

EUGENE NIDA (1914-2011)

“Principles of correspondence” (1964)

Keywords:

Bible translation, concordance of terminology, dynamic equivalence, formal equivalence, gloss translation, linguistic and cultural distance in translation, natural translation, poetry translation, principle of equivalent effect

1. Author information

Born on November 11, 1914, in Oklahoma City, OK, Eugene Nida and his family moved to Long Beach, California when he was 5 years old. He began studying Latin in high school and was already looking forward to being able to translate Scripture as a missionary. Having earned his degree in Greek, *summa cum laude*, he enrolled in the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) and discovered the works of such linguists as Edward Sapir and Leonard Bloomfield. Nida then pursued a Master's degree in Greek New Testament at the University of Southern California. In 1941 he began a PhD in Linguistics at the University of Michigan and completed it in two years. His dissertation, *A Synopsis of English Syntax*, was at that time, the only full-scale analysis of a major language according to the “immediate constituent” theory. In the year 1943, in addition to completing his PhD, he was ordained in the Northern Baptist Convention.

Although his initial hiring at the American Bible Society was experimental, Nida was made Associate Secretary for Versions from 1944-46, and from then until he retired in 1984, he was Executive Secretary for Translations. His contribution to Bible translation did not only include theoretical ones. He spearheaded efforts to create better source texts for the Greek New Testament and the Hebrew Bible. He launched journals for practical discussions of translation and cultural problems. And together with Johannes Louw he

produced a now standard reference work, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*.

Nida is also remembered as a driving force that brought the United Bible Societies together with the Vatican to work out an agreed statement on Bible translation that would enable cooperative ventures from the 1960s onwards. He died on August 25, 2011.

2. Abstract

The text suggests three basic factors affecting translation: the nature of the message, the purpose of the author and the translator and the type of audience. It describes the nature of the message in terms of content and form using examples of poetry translation. The purposes of the author may be regarded in many different ways and assuming that the same purposes lie with the translator can prove wrong. Still, a translator's aim should always be the closest achievable equivalence in form and meaning with the source text. The type of audience (the capacity of children, literates, the average literate adult and the decoding ability of the specialists' of the target society), which the translation is intended to reach, has to be taken into consideration as well. After giving a brief account of three types of different translations, two sorts of translation equivalence are presented: formal equivalence - which takes the message of the source text in both form and content as a focal point, and tries to render it word to word, concept to concept, etc., and dynamic equivalence - which aims at revealing the whole naturalness of the source language in the target language. Basic requirements of a translation from various angles have also been considered; a good translation should aim at achieving an affective blend of 'matter and manner', for these two aspects of any message are inseparably united.

3. Terminology

| Source text term | Meaning | Term in Polish |
|------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| adaptation | extracting what the words mean in a particular situation according to cultural context | adaptacja |
| formal equivalence | an orientation in translating focusing on the message itself, in both form and content | ekwiwalencja formalna |
| dynamic equivalence | an orientation in translating aiming at complete naturalness of expression and trying to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture | ekwiwalencja dynamiczna |
| the principle of equivalent effect | the relationship between TT receptor and TT message should be substantially the same as that which existed between the ST receptors and the ST message | zasada ekwiwalentnego efektu/reakcji |
| concordance of terminology | rendering a particular term in the source language document by a corresponding term in the receptor document | zgodność terminologii |
| natural translation | involves grammar and | Tłumaczenie naturalne |

| | | |
|--------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| | lexicon, aims at reproducing the closest natural meaning of the source document in the message | |
| exocentric type of expression | the construction is one whose distribution is functionally equivalent, or approaching equivalence, to one of its constituents, which serves as the center, or head, of the whole | egzocentryczny sposób wyrażania |
| endocentric type of expression | a construction defined negatively as a construction whose distribution is not functionally equivalent to any of its constituents | endocentryczny sposób wyrażania |
| intraorganismic meanings | a meaning associated essentially with the symbol, and not with the body part or function. | znaczenie wewnętrzjęzykowe |

4. Methodology

Overview of the main ideas presented in the article:

Basic factors affecting translation

- The Nature of the Message (content/form)
- The Purpose of the Author / Translator (Informative, Imperative or Meaningful)
- The Audience (Decoding ability /Potential interest)

- capacities of children (limited vocabulary and culture),
- the double-standard capacity of literates (not all contexts understood)
- the capacity of the average literate adult (vocabulary and culture at a standard level, but no specialist field-oriented knowledge is assumed)
- the high capacity of decoding ability of the specialists of the target society

Potential Interest: different in each of the groups. A translation designed for pleasure-reading for an average adult and for a child is different from a handbook for a person who tries to get information on how to operate some specialized device.

Types of equivalence

• Formal Equivalence

- Revealing the content and form of the original message
- Oriented towards the ST
- Reproducing several formal elements (grammatical units, consistency in word usage, meanings of S. context)
- Concordance of terminology
- Gloss translation

• Dynamic Equivalence

- Focused on receptor's response
- Equivalent, natural, closest
- Including adaptations of grammar, lexicon (terms which for there are really available parallels, e.g. tree, stone, spoon; terms which identify culturally different objects, e.g. book >> papyrus; terms which identify cultural specialty, e.g. jubilee, synagogue), and of cultural references
- Foreignness of ST is minimized

5. Links with other publications on the subject

Baker, M. *In Other Words: a Coursebook on Translation*. London. Routledge. 1992.

Catford, J. *A Linguistic Theory of Translation: an Essay on Applied Linguistics*. Oxford University Press. 1965.

House, J. *A Model for Translation Quality Assessment*. Gunter Narr. 1977.

Jakobson, R. "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation", in: Reuben Arthur Brower, *On translation*. Harvard University Press. 1959.

Nida, E. *Towards a science of translating*. Brill, 1964.

6. Critical commentary

In Nida's article, it seems clear that the author is in favor of the implementation of the dynamic equivalence as a more productive translation process, although; he maintains that the formal equivalence in translation can still be appropriate for a specific type of audience: "It might be supposed that such translations are categorically ruled out. To the contrary, they are often perfectly valid translations of certain types of messages for certain types of audiences". Nida holds a supportive opinion towards formal equivalence in some respects, however; he is mainly concerned with the notion of dynamic equivalence in translation. "In such a translation the focus attention is directed not so much toward the source message, as toward the receptor response", he claims. In other words, in agreement with the author, dynamic equivalence can be explained as a translation principle according to which a translator pursues to translate the meaning of the original text in a way that would have the same effect on the target culture reader.

In the general scheme of Eugene A. Nida's linguistically based approach on translation, one can observe that his study seems to neglect the socio-cultural aspect of translation to some extent. Moreover, translation in its very nature is not a solely matter of linguistics

but also includes contributions from other fields as well. Although this notion of translation seems to be disregarded by Nida to some degree, his analysis of the notion of equivalence can be regarded as an important study within the science of Translation Studies.

While providing many examples, the text is easy on the reader; virtually none of the presented ideas are left without images to explain them. Many of those come from the bible or popular literature; hence they are understandable and help with finding out the meaning of the terms. Considering the time it was written in and, in the context, its innovativeness, I believe the article to be one of the “cornerstones“ of Translation Studies.

7. Quotations to remember the text by

“Since no two languages are identical, either in the meanings given to corresponding symbols or in the ways in which such symbols are arranged in phrases and sentence, it stands to reason that there can be no absolute correspondence between languages. Hence there can be no fully exact translations. The total impact of a translation may be reasonably close to the original, but there can be no identity in detail”.

“Since ‘there are, properly speaking, no such things as identical equivalents’ (Belloc 1931, and 1931a: 37), one must in translating seek to find the closest possible equivalent. However, there are fundamentally two different types of equivalence: one which may be called formal and another which is primarily dynamic”.

8. References

Nida, E. *Principles of correspondence*, in: 'The Translation Studies Reader'. Ed. Venuti, Lawrence. Routledge. 2000.

Nida, E. *Towards a science of translating*. Brill, 1964.

<http://www.nidainstitute.org/eugene-nida>

<http://www.multilingual.com/articleDetail.php?id=1921>

[http://www.scribd.com/doc/90994127/8/Mit-t%C5%82umaczenia-naturalnego-](http://www.scribd.com/doc/90994127/8/Mit-t%C5%82umaczenia-naturalnego-%E2%80%9Et%C5%82umaczy%C4%87-ka%C5%BCdy-mo%C5%BCe%E2%80%9D)

[%E2%80%9Et%C5%82umaczy%C4%87-ka%C5%BCdy-mo%C5%BCe%E2%80%9D](http://www.scribd.com/doc/90994127/8/Mit-t%C5%82umaczenia-naturalnego-%E2%80%9Et%C5%82umaczy%C4%87-ka%C5%BCdy-mo%C5%BCe%E2%80%9D)

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