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## Equivalence in Translation through German, French and Macedonian Examples

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### Abstract

This paper aims towards a review of the history of determining and debating about the term equivalence in the translation studies and by giving examples from German, French and Macedonian, it tries to apply the theoretical statements into practicing translation. The notation equivalence has caused heated controversy in the translation theory as well as many different analyzes of its concept, especially of its definition, relevance and applicability within the field of translation studies. Until recently, equivalence has been studied in relation with the translation process by using different approaches, as results have been provided ideas for further studies on this topic. Despite the evident discrepancies in the views of various theorists, however, this term is being continuously used as most suitable in the most translation literature. For enabling the communication, it is necessary for a communication equivalence to be reached, which means that the target language text must have the same communicative value that the original text has for its original recipient. Not always is possible a total translation equivalence, but sometimes there is existence of incomplete (partial) equivalence or even non-existence of equivalence.

**Keywords:** Equivalence; translation; translator.

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## **1. Introduction**

The essence of transferring language messages from one language into another lies in the realization of translation equivalency. The term “equivalence” has been for a long time the main topic of translation discussions.

Wills [1:159], who, according to Prunč [2:33] was the first to use the term equivalence in translation, states that hardly any another term in the translation theory has provoked so many thoughts, has caused so many contradictory statements of opinion and has caused so many defining attempts as the term of translation equivalence between source language text and target language text has caused.

## **2. Theoretical discussions about the term “equivalence”**

Roman Jakobson [3:233], one of the most prestigious representatives of structural linguistics, agrees with Wills and states that the equivalence in difference is one of the main linguistic problems.

In the comparative sciences of languages, the term “equivalence” was borrowed from the technical disciplines implying that all the languages contain symmetrical relations between the elements and there can be an exchange of elements among the languages by simple system of rules. Later comes the notion that there are no language pairs that contain perfectly symmetrical lexical and grammar structures and that the reversibility as the most important feature of equivalency is not sustained in translation as it is in exact sciences. Snell-Hornby [4:13] even considers the term equivalence as inappropriate for a measure for evaluation of the translation, since it was borrowed from exact sciences and it is very static and one-dimensional, and the languages contain no symmetry at all. Thus, as a more appropriate one, the term “functional equivalence” has been introduced. The functional equivalence is related to the Nida’s model, according to which the most important thing to do is to reach message equivalency, hidden within the depth structure (meaning) of the original, regardless the size of the changes that will have to be made within the surface structure of the language [5:38].

The most important representatives of the Leipzig school [6,7], when defining equivalency, refer to the language system itself, where the extralinguistic reality can be examined as *tertium comparationis* [2:56], and within the functionalist-oriented theory Reiß/Vermeer [8:124] examine equivalency along with adequacy. While equivalency is regarded as equatability [9:12], adequacy is defined as relation of adequacy between lingual means of expression on one hand, and the conditions and goals of the speaker on the other hand, in interlingual contrastive observation [10:34].

The term “equivalence” suggests that between the information with same values of two languages, there are translation relations being established, conditioned by naming data on reference frameworks. Koller [11:216] lists five referential frameworks that have a role in establishing the type of translation equivalence:

- The extralingual content transmitted by a text; the kind of equivalence oriented towards this factor is called denotative equivalence.

- The type of verbalization of contents regarding connotative dimensions of a single text (style, sociolects and geographical dimensions, frequency, etc.) – equivalence oriented according to such categories is connotative.
- The text and language norms (usage norms) for given text types: this kind of equivalence, having to do with text-type specific features is called text-normative.
- The receiver (reader) to whom the translation is directed (who is supposed to be able to understand the text), and to whom the translation is "tuned" in order e.g. to achieve a given effect; this is pragmatic equivalence.
- Certain formal-aesthetic features of the source language text, including word play, metalinguistic aspects, individual stylistic features; the kind of equivalence that relates to these textual characteristics is called formal-aesthetic, although this is admittedly a heterogeneous concept.

### **3. Translation equivalence between German, French and Macedonian**

If translation equivalents at a denotation level are to be considered as units connected by the same semantic content, and they may have different positions within their own language, a conclusion may be drawn that the ratio between units of two languages is no longer one-to-one, but a single unit of a language may have more or less than a single unit of another language corresponding. Thus, there are three possible cases: total equivalence, incomplete (partial) equivalence and non-existence of equivalence [12:140].

A. Total translation equivalence, which is called by Koller [11:229] one-to-one correspondence appears for a relatively short period of time and, in most cases, is present in: personal and geographical names, numbers, names of the days, months, seasons, scientific and technical terms, especially the ones originating from Latin, Greek, and nowadays from the English language, mostly related to the modern technology, etc. Except for the single word form *eins* in German or *un* in French (“еден”), *Montag* in German or *lundi* in French (“понеделник”) etc., the total translation equivalence may be present also in certain syntax units: *Ana hat zwei Kinder* in German or the same sentence in French, *Anne a deux enfants*. (“Ана има две деца”). In such cases there are no problems in translation because the word forms from one language simply can be replaced by appropriate word forms of the other language.

B. Incomplete (partial) equivalence represents the most common relations between lexic and grammar structures at an interlingual level. Thus, there are two possible situations:

- one-to-many correspondences

- many-to-one correspondences [11:230]

One-to-many correspondences are present when a concept of the first language has many concepts from the second language that correspond to the first language, and in that case it is said that the lexeme/syntagma of the source language has wider semantic field than the one of the target language. One of the basic problems, among others, that appear at the lexical level, is the polysemy: *Onkel* in German or *oncle* in French (“чичко” / “вужко”),

but such type of correspondance may also appear at a level of syntagma or sentence: Ich habe in Ramstore eingekauft in German or the same sentence in French, J'ai fait des courses en Ramstore ("Купував во Рамстор" / "Имам купувано во Рамстор").

Such cases are really troublesome for a German or French to Macedonian translator, because it is difficult to understand the German or French expression appropriately and to find one appropriate equivalent in Macedonian.

Many-to-one correspondences occur when the lexeme/syntagma of the source language has a semantic field narrower than the one of the target language, which is not problematic for the interpretation process. In that case, a synonymy is also present at a level of the lexeme: sehen, ansehen, schauen in German or the verbs with the same meaning in French, regarder, voir ("гледа") as well as at the level of the syntagma/sentence. Synonymy may also be called semantic equivalence [13:164] and it is present when two statements possess same or similar meaning. But, we have to say that very rarely there can be seen total synonyms, because there are often subtle meaning differences among the statements which disables their mutual replacement:

<p><i>Das ist noch umzusetzen.</i></p> <p><i>Ceci est à mettre en oeuvre.</i></p> <p><i>Das soll umgesetzt werden.</i></p> <p><i>Ceci doit être mis en oeuvre.</i></p> <p><i>Das gehört umgesetzt.</i> □ (This is a south-german passive voice construction)</p> <p><i>Cela doit être réalisé.</i></p> <p><i>Das bleibt umzusetzen.</i> (See more in Helbig/Buscha [14:165])</p> <p><i>Cela reste à mettre en oeuvre.</i></p>	<p>“Ова треба да се спроведе.”</p>
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However, this is not relevant regarding the translation from German or French into Macedonian, since the recipient of the target text, and not the translator, is the one who will have difficulties understanding. In order to contribute to proper understanding, the translator can paraphrase the structure of the sentence. Thus, instead of “Ова треба да се спроведе.”, he/she can say “Ова треба да биде спроведено.”, or “Треба да го спроведат ова.”, of course, if time and space allow it.

B. Regarding the non-existence of equivalence or one-to-zero correspondence we may use that term when there are temporary gaps within the lexical or grammar system of the target language. Koller [11:232] calls them real

gaps. Translator's task in such cases is to find a way how to fill in such gaps. The gaps are most commonly features of cultural differences. Such cultural specifics that also reflect on languages may be observed at a lexeme level, which, in this case, most often are the realia (eg. Dirndl) and at a level of syntagma/sentence, which most often are the idiomatic expressions (eg. Husch, husch ins Körbchen). The meanings of idiomatic expressions most often are transferred by paraphrasing from one into another language, and a real problem are the ones that possess grammatically irregular constructions: "Fahr langsamer, da vorne ist eine Kurve, die ist nicht ohne!" [15].

The obstacles in finding an appropriate translation equivalent is due to: 1. Differences in language structures, for example the content of the German sentence Er heißt Paul, in different languages is expressed by different lexical and morphosyntax means: Il s'appelle Paul (French), or His name is Paul (English), Si chiama Paolo (Italian); 2. Multifunctionality of some word forms in one language (eg. се обесува, „се“ can be reflexive pronoun of the reflexive verbs or pronominal form for making passive voice form) or existence of more meanings, relations and types of relations between word forms (eg. Фатени се крадци на улични столбови. „На улични столбови“ may be understood as an objective attribute of the noun „крадци“ or as a local determination of the verb „фатени се“, which is a result of numerous meanings that possess the preposition „на“ as well as the semantic compatibility of the language units (which is not case with the other language); 3. False pairs: Dieses große Unternehmen hat gerade den Konkurs erklärt, where the german word Konkurs in Macedonian means “стечај” and not “конкурс” which in German is Ausschreibung etc. Or in a French exemple, Paul est un artiste, where the French word artist in Macedonian means „уметник“ and not „артист/глумец“.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In trying to define equivalence we come to the conclusion that this notion is quite debatable because of the existence of evident discrepancies in the views of various theorists, however, this term continues to be used as suitable. By making an attempt to specify the concept of equivalence more precisely, bearing in mind the various categories, we can conclude that the concept of equivalence postulates a relation between the source language text (or text element) and the target language text (or text element). The kind of equivalence relation is defined in terms of the frame and the conditions to which one refers when using the concept of equivalence. In other words, a normative statement is made: equivalence between a given source text and a given target text exists if the target text fulfills certain requirements with respect to these frame conditions. The relevant conditions are those having to do with such aspects as content, style, function, etc. The requirement of equivalence thus has the following form: the quality in the source language text must be preserved. This means that the content, form, style, function, etc., of the source text must be preserved, or at least that the translation must seek to preserve them as far as possible.

Reaching equivalence in translation is also related to overcoming differences in language systems and appropriate cultures, as well as to establishing formal correspondence at phonologic, grammar and lexical level. Despite relativity of lingual communication and non-existence of absolute equivalents, yet, within the translation process, it is necessary to be found the closest of many potential translation equivalents that will match the so called invariant, i.e. the component that remains unchanged, permanent during the translation of

lingual signs from one language to another.

Finally, everyone will probably agree that the goal of the translation process is realization of communication between communicators that belong to two different lingual and cultural environments. The communication is established by communication equivalency. According to Jäger [7:87] communication equivalence exists when the translation text has the same communication value for his addressees as the original has for his originally lingual addressee. Communication value represents a feature of a text that enables the text to cause certain communication effect (i.e. picture that a sender wants to create in an addressee), which is the aim of every translator.

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