



The importance of dynamic equivalence when translating cultural texts

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Abstract

This research is about the significance of Dynamic Equivalence when translating cultural texts regarding Mexican culture. As well, this project considers not only the translator dominance of a language, but also a wide knowledge of the target and source culture of a text. The main purposes of this project are, first, to emphasize the importance of Dynamic Equivalence when facing cultural problems within a text when translating non-common elements. Moreover, to identify the characteristics of Mexican Culture based on two texts related to a period of time on the History of Mexico and Gastronomy and on the non-common elements that are exclusively grounded on them, that are almost impossible to translate. Finally, to determine the effectiveness of Dynamic Equivalence for avoiding cultural problems in the translation process. Due to the fact that culture is a complex concept, and there is no statement of the principles of correspondence in translating, it can not be completed without recognizing many different types of translation. This research focuses only on one type of translation, Free Translation through Dynamic Equivalence. It is based on two kinds of text; one related to a specific period of time on the History of Mexico and another on Gastronomy regarding Mexican Culture. Moreover, the subjects of this research project were: firstly, a group of students of translation VIII of LEMO Faculty who translated the History of Mexico text; the second group of subjects who translated the gastronomic text were professional translators who work as professors in the LEMO Faculty of the BUAP university as well.

1. Introduction

On one hand, the purpose of this research project is to demonstrate the importance that culture and language has in the translation process; since both are the main characteristics which are taken into account in the source and target text when a translation is carried out. On the other hand, is to prove the effectiveness of Dynamic Equivalence, as a technique of translation, when facing cultural problems in the process itself. As well, translators must be conscious that translation implies



not only the dominance of a language but also, it is necessary to have a wide knowledge about the culture and get involved in it.

Since culture is a complex concept, and there is no statement of the principles of correspondence in translating can be complete without recognizing the many different types of translation, Phillips (1959). This research focuses only in one style of translation, Dynamic Equivalence, based on two texts regarding Mexican culture.

The instruments used were two types of Mexican cultural texts, the first one is related to a specific period of time of the History of Mexico, and the second one is related to gastronomy, specifically a recipe of a Mexican dish. In addition, the former text (history of Mexico) was carried out by students of translation VIII in LEMO Faculty; and the latter text (recipe) was a translation carried out by translators of the LEMO faculty. It is necessary to point out that the source language of the first text is English and the translation that the students from LEMO Faculty did was from English into Spanish; the source language of the second text is Spanish, thus the translation that the translators of LEMO Faculty did was from Spanish into English.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Translation

To have a clear idea of what this research project focuses on; some researchers have discussed and investigated some of the principal concepts that the translation process involves. According to Robinson (1997, p. 222) “translation is the ability to mediate between cultures, to explain one to another; mixed loyalties; the pushes and pulls of the source and target cultures.” Thus, when translating, it is important to consider not only the lexical impact on the target language reader, but also the manner in which cultural aspects may be perceived and make translating decisions accordingly. In addition, Procházka cited by Venuti (2000, p.131) states that a good translation in terms of certain requirements which must be made of the translation, namely; (1) “He must understand the original word thematically and systematically; (2) he must overcome the differences between the



two linguistic structure and (3) he must reconstruct the stylistic structures of the original work in his translation". In other words, the source language has to be understood, decoded and reconstructed by the translator in order to achieve a similar impact in the target reader. The translation process needs to consider certain factors, grammatical and cultural, so that the target text can be comprehended by the target readers as by the source readers.

2.2 Language and Culture

Language and culture are the two main principles on which translation is based on; therefore, some authors have provided important definitions. Newmark (1988, p.94) points out that "culture is the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression." Thus, the notion of culture is essential considering the implications for translation. Culture as a conclusion means knowledge. Hudson (1996) says that this kind of knowledge is learned by other people from others, either by direct instruction or by watching their behavior. It may be consider that this knowledge play an important role in communication among people when language is used.

Moreover, language plays an important role as well as culture because of the close relationship that both have in the process of translation. Due to this fact, "different languages do not simply provide different ways of expressing ideas, but they are also different in the more fundamental sense that the ideas that can be expressed differ from language to language." Hudson (1996, p. 82). For this reason, meaning in each language is particular in different societies or groups. In addition to both concepts, Benjamin Lee Whorf cited by Wardhaugh (1998, p 216) states in their hypothesis known as the Whorfian Hypothesis that: "The relationship between language and culture is that the structure of a language determines the way in which speakers of that language view the world. Different speakers will experience the world differently at the same level in which the languages they speak differ structurally". Thus, it can be concluded that language controls the world view, and as a consequence speakers of different languages will, therefore, have different world views.



2.3. Dynamic Equivalence

The relevance of Dynamic Equivalence is grounded on the basis that this technique provides more accurate results regarding cultural aspects in both, source and target texts, than other techniques. According to Nida (1964, p.166) “Dynamic Equivalence is described as the closest natural equivalent to the source language message,” this definition contains three essential terms: 1) ‘equivalent’ which points toward the source language message; 2) ‘natural’, which points toward the receptor language and; 3) ‘closest’, which binds the two orientations together on the basis of the highest degree of approximation.” Moreover, Dynamic Equivalence is seems as the best technique, when facing cultural aspects, because it provides: 1) a natural and easy form of expression without changing the spirit of the source text, in this case, regarding culture; 2) Through Dynamic Equivalence the translator is able to make sense for the target reader keeping the same meaning and sense that the original text; 3) convey the spirit and manner of the source text to the target text, and 4) finally the target text produce a similar response in the target readers. Nida (1964)

3. Methodology

This research project was carried out through a survey research, which involves collecting and analyzing data, particularly in this case through the translations and a questionnaire. The analysis for interpreting the result was mainly qualitative, but complemented with a quantitative analysis, because through such analysis the use and effectiveness of Dynamic Equivalence could be shown.

First of all, since the purpose of this thesis was to identify if Dynamic Equivalence could help students of translation VIII from LEMO as well as professors, who work at LEMO University in the translation area, to avoid cultural problems in the translation process. The instruments that were used were one text related to Mexican culture and a gastronomic text (recipe).

The study was carried out at the Licenciatura en Lenguas Modernas (LEMO), Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP). The population

selected in this research was composed by ten students from LEMO, and by six professors (three Americans, one French and two Mexicans), who work at LEMO University. The subjects were from the translation area

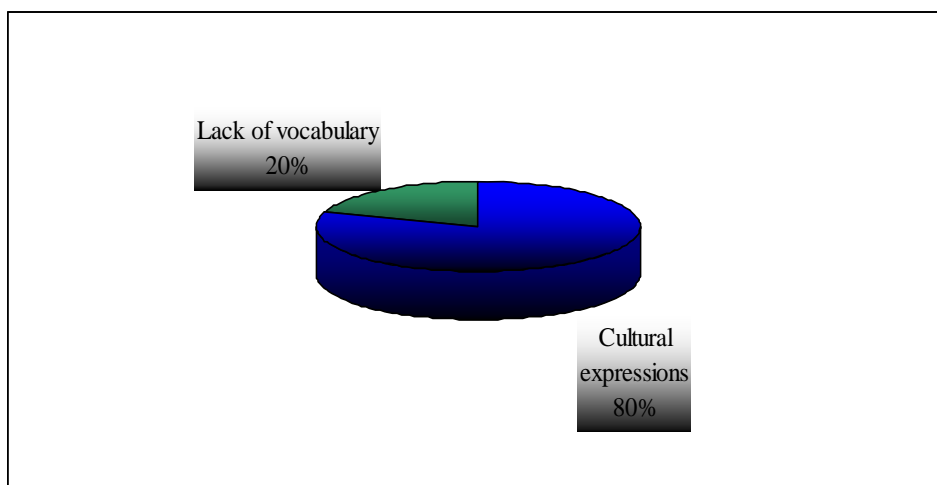
Moreover, the procedure to develop this study consisted of analyzing all the material that was provided to the subjects; this is for two main objectives. In one hand, translators and students put into practice the knowledge they possess to produce a suitable translation. On the other hand, it was important to analyze what their answers in the interview were as well as the way they translated cultural elements in the text related to Mexican culture and the gastronomic text (recipe).

4. Results of the research project

According to theoretical aspects, questionnaires were developed and texts were used as instruments for the purposes of the research project. The results can be seen in the next graphs.

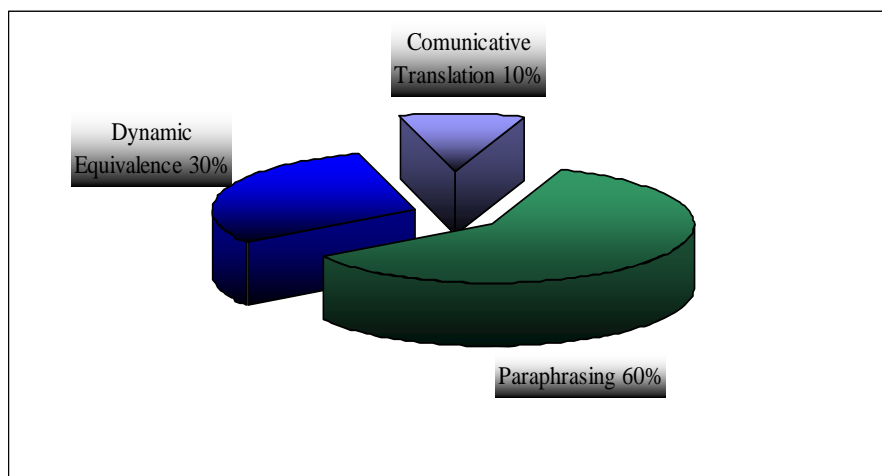
The following two graphs show the results of the translation of the text “History or destiny?” (See Appendix 1)

1. Main problems showed by LEMO students from BUAP when translating the text: History or Destiny?



As shown in the graphic the students of translation VIII from LEMO considered that not only the lack of vocabulary, but most important facing cultural expressions are the main problems when they translated the given text. Thus, it is important to say that based on Phillips's study (1959) "free translation through dynamic equivalence could fix in a better way the problems of cultural translation."

2. Use of Dynamic Equivalence when translating the text: History or Destiny? By LEMO students of the BUAP

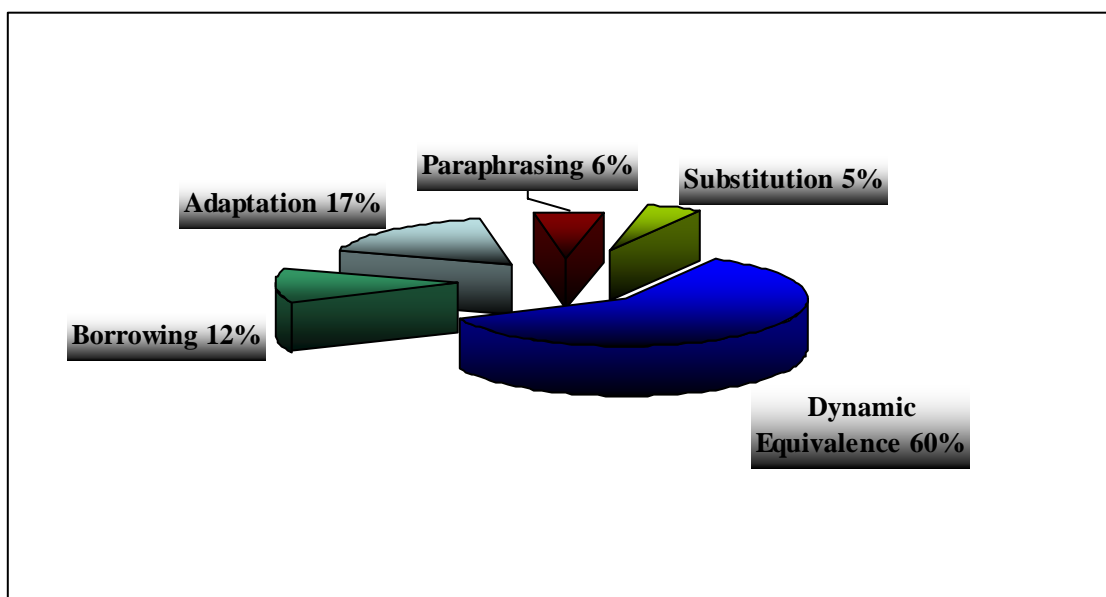


The results showed that the students of translation VIII from LEMO used Paraphrasing rather than Dynamic Equivalence when they translated cultural expressions; regarding the provided given text. Only in a little percentage of the results, it was observed that the students used Communicative Translation as well, as an option for translating texts regarding a specific culture.

These results suggest that the subjects took more into consideration the understanding and the interpretation of the text itself, according to them, than the cultural aspects that were grounded in the text, and were supposed to be expressed in the target language according to the new culture based on the source culture.

And the following graph shows the results of the translation of the gastronomic text. (See Appendix 2)

3. Global results of the gastronomic text (recipe)



This graph illustrates the final results of use that each technique had and also which of them presented better results from the source language into the target language culture taking into consideration the five translations under study. It can be observed that in order to translate non-common elements it was necessary that translators, who work as professors in LEMO faculty, made use of different techniques but mainly they used Dynamic Equivalence.

This graph shows the global results of the five translations of the recipe. The methodology used to represent the final results in percentages and graphics consisted on the following. First, to add all the percentage of each technique reported in each translation. Afterwards, the arithmetic mean was obtained in order to provide the readers and average of the use of each technique.

Through this methodology, it was possible to illustrate the percentage of use that each technique had and also which of them presented better results from the source language into the target language culture taking into consideration the five translations and the five techniques under study.



4. Conclusions

It was observed in the graphs of the text “History or destiny?” that the subjects have experience regarding methods of translation; however, theoretical aspects were better developed than practical ones, as well as it was observed that the students applied and considered Paraphrasing as the most suitable technique when they translate cultural expressions, regarding Mexican culture in this specific case, rather than Dynamic Equivalence.

According to the analysis results that were showed in the graphs of the recipe, Dynamic Equivalence was one of the most used techniques by translators, who work as professors at LEMO Faculty, because this technique permits to convey messages from one culture to another and regarding gastronomic text which mainly represents the culture of a country. Thus, it can be concluded that in order to translate this instrument (recipe), the target text produced a similar response through a Dynamic Equivalence.

Furthermore, Dynamic Equivalence is to provide to translators a natural and easy form of expression without changing the main idea of the original text. Moreover, and based on the previous statements, of Nida and Phillips, Dynamic Equivalence seems to be one of the best techniques for translating expressions that are grounded in a specific culture. Finally, it can be concluded that in order to translate texts that explain or use utterances related to specific cultures, Dynamic Equivalence can proportioned one of the best ways to translate them; however, translator have to take into account the content and context that are related to the text in order to express in the translation the essence and meaning of the text in the target language.



APPENDIX 1

History or destiny?

Mexicans have always exhibited an obstinate determination to safeguard the memory of the major events that have marked their society and this has coloured the way in which they view their identity and destiny. From pre-Columbian times they have been engaged in a continuous battle to save their history from oblivion. Knowledge of the past was the foundation on which their priest and diviners based their astronomic calculations and their predictions of the future. Countless archeological remains from the two thousands years before the arrival of the Spaniards in 1519 bear witness to the Mexican desire to interpret and record the history of gods and man. The stelae known as *danzantes* (“dancers”) at Monte Albán in the Oaxaca valley, on which are inscribed a record of the passing days and years, place-names and the names of kings and other notables, constitute the oldest known chronicle (600 to 300 BC) of the New World.



APPENDIX 2

POLLO CON CHOCHOYOTES

Ingredientes:

1 pollo en trozos

10 [miltomates](#)

1 [cebolla](#)

4 dientes de [ajo](#)

1 hoja de [yerba santa](#)

1 rama de [epazote](#)

1 manojo chico de [perejil](#)

6 [pimientas](#)

2 [clavos](#)

- [chile serrano](#) al gusto

- [manteca para freír](#)

- sal

Procedimiento:

En 4 tazas de agua cueza los trozos de pollo con la cebolla, el ajo y la sal, hasta que estén tiernos.

Licue el clavo, la pimienta, el miltomate y el chile. [Fríalos](#) en manteca hasta que sazoneen.

Para hacer los chochoyotes mezcle la masa y el polvo para hornear con la manteca y la sal. Bata hasta que se logre una masa fina. Haga bolitas.

Cuando la carne esté hirviendo, deje caer los chochoyotes y baje el fuego para que no se deshagan.

Poco antes de servir, agregue al caldo el epazote, el perejil y la yerba santa molidos con un poco de agua.

Para los chochoyotes:

1 [taza de masa de maíz](#)

1/4 cucharadita de polvo de hornear

2 cucharadas soperas de manteca

- sal



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