



Identifying Unit of Translation in Self-Prefixed Words from English to Persian: Word, Phrase or Sentence

IDENTIFICATION DE L'UNITE DE LA TRADUCTION DES MOTS DE L'AUTO-PREFIXES EN ANGLAIS AU PERSAN: MOT OU PHRASE

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Received 30 August 2011; accepted 20 November 2011

Abstract

This paper discusses the unit of translation of inflected words between English and Persian. To conduct this research, 10 MA students of translation studies were picked and asked to translate 20 sentences each of which contained a self-prefixed word. Self-prefixed items are all considered as word in English but as it turned out only 56% of the participants were able to render self-prefixed Persian words of which about 43.5% were translated correctly.

Key words: Translation; Self-prefixed; English; Persian

Résumé

Ce document traite de l'unité de traduction de mots fléchis entre l'anglais et le persan. Pour mener cette recherche, 10 étudiants de maîtrise des études de traduction ont été prélevées et demandé de traduire 20 phrases dont chacun contenait un mot d'auto-préfixés. Auto-préfixés articles sont tous considérés comme des mots en anglais, mais comme il s'est avéré que 56% des participants étaient en mesure de rendre l'auto-préfixés mots persans dont environ 43,5% ont été traduits correctement.

Mots clés: Traduction; auto-préfixés; anglais; Persique

Ali Eskandari, Ahmad MoienZade (2011). Identifying Unit of Translation in Self-Prefixed Words from English to Persian: Word, Phrase or Sentence. *Canadian Social Science*, 7(6), 191-196. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/view/j.css.1923669720110706.089>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.css.1923669720110706.089>

INTRODUCTION

Human being is naturally a complicated creature. He is constantly evolving and consequently its society and language. Language is one of the most complicated and complex entities human beings have made up. Language of each society is shaped by its culture and mirrors its values and ideology. As Cote puts it: "language determines the way a person views the world" (1998, p.21). There is no doubt that lexical items, idioms and expressions of each language is made up in compliance with its culture and social values. This difference in ways of viewing the world undoubtedly accounts for the differences in the patterns of languages, either their grammars or lexicon. A language is heavily contingent upon other factors too, like the interests, predilections and priorities of each society. As everybody knows, each language is considered to have specific features and tendency. For example French is known as the language of poetry, literature and fine arts, German as the language of philosophy, Persian as the language of poetry and mysticism and last but not least English as the language of literature and science. We can assume English as the language of affixation, as well. English is one of the languages a considerable number of its words are made up through the process of affixation. By a look at English dictionaries, one can come across with a lot of affixed words. One of these affixes is the prefix *self* which this study is going to cover. So a comparative study between *self*-prefixed words and their Persian translation is launched. There are some researches in the realm of comparative study between English and Persian, of course, in other aspects of language. For example, Davies deals with the various translations of culture-specific items in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books. In this research, the researcher tries to single out translation strategies adopted by the translators and efficacy of them (2003). She suggests that it will be more viable if we take into consideration these culture-specific items in whole rather than covering them one by

one; the approach that in her opinion will contribute to the development of the whole text. Fernandes takes the translation of names in children’s fantasy literature as his research topic (2006). In this research, he, at first, provides a definition for names, aiming to clarify the meaning each name conveys. And finally he proposes ten translation strategies in the process of rendering names from source language to target language.

Before talking about methodology and results, it is preferable to elaborate on the notion of difficulty and ambiguity, respectively. According to Newmark “the chief difficulties in translating are lexical, not grammatical, i.e. words, collocations and fixed phrases or idioms” (1988, p.32). So he believes that “difficulties are of two kinds: a) you do not understand them; b) you find them hard to translate”. If you cannot understand a word, it may be because all possible meanings are not known to you, or because its meaning is determined by its unusual collocation or a reference elsewhere in the text (Newmark 1988, p.33).

Ambiguity

Newmark defines ambiguity as “a stretch of SL text, normally word or syntactic structure, having apparently more than one meaning” (1988, p.218-219). According to his definition, there are seven kinds of ambiguity.

Grammatical Ambiguity

When the style or manner of composition of a text is not well-formed, it causes syntactic ambiguity, which is quite common in English too. According to Newmark, it is possible to clarify a text, if the context is informative.

Lexical Ambiguity

Because of the nature of language, especially English, one word can denote to one or more meanings, depending on its context. And this point makes the act of translation much more arduous.

Pragmatic Ambiguity

As Newmark (1988, p.219) puts it: pragmatic ambiguity arises when the tone or the emphasis in an SL sentence is not clear. And it surfaces most of the time in written texts, because of the lack of immediate and instant clarification.

Cultural Ambiguity

It refers to cases where a cultural feature does not hold water anymore and assumes a new function.

Idiological Ambiguity

It points out this fact that the word or expression a person use with a particular meaning, is based on his own interpretation or the way he perceives that very word, not its dictionary meaning.

Referential Meaning

It surfaces in cases that the use of a word makes us to come up with two or more meanings, like “spring” which simultaneously prompts more than one meaning. In such cases, we have to look back the text to figure out the main sense.

Metaphorical Meaning

And finally, this refers to metaphorical expressions, conjuring up different images in readers’ mind. Newmark puts forth that in translating them, it is preferable to render the “most probable sense”.

Regarding aforementioned points and Newmark’s opinion about different kinds of difficulties, this research tries to find out the unit of translation from English to Persian. According to Newmark unit of translation is “the minimal stretch of language that has to be translated together” (1988, p.54). All *self*-prefixed items are counted as words, whether noun or adjective. So by conducting this research we are after this point whether Iranian students are able to render them as words or not.

1. METHODOLOGY

To conduct this research, 10 MA students of translation studies from Isfahan University were picked. It is considered that these participants have a very good command of both English and Persian. Besides that these participants have studied specialized courses in translating every kind of text, like economic, legal correspondence and literary, to name a few. After choosing the participants, 20 sentences handed over to them and they were asked to translate the items. In each sentence, the *self*-prefixed word was highlighted and they were allowed to use dictionaries of every type and World Wide Web. Although they were allowed to use dictionaries, the participants were asked to provide the translation in their own word, expressing them in whatever format they are capable of, word or sentence.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1
Number of Translated, Mistranslated and not Translated Items

Items No	Response		
	Translated	mistranslated	Not translated
1	10	0	0
2	7	2	1
3	8	2	0
4	10	0	0
5	5	5	0
6	8	2	0
7	7	3	0
8	3	6	1
9	10	0	0
10	7	3	0
11	9	0	1
12	8	2	0
13	5	4	1
14	8	2	0
15	5	5	0
16	10	0	0

To be continued

Continued

Items No	Response			Total	Frequency
	Translated	mistranslated	Not translated		
17	9	1	0		
18	1	9	0		
19	6	4	0		
20	10	0	0		
Total	146	50	4	200	
Frequency	73%	25%	2%		100%

Tables 2
Unit of Translation

Items No	Response					Total	Frequency
	Self words	words	phrases	sentences	Not translated		
1	9	0	1	0	0		
2	2	2	3	2	1		
3	4	2	4	0	0		
4	7	1	2	0	0		
5	2	2	2	4	0		
6	6	2	2	0	0		
7	5	1	4	0	0		
8	4	1	1	3	1		
9	6	3	1	0	0		
10	6	3	1	0	0		
11	7	1	1	0	1		
12	6	1	3	0	0		
13	5	3	1	0	1		
14	7	3	0	0	0		
15	7	1	1	1	0		
16	10	0	0	0	0		
17	2	1	4	3	0		
18	3	4	3	0	0		
19	4	4	2	0	0		
20	10	0	0	0	0		
Total	112	35	36	13	4	200	
Frequency	56%	17.50%	18%	6.50%	2%		100%

Table 3
Number of Correct and Wrong Translation in Each Category

	self words		words		phrases		sentences		Not translated	
	correct	wrong	correct	wrong	correct	wrong	correct	wrong		
1	9				1					
2	1	1	2		2	1	2			1
3	3	1	1	1	4					
4	7		1		2					
5		2	1	1		2	4			
6	5	1	2		2					
7	4	1		1	2	2				
8		4		1		1	3			1
9	6		3		1					
10	4	2	3			1				
11	7		1		1					1
12	5	1		1	3					
13	2	3	2	1	1					1
14	5	2	3							
15	3	4	1		1		1			
16	10									
17	2			1	4		3			
18	0	3		4		3				
19	4		1	3	2					
20	10									
Total	87	25	21	14	26	10	13	0	4	200
Frequency	43.50%	12.50%	10.50%	7%	13%	5%	6.50%	0	2%	100%

Regarding Newmark's contention that difficulties are of two kinds whether you do not understand them; or you find them hard to translate, the researcher believes that in the process of rendering, translators find *self*-prefixed words hard to translate the most. Generally speaking, most of the translators, as the tables above show, are well aware of the meaning of *self*-prefixed words. The part that causes the most difficulty is how to render them in their Persian equivalents. As it was told in introduction, this research

was after the translation of *self*-prefixed words, so I was particularly looking forward to Persian equivalence at word level. As it turned out 73.5% of the samples were rendered at word level, without regarding the correctness of the answer provided. Newmark believes that "the largest quantity of translation in a text is done at the level of word, the lexical unit, the collocation, the clause and the sentence, respectively" (1988, p.55). By a look at the result tables, this definition comes true. Arranged in

a descending order, the largest quantity is word and the smallest one is sentence.

By going through the sentences, I came across with translations that the participant himself or herself did not understand the words and consequently mistranslated it. For example, this one 'they are **self-drive**, one to four nights' for which some participants provided wrong translations. Longman dictionary of contemporary English defines self-drive as: (1) a **self-drive** car is one that you have hired to drive yourself (2) a **self-drive** holiday is one in which you use your own car to visit the holiday area. Based on the context, it seems that the first definition suits the best, while one participant translated it as

“از خودروی شخصی استفاده میکنند، اقامت از یک تا چهار شب.”

This literally means 'they use their own car, staying from one to four nights'. By a careful glance at the sample and its context, it is obvious that the participant misunderstood this sentence, and rendered it base on the second definition. Another participant was completely ignorant of the context, while translating, he was thinking about something else, so rendered that sentence as

“آنها خودکار هستند” that literally means “they are automatic”, or this one who rendered it as “آنها خودجوش هستند” which literally means “they are impulsive”. Another example which caused a little difficulty for the participants was this sentence “..... she is always mistress of the situation, coolly self-possessed”. According to Longman dictionary, self-possess means: ‘calm, confident, and in control of your feelings, even in difficult or unexpected situations’. Some participant, were completely preoccupied with the main meaning of possess, ‘to own something’, came to this conclusion that self-possessed is relevant to that meaning; therefore render it as “او همیشه مالک خود”. This sentence is rendered literally in English as “she is in possession of herself.” or another participant rendered it as “نمیشه با اعتماد بنفسش ملکه موقعیتهاست” which literally means “she always domineers situations with her self-confidence”. In one case, the participant did not translate it at all. But some of participants were completely aware of the context and new meaning of the word and rendered it appropriately into Persian like

“او همیشه با خونسردی کامل بر اوضاع مسلط است.”

This Persian rendering completely suits its English counterpart and it literally means “she can handle all the imbrolios with serenity.” Surprisingly, in some cases, all participants translated the self-prefixed words correctly, using “(self-..)-خود-” in the Persian renderings, like this one “vigilantes were the self-appointed administrators of justice” for which participants used Persian equivalent words such as “خودمنتخب” and “خودبرگزیده”, “خودخوانده”, “خودگمارده” all which literally means self-appointed.

CONCLUSION

Regarding the aforementioned points and results, knowing

the meaning of a word, collocation, sentence, in sum knowing the comprising elements of a text is vital in the process of translation. In other word, to render a word or sentence from source language to target language is contingent upon understanding the source language. To be able to understand and then render source language to target language depends upon having a good command of source language. Nida believes that (as cited in Hatim & Munday, 2004, p.35) there are two sorts of meaning, referential meaning and connotative meaning. Nida defines referential meaning as “denotation which deals with the words as signs or symbols” and connotative meaning as “emotional reaction engendered in the reader by a word” (Hatim & Munday, 2004, p.35). So in dealing with a text, a translator should be well aware of these two kinds of meaning to render the text into target language appropriately and correctly.

Besides that evaluating and analyzing the efficacy of a translated text is an important factor, as well. To evaluate the efficacy of a translation, one should set a touchstone, equivalence. This means to arouse the same feeling and interest in the target language readership as source language reader would comprehend upon reading that text. Nida (as cited in Munday, 2001, pp.41-42) categorizes equivalence as formal and dynamic. In her terms formal equivalence is pretty much concerned “with the message and its accuracy and correctness”, and dynamic equivalence is “based on the principle of equivalent effect”. It means that the relationship between target reader and the text ought to be similar to that of source reader and the original text. Bearing in mind these facts, by going through the translations, participants have made, it immediately comes to fore that most of the renderings do not arouse the same feeling and impression in target language reader as intended in source text. Nida (as cited in Venuti, p.134) counts four criteria for a good translation, which are respectively:

1. making sense
2. conveying the spirit and manner of the original
3. having a natural form and easy form of expression
4. producing a similar response

By analyzing the answers provided, most of them fail to meet these requirements. BA students of translation are supposed to study the specialized translation courses during their undergraduate schooling, the courses all of which are taught based on the guidelines provided in our English department curriculum nationwide. I believe it is the time to make some revisions to this curriculum and amend it to be in complete accord with the growing need of our prospect translators.

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Appendix

- 1-Female **self-actualization** becomes the means to feminist revolution.
- 2-A detailed leaflet with illustrations is available for **self-assembly**, but the company offers a complete installation service as well.
- 3-Medical certificates should be forwarded directly to the course director or senior course tutor. **Self-certification** will not be accepted.
- 4-If refused, they may feel saddened, disappointed, or inconvenienced, but their **self-concept** isn't shattered.
- 5-Attempts to stir up nationalistic feeling at such times are bound to be **self-defeating**.
- 6-And we also think that fairness and **self-determination** are things most people believe in.
- 7-Finally, she lists the intellectual pursuit model, which is **self-directed** and self-motivated by intellectual curiosity.
- 8-They're self-drive, one to four nights; accommodation ranges from **self-catering** apartments to top châteaux hotels.
- 9-As you will see, full, free **self-expression** is the essence of leadership.
- 10-Today she runs her own New Age **self-help** business, Kismet, employing four staff.
- 11-Without the royal family, titles would be just that - forms of address for the **self-important** to dignify themselves.
- 12-Until his death in 1980, he followed a strenuous, **self-imposed** work schedule.
- 13-Until tragedy and fate catch up with her she is always mistress of the situation, coolly **self-possessed**.
- 14-Finniston maintains there is inescapable evidence that the corporate world has become more selfish and **self-seeking**.
- 15-The decentralized authority, a strategy of decentralization would appear to answer the critics of monolithic bureau and **self-serving** power and resources maximizers.
- 16-Originally North Dalton was a **self-supporting** agricultural village with farming being the only means of employment.
- 17-Stress and anxiety are often **self-inflicted**.
- 18-Why do the retraining efforts of **self-defeating** organizations tend to create at least as many difficulties as they resolve?
- 19-As with any isolated and largely **self-contained** community the agricultural village was often the object of a fierce loyalty among its inhabitants.
- 20-Vigilantes were the **self-appointed** administrators of justice and public executioners.