



## TRANSLATION UNITS AND TRANSLATION SHIFTS: AN ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract** *This article explores the concepts of translation units and translation shifts, fundamental elements in translation studies. By examining their definitions, classifications, and interrelations, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these concepts influence translation practices. The discussion incorporates recent research findings and emphasizes the cognitive aspects of translation, offering valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners in the field.*

### Introduction

In the realm of translation studies, the concepts of translation units and translation shifts are pivotal in understanding the intricacies of translating texts across languages and cultures. Translation units refer to the segments of a source text that a translator processes as single entities, while translation shifts denote the changes that occur when moving from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL). This article delves into these concepts, analyzing their definitions, classifications, and the interplay between them, with a focus on their practical implications in translation.

#### Translation Units: Definitions and Classifications

A translation unit is defined as the smallest segment of a text that a translator considers as a whole during the translation process. The size of a translation unit can vary, encompassing words, phrases, sentences, or even entire paragraphs, depending on the context and the translator's approach. Vinay and Darbelnet emphasized that the size of translation units can influence the idiomatic quality of the translation, suggesting that larger units may lead to more natural translations.

From a cognitive perspective, translation units are linked to the translator's working memory capacity. Dragsted (2005) found that the size of translation units varies with the difficulty level of the text and the translator's expertise, with professionals tending to process larger units.

#### Translation Shifts: Types and Significance

Translation shifts are the changes that occur during the translation process when the translator deviates from a direct correspondence between the SL and TL. Catford (1965) categorized translation shifts into two main types: level shifts and category shifts. Level shifts involve a change from one linguistic level to another, such as from grammar to





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lexis. Category shifts are further divided into structural shifts, class shifts, unit shifts, and intra-system shifts.

Understanding translation shifts is crucial for achieving equivalence between the SL and TL, as they often reflect the translator's strategies to maintain meaning, style, and function in the target text.

### Interrelation Between Translation Units and Shifts

The concepts of translation units and translation shifts are intrinsically linked. The identification of translation units influences the occurrence and type of shifts during translation. For example, when a translator processes larger units, such as entire sentences or paragraphs, they may employ shifts that affect the structure or class of words to maintain coherence and naturalness in the TL. Conversely, focusing on smaller units may lead to more literal translations, potentially requiring fewer shifts but risking a loss of idiomatic expression.

Recent studies have highlighted the cognitive aspects of this interplay. Alves and Vale (2009) introduced the concepts of micro and macro translation units, suggesting that translators process texts in segments that align with their cognitive load and the complexity of the source material. These processing decisions directly impact the types and frequency of translation shifts employed.

### Practical Implications for Translation Practice

An in-depth understanding of translation units and shifts has significant implications for translation practice. Translators must be adept at identifying appropriate units of translation and anticipating necessary shifts to produce accurate and fluent target texts. Training programs should emphasize these concepts, incorporating exercises that enhance translators' abilities to recognize and manage units and shifts effectively.

Moreover, awareness of these concepts can inform the development of translation tools and technologies. For instance, machine translation systems and computer-assisted translation tools can be designed to better handle translation units and predict shifts, leading to improved translation quality.

### Conclusion

Translation units and translation shifts are fundamental concepts in translation studies, offering insights into the cognitive and linguistic processes involved in translating texts. By examining their definitions, classifications, and interrelations, this article underscores their significance in achieving equivalence and naturalness in translation. A comprehensive understanding of these concepts is essential for both novice and experienced translators, as well as for the advancement of translation technologies.





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