

Adequacy, Equivalency and Translation Evaluation

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Abstract: This article explores the theoretical foundations and practical implications of adequacy and equivalence in translation studies. Drawing upon the frameworks of prominent scholars such as Y.I. Retsker, L.S. Barkhudarov, the paper examines how different approaches define and apply the concepts of equivalence in relation to linguistic norms, functional correspondence, and communicative effect. The analysis highlights the distinction between formal, dynamic, and functional equivalence, and the roles they play in achieving accurate translation outcomes. Special attention is given to the translator's linguistic and cultural competence and the inherent asymmetry in bilingualism, which significantly affects translation choices. Furthermore, the article discusses translation criticism as a tool for evaluating the quality and equivalence of translated texts.

Keywords: Translation theory, equivalence, adequacy, functional correspondence, dynamic equivalence, linguistic norm, Retsker, Barkhudarov, bilingualism, translation criticism, translator competence.

Introduction: In accordance with modern realities, our era has been called the "age of translation" alongside other epithets, due to the unprecedented growth of information and the rapid dissemination and consumption of that information, which humanity owes largely to translation. Many people who are not professional translators are engaged in translation activities. Knowledge of the basics of translation theory, its boundaries, capabilities, and key techniques is becoming an essential component of a person's general education.

Today, when the demands for a translator's worldview and erudition have significantly increased, this "element of general education" is more necessary than ever for all those studying foreign languages. Global changes in society have led to a transformation in the role of foreign languages within the education system. A foreign language has become a foundational element of modern education and a means of achieving personal and professional self-realization.

Technological progress and the international relations associated with it require graduates of universities to have both theoretical knowledge and practical skills in the areas of translation, text analysis, summarization, and annotation of texts and documents. Studying

foreign languages is now a necessary and integral component of the general educational and professional training of scientific and academic personnel. This is driven by the internationalization of scientific communication, the development of global-level collaboration among specialists and researchers, and the expansion of scientific discourse in modern communication.

Knowledge of a foreign language facilitates access to scientific information, the use of internet resources, the establishment of international academic contacts, and the enhancement of a researcher's professional qualifications. The relevance of this research's content lies in the fact that translation theory is necessary for translation students, novice translators, professional translators, and translation instructors alike. As L.S. Barkhudarov stated: "Translation as an academic discipline cannot exist without theory, since without theoretical generalizations, teaching is reduced to the hardly controllable development of intuition, or worse, to mere mechanical training." A professional translator can more effectively utilize advanced experience in the field and develop their craft if they have mastered the method of critical analysis of translation. [1.]

METHOD

People have been using translations from one language to another for a long time, although no one can say exactly when the first translation occurred. It likely happened when communication between people speaking different languages was made possible through an intermediary language. It is worth noting that attitudes toward translation were quite contradictory until the emergence of linguistic translation theory in the 1930s. For some, translation was a hobby or favorite occupation; for others, it was a professional duty; and for some, translation was considered altogether impossible due to ideological beliefs. Thanks to translation, people speaking different languages could communicate within multinational states. Translation enabled interlingual and intercultural communication and facilitated the spread of various teachings and religions.

The categories of equivalence and adequacy, when considered within a modern communicative context, inevitably imply a response to the translation from its recipients — i.e., the consumers of the new speech product. This implies that equivalence and adequacy are, to some extent, normative categories. The concept of norm is closely tied to the concept of evaluation, and evaluation is an external category in relation to the object being evaluated.

When it comes to a translated text, it is judged as either good or bad by the reader of the translation. In certain historical periods, translation quality was evaluated according to rigid norms dictated by prevailing literary movements. A translated work was judged by the same criteria as an original literary work written in the target language. It was considered good if it aligned with the literary trends of that era, and bad if it did not.

Today, in the absence of clearly dominant literary trends — or more precisely, in the presence of a tendency toward complete freedom and variation in literary creativity — the problem of external evaluation and normative standards in translation is reduced to a single aspect: the translated text must comply with the norms of the target language. Otherwise, it will be disregarded, and the social function of translation as an act of interlingual mediation will not be fulfilled.

However, the external (reader) evaluation of a translation does not directly relate to the category of translation equivalence. The translated text is evaluated as if it were originally written in the target language. The reader assumes the author of the original work wrote exactly what appears in the translation. The external assessment of equivalence specifically — that is, whether the translation corresponds to the original — remains the domain of one of the less-developed areas of translation studies:

translation criticism.

Translation criticism can evaluate not only whether the translation adheres to the literary norms of the target language, but also the degree of equivalence to the original. More broadly, the evaluation of a translation's equivalence is a category of the translator's self-awareness — an internal category. The translator determines their own level of responsibility to both the author and the reader, and develops a personal standard of fidelity between the translation and the original text. Evaluation becomes self-evaluation, and normativity becomes an internal conviction of the translator regarding the criteria of truth in the equivalence relationship between the source and target texts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In essence, all treatises on translation written throughout history, reflections on translation, and translation criticism have been attempts to establish norms of equivalence. This conviction is based on knowledge of the nature of interlingual correspondences and discrepancies — both in universal terms and within specific language pairs.

That is why one of the earliest theoretical perspectives on translation equivalence was a purely linguistic one, based on the comparison of structural relations between the two languages involved in translation. This view is reflected in particular in Y.I. Retsker's theory of regular correspondences.

"The theory of regular correspondences," wrote Y.I. Retsker, "must establish certain parameters within which the choice of translation options can occur. Without offering any prescriptive formulas, the theory of correspondences reveals the general patterns of the translation process, based on functional dependence. When translating from one language to another, it is necessary to take into account the operation of the same logical-semantic factors in order to convey the same semantic content." [2.]

In this statement, Retsker highlights three key points:

- parameters that limit the translator's choices,
- functional dependence,
- and logical-semantic foundations.

Thus, this theory is constructed from the outset as a normative theory. The author attempts to outline the boundaries within which translational actions may be considered justified. He does not use the category of equivalence as the relationship between the source text and the target text in full, but rather speaks of regular correspondences as relationships between individual fragments of the original and the translated text.

Retsker prefers the term "adequacy" as the evaluative category. When addressing the question of what constitutes the criterion for choosing appropriate means of expression to achieve translation adequacy, he writes: "Since the criterion of adequacy can only be the correspondence to the fragment of reality described in the original, the equivalence of means is determined not by identity, but by the maximum possible approximation of the effect produced to that of the original. Analysis of any high-quality translation shows that the foundation for establishing the equivalence of linguistic means must be functional, not formal." [3.] In defining the criteria of adequacy, Y.I. Retsker proceeds from such notions as the reader's response and functional equivalence.

At first glance, Y.I. Retsker's concept appears to differ little from Eugene Nida's theory of dynamic equivalence — the main distinction lies only in terminology. But this is not entirely the case. When discussing functional equivalence, Retsker contrasts the dictionary meanings of lexical units with the meanings derived from the content of a real, contextualized text — in other words, the actual speech product. In his contrast between functional and formal equivalence, we can see echoes of Saussure's dichotomy between *langue* and *parole*.

"No dictionary," writes Retsker, "can foresee the full diversity of contextual meanings realized in the stream of speech, just as it cannot capture the entire variety of word combinations. Therefore, translation theory can only establish functional correspondences, which take into account the dependence of the transmission of certain semantic categories on the operation of various factors."

Using the terms "adequacy" and "equivalence" to describe the required relationship between source and target texts — the very relationship modern translation theory typically refers to as equivalence — Retsker introduces into his framework the concepts of equivalent and equivalent correspondence.

He considers it unconstructive to use the term equivalent for any type of correspondence between a fragment of the source and a fragment of the target text. According to Retsker, an equivalent should be seen as a stable, constant correspondence, generally independent of context. He places geographical names, proper names, and technical terms into the category of equivalents. These equivalents are subdivided into full and partial, absolute and relative:

- Full equivalents are units that fully match in all meanings or have a single meaning in both languages.
- Partial equivalents are polysemous words or phrases that overlap in at least one of their meanings.

- Absolute equivalents have only one acceptable translation option.

When discussing absolute equivalents, Retsker makes an important observation for both theory and practice: "The tradition of interlingual equivalence is so persistent that any other translation would be considered incorrect."

Thus, equivalents are linguistic units that have become fixed due to the identity of what they denote and have solidified through long-standing language contact traditions.

In contrast to equivalents, Retsker identifies other types of correspondence: variant correspondences, contextual correspondences, and those arising from various translation transformations. According to his theory, there is a fundamental difference between equivalent correspondences and these two other groups. Equivalents belong to the realm of language (*langue*), whereas variant and contextual correspondences belong to the realm of speech (*parole*).

Is this distinction significant for translation theory?

A.D. Schweitzer argues that the distinction between equivalent and variant correspondence is driven more by lexicographic considerations than by translation needs. He maintains that for a translator, distinguishing between partial equivalents and variant correspondences is of little practical importance, since in both cases the translator is dealing with non-unique correspondences — one source language word corresponds to multiple target language words. [4.]

It must be acknowledged that Retsker's distinctions can sometimes appear somewhat artificial. Some of the "variant correspondences" he describes may just as well be viewed as lexical substitutions or translation transformations. In other words, the boundaries between different types of interlingual correspondences can be quite blurred.

L.S. Barkhudarov identifies three levels of equivalence, each characterized by distinct evaluative and normative features. At the center lies the type of translation "performed at a level necessary and sufficient to convey the invariant content while adhering to the norms of the target language." This type of translation is referred to as equivalent translation. [1.]

On a lower level is literal translation, while free translation occupies the higher level. Barkhudarov argues that free translation is preferable to literal translation because it avoids significant semantic distortions and does not violate linguistic norms — although he admits this is not always the case.

Conclusion. The categories of equivalence and adequacy are among the most fundamental in translation theory. How these categories are interpreted determines the resolution of many long-standing theoretical issues in translation studies — such as:

- What qualifies as a translation?
- The distinction between free and literal translation
- The translatability of texts
- The translator's responsibility
- The inevitability of meaning loss, and many others.

Every practicing translator, once having studied the theoretical foundations of translation, develops their own personal concept of equivalence, which they follow in their creative work, guided by their linguistic and cultural competence.

The linguistic and cultural competence of the translator — as someone proficient in two languages and familiar with two interacting cultures — is typically asymmetric. This asymmetry is one of the core features of translational bilingualism, which must be taken into account when evaluating translation decisions.

Despite the complexities of translation, the translator's only reliable support is the text itself, and the foundation of the linguistic approach lies in identifying functional correspondences.

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