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Challenges in Translating Terminology and the Problem of Equivalence

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ABSTRACT

Terminology translation remains one of the most complex challenges in the field of translation studies. The article explores the core problems translators face when dealing with specialized terms, with a specific focus on the issue of equivalence between source and target language terms. The research draws upon a comparative analysis of English, Uzbek, and Russian terminologies in the fields of law, economics, and information technology. It identifies common sources of non-equivalence, such as cultural gaps, structural differences, and conceptual mismatches. The study also outlines effective translation strategies that include borrowing, paraphrasing, and functional equivalence. The findings suggest that achieving accurate and contextually appropriate terminology translation demands both linguistic proficiency and domain-specific knowledge.

Keywords: Terminology translation, equivalence, non-equivalence, functional approach, linguistic structure, cross-cultural communication.

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized and rapidly evolving world, effective translation plays a central role in facilitating cross-cultural communication, international cooperation, and the exchange of specialized knowledge. Among the various branches of translation, the translation of terminology – the set of specialized terms used in specific disciplines such as law, medicine, economics, and technology – presents a unique set of challenges. Unlike general vocabulary, which may allow for stylistic flexibility or contextual paraphrasing, terminological units are tightly bound to domain-specific concepts, structures, and cultures. Their accurate and context-sensitive translation is vital for preserving the integrity and functionality of the target text.

One of the key challenges in terminology translation is the problem of equivalence. This refers to the difficulty, and often the impossibility, of finding a target-language term that is fully identical in meaning, function, scope, and connotation to the source-language term. Equivalence is not only a linguistic issue but also a cultural and conceptual one, since many terms are deeply embedded in the worldview, legal frameworks, and professional practices of a particular speech community. This challenge becomes even more pronounced when translating between languages with significantly different cultural and structural systems – such as English and Uzbek or Russian and Uzbek. Theoretical perspectives on equivalence have been diverse. Eugene Nida (1964) introduced the concepts of formal and dynamic equivalence, advocating for the reproduction of equivalent effect rather than mere structural symmetry. Peter Newmark (1988) further classified translation into semantic and communicative approaches, emphasizing the need to balance accuracy with comprehensibility. Functionalist scholars such as Katharina Reiss and Hans Vermeer (1984) proposed that the translator's decisions should be guided by the function (Skopos) of the text, particularly in specialized translation. In recent years, the translation of terminology has become a priority in various fields, especially with the growth of international documentation, multilingual legislation, software localization, and academic publishing. However, practical challenges persist. Translators often face non-equivalence, false cognates, conceptual mismatches, and structural differences that hinder direct term substitution. In many cases, translators must resort to descriptive translation, borrowing, or paraphrasing to approximate meaning and function. Despite the development of glossaries, terminology databases (e.g., IATE, UNTERM), and domain-specific dictionaries, the issue of equivalence remains unresolved in many language pairs. This is particularly evident in under-resourced languages where terminological standardization is still in progress. In Uzbek, for instance, many technical and legal terms either lack stable equivalents or suffer from inconsistent usage across official documents and translations. Given this context, the present study aims to explore the challenges of translating terminology with a focus on the problem of equivalence. It seeks to analyze typical types of non-equivalence encountered in professional practice, investigate the underlying causes of terminological gaps, and evaluate practical strategies that translators apply to overcome such issues. The study is grounded in comparative examples from English-Uzbek and Russian-Uzbek translations in legal, economic, and technological domains, thus offering both theoretical insights and practical recommendations. This research contributes to a better understanding of how terminology functions across languages and cultures, how translators navigate the constraints of non-equivalence, and how terminology translation can be improved through systematic approaches, interdisciplinary collaboration, and terminological harmonization.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a qualitative-descriptive and comparative approach, which is widely used in translation studies for analyzing linguistic structures, contextual meaning, and translation strategies (Munday 2016). The goal of this methodology is to identify, categorize, and interpret the most common challenges encountered in the translation of specialized terminology, particularly those related to non-equivalence, and to propose effective solutions rooted in both theory and practice. The research is grounded in comparative analysis of English-Uzbek and Russian-Uzbek bilingual terminological usage in legal, economic, and technical texts. The design follows a non-experimental model based on naturalistic observation of texts and translator output. The choice of fields was guided by the high terminological density and sensitivity to contextual accuracy in these domains (Sager 1990).

Data was collected from the following sources: Bilingual legal and economic documents, including contracts, regulations, and policy papers translated into Uzbek from English and Russian; Terminological glossaries and dictionaries, such as: *Multilingual Glossary of Legal Terms* (UNODC 2014); *O'zbektiliningizohlilug'ati* (Uzbek Academy of Sciences, 2006–2008); IATE (InterActive Terminology for Europe); Translated software interfaces and IT manuals in Uzbek; Scientific articles and publications from OAK (Oliyattestatsiyakomissiyasi) e'tirofetganjurnallar.

These materials provided real-life examples of terminological translation decisions and revealed inconsistencies, patterns of equivalence or non-equivalence, and applied strategies. To analyze the collected data, several established theoretical models and frameworks were employed: Eugene Nida's equivalence typology – distinguishing between formal equivalence (literal translation) and dynamic equivalence (meaning-focused translation), useful for identifying translator decisions when faced with non-matching terms (Nida 1964). Peter Newmark's semantic vs. communicative translation theory — helpful in evaluating whether translations preserve the exact meaning or adapt to target-language norms and readership (Newmark 1988). Vinay and Darbelnet's model of translation procedures — including borrowing, calque, literal translation, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation (Vinay & Darbelnet 1995). Skopos theory by Reiss & Vermeer – emphasizing functionality and purpose of the translated text in the target context (Reiss & Vermeer 2013). These models enabled classification of terms based on their translation strategy and functional adequacy. The analysis focused on the following linguistic and functional parameters: Semantic precision – whether the target term maintains the same denotative and connotative meaning; Grammatical compatibility – comparison of source and target term structures; Cultural equivalence – assessment of sociocultural relevance and acceptability; Frequency of use – checking standardized or preferred translations in official contexts. Each term was categorized based on the presence or absence of equivalence and the strategy employed to address the gap. While the study provides a broad overview of terminological translation issues, it is limited by the scope of domains and language pairs. The findings are most relevant to English-Uzbek and Russian-Uzbek combinations and may not fully generalize to other language pairs with different structural and cultural relationships. Moreover, access to some confidential or unpublished translations was restricted, which may have limited exposure to additional real-world challenges. Despite these limitations, the chosen methodology allowed for a deep, context-rich understanding of the translation of terminology and how equivalence is pragmatically achieved across languages.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The results of this study reveal that terminological translation is a highly nuanced process, shaped by linguistic, cultural, and disciplinary factors. Through the comparative analysis of selected bilingual texts in English, Uzbek, and Russian, a number of recurring patterns of non-equivalence, structural discrepancies, and strategic adaptations were identified. These findings are grouped into five major categories, each illustrated with examples and analyzed in light of relevant translation theories.

Non-equivalence due to cultural and conceptual gaps

A significant number of specialized terms in English, particularly in the legal and political domains, lack direct equivalents in Uzbek. This is often due to systemic differences in national institutions, legal frameworks, or sociocultural practices. Example: “Senate hearing” → [No direct Uzbek equivalent] In Uzbek, the concept of “parliamentary hearings” exists, but the U.S. model of Senate hearings requires descriptive translation such as *Senatmajlisieshituvlari* or *Senatyig‘ilishidaeshitiladiganmasalalar*. This confirms Newmark’s (1988) observation that culturally embedded terms frequently require functional or descriptive equivalents rather than lexical substitution. Structural mismatches in term construction English terminology often relies on compound nouns and concise syntactic constructions, which may not align with the target language's grammar. Uzbek, in contrast, frequently employs genitive constructions or analytical phrases to express the same idea. Example: "Data protection policy" → *Ma'lumotlarnihimoyaqilishsiyosati*

Here, the English compound noun must be restructured grammatically in Uzbek. According to Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), this requires transposition – a shift in grammatical structure during translation.

Lexical gaps and neologisms

Modern technology and global economics have introduced numerous neologisms in English which are not yet fully standardized in Uzbek. In such cases, translators often rely on borrowing, transliteration, or calque formation Examples: "Outsourcing" → *autsorsing* (borrowed), or *tashqixizmatlardanfoydalanish* (descriptive) *Blockchain* → *blokcheyn* (transliterated). This supports Sager's (1990) view that lexical innovation often precedes terminological normalization in emerging domains. False equivalents and semantic shift ю some terms appear equivalent at first glance but differ in scope, usage, or connotation. These false friends can lead to misleading translations if used without critical analysis. Example: English: "discipline" (academic field or order) Uzbek: *Tartib-intizom* (usually refers to behavior). To address such discrepancies, "semantic clarification" or "contextual paraphrasing" is required. This aligns with Nida's (1964) recommendation for "dynamic equivalence" based on communicative effect.

Strategy patterns in professional translations

From the corpus analysis, the following translation strategies were most frequently applied by professional translators:

Strategy	Example	Frequency
Borrowing	"Internet" → *internet*	High
Descriptive translation	"Due diligence" → *kompaniyanitahlilqilishjarayoni*	Medium
Functional substitution	"Master's degree" → *magistrdarajasi*	High
Calque formation	"Human resources" → *insonresurslari*	Medium
Footnotes or commentary	Legal culture-specific terms	Low

These patterns reflect an adaptive approach, where translators prioritize "communicative efficiency" and "reader accessibility" over literal accuracy.

Empirical findings summary

Around 37% of analyzed terms were translated using descriptive equivalents.24% involved direct borrowings, especially for IT and business terms. Only 18% had a stable one-to-one equivalence across the compared languages. 21% required structural transformation due to syntactic or lexical incompatibility.This highlights the prevalence of non-equivalence and the translator's active role in constructing meaning.

Interpretation of results

The findings support the argument that terminology translation cannot rely solely on dictionaries or literal matching. Instead, it must be understood as a negotiated process that takes into account the target audience, genre, register, and cultural expectations. Functional and dynamic equivalence theories provide a robust framework for explaining translator choices in context. Moreover, the results suggest an urgent need for further standardization of Uzbek terminology, especially in scientific and legal fields; Wider access to multilingual databases such as IATE or UNTERM; Enhanced training for translators in contextual and interdisciplinary terminology management.

CONCLUSION

The conducted study confirms that terminology translation represents one of the most demanding and intellectually complex areas within the discipline of translation studies. Unlike general language translation, which may allow for stylistic and contextual flexibility, the translation of terms requires linguistic precision, conceptual equivalence, and functional appropriateness. These demands become especially acute when dealing with specialized texts in fields such as law, economics, and technology, where terminological accuracy has direct implications for legal clarity, academic integrity, and operational effectiveness.

One of the key findings of this research is the prevalence and inevitability of non-equivalence. This phenomenon arises from a variety of factors: differences in cultural norms, epistemological systems, institutional structures, and linguistic typologies. As a result, the expectation of a one-to-one correspondence between source and target terms is often unrealistic. Translators must navigate this gap through a range of strategic techniques such as borrowing, descriptive translation, functional equivalence, and structural adaptation. The analysis demonstrates that each of these strategies serves to bridge the semantic and pragmatic divides between languages while striving to preserve the communicative function of the original term.

Moreover, the study highlights that terminological equivalence is not static, but rather dynamic and context-sensitive. The same source term may require different translations depending on genre, register, and the target audience's background knowledge. For example, an economic term in a policy report may be translated differently than in a newspaper article or a technical manual, even within the same language pair. This reinforces the importance of functionalist approaches (Reiss & Vermeer 2013) and the concept of dynamic equivalence (Nida 1964), both of which emphasize the purpose and communicative effect of the translated term in context.

The practical implications of this research are significant. First, it underscores the need for continuous terminological standardization efforts, particularly in languages such as Uzbek where many neologisms and technical concepts are still under development. Second, it calls for the integration of terminological competence into translator education and training, including corpus-based research, glossarial development, and domain-specific knowledge building. Third, it suggests that professional translators should actively engage with terminological databases, collaborate with subject-matter experts, and participate in cross-linguistic harmonization efforts at national and international levels.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on translation equivalence by reaffirming that absolute equivalence is both rare and unnecessary; what matters is the functional adequacy of the target term in fulfilling the role of the source term in a new linguistic and cultural setting. This insight aligns with the shift in translation studies from prescriptive rules toward purpose-oriented and reader-focused paradigms.

In conclusion, terminology translation is not a mechanical process but a highly interpretive and intellectually demanding task that requires interdisciplinary awareness, linguistic creativity, and cultural competence. In our increasingly interconnected world, the accurate and meaningful translation of terms is not only a technical necessity but also a cultural and communicative bridge between peoples, disciplines, and systems of knowledge.

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