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**Semantic Equivalence in the English Translation of
Sa'ad Ad-Deen Wahbah's Sikkat As-Salaamah
A Communicative and Pragmatic Approach**

A Thesis Submitted by

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Dedication

To my mum and dad

Without whom

I wouldn't have been.

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Contents

	Page
Introduction	1
Chapter one- Review of Literature:	
1. Pragmatics	
1.1. Pragmatic Meaning	5
1.2. Speech Act Theory	14
1.3. Implicature	21
Chapter Two- Methodology:	
2. Pragmatic-oriented Models in Translation Studies	
2.1. The Pragmatic Dimension of Texts	34
2.2. Pragmatic Equivalence	63
2.3. Shifts of Coherence	111
Chapter Three- Practical Analysis:	
3. Pragma-linguistic Analysis of the English Translation of Sa'ad Ad-Deen Wahbah's Play <u>Sikkat As-Salaamah</u> (2008)	
3.1 Lexical Items in Egyptian Colloquial Dialect	146
3.2 Idioms and Fixed Expressions	228
3.3 Modes of Address	282
3.4 Modes of Swearing	307
3.5 The Identity of Reference	324
Conclusion	339
References	349

List of Abbreviations:

CP Co-operative Principle

SL Source Language

TL Target Language

ST Source Text

TT Target Text

Abstract

Almost any definition of translation would revolve around the communication of source text (ST) meaning in the target text (TT). Yet the question is how meaning can actually be tracked down and then conveyed in a translated text and consequently equivalence attained in translation. Pragmatics as a branch of linguistics concerned with the making of meaning proves useful in answering this question. The study thus draws on pragmatic-oriented approaches to translation to examine factors that contribute to the working out of intended meaning in communication and to observe how such meaning can be relayed in translation. It highlights that failure to acknowledge the pragmatic dimension of texts (that aspect of language which enables it to “do” things in addition to “say” things) leads to changes of the ST intended meaning in the TT i.e. “shifts of coherence”. A pragma-linguistic contrastive analysis of the play Sikkat As-Salaamah and its English translation yields the following outcomes: Firstly, when pragmatic meaning is not realized properly in the TT, mostly due to a focus on achieving semantic equivalence, a shift of coherence occurs. Secondly, too many occurrences of shifts lead to differences between the ST and the TT regarding the depicted state of affairs, the attitudes of the characters as well as the power relations that hold between them. The recurrence of shifts also minimizes the relevance between the conversational turns in the TT as compared to the ST. Finally, all the above negatively affect the readability and coherence of the produced TT.

Keywords: translation studies, pragmatic equivalence, semantic equivalence, shifts of coherence, illocutionary force/act, implicature, intended meaning.

Introduction:

Developments in the study of pragmatics and discourse analysis since the 1960s had a considerable impact on recent studies of translation equivalence. The feature of language that enables it to perform actions, underlined by pragmatics and the view of text as a communicative act elaborated by discourse analysis, has modified the notion of equivalence. Equivalence is no longer considered to hold solely on the level of lexical items, syntactic structures or denotative meaning, but the pragmatic force of utterances which can also be referred to as the pragmatic meaning is taken into account both when seeking and judging equivalence in translation. According to pragmatics, the meaning of an utterance is not limited to the words and structures the utterance consists of, but it is constructed in relation to a communicative situation that involves variables such as the speaker, the listener and the context of situation. Coherence and implicature are -as Baker (1992) asserts- two pragmatic notions "particularly helpful in exploring the question of making sense" (pp. 217-218) i.e. the question of arriving at utterance meaning. This pragmatic approach to the comprehension of meaning in utterances and texts adds a new perspective when examining equivalence in translation i.e. pragmatic equivalence. An ST-TT analysis on the pragmatic level helps detect any change of the intended meaning from the ST into the TT. In other words, a pragmatic level analysis of texts can help trace the difference between how an utterance coheres (comes to make sense) in the ST and the TT.

Problem Statement

Translation theorists have often studied translation shifts that occur as part of the translation process from different angles. The focus has been largely on investigating formal changes represented in the work done by Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) and Catford (1965). Blum-Kulka (1986), on the other hand, is among those who study translation shifts on a different level. She moves away from minor linguistic comparisons by pointing out how changes that occur subtly in translation may have far reaching consequences on the way the text or a portion of it can come to make sense to the reader. She examines the disparity between the way a text or part of a text is understood in the ST and the way it is perceived in the TT. Such

changes in the meaning potential of a text are what Blum-Kulka (1986) refers to as "shifts of coherence".

The serious consequences of such shifts can be illustrated, as Hatim and Mason (1990) demonstrate, by considering for example the outcome of yielding a plea into a demand in translation (more accurately simultaneous interpreting in this case) by a defendant to a judge in a court of law. Similar outcomes hold when such changes occur in the translation of literature. Assigning intentions (speech acts) to utterances in a dramatic dialogue is what a reader does to start making sense of the world a play presents. As Herman (1995) points out "different acts and classes of acts ...can form a tapestry of cues for interpreters to create the state of affairs in the dramatic world" (p. 222). Hence, alterations of speech acts that may happen as part of the transition from the ST to the TT can eventually lead to shifts in the dramatic context as depicted by the ST author. Blum-Kulka asserts that it is often the case in literary translation that seemingly insignificant changes on the linguistic level can affect the indirect speech acts being transmitted by the ST. This is because in literature, especially drama "short lines of seemingly ordinary talk are so heavy with implied meaning, each shift [on the linguistic level] has far reaching consequences for the interpretation of those meanings" (Blum-Kulka, 1986, p. 303).

Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to examine translation equivalence on the pragmatic level and to explore the variables that contribute to attaining such equivalence. It will seek to prove the relationship between achieving pragmatic equivalence and establishing TT coherence as closely as possible to the ST. Through application of such notions on the English translation (1979) of the Arabic play "Sikkat As-Salamah" by Sa'ad Ad-Deen Wahbah (2008), the proposed study will attempt to detect shifts of coherence that occur between the ST and the TT; and to account for such shifts of coherence with the aid of insights gained from the pragmatic-oriented models of translation of Basil Hatim and Ian Mason (1990) and Mona Baker (1992).

Significance of the Study

Considerable research has been directed towards studying formal shifts in translation i.e. changes that occur between ST-TT on the level of the linguistic systems. Although such research which studies translation shifts based on linguistic contrastive analysis between a pair of languages is useful, it does not, as Munday (2001) notes, "incorporate sociocultural and pragmatic factors, nor the role of translation as a communicative act" (p. 9). Two of the most prominent approaches that deal with the process of translation as a communicative act are Hatim and Mason's (1990) and Baker's (1992). They provide a viable framework on which the proposed study relies in its investigation of shifts in translation with a view to contribute to the body of studies which tackle translation shifts that occur on a communicative and pragmatic level.

The following chapter will give an overview of pragmatics as one of the communicative approaches to language. It will tackle some of its main theories and concepts as well as its relation to semantics.

Chapter One

Review of Literature

Pragmatics

1.1. Pragmatic Meaning

1.1.1. Historical Rise of Pragmatics

Pragmatics is generally defined as the study of language in use or the study of meaning in interaction. To help better demonstrate what pragmatics is, it is useful to start with a review of the historical rise of pragmatics, the needs it came to address and the views it came as a reaction against. Most references which discuss the emergence of pragmatics show that pragmatics as a field of study originally rose in response to addressing issues of philosophy and not issues of pure linguistics. Leech (1983) asserts that “the more lasting influences on modern pragmatics have been those of philosophers” (p. 2). The 1950s saw the rise of two main schools of thought in the philosophy of language: ideal language philosophy and ordinary language philosophy (Huang, 2007, p. 2). Ideal language philosophers were concerned with finding a consistent relationship between languages and logical systems. They deemed everyday language as defective, full of illogicalities and imperfections. Their aim was to refine language and rid it of imperfections and contradictions; thus creating an “ideal language” as the name of their school suggests. So, in order to reconcile language with logic, they held that the only statements that are meaningful are those that can be tested empirically. In other words, according to the ideal language philosophy statements that cannot be verified in terms of empirical evidence are deemed false and meaningless.

An example set forth by Thomas (1995) can better illustrate this point. A sentence like “I sleep all the time” said by a patient to a doctor is according to the view of ideal language philosophers logically anomalous and contradictory and will be regarded as false and meaningless; because simply the speaker was obviously awake when s/he uttered the sentence. Such sentences are, however, commonly encountered in casual conversations in everyday life. Yet, they are not dismissed as being logically contradictory and people still seek to make sense of them and communication works successfully. Observing the above-mentioned fact, Austin and the group of ordinary language philosophers argued that “instead of striving to rid everyday language of its imperfections...we should try to understand

how it is that people manage with it as well as they do” (Thomas, 1995, p.29). In other words, instead of seeking to create an ideal language based on and complying with a logical system, ordinary language philosophy sought to explore and understand how it is that ordinary people manage to communicate effectively despite the seeming illogicality and contradiction of the language used. It was the thoughts of ordinary language philosophy that generated the issues and ideas which later came to be known as pragmatics.

1.1.2. Pragmatics: Definitions and Scope

Pragmatics is "the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener or reader" (Yule, 1996, p. 3). Pragmatics involves “the study of speaker meaning...the study of contextual meaning...[and] the study of how more gets communicated than is said” (Yule, 1996, p. 3). The definition of pragmatics introduced by Huang (2007) revolves along the same lines: “pragmatics is the systematic study of meaning by virtue of, or dependent on, the use of language” (p.2). Thus, it is clear in most definitions of pragmatics that its focus is on the study of language and meaning in communication, in use and in interaction. As Leech (1983) maintains pragmatics is “the study of the general conditions of the communicative use of language” (p. 10). The focus of pragmatics on the study of language in use or in communication is what sets it apart from semantics, which studies the vocabulary of a language and the relationship between words and entities or states of affairs in the world regardless of the users or the context. As Leech (1983) says “pragmatics is distinguished from semantics in being concerned with meaning in relation to a speech situation” (p.15) with speech situation involving addresser and addressee, context, goals, illocutionary act and utterance.

Both pragmatics and semantics have the study of meaning as their concern. Yet, there is a difference between the pragmatic approach to meaning and the semantic view of meaning. As Huang (2007) notes semantics and pragmatics are “complementary though distinct sub-disciplines of linguistics, shedding light on different aspects of meaning” (p. 211). Highlighting the different aspects of