

A Brief Review Of Vilen Komissarov's Theory Of Equivalence

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Abstract: This article provides an in-depth analysis of the scientific interpretation of the theory of equivalence, a central concept in translation studies. Based on the views of Vilen Komissarov, the paper explicates the linguistic, semantic, stylistic, and pragmatic dimensions of equivalence. The study substantiates that although absolute correspondence between the source and target texts is impossible, achieving semantic proximity, functional adequacy, and preservation of aesthetic effect constitutes the primary task of the translator. The article highlights that equivalence goes far beyond formal lexical matching and encompasses a multi-layered phenomenon closely tied to cultural context, communicative purpose, and reader impact. Furthermore, the relationship between adequacy as a process-oriented category and equivalence as a result-oriented category is explained, and their significance in translation practice is theoretically justified.

Keywords: Translation theory, equivalence, adequacy, linguistic proximity, semantic correspondence, pragmatic effect, functional equivalence.

Introduction: Translation theory is a complex phenomenon occupying an important place in human culture; it is viewed not merely as a linguistic bridge between two languages but also as a cultural instrument that links different peoples' worldviews and modes of thinking. Accordingly, one of the most discussed theoretical problems in translation is the categories of adequacy and equivalence. On the one hand, these concepts define how closely a translated text approximates the original; on the other hand, they indicate the degree to which the translation produces the same aesthetic and communicative effect on the reader's mind as the source text. Practical issues in translation — the tension between literalness and creative reworking, the transmission of national-cultural specificities, and the preservation of artistic-aesthetic value — are resolved precisely through theories of adequacy and equivalence. In this respect, these theoretical categories form the foundation of translation studies and determine the scientific criteria for any translation process.

The Russian translation scholar Vilen Komissarov's definition — "equivalence is the maximal possible degree of linguistic closeness of the translated text to the original" [Komissarov 1985: 152] — occupies an

important place in translation theory. This definition is succinct and direct, expressing the principal aim of translation practice: to ensure, to the greatest extent possible, both semantic and formal proximity between the source text and the translation. Komissarov's approach implies that absolute identity in translation is unattainable, since each language has its own lexical-semantic system, grammatical structure, stylistic means, and cultural foundations. Nevertheless, the translator should strive to render an equivalent that is as close as possible to the original in linguistic and semantic terms.

According to V. Komissarov's approach, several key points become evident:

Firstly, the phrase "to the highest degree" in Komissarov's definition is of particular importance. It implies that translation does not aim for absolute identity, but rather for the closest possible approximation. Absolute equivalence is unattainable due to linguistic differences; however, the translator's task is to find the variant that comes as close as possible to the original within these constraints.

Secondly, the term "linguistic closeness" introduced by Komissarov denotes a phenomenon far broader and

more complex than simple word-for-word correspondence. According to him, equivalence in translation must manifest not only at the lexical level but also across various layers of the linguistic system—lexical, grammatical, semantic, stylistic, and communicative. Expanding this further, grammatical closeness is reflected in the translator's choice of syntactic structures. The grammatical forms and categories present in the original text must retain their communicative functions in the translation. Changes in tense, mood, or word order can affect meaning, and therefore grammatical correspondence must be handled with precision.

A second important aspect is stylistic harmony. Every text belongs to a particular functional style that conveys specific aesthetic or communicative effects to the reader. Preserving this stylistic tone during translation is one of the key conditions for achieving equivalence. For instance, in literary texts, poetic devices, metaphors, and imagery must produce an equivalent aesthetic impact in the translated version.

A third crucial dimension is the preservation of semantic depth. This involves not only transferring the dictionary meaning of a word but also its connotative and associative layers. Therefore, the translator must prioritize conveying the deeper contextual meaning rather than relying on surface-level lexical substitution. Finally, the pragmatic dimension of the text also forms part of what Komissarov refers to as “linguistic closeness.” The translated text must aim to fulfill the same communicative purpose that the original text was intended to achieve.

According to academician Sh. Sirojiddinov, “the translator must not ignore the issue of producing a pragmatic effect on the reader. Two difficult and responsible tasks lie before them. The first is to correctly grasp the author's communicative intent and to reconstruct the text at a level not inferior to the author's own mastery; the second is, taking into account the recipient's worldview, mentality, and beliefs, to find appropriate means and methods of influence that will create a target text without violating the author's stylistic principles and communicative aims. Preserving the pragmatic potential of the source text and fully reflecting the author's communicative intent in the translation is what is called the pragmatics of translation.” [Sirojiddinov 2011:29–30]

The views of V. Komissarov and Sh. Sirojiddinov are consonant: they both encompass the degree of impact perceived by the reader, the aesthetic pleasure the reader derives from the text, and the effectiveness with which information is received. Thus, Komissarov's notion of “linguistic closeness” should not be

understood as mere formal correspondence but as the complex process of recreating a text's semantic, stylistic, and communicative properties. The translator does not pursue only word-for-word equivalence; rather, they rework the entire communicative system of the source text in order to produce a target text that produces an equivalent effect on the reader.

Thirdly, one of the important features of Komissarov's views on equivalence is that he does not confine the translator to literal rendering. He emphasizes that ensuring the greatest possible linguistic proximity to the source text does not mean mechanically copying words; rather, it means recreating their semantic, stylistic, and communicative value within the target language system. Because the syntactic organization of each language differs, grammatical and syntactic transformations are often necessary. For example, a simple sentence in English may need to be rendered as a complex sentence in Uzbek, or conversely an Uzbek subordinate clause might be converted into a simple sentence in French, in order to preserve the natural flow of the translation. Although such changes alter form, they are aimed at preserving the original meaning and effect.

Due to the lexical richness of languages and the variation within synonym sets, there are cases when a direct equivalent for a word in the source text simply does not exist. In such situations the translator must select a synonym that is semantically closest and appropriate for the contextual function. For instance, the Russian adjective “печальный” may in different contexts be translated as “sorrowful,” “sad,” or “piteous.” Context plays a decisive role in the translator's choice. Equally important is the preservation of the source text's stylistic features, which is among the most responsible aspects of translation. Some stylistic devices cannot be transferred directly from one language system to another; therefore the translator re-creates the author's style through stylistic transformations available in the target language. For example, rhyme, metaphor, or the particular cadence of a poetic text cannot be translated literally; instead, other stylistic means must be used to produce the same aesthetic effect for the reader. In Komissarov's approach the guiding principle is that form is secondary to meaning and communicative impact. If necessary, the translator restructures the text, but must not lose the author's intended message or the emotional effect meant for the reader. Hence, in translation some degree of creative freedom, contextual adaptation, and sensitivity to national-cultural differences is of central importance.

According to Komissarov, translation is not merely the

substitution of linguistic means but a creative activity. The translator manifests as a co-creator with the author, producing a new text in their own language. Therefore, the translator does not remain confined to literalness but strives to reconstruct the spirit, tone, and idea of the original text within the conditions of the target language.

Thus, Komissarov's approach provides a balanced solution to the theories of adequacy and equivalence in translation studies: prioritizing meaning and effect over form, and, when necessary, modifying, adapting, or updating linguistic resources is considered the translator's primary responsibility. This highlights the most important criterion in the translation process.

Consequently, the category of "equivalence" has become one of the most widely discussed and scientifically grounded concepts in translation theory. Fundamentally, it relies on the principle of semantic generality, where units being equated in the translation process (words, phrases, sentences, or entire texts) achieve equivalence through similarity in meaning. Therefore, the initial manifestation of equivalence is the existence of semantic proximity.

At the same time, equivalence is not limited merely to the relationship between signs; it also encompasses intertextual connections. However, it is important to note that the equivalence of signs does not necessarily imply the equivalence of texts, just as the equivalence of texts does not mean that all their segments are absolutely equivalent. Thus, equivalence is a multi-layered phenomenon that takes into account partial correspondence, functional closeness, and overall communicative effect.

The issue of equivalence is not confined solely to the linguistic level; it also involves a cultural dimension. This is because, in the process of translation, the units of the source and target languages often exist within different cultural contexts. Therefore, the equivalence of texts must be evaluated not only in terms of their linguistic forms but also at the level of cultural equivalence. For instance, national customs, historical realities, or religious concepts in translation should be recreated not merely through direct linguistic correspondence but by taking the cultural context into account.

From this perspective, the terms "equivalence" and "equivalent" denote the relationship between source and target texts that perform the same communicative function across different cultures. In other words, equivalence expresses the functional equality achieved as a result of translation. The key distinction here is that while adequacy is process-oriented, equivalence is result-oriented.

L. Nelyubin interprets equivalence as a specific form of adequacy and explains it in terms of the existence of a functional constant between the source and target texts [Nelyubin 2003:253-254]. His view implies that equivalence should not be understood as entirely separate from adequacy; rather, it should be seen as a specialized manifestation of adequacy.

Thus, based on the definitions presented, it can be concluded that the core semantic meaning of equivalence lies in equality and conformity. However, this equality is not a mathematical or absolute identity; instead, it represents semantic and communicative parity formed while taking into account the differences between languages and cultures.

CONCLUSION

The above theoretical analyses demonstrate that the process of translation is a complex form of linguistic and cultural mediation, requiring not only the reconstruction of the text's linguistic structure but also the recreation of its semantic content, stylistic tone, and pragmatic effect. V. Komissarov's concept of "linguistic proximity" indicates that the translator's task is not limited to merely substituting words; rather, it entails fully restoring the communicative function of the text in the context of the target language. Similarly, Sh. Sirojiddinov's views on pragmatic equivalence emphasize the necessity of harmonizing the author's intent, the reader's mentality, and the text's impact. L. Nelyubin interprets equivalence as a specific form of adequacy, highlighting its functional significance.

Overall, equivalence is revealed to be a multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses not only formal correspondence but also semantic, stylistic, communicative, and cultural layers. Adequacy is oriented toward the translation process, while equivalence is directed toward the outcome of translation. Collectively, these insights indicate that the primary criterion in translation practice is the faithful transfer of the original text's content, emotional and aesthetic tone, and communicative effect into the target language. Accordingly, the theories of adequacy and equivalence continue to serve as foundational concepts in translation studies, retaining their enduring scholarly significance.

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