3.1 Exploration: Interlinguistic difference

Look again at Jakobson's comment that 'Languages differ essentially in what they *must* convey and not in what they *may* convey.' Find examples from your own languages that illustrate this. How are these dealt with in translation?

The questions of meaning, equivalence and translatability became a constant theme of translation studies in the 1960s and were tackled by a new 'scientific' approach followed by one of the most important figures in translation studies, the American Eugene Nida (1914–2011).

3.2 Nida and 'the science of translating'

Eugene Nida's theory of translation developed from his own practical work from the 1940s onwards when he was translating and organizing the translation of the Bible, training often inexperienced translators who worked in the field.[2] Nida's theory took concrete form in two major works in the 1960s: *Toward a Science of Translating* (Nida 1964a) and the co-authored *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Nida and Taber 1969). The title of the first book is significant; Nida attempts to move Bible translation into a more scientific era by incorporating recent work in **linguistics**. His more systematic approach borrows theoretical concepts and terminology both from semantics and pragmatics and from Noam Chomsky's work on syntactic structure which formed the theory of a universal generative–transformational grammar (Chomsky 1957, 1965).

3.2.1 The influence of Chomsky

Chomsky's generative–transformational model analyses sentences into a series of related levels governed by rules. In very simplified form, the key features of this model can be summarized as follows:

(1) Phrase-structure rules generate an underlying or **deep structure** which is
(2) transformed by transformational rules relating one underlying structure to another (e.g. active to passive), to produce

(3) a final **surface structure**, which itself is subject to phonological and morphemic rules.

The structural relations described in this model are held by Chomsky to be a universal feature of human language. The most basic of such structures are **kernel sentences**, which are simple, active, declarative sentences that require the minimum of transformation (e.g. *the wolf attacked the deer*).

Nida incorporates key features of Chomsky's model into his **'science' of translation**. In particular, Nida sees that it provides the translator with a technique for decoding the ST and a procedure for encoding the TT (Nida 1964a: 60). Thus, the surface structure of the ST is analysed into the basic elements of the deep structure; these are 'transferred' in the translation process and then 'restructured' semantically and stylistically into the surface structure of the TT. This three-stage system of translation (analysis, transfer and restructuring) is presented in Figure 3.1:

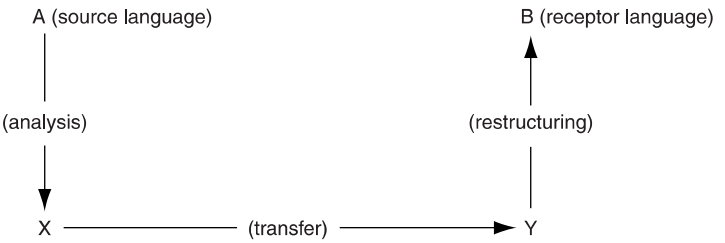

Figure 3.1 Nida's three-stage system of translation (from Nida and Taber 1969: 33)

Nida and Taber's own description of the process (1969: 63–9) emphasizes the 'scientific and practical' advantages of this method compared to any attempt to draw up a fully comprehensive list of equivalences between specific pairs of SL and TL systems. 'Kernel' is a key term in this model. Just as kernel sentences were the most basic structures of Chomsky's initial model, so, for Nida and Taber (ibid.: 39), **kernels** 'are the basic structural elements out of which language builds its elaborate surface structures'. Kernels are to be obtained from the ST surface structure by a reductive process of back transformation. This entails analysis using generative–transformational grammar's four types of functional class:

(1) events: often but not always performed by verbs (e.g. *run, fall, grow, think*);
(2) objects: often but not always performed by nouns (e.g. *man, horse, mountain, table*);
(3) abstracts: quantities and qualities, including adjectives and adverbs (e.g. *red, length, slowly*);

(4) relationals: including affixes, prepositions, conjunctions and copulas (e.g. *pre-, into, of, and, because, be*).

Examples of analysis (e.g. Nida 1964a: 64), designed to illustrate the different constructions with the preposition *of*, are:

surface structure: *will of God*
back transformation: B (object, *God*) performs A (event, *wills*)

and

surface structure: *creation of the world*
back transformation: B (object, *the world*) is performed by A (event, *creates*).

Nida and Taber (ibid.: 39) claim that all languages have between six and a dozen basic kernel structures and 'agree far more on the level of kernels than on the level of more elaborate structures' such as word order. Kernels are the level at which the message is transferred into the receptor language before being transformed into the surface structure in a process of: (1) 'literal transfer'; (2) 'minimal transfer'; and (3) 'literary transfer'. Box 3.1 displays an example of this transfer process in the translation of a verse from the New Testament story of John (John 1:6, cited in Nida 1964a: 185–7).

Box 3.1

- Greek ST:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
egeneto	anthrōpos,	apestalmenos	para	theou,	onoma	autō	lōannēs

- Literal transfer (stage 1):

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
became/happened	man,	sent	from	God,	name	to-him	John

- Minimal transfer (stage 2):

1	2	3	4	5	7	6	8
There	CAME/WAS a	man, sent	from	God,	WHOSE	name *was*	John

- Literary transfer (stage 3, example taken from the *American Standard Version*, 1901[3]):

  1 2 3 4 5 7 6 8
  There CAME a man, sent from God, WHOSE name *was* John

  or (example taken from Phillips *New Testament in Modern English*, 1958[4]):

  2 6 7 8 3 4 5
  A man, NAMED * John WAS sent BY God

  Notes: Adjustments from the ST are indicated as follows: changes in order are indicated by the numeral order, omissions by an asterisk (*), structural alterations by QK?JJ A?NQR?JQ and additions by *italics*.

The two examples of literary transfer are different stylistically, notably in syntax, the *American Standard Version* being more formal and archaic. The reason for this may be the kind of equivalence and effect that is intended, a crucial element of Nida's model (see section 3.2.3).

3.2.2 The nature of meaning: advances in semantics and pragmatics

When it comes to analysing individual words, Nida (1964a: 33ff) describes various 'scientific approaches to meaning' related to work that had been carried out by theorists in semantics and pragmatics. Central to Nida's work is the move away from the old idea that a word has a fixed meaning and towards a functional definition of meaning in which a word 'acquires' meaning through its context and can produce varying responses according to culture.

Meaning is broken down into the following:

(1) **Linguistic meaning:** the relationship between different linguistic structures, borrowing elements of Chomsky's model. Nida (ibid.: 59) provides examples to show how the meaning crucially differs even where similar classes of words are used. For instance, the following three expressions with the possessive pronoun *his* all have different meanings: *his house*

means 'he possesses a house', *his journey* equals 'he performs a journey' and *his kindness* is 'kindness is a quality of him'.

(2) **Referential meaning:** the denotative 'dictionary' meaning. Thus, *son* denotes a male child.

(3) **Emotive** or **connotative meaning:** the associations a word produces. So, in the phrase 'Don't worry about that, *son*', the word *son* is a term of endearment or may in some contexts be patronizing.

A series of techniques, adapted from linguistics, is presented as an aid for the translator in determining the meaning of different linguistic items. Techniques to determine referential and emotive meaning focus on analysing the structure of words and differentiating similar words in related lexical fields. These include **hierarchical structuring**, which differentiates series of words according to their level (for instance, the superordinate animal and its hyponyms *goat, dog, cow*, etc.) and techniques of **componential analysis**. The latter seek to identify and discriminate specific features of a range of related words. The results can be plotted visually to assist in making an overall comparison. For example, Table 3.1 plots family relationship terms (*grandmother, mother, cousin*, etc.) according to the values of sex (male, female), generation (the same, one, two or more apart) and lineality (direct ancestor/descendant or not).

Table 3.1 Example of componential analysis (adapted from Nida 1964a: 85)

	grand-father	*grand-mother*	*father*	*mother*	*uncle*	*aunt*	*son*	*daughter*	*grand-son*	*grand-daughter*
G1	+	+								
G2			+	+	+	+				
G3							+	+		
G4									+	+
Sex m	+		+		+		+		+	
Sex f		+		+		+		+		+
Lineality 1	+	+	+	+			+	+	+	+
Lineality 2					+	+				

For example, the first column, for *grandfather*, has the values of first generation, male sex and direct lineality. Such results are useful for a translator working with languages that have different kinship terms. Sometimes more values will need to be incorporated. For example, Chinese may distinguish lexically between the maternal and paternal grandfather.

Another technique is **semantic structure analysis** in which Nida (ibid.: 107) separates out visually the different meanings of *spirit* ('demons', 'angels', 'gods', 'ghost', 'ethos', 'alcohol', etc.) according to their characteristics (human vs. non-human, good vs. bad, etc.). The central idea of this analysis is to encourage the trainee translator to realize that the sense of a complex semantic term such as *spirit* (or, to take another example, *bachelor*) varies and most particularly is 'conditioned' by its context. *Spirit* thus does not always have a religious significance. Even (or perhaps especially) when it does, as in the term *Holy Spirit*, its emotive or connotative value varies according to the target culture (Nida ibid.: 36). The associations attached to the word are its connotative value, and these are considered to belong to the realm of pragmatics or 'language in use'. Above all, Nida (ibid.: 51) stresses the importance of context for communication when dealing with metaphorical meaning and with complex cultural idioms, for example, where the sense of the phrase often diverges from the sum of the individual elements. Thus, the Hebrew idiom *bene Chuppah* (lit. 'children of the bridechamber') refers to the wedding guests, especially the friends of the bridegroom (ibid.: 95).

In general, techniques of semantic structure analysis are proposed as a means of clarifying ambiguities, elucidating obscure passages and identifying cultural differences. They may serve as a point of comparison between different languages and cultures and are proposed by Nida especially for those working with widely differing languages.

3.2 Exploration: Componential analysis

Use Table 3.1 above to plot kinship terms for your L1 and L2. How far do these map onto the English terms? How helpful is this componential analysis for translation?

3.2.3 Formal and dynamic equivalence and the principle of equivalent effect

The old terms such as 'literal', 'free' and 'faithful' translation, which were examined in Chapter 2, are discarded by Nida in favour of 'two basic orientations' or 'types of equivalence' (Nida 1964a: 159): (1) formal equivalence; and (2) dynamic equivalence. These are defined by Nida as follows:

(1) **Formal equivalence:** Formal equivalence focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content . . . One is concerned that the message in the receptor language should match as closely as possible the different elements in the source language.

(Nida 1964a: 159)

Formal equivalence, later called 'formal correspondence' (Nida and Taber 1969: 22–8), is thus keenly oriented towards the ST structure, which exerts strong influence in determining accuracy and correctness. Most typical of this kind of translation are 'gloss translations', with a close approximation to ST structure, often with scholarly footnotes. This type of translation will often be used in an academic or legal environment and allows the reader closer access to the language and customs of the source culture.

(2) **Dynamic equivalence:** Dynamic, later 'functional', equivalence is based on what Nida calls 'the principle of **equivalent effect**', where 'the relationship between receptor and message should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the message'.

(Nida 1964a: 159).

The message has to be tailored to the receptor's linguistic needs and cultural expectation and 'aims at complete naturalness of expression'. 'Naturalness' is a key requirement for Nida. Indeed, he defines the goal of dynamic equivalence as seeking 'the closest natural equivalent to the source-language message' (Nida 1964a: 166, Nida and Taber 1969: 12). This receptor-oriented approach considers adjustments of grammar, of lexicon and of cultural references to be essential in order to achieve naturalness. The TT language should not show interference from the SL, and the 'foreignness' of the ST setting is minimized (Nida 1964a: 167–8) in a way that would be criticized by later culturally-oriented translation theorists (see Chapters 8 and 9).

For Nida, the success of the translation depends above all on achieving **equivalent effect** or **response**. It is one of the 'four basic requirements of a translation', which are (ibid.: 164):

(1) making sense;
(2) conveying the spirit and manner of the original;
(3) having a natural and easy form of expression;
(4) producing a similar response.

Although dynamic equivalence aims to meet all four requirements, it is also a graded concept since Nida accepts that the 'conflict' between the traditional notions of content and form cannot always be easily resolved. As a general rule for such conflicts, Nida considers that 'correspondence in meaning must have priority over correspondence in style' if equivalent effect is to be achieved. However, it is interesting to note the similarity with Tytler's principles of translation in one of the early attempts at systematizing translation theory at the end of the eighteenth century (see Chapter 2). This suggests that the scientific approach is still supported by the essential subjectivity of some of the language of the literal vs. free debate.

3.2.4 Discussion of the importance of Nida's work

The key role played by Nida is to develop the path away from strict word-for-word equivalence. His introduction of the concepts of formal and dynamic equivalence was crucial in introducing a receptor-based (or reader-based) orientation to translation theory. However, both the principle of equivalent effect and the concept of equivalence have come to be heavily criticized for a number of reasons: Lefevere (1993: 7) felt that equivalence was still overly concerned with the word level, while van den Broeck (1978: 40) and Larose (1989: 78) considered equivalent effect or response to be impossible. (How is the 'effect' to be measured and on whom? How can a text possibly have the same effect and elicit the same response in two different cultures and times?) Indeed, the whole question of equivalence inevitably entails subjective judgement from the translator or analyst.

It is interesting that the debate continued into the 1990s. In 1992 and 1993, for example, *Meta*, one of the leading international journals of translation studies, published a series of five papers by Qian Hu whose express aim was to demonstrate the **'implausibility' of equivalent response**. The focus in these papers[5] is notably on the impossibility of achieving equivalent effect when meaning is bound up in form, for example the effect of word order in Chinese and English, especially in literary works (Qian Hu 1993b: 455–6). Also, that 'the closest natural equivalent may stand in a contradictory relation with dynamic equivalents'. The example given (ibid.: 465) is of the English words *animal, vegetable, mineral* and *monster*. The closest Chinese equivalents are *dòng wù, zhí wù, kuàng wù* and *guài wù*. These all happen to contain the character *wù*, meaning 'object' (thus, *dòng wù* means 'moving object', hence *animal*). If these Chinese equivalents are chosen, such an unintended cohesive link would lead to what Qian Hu terms

'overtranslation'. Qian Hu also discusses cultural references, and the argument recalls the kind of criticism that has surrounded a notorious example where Nida (1964a: 160) considers that *give one another a hearty handshake all round* 'quite naturally translates' the early Christian *greet one another with a holy kiss*. While some may feel the loss of the source culture term/custom, such cultural adaptation is far from unusual. It is witnessed, for example, by Arabic translations of *Harry Potter* that translate *she kissed him on the cheek* by *she waved at him and said 'Good-bye, Harry'* (Dukmak 2012).

3.3 Exploration: Equivalent effect

Read the discussion of equivalent effect by Qian Hu in one or more of the papers in *Meta* available online (Qian Hu 1992a, 1992b, 1993a, 1993b, 1994). Note the criticisms made. Look also at the article by Miao Ju (2000) on the ITS companion website. How valid do you consider these criticisms to be?

The criticism that equivalent effect is subjective raises the question of whether Nida's theory of translation really is 'scientific'. The techniques for the analysis of meaning and for transforming kernels into TT surface structures are carried out in a systematic fashion, but it remains debatable whether a translator follows these procedures in practice. However, Nida's detailed description of real translation phenomena and situations in a wealth of varied languages is an important rejoinder to the vague writings on translation that had preceded it. Additionally, Nida showed he was aware of what he terms (ibid.: 3) 'the artistic sensitivity which is an indispensable ingredient in any first-rate translation of a literary work'.

One of Nida's fiercest critics is Edwin Gentzler, whose *Contemporary Translation Theories* (1993/2001) contains a chapter on 'the "science" of translation' (Gentzler's quotation marks). Working from within a deconstructionist perspective (see Chapter 10), Gentzler denigrates Nida's work for its theological and proselytizing standpoint. In Gentzler's view, dynamic equivalence is designed to convert the receptors, no matter what their culture, to the dominant discourse and ideas of Protestant Christianity. Ironically, Nida is also taken to task by certain religious groups who maintain that the Word of God is sacred and unalterable; the changes necessary to achieve dynamic equivalence would thus verge on the sacrilegious.

However, 'in the field' in the 1960s, dealing daily with real and practical translation problems and attempting to train translators for work in very different

cultures, Nida achieved what few of his predecessors attempted: he went a long way to producing a systematic analytical procedure for translators working with all kinds of texts and he factored into the translation equation the receivers of the TT and their cultural expectations. Despite the heated debate it has provoked, Nida's systematic linguistic approach to translation exerted considerable influence on many subsequent and prominent translation scholars, among them Peter Newmark in the UK and Werner Koller in Germany.

3.3 Newmark: semantic and communicative translation

Peter Newmark (1916–2011)'s *Approaches to Translation* (1981) and *A Textbook of Translation* (1988) have been widely used on translator training courses and combine a wealth of practical examples of linguistic theories of meaning with practical applications for translation. Yet Newmark departs from Nida's receptor-oriented line. He feels that the success of equivalent effect is 'illusory' and that 'the conflict of loyalties, the gap between emphasis on source and target language, will always remain as the overriding problem in translation theory and practice' (Newmark 1981: 38). Newmark suggests narrowing the gap by replacing the old terms with those of 'semantic' and 'communicative' translation:

> Communicative translation attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original. Semantic translation attempts to render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original.
>
> (Newmark 1981: 39)

This description of **communicative translation** resembles Nida's dynamic equivalence in the effect it is trying to create on the TT reader, while **semantic translation** has similarities to Nida's formal equivalence. However, Newmark distances himself from the full principle of equivalent effect, since that effect 'is inoperant if the text is out of TL space and time' (1981: 69). An example would be a modern British English translation of Homer. No modern translator, irrespective of the TL, can possibly hope or expect to produce the same effect on the reader of the written TT as the oral ST had on its listeners in ancient Greece. Newmark (ibid.: 51) also raises further questions concerning the readers to whom Nida directs his dynamic equivalence, asking if they are 'to be handed everything on a plate', with everything explained for them.