

THE THEORY OF EQUIVALENCE IN TRANSLATION

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Contemporary translation is considered as an area of literature, and, the translator, a literary artist. The task of the translator is to rewrite the original in the target language with a hope that the readers of the translation will perceive the text emotionally and aesthetically which parallels and corresponds the aesthetic experience of its original readers. The task of the translator is to achieve a proximity between the source text and its readers on the one hand and the target text and target audience on the other, which is not so easy. It is so because the translator achieves his or her goal by taking a series of creative decisions and imaginative acts or criticism. In translation the cultural, aesthetic and linguistic values of the source language work are recreated in a target language having its own cultural, linguistic and aesthetic values. The translator substitutes the source language message by the target language message by an act of “analogy” (Grossman10) that is by finding comparable cultural, linguistic and aesthetic characteristics in the target language. This act of the translator compels him or her to choose the appropriate equivalence in order to present the translation before the reading public. A faithful representation of the original depends very much upon the application of a suitable and appropriate equivalence. Sujeet Mukherjee has rightly observed, “The obligation to forge equivalence compels the translator to look very closely at the original as well as to consider carefully what alternatives he can offer in translator”(147).

Equivalence is considered as the core issue in translation although its definition, application and relevance have caused a lot of controversy within the area of translation theory. Translation scholars and theoreticians are broadly divided into two groups on the bases of cultural approach and linguistic approach to translation. Those who favour the linguistic approach to translation seem to forget that translation in itself is not merely a matter of linguistics. A word or expression in the source language carries within itself a host of associations and connotations which are not restricted within the linguistic boundary but accommodates cultural meaning and significance. This particular aspect seems to have been taken by the scholars who regard translation equivalence as being essentially a transfer of the message from the source culture to the target culture. Harish Trivedi observes, “Literary texts are constituted not primarily of language but in fact of culture, language being in effect the vehicle of culture” (St-Pierre and Kar 280).

The scholars like Roman Jakobson and J.C. Catford lay much emphasis on the linguistic approach to translation. Jakobson is of the view that the meaning of a word is a linguistic phenomenon, and the meaning lies with the signifier and not with the signified. He observes,

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“There is no signatum without signum”(Brower 113). Jakobson seems to follow Ferdinand de Saussure’s view that there is an arbitrariness between the signifier and the signified and suggests how this arbitrariness can be transferred between different languages. He also expands Saussure’s idea and suggests that concepts can be transferred without, however, attaining full equivalence.

In his essay, “On linguistic Aspects of Translations”(1959) Jacobson lays importance on mutual translatability. It refers to a kind of translation in which translation takes place between two languages. In such translation the translator substitutes the meaning of a source language by the meaning of a target language. The translator makes use of the synonyms for translating the source language into the target language message. Therefore, there is no full equivalence between the code units of the two languages. Translation, therefore, involves two different messages in two different codes. Such translation is under the constant scrutiny of the linguistic science. Therefore, bilingual dictionaries are to be consulted and its must be taken into consideration that the comparative definitions of all the corresponding units are explained properly in their intentions and extensions. Similarly bilingual grammars are to be consulted for such translations.

Translation becomes difficult when the verbal or grammatical units of a source language do not have corresponding verbal or grammatical units in the target language. But language depends less upon the grammatical patterns so far its cognitive function is concerned. Therefore: “All cognitive experience and its classification is conveyable in any existing language. Whenever there is deficiency terminology may be qualified and amplified by lone words, neologisms and semantic shifts, and finally, by circumlocutions” (Jacobson 116).

However, whenever there is no literal equivalent of the source language words or expressions in the target language then the translator should choose the most suitable way of rendering the source language message. But in such cases it is very difficult to remain faithful to the source text when the target language has a rigid grammatical structure.

Developments in linguistic science have shed important lights on the theory and practice of translation. Such developments ensure that translating is not a only a process of matching surface forms by rules of correspondence. It is rather a more complex procedure involving analysis, transfer and restructuring. A competent translator goes through a around about process of analysis, transfer and restructuring. Eugene A.Nida observes:

That is to say, the translator first analyses the message of the SOURCE language into its simplest and structurally clearest forms, transfers it at this level and then restructures it at the level of the RECEPTOR language which is most appropriate for the audience which he intends to reach.
(484)

The analysis of the text in the source language should not only be limited to the study of the structural relationship between the linguistic units or to the denotative meaning of the same units. It should also treat the connotative values of the formal structure of the communication.

The connotative evaluation of the formal structure of the message is essentially an analysis of the style of the communication. In order to realise the stylistic values the translator must not be restricted to the sentence as the upper level of linguistic relevance because the stylistic factors affect the total form of any message, from the level of sound symbolism to the limits of the discourse. A delineation of the essential elements of the message is more important

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in such an analysis. This will help materially in pointing out the essential parallelism between the two sets of formal features.

Restructuring is more important than analysis and transfer. It depends upon the structure of the receptor language. There are two principal dimension of restructuring namely formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence.

Formal equivalence focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content. Such translation is concerned with such correspondences as poetry to poetry, sentence to sentence and concept to concept. According to Nida, such type of structural equivalence in translation is called “gloss translation”(486) in which the translator aims at producing as literally and meaningfully as possible the form and the content of the original. The guiding principle governing the formal equivalence translation would then be reproduction of grammatical units, consistency in word usage and meaning in terms of source context.

Dynamic equivalence, on the other hand, aims at complete naturalness of expression. A dynamic equivalence translation is directed primarily towards equivalence of response rather than equivalence of form. The relationship between the target language receptor and message should substantially be the same as that which existed between the source language receptor and the message.

The principle governing the dynamic equivalence is “conformance”(Nida 487) of translation to receptor language and culture as a whole. The translation must be in accordance with the extent of the message which involves the stylistic selection and arrangement of message constituents.

Translation should be receptor friendly. A piece of translation is considered to be adequate only if the response of the intended receptor is satisfactory. Therefore, translating is reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message first in terms of meaning and second in terms of style.

Equivalence in translation should not be approached as a search for sameness since sameness cannot even exist between two target language versions of the same text. Susan Bassnett has rightly considered equivalence “as a dialectic between the signs and the structures within and surrounding the SL and TL texts”(36). Thus, equivalence can be forged by taking both linguistic and cultural elements of a language into consideration.

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