

**Achieving linguistic
equivalence in Arabic**

مجلة
الاندلس
العلمية

عارف علي صلاح الذبياني
دكتوراه في اللغويات
أستاذ مساعد بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية
كلية الآداب بالمكلا
جامعة حضرموت للعلوم والتكنولوجيا

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ملخص البحث:

يتطرق هذا البحث إلى مفهوم المكافئ اللغوي حيث يستعرض في مستهله أنواعه المختلفة من خلال استعراض العديد من الدراسات السابقة التي ناقشت هذا الموضوع.

ولأن بلوغ المكافئ اللغوي ليس بالأمر الهين نظراً لإختلاف اللغات فيما بينها من حيث المخزون المفرداتي والدلالي والبنوي ناهيك عن الثقافي والإجتماعي وتأثير هذه الإختلافات على أساليب التعبير وطرق التقبل لدى مختلف الشعوب والمجتمعات، فإن أهمية هذا البحث تكمن ليس فقط في كونه يستعرض بالدراسة والتحليل مكان الإختلاف بين الإنجليزية والعربية، بل إنه يقدم حلولاً ناجعة لبلوغ المكافئ عن طريق طرح العديد من الآليات التي تحل هذه المشاكل. وقد استخدمنا في هذا البحث الكثير من الأمثلة التوضيحية التي تثبت فعالية الآليات المقترحة في تقريب الإختلافات عند الترجمة من الإنجليزية للعربية شريطة استخدامها بطرق عقلانية ومتناسبة.

Abstract

This study sheds light on the notion of equivalence and its significant role in translation. At first, types of equivalence have been thoroughly defined and analyzed in light of some previous studies in this aspect.

This study not only demonstrates, with sufficient illustrative examples, many lexical, structural and cultural gaps arising when translating from English into Arabic, but it also provides practical solutions for bridging these gaps. The offered strategies have been empirically tested and shown high level of reliability and consistency, conditioned they are applied reasonably and proportionally.

1. Introduction

Theoretical Background of the study:

For the past fifty years, equivalence has been the central issue in translation. It is undoubtedly one of the most problematic and controversial areas that has caused, and probably going to cause, many different theories and heated debates in the field of translation.

The notion of equivalence in translation has been the focal point in the works of Eugene A. Nida, Peter Newmark, Roman Jakobson, Monia Bayar and many other theorists. With the revolutionary emergence of machine translation, researches in the field of equivalence had reached their peak. Van Leuven Zwart (1990:227 cited in Mehrach, 1977:14) states: "It [equivalence] was used then in its strict scientific sense, to refer to an absolute symmetrical relationship between words of different languages."

The Russian-born American structuralist Roman Jakobson is considered to be one of the earliest pioneers who were occupied by the study of equivalence. Jakobson claims that "there is ordinarily no full equivalence between code units" (qtd by Munday, 2001:36). To corroborate his idea, Jakobson uses the example of 'cheese', which does not have the same equivalent of the Russian 'syr'. For the latter's code unit does not have the concept 'cottage cheese' in its dictionary (for more clarifications see Munday, 2001:36-37). So, the term is better to be translated by 'tvarok' not 'syr'. Jakobson also points out that the problem of both meaning and equivalence is related to the differences between structures, terminology, grammar and lexical forms of languages.

2. Statement of the study:

Since Arabic and English belong to different domains and have different systems, it is highly expected that translation between the two languages poses tremendous challenge, especially for novice translators. Thus, the present study attempts to investigate this thorny field by analyzing various supportive data collected throughout years of teaching practical translation in the English Language Department of Hadramout University.

3. Objective of the Study:

The present study aims at investigating areas of difficulties in translating English phrases and sentences into Arabic. Disclosing the nature and classifying the types of difficulties are among the priorities

of this study. Yet, the main issue of this study is to find practical translation strategies which could help cross the multiple linguistic and extra-linguistic gaps between the two languages, which would eventually assist translators achieve optimal and more natural Arabic translations of English phrases and sentences.

4. Significance of the Study:

The significance of this study is in its practical approach, represented in the employment of a huge number of illustrative examples, especially collected for disclosing and classifying the nature of difficulties in translating English phrases and sentences into Arabic.

Furthermore, classifying types of difficulties will hopefully lead to the identification of some practical strategies that could be implemented in the translation of English phrases and sentences into Arabic. Besides, naming specific translation strategies will mean deep understanding of the disparities between the two languages, which will facilitate reaching optimality in translation.

5. Limitation of the study:

Many are the problems that are encountered in translation, but this research is restricted to finding out about strategies which could be implemented in the translation of English phrases and sentences into Arabic. Doing the opposite; i.e., translating from Arabic into English is not within the scope of this study.

6. Analysis of previous literature

In his work on the Bible translation, Nida (1964) concentrates on studying meaning in both its semantic and pragmatic natures. To give meaning a more functional nature, he breaks with the old-fashioned notion which considers meanings of words fixed and unchanged. For him, words get their meanings according to the context and can be changed through the culture in which they are used.

Chomsky's theory of generative transformational model gave birth to new insights and approaches in translation theories. Chomsky's theory focuses on the universal features of human languages. For Chomsky, each language is composed of a deep structure that undergoes the process of transformations, and a surface structure produced by these transformations. Being somehow inspired by the Chomskyan theory, Nida adopts in his translation of the Bible these two structures; i.e., deep and surface structures, and focuses more on the former one, since it contains the core of meaning. Yet, Nida's treatment of meaning is different from that of Chomsky.

The major disparity between Chomsky and Nida is Chomsky's relegation of the cultural context. Edwin Gentzler (1993:53) points out: "Chomsky investigates the meaning inherent in the sign cut off from cultural context; Nida's primary concern is not with the meaning any sign carries with it, but with how the sign functions in any given society.". But, despite the differences in goals between the two theories, both of them share the same view about the nature of language as including a deep structure and a surface one (ibid.:55).

Nida's theory of translation is characterized by the distinction between two types of equivalence: formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. In formal equivalence, the translator focuses on the message itself, that is, its form and content, and there should be a close similarity between the ST and the TT message (Nida, 1964:159). In Nida's point of view, content should be given priority in translation. He also believes that formal translators who focus more on forms are more likely to misinterpret the "intention of the author", and more apt to "distort the meaning" (ibid.:191-192).

According to him, the dynamic translator is more faithful than the literal one, since he (DT) may perceive "more fully and satisfactorily the meaning of the original text" (ibid.:1964:192).

Using different terms, Newmark's distinction between 'communicative translation' and 'semantic translation' is similar to Nida's types of equivalence. According to Newmark (1981:39), Communicative translation resembles Nida's notion of dynamic equivalence, for it tends to create the same effects on the reader of the TT as those obtained by readers of the ST, whereas 'semantic translation' is similar to Nida's formal equivalence as it focuses on the rendition of the contextual meaning of the SLT according to the syntactic and the semantic characteristics of the TLT.

Monia Bayar (2007) mentions different types of equivalence such as formal equivalence, semantic equivalence, cultural equivalence and pragmatic equivalence.

Formal equivalence, in her point of view, means categorical correspondence, i.e., the correspondence of 'noun to noun, verb to verb' between ST and TT, and textual correspondence such as length, stylistic aspects and many other features.

Monia Bayar's definition of semantic equivalence relies on the preservation of many semantic criteria such as: denotation, connotation and propositional content (ibid.:163-7).

Her definition of 'cultural equivalence' implies the rendition of the SL cultural features into a 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. Arabic and English are a case in point. In her opinion 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 or inter-community social behavior, to any cultural event having an effect on the language community." (ibid.:177).

Despite the fact that the equivalence notion has many proponents, it has been rejected by some theorists. In his essay *The Concept of Equivalence in Translation*, Van den Broek, who is a strong opponent of the notion, states: "we must by all means reject the idea that the equivalence relation applies to translation." (Broek, 1978:33).

The reasons behind the rejection are understood to be the huge amount of differences between languages at the semantic, socio-cultural, and grammatical levels.

However, these differences can be resolved through some kind of structural adjustment, or transposition as referred to by Vinay and Darbellnet, or linguistic shifts (see Catford, 1965) or alteration (see Newmark, 1988: 85).

We regard structural adjustment as a set of strategies which are essential for bridging multiple gaps between languages and achieving some kind of equivalence. The set of strategies is supposed to be present in a form of codes in the subconscious minds of native speakers, and is particularly stimulated upon translation of alien structures into mother tongues. Thus, the set of strategies secures natural translation and protects language norms from violation and from imposing alien structures.

Regarding translation, we strongly believe that what a translator does is somehow similar to what a native speaker does with his codes of structural adjustment. We also think that a normal translation course should mainly teach how to simulate native speakers' codes of structural adjustment. As a proof to this proposal, interpreters, compared with translators, are highly trained to easily navigate between languages' systems of structural adjustment.

Referring to structural adjustment, Catford uses the term translation shift. By definition, to shift from one language to another is to alter

the forms (Bell, 1991: 6). Alteration of form means changes of categories, word classes, and word orders. Structural adjustment, according to (Nida 1964: 226), is meant to:

1. Allow adjustment of the form of the message to the requirements of structure of the receptor language.
2. Produce semantically equivalent structures.
3. Provide equivalent stylistic appropriateness.
4. Carry an equivalent communication load.

In this paper, we are going to find an implementation to the theory of structural adjustment by providing numerous examples showing areas when English finds no one-to-one Arabic equivalents, or when a SL grammatical structure does not exist in Arabic, in which case, applying some kind of linguistic alteration in the TL is almost inevitable.

In this paper, we are also going to introduce a set of ten strategies that are extremely indispensable for the translator to bridge different linguistic and cultural gaps when translating English sentences and phrases into Arabic.

7. Data collection and Methodology

The examples in this paper have specially been selected to illustrate the areas where translation from English into natural Arabic pose a practical challenge, in the sense that translation cannot be done without implementing some translation strategies. These strategies are the compensation for multi-linguistic and extra-linguistic disparities between the two languages.

This paper attempts to demonstrate a somehow a complete inventory of these strategies as a prerequisite tool for bridging the gaps and achieving some kind of translation adequacy.

For this purpose, two methods of analysis are adopted in this paper: the comparative method and the analytical method. The comparative method aims at comparing two versions of translations. Newmark (1991:163) argues “the only way to assess the deficiencies of the translation is to examine the linguistic differences between it and the original.”.

The analytical method, on the other hand, is conducted by ways of a close analysis of the examples to analyze and choose the appropriate strategy(ies) that should be adopted for reaching optimal translations.

8. Data Analysis:

8.1 The strategies:

8. 1.1 Addition:

In many situations, the translator has to add a word(s) to reach a natural and sound translation. Addition may be applied when translating a word, a phrase or a sentence.

Translating English compound adjectives into Arabic, for instance, often involves some kind of addition as in the case of (bitter-sweet), where the head word is (sweet), while (bitter) is merely a modifier. The natural translation for this combination should be:

(عذب تشوبه بعض المرارة).

Addition is also almost indispensable when translating compound nouns into Arabic, as in the case of (tear-gas), which is usually translated as:

(غاز مسيل للدموع).

Translating prepositional phrases into Arabic is also not an exception as in the case of the phrase (at worst), which is to be translated:

(في أسوأ الحالات) .

Addition is often applied in the translation of sentences where a lexical gap must be compensated for. The underlined words in the following examples illustrate this point:

1. The committee discussed Sami.

ناقشت اللجنة موضوع سامي

2. It happened so quickly.

لقد حدث الأمر بسرعة فائقة

3. Turn back the clock.

يعيد عقارب الساعة إلى الوراء.

4. Pay dearly for smth.

يدفع الثمن غالياً

5. Lose ≠ save face.

يخسر/ ينفذ ماء الوجه

8.1.2 Omission:

In some cases doing the opposite, i.e., omitting a word(s), is just the right choice for achieving natural translations. Omission is required

because of difference between languages in wording different notions.

The following examples are illustrative of this point:

1. take revenge ينتقم
2. turn red يحمر
3. grow older شاخ-هرم
4. went crazy جنّ

8.1.3 Addition and omission:

This technique requires the application of both processes, as in the phrase (in all conscience), which should be translated as (بضمير راض).

Consider the following example:

She could not in all conscience back out on her deal with him.

لم تستطع التراجع عن إتفاقها معه وضميرها راض.

8.1.4 Disagreeing number:

This technique means that a singular noun is rendered as plural, and vice versa, or when rendered in another way as in the case of (dozen).

The following examples illustrate this point:

1. Be sure of your ability.

كن واثقاً من قدراتك

2. Use your brains.

استخدم عقلك

3. Faculty of Science.

كلية العلوم

4. Dozens of people were found alive.

عُثِرَ على العشرات من الناس أحياء

8.1.5 Modification:

Modification should take place when words are contextually bound; when a word(s) appeal(s) to be translated in a way which is different from its/ their denotative meaning(s). This phenomenon is customary in translation as words in association can be easily influenced by others, to the extent of adopting idiomatic shades.

This technique requires maximum adherence to the norms of the TL wording and collocations. The following examples show the wide range of application of this technique:

1. He enjoyed himself. إستمع بوقته.
2. What's your height. كم طولك؟
3. Go halves. يقتسم مناصفة.
4. Find favour with. يلقى قبولاً لدى.
5. Get out of hand. يخرج عن السيطرة.
6. Poison smb.'s mind. يسمم أفكاره.
7. Life-threatening illness. مرض ينذر بالموت.
8. Drop one's business. علق/ جمّد أعماله.
9. The gun went off. انطلقت الرصاصة.
10. Answer the purpose. يفي بالغرض.

8.1.6 Modification and addition:

In this technique two processes are applied as in the following examples:

1. Play for time. يراوغ لكسب الوقت.
2. Answer the description. ينطبق عليه الوصف.

3. To give somebody a lift to down town. يوصله لمركز المدينة بالسيارة.

8.1.7 Adopting different structures:

This is usually the right decision when the SL structure is inappropriate to the TL norms. The adoption may take various forms.

In its minor form, it may be expressed by a change in a grammatical class as in the following examples:

1. Oxford Learner's Dictionary.

قاموس اكسفورد التعليمي

2. The damage was restricted to the left side of the car.

أقتصرت الأضرار على الجانب الأيسر من السيارة.

3. Better untaught than ill-taught.

الجهل أفضل من علم مغلوط

4. Well begun is half done.

البداية الجيدة نصف العمل

5. I wouldn't be surprised if...

لن أستغرب إذا ...

The change in structure may be expressed in reordering the SL sentence as in the following:

Thousands of people, none of whom realized what was about to happen, had come to Dallas to see the President.

وصل آلاف الناس إلى دالاس لمشاهدة الرئيس، ولم يكن من بينهم من أدرك ما كان على وشك الحدوث.

8.1.8 Adopting different tenses:

Adopting different TL tenses is rare, but sometimes it's effective for reaching natural translations. The following example illustrates this point:

She wore a red dress.

كانت ترتدي فستاناً أحمر

No matter what happens مهما حدث

No matter what happens I plan to go swimming on Saturday.

8.1. 9 Adopting multiple techniques:

As is clear from the title, multiple techniques may be applied in different proportions. This is usually required when a phrase is somehow idiomatic as is the case with the following examples:

1. out of place.

ليس في مكانه الطبيعي

2. on the spot.

في مسرح الحدث

3. He's highly thought of.

إنه يحظى بتقدير الناس

4. over my dead body.

لن يحدث هذا ما حييت

But when phrases are highly idiomatic, the content is rendered either functionally or ideationally:

1. have a narrow escape. نجا يا عجيبة

2. learn the ropes. يتعلم أسرار المهنة

3. keep a cool head. يحافظ على رباطة جأشه

4. bend over backwards to..... يبذل كل ما في وسعه لكي.....

8.1.10 Cultural approximation:

This technique is used when a notion is alien to the culture, religion or to the traditions of the TL. In this case, the notion should be either reworded or replaced by another one from the TL. The following examples illustrate this point:

1. One needs the patience of a saint to finish this job.

يحتاج المرء لصبر أيوب لإنهاء هذا العمل.

2. Make hay when the sun shines.

إن هبّت رياحك فأغتمها.

3. The news has warmed his heart.

أثلجت الأخبار صدره.

In case if the image used in the saying is neither accepted and/ or understood in the TL culture nor does it have a TL standard equivalent, the translator may improvise something of his own. Consider the following sentence:

I need this thing like a hole in the head.

If we attempt to translate the underlined phrase as it is, the translation would probably be odd and vague, so, it might be a good idea if the translator improvised something that could deliver the message and be acceptable in the TL. Thus, the translation of the above sentence could be:

إن حاجتي لهذا الشيء كحاجة (السمكة لليابسة/ الفقير للفقير... الخ)

9. Conclusion:

In light of the studied literature and the example-enriched discussion, it seems that achieving equivalence in its full sense of the word, though possible, is not an easy task as languages differ significantly in lexis, structures, cultures and in many other aspects.

However, the empirically studied strategies intended for reducing the linguistic and cultural disparities between the two languages have shown an exceptionally high level of reliability and consistency.

We recommend making use of the outcome of this paper along with the multiple examples in the design of textbooks on practical translation between English and Arabic. We also recommend further research be conducted in back-translation, i.e., the translation of Arabic phrases and sentences into English.

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