

Looking for Equivalent Forms: A Theoretical Presentation

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Abstract

Our prophet Muhammad "May peace be upon Him" says " Otlubul-9ilma walaw fissin". Not only does He show His great belief and interest in science, He also perpetuates the necessity of communication among the world's nations regardless of the natural and human-made barriers that may separate one nation from another. Languages are different and so are people, but this does not prevent the latter from communication since there is the science of translation.

Translation is the process through which most difficulties can be got over as it will be explained later. One of the essential backbones of translation is looking for equivalent forms in both languages studied, i.e. Source Language SL and Target Language TL, though this is not always possible even within two dialects of the same language.

Due to the importance of Equivalence as being the essence of translation, the present research has come into existence to tackle this concept, its importance, types and applications. Standard English and Modern Standard Arabic have been chosen to be the two languages under study. To show the application of Equivalence and the difficulties faced by translators in rendering a certain structure from or into Arabic, prepositions, as a thorny area or part of speech, has been selected. This research attempts to show some of the difficulties and problems that may arise in translating prepositions into the TL. Examples of both languages will be used here to diagnose difficulties and an attempt is made to remedy them.

Key words: Standard English, Modern Standard Arabic, Equivalence

1.1 Introduction

To be acquainted with other languages, people need to have a full knowledge of the culture, customs and habits of these languages. This of course requires studying these peculiarities to penetrate their secrets and characteristics. It has been mentioned earlier that translation is the means that can be manipulated to overcome most of the difficulties and problems that may appear in rendering a text from or into a certain language. Accordingly the present research has come into existence to deal with some of these difficulties and problems mainly those related to translating prepositions from and into Arabic.

An essential concept in translating any text is looking for equivalence. The latter term is the backbone of the translation process and it requires that the translator has to have a mastery over both languages he/she is tackling. This means that we may find differences among translators who render the same text due to their knowledge, cultural level and experience. Let's take this Arabic example, the word "موصة"

Seems to be unknown for most young translators since it is a classical one which means "wash it". Some may not be able to find an equivalent form for this word due to the lack of knowledge of classical words. Another example is that many of the Old English words also came from the influence of the Romans and Greeks. These words were borrowed by the Germanic conquerors

and incorporated into Old English. For example, the following words were adapted from the Romans, Greeks and from Latin:

- Apostle - came from apostol
- Chalk - came from cealc
- Wine - came from win
- Monk - came from munuc

While the spelling is different, the meanings all follow the original words and correspond to the modern meanings. (<http://www.pointtopoint>).

Problems arise in case we want to find equivalent forms for the old or classical items. It is said that some classical items have kept the same meanings such as:

-strong

-water

Whereas others seem to be difficult to identify their modern meanings such as:

-widue= for widow

-wifmann= for the term woman

In Old English, for instance, there was a system of grammatical gender, so we find that hand was feminine, foot "foot" was masculine, wif "wife" was neutral, but wifmann "woman" was masculine,...etc. In Modern English, most of these have changed i.e. grammatical gender has disappeared. This of course complicates the process rather than facilitating it for the translator.

Some classical items may not have equivalent forms in a certain language. For example, in our Holy Quran, we find:

" انا اعطيناك الكوثر "

In this verse, the word "Al-kauther" has no equivalent form in English; therefore a translator has to transliterate it and may use explanatory notes to clarify it :

"We have granted you (Mohammed) Al-Kauther (a river in the paradise)

The same problems may also arise in case we try to render a modern items or text into its equivalent old form because of the huge number of new words that have come into existence and have not been there before such as: printer, computer, cancer, mobile,...etc.

Accordingly it seems that such problems cannot be mastered unless translators perfectly have a full knowledge of the origins of both languages they are tackling. They are advised to use every day speech and keep their translation simple and attractive as well. (<https://marielebert.wordpress.com/2016/11/02/translation>)

1.2 The Notion of Translation

There is no unanimous agreement on the definition of translation, nor do translation theorists agree on its types and models. Translation may simply be defined as rendering a word, a phrase, a sentence, or a text into another language. Dostert, as cited in Catford (1965:35) defines it as a branch of applied linguistics "...which is specifically concerned with the problem or the fact of the transference of meaning from one set of patterned symbols...into another set of patterned symbols". Catford, like Dostert, emphasizes the importance and role of meaning in translation saying that it is important for a translation theory to depend on a theory of meaning without which "...certain important aspects of a translation process cannot be discussed" (ibid.).

Newmark (1988:23) regards meaning as the essence of translation, it is what most translators and specialists are after. He also adds that the translation theorist "is concerned from start to finish with meaning...not concerned with the theoretical problems and solutions of semantics, linguistics, logic and philosophy, but only with their applications". As parallel to Newmark's view, Farghal and Shunnaq (1999:2), as cited in Al-Naqqash (2000:129) confess that translation is often regarded as "a project for transferring meaning from one language to another". It seems that the ultimate objective of translation process is the transfer of meaning and principal problems that may arise here are those of meaning.

1.3 History of Translation

Specialists all agree that translation is an old human activity. The first hints were noticed in the Old Egyptian Kingdom (3000 B.C.). The attempts of the Roman translators, Cicero and Horace, were very active in translating the Greek literature into Latin. Their attempts had a great influence on the following generation.

In the 12th century, Europe came into contact with Arab Islamic culture in Spain. This situation favoured the two main conditions for large- scale translation: a qualitative difference in culture i.e. the West was inferior but scientifically acquisitive and receptive to new ideas and continuous contact between two languages (Mohamed,2013:47).

The translation of Bible was witnessed in the 16th century into a variety of European languages. In English John Wycliffe issued the first translation of the complete Bible in Germany in 1525 where he had sought asylum away from the persecution of Henry VII who was opposed to the Reformation at that time.

The scholars of this period such as Dante, Roger Bacon and Gianfranco differentiated between two types of translation: vertical and horizontal translation. The former means "translation between an SL, Source language, that has prestige and value as in the case of Latin then, into a vernacular language of less prestige and value" .The latter means "translation between languages of similar prestige and value as in the case of translating from Norman-French into English, then."

Moving to the 17th century, we find that John Dryden was the most important translator of the age. Dryden had devised three basic types of translation as follows:

1-Metaphrase which denotes the exact translation of the original text word by word and line by line.

2-Paraphrase which means translating the sense or meaning of the original text without paying attention to its form or style.

3-Imitation which refers to translation where the translator is free to forget about the original text as he sees fit his/her work.(ibid.:52)

The second type of translation was supported by Alexander Pope who was Dryden's successor (1688-1744). Pope insisted on a careful reading of the original text so as to distinguish the spirit and stylistic features of the original poem.

The view to translation in the 19th century was that as a "one-way means of communication between prominent men of letters and, to a lesser degree, philosophers and scientists and their readers abroad." Two diametrically opposed views prevailed at the beginning of this century:

1-The translator was conceived as a "creative genius who enriched the literature and language into which he translated".

2-Translation was seen as a "mechanical activity that aimed at making known to the T.L. (Target Language)".

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the major trends in translation can be summarized as follows:

1-An approach which gives pre-eminence to the original text over the translated (in this approach the translator is not free to alter any aspect of the S.L. text).

2-An approach which gives the translator the freedom to depart from the original text as much as he finds this necessary.

3-An approach in which the translator tries to render translations which are full of archaism in an attempt to retain as much as possible the S.L. text.(ibid.:57)

In a nutshell, Translators have always played a key role in society. Medieval translators for example had a major impact on scholarship, and contributed to the development of vernacular languages and national identities around these languages. Translators went on playing a key role in the advancement of society for centuries. But most translators have become "invisible"

in the 21st century, with a precarious life and their names often forgotten on press releases and book covers.

(<https://marielebert.wordpress.com/2016/11/02/translation>)

1.4 Loss of Meaning

Due to the similarities and differences between any two languages or even two dialects of the same language, translation process may involve a certain amount of loss and gain of meaning. Newmark (1982:7-8) ascribes this loss of meaning to many factors such as:

a- Cultural dissimilarities between SL and TL.

b- Different grammatical structures each language has, let alone the pragmatic norms of each language.

c- Different viewpoints, values and theories which a translator and a text author may hold or believe in which may affect the interpretation of the text.

In a nutshell, similar to the relation that links syntax with semantics is that which links translation with meaning. The ensuing discussion will focus on the core of translation process or its key concept, viz. Equivalence which has been the centre of a long debate for many scholars and translation theorists.

1.5 Equivalence as a Concept

One of the essential dilemmas any translator or a translation specialist may come across in translation is that of looking for equivalents in both languages, i.e. SL and TL. It is not always easy or possible to find equivalent forms between any two languages due to various reasons such as uniqueness of a language, different cultures,...etc. McGuire (1980:29) points out that looking for sameness or equivalence cannot be obtained within two TL versions of the same text, so how can anyone accept to hold it between two different languages?

No single subject in the field of translation has attracted the attention of specialists more than that of equivalence. For Al-Hajjaj(1995:233), it has been regarded as the backbone of translation process. Miremadi (2001:115) points out that in translation the focal point must be to produce equivalent text in the TL as much as possible.

To clarify the meaning of equivalence, Hartmann and Stork (1972:78) say that equivalence is "a word or phrase which corresponds to a similar word or phrase in another language". In their clarification, they did not identify the areas in which this correspondence may occur. So to fill this gap, it is suggested that correspondence may occur in style and meaning in addition to that in form (op cit).

A point to be stressed here is that priority must be given to meaning if correspondence cannot be got in style and meaning in both languages. What makes it difficult to find equivalent forms between SL and TL or more particularly Source Text and Target Text "ST and TT" is the permanent fact that meaning is a language specific, i.e. an SL text has an SL meaning and a TL text has a TL meaning. Accordingly, a translator or a specialist cannot render an expression depending solely on linguistic features, but he/ she has to focus on some extra-linguistic ones such as focusing on semiotics "the scientific study of signs" with its three essential aspects; syntax, semantics and pragmatics (McGuire, 1980:119).

The relative indeterminacy of the concept of equivalence is ascribed to translator-specific and recipient-specific nature and idiosyncrasy. Due to this fact, partial or relative equivalence is what can be obtained in translation. Wilss (1982:134) states that equivalence is a term " on which linguists seem to have agreed to disagree due to its complexity, semantic ambiguity and illusiveness". It seems that absolute equivalence is an illusion that can hardly be obtained (Bell, 1991:6).

Problems arise in translation because of the lack of equivalence. Baker (1992:10) believes that there is no one –to-one correspondence between orthographic words and elements of meaning

within or across languages. Due to differences in the systems, rules and conventions of a language and culture, total equivalence or one-to-one correspondence can never be obtained throughout the whole text, it is a relative matter.

1.6 Types of Equivalence

As far as its types are concerned, equivalence has four types as follows (McGuire, 1980: 24-5):

1-Linguistic Equivalence:

In this type, there is homogeneity on the linguistic level of both texts, i.e. word-for-word translation.

2-Paradigmatic Equivalence:

Paradigmatic relation refers to the set of relationships a linguistic unit has with other units in a specific context. In this type, there is equivalence of the elements of grammar outside the text at all levels of analysis. It is also called "in absentia"

3-Stylistic Equivalence:

Here, there is a functional equivalence of elements in both texts "aiming at an expressive identity with an invariant of identical meaning".

4-Textual Equivalence:

As a term, Syntigmatic refers to the relation of a sign with the preceding and following signs in a sentence. It is also called "in praesentia". Here, there is equivalence of the syntigmatic structuring of a text, i.e. equivalence of form and shape.

Among the other types of equivalence are the formal, functional and ideational equivalence which are going to be discussed with special emphasis on the second type due to its importance in this study.

1.6.1 Formal Equivalence

As its name implies, formal equivalence focuses on the form of the SL expression. Nida (1969:201) defines this type as that in which the characteristics of the SL text have been mechanically reformed in the receptor language. Form here is related to the image employed in the SL expression. Benjamins (1999:3), as cited in Al-Naqqash (2000:132), points out that in this type the translator tries to "...render each word of the original language into the receptor language and seeks to preserve the original word order and sentence sequence structure as much as possible". To clarify Benjamins' point, let's take the following English examples:

-After a storm comes a calm.

-The treaty has remained dead letter since then.

Concentrating on form only, these examples are translated into Arabic respectively as follows :

1- بعد العاصفة يأتي الهدوء.

2- وقد بقيت المعاهدة حبرا "ميتا" منذ ذلك الوقت.

In this type, attention is paid to the message itself in both form and content. Thus it is considered as a source oriented type.(Nida, 1964:165).

1.6.2 Functional Equivalence

This type of translation equivalence aims to capture " the function" of the SL expression independently of the image originally utilized by rendering it into TL expression that achieves the same function. Thus functionally translating the two previous examples results in :

1- بعد كل ضيق فرج.

2- وقد بقيت المعاهدة حبرا على ورق منذ ذلك الحين.

Waard and Nida (1986:9) define functional equivalence as "understanding not only the meaning of the source text but also the manner in which the intended receptors of a text are

likely understand it in the receptor language". They replace the term "dynamic equivalence" by functional equivalence. Both terms seem to be the same, but the former seems to be more confusing than the other since dynamic equivalence is oriented to the TL reader.

It has been stated earlier that translation studies have to depend upon extra-linguistic features, in addition to the linguistic ones, such as semiotics. Thus when a translator analyzes a text in terms of the three components of semiotics, he/ she does his/her best to achieve a functional equivalence in the TT. To add more, McGuire (1980:119) suggests that the translator should identify the function of the SL system and then look for the TL one that will accurately reflect this function. In doing so, he/she is trying to pragmatically analyze and understand the author's intention and the way he/ she expresses this intention, then he/ she has to convey this intention of the SL author to the TT keeping in mind that the translator's version should serve the original function of the SL. (Al-Ani,2000:92).

Functional equivalence is very important in translating prepositions. Some AILs of English tend to focus or pay much more attention to form than to the real function a preposition may perform in a certain structure as it will be explained later.

1.6.3 Ideational Equivalence

This type aims to capture the communicative sense of the SL expression independently of its function and form. Thus a translator is concerned with communicating the meaning of the SL expression rather than its functional or formal equivalence. Benjamins(1999:5), as cited in Al-Naqqash (2000:137), introduces one form of such equivalence that is "Paraphrase". The latter is used for "any translation translated by one individual that emphasizes freshness in style and that seems to take substantial liberty in translation". Applying this type to the second previous examples results in:

- 1 - ان مع العسر يسرا.
- 2 -ولم يتم تطبيق المعاهدة منذ ذلك الحين.

Let's examine the following example:

3-How do you do?

Such an expression has no direct equivalent in Arabic, so it would be wrong if someone translated it literally as follows:

3 - كيف تعمل؟

Such a translation makes this expression meaningless. Thus it has to be translated communicatively to be meaningful. This can be performed depending on "the context and cultural background of the original speaker as well as the reader of the translation. Accordingly, the previous example may be translated as follows (Matloob, 2000:95):

3a- كيف حالك؟

3b- تشرفت بمعرفتك.

3c-سعدت بلقائك.

1.7 Prepositions in Translation

Examining the previous sub-sections results in the fact that translation is one of the thorny areas in which many problems can be noticed or met by those who attempt to translate. Such problems are created by the nature of both languages, i.e. SL and TG and the different structures each language has.

Prepositions are generally used to express a certain relation between two parts of a sentence. This relation may be a spatial or temporal one as in the following examples respectively:

4-He is in the house.

5-They came at ten o'clock.

Different views have been raised within the three Schools of Grammar concerning prepositions. Each one has manipulated and defined them according to its proponents'

standpoints. For instance, examining the views of Traditional Grammar shows that the meaning is the essence here and not forms. Meaning represents the main source of analysis for the traditional grammarians. Curme's definition of English prepositions, as quoted by Huddleston (1984:334) seems to be inadequate in identifying the accurate nature of a preposition. Curme states that a preposition is a word that indicates a relation between a noun or pronoun it governs and another word, which may be a verb, a noun or pronoun. Strumpf and Douglas (1999:227) describe prepositions as "relationship words". Not only can prepositions perform this function "indicating a relationship" but even "verbs and coordinating conjunction" can do so as in the following examples:

6-John is standing on the ship.

7-John and Linda left the class.

Structuralists have mainly concentrated on form in defining any part of speech rather than on meaning. But form may be a misleading criterion to depend on in some context. The word considering, for instance, can function as a preposition though it has the form of a verb as in:

8-Considering the amount she paid, the cat was so dear to her.

Some others like inside, can function as an adverb and as a preposition as in the following examples respectively (Stageberg, 1981:171) :

9-She went inside.

10-She went inside the room.

The failure of form criterion in defining any part of speech has paved the way for another one to come into existence, that is of position. According to the latter, any word can be a preposition if it links any two parts of a sentence with the proviso that the second part must be a noun or its equivalent.

Undeniable fact about English prepositions is that they have been a subject to various arguments and have occupied an essential part of the grammarians' minds within the previous schools of grammar due to the difficulties and problems they cause not only for foreign language learners but also for native speakers.

Moving to a practical aspect, it seems that it is a matter of association between the uses of a preposition in both languages. Since each preposition may perform different functions and have different meanings within one language, problems and difficulties can easily occur. In translating a text or an expression, a foreign language learner may (Point-to Point, 2002):

a-Choose the wrong preposition.

b- Use an unneeded one, or

c- Delete a necessary one.

Of course, doing any of the choices above is determined by the learner's experience, which is in turn, affected by:

a- Mother tongue interference (positive or negative)

b-The strategies adopted by the learner (as a translator) such as overgeneralization and oversimplification and transfer of meaning.

Being foreign language learners, Advanced Iraqi Learners AILs of English face the same types of difficulties stated above. Mother tongue interference, for instance, unconsciously represents a great deal of difficulty for AILs. A simple example that may clarify this is the use of the English preposition (on) before the days of the week. In English it is natural to say on Sunday. In Arabic, on the other hand, the equivalent preposition is (fi) as in:

- في يوم الاحد.

What some AILs may do is that they associate their language preposition (fi) with the English one (in), which carries the same meaning as the Arabic one rather than with (on) which has the same meaning. As a result, they may say

*11-In Friday

rather than:

11a-On Friday.

Here, the first strategy, i.e. overgeneralization, is included within that of mother tongue interference. So they generalize the use of (in) to include its use before the days of the week forgetting the other choices. This can be noticed in:

12-He is in school.

12a-انه في المدرسة.

In Arabic, there is no difference in saying such a sentence to describe the place of a student or a teacher. But in English, the case is different. If the student is referred to, then (at) is used, but if a reference is made to the teacher, (at) or (in) is acceptable. (Alexander, 1988 :327).

Another type of errors which can be noticed is the use of an unnecessary preposition. Some structures (namely with main verbs) in English and Arabic do not stipulate the use of a preposition while the others do. The problems lie with those structures which, in one language, require the use of a preposition, while in the other, they do not. In the English sentence:

13-I'll wait for you.

The use of a preposition is necessary to complete the meaning of the main verb. Comparing this verb with its equivalent in Arabic, one can notice that no preposition is used as in:

13a-سانتظرك

The vice versa can be noticed in:

14-He entered the house.

14a-دخل (الى) المنزل.

In some other situations, foreign language learners may delete a necessary preposition or add an unnecessary one depending on the learner's personal knowledge. If we take this example:

15-انه يتعامل بحذر مع تلك المسألة.

The Arabic underlined verb requires the word (ma9a)to complete its meaning, whereas in English the same verb or its equivalent may be replaced either by (deal with) or (tackle). What may occur here is that some AILs of English may use the verb (tackle) with the preposition to indicate the same meaning of the Arabic verb. Accordingly, the following translation may be noticed:

15a-He deals with this matter carefully.

*15b-He tackles with this matter carefully.

Conclusions

Prepositions pose more problems for the non-native speaker or learner of English than any other part of speech because they are just little words that never change in form. Prepositions in general form a great troublesome spot for the majority of learners or more particularly translators. This is due to the thorny nature of most, if not all, prepositions. So it is important to have a full knowledge and be highly acquainted with the nature, use and meaning of prepositions in both languages.

Superficial thinking, usage and reliance on the form are what many AILs of English depend on when attempting to choose a preposition rather than on logical reasoning and understanding let alone giving specific and fixed meaning to a certain preposition which will never be changed or modified. As a result, they reflect these incorrect criteria which they possess on their attempts in translation.

Advanced Iraqi Learners and translators of English have to be aware of the problem with English prepositions. They have to also focus and pay attention to:

a-Grammatical structures in which prepositions are used.

b-The peculiar nature and complexity of prepositions.

C-Interference errors that may occur in translating a text from or into the native language.

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