

Chapter 5

Grammatical Equivalence in Translation

5.1 Grammatical versus Lexical Categories

Understanding Grammatical and Lexical Categories

In linguistics, words are categorized into **lexical categories** (content words) and **grammatical categories** (function words).

- **Lexical categories** include nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, which carry substantial meaning in a sentence.
- **Grammatical categories** include prepositions, conjunctions, determiners, pronouns, and auxiliary verbs, which provide structure and coherence to a sentence.

When translating between languages, both categories pose challenges. Lexical items often require cultural adaptation, while grammatical structures may not have direct equivalents.

Grammatical Equivalence in Translation

Grammatical equivalence refers to maintaining grammatical features such as **number, gender, tense, voice, and case** across languages. However, many of these features do not have direct counterparts in other languages. The translator must make informed choices to preserve meaning and readability.

For example, English distinguishes singular and plural nouns (e.g., **book** vs. **books**), while Chinese does not mark plural nouns in the same way. A translator working from English to Chinese must convey plurality through context or additional lexical items.

5.2 The Diversity of Grammatical Categories Across Languages

Number, Gender, and Case

- **Number:** English has singular and plural forms, but some languages, such as Arabic and Russian, include a **dual** form (for precisely two objects).

- **Gender:** Languages like French and Spanish assign gender (masculine/feminine) to nouns, while English does not. This can lead to complications in translation.
- **Case:** Some languages, such as German and Latin, use grammatical cases to indicate the function of a noun in a sentence (e.g., nominative, accusative, dative, genitive). English relies on word order instead.

Tense and Aspect

- English has multiple tenses (e.g., **simple present, past continuous, present perfect**) that may not exist in other languages. Mandarin Chinese, for instance, does not mark tense morphologically but uses **aspect markers** and contextual cues.
- Translators must adapt tense distinctions according to the target language's grammatical system, ensuring that the intended meaning is conveyed accurately.

Voice (Active vs. Passive)

Some languages, such as English, frequently use the **passive voice** (e.g., "The book was written by the author"), while others prefer active constructions. When translating between languages with different preferences, translators may have to restructure sentences for fluency and coherence.

5.3 A Brief Note on Word Order

The Significance of Word Order in Translation

Different languages have varying word order structures.

- **English follows Subject-Verb-Object (SVO):** "She (S) reads (V) a book (O)."
- **Japanese follows Subject-Object-Verb (SOV):** "She (S) a book (O) reads (V)."
- **Arabic allows greater word order flexibility,** relying on case markings to indicate sentence roles.

Translational Challenges in Word Order

Translators must adjust sentence structures to align with the syntactic norms of the target language while maintaining clarity and meaning.

Sometimes, reordering elements can lead to shifts in emphasis or tone, requiring careful consideration.

For instance, when translating from English to German:

- English: "**She has never seen such a beautiful landscape before.**"
- German: "**Eine so schöne Landschaft hat sie noch nie gesehen.**" (A so beautiful landscape has she never seen before.)

The subject and object positions may shift in translation, but the overall meaning remains intact.

5.4 Introducing Text

Cohesion and Coherence in Translation

Translating texts involves ensuring that grammatical structures contribute to **cohesion (logical flow)** and **coherence (understandability)**.

Strategies for Introducing Texts

1. **Use of Connectors:** Languages differ in their use of conjunctions and linking phrases. Translators must ensure smooth transitions between sentences and ideas.
2. **Maintaining Thematic Progression:** Some languages prefer a topic-comment structure, while others use subject-predicate order. Adapting the thematic flow enhances readability.
3. **Handling References and Pronouns:** Pronoun usage varies across languages. Some languages omit pronouns when they are implied, while others explicitly state them. Adjusting references ensures clarity.

Example: Differences in Introducing Text

- **English:** "This book explores the impact of globalization. It discusses economic, social, and cultural aspects."
- **Chinese:** "这本书探讨了全球化的影响。它讨论了经济、社会和文化方面。" (This book discusses the impact of globalization. Economic, social, and cultural aspects are discussed.)

The explicit subject in English ("**It discusses**") is omitted in Chinese, which requires restructuring the sentence for fluency.

Conclusion

Grammatical equivalence in translation requires careful attention to linguistic differences across languages. Differences in number, gender, case, tense, aspect, voice, and word order must be accounted for to ensure accurate and natural translations. Moreover, maintaining cohesion and coherence when introducing texts helps ensure readability in the target language. By understanding these grammatical challenges, translators can develop strategies to navigate language-specific constraints while preserving the original message's integrity.