UNIT 1: GUESSING MEANING OF NEW / UNFAMILIAR WORDS

DO YOU KNOW?

Success in translating a document requires a translator to use of various problems solving skills. One of these skills is that it is almost impossible for a translator to know the exact meaning of every word he / she reads, especially when translating from another language to his / her native language. However, by developing guessing ability, he / she will often be able to understand enough to arrive at the total meaning of a sentence, a paragraph or a document as a whole. In using the context to decide the meaning of a word or a phrase, a translator has to use:

- **background knowledge,**

- **knowledge of the subject matter he / she is translating**

- **knowledge of grammar and sentence structure**

- **an ability to understand the author's ideas.**

Although there is no formula that you can memorize to improve your ability to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words, you should keep the following points in mind:

HINTS:

1. Use the meanings of (i) the other words in the sentence (or paragraph) and (ii) the meaning of the sentence as a whole to reduce the number of possible meaning.

2. Use grammar and punctuation clues that point to the relationships among the various parts of the sentence.

3. Be happy with a general idea about the unfamiliar word; exact definition or synonym is not always necessary.

4. Learn to recognize the situations in which it is not necessary to know the meaning of the word.

TASK 1 Read the passage below and in 10 minutes try to translate it into Vietnamese. Write your translation down on a piece of paper. You are supposed not to use dictionary or ask your friend(s).

VIETNAM NEW TECHNOLOGY IN TREE PLANTING

The gradual deforestation of the upstream riverine areas of Northwest and northern Central of Vietnam has led to a number of damaging environmental effects. The immediate effect of the removal of root systems and overhead shelter is to expose the earth to wind attrition, resulting in soil erosion. Subsequently, when trees no longer remove ground water, a second consequence of deforestation is a rise in water table, resulting in a great incident of flooding and salinity. Both these problems pose a serious threat to agriculture, the most important sector of the country's economy. As a counter measure, the Government of Vietnam launched an ambitious scheme to plant a billion trees by the year 2020. The project, however, encountered a number of initial difficulties.

This is one part of a longer translation exercise. After the exercise, some of the students were asked if they had any problems while translating it. Below are some of their answers.

Student 1
> " I started translating right away. However, some difficult structures slow me down a lot. I feel comfortable with the Vietnamese sentences but the English words did confuse me at first...... "

Student 2
> " Many news words ! They prevented me from translating. I understand the idea of the whole passage but I have left some sentences just half translated. I didn't do the translation well enough. Maybe I will do it again...."

Student 3
> " I had never read anything about forestry so I really got shocked when I read the passage. I usually translate something more common, not about anything specific like that ..."

Student 4
> " I feel it difficult to understand the passage. My translation doesn't sound Vietnamese at all. Why did people write English that way ? "

Student 5
> " I understand the passage but it is not easy to give Vietnamese equivalents to some of the phrases, isn't it "

WHO ARE YOU ?

TASK 2   After you have translated the extract, what Vietnamese equivalents did you find that fit the following phrases?

1. **upstream riverine areas**
2. **the removal of root systems and overhead shelter**
3. **wind attrition**
4. **remove ground water**
5. **a rise in water table**
6. **a great incident of salinity**
7. **a counter measure**
8. **an ambitious scheme**
9. **encountered**

TASK 3   Now you have, to some extent, acquired two skills of guessing the meaning of new/ unfamiliar words. Use these skills to guess the meaning of the bold typed words in the following passage and translate the passage into Vietnamese

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VIETNAM NEW TECHNOLOGY IN TREE PLANTING   (Cont)

By using traditional manual planting techniques, the **scheme** would have required a massive number of workers (estimated at 50,000 over a 10 year period). This would have resulted in extremely high unit costs which were unrealistic for many **rural agencies** who are providing half of the finance. In addition, the eucalyptus **seedlings**, which are imported from Australia and young trees suffered a 20 % **mortality** rates as a result of disease, poor drainage and **inadequate** protection from wind, animals and birds.

Mechanical planters and **tree guards** provide two solutions which have significantly improved the efficiency of the planting program. The Research Institute of Forestry Technology (RIFT) developed a **tractor-driven planter** capable of planting both seeds and saplings. The planter can drill, plant and water 5000 seeds or 1000 saplings per hour. It is operated by one person, requires little maintenance and costs around 10,000 USD.

The mortality rate of young trees has been drastically cut by a tree guard also developed by RIFT. This simple device is composed of a sheet of PVC plastic costing of around 20 cents which is wrapped around the trunks of young trees. It provides support for the growing trunk and protection against oxen, cows, water buffaloes or other animals while special holes and channels in the plastic allow light and air to enter and concentrate water to the roots of the tree.

In contrast to traditional **stake and wire support** and protection systems, the plastic guards are much cheaper and can be installed on site more rapidly. Experiments have shown that mortality in young trees can be reduced by almost 90 percent using this system.

Are you happy with your translation?   YES / NO. And why?