



# **DBB 408 TRANSLATION STUDIES IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

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## Dedikodu

## Rumours

## Gossip

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1 Kim söylemiş beni

1 Who says

1 Who started the rumor

2 Süheyla'ya vurulmuşum diye?

2 I've fallen for Süheyla?

2 That I have a crush on Süheyla?

3 Kim görmüş ama kim,

3 Who saw me, who

3 I dare you to tell who saw me

4 Eleni'yi öptüğümü,

4 Kissing Eleni

4 Kissing Eleni

5 Yüksekaldırımda, güpegündüz?

5 On the sidewalk in the middle of the day?

5 On the Winding Steps in broad daylight?

6 Melahat'ı almışım da sonra

6 And they saw I took Melahat

6 Do they say I grabbed Melahat and took her to Alemdar,

7 Alemdara gitmişim, öyle mi?

7 To Alemdar

7 Is that what they are saying?

8 Onu sonra anlatırım fakat

8 Is that so?

8 Well, I'll explain that later, but

9 Kimin bacağını sıkılmışım tramvayda?

9 I'll tell you about it later,

9 Whose bottom do they claim I pinched on the streetcar?

10 Güya bir de Galata'ya dadanmışız;

10 But whose knee did I squeeze on the streetcar?

10 And what's the one about the Galata brothels

11 Kafaları çekip çekip

11 Supposedly, I've developed a taste for the fleshpots of Galata

11 That I took loaded, the liquor goes to my head

12 Orada alıyormuşuz soluğu;

12 I drink, get drunk,

12 And I rush down there?

13 Geç bunları, anam babam, geç;

13 Then take myself there

13 Come off it, man?

14 Geç bunları bir kalem;

14 Forget about these guys

14 Never mind all that,

15 Bilirim ben yaptığımı.

15 Forget, forget about them.

15 I know what I'm doing.

16 Ya o, Mualla'yı sandala atıp,

16 I know what I'm doing.

16 And what's that story about my getting Mualla into a rowboat

17 Ruhumda hicranın'ı söyletme hikâyesi?

17 And what about me

17 And making her sing "Your grief is in my heart"?

18 Supposedly putting Mualla on a rowboat

19 And making her sing out loud "My soul is yearning for you..."

20 In the middle of the harbour.

# Grammatical Equivalence

- ▶ **Grammar** is the set of rules which determine the way in which units such as **words and phrases** can be combined in a language and the kind of information which has to be made regularly explicit in utterances.
- ▶ A language can express any kind of information its speakers need to express, but **the grammatical system** of a given language will determine the ease with which certain notions such as **time reference** or **gender** can be made explicit.
- ▶ Languages **differ** widely in the range of notions they choose to make explicit on a regular basis.

# Grammatical vs. Lexical Categories

- ▶ **Grammar** is organized along two main dimensions: **morphology** and **syntax**.
- ▶ **Morphology** covers the structure of words, the way in which the form of a word changes to indicate specific contrasts in the grammatical system.
- ▶ **For instance**, most nouns in English have **two forms**, a **singular** form and a **plural** form:
- ▶ *man/men, child/children, car/cars.*
- ▶ **English** can therefore be said to have **a grammatical category of number**.

- ▶ **Syntax** covers the grammatical structure of **groups, clauses, and sentences**: the linear sequences of classes of words such as **noun, verb, adverb, and adjective**, and functional elements such as **subject** and **object** which are allowed in a given language.
- ▶ The syntactic structure of a language imposes certain **restrictions** on the way messages may be organized in that language.
- ▶ Choices in a language can be expressed **grammatically** or **lexically**, depending on the **type** and **range** of linguistic resources available in a given language.
- ▶ Choices made from **closed systems**, such as **the number system (singular/plural)** or **the pronoun system** in English, are **grammatical**; those made from **open-ended sets of items** or expressions are **lexical**.

- ▶ The **most important difference** between grammatical and lexical choices, as far as translation is concerned, is that **grammatical choices are largely obligatory** while **lexical choices are largely optional**.
- ▶ Languages which have morphological resources for expressing a certain category such as **number, tense, or gender**, have to express these categories regularly; those which do not have morphological resources for expressing the same categories do not have to express them.
- ▶ Because **a grammatical choice** is drawn from a **closed set of options**, it is:  
**(a) obligatory,**  
**(b) rules out other choices from the same system by default.**
- ▶ The fact that number is a grammatical category in English means that an English speaker or writer who uses a noun such as **student** or **child** has to choose between **singular** and **plural**.
- ▶ The same is not true in **Chinese** or **Japanese**, where **number is a lexical rather than a grammatical category**. A **Chinese** or **Japanese** speaker or writer **does not have to choose between singular and plural**, unless the context demands that this information be made explicit.

- ▶ Where necessary, number is indicated in these languages by means of adding a word such as **'several'** or a numeral such as **'one'** or **'five'** to the noun, rather than by changing the form of the noun itself.
- ▶ Grammatical structure also differs from lexical structure in that **it is more resistant to change**. It is much easier to introduce a new word, expression, or collocation into a language than to introduce a new grammatical category.
- ▶ The grammatical structure of a language changes, but this does not happen overnight. Grammatical change occurs over a much longer time scale than lexical change.
- ▶ On the whole, the grammatical structure of a language remains fairly constant throughout the lifetime of an individual, whereas one encounters new words, expressions, and collocations on a daily basis.

## The Diversity of Grammatical Categories Across Languages

- ▶ It is difficult to find a notional category which is regularly and uniformly expressed in all languages.
- ▶ Even categories such as **time** and **number**, which many of us take as reflecting basic aspects of experience, are only optionally indicated in some Asian languages such as **Chinese** and **Vietnamese**.
- ▶ On the other hand, a number of **American Indian languages** such as **Yana** and **Navaho** have grammatical categories which in many other languages would hardly ever be expressed even by lexical means. These languages, for instance, have a category of '**shape**', which means that an object must be classified according to whether it is **long** or **round**. (Sapir and Swadesh, 1964).



- ▶ Some languages, such as **Amuesha of Peru**, regularly indicate whether a person is **dead** or **alive** by adding a **suffix** to the name of any person referred to after his/her death (Larson, 1984). **The absence of the suffix indicates that the person concerned is alive.**
- ▶ **Languages therefore differ widely** in the way they are equipped to handle various notions and express various aspects of experience, possibly because they differ in the degree of importance or relevance that they attach to such aspects of experience.
- ▶ **Time** is regarded as a **crucial aspect of experience** in English, so that it is virtually impossible to discuss any event in English without locating it in the **past, present, or future.**

- ▶ Differences in the grammatical structures of the source and target languages often result in some change in the information content of the message during the process of translation.
- ▶ This change may take the form of adding to the target text information which is not expressed in the source text. This can happen when the target language has a grammatical category which the source language lacks.
- ▶ In translating from **English** or **French** into an **American Indian language** such as **Yana** or **Navaho**, one would have to add information concerning the shape of any objects mentioned in the text.
- ▶ Likewise, in translating into **Amuesha**, one would have to indicate whether any person mentioned in the text is **dead or alive**.

# 1. Number

- ▶ The idea of **countability** is probably universal in the sense that it is accessible to all human beings and is expressed in the lexical structure of all languages. However, **not all languages have a grammatical category of number**.
- ▶ English recognizes a distinction between one and more than one (**singular and plural**). This distinction has to be expressed morphologically, by adding a suffix to a noun or by changing its form in some other way to indicate whether it refers to one or more than one: ***student/ students, fox/foxes, man/men, child/children***.
- ▶ Some languages, such as **Japanese, Chinese, and Vietnamese**, prefer to express the same notion lexically or, more often, not at all. The form of a noun in these languages does not normally indicate whether it is singular or plural. For example, ***my book*** and ***my books*** are both ***wo-de-shu*** in **Chinese**.

- ▶ **Arabic, Eskimo, and some Slavonic languages** formally distinguish between **one, two, and more than two**.
- ▶ **English** regularly expresses a meaning contrast between **house** and **houses**, whereas **Eskimo** regularly expresses a meaning contrast between **iglu**, **igluk**, and **iglut** (**'one/two/more than two houses'**).
- ▶ A translator working from a language which has **number distinctions** into a language with no category of number has two main options: s/he can:
  - ▶ **(a) omit the relevant information on number, or**
  - ▶ **(b) encode this information lexically.**

## 2. Gender

- ▶ **Gender** is a grammatical distinction according to which a noun or pronoun is classified as either **masculine** or **feminine** in some languages.
- ▶ The distinction applies to nouns which refer to **animate beings** as well as those which refer to **inanimate objects**.
- ▶ **French** distinguishes between **masculine** and **feminine** gender in nouns such as *fil*/*fille* ('son'/'daughter') and *chat*/*chatte* ('male cat'/'female cat').
- ▶ **Determiners, adjectives,** and sometimes **verbs (as in the case of Arabic and Swahili)** usually agree with the noun in gender as well as in number.
- ▶ **English does not have a grammatical category of gender as such;** English nouns are not regularly inflected to distinguish between feminine and masculine.
- ▶ The gender distinction nevertheless exists in some semantic areas and in the **person** system.

- ▶ Different nouns are sometimes used to refer to **female** and **male** members of the same species: **doe/stag, mare/stallion, ewe/ram**.
- ▶ A small number of nouns which refer to professions have **masculine** and **feminine forms**, with **the suffix -ess** indicating feminine gender.
- ▶ **actor/actress, manager/manageress, host/hostess**.
- ▶ In addition to gender distinctions in specific semantic areas, English also has a category of **person** which distinguishes in the third-person singular between **masculine, feminine, and inanimate (he/she/it)**. This distinction does not apply to **the third-person plural (they)**.
- ▶ **Russian and German** make **similar gender distinctions in the third-person singular pronouns** and, like English, do not apply these distinctions to the third-person plural.

- ▶ On the other hand, languages like **French** and **Italian** maintain the **gender distinction in the third-person plural**: for example, *ils vs. elles* in French.
- ▶ Other languages such as **Chinese** and **Indonesian** do not have gender distinctions in their person systems at all.
- ▶ There is now a conscious attempt to replace **the unmarked masculine form *he*** in English with forms such as *s/he*, *he* or *she*, and *him* or *her*. This is particularly true of academic writing. But even among the general public, overtly masculine nouns such as ***chairman***, ***spokesman***, and ***businessman*** are consciously being replaced by more neutral ones such as ***chairperson***, ***spokesperson***, ***businesswoman***.
- ▶ This ideological stance is somewhat difficult to transfer into languages in which gender distinctions pervade the grammatical system. It is fairly easy to make the switch from ***he*** to something like *s/he* or *him/her* in English because the change affects these items only. But in a language such as **Arabic**, where gender distinctions are reflected **not only in nouns and pronouns**, but also in the **concord between these** and **their accompanying verbs and adjectives**, the resulting structures would clearly be much more complex than in English.

## 3. Person

- ▶ The category of **person** relates to the notion of **participant roles**.
- ▶ The most common distinction is that between **first person** (identifying the speaker or a group which includes the speaker: English *I/we*), **second person** (identifying the person or persons addressed: English *you*), and **third person** (identifying persons and things other than the speaker and addressee: English *he/she/it/they*).
- ▶ The pronoun system in **Chinese** features a **number distinction** (e.g. *Wo* 'I' vs. *Wo-men* 'we'; *Ni* 'you' singular vs. *Ni-men* 'you' plural). On the other hand, it does not feature any gender distinctions at all (e.g. *Ta* 'he/she/it' vs. *Ta-men* 'they')
- ▶ A large number of modern European languages, not including English, have a **formality/politeness dimension** in their person system. Examples: Spanish *usted* as opposed to *tu*; German *Sie* as opposed to *du* etc.



- ▶ All languages have **modes of address** which can be used to express familiarity in a similar way, cf. the difference between *you, mate, dear, darling*, and *Mr Smith, Sir, Professor Brown, Mrs Jones, Madam*.
- ▶ Decisions have to be made along such dimensions as gender, degree of intimacy between participants, or **whether reference includes or excludes the addressee**.
- ▶ The **familiarity dimension** in the pronoun system is among the most fascinating aspects of grammar and the most problematic in translation.

- The examples are taken from a French translation of one of **Agatha Christie's thrillers, *Crooked House* (1949)**. The events of the novel involve a number of key characters who are related to one another in a variety of ways. **In the French translation**, the nature of each relation has to be reflected in the **choice of pronouns** that various characters use in addressing each other. The characters in the following dialogue are a **young man, Charles**, and a **young lady, Sophia**. They have worked together and have been friends for some time. **Charles has just asked Sophia to marry him.**

Note the use of the **vous** form in the French translation, indicating a level of formality and politeness which are not overtly conveyed in the English original.

English source text (p. 9):

‘Darling – don’t you understand? I’ve tried *not* to say I love you-’

She stopped me.

‘I do understand Charles. And I like your funny way of doing things. . . .’

French translation (p. 9):

– Mais **vous** ne **comprenez** donc pas? **Vous** ne **voyez** donc pas que je fais tout ce que je peux pour ne pas **vous** dire que je **vous** aime et. . .

Elle m’interrompt.

– J’ai parfaitement compris, Charles, et **votre** façon comique de présenter les choses m’est très sympathique. . .

## 4. Tense and aspect

- ▶ **Tense and aspect** are grammatical categories in a large number of languages. The form of the verb in languages which have these categories usually indicates **two main types of information: time relations and aspectual differences**.
- ▶ **Time relations** have to do with **locating an event in time**. The usual distinction is between **past, present, and future**.
- ▶ **Aspectual differences** have to do with the **temporal distribution of an event**, for instance **its completion or non-completion, continuation, or momentariness**.
- ▶ In some languages, **the tense and aspect system**, or parts of it, may be highly developed. **Bali**, for instance, **has a rather precise system of time reference**.

- ▶ Some languages, such as **Chinese, Malay, and Yurok**, have **no formal category of tense or aspect**. The form of the verb in these languages does not change to express temporal or aspectual distinctions. If necessary, **time reference can be indicated by means of various particles and adverbials**.
- ▶ **Japanese** has a **grammatical category of tense** which is not too dissimilar to that of English. The suffixes **-ru** and **-ta** are regularly added to verbs to indicate **non-past** and **past reference** respectively.

- ▶ The following examples show **how time relations are typically signalled in Chinese** when the context demands that such information be made explicit:

ta *xian-zai* zai bei-jing gong-zuo (lit.: 'he *now* in Peking work', i.e. 'he is working in Peking')

ta *dang-shi* zai bei-jing gong-zuo (lit.: 'he *at that time* in Peking work', i.e. 'he was working in Peking')

(from Tan, 1980:111)

- ▶ If the adverbials in the above examples were not included in the clause, one would have to rely entirely on the context to establish the time of the event.

## 5. Voice

- ▶ The use of the **passive voice** is extremely common in many varieties of written English and can **pose various problems in translation**, depending on the availability of similar structures, or structures with similar functions, in the target language.
- ▶ **Voice** is a **grammatical category** which defines the relationship between a **verb** and **its subject**. In **active** clauses, **the subject is the agent** responsible for performing the action. In **passive** clauses, **the subject is the affected entity**, and the agent may or may not be specified.
- ▶ Most languages have a variety of mechanisms for constructing '**agentless**' clauses; for instance, the **French** statement ***On parle anglais*** and the **German** ***Man spricht Englisch*** leave the agent unspecified by using a '**dummy**' subject, ***on*** and ***man*** respectively. **They can be translated into English either by using a similar 'dummy' subject, *They speak English***, where *they* does not refer to a specific agent, or by using the passive voice, ***English is spoken***.

- ▶ Languages which have a **category of voice** do not always use the passive with the same frequency. **German uses the passive much less frequently than English.**
- ▶ **Scientific and technical writing in English**, for instance, **relies heavily on passive structures.** This is done to give the impression of **objectivity** and to **distance the writer** from the statements made in the text. **Russian**, on the other hand, **does not favour this strategy.** Common fixed and semi-fixed phrases in Russian make use of the active voice. An expression such as **'we invite you to . . .'** is **more natural in Russian** than **'you are invited to . . .'**, although both are possible.
- ▶ **Some languages use the passive more frequently than English in everyday contexts.** In **Tjolobal** of Mexico, **passive structures are the norm**, with **active structures being used very rarely.**



- ▶ **The main function of the passive in English** and in a number of other languages is, as already mentioned, **to avoid specifying the agent and to give an impression of objectivity.**
- ▶ In some languages, notably **Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese,** and **Thai,** the main function of the passive, or passive-like structures as in the case of Chinese, **is to express adversity.**
- ▶ In these languages, **the passive is traditionally used to report unfortunate events;** for instance, one would say something like **'I was rained on'** in **Japanese,** rather than **'It rained on me'.**
- ▶ The regular association of passive structures with adversity in certain languages means that **the passive can often carry connotations of unpleasantness** even when the event depicted is not normally seen as unpleasant.

- ▶ **The most important things to bear in mind** as far as voice is concerned are **the frequency of use of active, passive, and similar structures in the source and target languages**, their respective **stylistic value in different text types**, and – most important of all – **the function(s) of the passive and similar structures in each language**.
- ▶ Other grammatical categories which can pose difficulties in translation include **mood, direct and indirect speech, causativity**, and many others.
- ▶ **Translators** should find it useful to investigate and compare the expression of such categories and the meanings associated with various structures in their source and target languages.