

What Resists Translation

Languages

The kinds of meaning that do not transfer cleanly between languages.

Where translators have to make a decision the original did not.

Difficulty	Why
Idioms	Meaning is not built from the parts
Grammatical gender	No equivalent category to carry
Formality (tu/vous)	English has no obligatory distinction
Aspect	Some languages mark it, others do not
Evidentiality	Some grammars require your source
Wordplay	Depends on the specific forms
Cultural concepts	No matching referent

Some languages force you to state whether you witnessed something. Translating into English silently discards that information.