| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Literal Translation: Advantages and Disadvantages from the Perspective of Translation Students

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| **ABSTRACT**

The translator's main task while practicing the process of translating from one language to another is to choose the suitable strategy for the suitable text. Literal translation is the starting point for any translator and may be changed according to the text-type. This means, it is not a fault in translation. While it is sometimes useful, it can have several disadvantages. One of the main drawbacks is that it can result in awkward or unnatural-sounding language, as it may not capture the nuances, idioms, or cultural references present in the original text. This can lead to a loss of meaning or confusion for the reader. This paper is going to search the advantages and disadvantages of literal translation according to the point of view of a group of translation students in Aden University (Yemen).

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1. Introduction

Translation is the bridge which connects and allows for the nations of different languages to communicate with each other regardless of their languages and cultures. It can be described as the process in which a source text (ST) written in its source language (SL) is rendered and transferred into another language which is called target language (TL) and this translated text is called target text (TT). Translation in this way is not easy as it may be thought, but it is very difficult and complicated process because it needs from the translator to have great knowledge not just of the linguistic systems of the different languages but also of the source language culture (SLC) and the target language culture (TLC) in order to be able to render the ST with its background and framework in a way that makes it acceptable in the TL and TLC.

Translation as a term is a flexible one which was defined by different scholars from different points of views, Tolman (1901, p.18) describes translation as a mental process which "consists of two parts: first we must grasp the thought of the author; second, we must express this thought in the language into which we are translating". It seems to be the same idea which Catford (1965, p.20) considers when he defines translation from a linguistic view as "The replacement of one textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)". In this direct and obvious definition, Catford concentrates on the necessity of replacing the text of the SL with its equivalent in the TL.

The term equivalence is the key term which Nida and Taber (1982) used to discuss translation concentrating on the response of the receptor, not the message. They describe translation (ibid, p.12) as "consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style". In this way, the main aim of translation is to produce an equivalent effect on the TT reader which should be close to that on the SL reader.

Das (2005, p.1) in his turn confirms that "translation is both a substitution and transference of meaning from one language (source language SL) to another language (target language TL) and neither". Das in this definition concentrates on the duality of processes, substitution and transference, between the SL and the TL.

In this way, Palumbo (2009, p.122) states that "translation may be defined as a text in one language that represents or stands for a text in another language; the term translation also refers to the act of producing such a text". This means that the term translation is a very wide one and includes the science of translation, the act or process of translation and the production of translation or the translated work.

By reviewing all the definitions above or other definitions, we can state that the translation is a humanitarian activity which is used to narrow the gap between the different languages, and through which humans can communicate and render their thoughts, opinions, desires, religion, culture, history and social activities for the other nations in the world in spite of having different languages.

To achieve this aim translators conduct different strategies or procedures, away from the terminological problem which is not the concern of this paper, according to different factors. Text-type is the most important factor which helps the translator to adopt the suitable strategy for this text or that. One of the first and most famous strategies is literal translation, which is the concern of this paper.

This paper is going to discuss in detail the literal translation as a strategy or type of translation in terms of advantages and disadvantages. But before that let's shed light on the theoretical background of the translation strategies in general and, particularly, the literal translation.

2. Literature Review

Literal translation is an old topic as the translation process, and there are many scholars who have written about it since Cicero and Horace up to now. This paper investigates this topic from the practical side concentrating on searching the advantages and disadvantages of using literal translation as a strategy of translation.

This section of this paper is going to shed light on some of the previous literature of translation strategies as a whole and literal translation in particular.

2.1. Translation Strategies

Venuti cited in Baker (1998, p.240) states that "Strategies of translation involve the basic tasks of choosing the foreign text to be translated and developing a method to translate it". Thus the main concern that the translator should take into account is to have the ability to make a good decision in choosing the text and choosing the appropriate method or strategy which fits that text.

Some other scholars relate between the strategy of translation and the problems of translation in way that the strategy is considered to be a solution for that problem. Palumbo (2009) looks at translation strategy as a method or a procedure that is adapted by the translator to solve a particular kind of problem that may occur in the text that is translated. So the kind of the problem determined the kind of the strategy. Textual strategies, for example, are the most common kind of strategies which are required for solving textual problems and "have to do with how the translator manipulates the linguistic material in order to produce an appropriate target text" (Chesterman, 1997, p.92).

Since Horace (20 BC) and Cicero (46 BC) and later scholars of the ancient Chinese and Arab cultures seriously, there were several discussions about the nature of translation. Such discussions consequently, realized the ever-existing tug-of-war between form (literal translation) and content (free translation) or, alternatively, what St Jerome early on (395 Ad) called 'word-for-word' or 'sense-for-sense' (Farghal,2012, p.33).

2.2 Literal Translation

Literal translation, according to Newmark (1988) should be the start and basic strategy of translation in which the lexical words are translated singly. It is the most restricted strategy which takes into account the original text firstly. Newark (ibid, p.45) defines literal translation as "the SL grammatical constructions are converted to their nearest TL equivalents, but the lexical words are again translated singly, out of context. As a pre-translation process, this indicates the problems to be solved". Nobokov cited in Suttleworth and Cowie (1997, p.96) describes it as "rendering as closely as the associative and syntactical capacities of another language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original".

Literal translation, also called word-for-word translation by Cicero (106±46 BC) Horace (65±8 BC) and virtually everyone thereafter, and Metaphrase by John Dryden (1631±1700), is ideally the segmentation of the SL text into individual words and TL rendering of those word-segments one at a time (Baker, 1998, p.125)

Moreover, literal translation as the first mode of translation is put in comparison with the other mode represented in free translation. Cicero, for example, confirms that when translating word-for-word, the result will be unclothed, and if compelled by necessity to alter anything in order or wording it shall seem to have departed from the function of the translator. Farghal (2012, p.34) states that " the early translation thinkers resolved the conflict between form and content by siding with one or the other,

thus promoting the 'sense-for-sense' method of translation (e.g. St Jerome, who was an adamant supporter of this method) and, simultaneously, condemning the other method, or, alternatively, proclaiming the 'word-for-word' method (e.g. Schleiermarcher) while dismissing the other method as inadequate."

3. Methodology

This paper is a retrospective and introspective study which uses descriptive and analytical approaches to investigate the topic covered mainly by the qualitative method in addition to the quantitative method for analyzing the results of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire is designed as an instrument for collecting the data of this paper from the informants, who are 25 of MA students of translation studies at the University of Aden (Yemen). In addition, the previous literature on this topic is reviewed and discussed.

4. Findings and Discussion

This paper has found that literal translation has advantages and disadvantages, according to the opinion of the scholars and the answers of the questionnaire by the informants. The result of the questionnaire can be expressed as follows:

1. All the informants think that literal translation is good sometimes and bad other times.

2. Choosing literal translation is determined by the following factors ordered regularly:

    i.   The text-type.

    ii.   The context.

    iii. The purpose of translation.

    iv.   The translator.

3. The informants agree that legal texts and scientific texts are the most suitable texts to be translated by literal translation.

4. 87.5% of the informants prefer to use literal translation for learning purposes, while 12.5% do not prefer that.

5. 62.5% agree that literal translation should be the starting point of the translation process, while 37.5% disagree.

6. 75% think that the disadvantages of literal translation are more than its advantages, while 25% think the opposite.

7. 75% agree that literal translation doesn't respect the target reader's culture, while 25% disagree.

8. 62.5% think that translators use literal translation unconsciously, while 37.5 use it consciously.

Through the above result, it can be said that literal translation can be both good and bad, depending on text and context. There are times when a literal translation can preserve the original meaning, tone, and cultural nuances of the source language, especially in technical or legal documents. However, in many cases, a literal translation may result in awkard or unclear language, as it may not accurately convey the intended meaning or cultural connotations of the original text. It's important to consider the context, audience, and purpose of the translation when deciding whether to translate literally. In general, a translator should aim for a balance between fidelity to the original text and readability in the target language. This may involve adapting the translation to ensure it is natural and meaningful to the intended audience.

Literal translation should be a starting point in the process of translating text from one language to another while maintaining the original structure and wording as closely as possible. While this approach has its advantages, it also comes with a set of disadvantages that can impact the accuracy and readability of the translated content.

Furthermore, the informants were asked to mention the advantages and dis disadvantages of literal translation regarding their own experience, they are discussed in the following sections.

4.1 Advantages of Literal Translation:

1. **Preservation of original meaning:** Literal translation aims to preserve the original meaning and intent of the source text, and ensures that the core message and content of the original text are accurately conveyed in the target language. This can be particularly useful in legal, technical, or scientific texts where precision is paramount.

2. **Retention of Original Meaning**: making it useful for technical, legal, or scholarly documents where precision is crucial.

3. **Cultural Sensitivity**: In some cases, literal translation can help maintain cultural sensitivity by avoiding the unintentional alteration or distortion of cultural references present in the original text. By sticking closely to the original wording, the translator can prevent misinterpretations, providing a more authentic representation of the source material.

4. **Consistency:** Literal translation can contribute to consistency in terminology and phrasing, especially in specialized fields such as medicine, law, or engineering, where specific terminology is essential.

5. **Educational purposes:** Literal translation can be beneficial for language learners or students who are trying to understand the structure and vocabulary of a foreign language. By seeing a word-for-word translation alongside the original text, learners can grasp the meaning and syntax more easily, as it provides a direct comparison between the original and translated text.

4.2 Disadvantages of Literal Translation:

1. **Idioms, Metaphors and Cultural Challenges** : One of the main challenges of literal translation is dealing with idiomatic expressions and metaphors that do not have direct equivalents in the target language. Translating these phrases word-for-word can result in confusion or nonsensical translation**s**.

2. **Lack of Natural Flow:** Translating word-for-word can lead to awkward and stilted language in the target text, as it may not adhere to the natural flow and syntax of the target language.

3. **Loss of context:** By ignoring the context in which certain words or phrases are used, literal translation can lead to inaccuracies or misinterpretations. Context plays a crucial role in understanding the meaning of a text, and a word-for-word translation may overlook this important aspect. Focusing solely on the literal meaning of words can lead to a loss of contextual understanding, making it difficult to convey the intended message accurately.

4. **Misinterpretation:** In some cases, literal translation can result in misinterpretation or ambiguity, as it may not account for the different ways concepts are expressed across languages.

5. **Ineffective Communication:** Literal translation may hinder effective communication, particularly in marketing, creative writing, or literary works, where conveying emotions and cultural nuances is crucial.

6. **Lack of creativity:** Literal translation can stifle the translator's creativity and ability to adapt the text for the target audience. Translators may miss opportunities to enhance the clarity, elegance, or impact of the text by adhering strictly to a word-for-word approach.

7. **Linguistic differences:** Languages have different grammatical structures, syntax, and word order, which can make literal translation challenging. A direct translation may not adhere to the rules of the target language, resulting in awkward or ungrammatical sentences.

8. **Tone and style:** Literal translation may fail to capture the tone, style, or voice of the original author. Literary texts, in particular, rely heavily on the author's unique style and voice, which can be lost in a literal translation that focuses solely on individual words.

5. Conclusion
In conclusion, while literal translation has its advantages in maintaining accuracy and preserving the original meaning of a text, it is essential to recognize its limitations in capturing cultural nuances, idiomatic expressions, and natural language flow. Translators must carefully balance the need for accuracy with the requirement to produce a clear, natural, and culturally sensitive target text.

Depending on the context and purpose of the translation, a more flexible and context-aware approach may be necessary to ensure effective communication across languages.

Additionally, literal translation may not account for differences in sentence structure or word order between languages, further complicating the clarity and coherence of the translated text. Finally, it's important to note that literal translation may not convey the appropriate tone or style of the original text, which can impact the overall impact and effectiveness of the translation.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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