**Common problems of non-equivalence**

The following are some common types of non-equivalence at word level, with examples from various languages:

**(a)** Culture-specific concepts

The source-language word may express a concept which is totally unknown in the target culture. The concept in question may be abstract or concrete; it may relate to a religious belief, a social custom or even a type of food. Such concepts are often referred to as 'culture-specific'. An example of an abstract English concept which is notoriously difficult to translate into other languages is that expressed by the word privacy. This is a very ‘English' concept which is rarely understood by people from other cultures. Speaker (of the House of Commons) has no equivalent in languages such as Russian, Chinese and Arabic, among others. It is often translated into Russian as 'Chairman', which does not reflect the role of the Speaker of the House of Commons as an independent person who maintains authority and order in Parliament. An example of a concrete concept is airing cupboard in English which, again, is unknown to speakers of most languages.

Culture-Specific Words

* Aqi:qa : food in honor of a new born
* Baptism: purification from a sin
* Zaka: 2.5% paid in donation
* Odheyeh: Sacrifice in a holiday
* Wudu’: A purification condition before prayer
* Communion: Sharing the blood of Christ
* Faza3a: A group of people who protect each other’s interest in times of individual needs
* Jaha: The gathering of family members or tribe members for the purpose of a wedding proposal
* Atweh: The gathering of family members or tribe members for the purpose of seeking forgiveness for a mistaken murder
* Mansaf: Yoghurt with meat
* Mlokhiyyeh: Cooked green leaves
* Msakhan: Bread with onions and sumac
* Taco: Corn shell stuffed with minced meat
* Sushi: Raw fish with rice

**(b)** The source-language concept is not lexicalized in the target language

The source-language word may express a concept which is known in the target culture but simply not lexicalized, that is not 'allocated' a target-language word to expresses it. the word savoury has no equivalent in many languages, although it expresses a concept which is easy to understand. The adjective standard (meaning ordinary, not extra', as in standard range of products) also expresses a concept which is very accessible and readily understood by most people, yet Arabic has no equivalent for it. Landslide has no ready equivalent in many languages, although it simply means 'overwhelming majority'.

* Nostril فتحة الانف
* Uncle عم/ خال
* Charity زكاة/ صدقة
* Toe اصبع قدم
* Bookshop/library مكتبة
* Hoodie معطف
* Aunt عمة/ خالة
* Pencil قلم رصاص
* Gangster رجل عصابات
* Turkey ديك رومي
* Fishing صيد اسماك

**(c)** The source-language word is semantically complex

The source-language word may be semantically complex. This is a fairly common problem in translation. Words do not have to be morphologically complex to be semantically complex (Bolinger and Sears 1968). In other words, a single word which consists of a single morpheme can sometimes express a more complex set of meanings than a whole sentence. Languages automatically develop very concise forms for referring to complex concepts if the concepts become important enough to be talked about often. Bolinger and Sears suggest that "if we should ever need to talk regularly and frequently about independently operated sawmills from which striking workers are locked out on Thursday when the temperature is between 500° and 600°F, we would find a concise way to do it (ibid.: 114). We do not usually realize how semantically complex a word is until we have to translate it into a language which does not have an equivalent for it. An example of such a semantically complex word is arruação, a Brazilian word which means 'clearing the ground under coffee trees of rubbish and piling it in the middle of the row in order to aid in the recovery of beans dropped during harvesting' (TI News 1988:57).

Words that are semantically complex

1. قراءة فاتحة

As muslims, when people (couple) wants to get married the first step that they do. They read *surret al fateha*. (which means that they are together in front of family and friends.

1. كتب الكتاب

They are officially married, but then they have to do the wedding to announce their marriage.

1. العقيقة

When a baby is born, the baby’s parents slaughter a sheep.

1. جاهة

When a guy’s family and male relatives ask the girl’s family and male relatives for their daughter.

1. العدة

It’s the period, when a women must observe after the death of her husband or after a divorce during which she may not marry another man. It lasts 4 months and 10 days for the widow, and 3 months for the divorcee.

**(d)** The source and target languages make different distinctions in meaning

The target language may make more or fewer distinctions in meaning than the source language. What one language regards as an important distinction in meaning another language may not perceive as relevant. For example, Indonesian makes a distinction between going out in the rain without the knowledge that it is raining (kehujanan) and going out in the rain with the knowledge that it is raining (hujan-hujanan). English does not make this distinction, with the result that if an English text referred to going out in the rain, the Indonesian translator may find it difficult to choose the right equivalent, unless the context makes it clear whether or not the person in question knew that it was raining.

**(e)** The target language lacks a superordinate

The target language may have specific words (hyponyms) but no general word (superordinate) to head the semantic field. Russian has no ready equivalent for facilities, meaning 'any equipment, building, services, etc. that are provided for a particular activity or purpose'. It does, however, have several specific words and expressions which can be thought of as types of facilities, for example sredstva peredvizheniya ('means of transport'), naem (loan'), neobkhodimye pomesh-chenia ('essential accommodation) and neobkhodimoe oborudovanie ('essential equipment). Brennan (1999) discusses a range of interesting examples that demonstrate this type of difficulty in interpreting between English and British Sign Language (BSL):

An ongoing problem for interpreters is that the speaker often uses an English generic term for which BSL has no direct equivalent: the opposite problem is that BSL is frequently much more specific than English. Some examples of generic English terms include: touch, hit, murder, assault, hold. While the English word hit does not specify how someone was hit (for example with the flat hand, the fist, the back of the hand, etc.) or where someone was hit (on the face, head, legs, back, etc.), a signed version of hit would typically be quite specific in relation to how and where.

**(f)** The target language lacks a specific term (hyponym)

More commonly, languages tend to have general words (superordinate) but lack  
specific ones (hyponyms), since each language makes only those distinctions in  
meaning which seem relevant to its particular environment. There are endless  
examples of this type of non-equivalence. English has many hyponyms under article  
for which it is difficult to find precise equivalents in other languages, for example  
*feature, survey, report, critique, commentary, review* and many more. Under house,  
English again has a variety of hyponyms which have no equivalents in many  
languages, for example *bungalow, cottage, croft, chalet, lodge, hut, mansion,  
manor, villa and hall.* Under jump we find more specific verbs such as *leap, vault,  
spring, bounce, dive, clear, plunge and plummet.*

Words that are missing from the lexical set in one language but not in the other

* المثنى والجمع .. they put S instead in English
* الحواضر.. breakfast
* تسالي او المكسرات .. Different kinds of nuts
* قواعد الاعراب
* بحور الشعر
* حركات الاحرف.. diacritics
* Prefixes. مجموعة احرف توضع في بداية الكلمة لتغير المعنى
* Suffixes. مجموعة احرف توضع في نهاية الكلمة لتغير المعنى
* Past participle
* Present perfect
* Past perfect
* Complementizers (if, whether, that, for)
* ان واخواتها

**(g)** Differences in physical or interpersonal perspective

Physical perspective may be of more importance in one language than it is in  
another. Physical perspective has to do with where things or people are in relation to  
one another or to a place, as expressed in pairs of words such as come/go, take/  
bring, arrive/depart and so on. Perspective may also include the relationship  
between participants in the discourse (tenor). For example, Japanese has six equivalents forgive, depending on who gives to whom: yaru, ageru, morau, kureru  
itadaku and kudasaru (McCreary 1986),

**(h)** Differences in expressive meaning

There may be a target-language word which has the same propositional meaning as  
the source-language word, but it may have a different expressive meaning. The  
difference may be considerable or it may be subtle but important enough to pose a  
translation problem in a given context. It is usually easier to add expressive meaning  
than to subtract it. In other words, if the target-language equivalent is neutral compared to the source-language item, the translator can sometimes add the evaluative element by means of a modifier or adverb if necessary, or by building it in somewhere else in the text. So, it may be possible, for instance, in some contexts to render the English verb batter (as in child/wife battering) by the more neutral Japanese verb *tataku*, meaning 'to beat', plus an equivalent modifier such as savagely' or 'ruthlessly'. Differences in expressive meaning are usually more difficult to handle when the target-language equivalent is more emotionally loaded than the source-language item. This is often the case with items which relate to sensitive issues such as religion, politics and sex. Words like homosexuality and homosexual provide good examples. Homosexuality is not an inherently pejorative word in English, although it is often used in this way. On the other hand, the traditional equivalent expression in Arabic, shithuth jinsi (literally: 'sexual perversion'), is inherently more pejorative and would be quite difficult to use in a neutral context without suggesting strong disapproval.

**(i)** Differences in form

There is often no equivalent in the target language for a particular form in the source  
text. Certain suffixes and prefixes which convey propositional and other types of  
meaning in English often have no direct equivalents in other languages. English has  
many couplets such as employer/employee, trainer/trainee and payer/payee. It  
also makes frequent use of suffixes such as -ish (e.g. boyish, hellish, greenish) and  
-able (e.g. conceivable, retrievable, drinkable). Arabic, for instance, has no ready  
mechanism for producing such forms and so they are often replaced by an appropriate paraphrase, depending on the meaning they convey (e.g. retrievable as 'can be retrieved' and drinkable as 'suitable for drinking'). Affixes which contribute to expressive or evoked meaning, for instance by creating buzz words such as washa-teria, carpeteria and groceteria (Bolinger and Sears 1968), and those which convey expressive meaning, such as journalese, translationese and legalese (the -esesuffix usually suggests disapproval of a muddled or stilted form of writing), are more difficult to translate by means of a paraphrase. It is relatively easy to paraphrase propositional meaning, but other types of meaning cannot always be spelt out in a translation. Their subtle contribution to the overall meaning of the text is either lost altogether or recovered elsewhere by means of compensatory techniques.11

It is important for translators to understand the contribution that affixes make to  
the meaning of words and expressions, especially since such affixes are often used creatively in English to coin new words for various reasons, such as filling temporary  
semantic gaps in the language and creating humour. Their contribution is also important in the area of terminology and standardization. Examples of creative use of fixes can often be found in advertisements and other types of promotional literature. One advertisement for the chocolate Toblerone which appeared in many outlets in the mid 1990s showed three chocolate triangles against a larger image of the three pyramids in Egypt, with the caption 'Ancient Tobleronism?' appearing next to the pyramids. Here, the -ism ending evokes spirituality (as in Buddhism) and possibly, tradition - the kind we associate with established schools of thought that have large numbers of loyal followers, such as Marxism, Existential and so on. Eating Toblerone is thus likened to a spiritual experience; at the same time, the making of the chocolate, as well as eating it, are presented as part of a tradition, with a long and stable history.

**(j)** Differences in frequency and purpose of using specific forms

Even when a particular form does have a ready equivalent in the target language there may be a difference in the frequency with which it is used or the purpose for which it is used. Thus, English uses the continuous -ing form for binding clauses much more frequently than other languages which have equivalents for it, for example German and the Scandinavian languages. Consequently, rendering every ing form in an English source text with an equivalent -ing form in a German, Danish or Swedish target text would result in stilted, unnatural style.

**(k)** The use of loan words in the source text

The use of loan words in the source text poses a special problem in translation. Quite apart from their respective propositional meaning, loan words such as *au fait, chic, Auf Wiedershen* and *alfresco* in English are often used for their prestige value,because they can add an air of sophistication to the text or its subject matter.Japanese in particular tends to use loan words widely, 'just for effect, for examplebecause they sound beautiful or look elegant' (Jüngst 2008:61). This effect is oftenlost in translation, both into the language from which the loan word is originallyborrowed and into other languages, where it is not always possible to find a loanword with the same meaning or associations. Dilettante is a loan word in EnglishRussian and Japanese, but Arabic has no equivalent loan word. This means that onlythe propositional meaning of dilettante can be rendered into Arabic; its stylisticeffect would almost certainly have to be sacrificed.

Loan words also pose another problem for the unwary translator, namely the problem of **false friends**, or **faux amis** as they are often called.12 **False friends** are words or expressions which have the same form in two or more languages but convey different meanings. They are often associated with historically or culturally related languages such as English, French, Spanish and German, but in fact false friends also abound among totally unrelated languages such as English, Japanese and Russian. Mayoral Asensio (2003:95-96) discusses several interesting examples of false friends (which he refers to as 'deceptive cognates) in English and Spanish in the context of translating official documents, including college/colegio and graduate/graduado.

Once a word or expression is borrowed into a language, we cannot predict or control its development or the additional meanings it might or might not take on. Some false friends are easy to spot because the difference in their meanings is so great that only a very inexperienced translator is likely to be unaware of it. The average Japanese translator is not likely to confuse an English feminist with a Japanese feminist (feminist in Japanese is usually used to describe a man who is excessively soft with women). An inexperienced French or German translator may, however, confuse English sensible with German sensibel (meaning 'sensitive), or English sympathetic with French sympathique (meaning 'nice/likeable'). The above are some of the more common examples of non-equivalence among languages and the problems they pose for translators. In dealing with any kind of non-equivalence, it is important first of all to assess its significance and implications in a given context. Not every instance of non-equivalence you encounter is going to be significant. It is neither possible nor desirable to reproduce every aspect of meaning for every word in a source text. We have to try, as much as possible, to convey the meaning of key words which are focal to the understanding and development of a text, but we cannot and should not distract the reader by looking at every word in isolation and attempting to present him or her with a full linguistic account of its meaning.

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