

The Concept of Equivalence

Equivalence

Equivalence is the term used to refer to the relationship of correspondence or similarity existing between the source text and the target text.

Equivalence can be analyzed from two different perspectives (1) the level of similarity (between the source and target text and (2) the quality of similarity between the two texts.

- (1) At what level equivalence is established (is it based on morphemes, words, clauses sentences or whole texts?)

Consider the following examples:

1. رجلان : man – two (two men, both men) : طبيب : doctor- female. (morpheme)
2. the boy filled the cup with water: الولد ملى القدر بالماء (word)
3. the man fell ill : الرجل سقط مريضاً (phrase)
4. while she was crossing the street, she saw the car coming : بينما كانت تعبر الشارع رأت سيارة قادمة .. (clause)
5. I looked at the green field extending as far as the eye could see. I saw no one. The fields seemed deserted نظرت إلى الحقول ممتدة إلى أقصى حدود البصر. لم أر أحداً . لقد بدت الحقول مهجورة.

- (2) In terms of what specific qualities the source and target texts can be said to be the similar (is it form, meaning or function?).

In this respect we can distinguish between formal equivalence and functional equivalence. Formal equivalence is more literal translation that is more faithful to the source text.

Functional equivalence is more dynamic and is faithful to the target text.

Consider the following examples, which show the different between formal and functional equivalence:

1. This cat is as black as ink.

هذه القطّة سوداء كالخبر.

هذه القطة سوداء كالفحم.

In the first translation a formal equivalence is used, because it is closer the conventional English expression. In the second translation, however, a functional equivalence is used, because the translator replaces the conventional English expression with an expression that is conventionally used in such a context.

2. Man proposes, God disposes

الانسان يقترح والله يقرر
العبد في التفكير والله في التدبير

In the first translation a formal equivalence is used, because it is closer the conventional and culture-bound English expression/proverb. In the second translation, however, a functional equivalence is used, because the translator replaces the conventional and culture-bound English expression/proverb with an expression that is conventionally used in such a context.