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Lecture 03

Dynamic equivalence: Characteristics and Advantages

I. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PRINCIPLE OF DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCE

In his work "Toward a Science of Translating," Nida initially introduced the principle of dynamic equivalence, defining it as "the relationship between receptor and message should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the message" (Nida, 1964, p.159). According to this principle, dynamic-equivalence (D-E) translation is defined as "the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message" (Nida, 1964, p.166). Understanding the merits of this principle requires an exploration of its fundamental features and the nature of D-E translation.

As Nida outlines, the essential features of D-E translation include:

1. **Equivalence:** This refers to reproducing the message of the original text. It is the fundamental requirement of D-E translation, similar to other forms of translation. Essentially, to create a D-E translation, the translator must prioritize conveying the meaning of the original text. Anything else would deviate from the translator's task, as translation fundamentally serves as a form of communication (Nida and Taber, 1982).

These points collectively aim to evoke a "similar response" between readers of the source text and readers of the target text.

B. Natural

In dynamic-equivalence (D-E) translation, the primary aim is to elicit a similar response as that of the original text. Achieving this goal necessitates naturalness in the translation, as it plays a crucial role in evoking a response akin to that of the original readers. To be natural, the equivalent forms should not appear "foreign" in either form or meaning, ensuring that the translation does not betray its non-native origin (Nida, 1975). Nida emphasizes that naturalness in D-E translation must align with three aspects: (1) the overall language and culture of the

target audience, (2) the context of the specific message, and (3) the audience of the target language (Nida, 1964). He further asserts that the ideal translation should seamlessly integrate with the target language and culture, devoid of any awkwardness or semblance of "translationese," which compromises fidelity to the content and impact of the message (Nida and Taber, 1982).

C. Closest

The term "closest" in dynamic equivalence holds a dual significance. Firstly, it acknowledges that absolute identity in translation equivalence is unattainable, as inherent losses occur in all forms of communication, whether involving translation or not (Bassnett and Lefvere, 1990). Translation can only approximate equivalence since languages differ in their symbol meanings and structural arrangements. Consequently, while a translation may closely approximate the original, there can never be identity in every detail. Secondly, recognizing that equivalence in translation is inherently approximate, it opens the possibility of establishing equivalence between the source and target texts to varying degrees or in different aspects. Nevertheless, D-E translation aims for the highest possible degree of equivalence. In essence, despite inevitable loss of meaning, the translator endeavors to minimize it to the greatest extent possible.

D. Aim for Similar Response

The primary objective of dynamic-equivalence (D-E) translation is to elicit a similar response from the audience, and all preceding points contribute to achieving this aim. In this context, "response" refers to how readers comprehend a text and the effects it has on them. "Similar response" involves comparing two relationships: the connection between the readers of the target text and the target text itself should closely mirror that between the readers of the source text and the source text. Essentially, readers of the target text should not only grasp the content as the readers of the source text did but also appreciate some of the impact and appeal that the source text had on its readers (Jin Di and Nida, 1984).

II. ADVANTAGES OF THE PRINCIPLE OF DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCE

Translation, fundamentally, serves as a form of communication, with its primary objective being to facilitate understanding for the target reader. The quality of a translation largely hinges on whether the target reader comprehends the original message sufficiently. However, traditional evaluation methods, which predominantly focus on lexical and grammatical correspondence between source and target languages, can be misleading (Nida, 1993). Given that translation is a communicative act, assessing adequacy solely through lexical and grammatical comparisons overlooks crucial aspects. Instead, evaluation should encompass the reader's response, comparing how the original audience engaged with the source text to how the translated audience engages with the translated text (Nida, 1993, p.116).

Considering the readers' response and striving for similarity between the responses of the source text readers and those of the target text readers offers several merits:

A. Rationality of Considering Reader's Response

Given that translation aims primarily for reader comprehension, it's logical to consider how readers interpret the translation and compare their response to that of the source text readers. Only when the responses align can the translation be deemed adequate. Neglecting reader response in evaluation can lead to misinterpretation. It's essential to recognize that a translation may seem lexically and grammatically equivalent to the original text but could distort its meaning, as illustrated in the following example taken from the Chinese culture:

A. *She is a cat.*

B. *She is a woman who harbors evil intentions.*

At first glance, Version A appears to closely resemble the original sentence in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and other aspects. However, it lacks equivalence in meaning, which is the fundamental goal of translation. In Western culture, cats are often associated with sinister connotations, being viewed as symbols of evil and serving as familiars to witches during the Middle Ages. Thus, the word "cat" is commonly used metaphorically to denote a deceitful or ill-tempered woman. Consequently, the original reader would not interpret "she is a cat" literally but would perceive it as implying wickedness. To evoke a similar response, Version B accurately translates this sentiment as "**She is a woman who harbors evil intentions**" aligning with the original meaning.

Professor Jin Di underscores the importance of considering readers' responses in translation. While traditional approaches focus on the relationship between source and target texts, dynamic equivalence introduces a crucial dimension by emphasizing the relationship between readers and the respective texts. It recognizes that translation is not merely about signs, but about how verbal signs convey meaning to readers. Therefore, discussions about translational adequacy and acceptability are most meaningful within this context.

In essence, accounting for readers' responses ensures the faithful reproduction of the original message and establishes true equivalence between the source and target texts.

B. Shifting Away from the Literal versus Free Translation Debate

The translation community has long grappled with the question of whether to prioritize literal translation or free translation. Some argue fervently for a literal approach, while others advocate for freedom in translation. This ongoing debate appears to have no resolution in sight, as the two viewpoints remain fundamentally opposed. However, it is unproductive to argue for one over the other, as both literal and free translation methods possess their own merits and limitations. Instead, a more constructive approach, in the author's view, is to address this issue from a different angle and propose a translation principle that effectively integrates both approaches.

In this regard, the principle of dynamic equivalence emerges as a viable solution to circumvent the debate. By emphasizing the importance of eliciting a similar response, dynamic equivalence suggests that any translation method, whether literal or free, can be deemed

adequate if it achieves the desired response. Consequently, the debate between literal and free translation becomes somewhat irrelevant, and the choice between them hinges on their respective abilities to produce the "closest natural equivalent" and evoke a "substantially the same response."

Sometimes, a literal translation proves adequate and can evoke a similar response in the target readers as that of the original readers. This is especially true when languages share similar wordplays, nearly identical proverbs, or parallel rhetorical structures. However, in general, achieving the "closest natural equivalent" and eliciting a "substantially the same response" is more likely through free translation. Nonetheless, it's crucial to exercise caution regarding the extent of freedom in free translation. The goal of free translation should be to enhance the conveyance of the original message and evoke a similar response without sacrificing the essence of the original text. This is because the primary objective of translation is to effectively convey the message of the source text. A translation that fails to achieve this is not considered successful; at best, it may be viewed as a creative adaptation or rephrasing.

C. Liberating the Translator from the Constraints of the Original Verbal Form to Enhance Translatability

Languages possess unique characteristics, with each having its own idiosyncrasies. Sometimes, certain language usages are specific to a particular language. In such instances, a translator who rigidly adheres to the original verbal form may find themselves inadequate. However, by shifting focus away from the verbal form and prioritizing the elicitation of a similar response, translators can sometimes find solutions to challenging translation tasks.

III. Conclusion

Translation fundamentally serves as a form of communication, with its primary objective being to establish equivalence between the source text and the target text. Various principles of translation equivalence have been proposed, among which Eugene A. Nida's principle of dynamic equivalence stands out for its merits. This principle prioritizes creating "the closest natural equivalent" of the source language message and aims to elicit "substantially the same response" from both source text readers and target text readers. By emphasizing similar response between readers, dynamic equivalence suggests that any translation method is adequate as long as it achieves this objective. As a result, it liberates the translator from the constraints of the linguistic form of the source text, thereby enhancing translatability to a certain degree.