

One Two and Three: Theory and Function in Translation: A Study on the Notion of Number in Translation

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Number is a universal concept that can be discussed both in the fields of Linguistics and Translation Methods. It is readily accessible to all human beings and is expressed in the lexical structures of all languages. In this paper the factor of number is further investigated as well as the issues related to translation.

Some Languages identify a distinction between 'one' and 'more than one' like 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 point out whether it refers to 'one' or 'more than one'.

Girl → Girls
Woman → Women
Ox → Oxen

Some other languages 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, in Japanese

Isu → Isu
Chair → Chairs
Neko → Neko
Cat → Cats
Yubi → Yubi
Finger → Fingers

It is clearly seen that Japanese does not distinguish number lexically.

Sinhala and English always distinguish between 'one' or 'more than one'. Unlike some languages such as Sanskrit, Arabic and some Slavonic languages formally distinguish between 'one', 'two' and 'more than two'. In the case of Sinhala and English, 'dual' is a lexical rather than a grammatical category. It can only be indicated by the use of a numeral. So English rarely expresses a meaning contrast between fruit and fruits whereas Sanskrit regularly expresses a meaning contrast between /phalam/, /phale:/, /phala:ni/

A small number of languages such as Fijian even distinguish between singular, dual, trial and plural. Such additional variations to a system can sometimes cause problems in translation.

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