Handout Four

Equivalence and equivalent text

Key texts

Bassnett, S. (1980, revised edition 2002*) Translation Studies*, London and New York: Routledge, Chapter 1.

Jakobson, R. (1959/2004) 'On linguistic aspects of translation', in L. Venuti (ed.) (2004),

pp. 138–43.

Koller, W. (1979b/89) 'Equivalence in translation theory', translated by A. Chesterman, in A. Chesterman (ed.) (1989), pp. 99–104.

Newmark, P. (1981) *Approaches to Translation*, Oxford and New York: Pergamon.

Newmark, P. (1988) *A Textbook of Translation*, New York and London: Prentice-Hall.

Nida, E. (1964a) *Toward a Science of Translating*, Leiden: E. J. Brill.

Nida, E. (1964b/2004) 'Principles of Correspondence', in L. Venuti (ed.), pp. 153–67.

Nida, E. and C. Taber (1969) *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, Leiden: E. J. Brill.

1. ROMAN JAKOBSON: THE NATURE OF LINGUISTIC MEANING AND EQUIVALENCE
   a) Jakobson goes on to examine key issues of this type of translation, notably **linguistic meaning** and **equivalence**.
   b) Jakobson then moves on to consider the thorny problem of **equivalence in meaning** between words in different languages. He points out (1959/2004: 139) that 'there is ordinarily no full equivalence between code-units'.
   c) In Jakobson's description, interlingual translation involves 'substitut[ing] messages in one language not for separate code-units but for entire messages in some other language':
      The translator recodes and transmits a message received from another source. Thus translation involves two equivalent messages in two different codes. (Jakobson 1959/2004: 139)
2. NIDA AND 'THE SCIENCE OF TRANSLATING'
   a) Meaning is broken down into **linguistic meaning** (borrowing elements of Chomsky's model), **referential meaning** (the denotative 'dictionary' meaning) and **emotive** (or connotative) **meaning**. These include **hierarchical structuring**, which differentiates

series of words according to their level (for instance, the superordinate animal and its hyponyms goat, dog, cow, etc.) and techniques of **componential analysis**.

b)   Another technique is **semantic structure analysis** in which Nida (p. 107) separates out visually the different meanings of spirit ('demons', 'angels', 'gods', 'ghost', 'ethos', 'alcohol', etc.) according to their characteristics (human vs. non-human, good vs. bad, etc.).

c)   Chomsky's generative–transformational model analyses sentences into a series of related levels governed by rules. In very simplified form, the key features of this model can be summarized as follows:

   (1) Phrase-structure rules generate an underlying or **deep structure** which is

   (2) transformed by transformational rules relating one underlying structure to another (e.g. active to passive), to produce

   (3) a final **surface structure**, which itself is subject to phonological and morphemic rules.

d)   The most basic of such structures are **kernel sentences**, which are simple, active, declarative sentences that require the minimum of transformation.

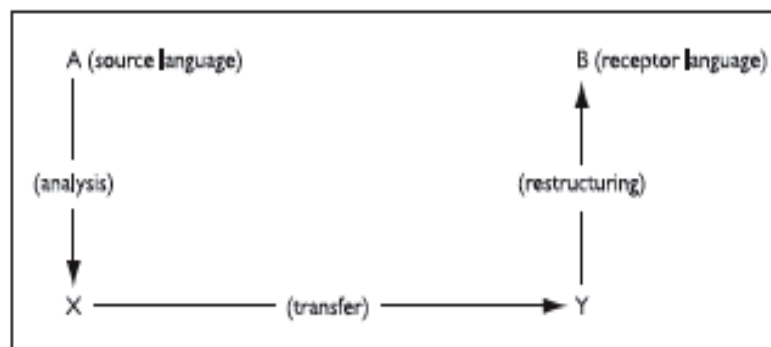Figure 1: Nida's three-stage system of translation (adopted from Nida and Taber 1969: 33)

Figure 2:

Box 3.1

- Greek ST:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
egeneto	anthrōpos,	apestalmenos	para	theou,	onoma	autō	Iōannēs

- Literal transfer (stage 1):

became/happened man, sent from God, name to-him John

- Minimal transfer (stage 2):

There CAME/WAS a man, sent from God, WHOSE name *was* John

- Literary transfer (stage 3, example taken from the *American Standard Version*, 1901):

There CAME a man, sent from God, WHOSE name *was* John

or (example taken from *Phillips New Testament in Modern English*, 1958[1]):

A man, NAMED *John WAS sent BY God

Notes: Adjustments from the ST are indicated as follows: changes in order are indicated by the numeral order, omissions by*, structural alterations by SMALL CAPITALS and additions by *italics*.

3. FORMAL AND DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCE AND THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUIVALENT EFFECT

a) The old terms such as 'literal', 'free' and 'faithful' translation, which were examined in the previous lecture , are discarded by Nida in favour of 'two basic orientations' or 'types of equivalence' (Nida 1964a: 159): (1) formal equivalence and (2) dynamic equivalence. These are defined by Nida as follows:

(1) **Formal equivalence**: Formal equivalence focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content . . . One is concerned that the message in the receptor language should match as closely as possible the different elements in the source language. (Nida 1964a: 159)

(2) **Dynamic equivalence**: Dynamic, or functional, equivalence is based on what Nida calls 'the principle of equivalent effect', where 'the relationship between receptor and message should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the message' (Nida 1964a: 159).

b) For Nida, the success of the translation depends above all on achieving equivalent response. It is one of the 'four basic requirements of a translation', which are (p. 164):

(1) making sense;

(2) conveying the spirit and manner of the original;

(3) having a natural and easy form of expression;

(4) producing a similar response.

4. DISCUSSION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF NIDA'S WORK

   a) Lefevere (1993: 7) felt that equivalence was still overly concerned with the word level, while van den Broeck (1978: 40) and Larose (1989: 78) considered equivalent effect or response to be impossible.

   b) The criticism that Nida's work is subjective raises the question of whether Nida's theory of translation really is 'scientific'.

   c) Gentzler, working from within a deconstructionist perspective denigrates Nida's work for its theological and proselytizing standpoint since, in Gentzler's view, dynamic equivalence serves the purpose of converting the receptors, no matter what their culture, to the dominant discourse and ideas of Protestant Christianity.

5. NEWMARK: SEMANTIC AND COMMUNICATIVE TRANSLATION

a) Newmark suggests narrowing the gap by replacing the old terms with those of 'semantic' and 'communicative' translation:

   Communicative translation attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original. Semantic translation attempts to render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original. (Newmark 1981: 39)

b) *In communicative as in semantic translation, provided that equivalent effect is secured, the literal word-for-word translation is not only the best, it is the only valid method of translation. (Newmark 1981: 39)*

Figure 3: Comparison of Newmark's semantic and communicative translation

Parameter	Semantic translation	Communicative translation
Transmitter/addressee focus	Focus on the thought processes of the transmitter as an individual; should only help TT reader with connotations if they are a crucial part of message	Subjective, TT reader focused, oriented towards a specific language and culture
Culture	Remains within the SL culture	Transfers foreign elements into the TL culture
Time and origin	Not fixed in any time or local space; translation needs to be done anew with every generation	Ephemeral and rooted in its own contemporary context
Relation to ST	Always 'inferior' to ST; 'loss' of meaning	May be 'better' than the ST; 'gain' of force and clarity even if loss of semantic content
Use of form of SL	If ST language norms deviate, then this must be replicated in TT; 'loyalty' to ST author	Respect for the form of the SL, but overriding 'loyalty' to TL norms
Form of TL	More complex, awkward, detailed, concentrated; tendency to overtranslate	Smoother, simpler, clearer, more direct, more conventional; tendency to undertranslate
Appropriateness	For serious literature, autobiography, 'personal effusion', any important political (or other) statement	For the vast majority of texts, e.g. non-literary writing, technical and informative texts, publicity, standardized types, popular fiction
Criterion for evaluation	Accuracy of reproduction of the significance of ST	Accuracy of communication of ST message in TT

6. KOLLER: KORRESPONDENZ AND ÄQUIVALENZ

Figure 4: Differnatiation of equivalence and correspondence (Koller 1979: 183-185)

Field	Contrastive linguistics	Science of translation
Research area	**Correspondence** phenomena and conditions, describing corresponding structures and sentences in the SL and TL systems	**Equivalence** phenomena, describing hierarchy of utterances and texts in SL and TL according to equivalence criteria
Knowledge	*Langue*	*Parole*
Competence	Foreign language competence	Translation competence

Koller (1979a: 186–91; see also 1979b/89: 99–104) describes five different types of equivalence:

(1) **Denotative equivalence** is related to equivalence of the extralinguistic content of a text. Other literature, says Koller, calls this 'content invariance'.

(2) **Connotative equivalence** is related to the lexical choices, especially between near-synonyms. Koller sees this type of equivalence as elsewhere being referred to as 'stylistic equivalence'.

(3) **Text-normative equivalence** is related to text types, with different kinds of texts behaving in different ways. This is closely linked to work by Katharina Reiss

(4) **Pragmatic equivalence**, or 'communicative equivalence', is oriented towards the receiver of the text or message. This is Nida's 'dynamic equivalence'.

(5) **Formal equivalence**, which is related to the form and aesthetics of the text, includes wordplays and the individual stylistic features of the ST. It is elsewhere referred to as 'expressive equivalence' and is not to be confused with Nida's term.

Figure 5: Characterisitics of researcg foci for different equivalence types (Koller 1979: 187-191)

Type of equivalence	How attainable	Research focus
Denotative	By analysis of correspondences and their interaction with textual factors	Lexis
Connotative	'One of the most difficult problems of translation, and in practice is often only approximate' (Keller 1979b/89: 189); theory needs to identify the connotative dimensions in different languages	Additional dimensions: formality (poetic, slang, etc.), social usage, geographical origin, stylistic effect (archaic, 'plain', etc.), frequency, range (general, technical, etc.), evaluation, emotion
Text-normative	Description and correlation of patterns of usage between languages using functional text analysis	Look at usage in different communicative situations
Pragmatic	Translating the text for a particular readership, overriding the requirements of other equivalences	Analyse the communicative conditions valid for different receiver groups in different language pairs and texts
Formal	An analogy of form in the TL, using the possibilities of the TL and even creating new ones	Analyse the potential of equivalence in rhyme, metaphor and other stylistic forms

7. LATER DEVELOPMENTS IN EQUIVALENCE

   a) Chesterman (1989: 99) notes that 'equivalence is obviously a central concept in translation theory'

b) Bassnett (2002) devotes a section to 'problems of equivalence' in the chapter entitled 'central issues' of translation studies.

c) Kenny (1998: 77) summarizes criticism that has targeted the 'circularity' of the definitions of equivalence:

'equivalence is supposed to define translation, and translation, in turn, defines equivalence'.

As might be imagined, scholars working in non-linguistic translation studies have been

especially critical of concept. Bassnett summarizes the major problem as she sees it:

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. (Bassnett 2002: 34)

d) the comparison of a ST and a TT - ***tertium comparationis***

8. CASE STUDY

Box 3.2

1 King James version (KJV, originally published 1611)
    1:1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
    1:2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.
    1:3 And God said, 'Let there be light': And there was light.

2 New English Bible (NEB, originally published 1970)
    1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
    1:2 Now the earth was without shape and empty, and darkness was over the surface of the watery deep, but the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the water.
    1:3 And God said, 'Let there be light': And there was light.

3 New American Bible (NAB, originally published 1970)
    1:1 In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth,
    1:2 the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters.
    1:3 And God said, 'Let there be light': And there was light.

Box 3.3

1 English

By this Treaty, the HIGH CONTRACTING PARTIES establish among themselves a EUROPEAN UNION, hereinafter called 'the Union'.

This Treaty marks a new stage in the process of creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as openly as possible and as closely as possible to the citizen.

2 Portuguese

Pelo presente Tratado, as ALTAS PARTES CONTRATANTES instituem entre si uma UNIÃO EUROPEIA, adiante designada por «União».

O presente Tratado assinala uma nova etapa no processo de criação de uma união cada vez mais estrita entre os povos da Europa, em que as decisões serão tomadas de uma forma tão aberta quanto possível e ao nível mais próximo possível dos cidadãos.

Notes: