



TITLE

Why is it difficult to translate some words and phrases?
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KEY IDEA

Languages have different tools to express the same meaning
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CONSPECTUS

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Introduction: What “translation” means2. Key idea: Languages have different tools to express the same meaning3. Reasons: What are the difficulties in translating a text4. Consequences: Translators need to be careful<ol style="list-style-type: none">4.1 Rules to help translators5. Conclusions: To make a good translation you need to know your languages very well and use them wisely |
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REFERENCES

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OBJECTIVES

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. You can select what are the specific challenges of translation in a list of various |
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difficulties.

2. You can **evaluate** the translation of a sentence in your own language according to the translators' principles.

FULL TEXT

1. Introduction

If we know two or more languages, we can understand what people are saying in these languages.

For example, if we know Polish sign language and written Polish very well we can transform a message from Polish sign language into a message in Polish so that other people who do not sign can understand this message too. If we change a message from one language into another we are translating it. To translate means to transfer meaning from one language into another language.

2. Key idea

If we want to translate a message from one language to another, we need to know these languages very well. We also need to know how a meaning is expressed in these languages. To express meanings, languages use different tools. For example, we need to know that we use signs, facial expression, body movement and space in sign language, and that we use words and punctuation (dots and commas) in spoken/written language. We have to transfer the meaning from one language and use the tools of the other one, to express the same meaning. Every language has different tools to express the same meaning. That is why it is not possible to translate a message word by word or sign by sign.

3. Reasons

It is difficult to translate some words and signs, because in two languages they can cover different meanings. For example in Polish we use verb *pływać* (to swim). In Polish you can use this verb to say that a person is swimming, a boat is swimming, a



dog is swimming, a fish is swimming. But in Polish sign language there are more signs to express these meaning. We use different signs and handshapes depending on who or what is swimming.

It is difficult to translate some words also because they express something that exists only in that language/country/culture. For example, a typical Japan dish is called *sushi*. But in Poland we don't have this dish so we don't have a special Polish word to express this meaning. We need to use more words to explain what sushi is. For example, we can say it is a Japan dish made of rice and raw fish. Or we can borrow the word *sushi* and get used to it so that it becomes a part of Polish vocabulary.

It is difficult to translate some phrases, because two languages use different tools to express the same meaning. For example if we want to express in sign language that a dog is sitting next to a tree we use handshape, space and facial expression. If we want to express the same meaning in Polish we use words (dog, tree) and a special word to express the activity that the dog is doing (sit) and a special word to express the spatial relation between the dog and the tree (next to).

4. Consequences

We cannot translate a message from one language into a message in another language word by word or sign by sign. If we do so, people may not understand the message or they might understand it wrongly.

4.1 Rules to help translators

There are rules which can help you understand how to make a good translation. You can discover them through these examples.

- 1) When you see a sentence in your own sign language, dealing for example with the pollution in the sea and it makes you feel angry and sad, the same should happen when other people see the same sentence translated in their sign languages. The translation of the message should be able to provoke the same kind of thoughts/feelings that the original message provoked. When the effect of the first text is equivalent (the same) to the effect of the translated text, we call this property *equivalence*.
- 2) When you read the page of a book written in English and then you read the same



page translated into your own language, the page cannot be shortened to a half page. In this case, this means that the translator has not translated the entire text and that some information has been left out. Sometimes parts of a text can be left out because they are not important for the final message the author wants to give. When the parts which are left out are very important for the whole meaning of the text, then the translation is not accurate. This property of the translation we call *accuracy*.

- 3) If, for example, your 3-year-old child is reading a book about “Funny stories of Napoleon” and you play the signed version DVD which came along with the book, the translation cannot be addressing a 20-year-old person and using complex signs or very formal expressions. Right? The translation must respect the original style of the text, matching the audience and the situation. This property we call *adequacy*.
- 4) Suppose you are very competent in the written language of your own country and you read the translated version of your famous friend’s signed interview. Imagine that, despite your competence, you don’t understand the text. In this case the text is not useful to you at all; you cannot use it because you don’t understand it. You must be able to understand the translated text. This property we call *usability*.

5. Conclusion

Translation is difficult because words and phrases in one language usually don’t have one to one equivalents in another language. Languages express the same meaning using different tools. You need to know two languages very well to make a good translation.