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## **The Unit of Translation**

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The Unit of Translation refers to any word or group of words that can independently convey a meaningful part of a sentence. It is the segment of text that a translator considers complete and coherent enough to be translated on its own before moving on to the next segment. This unit could be as small as a single word or as large as an entire sentence, depending on how it encapsulates meaning within the context of the text.

### **Examples and Types of Units of Translation:**

#### **1. Single Word:**

- Example: Words like "thus," "therefore," "yet," "actually," and "clearly" at the beginning of sentences often function as standalone units of translation.

- Explanation: These words serve as connectors or adverbials that guide the logic of a sentence, and their translation can often be done independently of the rest of the sentence.

#### **2. Phrase-Level Unit:**

- Example: Collocations such as "pass a law" (يُصدِر قانوناً) or "brain drain" (هجرة العقول).

- Explanation: Phrases like these are translated as single units because they carry specific meanings that might not be clear if the words were translated individually.

#### **3. Idiomatic Expressions:**

- Example: Idioms such as "tall order" (مطلب صعب) or "sitting duck" (هدف سهل).

- Explanation: Idioms are inherently tied to cultural and linguistic contexts, so translating them as units ensures that their figurative meanings are preserved.

#### **4. Clause-Level Unit:**

- Example: "She did not come to work yesterday because she was sick" can be broken into two clauses: (1) "She did not come to work yesterday" and (2) "because she was sick."

- Explanation: Each clause provides a distinct piece of information and can be translated separately if the context allows for it.

#### **5. Sentence-Level Unit:**

- Example: "The man who paid me a visit last week when I was away was an old friend of mine" might be translated as a single unit.

- Explanation: In this sentence, the main clause is split by a relative clause, requiring the translator to consider the entire sentence as a single unit to maintain coherence in translation. The main idea (the man was an old friend) is spread across the sentence, which in Arabic would typically start with the verb, thus requiring the whole sentence to be considered before translation begins.

#### **The Sentence as the Largest Unit of Translation:**

In practical terms, the largest and most common unit of translation is the sentence. As Newmark (1988: 30-31) notes, the sentence is the basic unit of thought, encapsulating a complete idea that often needs to be understood and translated in its entirety. This is because a sentence usually

contains interconnected elements—such as subject, verb, and object—that work together to convey a full meaning.

However, there are occasions when translators might break down a sentence into smaller units, like clauses, if the sentence contains clear-cut divisions of meaning. On the other hand, there might also be instances where understanding an entire text is necessary to properly translate a single sentence, especially in cases where the sentence is heavily dependent on the context provided by the surrounding text.

### **Balancing Literal and Free Translation:**

Throughout this discussion on units of translation, it's important to note that both literal and free translation methods have their places. For students and beginner translators, the literal method—focused on direct translation of meaning—is often safer and more straightforward. It ensures that translations are accurate and aligned closely with the source text. However, free translation should not be dismissed; it is particularly valuable for certain types of texts, especially where conveying the spirit or emotional tone of the original is more important than sticking rigidly to the form.

As Newmark (1988: 31) points out, a translator might need to switch between literal and free translation depending on the context and challenges presented by the text. Literal translation is preferred unless it leads to an unnatural or inaccurate translation. In such cases, free translation becomes necessary to convey the intended meaning more effectively.

Understanding and choosing the correct unit of translation is crucial for producing accurate, coherent translations. Whether translating a single word, a phrase, a clause, or an entire sentence, the translator must consider how meaning is constructed and conveyed within the text. The ability to flexibly move between different methods and units of translation, balancing literal and free approaches, is key to successful translation work. As we delve deeper into translation practices, recognizing the potential challenges and adopting appropriate strategies to overcome them will further refine our skills as translators.