having a bilingual memory is that it connects two language systems which can differ in so many ways and aspects. In fact, term to term equivalence between languages exists very rarely (Tokowics and Kroll, 2007). Most words have different meanings or senses, which leads to multiple translations in another language. Since proficiency has been increasing, bilinguals are becoming more aware of the language-specific characteristics of meaning and that there is always a distinction between the semantics of two languages. A word that has multiple translations may raise the problem of mapping the word to its "right" translation. Meanwhile, words with one or fewer translations lighten the competition for activation during the translating task. Laxen & Lavour (2010) illustrated these translation challenges in their hypothetical representation of shared semantic nodes between translation equivalents for words with one and words with more-than-one translation equivalent.

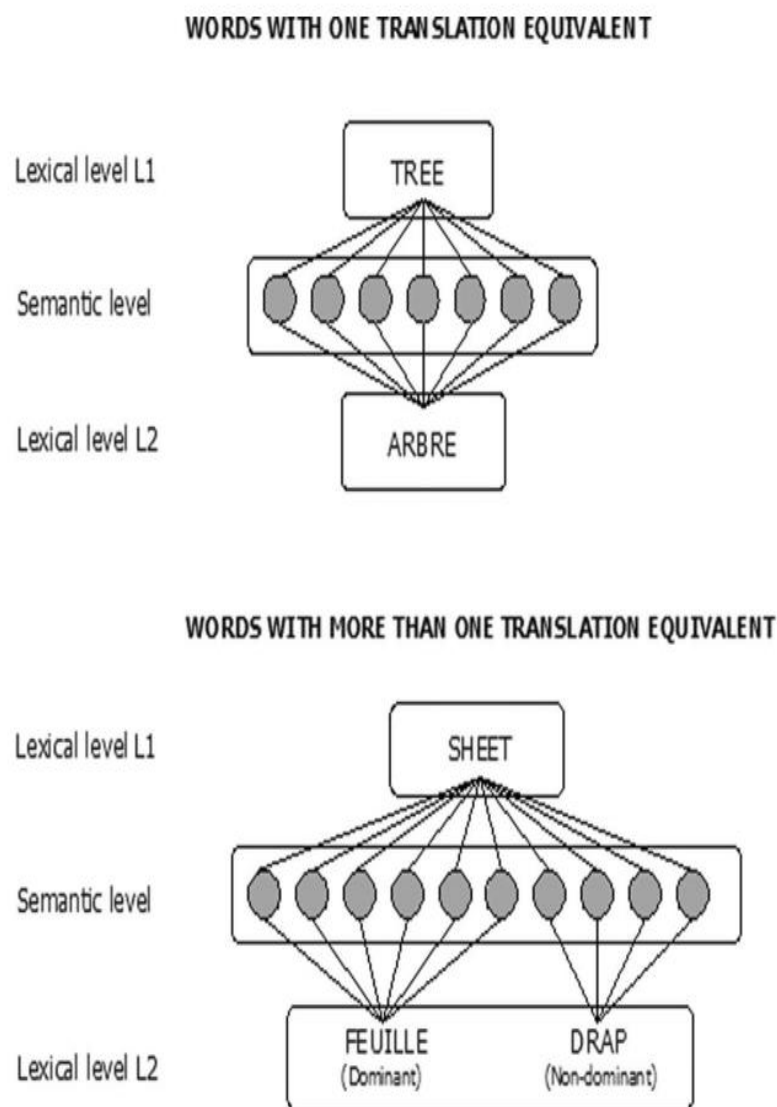


Figure 2: Hypothetical representation of shared semantic nodes between translation equivalence for words with one and words with more than one translation equivalent (Laxen & Lavour, 2010)

In the above illustration, the English word “tree” shares a big part of its meaning (semantic nodes) with its French translation equivalent “, arbre”. For words such as this, translation may be easier and faster. However, for the words with more than one translation equivalent, the translation process may become more complicated. In the above example, the English word *sheet* can have two different translations. It can mean *feuille* (“a sheet of paper”) or *drap* (“a bedsheets”) in French. When a word has more than one translation, one of them may be used more often (dominant translation). In this case, *feuille* is used more often to translate the word *sheet*, thus, activated more often than its counterpart (*drap*). Dominant translations are easily activated due to the fact that it shares more semantic nodes than non-dominant one. It may also generate various translations which correspondingly represent only a part of the whole meaning of the word (e.g. the English translations for the French word *femme* are *woman* and *wife*). Furthermore, according to Laxen & Lavour, the concreteness of the word generally affects the number and dominance of the translation. They hypothesized that concrete words share more of their nodes with their translation equivalent because they have a more precise meaning which is shared between languages. On the other hand, abstract words are more dependent on linguistic context, so the semantic overlap between translation equivalents is smaller. The impact of concreteness and translation dominance in the translation process is evident in their study results.

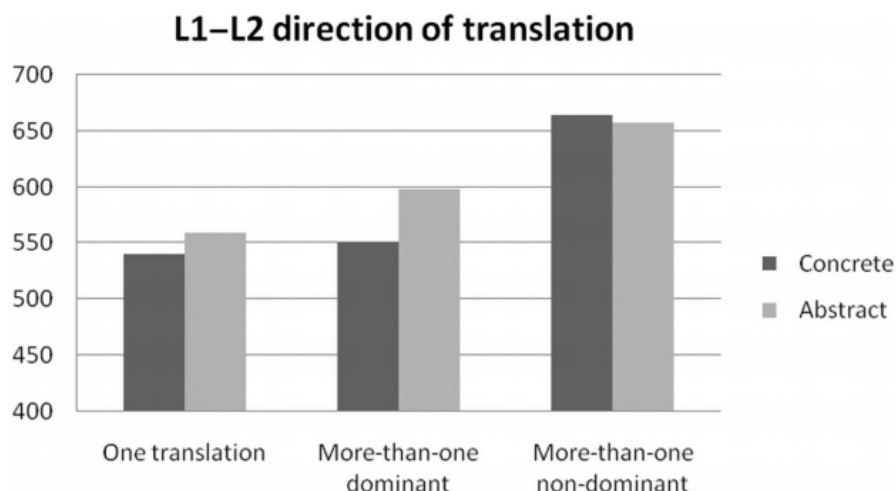


Figure 3: Impact of concreteness in function and dominance of the translation (Laxen & Lavour, 2010)

Aside from the difficulty in choosing the exact translation due to varieties of meanings, other chief difficulties in translating are lexical (i.e. words, collocation and fixed phrases or idioms). Difficulties with words are possibly brought out by two dilemmas: (a) you do not understand them; (b) you find them hard to translate. If the translator cannot understand the word, it's probably because all of the possible meaning are not known to him/her or because its meaning is determined by its unusual collocation or reference elsewhere in the text (Newmark, 1988). According to Newmark, there are at least eighteen types of unfindable words in a source language text. These include the following:

- Neologisms, recent and original, including newly coined forms, new collocations, new terminologies, old words and phrases with new senses, etc.
- Dialect, patois and specialized language which is spoken more often than written
- Colloquialisms, slang, taboo words
- Third language or target language words waywardly introduced into a SL text
- New or out-of-date geographical and topographical terms and 'rival' alternative names
- Names of small villages, districts, streams, hillocks, streets.
- Names of obscure persons
- Brand names, names of patented inventions, trademarks – usually signaled by capitalization and often more or less standard suffixes
- Name of new or unimportant institutions
- Misprints, miscopyings, misspellings, particularly of proper names
- SL, TL and third language archaisms
- Unfamiliar connotations and symbolic meanings of words and proper names
- Familiar alternative terms or words
- Codewords
- Common words with specific SL or third language cultural senses
- Private language or manifestations of 'underlife'
- Exophoric reference
- Dictionary words or words that are rarely used but have time-honoured places in the dictionary.

In addition, one should also be particularly careful in translating proper names. In medical texts, a drug in one country can be marketed under another brand name in another country. In English, first names of foreign persons are kept, while French and Italian sometimes arbitrarily translate them.

6.2 The Communicative Approach to Translation

One main purpose of translation is to communicate the meaning intended by the original author by using different languages for the comprehension of the target audience. For this type of translation approach, emphasizing the force of the message is of utmost importance than the content of the message. Communicative translation focuses more on the social aspect, concentrates on the message and the main force of the text and is always written in a natural and resourceful manner. According to this method, the act of translation must be considered in the context of the communication environment. This may include various factors such as the author of the Source Text (ST), the receivers (recipient) of the ST, the translator, as well as the receivers of the Target Text (TT). Furthermore, the focus of such a communication environment is not on the lexical or the grammar aspect; rather, it's on the environment where human beings act. Since it is viewed as a human activity in the interest of human beings, the translation process is always considered very personal and individual (Sdobnikov, 2011). According to Eugene Nida, one of the pioneering scholars who introduced the involvement of personal factors in the translation process, translating can be defined on the basis in which the receptors can comprehend the translated text in such a way that the original receptors have understood it (Waard, Nida, 1986). Moreover, it does not only rely on the lexical terms and semantic context, nor the mere replacement of SL words to TL words, but most importantly, it is being directly affected by numerous extralinguistic factors making up the whole communication process (Petrova, 2006). Daniel Gile also supported such a claim by stating that a professional translation setting can be significantly triggered by an aim or intention (Gile, 1991). These aims may vary from informing, explaining to convincing objectives. It is when the sender achieves his aim (i.e. to convince or inform), with the help of the mediator, he can consider his communication to be successful. This statement, however, is not perceived to be always true by some theorists. According to Gentzler, it still depends on who is the initiator of the translation process. A person or group may have varied goals or aims different from the source-text author, and it is the initiator's goal that determines both the character and setting of the translation process (Gentzler, 2001). However, in order to achieve the target aim, clearness and fluency, some semantic concepts may be lost in the process. It is also noteworthy to consider the effect of the translator's decision-making during the translation process. This decision-making is often motivated by the following reasons:

Aesthetics. During the translation process, the decision-making process is often driven by a number of fairly subjective factors, and one of them is the translator's own aesthetic standards (Levy, 1967).

Cognition and knowledge. The translator's own socio-cognitive system, which is greatly directed by the translator's culture and system and system of beliefs and values, also plays an important role in the over-all decision-making process of the translator.

Commission. This factor is very much connected with the impact of aim and intentions on the translation process mentioned earlier. Most translation tasks involve certain specifications agreed with clients. This triggers issues of translation purpose, loyalty and conflict of interest (Hatim & Munday, 2004).

7. Semantic vs. Communicative Translation

Theoretically speaking, communicative translation allows more freedom than semantic translation since it gives the translator the chance to explore various motives outside the plain text. It gives the translator the right to remove obscurities, eliminate repetition and specify general terms for the comprehension of the target audience (Ali, 2018). In communicative translation, the translator is more concerned with the "effect" of the relayed message to the receiver. It is likely smoother, simpler, clearer, more direct, conforming to a particular register of language (Hrala & Cenkova, 1995). Meanwhile, semantic translation only follows a single well-defined authority, who is usually the author of the Source Text, emphasizing faithfulness and loyalty to the text writer. Thus, semantic translation is personal and individual, tends to over-translate and pursues nuances of meaning (mm). Its translation is more complex, more awkward, more detailed, more concentrated and is more specific than the original. Semantic translation is more likely economical than communicative translation, and it is more objective than the latter. In general, semantic translation has to interpret, while communicative translation has to explain. Furthermore, Newmark (2001) added that different writing styles are suitable for different methods of translation. Non-literal writing, journalism and popular fiction are suitable for communicative translation. On the other hand, writings such as philosophical, religious, political, scientific, technical or literary require semantic translation. Although, in most cases, a specific type of writing requires a specific translation approach but sometimes, a text may need both semantic and communicative translation, especially when the text relays a general rather than cultural or specific message. This can be true in instances when both the "form" and "content" of the message are equally important (Ali, 2018). Other than a semantic and communicative approach to translation, translation methods involve word-for-word translations, literal translations, faithful translation, adaptation, free translation, and idiomatic translation.

8. Conclusion

The translational units may differ for an individual word across languages, as with the words a, b, and c. In 'c', its translation is the same with sense 'b' as well as it refers to rebellion and violence. Meanwhile, sense 'a' describes the botanical sense with the translation shoot (of a plant), and the two-word unit (echar brotes) may be translated to sprout or put out shoots.

Before translating a sentence or a line, there is some preliminary work that needs to be done, and that includes understanding the whole context or poem first, or else you may eventually find yourself wasting your time putting a wrong construction on a whole paragraph.

During the translation process, the translator may consciously or unconsciously form decisions that impact the way the messages are translated.

A word that has multiple translations may raise the problem of mapping the word to its "right" translation. Meanwhile, words with one or fewer translations lighten the competition for activation during the translating task.

The words with more than one translation equivalent, the translation process may become more complicated. The English word sheet can have two different translations. It can mean feuille ("a sheet of paper) or drap ("a bedsheet") in French.

When a word has more than one translation, one of them may be used more often (dominant translation). In this case, feuille is used more often to translate the word sheet, thus, activated more often than its counterpart (drap). Dominant translations are easily activated due to the fact that it shares.

One should also be particularly careful in translating proper names. In medical texts, a drug in one country can be marketed under another brand name in another country. In English, the first names of foreign persons are kept, while French and Italian sometimes arbitrarily translate them.

However, in order to achieve the target aim, clearness and fluency, some semantic concepts may be lost in the process. It is also noteworthy to consider the effect of the translator's decision-making during the translation process.

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ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3038-2279>

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