

Prof. Vilma Esperanza Portillo Campos
Prof. Mizael Garduño Buenfil
Universidad de Quintana Roo, Campus Cozumel

Does the Success of Translation from English into Spanish Depend on Achieving an Equivalent Response?

Abstract

Perhaps because translation is a new arrival in the August halls of Academia, there is an on going debate as to appropriate theoretical approaches, strategies and techniques to translation. Therein, a number of *concepts of equivalence have been elaborated within this field in the past fifty years* Leonardi (2000). The present research addresses an analysis of the contributions and theories about how to obtain a successful rendering from English into Spanish. Part and parcel of this analysis is to prove or disprove if the key for succeeding in translation is the use of Equivalence. Equivalence, according to Webster (1994) is the state of being equivalent or equal. Equivalence as far as words are concerned suggests synonyms. Synonyms, by lexical definition, are words having similar meanings within the same language. However, in the field of translation, a conclusive definition of equivalence is challenging. Some proponents of equivalence-based theories of translation usually define equivalence as *the relationship between a source text (ST) and a target text (TT) that allows the TT to be considered as a translation of the ST in the first place* Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies (1998). Others, like Vinay & Darbelnet (1958), state that since translations are nearly always longer than an original script, the use of Equivalence comes in great help. On the other hand, what happens when the translator finds out that a satisfactory equivalent word or phrase does not always exist in the target language? This important issue will be also conducted throughout this research. The findings and final comments will be discussed at the end.

Does the Success of Translation from English into Spanish Depend on Achieving an Equivalent Response?

1. Introduction

The rendition between two languages, English and Spanish, is the focus of this work. English and Spanish are members of the Indo-European family of languages and therefore have many common linguistic roots. Spanish and English have Latin and Germanic roots, these two languages sprang from cultures which have important basic differences, which affect their ways of thinking according to The Columbia Encyclopedia (2001). That both English and Spanish are official languages of the United Nations is another indication of the eminence of these two languages in today's world.

2. The Importance of Translation

Translation is an emerging academic discipline which has gained prominence in Western universities over the past twenty to thirty years. Baker (1992) encourages formal academic training for translators, submitting that an understanding of theory will improve the quality of their work. Furthermore, she laments that translators have never enjoyed the kind of respect and recognition that professionals in fields such as medicine, law, and engineering have long been awarded. Nida has gained considerable recognition for his contributions to the field of translation theory in general, along with some notoriety in connection with providing justification for producing a Bible in modern English vernacular.

There is also the Christian Bible which has been translated and re-translated from the original ancient scrolls, written in languages that are no longer spoken. Due maybe, in part, to the skill and integrity of translators who have worked on this task in various times and places throughout the past two millennia, the Bible seems to retain significant relevance for many people who speak languages of the diverse cultures which make up today's world.

2.1 Requisites to Translate

Material to be translated is designated “Source Text,” which by means of a process that takes place in the mind of the translator, is rendered into the “Target Text.” In order to accomplish translation, the translator must be sufficiently familiar with the languages with which she/he is working to *possess two sets of parallel linguistic and cultural repertoires* (Darwish: 1989). However, this author states that *the most important step in translation theory is to go beyond the comparison of different textual versions and linguistic systems* and try to understand how translation operates as *communicative interaction*. Hatim and Mason (1990) agree that understanding is a prerequisite to translation, and further state that current models of translation theory represent an attempt to describe, not explain, this complicated procedure.

In view of the foregoing, the qualities required of the translator are many, and certainly include intelligence, integrity, and a facility with words. In the same way that, the healing ability of a physician is dependent on the extent to which he is able to combine the science and art of medicine, translation is not *just an art or just a science* (Schulte: 1995). *A translator must have not only comprehensive general world knowledge and an efficient linguistic knowledge in source and target languages and cultures but also have an intuitional cognitive ability and a transfer competence* (Gokturk: 1989).

3. Objectives

The main objective of the present research is to analyze the function of Equivalence when translating from English into Spanish.

4. Methodology

The hypothesis upon which this paper is based states that Equivalence is a superior strategy for translating English into Spanish. Equivalence, in this context, signifies a meaning-oriented translation. An analysis of the ideas of the main theorists is presented. Field work carried out in order to test the hypothesis, consists of interviews of a sample of 10

professional translators, during which they were asked to respond to several specific questions about their use of translation techniques.

5. Analysis of the Principal Equivalence Translation Theorists

Analysis is defined as an examination of a complex, its elements, and their relations according to some recognized scholars. The attempt to analyze translation has led prominent contemporary translators to make an effort to identify the strategies which they find most useful. Since one of the hallmarks of science is analysis, professional translators, especially in academic circles, have tried to figure out why they use certain approaches and have attempted to break the complicated process of translation down into steps.

While recognizing that the use of the word Equivalence brings up questions of ambiguity and cliché, it seems that translation theory cannot be addressed without it. Pym, amongst others, submits that while, *Equivalence is supposed to define translation . . . translation, in turn, defines equivalence* Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies (1998). Stecconi (ibid:1998) calls Equivalence *Crucial to translation because it is the unique intertextual relation that only translations, among all conceivable text types are expected to show.*

5.1 Vinay and Darbelnet

The theory of Equivalence as described by these authors is a process whereby the translator is able to *replicate the same situation as in the original, whilst using completely different wording* (quoted by Kenny: 1998). According to these experts, it is essential for the translator to understand the “situation” in the source language before looking for its Equivalence in the target language. For example, “gluttony” is lexically Equivalent to the Spanish word, “glotonería.” However, use of the Spanish word “gula” is required for situational Equivalence to “gluttony,” one of the seven deadly sins. They go on to state

without hesitation that Equivalence is the ideal method when the translator has to deal with proverbs, idioms, clichés, or onomatopoeia.

5.2 Roman Jakobson

One of the foremost modern translation theorists, expounds the idea of *equivalence in difference* and states simply that the translator must make use of synonyms in order to transmit the message of the source text. Equivalence in translation necessitates working with *two equivalent messages in two different codes*. This author anticipates times when the translator comes to the conclusion that a satisfactory Equivalent word or phrase does not exist in the target language. In such instances he has no qualms about using *loanwords*. He cites examples in translations where no literal Equivalence exists for certain words or expressions in the source language and emphasizes that it is up to the discretion of the translator to select the “best” Equivalence in such cases (Jakobson: 1959) .

5.3 Eugene Nida and Charles Taber

They divide translation into two types, *formal equivalence* and *dynamic equivalence*. Nida also refers to his concept of formal Equivalence as *formal correspondence*, which *focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content*. He further explains what he means by *formal correspondence* by saying that it is the *closest equivalent* in the target language to a word or phrase in the source language (Nida:1969). Nida, like Jakobson, is quick to point out that in many cases formal Equivalence between pairs of languages is difficult, if not impossible, for the translator to come up with. Nida and Taber do recommend that formal Equivalence be used whenever possible, depending on the type of text and the purpose of the translation. However, these theorists point out that the extent to which a formal correspondence is used will necessarily have a negative effect on the ease with which the target text can be understood (ibid: 1969).

Dynamic equivalence, on the other hand, is based upon *the principle of equivalent effect*. Therefore, the efforts of the translator are aimed primarily at using words and expressions which will have the same “impact” on the target audience as it has on readers of the original. Application of this principle often necessitates change in the form of the source text. However, if the change in form is accomplished with careful observation of the rules of syntax in both the source language and the receptor language, *the message is preserved and the translation is faithful* (Nida: 1969).

It is easily deduced from the foregoing paragraph that Nida prefers *dynamic equivalence* on the basis of his certainty that this approach results in a more vibrant and meaningful translation than is possible with literal techniques. Nida and Taber come right out and say that *dynamic equivalence in translation is far more than mere correct communication of information* (ibid: 1969). Although Nida advances a linguistic translation theory, he remains committed to maintaining semantic quality in his work, faithfully transmitting the message of the source text. He insists his theory of dynamic equivalence is something less than paraphrase. However, because there is an element of subjectivity allowing translators considerable freedom, his translation theories have drawn a significant amount of criticism.

5.4 John Catford

Talks about *types and shifts of translation*. To his way of thinking, translation theory as related to Equivalence is either *rank-bound translation* or *unbounded translation*, rank referring to grammatical rank. Therefore, rank-bound translation involves an effort to find an Equivalent for each word or phrase in the source text. Unbounded translation allows the translator freedom to apply the concept of Equivalence at the sentence level or beyond.

Catford defines *translation shifts* as *departures from formal correspondence in the process of going from the source language to the target language* (Catford: 1965). However, he sees two types of translation shifts: level shifts, where the Equivalent of a word or expression is at a different linguistic level in the target language; and category shifts which are divided into four types: Structure-shifts, involving grammatical change between the source text and the target text; Class-shifts, as when a verb in the source language is translated as a

noun in the target language; unit shifts, where there are changes in grammatical rank; and intra-system shifts, as when a singular in the source text becomes a plural in the target text (ibid:195).

While the organization described above may be helpful to some, Catford has been criticized by his peers, Snell-Hornby and Pym, for suggesting that the translation process can be reduced to a linguistic exercise (Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies:1998). Catford is one of the theorists who has looked closely at the nature of Equivalence and has come up with the idea that it is necessary that there be some commonalities between source and target cultures in order to provide referents in an extralinguistic domain of objects, persons, emotions, memories, history, etc.

5.5 Mona Baker

She contributes to the discussion of Equivalence as used in translation theory by exploring what this term means at different levels, which include Grammatical, Textual, and Pragmatic Equivalence. Baker's logical approach to the task of translating starts at word level, although she goes on to point out that grammatical Equivalence may require changes in number, tense, voice, person or gender.

The maintenance of Textual Equivalence between the source text and the target text, according to Baker, requires that the translator considers three main factors: the target audience, the purpose of the translation and the text type. Pragmatic Equivalence goes one step further and takes into account what is implied by the source text although not necessarily stated directly. Again, the role of the translator is paramount if a translation is to represent more than mere familiar words to the target readers (Baker: 1992).

5.6 Leonardi

The notion of equivalence is undoubtedly one of the most problematic and controversial areas in the field of translation theory (Leonardi: 2000). It would seem, however, that having a working definition of Equivalence is basic to any theoretical approach to translation.

And so the discussion of the meaning of Equivalence continues with each translation theorist adding his/her unique perspective.

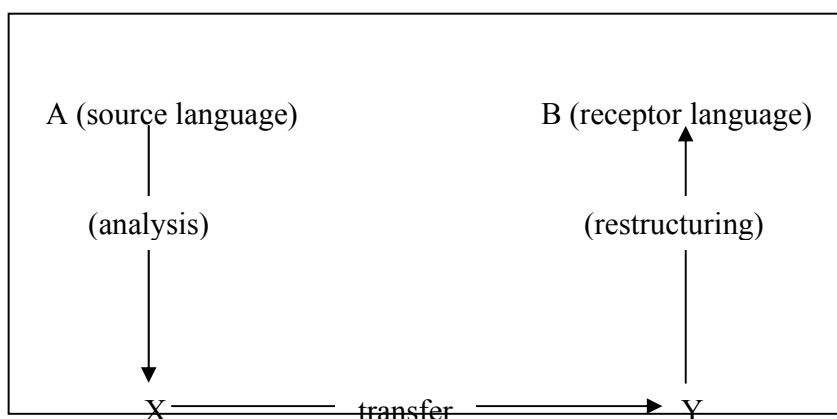
6. Conclusions and Final Comments

Although there is little question that translation between different languages has been performed throughout human history whenever diverse cultures came into contact, translation theory has only relatively recently come to be developed into a science. Then, in order to provide a method of translation which can guide students and practitioners of this art and science, procedures have been outlined and theories have been analyzed.

Despite the translation theory set forth by Nida is classified as linguistic, he seems to be much more interested in the message itself than the mechanics of how it is transmitted. Therefore, to him, the semantic quality of a translation is paramount.

The diagram below illustrates the notion of the process of translation.

EUGENE NIDA'S THREE-STAGE SYSTEM OF TRANSLATION (1969)



For Nida, the success of translation depends on achieving an Equivalent response. To this end, he puts forth four requirements for a translation: that it makes sense, convey the

spirit of the original, have a natural form of expression, and produce a similar response from the target audience. Equivalence and Equivalent response are key concepts of Nida's model.

Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) state that translations are nearly always longer than an original script due precisely to the frequent need for expansion or amplification. Orellana (1997) has found that up to twenty percent more words may be required in a Spanish translation when working from an English source text. This theorist provides a useful table, reproduced on the following page, outlining syntactical differences between English and Spanish.

ENGLISH	SPANISH
1. More economical, synthetic	Less economical analytic.
2. Ability to create new words.	Less ability to create new words.
3. Rich in synonyms. Active vocabulary.	Rich in synonyms. Active vocabulary.
4. Domination of the structure subject-predicate	Greater flexibility of the structure of the phrase.
5. Construction of the phrase with the verb at the end.	Construction of the phrase with the verb near the beginning.
6. Easy adoption and creation of new words to fit new technology.	Less adoption and creation of new words to fit new technology.
7. Frequent use of the noun instead of the verb.	Frequent use of the verb instead of the noun.
8. General use of the possessive.	Limited use of the possessive.
9. A wide use of the affirmative phrase.	A wide use of the negative phrase.
10. Frequent use of the definite and indefinite articles.	Limited use of the definite and indefinite articles.
11. Use of the plural.	Use of the singular.
12. Use of capital letters.	Use of lower case letters.
13. Prepositions are emphasized.	Prepositions are not emphasized.
14. Frequent use of the passive voice.	Frequent use of the active voice.
15. The mood of action is important.	The direction of the action is important.

16. Standard format for letters.	More variety of formats for letters.
17. Tendency to create and use acronyms.	Less tendency to create and use acronyms
18. Moderate use of honorary titles.	Marked use of honorary titles.
19. Creation of titles and subtitles.	Creation of titles and subtitles.
20. Punctuation rules.	Punctuation rules.

It would seem that modern translation theory seeks to justify giving the translator more latitude to use his own judgment, especially in translation of literary material, in an attempt to impart more than superficial meaning. Additional goals which modern translators strive toward include transmission of the intent of the author and a product with a feel similar to the source text.

On the other hand, López Guix and Wilkinson (1999) suggest that in most cases literal technique is the appropriate starting point for a translation, turning to the various equivalence techniques only as needed, keeping the afore mentioned aims of translation firmly in mind. According to Darwish (1989), who discusses the mechanics of the *continuous decision making process* which takes place in the mind of the translator, a shifting between literal technique and search for equivalence in the target language eventually becomes almost automatic.

The six questions listed below were posed to the experts in the field of translation. Responses to these questions are outlined and discussed.

1. Do you make use of translation techniques when translating, and if so, how frequently?

Seventy percent said that they use translation techniques only when faced difficulties, such as, clichés, idioms, metaphors, jargon, sociolect, or specialized terms. Many admitted that they sometimes find it necessary to review their notes on the theories of translation techniques.

2. How do you solve difficulties encountered when translating?

Ninety percent said that they research the problematic word or expression, taking into account the context, background, and the different functions of the term. Eighty percent said they consult dictionaries, and seventy percent said they consult experts in the respective field.

3. Do you work by yourself when translating or as part of a team? If so, how is the work organized?

Seventy percent said they normally work with a partner, dividing responsibilities of preparing a first draft of the translation, reading and reviewing, problem solving, etc.

4. Which are the main techniques you tend to rely on when translating?

It is important that the translator be aware of all of the techniques which are at his disposal. Eighty percent of the translators said that in practice they constantly look for equivalent terms when they paraphrase, expand, adapt, etc, although they may not be consciously aware of this mental process.

5. What fields do you find difficult to translate? Why?

Eighty percent of the translators said that they find literature to be difficult type of material to translate, along with some specialized areas such as medicine. One of the reasons Literature tends to be challenging is that it is often idiomatic. Fields like medicine or music cannot be translated literally.

6. Do you believe that translation is all about Equivalence? Why?

Eighty percent said that it is difficult to find precise synonyms between English and Spanish due to cultural differences and varying language roots. Therefore, the translator has to adapt or even paraphrase occasionally in an endeavor to produce a target text which is 'equivalent' in every way, with the original text.

The theories of Equivalence analyzed in this paper recognize the limitations of relying solely on linguistic techniques to produce a translation which truly conveys the message and intent of the source text. However, eighty percent of the translators interviewed consider Equivalence an essential strategy to render text from English into Spanish while recognizing the fact that a fully equivalent response cannot always be found when working in the field of translation.

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Biodata

Vilma Esperanza Portillo Campos y Mizael Garduño Buenfil son investigadores del Cuerpo Académico de Innovación Educativa (CAIE) en el Campus Cozumel y profesores de la Lic. en Lengua Inglesa. Ambos realizaron su preparación académica en Enseñanza y Aprendizaje de Lenguas en la Universidad de Quintana Roo (Uqroo), cursando así mismo una maestría en Traducción e Interpretación Inglés-Español (M.T.I.) en la Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara (UAG), actividad en la que también se desempeñan de manera profesional y académica.