Terminology in Translation

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I.

There are people who believe that skill in translation cannot be learned and, especially, cannot be taught. Behind this attitude is the assumption that some people are born with a gift of being good translators or interpreters, whereas others simply do not have the knack; in other words, skill in translation is a talent: either you've got it or you haven't.

Furthermore, theoretically we are used to come across terms such as Source text (ST) & Target text (TT). So, with these terms in mind, the translation process can be broken down into two types of activity: understanding a ST and formulating a TT. These two types of process do not occur successively, but simultaneously; in fact, one may not even realize that one has imperfectly understood the ST until one comes up against a problem in formulating or evaluating a TT. In such a case, one may need to go back to square one, so as to reinterpret and reconstruct the ST in the light of one's new understanding of it. In this way, ST interpretation and TT formulation go hand in hand. So for the purposes of discussion, it is useful to think of them as different, mutually separable, processes.

Translation equivalence is defined as a measure of semantic similarity between ST and TT.

If we compare a number of TTs with their STs we shall discover that the degree of semantic similarity between the two texts involved in the translating process may vary. In other words the equivalence between ST and TT may be based on the reproduction of different parts of the ST contents. Accordingly, several types of translation equivalence can be distinguished.

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 (cited from the published translations):

(1) *Maybe there is some chemistry between us that doesn't mix. - Midis nesh nuk ka dashuri që humbet.*

(2) *That's a pretty thing to say. – Tingëllon bukur !*

Here we cannot discover any common seems or invariant structures in the original and its translation. It is obvious the absence of logical link between the two messages which could lead to the conclusion that they arc "about the same thing", that they describe one and the same situation. It is still evident that the two sentences have something in common as to their meaning. This common part of their contents is obviously of great importance, since it is enough to ensure an adequate communication.

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.

In plain English, the translation does not convey either "what the original text is about", or what is said in it" or "how it is said", but only "what it is said for", i.e. what the Source meant, what the aim of the message is.

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

-       *He answered the telephone. –Ai u pergjigj ne telefon.*

-       *You see one bear, you have seen them all. –Nëse shikon një ari, zëre se i ke parë të gjithë.*

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.

Consider, for instance, the translations:

(1) Maybe there is some chemistry between us that doesn't mix. – Midis nesh nuk ka dashuri që humbet.

(2) He answered the telephone. –Ai u përgjigj në telefon.

In (I) the things referred to are different, so that there is hardly any logical connection between the two statements. We can draw identical conclusions about the speaker's sentiments: there is no love lost between him and another person.

In (2) the incomparable language units in the original and in the translation describe, in fact, the same action, refer to identical reality, as a telephone call cannot be answered unless one picks up the receiver.

Both texts give different information about the same, or, as one sometimes says, they express the same idea "using different words". It is the type of equivalence that can be well explained in terms of the situational theory. We may presume that such phrases describe identical situations but each is presented in a different way. Since in each of the two texts the situation is described in a different way, the common feature is not the method of description but the reference to the situation, the possibility of identifying the situation, no matter how it is described in the text.

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:

A. *Scrubbing makes me bad-tempered. – Pastrimi më ngre nervat (më acaron nervat).*

B. *London saw a cold winter last year.- Vitin e shkuar bëri ftohtë në dimër në Londër.*

C. *You are not serious? – Nuk e ke seriozisht?*

The translation contains the same general notions as the original. This means that the translation is a semantic paraphrase of the original. We should consider the first of the examples cited. Both in the translation and in the original the situation is described as a "cause-effect" event with a different pattern of identical semes.

The use of the identical notions in the two texts means that the basic structure of the messages they convey remains intact. Here it indicates "what is said in the original", i.e. what aspect of the described situation is mentioned in the communication.

Another group of translations can be illustrated by the following samples:

1. *He was never tired of old songs – Ai nuk u lodh kurrë nga këngët e vjetra.*
2. *I don't see that I need to convince you. – Nuk e shikoj të arsyeshme të të bind.*
3. *He was standing with his arms crossed and his bare head bent. – Ai po qëndronte me krahëmbledhur dhe me kokën e tullace (të qethur zero) të përkulur.*

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. The translation conveys something of the "how-it-is-said in the original".

The fifth group of translations can be discovered when we analyze 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. There is considerable semantic proximity of the correlated words in the two sentences:

1. *I saw him at the theatre. – Unë e pashë atë në teatër.*
2. *The house was sold for 10 thousand dollars. – Shtëpia u shit 10 000*

   dollarë.

Here we can observe the equivalence of words which make up the meaning 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.

We can sum up. We have discovered that there are five different types of semantic relationships between equivalent phrases (texts) in two languages, differing as to the volume and character of the information retained in each.

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, therefore, 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.

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.

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" in Albanian is «Londra», "a machine-gun" as «mitraloz» and "hydrogen" is always rendered as «hidrogjen». 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 units 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.

The choice of the equivalent will depend on the relative importance of a particular semantic element in the act of communication.

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 «pozicion, q*ëndrim, pozë*» depending on the variant the Albanian language prefers in a particular situation. Here the choice between equivalents is determined by TL factors.

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 is but a potential substitute, for the translator's choice is, to a large extent, dependent 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 Albanian equivalents to the English noun "attitude":

(1) I don't like your attitude to your work. – Mua nuk më pëlqen qëndrimi yt ndaj punës.
(2) He stood there in a threatening attitude.- Ai qëndroi atje në një pozicion kërcënues.

It is obvious that in the first sentence it should be the Albanian «*qëndrim*», in the second sentence « *pozicion* ».

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.

Geographical names have such equivalents which are formed by imitation of the foreign name in TL. And the name of the American town of New Haven (Conn.) is invariably rendered into Albanian as « New Haven ». But the sentence "I graduated from New Haven in 1930″ will be hardly translated in the regular way since the Albanian reader may not know that New Haven is famous for its Yale university. The translator will rather opt for the occasional equivalent: «Un*ë* u diplomova n*ë* Nju Hev*ë*n n*ë* 1930».

The same goes for phraseological equivalents. 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 somebody" are usually translated by the Albanian idioms «nuk ja vlen barra qeranë» and «te vesh koken ne rrezik per dike», 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. "*to get up on the wrong side of the bed*" —«t*ë* zgjohesh me nerva». Now an English idiom may have several Albanian 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 «*Sipas vendit bej kuvendin*», and in other contexts differently. 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: «Sillu ne Rome ashtu si sillen romaket».

Semantic dissimilarity of analogous structures in SL and TL also result in SL structures having several equivalents in TL. For instance, attributive groups are common both in English & Albanian: "*a green tree*"—« një pemë e gjelbërt/jeshile». As often as not the English attributive group is used to convey various adverbial ideas of location, purpose, cause, etc. Consider such groups as "Madrid trial" (location), "profits drive" (purpose), "war suffering" (cause). Such groups may also express various action-object relationships. Ex: labour movement" (movement by the workers), "labour raids" (raids against the workers), and "labour spies" (spies among the workers).

A word within an attributive group may sometimes alter its meaning. So, "war rehabilitation" is, in fact, rehabilitation of economy after the war, that is, "post-war rehabilitation".

As a result, many attributive groups are translated in a different way in different contexts. "War prosperity" may mean "prosperity during the war" or "prosperity in the post-war period caused by the war". 'The Berlin proposals" may imply "proposals made in Berlin" (say, at an international conference), "proposals made by Berlin" (i.e. by the FRG), "proposal on Berlin" (of political, economic or other nature).

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 "Common Law" and the like. Some grammar forms and categories may also be equivalent-lacking. (The English gerund, article or absolute participle construction which have no counterparts in Albanian.)

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 — tribalizëm*.

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* — dyqan artikujsh të përzier [amer.]/ farmaci. The Albanian «farmaci» 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 an explanation to convey the meaning of the SL unit, e.g. *landslide -* shkarje toke [gjeol.];or lumë votash [polit.] *, brinkmanship* — politikë e lojës me zjarrin.

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.

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 Albanian. 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. ; to see eye-to-eye with smb.*

Equivalent-lacking grammatical forms give less trouble to the translator. Here occasional substitutes can be classified under three main headings, namely:

1. Zero translations when the meaning of the grammatical unit is not rendered in the translation since it is practically identical to the meaning of some other unit and can be safely left out. In the sentence "*By that time he had already left Britain*" — "Ne ate kohe ai sa ishte larguar nga Anglia" the idea of priority expressed by the Past Perfect Tense needn't be separately reproduced in TT as it is made superfluous by the presence of "by that time" and "already".

2. Approximate translations when the translator makes use of a TL form partially equivalent to the equivalent-lacking SL unit, e.g.: *I saw him enter the room* — E pashë që hyri në dhomë. The Albanian language has no complex objects of this type but the meaning of the object clause is a sufficient approximation.

3. Transformational translation when the translator resorts to one of the grammatical transformations e.g.: *Your presence at the meeting is not obligatory. Nor is it desirable* — Prania jote në takim nuk është as e detyrueshme, as e dëshirueshme.

As has been emphasized, equivalents are not mechanical substitutes for SL units but they may come handy as a starting point in search of adequate translation. The translator will much profit if he knows many permanent equivalents, is good at selecting among variable equivalents and resourceful at creating occasional equivalents, taking into account all contextual factors.

As a conclusion, we should take into consideration every single rule mentioned above and others not mentioned, in order to have a good piece of translation.

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