EQUIVALENCE

Lecture 3

Lecture Outline

- The problem of equivalence in meaning, discussed by Jakobson (1959) and central to translation studies for two decades.
- Nida's 'scientific' methods to analyse meaning; concepts of formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence; the principle of equivalent effect: focus on the receptor.
- Newmark's semantic translation and communicative translation.
- Development of Ubersetzungswissenschaft ('science of translating') in the Germanies of the 1970s and 1980s: Koller.
- Komissarov's theory of equivalence levels

- In spite of differences you can see in various definitions of translation, there is a common feature shared by the absolute majority of them: the notion of equivalence between the original and the translation.

ROMAN JAKOBSON: THE NATURE OF LINGUISTIC MEANING AND EQUIVALENCE

- In ‘On linguistic aspects of translation’ (1959), R.Jakobson examines key issues of interlingual translation, i.e. translation between two different written languages, notably **linguistic meaning** and **equivalence**.

- Jakobson follows the relation set out by Saussure between the signifier (the spoken and written signal) and the signified (the concept signified). Together, the signifier and signified form the linguistic sign, but that sign is arbitrary or unmotivated.
- Thus, the English word *cheese* is the acoustic signifier which ‘denotes’ the concept ‘food made of pressed curds’ (the signified), although there is no inherent reason for that to be so.
- Jakobson stresses that it is possible to understand what is signified by a word even if we have never seen or experienced the concept or thing in real life.

- Jakobson then moves on to consider the problem of equivalence in meaning between words in different languages. He points out that '***there is ordinarily no full equivalence between code-units'.***
- He gives the example of *cheese* in English, which is not identical to the Russian *СЫР*, since the Russian 'code-unit' does not include the concept of cottage cheese. In Russian, that would be *ТВОРОГ* and not *СЫР*.
- In this way the general principle of interlinguistic difference between terms and semantic fields is established.

- Jacobson says that interlingual translation involves ***'substituting messages in one language not for separate code-units but for entire messages in some other language'.***
- In ST and TT, the code-units will be different since they belong to two different sign systems (languages) which partition reality differently.
- ***"Equivalence in difference is the cardinal problem of language and the pivotal concern of linguistics."***
- The problem of meaning and equivalence thus focuses on differences in the structure and terminology of languages. For Jakobson, cross-linguistic differences centre around obligatory grammatical and lexical forms: ***'Languages differ essentially in what they must convey and not in what they may convey' .***

Він зламав руку. He broke his arm / hand.

She came with her friend. Вона прийшла з подругою / з другом.

Where were you last night? Де ви / ти були / був / була вчора ввечері / сьогодні вночі?

EUGENE NIDA AND 'THE SCIENCE OF TRANSLATING'

- Eugene Nida's theory of translation first took concrete form in his major work *Toward a Science of Translating* (1964). The title of the first book is significant; Nida attempts to move translation into a more scientific era by incorporating recent work in linguistics.
- Central to Nida's work is the move away from the old idea that an orthographic word has a fixed meaning and towards a functional definition of meaning in which a word 'acquires' meaning through its context and can produce varying responses according to culture.
- Meaning is broken down into linguistic meaning, referential meaning (the denotative 'dictionary' meaning) and emotive (or connotative) meaning.

NIDA'S TECHNIQUES IN DETERMINING THE MEANING OF LINGUISTIC ITEMS

- A series of techniques is presented as an aid for the translator in determining the meaning of different linguistic items. Techniques to determine referential and emotive meaning focus on analysing the structure of words and differentiating similar words in related lexical fields.
- These techniques include:
- **1) hierarchical structuring** (e.g., the superordinate *animal* and its hyponyms *goat, dog, cow*, etc.);
- **2) componential analysis**. The latter seek to identify and discriminate specific features of a range of related words {e.g., the plotting of relationship terms (*grandmother, mother, cousin*, etc.) according to the values of sex (male, female), generation (the same, one, two or more apart) and lineality (direct ancestor/descendant or not)}.
- **3) semantic structure analysis** in which Nida 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.).

- In general, techniques of semantic analysis are proposed as a means of clarifying ambiguities, elucidating obscure passages and identifying cultural differences. They may serve as a point of comparison between different languages and cultures.

Two types of equivalence: (1) formal equivalence

- Nida postulates ‘two basic orientations’ or ‘types of equivalence’:
- (1) **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. Formal equivalence, or ‘formal correspondence’ is thus oriented towards the ST structure, which exerts strong influence in determining accuracy and correctness. Most typical of this kind of translation are ‘gloss translations’, with a close approximation to ST structure, often with scholarly footnotes, allowing the receptor to gain close access to the language and customs of the source culture.

Two types of equivalence:
(2) dynamic (functional) equivalence

- (2) **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'***.
- The message has to be tailored to the receptor's linguistic needs and cultural expectation and ***'aims at complete naturalness of expression***'. 'Naturalness' is a key requirement for Nida. This receptor-oriented approach considers adaptations of grammar, of lexicon and of cultural references to be essential in order to achieve naturalness; the TT language should not show interference from the SL, and the 'foreignness' of the ST setting is minimized.

The principle of equivalent effect

- 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:
- (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.
- As a general rule for conflicts between meaning and form, Nida underlines that ***'correspondence in meaning must have priority over correspondence in style'*** if equivalent effect is to be achieved.

PETER NEWMARK: SEMANTIC AND COMMUNICATIVE TRANSLATION

- Newmark's Approaches to Translation (1981) and A Textbook of Translation (1988) combine a wealth of practical examples of linguistic theories of meaning with practical applications for translation.
- Newmark departs from Nida's receptor-oriented line, feeling that the success of equivalent effect is 'illusory' and that

  "the conflict of loyalties, the gap between emphasis on SL and TL will always remain as the overriding problem in translation theory and practice."
- Newmark suggests narrowing the gap by replacing the old terms with new ones.

NEWMARK'S COMPARISON OF SEMANTIC AND COMMUNICATIVE TRANSLATION

- Newmark distances himself from the full principle of equivalent effect, since that effect

  *"**is inoperant if the text is out of TL space and time**."*

  An example: no modern translator of Homer can possibly hope to produce the same effect on the TT reader as the ST had on listeners in ancient Greece.
- Newmark raises questions concerning the readers to whom Nida directs his dynamic equivalence, asking if they are ***'to be handed everything on a plate',*** with everything explained for them.
- Newmark indicates that **semantic translation** differs from literal translation in that it 'respects context', interprets and even explains (metaphors, for instance). **Literal translation**, on the other hand, means word-for-word in its extreme version and sticks very closely to ST lexis and syntax.

Newmark: literal, semantic and communicative translation

- Importantly, literal translation is held to be the best approach in both semantic and communicative translation:

  "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."

- However, if there is a conflict between the two forms of translation (namely if semantic translation would result in an 'abnormal' TT or would not secure equivalent effect in the TL) then communicative translation should win out.

An example of this is the common sign

Bissiger Hund and *Осторожно! Злая собака*

translated communicatively as

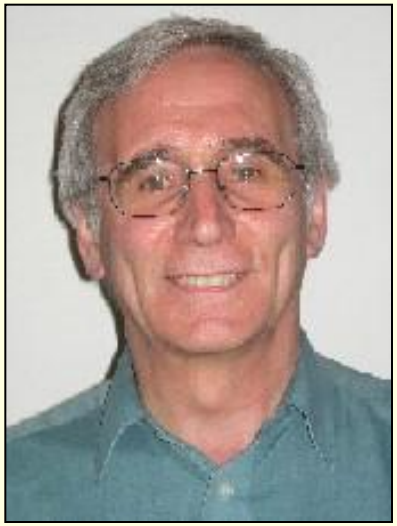
Beware of the dog!

in order to communicate the message, not semantically as

'Dog that bites' and *'Watch out! Savage dog*'.

WERNER KOLLER: KORRESPONDENZ AND ÄQUIVALENZ

- Koller's Einfuhrung in die Ubersetzungswissenschaft (1979; 'Research into the science of translation') examines more closely the concept of equivalence and its linked term correspondence.



Differentiation of equivalence and correspondence

- 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's 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.
- (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.

Vilen Komissarov and his теория уровней эквивалентности

- Komissarov defines translation equivalence as a measure of semantic similarity between ST and TT.
- In his book «Слово о переводе» (1973) he compares a number of TTs with their STs to demonstrate that the degree of semantic similarity between them varies greatly.

The theory of levels of equivalence in translation

- V.N. Komissarov distinguishes five types, or levels, of translation equivalence which differ as to the volume and character of the information retained in each. Each subsequent type of equivalence retains the part of the original contents which includes the information preserved in the previous types.
- Every translation can be regarded as belonging to a certain type of equivalence. Since each subsequent type implies a higher degree of semantic similarity we can say that every translation is made at a certain level of equivalence. Each level of equivalence is characterized by the part of information the retention of which distinguishes it from the previous level.
- The list of levels includes:

1) the level of the purport of communication;
2) the level of (the identification of) the situation;
3) the level of the method of description (of the situation);
4) the level of syntactic meaning;
5) the level of word semantics.

(1)The level of the purport (aim) of communication

- Let's look at the following examples:

Possession is nine points of the law. ***Сильні та багаті рідко винуваті.***

A rolling stone gathers no moss. ***Кому вдома не сидиться, той майна не наживе.***

That's a pretty thing to say! ***Посоромився б!***

- No common semes or invariant structures can be found in the original and its translation, so we can say that there is an absolute dissimilarity of language units. In addition, there seems to be no logical link between the two messages because it is hard to show that they describe the same situation. However, in each pair of sentences the translation retains the general intent of the message, the implied or figurative sense. The Recipient of the translation can draw the conclusions that are sufficient to ensure an adequate communication although the greater part of the contents of the original is lost in translation.
- The part of the contents which contains information about the general intent of the message, its orientation towards a certain communicative effect is called "the purport of communication". Thus in the first type of equivalence it is only the purport of communication that is retained in translation.

(2) The level of (the identification of) the situation

This can be illustrated by the following examples:

It was late in the day.	***Наближався вечір.***
Do not confuse with inferior models.	***Ви маєте остерігатися підробок.***
I couldn't take any more.	***З мене було досить.***

This group of examples is similar to the first one because the equivalence of ST and TT here does not involve any parallelism of lexical or structural units. The words and syntactical structures of the original have no direct correspondences in the translation. At the same time it is obvious that there is a greater proximity of contents than in the previous group. Besides the purport of communication, there is some additional information contained in the original that is retained in the translation.

In (2) the incomparable language units in TT and ST describe, in fact, the same action, refer to identical reality as when it is late in the day, evening is approaching. We may say that the original and the translation describe identical situations but each is presented in a different way. Thus at this level the equivalence implies retention of two types of information contained in the original - the purport of communication and the indication of the situation. However, the situation is described differently, so the common feature is not the method of description but the reference to the situation, the possibility of identifying the situation.

(3) The level of the method of description (of the situation)

This type of equivalence can be exemplified as follows:

The film stars Hugh Grant. ***Головну роль у фільмі грає Хью Грант.***

Keep a look-out for the postman. ***Не прогав листоношу.***

Oilmen from Texas are frequent flyers too. ***Техаські нафтовики також часто користуються цими літаками.***

Here the part of the contents retained is still larger. In this case the translation retains the two preceding informative complexes as well as the method of describing the situation. In fact, the translation is a semantic paraphrase of the original, preserving its basic semes and allowing their free reshuffle in the sentence. The basic structure of the messages that ST and TT convey remains intact. If in the previous types of equivalence TT gave the information of ‘what the original message is for’ and ‘what it is about’, here it also indicates ‘what is said in the original’, i.e. what aspect of the described situation is mentioned in communication - the method of its description.

(4) The level of syntactic meaning

Here we'll look at the following examples:

He didn't have much education. ***Він не був дуже освіченою людиною.***

I went to the surgery to see the doctor. ***Я пішов на прийом до лікаря.***

He's lucky to be alive. ***Йому пощастило, що він залишився живим.***

In this group the semantic similarity of the previous types of equivalence is reinforced by the invariant meaning of the syntactic structures in the original and the translation. We can see the retention of the linguistic meaning, i.e. the information fixed in the substantial or structural elements of language. We can say that here the translation conveys not only the 'what for', the 'what about' and the 'what' of the original but also something of "how it is said" in the original. Thus, the fourth level of equivalence presupposes retention in the translation of the four meaningful components of the original: the purport of communication, the identification of the situation, the method of its description, and the invariant meaning of the syntactic structures.

(5) The level of word semantics

Here we find the maximum possible semantic proximity of the translation to the original. These translations try to retain the meaning of all the words used in the original:

Artists are always young. ***Художники завжди молоді.***

The house was sold for $100,000 ***Будинок було продано за сто тисяч доларів.***

The Organization is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its members.

Організація ґрунтується на принципі суверенної рівності всіх її членів.

Here we can observe the equivalence of semes which make up the meaning of correlated words in the ST and TT; parallelism of syntactic structures implying the maximum invariance of their meanings; the similarity of the method of describing the situation; the identity of the situations; the identical functional aim of the message.

CONCLUSION to the theory of translation levels

Summing up, we can say that every translation can be regarded as belonging to a certain type of equivalence. Since each subsequent type implies a higher degree of semantic similarity we can say that every translation is made at a certain level of equivalence. It should be emphasized that the level hierarchy does not imply the idea of approbation or disapprobation. A translation can be good at any level of equivalence.

LATER DEVELOPMENTS IN EQUIVALENCE

- The notion of equivalence held sway as a key issue in translation throughout the 1970s and beyond.
- Mona Baker, in *In Other Words* (1992) discusses different kinds of equivalence – at the levels of the word, phrase, grammar, text, pragmatics, etc. , but notes that equivalence ***'is influenced by a variety of linguistic and cultural factors and is therefore always relative'***.

- Equivalence continues to be a central, if criticized, concept. Kenny (1998) 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."***(2002)

- Perhaps the biggest bone of contention in the comparison of a ST and a TT is the so-called **tertium comparationis**, an invariant against which two text segments can be measured to gauge variation. The problem of the inevitable subjectivity that the invariant entails has been tackled by many scholars from a range of theoretical backgrounds.