

The Problem of Equivalence in Translation(*)

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Abstract

This research is concerned with the examination of the problem of equivalence in translation. By definition, translation is a process that deals with transferring meaning across different languages as well as cultures. In this sense, the translator is required to have sufficient knowledge about the process of translation and its various techniques in order to achieve equivalence. Moreover, this paper tackles the role of the context in translation and its different types. It is noteworthy that context plays a remarkable role in the process of translation. This is attributed to the fact that the context aids the translator to determine the selection of the convenient equivalent meaning. This research also sheds light on the notion of 'ideational equivalence' as a third option in translation beside 'formal' and 'functional' equivalence. Finally, this paper seeks to help translators to achieve accuracy, faithfulness, and success in their mission.

Keywords

Equivalence, Translation, Context, and Ideational Equivalence

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المخلص

يتناول هذا البحث دراسة وتحليل إشكالية التقابل في الترجمة. وحسب تعريف الترجمة فهي عملية تتناول نقل المعنى عبر لغات وثقافات مختلفة. وفي هذا الإطار، فإن الترجمة تتطلب أن تتوافر لدى المترجم المعرفة الكافية فيما يتعلق بعملية الترجمة وأساليبها المختلفة لتحقيق التقابل. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يتناول البحث أهمية دور السياق في عملية الترجمة. وترجع هذه الأهمية إلى حقيقة أن السياق يمكّن المترجم من تحديد المقابل المناسب للنص المراد ترجمته. كما يلقي البحث الضوء على مفهوم المقابل الذهني (الفكري) كخيار ثالث في عملية الترجمة إلى جانب كل من المقابل الشكلي والمقابل الوظيفي. وأخيرًا، فإن هذا البحث يهدف إلى تقديم العون للمترجمين لتحقيق الدقة والأمانة والنجاح في مهمتهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية

التقابل ، الترجمة ، السياق ، التقابل الذهني (الفكري).

Introduction

This notion of equivalence and equivalent effect in translation studies has been the revolve of a heated debate among linguistics and researchers. Bassnett (1991: 25) describes equivalence as "*a much-used and abused term in translation studies*", while Mary Snell Homby (1990: 80) regards it as a highly controversial concept that, despite a heated debate of over twenty years, was never satisfactorily defined in its relevance to translation. Equivalence, however, remains the most prominent concept within the field of translation studies owing to the circularity of its definition: "*equivalence is supposed to define translation, and translation in turn defines equivalence*" (Pym 1992: 37). It is the unique intertextual relation that only

translations among all conceivable text types are expected to show.

1. Translation

By definition, translation is a process that deals with meaning across language boundaries. The essential mission of translation "lies in the preservation of 'meaning' across different languages" (House, 1977). In this context, Newmark (1981) argues that through acquiring more knowledge about the process of translation and conducting more research about meaning across cultures, the knowledge about the process of translation would be enriched so that it could be made more adequate in rendering texts across cultures. Furthermore, Larson (1984: 3) states that translation consists of studying the lexicon, grammatical structure, communication meaning, and then reconstructing this same meaning using the lexicon and grammatical structure which are appropriate in the 'receptor language' and its cultural context.

The above mentioned definitions would raise the issue of translation problems. The term 'translation problems' has been first initiated by Eugene Nida (1964:91) who used it to refer to any difficulty that may confront a translator. In addition, Ghazala (1995: 18) states that, it is "*any difficulty which makes us stop translating to think about it, rewrite it, or use a dictionary to check the meaning of a word, etc.*" However, M. Enani: (2000: 309) distinguishes between the 'translation problem' and the 'translation difficulty'. He believes that "*the difficulty in translation is personal, it differs from one translator to another,*

but the problem of translating is an obstacle which hinders achieving a good translation".

2. The Role of the Context

As a result of the increasing importance of the notion of context in the process of translation, different linguists and researchers have tackled it from various angles. In order to understand what context is, Yule (1996:21) starts by dividing context into two major branches; linguistic context and physical context. Another division of context into two main branches as well has been suggested by Cutting (2002: 3); (a) the situation context, and (b) the background knowledge context.

It should be noted that division of context has been an issue that raised a lot of controversy among linguists and researchers. Nevertheless, Hymes handled the notion of context from a different perspective. Hymes' (1964: 25) theory of context is based on the 'role' and not 'division' of context. In his view, context plays two major roles; first is "*limiting the range of possible explicit interpretations*", and second is "*supporting the intended interpretation*". Furthermore, Hymes sets twelve elements, which he regards as basic for context in order to guarantee a better understanding of the process of interpreting. Hymes starts by the 'addresser'; the speaker or writer who makes the speech, then the 'addressee'; the hearer or reader who is the recipient of the speech. The 'audience' is more or less as the addressee. The 'topic' refers to the subject in which the speech is involved. The 'setting' includes time and place, which are

relevant to the physical context. 'Channel' is the language used between participants in the event. 'Code' is the dialect used to continue conversation or register. 'Message form' is which form is used to deliver the message. 'Event' is the nature of communicative event, and 'key' refers to evaluation. Finally, 'purpose' is the participant's intentions.

3. Equivalence in Translation

The notion of equivalence and equivalent effect in translation studies has been the revolve of a heated debate among linguists and researchers. Bassnett (1991: 25) describes equivalence as "*a much-used and abused term in translation studies*", while Mary Snell-Hornby (1990: 80) regards it as "*a highly controversial concept*" that, despite a heated debate of over twenty years, was never satisfactorily defined in its relevance to translation". Equivalence, however, remains the most prominent concept within the field of translation studies owing to the circularity of its definition: "*equivalence is supposed to define translation, and translation, in turn defines equivalence*" (Pym 1992: 37). It is the unique inter textual relation that only translations among all conceivable text types are expected to show.

It should be noted that translation is a process performed on languages, and languages differ from each other in form due to the fact that each of them has its distinct codes and rules that regulate the construction and meaning of texts. Thus, equivalence is a kind of a relationship that exists between two (or more)

entities and is described as one of likeness/ sameness/ similarity/ equality in terms of any number of potential qualities.

Nevertheless, 'translation equivalence' cannot, by any means, be regarded as an equivalent for 'correspondence'. On the one hand, correspondence is always studied under contrastive linguistics- the field which is concerned with the comparison of two different language systems in an attempt to trace both similarities and differences. On the other hand, "*equivalence relates to equivalent words, terms, expressions or idioms in specific languages and contexts.*" (Enani 2003: 76). It is a relative concept in that " it is subject to the historical- cultural conditions under which translations are produced and to a variety of linguistic- textual and extra textual factors" (Hatim 2001: 28).

4. The Ideational Equivalence

Translation Equivalence is mainly a transfer of a message in the source language (SL) and the source culture (SC) into the target language (TL) and the target culture (TC); a functionally oriented approach to translation. In this sense, it is essential to shed light on the notion of 'ideational equivalence'. In his article entitled, "*Ideational Equivalence in Translation*", Farghal (1994) suggests limiting 'ideational equivalence' to correspondence between 'ideas', alongside the more usual criteria of 'formal equivalence' measure in terms of whether linguistic forms are correspondingly arranged, and 'functional equivalence' in terms of whether corresponding communicative actions are performed.

Moreover, Farghal believes that the concept of 'ideational equivalence' can work as a third helpful counterpart to both formal and functional equivalence for several reasons.

First, the translator's sensitivity for ideational equivalence can enhance the choice of options during the process of translation. Second, the concept of ideational equivalence can relieve the translator from using awkward or add expressions. Finally, some expressions and registers would favour one type of equivalent over the others.

Conclusion

This research focuses on examining and analyzing the issue of equivalence in translation. Since every language is *Sui-generis*, a self-contained system, no words (semantic units) or constructions can have absolute equivalents in another language. Also, this paper provides an overview of the process of translation and the various elements of direct association to it. Among these elements, context plays a remarkable role in the process of translation. Thus, the present work examines the role of context and its different types. In addition, the notion of equivalence, with its various definitions is handled. Finally, this research ends by discussing the concept of 'ideational equivalence' as a third counterpart to both 'formal' and 'functional' equivalence.

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