

THE PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE OF TRANSLATION EQUIVALENCE

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Abstract. The following research focuses on the evolution of the translation equivalence theory and different interpretations of the same phenomenon. One of the perspectives through which translation equivalence can be analyzed is the philosophical aspect.

The *aim* of the research is to address the philosophical perspective of translation equivalence and different equivalence theories.

The research includes the following *objectives* are to find out whether it is possible to understand the true intentions of the speaker to translate them correctly, to explore the skeptical approach towards translation equivalence based on the philosophical relativity of the meaning of the word, and its usage, to examine Nida's translation equivalence theory from the philosophical standpoint and to understand whether it is equally important to maintain the formal equivalence together with dynamic equivalence on the basis of extracts taken from *J.R.R. Tolkien, "The Lord of the Rings" (Volume I: The Fellowship of the Ring)* and its Russian translation by *Muravyov and Kistyakovsky*.

In the research, we employed the comparative and contrastive analysis *methods* to compare different equivalence theories. It has also been used to compare and contrast the literary piece and its Russian translation. The qualitative analysis method has been used to analyze the philosophical aspect and concepts within the framework of translation equivalence. The methods also included descriptive and literary discourse analysis methods.

In the research, *it is established* that it is not always easy to interpret the meaning of the text, and it depends on the translator's background whether he/she will skillfully implement the translation and transmit all the peculiarities of the text or speech.

Keywords: *Equivalence, function, sign, meaning, effect, linguistic and non-linguistic acquaintance*

Introduction

Translation is a dynamic and multi-phase process. It involves two texts, and the analysis focuses not only on those two texts but also on the two distinct language systems and cultures. To gain a deeper understanding of the process, all aspects of the translation should be analyzed. The fact that the translation involves multiple levels of complexity enables us to view the process from various perspectives. The most significant spectrum used to describe translation is the Speech Act Theory and the Communication Model. According to this model, the communication act includes the speaker/sender who initiates the communication, the listener or the receptor, the message, the speaker's intentions that he wants to achieve in the communication act, and the context. The term *context* can refer to the sentence in which the word is used, the text in which the sentence is used, the situation during which a word, phrase, or sentence is uttered, and political or ideological circumstances that can influence the communication act or the text. In a simple communication act, the speaker encodes the message and sends it to the receptor through a specific channel, which is encompassed by a context. The message contains inherent intention. The intentions of the speaker may vary; it can be elucidated through another methodological tool, discourse analysis, and is studied by pragmatics. Based on the speaker's intention, the effect he wants to achieve, the utterance can be formulated in many alternative ways. On this aspect, we can analyze J. L. Austin's words that language is performative. (*Austin, 1962*,

p. 6) We can observe the mentioned components of communication act in the following example. During the electoral campaign (context), the presidential candidate (the speaker) delivers a speech in front of the people (the receptors). Each of the uttered sentences has meaning and expresses the ideology of the political campaign the candidate represents. The intention of the speaker can be to convince the listeners that their strategic agenda for the possible presidential term is the most comprehensive and realistic one, or to vote for them during the elections. It depends on the formulation of the utterance whether the speech will be persuasive or not. Careful formulation of your ideas is the key to accomplishing your desired outcomes. As a form of communication, translation is regarded as a complex process, and the translator's place in the communication is between the message and the receptor. If the audience does not understand the speaker, the translator takes the role of the mediator. He listens to the speech or reads the source text instead, decodes the message, perceives the intentions of the speaker, and produces the same in the target language. In this process, it is essential to identify the speaker's intentions and transmit them to the target audience. Here, the term equivalence is identified. The most important task of the translator is to render the message correctly, create the same impact on the reader or listener as the source text (for example, if the impact of the ST is to convince or evoke patriotic sentiment among the ST readers or listeners, the TT should have the same power and influence on the TT reader or listener in the same way), and ensure the transmission of the speaker's intention. However, it is essential to answer such questions as whether a translator can fully access the speaker's intention, the philosophical skepticism towards meaning questions the concept of equivalence, and whether it is equally important to ensure formal equivalence together with dynamic equivalence.

Methods

To examine how the philosophical concepts shape equivalence theory in translation studies and how it is interpreted in this realm, we use *the qualitative analysis method*. It allows us to analyze the theoretical concepts related to equivalence, to identify how this concept is defined by different theoreticians, and to categorize the hypotheses mentioned about the notion explored in this research. We also used *the comparative and contrastive analysis method* to compare different theories and different ideas proposed by them. The descriptive analysis and literary discourse analysis methods have been used to do a comparative analysis of the extracts taken from the literary piece the “*Lord of the Rings*” by J.R.R. Tolkien, and its Russian Translation.

Discussion and Results

The most significant element in translation is maintaining the intention of the speaker. While in some cases the speaker's intentions are obvious, sometimes it is very complicated to perceive the intention as it is not explicitly manifested. For example, if someone says, “*Interesting perspective*”, it is vague whether the speaker expresses agreement or silent disapproval. Nevertheless, if the speaker says, “*I am proud of you*”, it is obvious that he wants to praise or encourage the listener. The intended purpose and function of the source text and its conveyance are integral to the Skopos theory. The theory has been discussed and developed by such theoreticians as **Christiane Nord** (functionalism), **Katharina Reiss**, and **Hans Vermeer** (Skopos theory). The key aspect of Skopos theory is not to analyze the impact of the source text on the reader, but rather the analysis of the coherence and preservation of the intention in the translated text. (Munday, 2016, 23) The importance of preserving the intention of the speech act can be elaborated with the help of the following three levels of speech: locutionary act, illocutionary act (or illocutionary force), and perlocutionary act. (Austin, 1962, p. 94) The locutionary act is the process of articulating the sounds and producing a meaningful utterance. Illocutionary act is the intention of the utterance, and the perlocutionary act is the impact that the utterance has on the listener. For example, if someone says, “*This could use a touch more salt,*” at the table while eating, the locutionary act is literal utterance of the sentence, the illocutionary act is the indirect request for salt, and the perlocutionary act is its impact on the listener (whether he/she will bring the salt or not). The translator plays a crucial role in this communication as he should transmit the intended function, retaining both the meaning of the text/speech and the intended function. This theory differentiates not only the intended function, but also the actual effect that the speech or text has on the listener or reader. In this particular context, the following options can also be used:

Could you pass me the salt? (Polite, direct)

This soup is a bit bland. (Neutral, indirect)
The dish is not salty enough. (Neutral, direct)
It needs more seasoning. (Neutral, indirect, broad)
It lacks salt. (Direct, clear)

These expressions may vary from culture to culture, and it is important to use the right variant expressing the same tone as the source expressions while translating the sentence. In Japanese and Chinese cultures, people usually use polite and indirect ways to convey the same idea. In Japanese, it will be translated as *とても繊細な味がします。* (*Totemo sensai na aji ga shimasu*) which means “*It has a very subtle taste.*” The Japanese variant of the same expression is polite and respectful, and with the mentioned expression, the speaker praises whatever the dish lacks. However, the translator should take into consideration the TL culture, as the same expression that sounds neutral to one culture may be perceived with a tone of discourtesy in another culture. The question of whether the translator can fully understand the intention of the speaker depends on different factors (background, education, experience, the depth of textual analysis, and the study of the source text culture before the actual translation). Failure to maintain the intended function may result in a misunderstanding.

The concept of equivalence has long been the cornerstone of translation studies, which includes deep philosophical inquiries. The idea of equivalence has been discussed and developed by different theoreticians who explored different types of equivalence, its relevance, and the untranslatability of certain phenomena. Translation equivalence has been discussed in literary translations, as the main focus of the theoreticians has been on literary texts. More profound foundations of the concept of equivalence have been established by Jakobson, who delineates three main types of translation (intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic), and Eugene Nida, who articulates the two different types of equivalence: formal and dynamic equivalence. The theory articulated by Nida is the foundation of the equivalence theory from which alternative theories derive. In his theory, Jakobson restates the **dual nature** of the *sign* proposed by **Ferdinand de Saussure**, differentiating between the concepts of *signatum* and *signum*. He claims that there is no *signatum* without *signum*. According to the theory, *signum* (*signifier*) is the form (word, image, sign, gesture), and *signatum* (*signified*) is the meaning. (Chandler, 2024, p. 67) If we observe the word *tree* as an example, the word itself (or the physical *tree*) is the signifier, the meaning or the concept of *tree* is the signified. With its inseparable co-existence, we can draw lines between such concepts as body and soul, form and matter, or even Yin and Yang. Their dynamic unity creates balance and harmony. As signifier and signified, the body and soul unity is the immediate representation of the mentioned. In this context, the soul is the signified, and the body is the materialized expression of the soul, the signifier. However, within their indivisible relationship, a contrast can be seen as well. As *body and soul*, *signatum and signum* have a distinct difference, but they do not exist without each other. To develop his claim further, Jakobson discusses Bertrand Russell’s example of *cheese*, which is translated as *syr* in Russian and means “*food made of pressed curds*”. Russell states that it is not feasible to interpret the meaning of the word *cheese* without a *non-linguistic acquaintance* with it. On the other hand, Jakobson says that if one has *linguistic acquaintance* with the mentioned phenomenon, understands the meaning of the word *curds*, or knows the physical properties assigned to it, one will understand the word. However, we should take into consideration the fact that not all of the words are translated interchangeably. As it is visible from the example, the word *сыр* (*syr*) in Russian is used to denote “*hard cheese*” and its semantic range includes processed cheese (cream cheese - *сливочный сыр* (*slivóchny syr*), and cottage cheese - *творог* (*tvoróg*)) (sometimes *творог* can be used separately as well). As for the English word “*cheese*”, it excludes *cottage cheese*. (Chandler, 2024, p. 181) With this example, Jakobson demonstrates that in some cases the semantic scope of the words may vary, which can lead to the idea of refusing absolute equivalence, as in the majority of the cases, the words and their translations cannot be used interchangeably while translating the target text back to the source text. There is one word for “*friend*” in English, but in Russian, there are different words to indicate degrees of intimacy. The words *друг* (close friend), *приятель* (casual friend), and *знакомый* (acquaintance) can be distinguished.

As indicated earlier, Eugene Nida suggested two types of equivalence: formal and dynamic. Formal equivalence is a principle or method of translation that prioritizes *form* and *structure*. Dynamic equivalence, on the other hand, focuses on the *meaning* and *effect*. (Venuti, 2000, 129) These

foundational concepts are essential in translation theory, and they are frequently applied in translation evaluation. Though Nida's theory focuses on Bible translation, the same can be observed in literary translation. The theory underlines the importance of translating the essence and emphasizes the importance of maintaining dynamic equivalence rather than formal equivalence.

When it comes to literary translation, the translation process goes beyond the form and linguistic formulation. The translator takes into account the stylistic, pragmatic, lexical, linguistic, and philosophical factors to maintain the poetic function of the literary piece. In poetry translation, for instance, it is of paramount importance to consider such aspects of translation as rhythm, rhyme, message, and impact. To be able to consider all of these factors, understand the implicit ideas of the source text, the message, and transfer it into the target text, the translator should have the relevant experience and background. The mentioned ideas can be observed in the following example:

***“All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those who wander are lost;
The old that is strong does not wither,
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.***

— J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

Не всё то золото, что блестит,
Не всякий бродяга — потерян.
Не старое дряхлым бывает,
И корень в морозе не меркнет.

The provided translation is the Russian version of the verse that appears in “*The Lord of the Rings*” (*Volume I: The Fellowship of the Ring* (in Russian: *Братство Кольца*)) by Muravyov and Kistyakovsky. It is an official Soviet-era translation taken from the chapter “Strider” (Следопыт). The first thing that can be emphasized here is the structure of the poem. The first stanza mainly consists of complex sentences with subordinate (relative) clauses. The last sentence of the stanza (*Deep roots are not reached by the frost*) is a simple sentence. The first stanza of the verse is largely faithful to the source text.

*All that is gold does not glitter
Не всё то золото, что блестит*

The author used a literary technique known as inversion. The translator maintained the method, the metaphor, and the contrast, which is expressed with the words “gold” and “glitter”. The word *gold* expresses inner worth and value; the word *glitter*, on the other hand, shows the showiness and the presumable emptiness of certain things. In the translation, the same impression is created, and the metaphor is retained with the words *золото* and *блестит*, the equivalent translations of the relevant English words. The translator also utilized the translation technique of transposition to render the sentence from the SL to the TL. In the translation, the affirmative sentence shifted to negative (*All that is gold does not glitter* (“*Не всё то золото, что блестит*”) became *Not all that glitters is gold*. However, the translator achieved preserving the meaning of the sentence.

*Not all those who wander are lost;
Не всякий бродяга — потерян.*

The second line of the stanza is a complex sentence. But in the Russian version, the translation employed the translation technique of transposition. The dash (—) in the sentence is sometimes used in Russian instead of the verb *есть*. So, the complete sentence is *Не всякий бродяга (есть) потерян*. The translator also used the word *бродяга* instead of the word *wander*, changing the part of speech from a verb to a noun. The meaning of the verb is also changed as the translator uses the word *бродяга*. The English equivalent of the verb will be *vagabond*, which does not correspond to the lexical meaning of the word *to wander* or *wanderer*, as they are neutral in English, but the Russian word *бродяга* carries a negative tone and meaning. However, the word has the idea of movement and maintains the rhythm.

*The old that is strong does not wither,
Не старое дряхлым бывает,*

In the following sentence, the structure of the sentence is changed. The translator used inversion to retain the rhyme and rhythm in the target language. He also employed the translation technique of modulation and rephrased the whole sentence (Not everything old becomes decrepit.) The word *strong* is omitted here, and the contrast is expressed with the words *старое* (*old*) and *дряхлым* (*decrepit*). The English word *wither* has the meaning of becoming dry and shriveled, and it can be used for plants, flowers, etc. It can also be used figuratively in poetry, implying an old person. As for the word *дряхлый* in Russian, it only refers to a person who is old and weak due to age. The Russian translator expresses the metaphor with a cultural equivalent, using a more appropriate and natural variant for the Russian speakers.

*Deep roots are not reached by the frost.
И корень в морозе не меркнет.*

In the last sentence of the stanza, the author uses a metaphor. The translator changes the emphasis a bit, creating a different imagery (*The root does not fade in the frost*). The translator used semantic and cultural adaptation, changing the word “to reach” to “*меркнуть*”, which means “to fade”. The word “*меркнуть*” in Russian is more appropriate in that context and imagery than the translation of the word “to reach” (“*достигать / достигнуть*”). As can be seen, the translator also omitted the word “*deep*” based on the fact that the meaning of the word is expressed with the word “*root*”. There is also a structural shift in the translation as the sentence in the ST is in a passive voice, but in the translation, it is in an active voice. Despite the omission and the shifts in imagery, the translator achieved in retaining the overall message of the sentence and the metaphor.

On the whole, the translator tried to preserve the rhyme, though it is not fully maintained. At the same time, he wanted to preserve the fluency and rhythmic naturalness. However, as George Steiner observes, “*To understand is to translate, but poetry resists understanding because it resists translation*” (Steiner, 1975). The concept of untranslatability is used to refer to the challenges that the poem inherently conveys. The mentioned challenges can include translation of metaphors, culture-bound words, phrases, and idioms, structural differences between the languages, emotional impact, and other techniques employed by the writers.

Conclusion

In the light of the preceding arguments, though sometimes the author’s intentions maybe obvious, it is not always easy to fully understand them. If the translator does not have sufficient skills and background knowledge, the intentions and the mentioned ideas in the text can be misinterpreted. The three types of speech act forces prove that there are different functional aspects of speech. Those forces are equally important, and the perlocutionary act that describes the impact of the speech is a separate part of the process. Consequently, it is important for the translator to give special emphasis to that aspect of speech. The previously mentioned factors suggest that the translator should have extensive expertise and knowledge in different fields to successfully transfer the outlined ideas from the ST to the TT. The quality and accuracy of translation depend on the translator’s experience, background, skills, and the translator’s education. Apart from that, he should be aware of both the source language and the target language cultures as they convey multiple layers of cultural frameworks and cultural variables. The texts are being influenced by the culture, and the worldview; some linguistic units (such as idioms, expressions, collocations, comparisons) are culture-bound. In this way, the translation is not merely viewed as a mechanical substitution of the SL sign for the TT sign, but a complex process which encompasses a chain of translation choices. Ultimately, as has been observed in the example, there cannot be full equivalence between the text and its translation. Full equivalence cannot be observed even for a word and its translation, as the words can have different semantic scopes. In this sense, the translator encounters another obstacle in the process, whether to preserve the formal equivalence or the dynamic equivalence. Though it is assumed that maintaining dynamic equivalence is more important than preserving the form, it depends on the type of translation to which aspect the translator should pay attention.

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