

Translation and Issues in Translation

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ABSTRACT

Translation theory and translation practice are in an attached relation. Translation theory plays a really important role in operating the process of translation. Different languages encode meaning in various forms, so mastering translation theory is able to find appropriate ways of preserving meaning while using the most appropriate forms of each language. The paper aims to present some knowledge of translation involving translation in relation to linguistic theory, meaning in translation, equivalence in translation and translation strategies. Applying these issues to translation practice may help translation learners and translators produce effective translations.

Keywords: meaning in translation; equivalence in translation; translation strategies

1 Introduction

Translation theorists have made their great contributions to translation theory such as Catford (2004); Nida and Taber (2003); Newmark (1988a, 1988b); Vinay and Darbelnet (2004); Toury (2004). These authors have paid a special concern to translation studies of translation shifts, translation equivalence, methods of translation or universal strategies of translation. To be more specific, Catford (2004) gives a model of translation shifts at different levels and categories, which has grounded some applied and theoretical studies. As for Nida and Taber (2004), shifts are looked at from the perspective of meaning. In their terms, changes caused by lexis will result in changes in meaning. Vinay and Darbelnet (2004) give two main translation strategies consisting of seven procedures, of which *transposition* can be categorised as *structure shift* by Catford (2004), and *modulation* as a change of semantics, a variation of the form of the message, *direct translation* as *word-for-word* translation and *literal* translation by Newmark (1988b). Toury (2004) observes 'laws of translation' as *explicitation*, *simplification*, *implicitation* in the same position of Klaudy and Károly (2005). These translation issues will be useful for translators in the process of transforming a source language text into a target one. To be more specific, the translators can carry out changes or shifts and apply appropriate translation strategies so as to reach equivalence in translation. Therefore, it is rather important to grasp knowledge of translation theory.

2 Content

2.1 Defining Translation

Translation has been defined in different ways by different authors. Evolving from an introduction to linguistic aspects of translation based on linguistic background of signs by Saussure, Jakobson (2004, pp. 113-114) introduces translation as: (i) *intralingual* translation or *rewording*, which is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language; (ii) *interlingual* translation or *translation proper*, which is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language; (iii) *intersemiotic* translation or *transmutation* – an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems. He goes even further to describe translation from one language into another as “substitut[ing] messages in one language not for separate code-units but for entire messages in some other language” (ibid, p. 114). As a process, translation is regarded as changing an original written text (the source text or ST) in the original verbal language (the source language or SL) into a written text (the target text or TT) in a different verbal language (the target language or TL) (Jakobson as cited in Munday, 2001, 2008, p. 5). The concept has been moulded later by



Catford as “the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)” (Catford, 1965, p. 20). He adds that the term ‘textual material’, where ‘text’ might have been expected, in normal conditions “is not the entirety of a SL text which is translated, that is, replaced by TL equivalents” (Catford, 1965, p. 20). This means that there will certainly be correspondent changes in the replacement of textual material. Newmark (1988 a, p. 7) puts translation as “a craft consisting in the attempt to replace a written message and/or statement in one language by the same message and/or statement in another language”. From the above point of view, we can realize that the focus on translation refers to the rendering of meaning from SL into TL. In rendering the meaning, of course, the translator must consider the form of language, whether SL or TL to get the meaning equivalent in translating sentences or texts. Nida and Taber (2003, p. 12) add that the nature of translating involves “reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style”.

Likewise, Bassnett (2002) describes translation as follows:

Translation involves far more than replacement of lexical and grammatical items between languages ... Once the translator moves away from close linguistic equivalence, the problems of determining the exact nature of the level of equivalence aimed for begin to emerge. (p. 34)

Translation is thus not only reproducing the ST as making grammatical and lexical adjustments, but also taking account of linguistic equivalence. In the concept moulded by Nida and Taber (2003), a three-stage system of translation is suggested consisting of *analysis*, *transfer* and *restructuring* as illustrated in the following diagram (Figure 1), of which transfer is the crucial and focal point of the translation process involved semantic and structural adjustments.

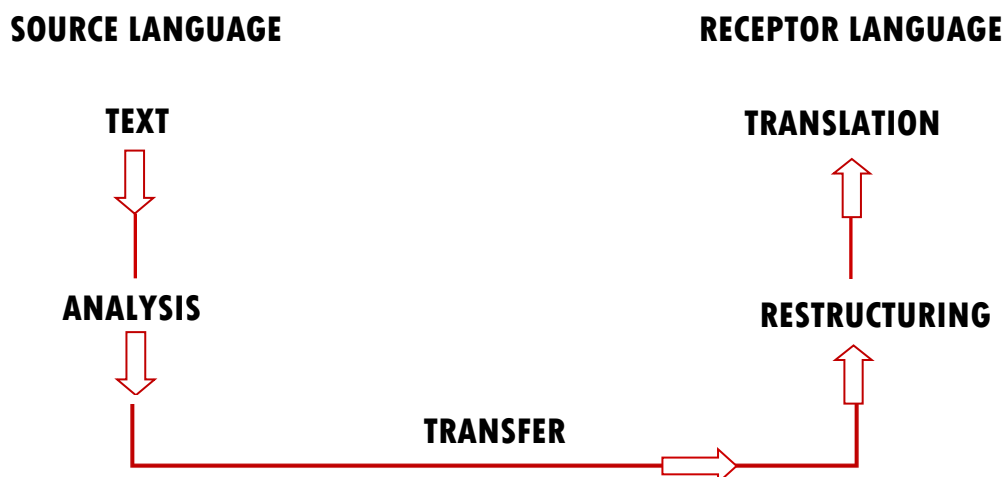


Figure 1: Three-stage System of Translation (Nida & Taber, 1969, p. 33)

As such, it can be seen that translation is the rendering a SL text into a TL text in a way that it must fully convey the meaning of the text that the writer conveys into another language.

2.2 Translation in Relation to Linguistic Theory

Munday (2001, 2008) mentions the spirit of linguistic approach to translation in the concept of Catford (1965) when he follows the Firth and Halliday’s linguistic model, which understands language via its

function in context and in various levels (namely phonology, graphology, grammar, lexis) and ranks (such as sentence, clause, group, word).

According to Catford (1965, p. 1), “translation is an operation on languages: a process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another”. Therefore, he suggests that “any theory of translation must draw upon a theory of language”. He gives a diagram (Figure 2) which shows the extralinguistic levels of medium-substance (*phonic* and *graphic* substance) and *situation*. The internal levels of language are that of medium or form including *phonology* and *graphology*, and that of ‘formal levels’ named by Halliday as *grammar* and *lexis*. The relationship between *grammar/lexis* and *situation* is that of contextual meaning or *context*. *Context* is the *interlevel* relating *grammar/lexis* and *situation*, symbolised by the dashed line on the right of the diagram.

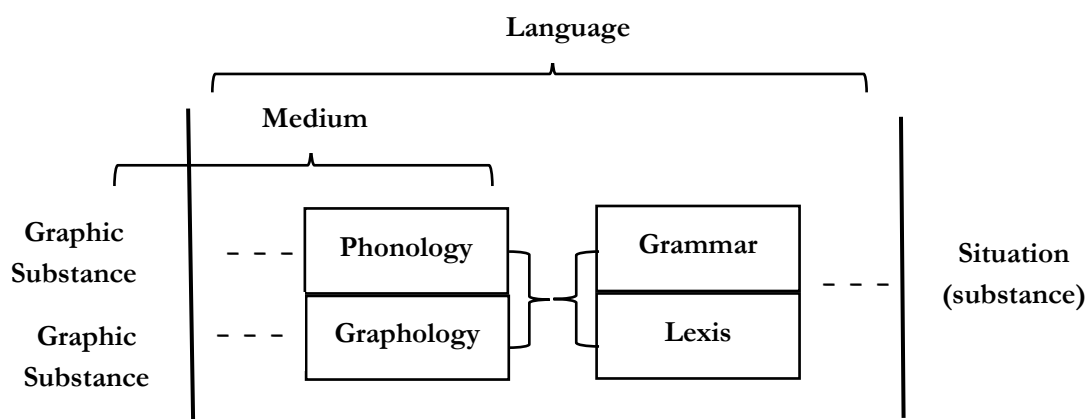


Figure 2. Levels of medium-substance (Catford, 1965, p. 3)

The basic categories of linguistic theory applied to the levels of grammar, phonology and graphology are *unit*, *structure*, *class* and *system*. *Unit* symbols a stretch of language activity which carries a pattern of a specific kind. For example, a sentence consists of one or more than two clauses, and the sentence is a *unit* of higher rank than the clause. Each clause consists of several groups, and it is a *unit* of higher rank than the group. *Structure* determines ordered arrangements of elements. *Class* is a group of members of a *unit* defined in terms of their operation in the structure of the *unit* next above in *the rank scale*. For instance, *class* of the unit *phoneme* defined in terms of the way in which they operate in the structure of the *unit* next above, the *syllable*. Thus, the members of the unit *phoneme* in syllable structure constitute the class ‘initial consonant’.

The *rank scale* as mentioned above is the scale on which units are hierarchically arranged in grammar or phonology. For example, a five-unit hierarchy ranking from the highest to the lowest is correspondingly on the *rank scales* in sequence of descending order *sentence* → *clause* → *group* → *word* → *morpheme*. If we put these units on a scale, this means that a sentence composes one or more than one clause. Put another way, a clause consists of one or more than one group, a group of one or more than one word, and a word of one or more than one morpheme. In a relation to units, “a unit at any rank consists of one or more unit of the rank next below, or conversely, that a unit at any rank operates in the structure of the unit next above” (Catford, 1965, p. 8). It can be concluded that *rank* and *rank scale* are important in theoretical linguistics and in translation theory as an application of linguistics.

2.3 Meaning in Translation

Meaning is a property of a language and has a vital role in translation (Catford, 1965). In Catford’s terms, a translation must “have the same meaning as the original”, that is the sameness in meaning does not reach

is a failure in rendering a SL text into TL text when “a SL text has a SL meaning, and a TL text has a TL meaning” (ibid, p. 35).

In English, meaning starts from morphemes, then to words, phrases, clauses and sentences and the form of words can be changed. In Vietnamese, however, the form of words experiences no such change because it is an isolating language. In this sense, it is important that the translator pays attention to this feature of language when transferring an English text into Vietnamese.

On the aspect of meaning, we must take account of various kinds of meaning. The two basic meanings are denotation and connotation which serves to identify the concept of a lexical item or core meaning, and identify people’s emotion/attitudes besides core meaning respectively. These meanings belong to the category of semantics, which will be applied to the analysis in translation. It can be added that taking account of meaning in context or meaning in use is very necessary. This aspect of meaning refers more to the pragmatic aspect of meaning when it comes to the context of situation and it relates partly to cohesion in texts. To sum up, these meanings help the translator deeply understand the SL text so as to find the appropriate equivalent in the TL text.

2.4 Equivalence in Translation

As mentioned by Catford (1965, p. 21), the central problem of translation practice is to find “TL translation equivalents”. Hence, a key task of translation theory is to define the “nature and conditions of translation equivalence” (ibid, p. 21).

Jakobson (2004, p. 114) says “translation involves two equivalent messages in two different codes”, i.e., rendering a text from SL into TL is a replacement of messages in one language “not for separate code-units but for entire messages in some other language”. This requires translators to recode and transmit the message received from another source.

Catford (1965, p. 27) shows that *translation equivalence* as an “empirical phenomenon” realized via comparing SL and TL texts. According to the author, translation equivalence occurs in a range of different levels such as phonology, graphology, grammar or lexis and ranks whereby the equivalence can be sentence-to-sentence, group-to-group, or word-to-word. Likewise, Nida and Taber (2003, p. 12) focus on rendering the meaning of a text, rather than of any single linguistic pair, adding that “certain radical departures from the formal structures are not only legitimate but may even be desirable”.

Catford further elaborated the concept of equivalence, showing the key differences between the formal correspondence and textual equivalence. These are understood, as follows:

A textual equivalent is any TL text or portion of text which is observed on a particular occasion, by methods described below, to be the equivalent of a given SL text or portion of text. A formal correspondent, on the other hand, is any TL category (unit, class, structure, element of structure, etc.) which can be said to occupy, as nearly as possible, the 'same' place in the 'economy' of the TL as the given SL category occupies in the SL.

(Catford, 1965, p. 27)

As for Munday (2001, p. 60), textual equivalence is “tied to a particular ST-TT pair, while formal equivalence is a more general system-based concept between a pair of languages”. Additionally, Catford (1965, p. 28) explains that in textual translation equivalent, “portion of a TL text is changed when and only when a given portion of the SL text is changed”.

In similar vein, Nida (2004, p. 129) distinguishes two kinds of equivalence: formal and dynamic equivalence, as follows:

Formal equivalence or formal correspondence ‘focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content ... such correspondences as poetry to poetry, sentence to sentence, and concept to

concept ... one is concerned that the message in the receptor language should match as closely as possible the different elements in the SL.

This type of translation tends to direct towards the ST structure which brings a strong impact on determining the level of accuracy and correctness. By contrast, *dynamic equivalence* bases on what Nida calls “the principle of equivalent effect” or “equivalent response principle” as coined by Newmark (1988b, p. 48). This type does not focus on matching the receptor-language message with the source-language message, but orients towards the relationship between the receptor and message which is similar to that between the original receptors and the message (Nida, 2004).

Koller (1979) agrees on the concept of equivalence in a relation to equivalent items in specific ST-TT pairs and contexts. The author expands the notion of equivalence in describing five different types of equivalence: (i) *denotative equivalence* towards extralinguistic content of a text; (ii) *denotative equivalence* related to lexical choices, typically between near-synonyms; (iii) *text-normative equivalence* associated with text types which are different from one another operating in different ways; (iv) *pragmatic equivalence* towards the receiver of the text or message, also called *communicative equivalence* which is named ‘dynamic equivalence’ by Nida (2004); (v) *formal equivalence* related to the form and aesthetics of the text.

Jakobson (2004, p. 114), however, confirms that “there is ordinarily no full equivalence between code-units, while messages may serve as adequate interpretations of alien code-units or messages”. Likewise, when mentioning *intralingual* translation Jakobson involves a use of synonyms but its limit is not complete equivalence. This can be explained that the code-units are not the same because they belong to two different sign systems. Nida (2004, p. 126) adds that “there can be no absolute correspondence between languages”. This can explain why “there can be no fully exact translations”, and the author comments that because “two languages are not identical, either in meanings given to corresponding symbols or in the ways in which such symbols are arranged in phrases or sentences” (Nida 2004, p. 126). All is what Jakobson wants to convey in a definition when mentioning the problem in equivalence: “Equivalence in difference is the cardinal problem of language and the pivotal concern of linguistics” (Jakobson, 2004, p. 37). This helps explain why “the problem of meaning and equivalence thus focuses on differences in the structure and terminology of languages rather than on any inability of one language to render a message that has been written in another verbal languages” (Munday, 2001, p. 38).

2.5 Translation Strategies

As far as translation strategies are concerned, there have been quite a good number of translation theorists who present their own points of view on this matter of translation. Newmark (1988b), for example, shows that translation theory’s main concern is to introduce applicable translation methods to the widest possible range of texts or text-categories. He builds eight methods of translation, namely (i) word-for-word translation; (ii) literal translation; (iii) faithful translation; (iv) semantic translation; (v) adaptation; (vi) free translation; (vii) idiomatic translation; and (viii) communicative translation. As for Vinay and Darbelnet (2004), two main translation strategies are stated involving *direct (literal) translation*, and *oblique translation* comprising seven procedures, of which direct translation covers *borrowing*, *calque* and *literal translation* while oblique translation include the four remaining ones –*transposition*, *modulation*, *equivalence* and *adaptation*. Although the authors categorize translation strategies differently, it is certain that they share a certain point. The first three strategies by Newmark (1988b) are known as direct (literal) translation by Vinay and Darbelnet (2004). These authors agree on *literal translation* as a common strategy, which converts SL grammatical constructions to their nearest TL equivalents but renders the lexical words singly, out of context by Newmark (1988b); which is the direct transfer of a SL text into a grammatically and idiomatically appropriate TL text by Vinay and Darbelnet (2004).

Baker (1996), however, suggests some strategies of translation which are considered as universals of translation namely *explicitation*, *simplification*, *normalization/conservatism*, *leveling out*. Explicitation is understood as “an overall tendency to spell things out rather than leave them implicit” (ibid., p. 180), described as ‘extra information’ while Vinay and Darbelnet (1995, p. 170) consider it “gain of information”, which is defined as a “stylistic translation technique which consists of making explicit in the target language what remains implicit in the source language because it is apparent from either the context or the situation” (ibid., p. 342). Simplification is regarded as the tendency to “simplify the language used in translation” (Baker, 1996, p. 181), and *normalization/conservatism* – glossed as a tendency to “exaggerate features of the target language and to conform to its typical patterns” (ibid., p. 183). Leveling out described as “the tendency of translated text to gravitate towards the centre of a continuum” (ibid., p. 184). In similar vein, in the category of translation universals, Toury (2004) regards *explicitation*, *implicitation*, *simplification*, *complexification*, etc. as kinds of shifts in translation, of which *explicitation* and *simplification* are considered as *up-rank shift* and *down-rank shift* respectively by Le (2014); *implicitation* is described as a “stylistic translation technique which consists of making what is explicit in the SL implicit in the TL, relying on the context or the situation for conveying the meaning” (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995, p. 344).

Regarding implicitation and explicitation, Klaudy and Károly (2005) present some criteria to distinguish between them as displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Criteria to distinguish Implicitation from Explicitation

No	Implicitation	Explicitation
1.	SL unit with a specific meaning replaced by a TL unit with a more general meaning	SL unit with a more general meaning replaced by a TL unit with a more specific meaning
2.	meanings of several SL words combined in one TL word	the meaning of a SL unit distributed over several units in the TL
3.	meaningful lexical elements of the SL text dropped in the TL text	new meaningful elements appeared in the TL text
4.	two or more sentences in the ST conjoined into one sentence in the target text (TT)	one sentence in the ST divided into two or several sentences in the TT
5.	ST clauses reduced to phrases in the TT	SL phrases extended or ‘raised’ to clause level in the TT

3 Conclusion

To sum up, the notion of translation has been reviewed in relation to the concepts of equivalence and meaning in translation. Some aspects of translation studies have been systematically described with due acknowledgements to great theorists in the field (i.e., Vinay & Darbelnet, 2004; Jacobson, 2004; Nida, 2004; Catford, 2004; Newmark, 1988b; Baker, 1996; Nida & Taber, 2003; Munday, 2012). The linguistic approach to translation is presented with a description of models of translation equivalence and translation strategies. The knowledge of translation theory provided may be useful for English learners, translation learners and translators. Grasping these issues may help them avoid leaving errors in their translation.

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