

THE PROBLEM OF EQUIVALENCE IN IGBO LANGUAGE TRANSLATION

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Abstract

Igbo language is the indigenous language of the Igbo people spoken in South Eastern Nigeria. The language is a tonal language classified under Niger-Congo/Benue –Congo language classification. It is also a dialectal language with varying terms that usually take the same form but differ in meaning. These differences also occur in Igbo translation. Also most problems in translation are related to meaning and meaning is the central core of translation. The translator faces the linguistic, semantic and cultural aspects of untranslatability and how to cope with equivalence. This paper seeks to address the problem of equivalence in Igbo language translation using different translation methods. Certain concepts would be translated to effectively portray and reflect retention of meaning in cases where there are no equivalent terms in Igbo Language.

Introduction

Equivalence is an important notion in translation theory. Therefore, theorists in the field of translation studies are interested in studying and examining this notion in order to discover its effect on the way a translator deals with a text. Equivalence refers to balancing both the sides of the equation. Translation is a linguistic activity where the translator tries to find equivalence between two languages at levels of words and structures and between two cultures. The essence of translation is basically to pass a certain message across to other people from different language boundary aside the original text language. When the context or the similar meaning or information is not well communicated, the essence of the translation is defeated.

In the words of Xiang (2011), since translation in essence is a kind of communication, equivalence between the source text and the target text naturally becomes an essential requirement. It is generally agreed that the fundamental requirement of any kind of communication is to guarantee that the message is adequately transmitted from the source to the receptor. Similarly, in translation, the translator should try his best to reproduce the

closest equivalent message of the original text in the target text so that the target text reader can understand the source message adequately; otherwise, translation as a kind of communication would end in failure. Therefore, it might be safe to say that the essence of translation as a kind of communication calls for the necessity of equivalence in translation. Equivalence is undoubtedly one of the most challenging and contentious areas in the field of translation theory. The term has been triggering heated debates within the field of translation studies but these debates are totally overlooked in practice (Alfaori, 2017).

Since languages are structurally different from each other, finding equivalence at times is not only difficult but impossible too. In reality, the act of translation is complex because of the lack of total equivalence between two languages and the cultures. The translator has to look for formal, semantic, stylistic, theoretical, pragmatic and associative equivalence in the target language. This is demanding because equivalence between two languages and cultures is impossible to find, even among sister language like Marath and Hinda (Indian languages) where the main culture is the same, translation from one into another is not always easy. Though it is a difficult task, it is not impossible because of the concept of languages universal. Each language has nouns, tense and other aspects which make translation possible.

In language like Igbo where issues pertaining equivalence have been on increase, whereby translators get along with different opinions of one particular item or content which has become hitch to close translation. We will consider the problem of equivalence in Igbo language translation.

Concept of Translation

Translation is interdisciplinary in nature and has been called different names by different scholars. The word 'translation' has the prefix 'trans', meaning 'going across'. So, we have words like transcendental, transcultural, transnational etc. It conveys the inherent meaning. Etymologically, it refers to the concept of 'transfer'. Translation is the production in the target language of the closest natural equivalence to the message of the source language first to meaning and then to style. Nida (1982) calls it "the science of translation"; Goffin (in Baker, 1998) gave it a widely acclaimed name of "Translation studies". Xiang (2011) in his work mentions "Translation as a science." "Translation as an art.", "Translation as a language activity." Etc.

Translation is a natural term used for all tasks where the meaning of the expressions in one language is turned into the meaning of another whether the

medium is spoken, written or signed (Crystal, 1987). It is the transfer of thoughts and ideas from one language (source) to another (target), whether the languages are in written or oral form, or whether the languages have established orthographics or do not have such standardization (Brislin, 1976). Translation is reproducing the text of one language into another. It refers to reproducing the message (Nida, 1969).

Translation is substituting or replacement of message of one text into another. In translation the form of the source language is replaced by the form of the target language (Catford, 1985). Translation is rendering of meaning (Newmark, 1981).

Al-zarqani (1998) in Alfaori (2017) argues that translation is an act of transferring a text with all its meanings and objectives from one language to another. This idea of transferring the different meanings and objectives of a given text imposes an important question that the researcher tries to answer in this paper. Is translation a process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another? Alfaori (2017). After reviewing the related literature and by analyzing different translated passages from Arabic and English, it shows that translation is not a mere substitution of texts among languages.

Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2014, refutes the definition and assumption of Alfaori (2017) and Al-zarqani (1998) translation is broadly defined as the *rendering of a message or information* from one language (Source Language) into another language (Target Language). In other words, it is the establishing of the semantic - or meaning - equivalence between a *SL text*, or more precisely, *discourse*, and a *TL discourse*. Translation is *not* the substitution of one TL word/phrase/sentence for one SL word/phrase/sentence. It is the *re-creation of a whole SL discourse* in a (similar or comparable) TL context, and uttered/written with *a similar function* and *a similar communicative intention*. Translation, as any other communicative content, invariably involves the *re-conceptualization* of the original SL information into the TL context- and addressee-mediated message. Several other definitions include;

Tanke, the Director of the Translation Institute at Siemens, defines translation as "the process of communication in which the translator is interposed between a transmitter and a receiver who use different languages to carry out a code conversion between them." (Huang Long 1988: 18) , and later he improves it as "transfer of a text from a source language into a text in target language, the objective being a perfect equivalence of meaning between the two texts." (Huang Long: 18)

From Newmark's perspective, he defines translation as "rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text." (Newmark 1988: 5)

Nida 1982 defines translation as "reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style." (p. 12)

In the traditional definition by Huang: "the process of transfer of message expressed in a source language into a message expressed in a target language, with maximization of the equivalence of one or several levels of content of the message...." (Huang Long: 19)

As can be easily seen in the above, no matter how translation is defined, the concept of equivalence is inseparable and is implied in one way or the other. In a sense, each of the above definitions is constructed round the basic concept of equivalence. Even in the words Newmark (1988), whereby the translator is meant to know the intention of the author to be able to do a good translation work. To this, it entails that the translator ought not to add or remove from what the author has stated; rather finding the reason for the writing and reduplicating it using another language medium. Equivalence has to do with exactness or sameness of something even when presented in another form. As that is the case, we will consider the concept of equivalence and then consider the problem facing Igbo language translators on the matter of equivalence.

2.1 Types of Equivalence

Odero(2017)and other scholars discuss a number of types of equivalence. The sections that follow present brief descriptions of the types of equivalence.

a. Equivalence at word level: A word is commonly defined as the basic meaningful element in a language. It may contain more than one element of meaning. However, even a unit smaller than a word, a morpheme, may convey meaning. Equivalence at word level is the first element to be taken into consideration by the translator in order to find a direct 'equivalent' term in the TL. The translator should pay attention to a number of factors such as tense, gender, and number when considering a single word (Baker 1992).

b. Equivalence above word level: The combination of words is not random. Each language imposes certain restrictions on the combinations of words as to how they can be combined to convey meaning. Some restrictions are written

down in the form of rules. These apply to classes of words and admit no exceptions.

c. Grammatical equivalence: This refers to the diversity of grammatical categories across languages. Certain grammatical categories may or may not be expressed in different languages and this influences the translation process. The lack of certain grammatical devices in the TL may cause changes in conveying the message. Amongst the grammatical devices which may cause problems in translation, Baker (1992) focuses on voice, tense, aspect, number, gender and person.

d. Textual equivalence: This is the equivalence between a SL text and a TL text in terms of cohesion and coherence. Being able to detect these features in the SL text helps the translator to convey them adequately in the TL text since they provide useful guidelines for the comprehension and analysis of the ST.

e. Pragmatic equivalence: This refers to what is implied rather than what is explicit. The translator's role is to transfer the author's intention in another culture in such a way that enables the target culture reader to understand it clearly.

f. Dynamic equivalence: Nida's *Science of Translating* states that the most important fact in translation is that the message should go through. The emphasis is on the TT receiver and to achieve this, translators need to be free in their style. Since the general context of the message is the priority, the foreign elements in the text are eliminated by rearranging the TT structure and word order, sentence order, by modifying or replacing some parts of speech (e.g. noun-pronoun, verb-noun, adjective-verb etc). Consequently, the translator leaves the author of the ST in peace and focuses more on satisfying the target audience. This approach is, sometimes, called the close natural equivalence of the ST.

g. Formal equivalence: This is also known as word for word translation. Preference is given to the SL text. The translator seeks to reflect the content and form of the ST in the TT as closely as possible. This is achieved through grammatical units such as the use of words and sense of terms i.e. the translator translates verb for verb, noun for noun, thus maintaining the sentence and paragraph boundaries and in the end, the ST foreignness is brought into the TT.

h. Directional equivalence: Kade (1968) highlights four types of directional equivalence. These were observed to include:

- Zero equivalence: one unit ST = Zero unit of TT e.g English 'incubator' has no unit in Kiswahili.
- Total equivalence: one unit ST = One unit of TT e.g English 'law' has 'sheria' in Kiswahili.
- Approximate equivalence: one unit ST = Two units of TT e.g Kiswahili 'mshtakiwa' has 'accused' and 'defendant' in English. French 'ciel' has 'sky' and 'heaven' in English.
- Optional equivalence: one unit ST = Many units of TT e.g Kiswahili 'utaratibu' has 'regulation, procedure, schedule, process' in English. English 'Voltage' has 'tension électrique, puissance électrique, courant électrique or énergie électrique' in French.

i. Functional equivalence: In translation of communication acts between experts, the first and foremost aim is to ensure that the translation has the same communicative function as the ST.

Equivalence Problem in Translation

We always come across contradictory statements that in translation, we translate the meaning of the message by finding equivalents in both the languages and the cultures. We are also told that total equivalence is impossible to find in any two languages. Nida (1975) talks about two types of equivalence- of formal and dynamic. In formal equivalence, attention is paid to the message in both form and content. It covers grammatical units, word usage and meaning in terms of source content. Here, noun is translated as noun and verb is translated as verb. The focus is more on literal meaning. So, a poem is translated as a poem-sentence to sentence and concept to concept with focus on accuracy and correctness. If reproduction of literal expression and cultural meaning is different, then the translator explains the glossed meaning in marginal notes. Dynamic equivalence focuses on the principle of equivalence effect. It covers bilingual and bicultural aspects, meaning and the intent of the SL text, and natural rendering in TL culture as a whole is emphasized. This sounds simple but in practice it is very difficult. The translator has to face a number of problems while finding translation equivalence. We must remember that "meaning" is the central core of translation and is related to meaning. A translator is always in a dilemma whether to go for literal or for free translation. This also depends on the genre of the text. In literature, especially in poetry, we come across suggestive meaning which is expressed through different images,

symbols and other figures of speech. This differs from language to language and culture to culture. Bhartrhari (quoted by Gopinathan) very aptly says that 'Sentence is the prime basis of meaning and not the word; the word becomes meaningful only when it is used in sentence, context, etymology, appropriateness, time and place, association, contrast, gender, collocation, its power of expressing the meaning, the speaker and the tone'. Due to the lack of semantic correspondence in two languages, it is difficult to express the core of the meaning if we go for literal translation.

Strategies of Solving the Problems of Linguistic Equivalence in LSP

Because of linguistic dependence in the process of transferring a message from a source language to the target audience, some theorists have come up with approaches to handle issues of equivalence. Examples include: *stylistique comparée* which include; borrowing, calque/loaning, and *traduction littérale*/word for word, Nida's dynamic and formal equivalence, Kade's directional equivalence, Newmark's linguistic shifts and others.

The approaches are hereby briefly discussed in the sections that follow.

a. Borrowing: It entails transferring an SL word to a TL. This is used when the TL does not have a lexicalized correspondence. E.g. *coup d'état*, *rendezvous*, menu in English and weekend/ *wikendi* for Kiswahili.

b. Loan/Calque: This literally means to copy. Here, a copy of an SL word or expression is made into the TL using literal translation of its elements. The translator/interpreter here imitates in his text or speech the structure or manner of expression of the SL. For example, the champions league in English translates into *la ligue des champions* in French.

c. Word-for-word translation: It ranges from Word to word to sentence to sentence:

i. Word to word/ group of words to group of words

ii. Collocation to collocation

iii. Clause to clause

iv. Sentence to sentence

d. Transposition: This reflects the grammatical changes from the SL to the TL (singular-plural, Noun-verb, Noun-adjective, etc). This is used as a way to replace a lexical gap.

e. Modulation: It refers to a change in point of view that allows the interpreter/translator to express the same phenomenon in a different way. This can be seen in cases where, for instance, the positive is used to express the negative.

f. Equivalence: This is the situation whereby a TL statement is substituted for one expressing the same situation when there is no formal semantic

correspondence to render a phrase from a SL with a set of phrase in the TL which expresses the same idea. For example;

Too many cooks spoil the broth translates into *deux patrons font chavirer la barque* in French.

This can also be demonstrated in the following translation in Kiswahili;

Ability is wealth = *Akili ni Mali* (Kiswahili).

g. Adaptation: Here, the translator/interpreter creates a new situation because the event in the

SL is unknown to the TL culture. For example, 'the rule of law' translated into *Un état de droit* -constitutional state, state of law.

Equivalence in Igbo language

We will present certain Igbo words, phrases which do not have direct equivalence with English and possible ways the translators have been going about in solving the problem in their various translation exercises.

English words	Igbo Equivalent
1. Table	tebulu
2. Photo	foto
3. Radio	igwe okwu redio
4. Window	window
5. Microsoft	maikrosɔftu
6. Tank	tanki
7. Purple	pɔpuul
8. Flower	fɔlawawa
9. Balcony	balukoni
10. Ball	bɔlu
11. Television	televishonu
12. Bucket	bokeeti
13. Engine	injini
14. Computer	komputa

15. Astrology	Astròlòji
16. office	òfisi
17. Fiction	fikshònu
18. Linguistic	lingwistiiki
19. Oxygen	òsijinù
20. Geology	jiòlòji
21. Morphology	mofòlòji
22. Fan	faanù
23. Catholic	katòlik
24. Trouser	tùraùza
25. Towel	tòwelù
26. Politics	Politks/ndòròndòrò òchìchì
27. Dictionary	dikishònari
28. Snow	suno
29. Laptop	laputòpu
30. Cement	simentì
31. Module	moduulu
32. Fertilizer	fatìlajza
33. Biology	Baiòlògi
34. Physics	Fiziks
35. Chemistry	Kemìstri
36. Geography	Jeogurafi
37. Tonado	tonado
38. Bishop	Bishòpu
39. Alumni	alumunaj

40. Diocese	Dajosis
41. Commissioner	Komishona
42. Minister of Labour	Minista nke Oru
43. Arts	Aati
44. Journal	jonalu
45. Committee	komitii
46. Congratulations	konguratuleshon
47. Have it at the back of your mind	Buru ya n'uche
48. Pork nosing	isu imi/itinye onu n'ihe agbasaghi mmadu
49. It is raining cats and dogs	Mmiri na-ezo nke ukwu
50. Kick the bucket	gbaa bokeeti ukwu/nwuo

In translating data from English to Igbo language, translators have found it difficult in allocating the equivalent of many words or phrases. This is because there are no established or centralized equivalents given to those English words or phrases. So, to that effect and also to keep on with the translation exercise and also to maintain the equivalence or the original author's intention as being defined by several authors, the translators apply some translation techniques. In the above presented data, it could be observed that the English words/phrases do not have direct Igbo equivalence. In other to get the problem solved at the course of the translation, techniques in translation are applied. The techniques used in the data above are adaptation, use of calque and naturalization. There are also observed lexical gaps which lead to language expansion i.e. borrowing & loaning. For idiomatic expressions where the translation is not word for word, the translator also finds it difficult to place the equivalence. Meanwhile, some of the idioms are pragmatically decoded as in the example 50. The statement has two different realizations in Igbo language but could be decoded only through the context. For the expression in 47, 'back of mind' could not possibly be 'n'azu uche' but the 'back' seems to be dropped as it serves as emphasis in English language whereas it is not recognized in Igbo translations. This study is a thrown challenge to the linguists and language experts for the creation of suitable terminologies, equivalence to the listed words as the languages of the world evolve which involves addition of new

words in the vocabulary of the languages. Igbo should also catch up with the development of her vocabulary which will assist the translators in doing a good job and not perpetually engaging in the popular 'Igbonization' of the English words/phrases.

Conclusion

It could be seen that equivalence has been a challenge in the course of translation as some translators battle to get what ought to be the central equivalence of the English words in the Igbo language. Equivalence in translation cannot be interpreted as identity in terms of its scientific sense. As we know, there are no words that have exactly the same meaning in one language. Quite naturally, no two words in any two languages are absolutely identical in meaning. As far as the whole text is concerned, it is simply impossible to transfer all the message of the original text into the target text. Therefore, equivalence in translation can only be understood as a kind of similarity or approximation. This means that equivalence between the source text and the target text can be established on different levels and in different aspects. As one of the three principal concepts in Western translation theory, equivalence is a constitutive feature and the guiding principle of translation. Without equivalence of certain degrees or in certain aspects, the translated text cannot be regarded as a successful translation of the original text. In short, equivalence is of absolute necessity in and a basic requirement of translation. As Catford contends, it is the central problem of translation-practice. (Catford, 1965:21).

In conclusion, finding linguistic equivalence calls for different approaches to translation and also interpretation. Even though one could suggest level-semantic translation which may not apply to words or phrases which are not realized on word to word basis; so there is need for development of not just terminologies for different contexts but also approaches to them. Also, cultural and socio-cultural background should also be considered in the development of the terminologies so they can mean the same thing as the ideas or intentions of the original author.

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