

Equivalence in the Vietnamese Translation of John Green's the Fault in Our Stars

Nguyen Thi Hoang Oanh

School of Foreign Languages, Jiangsu University Zhenjiang 212013, P.R of China

Abstract

Equivalence, one of the most important procedures, has become a central issue in Translation Studies. This study compares the John Green's the novel *The Fault in Our Stars* and the Vietnamese translation by Huy Hoang Nguyen to find out the types of equivalence. From an objective and subjective point of view, there is no unique type of equivalence in the Vietnamese Translation; it is a mixture because of the orientation of choosing the translator's equivalences by the influence of cultural, linguistic differences, and the translator's ability. Along with that, the study investigates the domestication and foreignization in achieving equivalence in Vietnamese version of the novel.

Keywords: Vietnamese translation; Equivalence; Foreignization; Domestication.



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1. Introduction

It can be clearly seen that equivalence can be considered a central concept in translation theory. Translations must be equivalence to the original texts; it is the requirement of translation. An ideal translation is a translation of completely equivalence to the original both content and form, therefore, it is difficult to have a perfect translation. According to [Derrida Jacques \(1998\)](#), he states that in the sense, everything is translatable and also untranslatable; translation, therefore, is impossible in another name. It is the reason for no absolute equivalence. As a form of communication, translation indeed is so important to establish equivalence between the source text and the target text. [Nida \(1964\)](#) defines translation as "reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style". The fact is the existence of equivalences of the basic concepts of translation is evident and cannot be neglected. The study will not only show how the types of translation equivalence have been used in the John Green's the novel *The fault in our stars* and the Vietnamese translation, but it also points out objective and subjective factors that affect the choice of the equivalents of the translator.

2. Defining the term "Equivalence"

From the 19th century, scientists used the term "equivalent" to indicate process or phenomenon ([Snell-Hornby, 1988](#)). In mathematics, equivalence is seen as the equilibrium relationship of a logic operator while in chemistry it is called a "measure" in a given reaction of a chemical. In addition, in linguistics, the meaning of equivalence is "an absolute symmetry between the words of different languages" ([Mohamed \(1977\)](#)). The scientific definition of equivalence shows that it is easy to imagine the quantity of a substance and absolute equality, yet it is an abstract reality in the field of language. According to [Halverson \(1997\)](#), equivalence is the relationship existing between two entities, and the relationship is described as one of similarity in terms of any of the number of potential qualities. ([House, 1997](#)) states the notion of equivalence is the conceptual basis of translation. On other words, ([Catford, 1965](#)) also shared "the central problem of translation practice is that of finding target language equivalents and the central task of translation theory is, therefore, that of defining the nature and conditions of translation equivalence".

3. Types of Equivalence in the Translation Version

a. Kade and Quantitative Approach of Equivalence

According to the regarding lexical equivalence of [Kade \(1968\)](#), equivalence was divided into 4 categories.

The first type is *One-to-one equivalence*, in which one expression in the original language has only acted by one equivalent in the translated language. This type of equivalence usually occurs in the terminology system.

Ex: *Blood-cancer* = *Ung thư máu*¹

Chocolate = *Sôcôla*²

The second one is *One - to - many equivalence* that is when more than one TL expression in a single SL expression is used and vice versa.

Ex: *Literary* = *Đầy tính nhân văn/ Văn chương*³

Conversation = *Cuộc trò chuyện/ Câu chuyện*⁴

¹ Chapter 4

² Chapter 9

³ Chapter 4. "Literary" of "literary decision"

Mang = to bring/ to carry

Thirdly, an expression in the original language has many meanings that express a target language is equivalent to one of these expressions, the phenomenon is called *One - to - part- of - one equivalence*.

Ex: *Rồng* = *Dragon*⁵

In European culture, the dragon is a legendary creature which is a folk and mythological symbol of power, but in the majority, European Dragons tend to symbolize devils and aggressiveness. They are portrayed as a lizard-like creature which has large bat-like wings with scales long back to the tail and can spit fire. However, in East culture generally and in Vietnamese culture particularly, the picture of dragons is completely different; they are the imagined creatures which have a long body with legs and can be flying; they are also the noble symbol of power, immortality, good fortune and straightforwardness. Although there are differences in definitions as well as images of "Dragons" in the minds of the West and the Vietnamese, there still have an equivalent in a meaning, that is the symbol of great power.

Lastly, *Nil equivalence* happens when there is no TL expression for an SL expression because of the disagreement language and culture.

Ex: *Toyota* = *Toyota*⁶

Internet = *mạng Internet*⁷

There are many words that cannot be found to accurately translate the meaning of the source language. Because of linguistic and cultural differences and some scientific terminology, it is difficult to find the right word for translation, therefore, by retaining the icon of the source text and transcribing them in Vietnamese, that is a reasonable choice. For instance, "Internet" \ 'in-tər-net \ in Phonetic Vietnamese is \ in-to-nét \⁸

b. Nida and Function-Based Equivalence

Nida (1964), made a great contribution to translation studies, created "dynamic equivalence" which was superseded by "functional equivalence" (1986). In his opinion, there are two different types of equivalence, including *formal equivalence*- which, in the second edition, is referred to as formal correspondence and *dynamic equivalence*

- *Formal equivalence*: the equivalence focuses attention in both form and content, viewed from "formal orientation", it shows that the message of target text (TT) in TL is as close as possible with source text (ST) in SL.

Ex: *Oh my god= Ôi chúa ơi*⁹

Original text	<u>But</u> <u>it's not</u> <u>a cancer</u> <u>book,</u> <u>because</u> <u>cancer</u> <u>books</u> <u>suck.</u>
Vietnamese	<u>Nhưng đây không phải là một cuốn sách về ung thư,</u> <u>bởi những cuốn</u> <u>như thế quá</u> <u>nhạt nhẽo</u>
Back to English	But it's not a cancer book, because such books suck.

There is no significant difference both structure and content in the above sentence, which shows that the translator has almost exactly followed formal equivalence.

- *Dynamic equivalence*: unlike formal equivalence, it emphasizes "equivalent effect". In other words, the translators find out the words carry the meaning that is not only familiar with target cultural reader's thinking but also creates the same response of the source cultural reader.

Ex:

ST: "Now, it wasn't as if I held my phone in my sweaty hand all day, staring at it while wearing my Special Yellow Dress, patiently waiting for my gentleman caller to live up to his sobriquet."¹⁰

TT: "Tôi cũng không phải kiểu suốt ngày ôm khư khư điện thoại trong lòng bàn tay dầm mồ hôi, nhìn chăm chăm nó trong khi mặc chiếc Váy Vàng Độc Đáo, kiên nhẫn chờ đợi một cuộc gọi đến từ vị lãng tử của mình như đúng tên gọi của cậu ấy."

From the sentences above, Huy Hoang Nguyen translated "It wasn't as if I held my phone in my sweaty hand all day" to "Tôi cũng không phải kiểu suốt ngày ôm khư khư điện thoại trong lòng bàn tay dầm mồ hôi". This translation makes Vietnamese readers feel that is not an idle girl who just stares at the phone for messaging or waiting for someone else. Back translation to English of the above sentence is "I was not the kind of person who tightly held my phone in my sweaty hand all day". By choosing the word "ôm khư khư" in the translation is equivalent to "tightly held", and looking for a familiar phrase "Tôi cũng không phải kiểu"= "I'm not the kind of person" to replace the phrase "It wasn't as if" of the original text, here, the translator focused on the natural,

⁴ Chapter 5

⁵ Chapter 8

⁶ Chapter 2

⁷ Chapter 6

⁸ Lạc Việt Dictionary of Vietnamese

⁹ Chapter 4

¹⁰ Chapter 5

appropriate culture and less emphasis on accuracy of surface structure of the original text. On the other hand, she tries to reproduce the response of the target readers which are the same as the reaction of the original readers.

4. The Dynamic Equivalence: Domestication and Foreignization

Schleiermacher introduced the concept of Domestication and Foreignization in the early 19th century. In the book *The Translator's Invisibility* in 1995 of Venuti, he once again mentioned two terminologies "domestication" and "foreignization" are believed that are the crucial strategies in Translation. Domestication is a strategy which is used to reduce the cultural values of the original language in source text to the recipient of the target language, directs translators to their native culture. Domestication strategy focuses on the influence of the translator on the work and more on the role of the receiver than the foreignization strategy. This is also Nida's intention to explain the purpose of the translation as dynamic (or functional equivalence). According to Nida, the translator should be oriented by the target readers, which makes the purpose of communicating between the source text and the translated text more efficient, and enables the translation to be closer to the reader's behavior related to their own cultural background.

For example:

ST: "...I would reach out my arms as I flew and he would reach out his arms, and then we would both see that our arms were not going to touch and no one was going to catch me, and it would kind of scare the shit out of both of us in the best possible way..."¹¹

TT: "...Tôi dang hai tay như thể đang bay vậy và ông sẽ đưa ra đón lấy, nhưng rồi ông nhận ra tay ông không với được tới tôi còn tôi thì chẳng có ai đỡ ở dưới, điều đó làm cả hai bố con đều sợ vãi mật..."

The use of the adjective "vãi mật" to qualify the verb "sợ", the translator translated "it would kind of scare the shit out of both of us in the best possible way" into "điều đó làm cả hai bố con đều sợ vãi mật" in the Vietnamese way. The way the translator chooses the words "sợ vãi mật" is very close to Vietnamese readers, this expression is familiar with that kind of "afraid of peeing in pants" in English. The translator's choice of pure Vietnamese with the image "burst the gallbladder out" to emphasize "scare", it was succeeded in expressing what the source text wanted to convey and influenced the response of the target readers themselves.

Foreignization, on the contrary, brings the reader out of the boundaries of national culture and makes them immersed in themselves emotions as well as the values of foreign language and culture. Additionally, through the deliberate breaking of the rules, tradition, and convention of the target language it preserves the foreign things in the translation. In terms of Domestication, the translator creates a unique product for target readers, the style and cultural values of the original are adapted to the target culture and the aesthetic taste of the target recipients. This does make it possible for the target cultural readers to respond to the target text in a way that is almost the same way the source cultural readers' feeling to the original. However, we could not deny the value of Foreignization in translation strategy, by preferring to make the translation become more faithful and correct rather than the smoothness of the word, the translation work can also achieve its communicative purpose. In the book of *The Fault in our Stars*, Huy Hoang Nguyen truly translated and respected the original.

For example:

ST: "They met in the Peace Corps in Papua New Guinea, and so whenever anything happened there, even something terrible, it was like all of a sudden they were not large sedentary creatures..."¹²

TT: "Ngày xưa hai người đã gặp nhau trong chiến dịch tình nguyện của Peace Corps ở Papua New Guinea, thế nên bất cứ khi nào có chuyện gì, kể cả tin xấu đi nữa, họ bỗng nhiên như không còn là những người lớn đã ổn định cuộc sống của mình nữa..."

In the following case, "Peace Corps", as we know it is a volunteer program of the United States, which the translator commented at the end of the book is "Đoàn quân Hòa Bình". By keeping the word "Peace Corps" in the translation and explaining it clearly, the translator has directed the reader to recognize that this is a non-Vietnamese activity. Supposing that the translator decided to translate the phrase "They met in the Peace Corps" by the Vietnamese way "Ngày xưa hai người đã gặp nhau trong Đoàn quân Hòa Bình" and without an explanation, it is easy for the Vietnamese readers to feel confused and have no motivation to go further to learn a new knowledge of what the "Peace Corps" is. In addition, Vietnamese readers, by way of this translation, get rich new knowledge outside the Vietnamese culture and open their mind.

5. Conclusion

Equivalence, in fact, is not only an important key in Translation Studies, but it also brings a lot of attention to translators to perfect the translation. There will never be only one equivalence in a translation. Through the relationship between dynamic equivalence in translation strategy with domestication and foreignization, the translator must consider choosing one of the two methods, either domestication or foreignization for the Vietnamese translation or both. After all, to conclude, this study researches these issues were analyzed by bilingual comparison of English-Vietnamese versions of the fault in our stars.

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¹¹ Chapter 4

¹² Chapter 5

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