



## UNDERSTANDING TRANSLATION UNITS AND SHIFTS: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract** *This paper explores the concepts of translation units and translation shifts within the field of Translation Studies. Drawing on the works of Vinay and Darbelnet, Catford, and other influential theorists, the article analyzes how meaning is transferred across languages and the inevitable transformations that occur. The study emphasizes the significance of identifying appropriate translation units and understanding the types of shifts that ensure accurate, contextually faithful translation.*

**Keywords:** *Translation Units, Translation Shifts, Equivalence, Linguistics, Catford, Vinay and Darbelnet*

### 1. Introduction

Translation is not merely a word-for-word replacement process, but a complex act of rendering meaning, context, and cultural nuance from a source language (SL) into a target language (TL). Within this intricate process, the notions of translation units and translation shifts serve as central pillars. Understanding what constitutes a unit of translation and how shifts in language form and meaning occur is vital for both practitioners and scholars in the discipline.

### 2. Translation Units

The term translation unit refers to the smallest segment of a text that can be translated as a whole without breaking the syntactic, semantic, or pragmatic integrity. This unit can vary in size—from a word or phrase to an entire sentence or paragraph—depending on context.

Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) were among the first to stress that translation units are dynamic and context-dependent. Nida (1964) later expanded this idea by suggesting that meaning often resides beyond the lexical level, thus requiring larger units of translation for accurate rendering.

### 3. Translation Shifts

A translation shift is a deviation from formal correspondence between the source and target texts. J.C. Catford (1965) categorized shifts into two major types:

**Level Shifts:** Occur when grammatical or lexical elements are translated across different linguistic levels (e.g., from a verb to a noun).





## MODERN PROBLEMS IN EDUCATION AND THEIR SCIENTIFIC SOLUTIONS

Category Shifts: Include structural shifts (word order), class shifts (part of speech), unit shifts (from phrase to clause), and intra-system shifts (within grammatical systems).

These shifts are not translation errors but necessary adjustments that ensure semantic equivalence and maintain stylistic and cultural relevance.

### 4. The Interrelation Between Units and Shifts

Translation units and shifts are interdependent. Identifying the correct translation unit often necessitates a shift, especially in languages with distinct grammatical structures. For example, idiomatic expressions typically require a unit-based translation approach and may involve multiple shifts to preserve meaning.

Additionally, the translator's decision on the unit affects the types and degrees of shifts implemented. The ability to flexibly navigate this relationship is a mark of professional translation competence.

### 5. Practical Implications

In practice, understanding these concepts equips translators to make informed decisions. For instance, legal and literary translation require different approaches to units and shifts due to differences in function, register, and audience expectations. Recognizing appropriate translation units and applying necessary shifts enhances both accuracy and readability.

### 6. Conclusion

Translation units and shifts form a foundational framework in Translation Studies. Far from being mechanical substitutions, translations involve nuanced decisions shaped by linguistic, cultural, and contextual variables. By mastering these concepts, translators can achieve higher fidelity and functionality in their work.

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