Lesson 2:

Translation Techniques and Strategies

Introduction to Translation Procedures

Translators employ various procedures to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers between languages. Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet's taxonomy of translation procedures provides a useful framework for understanding these techniques. In this lesson, we'll explore these procedures with a focus on English-Arabic translation contexts, examining how they can be applied to overcome specific challenges.

Direct Translation Procedures

1. Borrowing

Borrowing involves taking a word directly from the source language, sometimes with minor phonological or morphological adaptations. In Arabic-English translation, borrowing occurs in both directions:

English borrowings into Arabic:

- Technology: تكنولوجيا (tiknūlūjyā)
- Internet: إنترنت (intarnit)
- Computer: كمبيوتر (kumbyūtar)

Arabic borrowings into English:

- Algebra (from الجبر, al-jabr)
- Coffee (from قهوة, qahwa)
- Magazine (from مخازن, makhāzin)

Example in context: English: New technologies are revolutionizing education. **Arabic:** تقوم التكنولوجيا الجديدة بإحداث ثورة في التعليم.

When deciding whether to borrow or find a native equivalent, consider factors such as:

- Is there an established equivalent in the target language?
- Is the foreign term more widely recognized than any native alternative?
- Does the borrowing serve a stylistic purpose?

2. Calque

A calque is a literal, word-for-word translation of a foreign expression. This creates new expressions in the target language that reflect the structure of the source language.

Examples:

- "Skyscraper" → ناطحة سحاب (literally: "cloud piercer")
- "Cold war" → حرب باردة (literally: "war cold")
- "Brainwashing" → غسيل دماغ (literally: "washing brain")

Example in context: English: The conference addressed the problem of money laundering in the banking sector. **Arabic:** تناول المؤتمر مشكلة غسيل الأموال في القطاع المصرفي.

3. Literal Translation

Literal translation involves direct word-for-word translation where the grammatical structures allow. This works best between languages with similar structures or in simple sentences:

English: She reads many books. **Arabic:** هي تقرأ الكثير من الكتب.

However, literal translation often fails with more complex structures or idiomatic expressions:

English: It's raining cats and dogs. **Literal Arabic:** إنها تمطر قططًا وكلابًا. (nonsensical in Arabic) **Appropriate translation:** إنها تمطر بغزارة. (It's raining heavily)

Oblique Translation Procedures

When direct translation methods produce unnatural or incorrect results, translators must resort to more creative approaches:

4. Transposition

Transposition involves changing the grammar or word class without changing the meaning:

English: "She decided without hesitation." (adverb) **Arabic:** "قررت دون تردد." (noun phrase)

English: "She entered the room smiling." (participle) **Arabic:** "دخلت الغرفة وهي تبتسم." (conjunction + verb)

Example in context: English: "After completing his studies, he traveled abroad." **Arabic:** "بعد إكماله لدراسته، سافر إلى الخارج." (verbal noun construction)

Arabic often requires transposition of English gerunds (-ing forms) into verbal nouns (masdar):

English: "Swimming is good exercise." **Arabic:** "السباحة تمرين جيد." (verbal noun)

5. Modulation

Modulation changes the point of view or perspective while preserving meaning:

Types of modulation:

Negative for positive: English: "Don't forget to call me." **Arabic:** "تذكر أن تتصل بي." (Remember to call me.)

Part for whole: English: "She needs a roof over her head." **Arabic:** "هي بحاجة إلى مأوى." (She needs shelter.)

Active for passive: English: "This book is widely read." **Arabic:** "يقرأ الكثيرون هذا الكتاب." (Many people read this book.)

Cause for effect: English: "His argument doesn't hold water." **Arabic:** "حجته غير مقنعة." (His argument isn't convincing.)

Example in context: English: "This medicine is not recommended for pregnant women." **Arabic:** "يُنصح بتجنب هذا الدواء خلال فترة الحمل." (It is advised to avoid this medicine during pregnancy.)

6. Equivalence

Equivalence is particularly useful for idioms, proverbs, and expressions where literal translation would be meaningless:

English proverb: "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." **Arabic equivalent:** " عصفور في اليد خير من عشرة على الشجرة." (A bird in the hand is better than ten on the tree.)

English idiom: "To kill two birds with one stone." **Arabic equivalent:** " ضرب عصفورين بحجر واحد." (To hit two birds with one stone.)

English expression: "Break a leg!" (Good luck) **Arabic equivalent:** "بالتوفيق!" (With success!)

Example in context: English: "The new employee is still learning the ropes." **Arabic:** "الموظف الجديد ما زال يتعلم أصول العمل." (The new employee is still learning the principles of work.)

7. Adaptation

Adaptation substitutes a cultural element in the source text with one familiar to the target audience:

English: "He's as American as apple pie." **Arabic adaptation:** "إنه مصري حتى النخاع." (He's Egyptian to the bone.)

English: "They tied the knot last Sunday." (got married) **Arabic adaptation:** " عقدوا قرانهم الأحد الماضي." (They performed their marriage contract last Sunday.)

Example in context: English: "The graduation ceremony ended with a champagne reception." **Arabic adaptation:** "انتهى حفل التخرج بحفل استقبال فاخر." (The graduation ceremony ended with an elegant reception.)

Here, the cultural element (champagne) which may have negative connotations in Arab-Islamic culture is adapted to "elegant reception."

Additional Translation Strategies

8. Compensation

When elements of meaning, style, or effect are lost in one part of a translation, compensation involves adding them elsewhere:

English: "Y'all need to hurry up!" (Southern US dialect) **Arabic compensation:** "يا جماعة، لازم تسرعوا شوي!" (Adding colloquial markers "يا جماعة" and "شوي" to compensate for dialectal features)

9. Expansion and Contraction

Arabic often requires more words to express concepts that are concise in English, and vice versa:

Expansion: English: "The uninsured" **Arabic:** "الأشخاص الذين لا يملكون تأمينًا" (People who do not have insurance)

Contraction: English: "The people who attended the meeting" **Arabic:** "الحاضرون" (The attendees)

Example in context: English: "The findings suggest a correlation between the variables." **Arabic expansion:** "تشير النتائج إلى وجود علاقة ارتباط بين المتغيرات." (The findings indicate the existence of a correlation relationship between the variables.)

Extended Translation Example and Analysis

Let's analyze a paragraph-length text to see how these techniques work together:

English Source:

Urban planning has evolved significantly over the past century. What was once focused primarily on efficient transportation networks now encompasses sustainability, quality of life, and social equity. Modern city planners must juggle competing priorities while addressing the needs of diverse populations. Despite these challenges, well-designed urban spaces have the power to transform communities.

Arabic Translation:

لقد تطور تخطيط المدن بشكل كبير على مدار القرن الماضي. فبعدما كان يركز في الأساس على شبكات النقل الفعالة، أصبح الآن يشمل الاستدامة وجودة الحياة والعدالة الاجتماعية. ويتعين على مخططي المدن المعاصرين الموازنة بين الأولويات المتنافسة مع تلبية احتياجات الفئات السكانية المتنوعة. وعلى الرغم من هذه التحديات، فإن المساحات الحضرية المصممة جيدًا لديها القدرة على إحداث تحول في المجتمعات.

Analysis of techniques used:

1. **Transposition:** "Urban planning" → "تخطيط المدن" (word order change)
2. **Modulation:** "What was once focused" → "فبعدما كان يركز" (perspective shift)
3. **Expansion:** "Modern city planners" → "مخططي المدن المعاصرين" (addition of "contemporary")
4. **Connectives:** Note the use of connectives (و، ف) at sentence beginnings, typical in Arabic discourse
5. **Passive to active:** "well-designed urban spaces" maintains active voice in Arabic

Practical Application Exercise

Instructions: Apply appropriate translation techniques to render the following paragraph in Arabic:

English Text:

Digital literacy has become essential in today's job market. Employers increasingly expect candidates to navigate various software platforms and understand basic programming concepts. For job seekers, investing time in developing these skills can open doors to new opportunities. However, the rapid pace of technological change means that continuous learning is necessary to stay relevant.

Suggested Arabic Translation with Techniques Identified:

أصبحت المعرفة الرقمية ضرورية في سوق العمل اليوم [literal translation]. ويتوقع أرباب العمل بشكل متزايد من المرشحين أن يتمكنوا من استخدام مختلف منصات البرمجيات وفهم مفاهيم البرمجة الأساسية" → "employers expect" [transposition]. يتوقع أرباب العمل ["وبالنسبة للباحثين عن عمل، فإن استثمار الوقت في تطوير هذه المهارات يمكن أن يفتح أبوابًا لفرص جديدة" → "open doors" [equivalence]. يفتح أبوابًا ["ومع ذلك، فإن الوتيرة السريعة للتغير التكنولوجي تعني أن التعلم المستمر ضروري للبقاء مواكبًا للتطورات" → "stay relevant" [modulation]. البقاء مواكبًا للتطورات](staying up-to-date with developments) "

Conclusion

Understanding and applying these translation techniques allows translators to move beyond word-for-word translation to create target texts that preserve meaning while sounding natural in the target language. Recognizing when to use each technique is a skill that develops with practice and analysis of successful translations. In our next lesson, we'll explore how cultural considerations influence translation choices between English and Arabic.