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## Free Versus Literal Translation

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### Abstract

This paper is about two extreme methods of translation: free and literal translations. These two methods are important in differentiating between the different translated texts especially because there are numerous other methods between these two extremes.

This paper aimed at presenting a detailed explanation of two important methods of translation: literal and free. The aim is to show the difference between them, and which one is better for using in translating texts.

To do this, the researcher wrote three sections. The first section introduced the concepts to be researched. The second section reviewed the different methods of translation. The third section showed the difference between the two major methods of translation, namely literal and free translation.

The study concluded that literal translation is risky because it ignores the target language. It does not take into account the grammatical distinctions between the source and target languages, even if they may come from different language



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families. Conversely, in the context of free translation, the translator translates freely without constraints. He is not strictly constrained by the source language rules. The type of text or context may sometimes entail the method of translation to be chosen by the translator.

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## List of Abbreviations

Source Language	SL
Source Text	ST
Target Language	TL
Target Text	TT

## Literal Translation

### 1. Preliminaries on Translation

When talking about literal translation, one needs to explain what translation is. The following sections will tackle this concept.

Catford (1975:20) defines the theory of translation as a branch of comparative linguistics that focuses on specific types of relationships between languages. He also believes that "Translation, as a process always contains two directions: it is always performed in a given direction from 'a Source Language ' into ' a Target Language'" (Henceforth SL and TL). Then he defines translation as "the replacement of textual material in one language (source language) by equivalent textual material in another language (target language)." (Ibid.)



Translation is also an activity that is developing gradually in today's world. The study of translation can be known as Translation Studies which is an interdisciplinary field that has developed extremely recently (Hatim and Munday, 2004:xvii). Translation can be defined as a process of replacing a text in one language by an equivalent text in another (House, 2013:13).

## 2. Methods of Translation

Translation should utilise the complete range of resources and lexicon available in the target language. Occasionally, a translator of a literary book may intentionally retain certain terminology in the source language form to evoke the sensation of a foreign environment. Nevertheless, this practice is deemed unacceptable when it comes to legal and technical translation. The TL may not have a comparable word or phrase for the SL. When faced with such situations, the translator is required to convey the underlying idea rather than simply translating the literal word or phrase. In order to address these issues, many translation techniques can be categorised into distinct types such as literal translation, word-for-word translation, faithful translation, communicative translation, adaptation, and free translation. The terminology employed in this particular context comprises the terms technique, way, or strategy. The concept of translation strategy involves a cognitive process that has two distinct phases: the first being the reconstruction of the source language (SL) text, and the second being the reproduction of the target language (TL) text (Wills, 1983:147). Lörcher (cited in Sirriyya, 2009:33) defines translation as "a potentially conscious process used to solve a problem that arises when an individual translates a segment of text from one language to another." Sirriyya observes that based on this definition,





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“he derives the criteria of translation strategies as problem-orientations, potential consciousness and goal-orientedness. He further explains that a problem is defined as such only when the translator considers it as such. Thus, according to him, strategies are not prescriptive, but rather descriptive. In other words, it is not concerned with what a translator should do in order to translate optimally, but rather what he does in fact in the process of translating a text. His work is more empirical than theoretical. Although there are scholars who prescribe certain strategies to be followed in different kinds of translation, we find that each translator contrives a strategy of his own.”

(Ibid)

This is due to the fact that as the translator is a human being, s/he may be influenced by a number of extralinguistic factors. Wills (1983:145) mentions some of these factors as the translator’s mental disposition, his predilection for analytical, hermeneutic or associative processes, his feeling for the historical dimension of a text, motor-sensory operations, attitudinal factors, translation routine, world orientation, the effect of all the textual stimuli and stumbling-blocks that surround the translator. Therefore, Wills denies the existence of a model translation. A translator, he believes, is a human being and he is bound to leave his own “fingerprints” on the work he tackles in the field of translation as well as in other fields of human activity (ibid.). However, different translators of a certain language employ nearly similar strategies to solve similar translation problems. (Sirriyya, 2009:33-34)



These strategies constitute the second phase of the translation operation, i.e. TL reconstruction. The following sections will summarise some of the methods identified by translation theorists.

## 2.1 Rosyd's Methods of Translation

Rosyid (2011:87) identifies eleven methods of translation as follows:

1. Translation refers to the process of converting the sound of a source language (SL) into a target language (TL). This is the act of transcribing the characters of one alphabet into the characters of another alphabet that follows a distinct alphabetical arrangement.
2. Borrowing is a method used to incorporate a source language text (referred to as ST) into the target language (TL) when the TL does not have an equivalent term for the lexical item in the ST.
3. Literal refers to a direct and exact connection in both structure and concept. It encompasses a translation that is exact and literal, preserving the original words.
4. Transposition is a frequently employed technique in translation. It entails substituting a grammatical arrangement in the source language (SL) with a different arrangement in the target language (TL) to accomplish a similar outcome. As an illustration, the phrase 'Good morning' can be translated as صباح الخير.
5. Modulation involves altering lexical elements and shifting the point of view. Modulation and transposition are the primary procedures involved in translating. Simultaneous transposition and modulation can occur. As an illustration, the



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phrase 'No Smoking' can be translated as التدخين ممنوع. The word 'No' can be modulated with the Arabic term 'ممنوع'.

6. Adaptation is employed when other words are inadequate. It entails altering the concept or employing a situational analogy that is similar to the SL situation but not exactly the same. Adaptation can involve both modulation and transposition simultaneously.

7. Omission refers to the absence of translation from the source language (SL) to the target language (TT). For instance, the phrase "He speaks English" is translated into Arabic as "يتحدث الانكليزية" where the word "he" is omitted.

8. This procedure is employed to address issues pertaining to technique, culture, grammar, and other associated concerns in translation. Simultaneous addition and borrowing can occur, as seen by the translation of الرجل طويل into English as "The man is tall," where the word "is" is inserted for grammatical purposes.

9. Subtraction refers to the removal of a portion of the source language text. For instance, the phrase "جامعة الدول العربية" is translated into English as "Arab League," with the term "الدول" being deleted.

10. In a broader sense, "expanded" refers to the expansion of the target language text (TT). For instance, the translation of "pottery" into Arabic is rendered as "صناعة الخزف," where the term "صناعة" is added.



## 2.2 Sirriyya's Methods of Translation

Sirriyya (2009: 31-43), moreover, states eleven methods of translation, which she calls strategies, and they are: Literal Translation, Translation Proper, Loan Blending, Acculturation, Transliteration, Translation Couplet, Translation Triplet, Definition, Paraphrasing, Addition and Deletion. These are introduced in the following sections.

### 1. Literal Translation

Sirriyya (Ibid.: 31) explains this method by saying:

This method involves combining the meanings of the separate lexical components to form the overall meaning of the SL unit. There has been a long, and sometimes even unnecessary, debate concerning literal vs. free translation. Many translation critics condemn literal translation.

### 2. Translation Proper

In this approach, the translation process involves identifying the most suitable native equivalent that a translator aims to deliver. In this context, the translator endeavours to find the most suitable target language counterpart for the source language sign that accurately and efficiently conveys the intended meaning of the source language. The TL sign thus fulfils the two primary objectives of translation.

(Sirriyya, 2009: 35)

The good aspect of this method is that it:





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is likely to be the shortest, in other words, the one nearest to the number of lexical items used in the SL text. Therefore, this strategy can be considered the best method, provided that the meaning is also the nearest or the most accurate, for examples: Prophet نبي, Theft سرقة, god اله .

(Ibid:36)

Sirriyya (Ibid:36) comments on this strategy by saying “In searching for a TL equivalent, the closest optimal equivalent in such cases is the one that gives the denotations and connotations of the SL in the given context.” Nevertheless, the semantic domain of a term in one language is never entirely congruent with the semantic domain of a comparable word in another language. (Nida, 1964:96). Therefore, such equivalents are sometimes provided by means of semantic extension and/or reduction of TL sign. An example of semantic reduction is when the lexical item الحج which means a visit to Ka’ba in the month of Dhul-Hijja along with a lot of religious rituals, is translated into *pilgrimage*, which means a visit to a holy shrine, for this translation reduces some of the meanings of the Arabic word. An example of semantic extension is the translation of the word صدقة into *charity*.

### 3. Loan Blending

This approach involves analysing the morphemic structure of a sign language (SL) sign and identifying its constituent parts. The base morpheme is then borrowed, perhaps with phonetic substitutions if needed, while the remaining morphemes are replaced with target language (TL) morphemes. Typically, these additional morphemes refer to the inflectional and derivational suffixes. The result is a loanblend. For example, خوارج (Khawārij).



#### **4. Acculturation**

Acculturation refers to the process by which a group undergoes changes in their language, culture, and value system as a result of interacting with another group that possesses a different language, culture, and value system. (Cited in Sirriyya, 2009: 37) This method involves the translation of a cultural sign from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL). This method is subject to criticism due to the fact that the act of translating by offering a cultural equivalent is not a completely faithful procedure. However, it does have a practical effect on the reader of the target language (Newmark, 1988:83). For example, when rendering عصبية as "chauvinism" or when وضوء is translated as "ablution."

#### **5. Transliteration**

Transliteration is defined as “the establishing of a strict equivalence between characters in the script of a source language and corresponding characters in the script of a target language.” (Wellisch, 1977:25 quoted in Ibid. ). There are cases in which transliteration is mandatory: proper nouns, addresses, names of private firms, etc. this method may be used “after The translator's search for other counterparts proves unsuccessful, necessitating the implementation of an additional technique.” (Ibid: 38)

#### **6. Translation Couplet**

Here, the SL sign is rendered to the TL by two different methods. Mostly, one of these methods is transliteration. The second translation is usually put between square brackets. The translator may use this method when he feels that one



equivalent will not be sufficient to communicate the precise SL message, and when the original SL sign is important for the TT readership.

### **7. Translation Triplet**

Sometimes two equivalents aren't enough, so "the translator supplements the translation by introducing a third equivalent." Translation triplet. The three counterparts are usually the literal translation, transliteration, and denotative meaning. (Sirriyya, 2009:40).

### **8. Definition**

When using these techniques Because cultures differ in so many ways, it's possible that the translator won't be able to locate a word or phrase that adequately conveys the meaning of an SL indication. As a result, the translator has no choice but to define the SL sign. A transliteration or even a footnote is typically included with this method...The first introduction of the SL sign in the TT usually includes definitions. (Ibid: 41)

### **9. Paraphrasing**

The translator of this method provides "amplification or explanation of the denotations of SL sign or a segment of the ST." (Ibid.)

### **10. Addition**

In this method, the translator provides

any supplementary information or notes which have been dropped in the SL due to different reasons, e.g. the nature of the SL, old metaphors, well established



knowledge in the SL culture, cultural values or things, etc. In this case, the translator is bound to restore this missing information to make the TT intelligible.

(Sirriyya, 2009: 42)

As for the place of these addition, they “are provided within the text, usually between brackets, to indicate that they do not belong to the original ST, or as footnotes. The latter may interrupt the TT reader’s concentration; therefore, it is better to insert the addition within the text. (Ibid.)

## **11. Deletion**

No translation is performed in this strategy because the ST lexical item is deleted for different reasons, such as grammatical, cultural or stylistic reasons.

## **2.3 Newmark’s Methods of Translation**

One common approach to teaching languages is the translation technique. The basic idea behind this approach is that students may acquire a new language by practicing translation tasks in their native tongue, and vice versa. The primary activities in this approach are those involving this translation. From two different vantage points, Newmark (1988:22) lays out eight different translation techniques. Both viewpoints highlight TL, while one places more focus on SL. To translate a text with an SL emphasis, the translator adheres to the SL's common structure, vocabulary, and culture; to translate a text with a TL emphasis, the translator adheres to the TL's structure, vocabulary, and culture in order to help readers better understand the TT. There are four different translation strategies offered by each





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viewpoint. One viewpoint offers literal translation, faithful translation, semantic translation, adaptation translation, free translation, idiomatic translation, and communicative translation; the other offers word-for-word translation, literal translation, faithful translation, and literal translation. Here are the eight methods of translation New mark suggests (Newmark, 1988:25):

1. Literal translation: The Semantic Labyrinth is translated word for word.
2. The second step is literal translation, which involves finding the closest TL form of the SL grammatical terms. There is a lack of context in the translation of the lexical terms.
3. Trustworthy translation: This approach strives to capture the exact context of the source text while adhering to the grammatical structures of the target language. It properly respects the grammatical forms of SL and transfers cultural terms.
4. Semantic translation: This approach takes into account the text's aesthetic value, which is its lovely and natural tone. The approach also makes a concession about a suitable interpretation. That the translation does not suffer from any awkward assonance or repetition.
5. The most liberated kind of translation, adaptation is most often employed for literary works like plays and poems; in this type of translation, the concepts, characters, and storylines of the original text are retained but the culture of the target language is transformed.
6. No form of the ST is used in free translation; instead, the subject or context is reproduced.



7. Idiomatic translation: This type of translation takes the ST's message and replicates it, but it often misrepresents subtleties of meaning since it favours idioms and colloquialisms.

8. The eighth type of translation is known as "communicative translation," and its goal is to convey the ST's intended meaning in a form that the target audience can understand and appreciate.

### **3. Differences between Literal and Free Translation**

From the above sections, it is seen that there are many methods of translation that range from literal to free. Literal and free translations are the main two methods that theorists of translation concentrate on. The following sections will highlight them in more detail.

#### **3.1 Literal Translation**

Literal translation is defined as the process of translating individual words by Ghazala (2008:6-7). Translation is as simple as finding the TL term that means the same thing in SL, independent of any variations in syntax, word order, context, or use. Plus, the SL is the centre of attention, and the TL's job is to mindlessly mimic it and reflect it back to it in an exacting manner. Therefore, it is popular among novices in particular since it appears to be an uncomplicated, basic method of translation. Actually, there are a lot of reasons why this approach is dangerous—it could mess with meaning and translation—including:

1. It gives full and total deference to the SL and pays no attention to the TL at all.



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2. It doesn't take into account the fact that the two languages, which can be from separate families, have distinct grammars. As an example, Arabic is a Semitic language, while English is an Indo-European West Germanic language.
3. The syntax and word order of the target language are transmitted (Newmark, 1988: 69). Word order differences between the two languages are ignored.
4. It doesn't take into account the surrounding words when interpreting a word and just permits words to be comprehended alone.
5. The basic, or commonly understood, definitions of terms are transmitted (Ibid.). It eliminates the possibilities of figurative, indirect, special, or polysemous language usage in this way.
6. It is unable to handle Spanish words without a corresponding Turkish term.
7. It's unacceptable because it treats meaning as if it were a result of words alone.

In this method, “the meaning of the SL unit is composed of the sum of the meanings of the individual lexical items” (Sirriyya, 2009:31). There has been a long, and sometimes even unnecessary, debate concerning literal vs. free translation. Many translation critics condemn literal translation. Nida (1964, quoted in Sirriyya, 2009:34), however, does not reject it as a whole, but he states that “the differences between literal and free translating are... no more positive-negative dichotomy, but rather a polar distinction with many grades between them.” One of the defenders of this strategy is Newmark (1988:68-80). He distinguishes between literal translation and word-for-word and one-to-one translations. In word-for-word translation, SL grammar, word order and primary



meanings of all the SL words are transferred into the TL. One-to-one translation is one step above the previous translation

The grammatical structures of the source language are maintained in the target language by translating them into their closest counterparts. It happens when the SL and TL have structures that are similar to one other. The connotative meanings of words are ignored when they are translated out of context. An example that demonstrates this idea is as follows:

To blind someone with dust = يلقي التراب في العيون

The direct translation of the term "dust" in Arabic is "ashes," so the Arabic idiom "يذّر الرماد في العيون" is also applicable here. The cultural and biological settings of the two languages are distinct enough to provide grounds for this decision.

(Lahlali and Abu Hatab, 2014:6). In other words, *to throw dust into the eyes* can be freely translated into Arabic as يذّر الرماد في العيون.

Dust in the eyes blurs eyesight and impairs vision, thus the English expression to throw dust in the eyes. Arabic uses ashes instead of dust to convey the same meaning. Arabic dust is not supposed to impair eyesight and disguise reality. Deserts and dust storms are unusual in England. Another issue is English religious ceremonies that sprinkle dust on the dead. (Ibid:7)

### 3.2 Free Translation

According to Ghazala (2008:10), autonomous translation has existed since antiquity as a well-established method of translation. Typically, the act of





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translating is linked to conveying the essence or significance of the text, rather than the literal letter or structure (Newmak, 1988: 45). It once obtained widespread acclaim as the superior approach, albeit at the detriment of literal translation, the less effective method of translation. It is a method in which not every single word in a text is translated. It means to translate without restrictions or limitations. The translator is not bound by the literal and readily available meanings of words and phrases, the type of text or context, in the strictest sense. He ventures beyond the confines of texts and contexts, delving beyond words and phrases in an attempt to perceive the spirit or the underlying message. He is capable of translating according to his own interpretation. The degree to which his method of comprehending is constrained by text and context varies considerably. It is possibly the only limitation that he faces. He is limited to the way he comprehends and not the way he desires to translate. The aforementioned terms, including "idiomatic," "communicative," "dynamic," "pragmatic," "creative," and "communicative," which are currently employed in place of "free," align with a number of these connotations.

This approach maintains the semantic integrity of the source text while employing authentic forms of the target language, such as regular word sequence and syntax, to facilitate a natural comprehension of the translation. It provides a more extensive paraphrase of the original while sacrificing form in order to preserve the content. It prefers idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms that are absent in the source language (SL). The subsequent passage is an excerpt from the Arabic translation of Cinderella:



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-Cinderella enjoyed herself immensely at the ball until the moment she detected the initial stroke of midnight. She recalled what the fairy had said and fled the Prince's embrace and dashed down the stairs without exchanging a farewell word. She misplaced one of her footwear while running, but she never considered pausing to retrieve it. It would be an absolute catastrophe if the final stroke of midnight were to occur. After escaping, she disappeared into the night.

- أمضت سندريللا وقتنا في غاية المتعة في حفلة الرقص حتى سمعت دقائق الساعة تعلن حلول منتصف الليل فتذكرت ما قالته الجنية فانسلت من غير بخاطركم ولا مع السلامة بخلسة من بين يدي الأمير ونزلت الدرج بسرعة. وبينما كانت تركض سقطت منها إحدى فرديتي الحذاء لكنها لم تتوقف ولم تحدث نفسها حتى بالتوقف لأنها إن فعلت ذلك فيا ويلها ويا سواد ليلها فركضت مسرعة واختفت في الظلام”.

Notice the lengthier phrases in the TT. For example, 'a lovely time' is rendered as rather than ممتعا. Colloquial expressions are also employed, as seen in the examples below. Without saying goodbye: من غير بخاطركم ولا مع السلامة. What a disaster would that be! Lahlali and Abu Hatab (2014:11)

Ghazala (2008:13-14) mention two types of free translation as the following:

**1. Literal Translation:** This kind of translation is directly taken from the context, although it may deviate from it by exaggeration, expressiveness, and the use of effective, rhetorical, or formal language. This is the style of translation that is commonly referred to as 'free translation'. Here are some illustrations:

- He got nothing at the end رجع بخفي حنين/عاد خالي الوفاض

- She was sad deep down تظفر قلبها من الحزن/أصبح فؤادها فارغ

- You look quite cool تبدو رابط الجأش



**2. Loose Free Translation:** This style of free translation diverges significantly from the immediate language context and relies heavily on inferences. It relies on the translator's inferences on the intended message of the speaker/writer. Put simply, it is the act of converting intentions into words or actions. Thus, it may be seen as a form of pragmatic translation. Thus, it is not directly connected to the original context, but rather inferred from it. Here are a few instances that serve as clear examples:

Thank you, Mr. Wilson. Next please. عندنا غيرك. تفضل بالانصراف يا سيد ويلسون.

It is half past nine. انتهى الوقت/انتهت الحصة/علينا بالمغادرة/تأخرنا كثير أ/حان الوقت.

Thank you, thank you ladies and gentlemen. هدوء أيها السادة والسيدات.

I am frightened. ابق معنا.

### 3.3 Literal – Free Translation

The dichotomy free and literal finds a different application. The translator can either stay closer to the SL-text (literal) or move further away (free). A translator attempts to convey the foreign as s/he as a foreigner perceives it. Thus the TL can only change or be influenced by means of translation, never due to imitation. Paraphrase and imitation, however, signify "pre-translation" stages. First, a ST is imitated to awaken general interest in the foreign, a paraphrase then prepares widespread understanding and, finally, translation per se succeeds. Translation is important because "It is important to recognise that a significant





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portion of the beauty and strength in our language has been either created through translation or brought to light from obscurity through translation." Translation plays a crucial role in the process of revitalising a language. Benjamin argues that translation reveals the deep and evident connection between languages, surpassing the surface and indescribable similarities between two literary works (Benjamin, 1969: 72-73).

Hence, translation not only elucidates the connection between languages, but also imparts knowledge to translators and readers about their own language, rather than just focusing on the source language. Within the target language (TL), a translation assumes a distinct existence, apart from its source. TL-text and original are fundamentally distinct. Translation would be impossible if, at its core, it aimed to be identical to the original. (ibidem: 73), A translation acquires its own distinct existence in the target language (TL). The conventional distinction between literal and free translation is inadequate for a translation theory that aims to achieve more than mere replication of content. Direct translation, which adheres strictly to individual words, is seldom able to accurately convey the essence or significance. Furthermore, even the most unrestricted interpretation fails to encapsulate that which exists but cannot be conveyed, namely, the core essence, since it strays too distantly from the original term, which remains the foundation of translation. Therefore, both approaches lack any practicality for a comprehensive translation theory.





## Conclusions

Translation is converting the meaning from one language to another. It is the process of analyzing and understanding the ST and convert it to the TT.

There different classifications of the methods of translation. Rosyd identifies ten methods: Translation, borrowing, literal translation, transposition, modulation, adaptation, omission, adding, subtraction and expanded translation. Sirriyya also offers ten methods which she calls strategies: literal translation, translation proper, loan blending, transliteration, acculturation, translation couplet and triplet, definition, paraphrasing, addition and deletion.

Literal translation preserves the grammatical structures of the source language (SL) and translates them into the closest counterparts in the target language (TL). It occurs when the source language (SL) and target language (TL) possess parallel structures.

Free translation maintains the essence of the source text while employing the natural structures of the target language, including conventional word order, to ensure the translation is readily comprehensible. It prioritises the substance while sacrificing the structure, and it offers a more extensive rewording of the original.

Literal translation is a dangerous approach as it disregards the target language. It ignores the grammatical distinctions between the two languages, even if they may belong to separate language families. In the context of free translation, the translator is able to render the text without any limitations or restrictions. The translator is neither bound by the specific genre or setting of the text, nor is limited



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to the literal and readily apparent interpretations of words and phrases. He ventures beyond the confines of established literature and disregards contextual boundaries.

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