A Critical Evaluation of Equivalence in Translation Theories

Halah Agsebat h.agsebat@yahoo.com
Nora Elarafi alorofinora@yahoo.com
University of Benghazi, Libya

Abstract

The concept of equivalence can be assumed to hold a central position in translation studies. However, it has been controversial, causing many heated debates among scholars of translation studies according to its nature, definition and applicability. This research paper provides a critical evaluation of the most influential equivalence theories that have been proposed by scholars in the field, such as Vinay and Darbelnet (1958), Jakobson (1959), Nida and Taber (1969), Catford (1965), House (1997), Koller (1979), Newmark (1981), Baker (1992), and finally, Pym (2010). These theories are presented in order to provide a better understanding of how the concept of equivalence developed. It is concluded that the concept of equivalence in the translation process varies among translation scholars according to their view on the qualities of equivalence.

Key word: Translation, equivalence, translation scholars, translation theories.

Introduction:

The concept of equivalence has concerned translation scholars since it has been strongly connected with both their definitions and practical aspects of translating. Equivalence became an important topic of translation theories in the 1960s and 1970s. Equivalence indicates that the source text and target text share some kind of similarity. The question was as to the kind and degree of similarity which created different types of theories of equivalence. This research attempts to critically analyze the concept of equivalence according to fundamental translation scholars including, Vinay and Darbelnet (1958), Jakobson (1959), Nida and Taber (1969), Catford (1965), House (1997), Koller (1979), Newmark (1981), Baker (1992), and finally, Pym (2010).

Research question

- What are the translation scholars' views of equivalence in translation?

Research aims:

1. This research aims to present a critical evaluation of the most influential equivalence theories that have been proposed by scholars in equivalence.

2. The study aims to shed light on similarities and differences between theories of equivalence in translation.

Contribution to Knowledge

The critical evaluation of equivalence theories in translation intend to contribute theoretically to the literature in the field of translation studies. In addition, it contributes to raise awareness of similarities and differences of equivalent theories in the field.

Limitation of the Study

This research study is restricted to the evaluation of translation equivalence theories according to nine key scholars, namely, Vinay and Darbelnet (1958), Jakobson (1959), Nida and Taber (1969), Catford (1965), House (1997), Koller (1979), Newmark (1981), Baker (1992), and finally, Pym (2010). The study does not include the evaluation of other theoretical scholars.

Literature review:

The literature review presents the most fundamental translation scholars' views on the concept of equivalence. In addition, it shows how each scholar defines equivalence, and their division to the types of equivalence. Moreover, the literature demonstrates if their theories show any advantages and defaults with a critical analysis of the concept of equivalence according to the following scholars in the field, namely, Vinay and Darbelnet (1958), Jakobson (1959), Nida and Taber (1969), Catford (1965), House (1997), Koller (1979), Newmark (1981), Baker (1992), and finally, Pym (2010).

A. Vinay and Darbelnet

Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet published their Stylistique Comparée du Françaiset de l' Anglais (1958) which is a comparative stylistic analysis of the different translation strategies and procedures used in French and English. In its English version, first published in 1995, they distinguished between direct and oblique translation. They consider that direct translation refers to literal translation and oblique translation refers to free translation (p. 84). Moreover, they presented seven procedures, the first three covered by direct translation and the remaining four by oblique translation. These procedures are: borrowing, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, equivalence and adaptation.

Equivalence according to Vinay and Darbelnet

They consider equivalence as reformulation, which produces an equivalent text in the target language by using completely different stylistic and structural methods from those in the source language. Classical examples of equivalence include translation of exclamations and expletives. For example, the English Expression of pain "Oach!" corresponds to the Polish "Au!" and to the Arabic " اخ او اي " . In addition, they added another type of expression that requires reformulation to fit into the target text which is onomatopoeia of animal sounds. This also includes different equivalent types of sounds that differ from one language to another to the same kind of animal. Moreover, since it embraces an opulent repertoire of idioms and proverbs that tend to be fixed in most cases.

This suggests that equivalence is viewed as a procedure in which the same situation is replicated as in the original, yet by using different words (Vinay and Darbelnet, 1995). According to Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) translating proverbs is a good example of employing equivalence for rendering more elaborated structures between the source language and target language. Yet, it may not be easy to find close equivalent to such proverbs.

They believe that through equivalence the stylistic influence of the source-language text can be preserved and transferred to the target-language text. Therefore, Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) consider that equivalence can be attained when translating proverbs, idioms and clichés, through rendering the meaning and message that create the same effect rather than merely focusing on form.

Furthermore, Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) regard that it is necessary for equivalent expressions between language pairs to be listed in a bilingual dictionary "*as full equivalents*" However, they recognized that it would be impossible for bilingual dictionaries to cover all idiomatic expressions. In addition, the translation of such idiomatic expression may not be fully equivalent. Consequently, they admitted that glossaries and collections of idiomatic expressions are not comprehensive. This indicates that the rendering of an equivalent expression from a dictionary or glossary in the source language text does not present or guarantee an adequate translation since it is out of context. As the context of these idiomatic expressions plays an important role in determining the translation strategy that should be used. Accordingly, they conclude by affirming that what determines the

need for creating equivalences are the context and situation of idiomatic expressions. Therefore, translators are advised to consider the situation and context of the source text in order to come up with an adequate translation equivalence in the target text (Vinay and Darbelnet, 1995).

B. Jakobson

The structuralist Roman Jakobson (1959) maintains that the field of translation is divided into three types, that is, intralingual (rewording or paraphrasing within the same language), interlingual (rewording or paraphrasing between two different languages), and intersemiotic (rewording or paraphrasing between sign systems). Yet, the focus in translation studies is on interlingual translation.

Equivalence according to Jakobson

Regarding equivalence Jakobson believes that there is no full translation equivalence between the meaning of words in different languages (Jakobson, 1959). He presents an example of '*cheese'* in English by saying that it is not identical to the Russian '*syr'*. They are different because cottage cheese is included in the general word 'cheese' in English. Yet, it is not included in the Russian word 'syr'. Jakobson does not suggest that translation is impossible, however, he identifies the differences in the structure and terminology between different languages.

Similarity and differences between Vinay and Darbelnet's theory of translation and Jakobson's theory

Considering the perspective of the above mentioned views on equivalence, it is claimed that there are some similarities between Vinay and Darbelnet's theory of translation and Jakobson's theory. Both theories argue that it is possible to provide a linguistically adequate translation despite cultural and grammatical differences between source language and target language.

This indicates that the translator should be able to render the message from the source text to the target text regardless of grammatical, cultural, semantic difference between the two languages in question. The theories suggest that the translator should consider the linguistic limitations and have enough knowledge, experience and skills to create an adequate comprehensive target text.

C. Nida and Taber

Nida (1964) has given four basic requirements of a translation: 1. Making sense 2. Conveying the spirit and manner of original. 3. Having a natural and easy form of expression 4. Producing a similar response. Nida (1964) presented semantics in translation, as well as the information theory, transformation theory, and communicational theory. In addition, he proposed dynamic equivalence and the three stage model of translation process which includes analysis, transfer and restructuring. Moreover, Waard and Nida (1986) substituted functional equivalence for dynamic equivalence in order to avoid unnecessary misinterpretations. Furthermore, Nida (1960) modified the consideration towards "formal correspondence" which had been considered as the opposite of "dynamic equivalence". Moreover, he found that translation is considered as part of linguistics.

Nida in translation studies presented semantics, function, context and culture. Most of Nida's translation linguistic theories are scientific, systematic and interdisciplinary. Nida's theories made a great influence all over the world.

Equivalence according to Nida

Regarding equivalence, Nida presents two main types of equivalence: (1) formal equivalence and (2) dynamic equivalence. In particular, Nida argues that in formal equivalence the target text resembles very much the source text in both form and content. However, in dynamic equivalence focuses on conveying the source text message into the target text as naturally as possible. It is claimed that Nida prefers dynamic equivalence because he considers it to be a more effective. Nida and Taber's (1969) state that dynamic equivalence in translation goes beyond correct communication of information.

Munday (2016) argues that Nida is credited for introducing a receptor-based direction to the task of translating. This in turn supports the view that Nida focuses on the effect of the target text (dynamic equivalence) rather than form and content (formal equivalence).

D. Catford

Catford's primary contribution in translation lies in the kinds and shifts of translation. the changes that happen during the translation process are called shifts. Very broad kinds of translation were described by Catford according to three standards. First of all, full translation is different from partial translation according to the extent of translation. Secondly, total translation and restricted translation also differ from each other according to the levels of language which are involved in translation, and, thirdly, rank-bound translation and unbounded translation are distinguished by Catford, relying on the grammatical or phonological rank at which equivalence is constituted.

Equivalence according to Catford

Catford (1965) has been known for introducing two main concepts into the field of translation theory, which are 'types' and 'shifts' of translation. In his analysis of the notion of translation, he presents categories of translation based on three criteria: 1) The extent of translation (full translation contrasted to partial translation), 2) The levels of language involved in translation (total translation as opposed to restricted translation), and 3) The grammatical rank at which the translation equivalence is established (rank-bound translation contrasted to unbounded translation)

The analysis of Catford's view of equivalence also focused on the notion of shifts. Catford (1965:73) defines translation shifts as "*departures from formal correspondence when translating from the SL to the TL*". Furthermore, he keeps that there are two primary types of translation shifts, which are: 1) level shifts (where a SL item at one linguistic level, for instance, grammar, has a TL equivalent at a different level, for example, lexis), and 2) category shifts, which are divided into (a) structure-shifts where changes happen in grammatical structure, (b) unit-shifts which involve

changes in rank, (c) class-shifts where changes occur in class, and (d) intra-system shifts which take place internally when source and target language systems take the same constitution but a non-corresponding term in the TL.

Catford was strongly criticized for establishing a linguistic theory of translation. Snell-Hornby (1988) claims that linguistics should not be considered as the only subject which enables translation to take place, but we should take into account cultural, situational and historical elements. Nevertheless, Malmkjaer (2005) notices that when Catford (1965) defines translation as the replacement of SL textual material by TL equivalent textual material, he does not mean equivalent in meaning.

E. House

When House (1997) carried out contrastive German-English discourse analyses, he distinguished between two basic types of translation, which are overt translation and covert translation. While overt translation refers to a target text that composes of components that 'betray' that it is a translation, covert translation is a target text that has the same purpose with the source text since the translator has made every possible attempt to relieve cultural differences. In sum, we can conclude that House's theory seems more flexible than Catford's since it integrates the pragmatic features of translation by using authentic examples.

Equivalence according to House

House (1997) generated a translation model where the primary demand for equivalence of source text and target text is that original text and translated text should match each other in function. This function should be accomplished by employing equivalent pragmatic ways. Thus, the translation is adequate in quality if it matches the "textual" profile and function of the original.

F. Koller

Koller's (1979) elaborated investigation of the idea of equivalence and its linked term 'correspondence'. Correspondence concerns the comparison of two language methods where differences and similarities are described contrastively. However, equivalence deals with equivalent items in particular source text and target text pairs and contexts.

Equivalence according to Koller

Koller (1979) states that there are five different kinds of equivalence: (a) denotative equivalence which involves the extra linguistic content of a passage, (b) connotative equivalence which relates to lexical selections, (c) text-normative equivalence which relates to text-types, (d) pragmatic equivalence which involves the recipient of the text or message, and finally, (e) formal equivalence which relates to the pattern and philosophy of the text. Koller (1979) argues that a hierarchy of values cannot be kept in translation unless the translator reaches a hierarchy of equivalence demands for the target text. Despite the hierarchical ordering of equivalences is open to argument, Koller's share to the field of translation studies is acknowledged for bringing into

translators' attention different kinds and ways where the then fashionable desideratum of equivalence can be accomplished.

G. Newmark

Newmark's Approaches to Translation (1981) and A Textbook of Translation (1988) try to describe a ground for dealing with troubles that meet the translation process. More specifically, Newmark changes Nida's terms of formal and dynamic equivalence with semantic and communicative translation respectively.

Equivalence according to Newmark

Newmark suggests two types of equivalence semantic and communicative translation. The main difference between them is that semantic translation focuses on meaning while communicative translation focuses on the effect. In other words, semantic translation focuses on the source text and tries to keep its characteristics as much as possible. On the other hand, communicative translation emphasizes the needs of the recipients. Therefore, in semantic translation a huge focus is placed on the writer of the original text whereas communicative translation serves a larger readership. It should be mentioned that during the translation process, communicative translation need not be used exclusively over semantic or vice versa. For instance, in a literary text a particular sentence needs communicative translation whereas another sentence from the same text may need a semantic one. Thus, the two methods of translation may be used in parallel, with varying focuses where each one can be used.

Furthermore, Newmark (1981:39) strongly thinks that literal translation is the best approach in both semantic and communicative translation. Nevertheless, he focuses on that when there is a conflict between the two types of translation, in order to avoid producing an abnormal, odd-sounding or semantically inaccurate result, we should use communicative translation. In order to exemplify his point, he uses the example of the common sign bissiger Hund and chien méchant, which should be translated communicatively as beware the dog! instead of the semantic translation as dog that bites! and bad dog! In order to communicate the message effectively.

H. Baker

The contribution of Baker (1992) to the field of translation studies is recognized in providing a systematic approach to training translators through the elaboration of specific strategies. These strategies can be applied in dealing with several translation problems that translators encounter. consequently, the strategies tend to be useful for both theoretical and practical issues in translation.

Equivalence according to Baker

Baker (1992) addresses the annoying issue of equivalence by adopting a more neutral approach when she argues that equivalence is a relative notion because it is influenced by a variety of linguistic and cultural factors. According to Baker (1992) equivalence is structured around different levels, that is, at the level of word, phrase, grammar, text and pragmatics. In more detail,

a distinction is made between word-level and above-world level equivalence. Adopting a bottom-up approach, Baker recognizes the importance of individual words during the translation process, since the translator looks firstly at the words as single units in order to find their equivalent in the TL. Baker presents a definition of the term word referring to its complex nature since a single word can sometimes be assigned to different meanings in different languages. Accordingly, parameters such as number, gender and tense should be taken into account when translating a word.

Grammatical equivalence refers to the diversity of grammatical categories across languages and the difficulty of finding an equivalent grammatical structure in the target text is due to the variety of grammatical rules across languages. Baker (1992) stresses that differences in grammatical structures may considerably change the way the information or message. As a consequence, the translator may be forced to add or delete information in the target text because of lacking specific grammatical structures. According to her, some of the major categories that often pose problems for translators are number, voice, person, gender, tense and aspect.

On the other hand, textual equivalence refers to equivalence that may be achieved between a source text and target text in terms of cohesion and information. Baker argues that the effect of text is important for translators because it facilitates their comprehension and analysis of the source text and helps them to produce a cohesive and coherent text in the target language.

The translators task is to preserve the cohesive ties as well as the coherence of the source language text. This in turn relies on three main factors; the target audience, the purpose of the translation and the text type.

Finally, pragmatic equivalence essentially deals with implicature. Baker argues that implicature is used to denote implied meaning, but not literal meaning. Accordingly, the focus of interest is not on what is explicitly stated, but rather on the intended or implied meaning in a given context. The role of the translator is to work out the meaning of implicatures. Hence, if the text carries implicatures, the main aim of the translator is to reconstruct the intended message of the source language text in a manner that is accessible and comprehensible to the target language reader.

I. Pym

Lastly, Pym (2010) contributes to the concept of equivalence by stating that there is no perfect equivalence between languages and he believes that equivalence is always estimated. According to Pym (2010) equivalence is a relation of creating similar source text effect in a target text which can be recognized on any linguistic level from form to function.

Equivalence according to Pym

Pym (2010) distinguishes between natural and directional equivalence. Natural equivalence exists between languages prior to the translation process, and it is not affected by directionality. Alternatively, theories of directional equivalence allow translators to be free in choosing between

several translation strategies which are not dictated in the source text. Regardless of the several ways of translating, the strategies for directional equivalence are reduced into two opposing poles; one is to preserve the source language norms and the other to target language norms. However, an important assumption of directional equivalence shows that it involves some kind of asymmetry. This suggests that when creating an equivalent by following a certain way of translating does not necessary imply the creation of the same equivalent when translating another way.

Discussion and critical evaluation of equivalence theories

Both Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) as well as Jakobson (1959) both believe that there is no complete or full translation equivalence. Yet, for Jacobson equivalence is not impossible. Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) focused on equivalence in idiomatic expressions and idioms and they consider that dictionaries and glossaries do not provide adequate equivalence since these terms are not in context. For Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) context and situation play an important role first in determining the translation strategy that should be used and secondly in producing an adequate target text equivalence. Both theories argue that it is possible to provide a linguistically adequate translation despite cultural and grammatical differences between source language and target language. The difference between them is that Jacobson focuses more on the different between structure and terminology (focus on form). However, Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) focus on effect (focus on meaning) especially in idioms and proverbs.

Nida (1964) divided equivalence into formal and dynamic equivalence. In which in formal equivalence focus is on form and content, while in dynamic equivalence focus is on the message. Yet, Nida (1964) prefers dynamic equivalence because he considers it to be a more effective. So we can conclude that Nida and Vinay and Darbelnet are similar in preferring to focus on effect, meaning and the message of the source text in the target text. Accordingly, Nida (1964) prefers the effect of the target text (dynamic equivalence) rather than form and content (formal equivalence).

Catford (1965) is acknowledged for introducing two basic concepts into the field of translation theory which are ‘types’ and ‘shifts’ of translation. The types include the extent of translation, level of translation and grammatical rank. In addition, he focused on shifts from the source language text to the target language text. He has been strongly criticized for establishing a large linguistic theory of translation. He is Similar to Jakobson (1959) in that he preferred to focus on form (formal equivalence) rather than focusing on meaning.

House (1997) distinguished between two types of translation, overt translation and covert translation. House’s theory seems more flexible than Catford’s theory since it integrates the pragmatic features of translation by using authentic examples. For him, the original text and translated text should match each other in function. Therefore, House is similar to Nida and Vinay and Darbelnet in focusing on receiving similar effect and function.

Koller (1979) points out on the difference between correspondence and equivalence. His contribution to the field of translation studies brought translations' attention to different kinds of equivalence and the ways in which equivalence can be achieved. The hierarchy of equivalence requirements depends on what the translator wants to achieve and render in the target text.

New mark described a basis for dealing with difficulties that face translators during the translation process. Newmark replaced Nida's terms of formal and dynamic equivalence with semantic and communicative translation respectively. In which semantic translation focuses on meaning while communicative translation focuses on effect. In semantic translation emphasis is placed on rendering the author's intention of the source text whereas in communicative emphasis is on the readership. In which the target language readership should receive an equivalent effect as that of the source language readership. Yet, Newmark (1988) stresses that semantic and communicative translation should be used in parallel, with varying focus, in relation to the type of text. Newmark's contribution in translation studies provided a wealth of practical examples that constitute a good guide for both trainees and established translators.

Baker (1992) adopted neutral approach she considers that equivalence is a relative notion because it is influenced by a variety of linguistic and cultural factors. She structured equivalence at the level of word, phrase, grammar, text and pragmatics. She adopted a bottom-up approach which starts from considering the word level to the pragmatic level. Baker's contribution to translation studies is well known for providing a systematic approach for training translators by following specific strategies that can be applied in dealing with several translation problems that translators' encounter theoretically and practically. Her contribution is similar to Newmark's (1988) contribution in providing practical approaches for translators, yet with focus on the theoretical counterpart.

Pym (2010), Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) as well as Jakobson (1959) all state that there is no perfect equivalence between languages. For Pym (2010) equivalence is always assumed. He divides equivalence into natural and directional equivalence. Natural equivalence exists between languages prior to the translation process. Directional equivalence offers the freedom to choose between several translation strategies, however, it is reduced into two types either adhering to source language norms or to target language norms. The argumentative assumption about directional equivalence was criticized since it involves some kind of irregularity. As when translating to produce an equivalent in a certain way does not imply that a similar equivalent will be produced when translating another way.

Conclusion:

To conclude, each translation scholar has his own view in considering and dealing with equivalence in translation. This in turn, shows that there is no perfect theory regarding translation equivalence. Yet, some scholars' theories are to some extent similar while others are carry different views and differ in their areas of interest to such theories. Translators should have a comprehensive

view and knowledge of such key theories as it represents theoretical and practical clues to most translation difficulties and it open insights to new ideas and expands their knowledge in the field. In addition, such equivalence theories cover how they developed through the years from one scholar to another.

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تقييم نقدي للتكافؤ في نظريات الترجمة

ا. نورا العرفي د.هالة قصيبات
alorofinora@yahoo.com h.agsebat@yahoo.com
كلية اللغات جامعة بنغازي

المستخلص:

يفترض أن نظرية التكافؤ تحتل موقعا مركزيا في دراسات الترجمة لكن هذه النظرية مثيرة للجدل مما أدى إلى العديد من المناقشات الحادة بين العلماء المختصين بدراسات الترجمة طبقا لطبيعتها وتعريفها وإمكانية تطبيقها. وتعرض هذه الورقة البحثية تقييما نقديا للعديد من نظريات التكافؤ التي إقترحها العلماء في هذا المجال مثل فيناي وداربلنت (1958) وجاكوبسون (1959) و نيدا وتابر (1969) و كاتفورد (1965) و هاوس (1997) وكولر (1979) و نيومارك (1981) وبيكر (1992) وأخيرا بيم (2010) حيث يتم تقديم هؤلاء النظريات لتجعلنا ندرك بشكل أفضل عملية تطور نظرية التكافؤ وقد تم استنتاج الأتي أن الفائدة وعدم الفائدة من فكرة التكافؤ في عملية الترجمة تختلف ما بين العلماء طبقا لوجهات نظرهم لنوعية التكافؤ.

The Dynamics of Narrative Structure in depicting the repercussion of migration movements in Razan Naiem Almoghrabi's *Women of Wind*

Amina M. B. Megheirbi

Department of Literature, Faculty of Languages
University of Benghazi