EQUIVALENCE VERSUS NON-EQUIVALENCE IN ECONOMIC TRANSLATION

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Abstract: *This paper aims at highlighting the fact that "equivalence" represents a concept worth revisiting and detailing upon when tackling the translation process of economic texts both from English into Romanian and from Romanian into English. Far from being exhaustive, our analysis will focus upon the problems arising from the lack of equivalence at the word level. Consequently, relevant examples from the economic field will be provided to account for the following types of non-equivalence at word level: culture-specific concepts; the source language concept is not lexicalised in the target language; the source language word is semantically complex; differences in physical and interpersonal perspective; differences in expressive meaning; differences in form; differences in frequency and purpose of using specific forms and the use of loan words in the source text. Likewise, we shall illustrate a number of translation strategies necessary to deal with the afore-mentioned cases of non-equivalence: translation by a more general word (superordinate); translation by a more neutral/less expressive word; translation by cultural substitution; translation using a loan word or loan word plus explanation; translation by paraphrase using a related word; translation by paraphrase using unrelated words; translation by omission and translation by illustration.*

Key Words: *differences, equivalence, non-equivalence, source language, target language, translation strategies, economic translation*

JEL Classification: *A10, A20, Z00*

Introduction

The notion of equivalence is undoubtedly one of the most problematic and controversial areas in the field of translation theory. "A much-used and abused term in Translation Studies" (Bassnett 2002: 34), equivalence has caused, and it seems quite probable that it will continue to cause heated debates within the field of Translation Studies (TS). It has been analysed, evaluated and extensively discussed from different points of view and has been approached from many perspectives. The present paper aims at enhancing the importance of equivalence within the framework of the theoretical reflections on translation in general and economic translation in particular.

Taking into account a classification of translation by subject matter or domain, Gouadec distinguishes "economic translation" or "the translation of documents relating to the economy" (2007: 11) among other types of translation. From Way's perspective the courses in translation of economic texts "are particularly unattractive" (2000: 137) for students. Consequently, she provides the solution of specialised sub-fields and encourages teachers to approach economic texts from those areas with which they are much more familiarised:

In courses for the translation of economic texts we may begin with macroeconomics: the national economy, the services sector, and tourism as possible fields. Besides being topics which are constantly in the news, the students are surrounded by a local economy that depends, to a large extent, on the services sector and particularly tourism. (Way 2000: 137).

In economic translation, theories and types of equivalence occupy a major position influencing the final product in the target language (TL). "A central concept in translation theory", yet a "controversial one" (Kenny 2001: 77), equivalence has led to a number of divergent opinions: some theorists (Catford (1965), Koller (1995), Nida and Taber (1969), Pym (1992) and Toury (1980) define translation in terms of equivalence relations while

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others (Snell-Hornby (1988) and Gentzler (1993) reject the theoretical notion of equivalence, claiming it is either irrelevant or damaging to TS. Neubert (1992: 142-146) thinks that a complete theory of translation includes a theory of equivalence relations conceived for both translation as a process and as a product. From our perspective, he is right when he stresses the need for such a theory postulating that translation equivalence must be considered a "semiotic category", comprising syntactic, semantic and pragmatic components arranged in a hierarchical relationship. As soon as the translator moves away from close linguistic equivalence, the problems of determining the exact nature of the level of equivalence aimed for begin to emerge. From our point of view, Bassnett's perspective (2002: 34) upon equivalence in translation holds valid in the sense that equivalence should not be approached as a search for sameness, since sameness cannot even exist between two TL versions of the same text, let alone between the source language (SL) and the TL version. Accordingly, we are in favour of equivalence as "a dialectic between the signs and the structures within and surrounding the SL and the TL texts" (ibid.: 38).

Even earlier, Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) have viewed equivalence-oriented translation as a procedure which "replicates the same situation as in the original, whilst using completely different wording" (342). They also suggest that, if this procedure is applied during the translation process, it can maintain the stylistic impact of the SL text in the TL text. By contrast, Baker uses the notion of equivalence "for the sake of convenience – because most translators are used to it rather than because it has any theoretical status" (1992: 5-6). As a consequence, equivalence has been perceived in various ways being regarded as a necessary condition for translation, an obstacle to progress in TS or a useful category for describing translations. When she discusses those theoreticians who are in favour of translation as an equivalence theory, Kenny stipulates that "proponents of equivalence-based theories of translation usually define equivalence as the relationship between a source text (ST) and a target text (TT) that allows the TT to be considered as a translation of the ST in the first place" (2001: 77). This definition of equivalence is rather general and does not manage to cover the intricacies of the term and the variety of aspects which equivalence encompasses. For instance, Pym (1992: 37) has pointed out the circularity of equivalence which is supposed to define translation and translation, in turn, is supposed to define equivalence. Kenny (2001: 77) wishes more attempts were made to define equivalence in translation in a way that avoids this circularity.

As far as we are concerned, the very fact that almost every translation theoretician has felt the need to express his/her opinions either in favour of or against the idea of equivalence in translation is a proof of its importance in TS. We consider that terminological controversies should be carefully handled. All in all, we agree with Neubert (1992) that a theory of translation is undoubtedly based on a theory of equivalence relationships, but on the other hand we also think that Holmes (1988) is right when he believes that asking for sameness is asking too much.

Understanding the exact nature of equivalence remains a problematic issue. According to Nida, there are different types of translation due to the following three basic factors: (1) the nature of the message, (2) the purpose or purposes of the author and, by proxy, of the translator, and (3) the type of audience (cited in Venuti 2004: 127).

In the case of economic translation, the decoding ability and the potential interest of the prospective audiences acquire great significance. Readers may be either the average literate adults who can handle both oral and written messages with relative ease or the specialists in the field who have the necessary competence to decode messages within their area of specialisation. Prospective audiences differ not only in decoding ability, but perhaps even more in their interests. Hence, a translation designed to stimulate reading for pleasure will be quite different from one of an economic text because text characteristics and the readers' interests are quite different too.

To sum up, we consider equivalence a concept worth revisiting in the context of economic translation and we support our ideas with relevant arguments and examples from both English and Romanian economic texts.

1. Types of Equivalence

In order to explain the nature of equivalence, various typologies have been put forward. In his definition of translation equivalence, Popovič (1976 cited in Bassnett 2002: 33) distinguishes four types: *linguistic equivalence,* where there is homogeneity on the linguistic level of both SL and TL texts, i.e. word for word translation; *paradigmatic equivalence,* where there is equivalence of "the elements of a paradigmatic expressive axis", i.e. elements of grammar, which Popovič sees as being a higher category than lexical equivalence; *stylistic (translational) equivalence,* where there is "functional equivalence of elements in both original and translation aiming at an expressive identity with an invariant of identical meaning"; *textual (syntagmatic) equivalence,* where there is equivalence of the syntagmatic structuring of a text, i.e. equivalence of form and shape.

At various levels, and loosely following Koller (1989: 100-4), Kenny (2001: 77) establishes that there are the following distinct types of equivalence: *referential or denotative equivalence* – based on the SL and TL words supposedly referring to the same thing in the real world; *connotative equivalence* – the SL and TL words trigger the same or similar associations in the minds of native speakers of the two languages; *text-normative equivalence* – the SL and TL words are used in the same or similar contexts in their respective languages; *pragmatic* (Koller 1989: 102) or *dynamic equivalence* (Nida 1964) – the SL and TL words have the same effect on their respective readers; *formal equivalence* – the SL and TL words have similar orthographic or phonological features.

From a different perspective, Kade (1968 cited in Pym 2010: 29) characterises equivalence relationships according to whether there is: a single expression in the TL for a single SL expression (*one-to-one equivalence*); more than one TL expression for a single SL expression (*one-to-many equivalence*); a TL expression that covers part of a concept designated by a single SL expression (*one-to-part-of-one equivalence*) or no TL expression for a SL expression (*nil equivalence*). Kenny remarks that "Such a quantitative approach may have limited applicability in language for specific purposes (LSP) [...]" (2001: 78).

An important theoretician of equivalence, Baker (1992) identifies another type of equivalence which she calls textual equivalence and thinks it covers similarity in ST and TT information flow and in the cohesive roles ST and TT devices play in their respective texts. Baker identifies different kinds of equivalence - at the levels of the word, phrase, grammar, text, pragmatics, etc., but with the proviso that equivalence "is influenced by a variety of linguistic and cultural factors and is therefore always relative" (1992: 6). In the following section of this paper we shall prove the topicality of Baker's typology of equivalence when translating economic texts.

After all, we agree with Neuman (1994: 4695) who stresses that not all the variables in translation are relevant in every situation and that translators must decide which considerations should be given priority at any time, thus establishing a kind of functional equivalence which is worth analysing.

2. Equivalence at the Word Level

When she tackles problems arising from lack of equivalence at the word level, Baker (1992/2006) asks herself what a translator does when there is no word in the TL which expresses the same meaning as the SL word.

Although she attempts to outline some of the most common types of non-equivalence which often pose difficulties for the translator and some attested strategies for dealing with them, Baker admits that: "It is virtually impossible to offer absolute guidelines for dealing with the various types of non equivalence which exist among languages" (1992/2006: 17). Nevertheless, a translator needs to be aware of some strategies which may be used to deal with non-equivalence in certain contexts.

2.1. Lexical Sets and Semantic Fields in Economic Translation

If a translator understands the concepts of semantic fields and lexical sets, he/she can appreciate the value that a word has in a given system and develop strategies for dealing with non-equivalence (ibid.: 19). The difference in the structure of semantic fields in the SL and TL allows a translator to assess the value of a given item in a lexical set. Knowing what other items are available in a lexical set and how they contrast with the item chosen by a certain author, you can appreciate the significance of the author's choice.

In addition, the hierarchical arrangement of semantic fields could help translators to face semantic gaps in the TL "by modifying a superordinate word or by means of circumlocutions based on modifying superordinates" (ibid.: 20).

Whereas semantic fields are abstract concepts, the actual words and expressions under each field are sometimes called *lexical sets* (ibid.: 18). Each semantic field has several sub-divisions or lexical sets under it and each sub-division has further sub-divisions and lexical sets. For example, the field of *change* in economic English has more sub-divisions including *verbs showing an upward trend* (bounce back; climb; escalate; go up; grow; improve; increase; leap; jump; pick up; rally; recover; rise; rocket; shoot up; soar; surge; take off), *verbs showing a downward trend* (come down; crash; decline; decrease; dip; drop; fall; fall off; go down; plummet; plunge; shrink; slide; slump), *verbs showing no change* (flatten out; hold steady; level off; level out; settle down; stabilize; stagnate; stand around; stick at around; stay steady) and *verbs showing fluctuation* (change; fluctuate; oscillate). A variety of general or more specific verbs are used to express the idea of change and they range from the informal to the formal register asking for similar counterparts when translated into Romanian. The problem is that the more detailed a semantic field is in a given language, the more different it is likely to be from related semantic fields in other languages. There generally tends to be more agreement among languages on the larger headings of semantic fields and less agreement as the sub-fields become more finely differentiated.

2.2. Non-equivalence and Translation Strategies of Economic Texts

Non-equivalence at the word level means that the TL has no direct equivalent for a word which occurs in the ST. Baker (1992/2006: 21-26) identifies the following common types of non-equivalence at word level:

a) Culture-specific concepts – are totally unknown in the target culture (TC) because they reflect a reality specific to the source culture (SC): *affinity card* – "card de credit, emis în Statele Unite, pentru un anumit grup (affinity group), precum membrii unui club, colegiu etc." (Dicționar de business englez-român 2009: 23); *inland bill* – "cambie care este emisă şi plătită în Regatul Unit al Marii Britanii" (ibid.: 349); *moonlighting* – "a avea două slujbe, una cu normă întreagă, pe timpul zilei, şi una cu jumătate de normă (part-time) seara" (ibid.: 450); *primary earnings per share* – "în SUA, reprezintă un calcul destinat evaluării performanțelor companiilor cu instrumente complexe" (ibid.: 538); *prime rate* – "rata dobânzii, la care băncile americane împrumută bani debitorilor de prima categorie (*base rate* în Marea Britanie)" (ibid.: 539). Gradually, some of these terms may become part of the reality in the TC and they could be borrowed and used as loans.

b) The SL concept is not lexicalised in the TL – the SL word may express a concept which is known in the TC but simply not lexicalised, that is not allocated a TL word: *gazump* – "a ridica prețul sau a accepta o ofertă mai mare pentru teren, construcții etc., ale căror prețuri de vânzare au fost convenite verbal, dar înainte să aibă loc o schimbare de contracte" (ibid.: 304); *gazunder* – "a reduce o ofertă pentru o casă, un apartament etc., imediat înaintea semnării contractelor, după ce, inițial, se stabilise un preț mai ridicat" (ibid.: 304); *slush fund* – "bani rezervați de către o organizație pentru plăți discrete, pentru a putea beneficia de tratament preferențial, de informații sau de alte servicii din partea unor persoane influente, în avantajul organizației" (ibid.: 636); *small print* – "clauzele imprimate pe un document, de tipul unei polițe de asigurare de viață sau al unui contract de vânzare în rate, în care vânzătorul stabilește condițiile vânzării şi responsabilitățile reciproce ale cumpărătorului şi ale vânzătorului" (ibid.: 637).

c) The SL word is semantically complex – a single word which consists of a single morpheme can sometimes express a more complex set of meanings than a whole sentence; hence languages automatically develop concise forms for referring to complex concepts if the concepts become important enough to be talked about often. This is the case of words such as: *cross-selling* – "practica vânzării produselor sau serviciilor înrudite consumatorilor existenți" (ibid.: 184); *intestate* – "persoană care decedează fără a lăsa un testament" (ibid.: 366); *lien* – "dreptul unei persoane de a reține unele bunuri ale altei persoane, până când reclamațiile sale împotriva proprietarului sunt satisfăcute" (ibid.: 394); *spamming* – "expedierea de e-mailuri nesolicitate şi nedorite, în cantități mari, în scopuri promoționale" (ibid.: 642).

d) The source and target languages make different distinctions in meaning – what one language regards as an important distinction in meaning another language may not perceive as relevant. For example, English has a series of words for the action of making someone lose their job: *to dismiss* "to remove someone from their job"(Longman 2001: 387); *to fire* (especially AmE, familiar) "to force someone to leave their job" (ibid: 524); *to sack* (BrE, informal) "to dismiss someone from their job" (ibid.: 1248); *to lay off* "to stop employing a worker, especially for a period in which there is not much work to do" (ibid.: 797). DER (2004) provides Romanian translations of the afore-mentioned terms which invariably include the general verb "a concedia" and the more formal verbs "a destitui, a revoca, a elibera (din funcție)" which do not capture the informal meaning of the English verbs *to fire* or *to sack*, thus pinpointing to the differences in expressive meaning. For the English phrasal verb *to lay off* there is no direct Romanian correspondent therefore the Romanian translation is rather by means of an explanation "a scoate (temporar) din activitate) (DER 2004: 550).

e) Differences in physical or interpersonal perspective – physical perspective has to do with where things or people are in relation to one another or to a place, as expressed in pairs of words such as *come/go*, *take/bring*, *arrive/depart* etc.; perspective may also include the relationship between participants in the discourse (tenor). As an illustration, the Romanian verb *a împrumuta* could be rendered into English by means of two verbs *to lend* and *to borrow* depending on who gives to or takes from whom.

f) Differences in expressive meaning – are usually more difficult to handle when the TL equivalent is more emotionally loaded than the SL item. For instance, the English term *perks* is an informal one, an abbreviation for the term *perquisites* with the meaning of "something that you get legally from your work in addition to your wages such as goods, meals or a car" (Longman 2001: 1051). The expressive load of the English term could not be rendered into Romanian where there is no equivalent with the same degree of expressiveness since it is translated by means of a phrase "câştiguri suplimentare" (Dicționar de Business Englez-Român 2009: 514).

g) Differences in form – certain suffixes and prefixes which convey prepositional and other types of meaning in English often have no direct equivalents in other languages. For example, the English prefix *over*- has the Romanian equivalent *supra*- in words such as *to overbid* "a supralicita" (Ionescu-Cruțan 2008: 214), *to overburden* "a suprasolicita" (ibid.: 214), *to overcapitalize* "a supracapitaliza" (ibid.: 214), *to overvalue* "a supraevalua" (ibid.: 215) etc., but there are instances when the Romanian equivalents of the English terms formed by means of the prefix *over*- lack the corresponding Romanian prefix: *to overinvest* "a investi excesiv" (ibid.: 214), *to overlend* "a împrumuta/a credita excesiv" (ibid.: 214), *to overpay* "a plăti excesiv" (ibid.: 214), *to overproduce* "a produce excesiv" (ibid.: 214) etc. It is most important for translators to understand the contribution that affixes make to the meaning of words and expressions, especially since they are often used creatively in English to coin new words for various reasons, such as filling temporary semantic gaps in the language and creating humour.

h) Differences in frequency and purpose of using specific forms – even when a particular form does have a ready equivalent in the TL, there may be a difference in the frequency with which it is used or the purpose for which it is used. English, for instance, uses the continuous *–ing* form for binding clauses much more frequently than Romanian which has equivalents for it: The report deals mainly with the **buying** habits of housewives. – *Raportul se referă în principal la tipicul de* ***a face cumpărături*** *caracteristic gospodinelor*. (Marcheteau, Berman and Savio 2000: 60-61); What is the estimated rise in the **purchasing** power? – *Cu cât se estimează creşterea puterii* ***de cumpărare****?* (ibid.: 60-61).

i) Loan words in the ST – are often used for their prestige value adding an air of sophistication to the text or its subject matter. In Romanian economic texts there are more and more terms borrowed from English such as: *management* (Puiu 2001: 25), *manager* (ibid.: 51), *leader* (ibid.: 75), *coaching* (ibid.: 139), *mentoring* (ibid.: 139), *broker* (ibid.: 234) etc.

According to Baker (1992/2006: 26-42), professional translators should use a number of strategies to deal with non-equivalence at the word level. Among them, she mentions:

a) Translation by a more general word (superordinate) – is used in order to overcome a relative lack of specificity in the TL compared to the SL; translators have to find a more general word that covers the core prepositional meaning of the missing hyponym in the TL. For example, the English term *liability* with the specific meaning of "legal responsibility for something, especially for paying money that is owed, or for damage or injury" (Longman 2001: 812) is translated into Romanian by means of the more general terms "răspundere, obligație" (Turcu 1991: 387).

b) Translation by a more neutral/less expressive word – is inevitable in many cases when there is not an equally expressive correspondent in the TL. For instance, the English colloquialism *moonlighter* "a person who does two jobs, the second usually in the evening" (ibid.: 574) is neutrally translated "persoană cu două servicii" (Ionescu-Cruțan 2008: 191).

c) Translation by cultural substitution – involves replacing a culture-specific item or expression with a TL item which does not have the same propositional meaning but is likely to have a similar impact on the TL. A Romanian term such as *ministru* is translated into English by means of an almost perfect equivalent *minister*, but problems may be encountered when translating the name of the Romanian function *ministru de finanțe* for which the English equivalent is not *Minister of Finance* as one might expect; the best option is *Chancellor of the Exchequer* indicating "the minister of finance in the British government" (Webster 1996: 246).

d) Translation using a loan word or loan word plus explanation – is particularly common in dealing with culture-specific items, modern concepts and buzz words. Following the loan word with an explanation is very useful when the word in question is repeated several times in the text. Once explained, the loan word can then be used on its own; the reader can understand it and is not distracted by further lengthy explanations. Many English economic terms are present in Romanian economic texts especially when they are frequently used in economic literature in general: *engineering*, *marketing* (Danciu 2005: 91), *challenger* (ibid.: 104), *know-how* (ibid.: 121), *cash-and-carry* (ibid.: 132) etc.

e) Translation by paraphrase using a related word – tends to be used when the concept expressed by the source item is lexicalised in the TL but in a different form, and when the frequency with which a certain form is used in the ST is significantly higher than would be natural in the TL. As an illustration the English noun *necessaries* has three possible translations into Romanian, each of them by means of paraphrase using a related word: <<banc.>> chelturieli necesare, <<pl.>> <<com>> 1. produse de primă necessitate. 2. bunuri necesare subzistenței (Ionescu-Crușan 2008: 197).

f) Translation by paraphrase using unrelated words – if the concept expressed by the source item is not lexicalised at all in the TL, the paraphrase strategy can still be used in some contexts. Instead of a related word, the paraphrase may be based on modifying a superordinate or simply on unpacking the meaning of the source item, particularly if the item in question is semantically complex. For example, the English term *add-on* does not have a direct Romanian correspondent therefore possible translations would be "un accesoriu suplimentar, piesă de schimb sau o versiune Premium a unui produs sau serviciu vândut unui client" (Dicționar de business englez-român 2009: 16) or "metodă de serviciu a datoriei în rate egale" (Popa and Popa 2003: 12).

g) Translation by omission – may seem drastic and out-of-place, but in fact it does not harm to omit translating a word or expression in some contexts. If the meaning conveyed by a particular item or expression is not vital enough to the development of the text to justify distracting the reader with lengthy explanations, translators can and often do simply omit translating the word or expression in question: *Băncile trebuie să asigure implementarea unor măsuri specifice pentru protejarea integrității datelor* ***aferente*** *tranzacțiilor de e-banking, înregistrărilor şi* ***altor*** *informații.* (Moga et all. 2011: 94) – *Banks should ensure that appropriate measures are in place to protect the data integrity of e-banking transactions, records and information*. (ibid.: 95). The translators' choice was to use the *of*- constructions instead of a phrase such as *related to* in order to translate the word *aferente* and to skip over the word *altor* for which the terms *other* or *some other* could have been used.

h) Translation by illustration – is a useful option if the word which lacks an equivalent in the TL refers to a physical entity which can be illustrated, particularly if there are restrictions on space and if the text has to remain short, concise and to the point. In economic texts there are usually no cases of pure translation by illustration, but there are many instances when tables, diagrams or charts are used to illustrate a certain method, strategy, classification or system. Accordingly, these illustrations and the adjacent explanations are rendered in the TL.

Conclusions

Investigating the problem of economic translation in terms of equivalence we have resorted to a methodology that was meant to prove that the denial of the need for the concept of equivalence has not been grounded convincingly. The most important methods that we have used are: the comparative analysis of economic terms in both English and Romanian specialised texts; the problematisation of the cases of non-equivalence and the strategies of dealing with these cases; the Action Research method bringing together theory and practice; the corpus-based research method providing parallel corpora of economic terms and last but not least, the case-study research method. Equivalence in terms of complete identity would be impossible because languages are different and complex linguistic systems and translation takes place not only between languages but also between texts embedded in complex communicative situations. The professional translator is always aware of the communicative value of SL-text and its closest equivalent in the TL. If the sender decides to write an economic text there will be a potential community of receivers who belong to the same field and the text is basically addressed to them. They would be the first addressees of the text, the readers who can work out most profitably the conveyed content of the message.

As the text deals with a specialised topic, the translator needs to possess the linguistic, communicative and textual competences to fully understand its meaning. Afterwards, he/she has to determine the way the text has been constructed in relation to the stylistic, syntactic and lexical characteristics, as well as the semantic, pragmatic and semiotic peculiarities, which may prove potentially problematic for the translation process. Initial translation drafts are subsequently reviewed in order to verify that all equivalence problems encountered have been adequately accounted for. Therefore, the main task the translator faces in his work is the establishment of equivalences in a continuous and dynamic problem-solving process.

From our perspective, one cannot know beforehand which text-levels will be activated as problematic in the translation process. The fact that equivalences are established at text-levels does not mean that they are isolated in and restricted to each of those levels. The text is to be understood as a complex, interwoven network of linguistic relations. Linguistic choices at the different text-levels are the product of a communicative event in which an SL-sender and a potential TL-receiver are involved; conditions and determinants (participants' competences and socio-psychological characterisation, and context) have necessarily been taken into account to fulfill a communicative purpose. Thus they are somehow visible in the different language choices present in the SL-text. The translator is also embedded in this communicative process and when he/she translates, i.e. establishes equivalences, he/she does so by taking into account again not only the linguistic material of the SL-text itself but also the conditions and determinants of the SL-text production and those of the TL-text reception.

Translation equivalence at the word level has been tackled separately only to establish some major guidelines in the translation of economic texts and to prove the topicality and applicability of a general theory of equivalence and types of equivalence in the specific case of translating economic texts. Our intention has been to help the professional translator solve the inevitable translation problems which might arise due to the lack of equivalence between the ST and TT. The subsequent types of equivalence are yet to be explored in order to establish connections and to provide solutions for the translation of texts in a specialised field such as economics.

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