



THE STUDY OF NON-EQUIVALENT VOCABULARY AND REALIA IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY GERMAN LINGUISTIC RESEARCH

Eshmuradov Ural Khujanovich

Senior Lecturer at the Department of Foreign Languages,
Karshi University of Economics and Pedagogy

Abstract

The paper also examines the influence of socio-cultural, historical, and technological contexts on the formation of non-equivalent vocabulary and the strategies used by translators to overcome these barriers. Through analysis of German vocabulary in literary, business, and cultural texts, this study demonstrates that effective translation requires not only linguistic expertise but also cultural knowledge, intuition, and strategic adaptation. Understanding these phenomena is crucial for enhancing both the accuracy and cultural fidelity of translations.

Keywords: realia, non-equivalent vocabulary, translation strategies, cultural linguistics, equivalence, temporarily non-equivalent terms

Introduction

Translation is a complex and multi-layered process, encompassing not only linguistic knowledge but also cultural, historical, and social understanding. It involves transferring meaning from a source language to a target language while preserving semantic, stylistic, and pragmatic content. One of the fundamental challenges in translation arises from the existence of non-equivalent vocabulary—lexical units that do not have a direct counterpart in the target language. This class of words reflects the unique cultural, historical, and social characteristics of the source language and requires the translator to navigate linguistic and conceptual gaps carefully.

Literature and Review

The study of non-equivalent vocabulary is crucial for understanding the dynamics of language contact and the role of culture in shaping linguistic expression. It also



sheds light on the cognitive processes involved in translation, as translators must not only find lexical substitutes but also consider pragmatic, stylistic, and cultural factors. Scholars such as A.B. Lebedeva, A.A. Vasilyeva, E.M. Vereshchagin, V.G. Kostomarov, L.S. Barkhudarov, and and uzbek scholars such S. Hamroyeva, M. I. Islomova have emphasized that non-equivalent vocabulary is an essential object of research in translation studies, as it reflects the unique worldview, traditions, and social structures of a linguistic community.

German scholar Kade was one of the pioneering German theorists of translation, part of what is known as the Leipzig School of Translation Studies. In his work, he introduced a typology of equivalence in translation: *totale Äquivalenz*, *fakultative Äquivalenz*, *approximative Äquivalenz*, and *NullÄquivalenz* (zero equivalence) — the latter being particularly relevant to vocabulary without equivalents (i.e., realia). His emphasis on communicative equivalence (rather than purely formal equivalence) places translation firmly in the context of culture, situation, and function.

By acknowledging “zero equivalence”, Kade provides a theoretical underpinning for why certain lexical items (e.g., cultural-specific objects, institutions, practices) cannot be “translated” by mere substitution. The translator must make a choice (borrow, explain, adapt) rather than assume a 1:1 equivalent exists [3].

Analyses and Discussions

Non-equivalent vocabulary is particularly prominent in words-realìa, which denote culturally specific objects, practices, and social phenomena. Realìa may include items of material culture, such as traditional clothing, culinary dishes, architectural elements, or technological tools, as well as intangible concepts, such as social institutions, political structures, or customary practices. Non-equivalent vocabulary refers to words in one language that lack a precise counterpart in another, often because they are deeply embedded in a specific cultural context. In German, there are numerous examples of this, particularly in terms of culturally specific practices, social phenomena, and conceptual ideas.

1. Material Culture

“Schultüte” – This is a cone-shaped package filled with sweets and school supplies, given to children on their first day of school (Einschulung). While other countries



may have “back-to-school gifts,” the German Schultüte is culturally specific, and there is no direct equivalent in English. Translating it literally as “school cone” does not convey its cultural significance.

“Kaffee und Kuchen” – A traditional German social ritual of having coffee and cake in the afternoon. While English might translate it as “afternoon tea,” the German practice carries unique social connotations and timing, distinct from the British custom.

2. Intangible Concepts

“Gemütlichkeit” – Often translated as “coziness” or “comfort,” but this fails to fully capture the combination of warmth, friendliness, and a sense of belonging that Germans associate with the term.

“Schadenfreude” – Literally “harm-joy,” it refers to the pleasure derived from another person’s misfortune. While English uses the German word itself in some contexts, a full equivalent does not exist; translations like “malicious delight” only approximate the meaning.

“Fingerspitzengefühl” – Literally “fingertips feeling,” it denotes a highly developed intuitive skill, sensitivity, or tact in handling complex situations. English equivalents like “instinct” or “sensitivity” fall short of conveying the nuanced, almost refined precision implied in German.

3. Social Institutions and Practices

“Kindergarten” – While adopted into English, the cultural connotations differ. In Germany, Kindergarten reflects a state-supported, structured approach to early childhood education, embedded within German educational philosophy, which may not align perfectly with informal preschool concepts in other countries.

“Vereinskultur” – Refers to Germany’s rich tradition of clubs (Vereine) for sports, hobbies, and social activities, fostering community bonding. Many cultures lack a direct equivalent, making the concept challenging to translate without explanation. These examples illustrate that German vocabulary often encodes cultural knowledge, practices, and social norms that do not have simple lexical equivalents. Translating such terms requires more than word-for-word substitution; it demands intercultural mediation, often involving explanation, context, or borrowing the original term. This highlights two key points:

Language reflects culture – Words are not just labels but carry historical, social, and cultural meaning.



Translation as communication – Translating non-equivalent vocabulary is an act of intercultural communication, bridging cultural understanding rather than merely transferring lexical content.

The difficulty of translating non-equivalent vocabulary lies not only in the absence of direct equivalents but also in the nuances of meaning, connotation, and usage. Words may carry historical references, social connotations, or symbolic meanings that are invisible to speakers of the target language. In addition to realia, there exists a category of temporarily non-equivalent terms—words that may eventually develop equivalents in other languages but are initially unfamiliar or contextually bound. These often arise from technological innovations, scientific discoveries, or socio-political developments that are first introduced in a specific linguistic and cultural community [4]. German, like many languages, often coins terms to describe new phenomena in technology, social media, and finance. When these concepts are culturally or temporally specific, there may be no ready equivalent in other languages until the concepts become globally familiar.

1. Digital Technology

“Handy” – In German, this means “mobile phone” or “cell phone.” A literal English translation would suggest a helpful or convenient object, which is misleading. English had to adopt “mobile phone” or “cell phone” instead.

“Datenschutz” – Literally “data protection,” but in German culture, it carries strong legal, ethical, and social connotations rooted in post-war privacy concerns. Translating it as “privacy” or “data protection” in other languages may fail to convey the depth of regulatory and cultural significance.

“Verschlüsselung” – Encryption in a digital context; while it can be translated directly, the German discourse on Verschlüsselung often emphasizes privacy rights and security culture more strongly than in other languages.

2. Social Media

“Follower” – Borrowed from English, but in German social media discourse, it may carry nuanced connotations about influence, credibility, and social capital that differ culturally from English contexts.

“Shitstorm” – A German neologism for online outrage, criticism, or backlash. While English speakers might understand “online backlash,” the German term is vivid, metaphorical, and culturally recognized, making direct translation tricky.

3. Contemporary Finance



“Girokonto” – A checking or current account, but the German banking system and its terminology differ in structure and practice from other countries, so translation requires contextual explanation.

“Schuldenfalle” – Literally “debt trap,” but in German financial discourse, it often refers to the broader social and legal mechanisms that can perpetuate indebtedness, not just the personal risk.

From a methodological perspective, analyzing non-equivalent vocabulary requires a contrastive approach, comparing lexical units across languages to identify gaps and partial correspondences. It also involves classifying words according to their semantic, cultural, and functional characteristics. Realia, temporarily non-equivalent terms, polysemantic words, and culturally specific idioms are among the categories that pose particular translation challenges. The identification and classification of these lexical units allow translators to select appropriate strategies, such as borrowing, calque, descriptive translation, or adaptation, ensuring both semantic accuracy and cultural fidelity [3]. Despite the challenges, non-equivalent vocabulary presents opportunities for creativity and innovation in translation. By carefully considering the cultural, historical, and social dimensions of the source language, translators can convey meaning in a way that enriches the target language and exposes readers to new concepts and experiences. This paper explores these issues through a detailed analysis of German non-equivalent vocabulary, emphasizing the differences between equivalents and realia, the role of temporarily non-equivalent terms, and the strategies used to overcome cultural and linguistic barriers. The discussion also highlights the importance of background knowledge, intuition, and cultural sensitivity in achieving effective and meaningful translations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of non-equivalent vocabulary is essential for both theoretical and practical aspects of translation. It reveals the interplay between language and culture, underscores the complexity of intercultural communication, and provides translators with the tools and strategies needed to bridge linguistic and conceptual gaps. By examining the concepts of equivalence, realia, and temporarily non-equivalent terms, this research aims to contribute to a deeper



understanding of the challenges and solutions associated with translating culturally and contextually bound lexical units.

References

1. Hamroyeva, S. (2023). TARJIMADA MILLIY SO‘ZLARNING BERILISHI (OYBEKNING “NAVOIY” ROMANI INGLIZCHA TARJIMASI MISOLIDADA). Ижтимоий-гуманитар фанларнинг долзарб муаммолари Актуальные проблемы социально-гуманитарных наук Actual Problems of Humanities and Social Sciences., 3(S/8). <https://doi.org/10.47390/SPR1342V3SI8Y2023N37>.
2. Islomova, M. I. kizi. (2023). Realia as a specific component of non-equivalent vocabulary. *Science and Education*, 4(2), 1646–1649. Retrieved from <https://openscience.uz/index.php/sciedu/article/view/5261>.
3. Kade, Otto A. W. *Zufall und Gesetzmäßigkeit in der Übersetzung*. Leipzig: Verlag Enzyklopädie, 1968.
4. Neubert, Albrecht. *Text and Translation (Übersetzungswissenschaftliche Beiträge 8)*. Leipzig: Verlag Enzyklopädie, 1985.
5. Reiß, Katharina. *Texttyp und Übersetzungsmethode: der operative Text*. Heidelberg: Julius Groos Verlag (2. Aufl.), 1983.
6. Лебедев А. В. “Перевод безэквивалентной лексики с английского языка на русский: вопросы теории и практики.” *Вопросы теории и практики*, №4 (130) 2023.
7. Васильева А. А., Фатхинуров Б. Ф. “Способы перевода безэквивалентной лексики в научно-технических текстах.” *Филологический аспект*, №5 (49), Май 2019.