

LEVELS AND TYPES OF EQUIVALENTS

We can speak about five different types of semantic relationships between equivalent phrases (texts) in two languages. Thus all translations can be classified into five types of 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 meanings; 5) the level of word semantics.

Let us first of all single out translations in which the degree of semantic similarity with ST seems to be the lowest. This type of equivalence can be illustrated by the following examples:

Maybe there is some chemistry between us that doesn't mix. – *Буває, що люди не сходяться характерами.*

A rolling stone gathers no moss. – *Кому дома не сидиться, той добра не наживе.*

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

Here we cannot discover any common semes or invariant structures in the original and its translation. Moreover, it comprises the information which must be preserved by all means even though the greater part of the contents of the original is lost in the translation.

Thus we can deduce that in the first type of equivalence it is only the purport of communication that is retained in translation.

The second group of translations can be illustrated by the following examples:

He answered the telephone. – *Він зняв слухавку.*

You see one bear, you have seen them all. – *Всі ведмеді схожі один на одного.*

It was late in the day. – Наближався вечір.

This group of examples is similar to the first one, as the equivalence of translations here does not involve any parallelism of lexical or structural units. Most of the words or 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 preceding group. Besides the purport of communication there is some additional information contained in the original that is retained.

The information which characterized the second type of equivalence can, therefore, be designated as “identification of the situation”.

In the next group of translations the part of the contents which is to be retained is still larger. This type of equivalence can be exemplified as follows:

Scrubbing makes me bad-tempered. – Від миття підлоги у мене псується настрій.

London saw a cold winter last year. – Минулого року зима в Лондоні була холодна.

You are not serious? – Ви жартуєте?

In this case the translation retains the two preceding informative complexes as well as the method of describing the situation. In other words, it contains the same general notions as the original. This means that the translation is a semantic paraphrase of the original, preserving its basic semes and allowing their free reshuffle in the sentence. Thus we are faced with a situation that can be explained in terms of the semantic theory. The common semes are easily discovered in the comparative analysis of the translations of this group.

We can now say that the third type of equivalence exemplified by the translations of the third group, implies retention in the translation of the three parts of the original contents which we have conventionally designated as the purport of communication, the identification of the situation and the method of its description.

The fourth group of translations can be illustrated by the following samples:

He was never tired of old songs. – Старі пісні йому ніколи не докучали.

I don't see that I need to convince you. – Не бачу потреби доводити вам це.

He was standing with his arms crossed and his bare head bent. – Він стояв, склавши руки на грудях, з похиленою непокритою головою.

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. In such translations the syntactic structures can be regarded as derived from those in the original through direct or backward

transformations. This includes cases when the translation makes use of similar or parallel structures.

Thus, the fourth type 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.

Last but not least, comes the fifth group of translations that can be discovered when we analyse their relationships with the respective originals. Here we find the maximum possible semantic similarity between texts in different languages. These translations try to retain the meaning of all the words used in the original text. The examples cited below illustrate this considerable semantic proximity of the correlated words in the two sentences:

I saw him at the theatre. – Я бачив його в театрі.

The house was sold for 10 thousand dollars. – Будинок було продано за десять тисяч доларів.

Here we can observe the equivalence of semes which make up the meaning of correlated words in the original text and the translation; parallelism of syntactic structures implying the maximum invariance of their meanings; the similarity of the notional categories which determine the method of describing the situation; the identity of the situations; the identical functional aim of the utterance or the purport of communication. The relative identity of the contents of the two texts depends in this case on the extent to which various components of the word meaning can be rendered in translation without detriment to the retention of the rest of the information contained in the original.

It is worth noting that the information characterizing different levels is inherent to any unit of speech. Indeed, a unit of speech always has some communicative intent, denotes a certain situation, possesses a certain notional structure, and is produced as a syntactically patterned string of words.

Thus, a translation event is accomplished at a definite 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.

The structural similarity of ST and TT implies that relationships of equivalence are established between correlated units in the two texts. Many SL units have regular equivalents in TL which are used in numerous TT as substitutes to those units.

Some of the SL units have permanent equivalents in TL, that is to say, there is a one-to-one correspondence between such units and their equivalents.

Thus “*London*” is always rendered into Ukrainian as “*Лондон*”, “*a machine-gun*” as “*кулемет*” and “*hydrogen*” as “*водень*”. As a rule this type of correspondence is found with words of specific character, such as scientific and technical terms, proper or geographical names and similar words whose meaning is more or less independent of the particular contextual situation.

Other SL units may have several equivalents each. Such one-to-many correspondence between SL and TL units is characteristic of most regular equivalents. The existence of a number of non-permanent (or variable) equivalents to a SL unit implies the necessity of selecting one of them in each particular case, taking into account the way the unit is used in ST and the points of difference between the semantics of its equivalents in TL.

Depending on the type of the language units involved regular equivalents can be classified as lexical, phraseological or grammatical.

Coordinated words in two languages may correspond to each other in one or several components of their semantic structures, while not fully identical in their semantics. The choice of the equivalent will depend on the relative importance of a particular semantic element in the act of communication. For instance, the English word “*ambitious*” may denote either praiseworthy or inordinate desires. Its translation will depend on which of these aspects comes to the fore. Thus “*the ambitious plans of the would-be world conquerors*” will be translated as “*честолюбні плани претендентів на роль завойовників всього світу*”, while “*the ambitious goals set by the United Nations*” will give “*грандіозні цілі, поставлені ООН*” in the Ukrainian translation.

A variety of equivalents may also result from a more detailed description of the same object in TL. The English word “*attitude*”, for instance, is translated as “*відносини, позиція, політика*” depending on the variant the Ukrainian language prefers in a particular situation.

Even if a SL unit has a regular equivalent in TL, this equivalent cannot be used in TT whenever the unit is found in ST. An equivalent depends on the context in which the SL unit is placed in ST. There are two types of context: **linguistic** and **situational**. The linguistic context is made up by the other SL units in ST while the situational context includes the temporal, spacial and other circumstances under which ST was produced as well as all facts which the receptor is expected to know so that he could adequately interpret the message.

Thus in the following sentences the linguistic context will enable the translator to make a correct choice among the Ukrainian equivalents to the English noun “*attitude*”:

- 1) *I don't like your attitude to your work.*
- 2) *There is no sign of any change in the attitudes of the two sides.*
- 3) *He stood there in a threatening attitude.*

It is obvious that in the first sentence it should be the Ukrainian “відношення (до роботи)”, in the second sentence – “позиція (обох сторін)”, and in the third sentence – “постава (погрожуюча)”.

The fact that a SL unit has a number of regular equivalents does not necessarily mean that one of them will be used in each particular translation. True, in many cases the translator’s skill is well demonstrated in his ability to make a good choice among such equivalents. But not infrequently the context does not allow the translator to employ any of the regular equivalents to the given SL unit. Then the translator has to look for an ad hoc way of translation which will successfully render the meaning of the unit in this particular case. Such an exceptional translation of a SL unit which suits a particular context can be described as **an occasional equivalent** or a **contextual substitute**. It is clear, for instance, that none of the above-mentioned regular equivalents to the English “attitude” can be used in the translation of the following sentence: *He has a friendly attitude towards all.*

An occasional equivalent may be found through a change of the part of speech: *Він до всіх відноситься по-товариськи.*

The particular contextual situation may force the translator to give up even a permanent equivalent. Geographical names have such equivalents which are formed by imitation of the foreign name in TL.

Phraseological units or idioms may also have permanent or variable equivalents. Such English idioms as “*the game is not worth the candle*” or “*to pull chestnuts out of the fire for smb*” are usually translated by the Ukrainian idioms “*гра не варта свічок*” and “*діставати каштани з полум’я для кого-небудь*”, respectively. These equivalents reproduce all the aspects of the English idioms semantics and can be used in most contexts. Other permanent equivalents, though identical in their figurative meaning, are based on different images, that is, they have different literal meaning. Cf. “*to get up on the wrong side of the bed*” – “*встати з лівої ноги*”, “*make hay while the sun shines*” – “*куї залізо, поки гаряче*”. Now an English idiom may have several Ukrainian equivalents among which the translator has to make his choice in each particular case. For instance, the meaning of the English “*Do in Rome as the Romans do*” may be rendered in some contexts as “*З вовками жити - по-вовчи вити*”, and in other contexts as “*В чужій монастир зі своїм статутом не ходять*”. But here, again, the translator may not infrequently prefer an occasional equivalent which can be formed by a word-for-word reproduction of the original unit: “*В Римі поведься як римлянин*”.

The choice of grammatical units in TT largely depends on the semantics and combinability of its lexical elements. Therefore there are practically no

permanent grammatical equivalents. The variable equivalents in the field of grammar may be analogous forms in TL or different forms with a similar meaning. As often as not such equivalents are interchangeable and the translator has a free choice between them. In the following English sentence “*He was a guest of honour at a reception given by the Soviet government*” both the Ukrainian participle “*улаштованим*” and the attributive clause “*який був улаштований*” can be substituted for the English participle “*given*”. And the use of occasional equivalents is here more common than in the case of the lexical or phraseological units. We have seen that in the first three types of equivalence no equivalents to the grammatical units are deliberately selected in TL.

No small number of SL units have no regular equivalents in TL. Equivalent-lacking words are often found among SL names of specific national phenomena, such as the English words “*coroner, condominium, impeachment, baby-sitter*” and the like. However, there are quite a number of “ordinary” words for which TL may have no equivalent lexical units: “*fluid, bidder, qualifier, conservationist*”, etc. Some grammar forms and categories may also be equivalent-lacking. (Cf. the English gerund, article or absolute participle construction which have no counterparts in Ukrainian).

The absence of regular equivalents does not imply that the meaning of an equivalent-lacking SL unit cannot be rendered in translation or that its translation must be less accurate. We have seen that words with regular equivalents are not infrequently translated with the help of contextual substitutes. Similarly, the translator, coming across an equivalent-lacking word, resorts to occasional equivalents which can be created in one of the following ways:

1. Using loan-words imitating in TL the form of the SL word or word combination, e.g. *tribalism* – *трайболізм*, *impeachment* – *імпічмент*, *backbencher* – *задньоловочник*, *brain-drain* – *витік мізків*. As often as not such occasional formations are adopted by the members of the TL community and get the status of regular equivalents.

2. Using approximate substitutes, that is TL words with similar meaning which is extended to convey additional information (if necessary, with the help of foot-notes), e.g. *drugstore* – *аптека*, *afternoon* – *вечір*. The Ukrainian “*аптека*” is not exactly a drugstore where they also sell such items as magazines, soft drinks, ice-cream, etc., but in some cases this approximate equivalent can well be used.

3. Using all kinds of lexical (semantic) modifying the meaning of the SL word, e.g. “*He died of exposure*” may be rendered into Ukrainian as “*Він помер від простуди*” or “*Він помер від сонячного удару*”.

4. Using an explanation to convey the meaning of the SL unit, e.g. *landslide* – *перемога на виборах приголомшливою більшістю голосів*, *brinkmanship* – *мистецтво ведення політики на межі війни*, etc.

This method is sometimes used in conjunction with the first one when the introduction of a loan-word is followed by a foot-note explaining the meaning of the equivalent-lacking word in ST. After that the translator may freely employ the newly-coined substitute.

There are also quite a number of equivalent-lacking idioms. Such English phraseological units as “*you cannot eat your cake and have it*”, “*to dine with Duke Humphrey*”, “*to send smb. to Coventry*” and many others have no regular equivalents in Ukrainian. They are translated either by reproducing their form in TL through a word-for-word translation or by explaining the figurative meaning of the idiom, e.g.: *People who live in glass should not throw stones.* – *Люди, які мешкають в скляних будинках, не повинні кидати каміння*; *to see eye-to-eye with smb.* – *дотримуватися однакових поглядів*.

?? Suggested Topics for Discussion

1. What levels of equivalence can be distinguished in translation? How do the equivalence levels mirror the essential features of speech units?
2. What level of equivalence can the translator reach in the translating process? Is it always necessary or possible to translate at the same level of equivalence? What factors does the choice depend on?
3. What is the translation equivalent? Should translating equivalents be studied on a bilingual or a multilingual basis? How can regular equivalents be defined? How are they discovered? How can they be classified? What role do they play in the translation practice?
4. What is an occasional equivalent? What are equivalent-lacking words? What types of words have, as a rule, no regular equivalents? What are the principal ways of rendering the meaning of an equivalent-lacking word in translation?

EXERCISES

CONSERVATION AND POLITICIANS

(1) Conservation and ecology are suddenly fashionable. (2) Politicians on both sides of the Atlantic are seizing on ‘the environment’ as a topical political issue. (3) It seems, however, that they are in danger of missing the point. (4) Protecting our environment cannot be achieved simply by some

magic new technology; nor by tinkering with our present system. (5) Saving the environment raises profound questions about some of fundamental assumptions of any society. (6) It is doubtful whether some of the politicians now climbing on the conservation bandwagon fully realise this point, or whether they would be so enthusiastic if they did. (7) Serious environmental conservation means that governments will have to set pollution standards, despite cries from the offending industries that their foreign competitors will benefit. (8) Politicians will have to face up to some extremely awkward decisions: for instance, whether to ban cars without anti-pollution devices. (9) There will have to be international agreements in which short-term national interests have to be sacrificed. (10) It means, in short, a more responsible view of man’s relationship to his habitat.

1. What is environment? What is environmental conservation (protection)? Is there anything in common between a conservative and a conservationist? What do they want to conserve?

2. What is a politician? Is this word positive or derogatory? What continents lie on both sides of the Atlantic? How can one ‘seize on the environment’? Does that phrase imply disapprobation?

3. What is the difference between ‘to be in danger’ and ‘to be in danger of doing smth.’? What is ‘to miss the point’? What is ‘the point’ in this case?

4. Why do people think of new technology as ‘magic’? What does ‘tinker’ mean? What connotation has it got in the sentence?

5. How can the expression ‘to raise a question’ be used? Does it mean here the same as ‘to call in question’ or ‘to raise doubts’? What is an assumption? How is it used in politics? in philosophy? in everyday life?

6. What is ‘habitat’? How can the words ‘a responsible view of man’s relationship to his habitat’ be paraphrased?

7. At what level of equivalence would you translate sentence (2)? or sentence (8)?

8. Which of the following translations of sentence (1) is made at a higher level of equivalence?

a) *Всі раптом заговорили про екологію та охорону навколишнього середовища.*

b) *Екологія та охорона навколишнього середовища раптово стали модними темами.*

9. Raise the level of equivalence of the following translation of sentence (9):

Короткострокові національні інтереси будуть принесені в жертву майбутнім міжнародним угодам.

10. Translate sentence (10) at the 4th level of equivalence.
11. What arguments can you find to prove that sentence (4) should not be translated at the 5th level of equivalence?
12. What makes a word-for-word translation of sentence (2) impossible?
13. What Ukrainian equivalents can be suggested to translate the term 'environment' in this text?
14. How do you translate the term 'conservationist'?
15. Which is the suitable equivalent here for 'politicians': *політики, політичні діячі, політїкани*? Why?
16. Should the phrase 'on both sides of the Atlantic' be rendered into Ukrainian as *по обидві сторони Атлантики* or as *як в Європі, так і в Америці*? Give your reasons.
17. Translate the text. State what level of equivalence is achieved in each sentence.