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Equivalence and contemporary equivalence theories

There were many discussions of the term "equivalence" in translation. The proponents of this notion such as Nida, Newmark, Jacobson, Bayar and others try hard to define its nature, types and also compare its degrees as a crucial subject of research in translation, whereas other opponents like Vander Broek, Mehrach and Van Leuven consider it an impossible target for any translator to reach, and a hindering matter in the development of translation theory.

I will try to shed as much light as possible on the theories and writings that have dealt with the notion of equivalence.

In fact, the increase in studying equivalence in translation coincides with the birth of a strong wave of research in machine translation. Van Leuven Zwart states: "It (equivalence) was used then in its strict scientific sense, to refer to an absolute symmetrical relationship between words of different languages" [1: 14, cited by Mehrach].

That is, the aim of researchers is to develop automatic translation led to concentrate on the equivalent effects that exist between words from different languages, hence the proliferation of equivalence studies.

In his work on Bible translation, Nida concentrates on studying meaning from both its semantic and pragmatic perspectives. He breaks with the old stories, which regard meanings of words as fixed and unchanged, to give meaning a more functional nature. For him, words get their meanings according to the context and can be changed through the culture in which they are used. Needless to say that Nida distinguishes between many types of meaning: linguistic meaning, referential meaning and emotive meaning [2: 38].

Nida's theory of translation is characterized by the distinction between two types of equivalence: formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. For formal equivalence, the translator focuses on the message itself, that is, its form and content, and there should be a close similarity between the source text (ST) and the target text (TT) message [3: 159]. In the same context, Munday, points out that "gloss translation", with scholarly "footnotes" is the most typical formal equivalence as they allow the student to understand the source culture's language and customs [2: 41].

Nida gives paramount importance to the notion of "naturalness". He claims that the main aim of "equivalent effect" is to achieve the closest natural equivalent to the source language. Actually, "naturalness" as a basic keyword in Nida's theory relies on the adaptation of grammar, cultural references and lexicon of the ST. It goes without saying that Nida privileges the preservation of the text meaning on its style, since it allows the translator to create the same equivalent effects.

The other figure of translation theorists who devotes a great deal of research to the notion of equivalence is Koller. He distinguishes between five types of equivalence: "denotative equivalence" refers to the case where the ST and the TT have the same denotations, that is conveying the same extralinguistic facts; "connotative equivalence", also referred to as "stylistic equivalence", is related to the lexical choices between near synonyms; "text normative" refers to text types, i.e., the description and analysis of a variety of texts behaving differently; "pragmatic equivalence", also called "communicative equivalence", is targeted towards the receptor of the text, as he should receive the same effect that the original text produces on its readers; "formal equivalence", may also be referred to as "expressive equivalence", is related to the word-for-word rendition of forms, aesthetic and stylistic features of the ST [2: 47]. It goes without saying that Koller devotes a large part of his research to the examination of the relation between "equivalence" and "correspondence".

The term "equivalence" continues to be a central issue for many years. Theorists and scholars try hard to define it as a way to enhance its role in translation. Translation equivalence occurs when the SL (source language) and the TL (target language) texts or items are related to the same relevant features of situation substance.

Some scholars use the term "text-bound equivalence", while others work on "functional equivalence". Mona Baker also devotes her work to equivalent types and argues that equivalence is always relative in the sense that it is influenced by many linguistic and cultural factors [4: 6].

Besides we can distinguish between formal equivalence, semantic equivalence, cultural equivalence and pragmatic equivalence. Formal equivalence designates an area of correspondence ranging around the word, even though involving lower units such as the phoneme or the morpheme. Semantic equivalence relies on the preservation of many semantic criteria: denotation, connotation and propositional content. So, words which do not have the same equivalent meanings can be translated by "explanatory expressions" as a way of compensation. Cultural equivalence aims at the reproduction of whatever cultural features the ST holds into the TT. These vary from things specific to the geographical situation, the climate, the history, the tradition, the religion, the interpersonal behavior to any cultural event having an effect on the language community [5: 177].

It is clear from this definition that cultural equivalence consists of the rendition of the SL cultural features into the TL in a way that helps the reader understand these foreign cultural features through his own cultural ones. Actually, cultural equivalence can be easily reached in case the cultural words under translation are universally known. However, this can be diminished with cultural differences that languages may have.

Pragmatic equivalence tends to reproduce the context and text goals of the SL. It subsumes all of the semio-pragmatic-communicative layers of communication.

Examples of these semiotic and communicative dimensions are genre, field, mode, tenor, text type and translation purpose.

However, some scholars opposes the idea of equivalence in translation as a form of linguistic synonymy, ensuring that the latter does not exist even with words of the same language.

Sometimes the term "equivalence" is redefined by the concept of "true understanding". Besides it not only distorts the basic problem of translation, but also obstructs the development of a descriptive theory of translation. M. Mehrach also considers equivalence as an impossible aim in translation. He corroborates his saying by the idea that no two languages share the same linguistic structures, and social or cultural aspects. Instead, he proposes the use of the term "adequacy" as a reference for the "appropriate" translation, that is, "a translation that has achieved the required optimal level of interlanguage communication under certain given conditions" [1: 16].

In brief, it is clear from the above conflicting views and theories that the notion of equivalence is arbitrary and relative as well. It is, in fact, difficult to determine since no one could objectively define the point at which the TT becomes equal to the ST. Thus, to be moderate as much as possible, we will not define equivalence as a point of translation proficiency or reject its existence in translation, but we will, instead, use it as a form of approximation in which the TT approximates the ST.

Література
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