Lexico-Semantic Translation: Yorubaphone, Francophone and Anglophone Perspectives

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Abstract

The ability to translate is not always derived from the understanding of the meaning of the word but the ability to find a corresponding equivalence in the target language. Most researches in translation studies have focused on the linguistic meaning and the problems arising from such translations. It is against this background that this paper seeks to investigate some difficulties encountered in the process of translating lexical and semantic phenomena within Yorubaphone, Francophone and Anglophone space. Drawing on the linguistic approach to translation, which foregrounds the centrality of lexical and semantic relationship in translation, this study discusses some difficulties in finding lexical and semantic correspondence while translating from Source Text to Target Text. Data were randomly sampled and the paper adopts a qualitative method for data analysis. Data were critically analysed using the dynamic equivalence translation theory which proposes the closest natural equivalence of a source text in the target text. The study concludes that a translator mostly recourses to direct translation such as literal translation, borrowing or calque or he may resort to oblique (indirect) translation which consists of modulation, adaptation, transposition and equivalence in order to convey appropriate message in translation.

Keywords: Translation, Linguistic Approach to Translation, Lexis, Semantics, Equivalence in Translation.

Introduction

Translation

Translation is an ancient act that thrives on the plurilinguistic nature of human society; it is as old as the oldest literate civilisation of man. However, in modern times, because of the magnitude of international communication, translation as a subject has assumed scientific dimensions. Thus, it is of interest not only to linguists, but also to diplomats and scientists, and indeed to everyone who has to deal with more than one language. The major problem of translation is the fact that languages differ sometimes radically from each other especially as far as their surface structures are concerned.

The word translation is from the Latin "Translatio" that is, "transfer". This attests to the crucial transference of word and meaning. Contemporarily, translation can imply a product, a process or an act of translating. In this study, translation is conceived as an act that involves a process of reflection on variety of choices available for a translator.

Translation has witnessed a tremendous growth in the modern times due to the globalization of the world economy. It has become useful in the transfer of information which is enhanced by the advancement in technological innovations. In the domain of news, translation

has been useful in multilingual dissemination of news. For instance, information media such as television, social media, blogs, the BBC, Al Jazeera International all depend on translation of their news to other languages. Translation has been seen to be important in the concept of localization. This concept aims at adapting a product of a source culture to the receptor culture. Localization is particularly advantageous in the advertisement of a product of a source culture in the target culture as it boosts sales of products. Thus for products to become available in target culture, localization through translation is indispensable. We can see that translation has come to stay in order to enhance the globalization of the world economy.

Another factor for the increase in translation needs is in the area of e-learning. People can learn the same topic in different languages through translation.

Linguistic Approaches to Translation

Linguistic approaches involved in translation are as numerous as scholars who have propounded them. In most cases the types of definitions that have been given seem to have been influenced by the types of material they worked with and their different audiences.

According to Peter Newmark (1982:7), one of the pioneers in Translation studies, "Translation is a craft consisting in the attempt to replace a written message and /or a statement in one language by the same message and or statement or another language". Newmark does not consider the form of text as important as the content in this definition.

In his own view, Eugene Nida (1982:12) defines translation "as a process of reproducing in the Receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the message of the source language, first in terms of meaning, second in terms of style".

For Nida therefore, the content is not only important but the form too.

Still defining Translation, Ghazala (1995:1) posits that "Translation is generally used to refer to all process and methods used to convey the meaning of the source language into the target language". This implies all forms of styles and techniques have to be employed in the translation process.

Another view of translation expressed by Adeyefa (2017), quoting Bassnett-Mc Guire asserts that

> translation has to do with the rendering of a source language into a target language text in a way that ensures that the surface meaning of the two texts will be approximately similar or such a way that the structures of the source language text are preserved as closely as possible, but not so closely as to seriously disarray the structures of the target language.

This view indicates that the primary meaning of a text is the most important while other structures that may not bring a complete change in meaning can be left out.

From the above, the view of Translation as expressed by Eugene Nida seems appropriate for consideration for this study. The translator is constantly under pressure on how to resolve the conflict between content and form. If he attempts to pay attention to the stylistic qualities of the original, he may end up losing much of the meaning whereas, if he strictly keeps to the literal equivalent of the content, stylistic flavor may not only be affected but meaning may also

suffer since the meaning of an utterance is not always derived from the individual words that make it.

Equivalence in Translation

Finding equivalence in translation is not always an easy task but the translator has to strive to provide one even though languages differ in their surface structures. According to Lawrence Venuti (2012) referring to Nida there are no two identical languages. In other words, absolute equivalence between languages cannot be achieved in translation. The translation can be very close to the source text however, the translation of certain details may not be achieved.

Furthermore on equivalence, Jenny Williams reaffirms Catford's view that for equivalent to be achievable, there must be a suitable condition in both the source text and the target text. He opines that that 'equivalence occurs when the TL text or items shares at least some of the same features of the situation and context of the SL text or item' (2013:31).

Meaning in Translation

In the translation process, semantics (study of meaning) plays a major role in determining the meanings of messages across languages while Lexis lays emphasis on the words a language employs. This is because words are indispensable tools without which no meaningful discussion would be achieved.

According to Hurford & Heasley (1983:1) "Semantics concerns the study of meaning as communicated through language". Over the ages, many arguments have been advanced as to what *Meaning* is. The topic of meaning is not only of interest to linguists but it is also of interest to other social discipline such as Naturalism, Behaviorism, Psycholinguistics, and Sociology and so on. Each of these disciplines has specific conceptions and interpretation of meaning.

The examination of the interplay between linguistic and translation vis-à-vis meaning explication in literary usage is avowed by scholars. Alston (1964:32) for example, opines that "the meaning of an expression is what it stands for". Proponents of this theory do not seem to give an adequate account of what meaning is unless it is true that all meaningful linguistic expressions do refer to something .Contrary to this position, some linguists assert that, for meaning to be derived from any linguistic expression, the lexical meaning (meaning of the word) is important. This opinion is expressed by Komlev (1976:17) that Meaning is "the connection established by a body of speakers between the sound cluster and certain phenomena of reality". However, "sound clusters" do not necessarily associate with reality. In other words, every word cannot be said to have a meaning. Besides, our knowledge of every word does not determine the meaning of an expression. What, for instance, is the semantic content of the sentence: 'He is our father'? The subject of the sentence could be a head of a household (that is, he shares the same biological make-up with other members of the household) that is, a man who shows fatherly affection to another person. In another context, it may even refer to God in a situation when a preacher is presenting a message on the pulpit. In the same vein, 'he is our father' politically, the subject may imply a contextual representation of god fatherism, most especially when it has to do with unethical power relation among some political lords.

Similarly, the use of collocations does not often prove helpful in defining the meaning of an expression. A collocation as Peter Newmark (1982:114) posits, "consists of two or three

words usually linked by grammatical (empty, functional, relational) words. The collocates within a collocation in most part delimit each other by eliminating at least some of their possible meanings". The meaning of one collocate in a collocation overshadows the meaning of the other collocates. Consider the collocation 'up and doing'; Here, the number of senses in which 'up' can be used is reduced to one- that of 'doing'. Similarly, the collocate 'doing' overshadows the meaning of 'up' thus, the simple meaning of this collocation implies 'busy doing something.' Meanings of collocations like; 'subir une perte' in French and its English equivalent ' suffer a loss', 'se porter comme un charme' in French and the English version 'hale and hearty','sain et sauf' in French and its English equivalent 'safe and sound' cannot be determined from the lexical items. There are also combinations of words in English and French languages whose meanings cannot be determined from the single lexical items. This is true of figurative expressions. Consider this statement: 'tomber amoureux' in French and its English equivalent 'to fall in love'. This expression cannot be divided to separate units of meaning since it conveys such meaning as 'to love'.

In the process of translation, it often happens that some measures of meaning are lost while the translator strives to achieve semantic or lexical equivalence of the source text in the target text. This is because as Tiwiyanti, L. and Retnomorti, A.B (2016) opine, the source language may have a concept which is totally foreign to the target culture. These phenomena may be religious or beliefs. Similarly, some gain in translation may occur if the target language renders in a more explicit way what the source language does not express clearly. The phenomena of loss and gain can be seen in the area of lexis, semantics, syntax and even style in the translation process. From the above explanation, meaning in translation depends to a large extent on the context in which a word is used.

Lexis in Translation

Lexis, in a general view is the study of words in a language. Lexis is as important as Meaning since without lexical items (words) meaning cannot be inferred. Since languages do not employ words in the same manner, the implication in the translation process is that problems of lexical equivalence may arise.

In his definition, Mario Pei (1966:295) refers to word as:

> a speech sound or a series of speech sounds symbolising and communicating meaning without being divisible into smaller units capable of independent use..., the spoken or written symbol of an idea regarded as the smallest unit of speech and language..., the smallest unit capable of functioning as a complete utterance. This suggests that word is crucial in the translation process.

It is a common practice for translators to find words or expressions which designate objects or experiences common to man such as the sun, the moon, the earth, parts of the human body and common human activities. These objects and activities tend to have common terms. There are still however, great differences even in these areas. French for example, employs the word 'ciel' for 'heaven' and 'sky'. Likewise, Yoruba language uses 'idanwo' for 'temptation' and 'examination' respectively. Susan Bassnett (2002:30) for instance, identifies several interpretations of the word 'esprit' in French. 'Esprit' in French can be rendered with the

following meanings; demons, angels, God/god, gremlins, fairies, sprites, part of a personality, ghost, liveliness/animation, ethos of group, intent, meaning as of a document, alcohol.

For the translator, therefore, his choice of lexical equivalence depends on the source language compared with the resources of the receptor-language. As Mario Pei (1966:295) opines, lexis is the "primary or intrinsic meaning of a word" and "the special shades of meaning… that a form has for its individual users respectively". In other words the translator may first determine the denotative and connotative use of words as well as figurative use of words in a language.

The following examples further illustrate this aspect of the use of words in a language:

  a. He has a chair
  b. He will chair the meeting.

In sentence (a), the denotative meaning of 'chair' is an object on which one can sit while in sentence (b) 'chair' has a figurative meaning, that is, one who directs a meeting. Similarly, prepositions like; 'into', 'at', and 'by' each has a meaning. One of the meanings of 'at' for instance is 'in the direction of'. We can thus, speak of an expression or a word as denoting or connoting only when it makes a sense as applying or referring to something.

The translator will also need to consider words which have many meanings and those that have restricted meanings. In Yoruba language for example, the word 'òwò' has the following meanings: "respect" as well as a name of Yoruba town.

In some situations when the translator finds it difficult to achieve a formal equivalence, he may resort to some other translation techniques like Modulation technique which Vinay and Darbelnet (1988:88) define as "a variation through a change of viewpoint, of perspective (*éclairage*) and very often of category of thought." Consider this example in French and English; 'Il est facile à savoir' becomes 'It is not difficult to know'. When a translator employs modulation technique, there is the assumption that the signified (the object referred to) remains the same in both languages, only that its expression is peculiar in the two languages or cultures.

Another technique to which the translator may recourse is *Adaptation*. Tareq Ali Eadaroos Assaqaf (2016) further expatiate on Adaptation as a translation that requires a number of modifications such that the target languages be in harmony with the intention of the source text. If a translator resorts to adaptation technique, he may attempt to literally embark on a dynamic equivalence which, according to Dohum Kim: while corroborating Eugene Nida.

> 'is to be defined in terms of the degree to which the receptors of the message in the receptor language respond to it in substantially the same manner as the receptors in the source language'

or he may combine the two depending on the need. The Yoruba language presents cases where some technological items have been adapted:

English	French	Yoruba	
Television	Télévision		Amohunmaworan (literally that which picks both pictures and voice)
Telephone	téléphone		*Ero ibanisoro* (literally machine which is used to speak to people)
Train	Train		*Okò oju Irin* (rail vehicle)
Internet	Internet		Èro ayé lu jára (that which connects the world at the same time)

Some other words have been borrowed and yorubalised:

English	French	Yoruba
Court	cour	kóòtù
Table	table	tábìlì
Paper	papier	bébà

We also have some lexical innovations like slangs and Nigerian English in the following examples:

French	English	Nigerian English
Embouteillage	Traffic hold-upGo-slow	
Un fils autochone	a native son	son of the soil
Contrebandier de Cocaïne	cocaine peddler	cocaine pusher

Sometimes we have a hybrid of indigenous languages and foreign languages as in the following:

English	French	Yoruba
Bean cakes	beignets	akara balls
Cafeteria	cafeteria	bukateria

The word 'akara' is the Yoruba word for either fried 'bean paste' or cooked 'bean paste' and buka refers to a place (usually a shed) in which one can buy food to eat.

We also have a literal translation of Yoruba language structure into English language:

Yoruba	Yoruba English	British	French
Gbó òórun	hear a smell	to smell	sentir une odeur
Mo nbo	I am coming	just a minute	un instant
Bawo ni?	How now?	How are you?	Ça va?

These varieties of speech among some Yoruba speakers are examples of literal translations of some Yoruba expressions into English language and this accounts for the lexico-semantic transfer in the variety of English among these Yoruba speakers. The Examples above do not only illustrate lexical interference but also semantic interference. One important implication of this type of interference is the reduction of international intelligibility. This should be born in mind by Nigerian translator who wishes to communicate with foreigners.

Conclusion

This paper draws from expressions typical of Yorubaphone, Anglophone and Francophone parlance to justify the stance of its argument. This study has shown to some extent, that the problems arising from lexis and semantics do not make translation an easy task; the reason being that, sameness in the communication process across languages is rarely obtainable. Nevertheless, the translator has a duty to attain not only semantic and lexical correspondence but also syntactic and stylistic equivalence as well. This, he can achieve by limiting himself to the context in which words and expressions are employed.

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