The Lexical Semantic See-Saw: The Degree of Equivalence

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Abstract

The comparison of Russian and the English language automatically involves the theory of equivalence. In every translation process there must be lexical and phrasal equivalence that are acceptable to both the receptor and translator. While the paper argues that meaning components are shared between languages, it maintains that there are instances where a total mismatch cannot be noticed. The degree of equivalence in a particular translation process according to the paper is measured through the bar of equilibrium. The measurement of the bar is determined by the relationship between the source language text and the translated text. Two methods are employed, deductive method through quantitative method, while quantitative method is employed in the working mechanism of the bar. Eleven translation exercises were given to level 300 students of Russian, University of Ghana for one semester to measure the speed or time the students used in the translation of every text, to measure their vocabulary horizon, the level of difficulty in translation of texts. It is based on these exercises that the equilibrium principle was developed. These translation exercises were given to level 300 translation students as a case study and the degree of equivalence was measured by the speed of the students, the accuracy of the translation. The content of the text, the competence of the students (translator) determines the movement of the bar of equilibrium.

Keywords: Lexical, Semantic, Equivalence, Equilibrium, Bar, See-Saw, Language, Russian, English.

1. Introduction and Theoretical Framework

The study deals with equivalence in translation, whereas the paper attempts to fashion out a new concept in the equivalence theory; it operates in the various theories carved out by scholars of translation.

Vinay and Darbelnet opines that equivalence oriented translation as a procedure which "replicates the same situation as obtained in the original, whilst using completely different wording" (Vinay and Darbelnet 1995).

They also maintain that "the need for creating equivalence arises from the situation, and it is in the situation of the source language text that translators have to look for a solution! (ibid 255)

Roman Jacobson introduced the notion of equivalence in difference which has the following linguistic features, (a) intra lingual deals with one language. (b) inter lingual deals with two different languages, that is basically referred to as translation proper and the third one is inter semiotic, which is between sign systems (Jacobson Roman 1959)

Nida and Taber established the fact that there are two different types of equivalence; formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. According to them formal equivalence focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and contact. Whiles dynamic equivalence is based on "the principle of equivalent effect." (Nida 1964:159) The two theorists explain with detail each type of equivalence (Nida and Taber 1982).

Catford introduces translation shift as an approach which clearly differs from that of Nida. His linguistic-based approach to translation. There are other translation theorists such as House (1977) and Baker (1992). The paper does not examine in detail all the above mentioned translation theories. It establishes the that it does not defy any of these established theories. It however attempts to compliment the positions of these theorists by proposing a degree of equivalence.

The degree of equivalence according to the paper is based on the lexical semantic nature of both the source language text and the translated text. This is demonstrated by an equilibrium bar.

2. Methodology

The methods used are qualitative, deductive and theory of equivalence. Translation exercises were given to Level 300 students of Russian, University of Ghana, The assignments were from different sources. The potentials and skills of students vary. Whatever be the case, the results of the translated lexical items enabled us to map or equate every result to a particular item on the diagram exhibiting the degree of equivalence. Inter lingual translation, an aspect of equivalence in difference by Roman Jacbson is embedded in Nida and Taber,s dynamic equivalence The hypotheses is that though we have equivalence and non-equivalence, 'absolute equivalence' can be a new dimension in the theory of equivalence.

3. The Purpose of the Study

The study does not deviate from the existing concepts and themes of equivalence. It rather provides an avenue

for scholars of translation to consider other perspectives of the equivalence theory. The method used is an effective way of determining students' understanding of lexical items learnt in the course of translation and how the student can apply it in the course of the translation process. It provides an opportunity for students to expand their knowledge in translation theory with special reference to the theory of equivalence. It serves as a motivation to researchers in the field of translation Studies with special reference to translation from Russian to English and also from English to Russian. Those researching into any area of translation studies will also find the study useful. It will also assist interpreters in all spheres of communication in our information age.

4. Lexical – Semantic Equivalence Confirmed

Translation is basically the process in which the translator studies the lexicon and the grammatical structure of the source language text and having the skills to analyse it to determine the meaning. The aim should be to reconstruct the same meaning that can be meaningfully communicated into the receptor language. The primary assignment of the translator is to look for lexical or phrasal equivalents that are acceptable to both the source language and the translated text. Concepts in the source language text that are not shared in the receptor language will not match the other divide of the equilibrium bar.. Lexical items that are not known in the receptor language are termed as non- equivalent lexical items. (Larson 1998).

5. The Concept of the Lexical Semantic See-Saw (The Bar of Equilibrium)

The lexical semantic see-saw is the behaviour of the source language text and how it impacts on the receptor language, or the translated text. It is concerned with the matching and mismatching of lexical equivalents. The wide diversity of the lexicon of languages on the world language map, with special reference to the Russian and English determines the working mechanisms of the bar of equilibrium.

As it will be demonstrated, the assignments given to level 300 students of Russian at the University of Ghana points to the fact that there are various degrees of equivalence as illustrated on the bar of equilibrium.

6. The Degree of Equivalence

Most concepts occurring in the source language text also occur in the receptor language .To a greater extent meaning components are shared between languages. There is a level of adequacy in translating, and in most cases, whereas concepts could be shared in the two languages, a total matching cannot be anticipated. Where concepts do occur in the two languages, the translation may not be precise and that the two languages will be expressed in different ways.

7. Exercises given to Level 300 Students of Russian

1) "Сеиччас всеми признано что раннее предупреждение является одим из необходимых условии эффективной превентивной дипломатии''.

КОФИ А АННАН 1999 :25

English Translation

"Now we all recognise the fact that early warning signs are one of the necessary conditions for effective preventive diplomacy".

2) "Однако отсутствие консенсуса по вопросу о схеме раздела власти между различными

Группировками не позволило урегулировать этот конфликт "(ibid :28).

English Translation

"However lack of consensus about the scheme for sharing the power between the different groups did not allow the settlement of the conflict"(ibid:28)

Kofi Annan 1999:125

3) Мальчик хочет показать вам свою коллекцию марков согласит посмотреть

English Translation

The gentleman would like show his collection of stamps to you, if you agree you can have a look at.

4)"Большинство исследователей считает что в современном русском литературном языке существует пять функциональных стилей"(Колесникова 2011:9)

English Translation

"Most researchers maintain that there are five functional styles in standard Russian Language" (Kolesnikova 2001:9)

5)На Русском Языке говорят она вышла за муж а о мужчине говорят он женился

English Translation

In the Russian Language, we say, 'She got married' but with regards to men we say'' He married'

6) чувство вины- это сигнал боли идушии

и к совести которыи информирует человека что-то не порядке и с этим нужно разобраться

English Translation

The feeling of guilt -It is a signal of ill feeling that goes to the conscience and informs a person that there is something wrong and there is the need to correct it.

7) АВОсь да как-нибудь до добра не доведут

English Translation

Draw not your bow till your arrow is fixed.

Literal

May be and somehow won't make any good.

8) А дело бывало-и Коза Волка сьедала

English Translation

Pigs might fly

Literal

It was happening-a goat was eating up a wolf

9) Азбука-К мудрости ступенька

English Translation

You have to learn to walk before you can ran.

Literal

Alphabet is the step to wisdom.

10) Алтынного вора вешают а полтинного чествуют.

English Translation

Little thieves are hunged, but great ones escape.

Literal

The thief who stole an altyn (3kopeeks) is hung, and the one who stole a poltinnik (50 Kopecks) is praised.

11) Аппетит приходнт во время еды.

English Translation

Appetite comes with eating.

Literal

The appetite comes during eating

(www.master.russian.com/proverbs/russian_proverbs.htm) numbers 7to Eleven were taken from this website

8. Results of the Exercise given to the Students

Twenty eight level 300 students of Russian participated in this exercise. They were to accomplish this exercise within one hour thirty minutes. The time taken to accomplish every translation exercise was recorded. On question one 18 of the students were able to translate the text within four minutes with a higher level of adequacy. Five of them translated the text within five minutes with a lower level of adequacy and five students translated it with difficulty. The translation of the last group did not meet the lexical-semantic structure of the source language text .In the case of the last group of five student they were able to translate the last three words:' Effective' 'preventive' 'diplomacy.' On example number two. twenty students were able to translate the text within three minutes, five students translated the text within four minutes and three students were able to do it within five minutes with a lower level of adequacy .The translation was easier because there were four borrowed words or international lexis.: 'consensus', 'scheme' 'groups', and 'conflict'. The bar will automatically achieve the highest level of stability. On question number three 19 students were able to translate the text in three minutes, six students did it in three and a half minutes and three students translated it in four minutes, they could translate 'коллекцию марков'(collection of stamps) precisely, and were not able to translate the other part of the sentence adequately . On question number four 18 students translated the text in four minutes, seven translated it in four and a half minute then three students did it in five minutes with a lower level of adequacy, in any case they were able to write 'functional' and 'style' properly, in other words they could do a proper translation of these words from Russian to English. On question number five, seventeen students adequately translated the source language text to the receptor language, it however took them six minutes. The level of difficulty is clearly manifested as compared to the other four texts. There is no mismatching between the source language text (SL) and the translated text(TL) in terms of understanding in the English Language 'she got married' and "he married'' are the same unlike the difference in Russian. In this perspective, the movement of the bar will be influenced by the receptor language On question number 6,17 students translated the text within 5 minutes. The language is not so simple for their level, however they managed to present an adequate translation not an excellent one, Six students managed to translate the text within 6 minutes with some level of difficulties,5 students translated it within 7 minutes with a higher level of inadequacy. From exercises 7 to 11 students could not do any proper translation. Students understood the words in isolation and translated some of them like' как',' добра' in seven,' дело бывало' in question 8' азбука',' мудрости' in question 9,' вора' in question 10. Students were able to translate question number 11 adequately. This required just a formal equivalence, while 7,8,9,10 required dynamic equivalence.

9. Analysis of the results of the Exercise in relation to the Bar of Equilibrium (Finding)

On questions numbers one, two, three, four, the bar was at the equilibrium because students could translate within a reasonable period of time. On the first, second and fourth questions, it was clear that the international lexis or the borrowed words brings the bar to the equilibrium. The occurrence of three or more international lexis stabilises the bar .One international lexis or borrowed word could be found in question four. Students were able to translate it faster because there were not much difficult words. Measuring the position of the bar in relation to a sentence, the level of stabilisation of the bar with regards to questions 1, 2, and 4 is higher than 3. Should we pick the words in isolation, the borrowed words alone bring the bar to the highest level of equilibrium. Student's ability to translate the other non-borrowed words without much hindrance in the cases cited above indicates that there is semantic or lexical equivalence, the equilibrium bar stabilizes all the same, but the degree is lower than that of sentences with majority of the words in the sentence being international lexis. It is clear that the appearance of these international lexis prepared fertile grounds for students to translate the entire sentence. The borrowed words which are also English words made the translation easier for English speaking students learning the russian language.   At the level of lexical semantic specifics, the international lexis have a higher level of adequacy in the translation process as demonstrated by the first, second and fourth examples. In terms of equivalence, the borrowed words have achieved absolute equivalence in the opinion of the paper, the degree of equilibrium is higher.

Examples 7 to 10 demonstrates that there could be lexical and even sometimes semantic equivalence in the two texts, however, the translation of proverbs needs extra linguistic efforts to convey the message to the receptor. Students were able to translate some of the words in isolation which did not benefit the receptor .This is not only the case of students alone, but even highly specialized translators cannot translate proverbs, idioms and some phrases without a prior knowledge of the content.

On question number 11, students could translate the proverb with a higher level of precision because the words are very familiar to them.

The bar of equilibrium which explains the level of equivalence could be explained in this direction. In terms of the degree of equivalence in the view of the paper, all international lexis or borrowed words are categorized as 'absolute   equivalence',(diagram one) the second category are semantic and lexical equivalence ,(diagram two) the third category is semantic equivalence where the sense being expressed in the source language text is not easily detected in the receptor language, they are mostly proverbs, idioms, phraseological expressions and sometimes poetic language.(diagram three) The fourth is non-equivalent lexis.(diagram four)
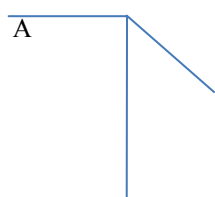
10. Lexical-semantic see-saw: The Degree of Equivalence (Diagrammatic Representation)

A   B
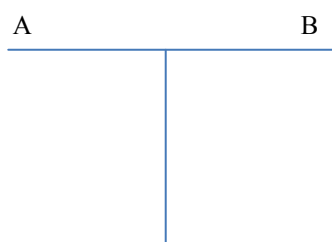
A – Source language text (SL)
B – Translated Text (T.L)

A – B – The Bar of equilibrium
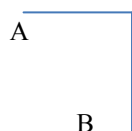A – B – Absolute Equivalence

A

B
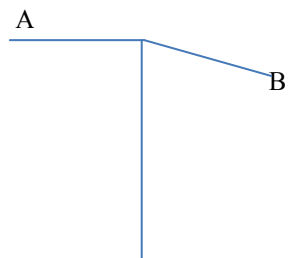
A – Source language text (SL)
B – Translated Text (T.L)

A – B – The Bar of equilibrium
A – B – Equivalence

A

A – Source language text (SL)
B – Translated Text (T.L)

A
Lexical semantic equivalence but different to determinate the sense in the reception language

A

B

A – Source Language (SL)
B – Translated Language (T.L)

A
B

- Non-Equivalence
- (The Bar of equivalence)

lt ıs a stark realıty that ın every translation process there must be lexıcal and phrasal equivalence that are acceptable to both the receptor language and the source language. There is a language culture in every communicative process. The norms of the source language text may differ from that of the translated text. The lexicon presented in the SL text must be adequately communicated to the receptor (TL). A total matching of lexical items may not be found in the translation of a particular text, but it is the duty of the translator to find the most natural way of communicating the message of the source language text (SL) to the receptor (TL).

The paper maintains that though concepts could be shared between the source language text and the translated text, it is difficult in some cases to find total equivalence between the source language and the translated text.The concept of the lexical semantic –seesaw is premised on the equivalent theory and does not deviate from the concept. The paper establishes the equilibrium concept on the basis of existing theories. Whereas the paper accepts the position of these theorists, it further proposes that apart from equivalence and non-equivalence which epitomises the theory, there are more to say about equivalence. The paper proposes 'absolute equivalence' 'as a new hypothesis in translation studies. An example like" Kofi A Annan Secretary-General of the United Nations translated" as "КОФИ Аннан Генеральныи секретарь Организации Обьединенных Наций," words like effective ('эффектифной)   matches the first example (A) .In the view of the paper all borrowed words or international lexis comes under absolute equivalence .Perfect equilibrium is achieved. Idioms, proverbs, poetic language, some phraseological expressions may not achieve equilibrium. Though there are semantic equivalence with regards to the SL and the translated language (TL), in most cases. Absolute equivalence in the view of the paper are borrowed words such as "preventive" (превентивной) "diplomacy"(дипломатии) page 25 Secretary- General's report, 1999)International lexis that cannot be equated to words like " женился", " Муж," cannot have the same effect on the bar of equilibrium, thereby showing different degrees of equivalence. Because of semantic equivalence.

The idea of "absolute equivalence" is still in its teething period. I will come out with another publication to strengthen the concept.

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