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Semantics and Equivalence Antinomy in Translation: The Case of Russian-Turkish Translation of Chekhov's "Misery"

Çeviride Anlambilim ve Eşdeğerlik Antinomisi:
Çehov'un "Acı" Adlı Eserinin Rusça-Türkçe Çevirisi Örneği

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ABSTRACT
Semantics and equivalence are two fundamental concepts in the disciplines of linguistics and translation, and they are phenomena that require particular attention in the translation process. This article addresses the possibility that dictionary meanings of words may be misleading in achieving semantic equivalence between the source and target languages during translation, and that selecting from among dictionary meanings in both the source and target languages may constitute an issue that requires additional consideration. Since words can be polysemous in dictionaries, they may also undergo various shifts, such as acquiring figurative meanings, within context. The study presents conceptual analyses of semantics and equivalence and offers practical comparisons based on Turkish translations of examples taken from the original Russian text of "Misery" by Anton Chekhov. This comparative analysis aims to reveal the points at which word semantics found in dictionaries and equivalence diverge in certain cases by relating theoretical inferences to practical application. The study highlights the subtle differences between these two concepts in the context of translation practices and linguistic analysis.

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Introduction

The concepts of equivalence and semantics have been addressed separately in numerous studies. However, examining these two notions together through both theoretical perspectives and practical examples within the framework of translation studies can be more beneficial for translation activity. Translation and linguistics are disciplines that encompass not only the transfer of words or texts between languages but also significant sociocultural transitions. According to Ilyushkina (2015, pp. 9-10), scholars such as August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767-1845), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1744-1832), Jacob Ludwig Karl Grimm (1785-1863), and Friedrich Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) emphasized that interaction in the translation process occurs not merely at the linguistic level but also at a broader cultural level. Another thinker of the period, Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1834), in his work *On the Different Methods of Translating* (*Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens*), defined translation as the encounter of people, languages, and cultures from different regions of the world, characterizing it as the reproduction of one language within another. Schleiermacher further argued that even in dialogues between different social strata within the same language, cultural translation can be observed (1992, p. 36). Translation studies and translators are engaged in a continuous search for qualified translation. Eugene Albert Nida (1914-2011) and

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Charles Russell Taber (1928-2007), in their work *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, likened this search to "the effort to find the shallowest part of a river in order to cross it" (1982, p. 34). Therefore, translation studies, being a product of language and culture interaction, should be approached from a multidisciplinary perspective.

This article addresses semantics and equivalence, two significant phenomena organically linked to linguistics and translation studies together. The concepts will be analyzed under the umbrella of translation studies, with emphasis placed on their points of divergence. The discussion will explore the extent to which lexical semantics can contribute to the phenomenon of equivalence within translation, while adopting a target-language-oriented perspective. Since the semantic structure of a word, when transferred directly from the source text to the target language based solely on dictionary meaning, may result in certain deficiencies, particular attention will be paid to polysemy. Translators often encounter difficulties in transferring meaning from the source language to the target language due to such semantic multiplicity. From this perspective, semantics and equivalence will be examined within the framework of translation studies, seeking answers to the question of how semantic variations in the source language can be transformed into equivalence in the target language to the greatest possible extent. In the theoretical section of the article, the concept of semantics will first be presented independently in its general sense, prior to situating it within the discipline of translation. Subsequently, the notion of equivalence though conceptualized within translation will likewise be introduced in a more general and independent manner. Thereafter, the positioning of these two concepts within translation studies will be analyzed in theoretical terms, thereby establishing a conceptual foundation before moving on to the practical section.

The application section will illustrate how semantics and equivalence diverge within words and sentences under the framework of translation. For this purpose, Anton Pavlovich Chekhov's short story Misery will be utilized, as it reflects Russian culture and language through various elements. Concrete examples of words and sentences in which semantic and equivalence distinctions can be observed will be selected from the text. Each example will first be presented in the source language, Russian, and subsequently, a semantic translation focusing on dictionary meaning will be provided, taking into account polysemy. Then, Turkish translations oriented toward equivalence will be presented. After each example, lexically based polysemous usages will be compared with semantically equivalent counterparts in a comparative analysis. In this way, semantics and equivalence will be examined within the framework of translation studies from a target-language perspective.

Finally, the study offers a comprehensive evaluation of the findings by delineating the research objectives and addressing the central questions, while simultaneously underscoring the contribution of a translation-oriented examination of semantics and equivalence to related disciplines such as linguistics, translation studies, and literary analysis. Within this framework, it must be emphasized that the present study does not seek to advance a translation critique, to evaluate translators, or to formulate a prescriptive methodological model; rather, it aims to interrogate, within defined limits, the potentially deceptive dimensions of lexical items in translation processes particularly with respect to polysemy, morphologically conditioned grammatical variation, and metaphorical usage and to analyze the extent to which these factors may constrain or complicate the establishment of semantic equivalence.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Lexical Semantics

Semantics, as a subfield of linguistics, is concerned with the systematic analysis of meaning, encompassing structural, synchronic, and diachronic dimensions of words, symbols, and signs. It constitutes a scientific domain dedicated to examining how meaning is constructed, encoded, and interpreted, with particular attention to the relationships between lexical items and their referents, as well as to semantic relations such as synonymy, polysemy, and the internal organization of lexical structures. In this respect, one of its principal objectives is to develop

analytical frameworks capable of reducing conceptual ambiguity (Yakıt, 1994, p. 18). Within this framework, the multidimensional nature of lexical semantics emerges as a phenomenon that necessitates careful consideration within translation activity, particularly in relation to the interaction between source and target language systems. Accordingly, the variability inherent in lexical meaning requires a context sensitive analytical approach that accounts for how semantic distinctions are negotiated across languages in the process of establishing equivalence

The meaning of a word is inherently multidimensional, even when evaluated within a single language system. This complexity intensifies in translation, where it encompasses the dynamics of both source and target languages. This inherent multidimensionality of lexical meaning is also reflected in the historical and etymological development of key terminology in the field. More specifically, the evolution of semantic terminology demonstrates that meanings are not static entities but are continuously reconfigured across different linguistic and intellectual traditions, thereby reflecting the inherently relational, context-dependent, and usage-sensitive nature of meaning construction in language (Cruse, 1986, pp. 1-10; Ogden & Richards, 1923, pp. 10-32). The term semantikos (σημαντικός), of Greek origin and meaning "significant" or "pertaining to meaning," has been transcribed into many languages. Its adjectival form derives from a root connoting "related to signs" or "concerned with meaning." Semantics, closely allied with both linguistics and semiotics the latter pioneered by the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) derives from the Greek word semeion (σημεῖον), meaning "sign" (Riemer, 2010, pp. 4-5). Within this context, the emergence of semantics as a distinct linguistic discipline in the late nineteenth century constitutes a notable development in the systematic and scientific investigation of meaning.

The term "semantics" was introduced into linguistics in the late nineteenth century by the French linguist Michel Bréal. In this respect, the emergence of semantics reflects a broader shift in linguistic inquiry toward the systematic analysis of meaning as an integral component of language structure. As Lyons (1977, pp. 136-140) notes, the development of semantics as a distinct field underscores the need to account for meaning not as an isolated phenomenon, but as a structured and rule-governed aspect of linguistic systems. This perspective situates meaning at the core of linguistic analysis, paving the way for its subsequent theoretical elaboration. Bréal's seminal work *Semantics: Studies in the Science of Meaning* constitutes a foundational contribution to the field (Abdulkhaeva, 2023, pp. 262-263). Following the establishment of semantics as a linguistic discipline, the question of meaning remains central to both linguistics and translation studies, particularly within the framework of lexical semantics. In this respect, lexical meanings are shaped by cultural, contextual, and sociocultural variables, which contribute to their inherently variable and non-fixed nature. Such semantic fluidity directly affects the reliability and adequacy of machine-generated translations, as full semantic equivalence between source and target language units is rarely achievable in translational practice. Building on Gideon Toury's theoretical framework, Franz Pöchhacker (2024, p. 2) argues that message transmission in translation may still occur despite a certain degree of semantic indeterminacy, which often arises from the insufficient capture of subtle lexical nuances and may necessitate the use of interpretive strategies such as footnotes.

From a broader linguistic perspective, semantics distinguishes between conceptual and associative dimensions of meaning. Conceptual meaning refers to the core denotative content of lexical items, whereas associative meaning encompasses context-dependent and culturally mediated connotations. In both linguistics and translation studies, lexical items frequently exhibit polysemy, metaphorical extension, and layered semantic structures. These properties demonstrate that meaning is not invariant across languages but is dynamically reconstructed through context, culture, and translational decision-making processes. Accordingly, attention to these multiple dimensions of meaning is essential for producing translations that are accurate, nuanced, and faithful to the source text.

The Phenomenon of Equivalence in Translation

Equivalence is a central concept in translation, referring to the relationship between source and target texts in terms of meaning representation. Within translation studies, it has been used to describe how meaning is transferred across languages and to explain the intended outcome of translation activity. In some contemporary discussions, concepts related to equivalence have been broadened to include more application-oriented approaches, sometimes described using terms such as "concrete translation." At the same time, the increasing mobility of populations and the global circulation of cultures have intensified the need for semantically oriented translation practices. This trend is particularly evident in machine translation systems integrated into everyday technologies, which provide practical examples of semantic processing. However, such systems often encounter limitations in conveying cultural and contextual nuances, as they may sometimes struggle to determine the most appropriate meaning among multiple possible lexical interpretations (Ciribuco & O'Connor, 2022, pp. 1-3). Despite these challenges, equivalence continues to hold a significant place in translation theory, where it is being reconceptualized in broader and more flexible terms. Equivalence remains a guiding principle that supports both theoretical inquiry and practical application, reflecting its long standing role in the development of translation studies.

A major milestone in this development was the work of James S. Holmes (1924-1986), who sought to establish translation studies as an autonomous scientific discipline in the second half of the 20th century. In his seminal paper *The Name and Nature of Translation Studies*, presented at the 1972 Congress of Applied Linguistics in Copenhagen, Holmes outlined the theoretical and applied dimensions of the field (Holmes, 1972, p. 69). This contribution played a key role in consolidating translation studies as a distinct domain of scholarly inquiry. Nevertheless, the concept of equivalence predates these developments and cannot be confined to a specific historical period, as the pursuit of adequate or ideal translation has been a recurring concern across different eras (Panou, 2013, pp. 1-2; Onet, 2023, pp. 42-43). While some scholars trace the explicit use of the term to the 19th century, others argue that it gained broader theoretical significance in the 20th century (Brykina & Shirokova, 2012, p. 30). Within this expanding disciplinary framework, different theoretical approaches have been developed to conceptualize equivalence from various perspectives. The concept of equivalence is observed to be target-text-oriented in various studies. Renowned scholars such as Jean-Paul Vinay (1910-1999), Jean Darbelnet (1904-1990), Roman Jakobson (1896-1982), John Cunnison Catford (1917-2009), Eugene A. Nida, and Charles R. Taber have approached equivalence from different perspectives (Panou, 2013, pp. 1-2). In their work *Comparative Stylistics of French and English: A Methodology for Translation*, Vinay and Darbelnet focus on various translation procedures. They distinguish between two main types of translation methods: direct and oblique. Direct translation includes borrowing, calque, and literal translation. A calque is essentially a distinct form of borrowing. The first type of translation, or direct translation procedure, can generally be defined as borrowing (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995, pp. 83-85).

Linguists and translation scholars often note that literal translation involves identifying a semantically equivalent or compatible expression in the target language and transferring it directly from the source language. For example, the sentence "Ali okula gitti" can be translated as "Ali went to school," illustrating a case of direct lexical correspondence. However, when such direct correspondence is insufficient, alternative translation procedures become necessary. This is particularly evident in cases involving language-specific lexical distinctions, such as Russian, where the verb "to go" is differentiated as ехать (movement by vehicle) and идти / пойти (movement on foot) (Learn Russian Step by Step, 2023). At this point, the concept of equivalence, as discussed by Vinay, Darbelnet, and other scholars, becomes operationally significant. They classify translation procedures into transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation, with equivalence and adaptation often describing the re-expression of the same situation through different linguistic forms (Saridaki, 2021, pp. 135-136). In a similar vein, John C. Catford emphasizes that translation difficulties arise not from impossibility but from

structural, cultural, and lexical differences between languages. In *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*, he argues that full equivalence is not always achievable at the level of phonology, grammar, or lexis, yet translation remains possible through systematic adjustments. Catford further introduces the concepts of "types" and "shifts," where shifts account for structural differences between source and target languages and are divided into level shifts and category shifts (Catford, 1965, pp. 26, 73-74). These shifts provide a framework through which equivalence can be approached in both spoken and written translation, as illustrated by examples showing that such adjustments are often necessary across languages. For instance, while Russian expresses "I like apples" as люблю яблоки (plural form), Turkish requires a singular grammatical structure, resulting in elma severim ("I like apple"). Although additional examples could further elaborate these mechanisms, a selective set has been presented here to clarify the concept of structural adjustment in translation.

When examining the concept of equivalence in translation, Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber's contributions are particularly significant. Their works, including *The Theory and Practice of Translation* and Nida's *Toward a Science of Translating*, are considered foundational in shaping both theoretical and practical approaches in translation studies. In these studies, equivalence is primarily discussed through two key categories: formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence refers to a source-oriented approach that adheres closely to the linguistic structure and wording of the original text, often described in Turkish as *formal eşdeğerlik*, *düzenli eşdeğerlik*, or *resmî eşdeğerlik* (Türk Dil Kurumu, n.d.). It is generally associated with word for word translation, where meaning is preserved through structural fidelity, sometimes supported by explanatory footnotes when necessary. Nida also uses the term "formal correspondence," which, despite terminological variation, similarly implies structural closeness to the source text. In contrast, dynamic equivalence is target-language-oriented and focuses on producing an equivalent effect on the target reader, ensuring that the message evokes a response comparable to that of the source audience. This approach is strongly associated with Nida and Taber's translation of biblical texts, where concerns about mistranslation led to a shift toward a more functional and reader-oriented perspective. They define translation as the recreation of meaning in another language, where dynamic equivalence aims to prioritize communicative effect in translation (Nida & Taber, 1982, pp. 3, 12, 13, 23).

Building on this functional orientation, dynamic equivalence can be further understood in terms of the translational processes it requires. As the name suggests, dynamic equivalence is not a static form of translation. To ensure that the feelings evoked in the source-language reader are also experienced by the target-language reader, the translator may undertake transformations across various linguistic levels, including phonetics, grammar, morphology, and syntax. The primary aim is to evoke, as closely as possible, an equivalent emotional response in the target-language reader, thereby establishing functional equivalence between source and target texts. In this process, lexical-semantic elements and grammatical structures may be required to undergo systematic transformation in order to achieve communicative equivalence. Vilen N. Komissarov further examines Nida's dynamic equivalence framework within the scope of transformation theory and illustrates lexical adaptation in relation to cultural variation. For instance, while the Russian expression "as white as snow" conventionally conveys whiteness, its direct transfer may not produce an equivalent effect in cultures unfamiliar with snow. In such cases, a culturally adapted rendering such as "as white as the feathers of an egret" is proposed to preserve communicative effect (Komissarov, 2002, pp. 228-229). This example demonstrates that cultural differences necessitate lexical transformation, and translators are therefore required to engage actively in such processes rather than avoid them. Consequently, equivalence in translation is not limited to structural correspondence but should be understood as a functionally adaptive process shaped by linguistic and cultural constraints.

The Antinomy of Semantics and Equivalence in Translation

The concepts of semantics and equivalence encompass a range of phenomena, including meaning, comprehension, perception, and acquisition, and extend beyond their respective

disciplinary boundaries to play a significant role in interdisciplinary research. Owing to their interconnected structure and shared focus on meaning, they emerge as key areas of inquiry that can be jointly examined within translation studies. In this context, the term *semantic equivalence* is sometimes used as a unified concept, particularly in discussions addressing the overlap between the lexicons of source and target languages or, conversely, the absence of such overlap. At this point, however, the distinction between equivalence and semantics becomes more evident. As previously noted in linguistics, lexical semantics generally refers to the multiple dictionary senses associated with a given lexical item. In translation, even when the most appropriate lexical correspondence between source and target languages is selected, complete interlingual equivalence cannot always be achieved, and reliance solely on word-for-word transfer may result in inadequate or erroneous outcomes. Such lexical transfer, when misaligned between source and target texts, may lead to discrepancies in meaning (Vandevoorde, 2020, pp. 28-29). These semantic divergences may arise not only from linguistic structures but also from cultural differences.

The concepts of semantics and equivalence are often perceived to diverge within translation activities, and for this reason translation has at times been described as paradoxical, giving rise to approaches that regard certain texts as "untranslatable." Such perspectives argue that full equivalence in translation may not always be attainable, and that translational outcomes may instead approximate forms of semantic correspondence. Each language and culture is considered unique, which contributes to the perception of untranslatability in specific contexts. Belyayeva and Huhin (2017, pp. 6-7), referring to Wilhelm von Humboldt's letter to August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767-1845), note that many translation endeavors resemble inherently difficult tasks. According to Humboldt, translators inevitably face a tension between remaining faithful to the structures of the source language and adapting to the norms of the target language. In this sense, translation may result in approximations rather than full equivalence. Humboldt emphasizes the inherent difficulty of achieving equivalence due to the unique *Geist* (spirit) of each language. He further illustrates this challenge through examples involving translations between Burmese (Myanmar) and Pali, where direct equivalence is often unattainable. In his linguistic reflections, Humboldt thus characterizes translation as a complex endeavor shaped by structural and cultural specificity and he underscores that during the act of translation the emphasis should be oriented toward equivalence rather than synonymy, insofar as languages embody the cultural and intellectual spirit of the societies in which they originate (Humboldt, 1999, pp. 114, 178).

Building on this discussion, it is necessary to reconsider the equivalence-oriented approach proposed by Nida and other scholars in translation studies. In Nida's framework, achieving optimal meaning transfer in the target language often requires structural adjustments during the translation process, including shifts, additions, and omissions at various linguistic levels. From this perspective, the relationship between semantics and equivalence becomes context-dependent rather than fixed, and at this point the concepts of semantics and equivalence diverge. Nida, in his study *Lexical Semantics of the Greek New Testament*, which he co-authored with Johannes Petrus Louw (1932-2011), addresses the concepts of semantics and equivalence together. Accordingly, a purely literal transfer of lexical items may sometimes be misleading or at least insufficient, as meaning varies depending on factors such as word choice, context, and text type. In this study, Nida introduces the notion of "the meaning of meaning" to investigate the nature of semantic interpretation. Although these insights are primarily developed within the framework of Bible translation, they can be regarded as broadly applicable to diverse contexts in linguistics and translation studies (Louw & Nida, 1992, pp. 1-3). Translation activity, particularly in religious and literary texts, requires similar sensitivity, since literary works often incorporate cultural elements, including theological terminology. Consequently, dismissing the relevance of research on religious translation for literary translation would be a limited perspective. Within this framework, translation should be understood as a dynamic activity in which literal meaning is necessarily transcended, and the distinction between semantic and formal equivalence emerges as a natural outcome. This phenomenon is frequently observed in literary texts,

especially when significant cultural differences exist between source and target languages, thereby intensifying semantic distinctions. Such dynamics can be further illustrated through concrete examples.

Findings and Discussion: The Phenomenon of Lexical Semantics and Equivalence

"Misery" (Toska) is part of the *Colored Stories* series published in 1886 in a weekly magazine called *Oskolki* (Alyonkina, 2020, pp. 176-177). Originally a physician by profession, Chekhov was able to delve into the depths of the human soul while simultaneously addressing various aspects of the social structure. In "Misery," Chekhov vividly captures the theme of human loneliness and portrays the struggle of a carriage driver who, after losing his son, seeks to ease his grief by finding someone with whom he can share his sorrow. The narrative opens with the poignant question, "To whom shall I tell my grief?" Iona Potapov, the driver, is consumed by loneliness following his son's death. He resumes work in the hope of confiding in his passengers, yet his attempts prove futile as none are willing to listen. The story underscores the theme of human isolation amid crowds. Ultimately, Iona finds solace only in sharing his sorrow with his horse in the stable. The work depicts events from the daily lives of ordinary people; therefore, it can be said that it is written in a conversational style, using informal, general words commonly used by the majority of society in everyday communication. The depiction of the tragic event experienced by a carriage driver is interwoven with dialogue. A work written in this manner typically incorporates various elements of the source language's culture. At this point, as various linguists have emphasized, a distinction between semantics and equivalence must be made to ensure that the translated text does not feel like a translation to the reader. Approaches such as Nida's dynamic equivalence or Catford's concepts of level shifts and category shifts are particularly significant in this context. Upon a comprehensive analysis of the work, originally written in Russian, various instances of semantic and equivalence divergence emerge in its translation into Turkish, as even the polysemous meanings of words listed in dictionaries often fail to reproduce the effect experienced by the source-language reader; therefore, semantic correspondence does not always coincide with equivalence. Concrete examples are presented below.

> e.g. (1) **Source Text**: *Крупный мокрый снег* ***лениво*** *кружится около только что зажженных фонарей* (Chehov, 1886, p. 387).
>
> **Semantic (formal) approach**: *Kocaman ıslak kar daha az önce yakılmış fenerlerin etrafından* ***tembelce*** *(1. anlam)* ***yavaşça*** *(2. anlam) dönüyor.*
>
> **Equivalent (functional) approach:** *Kocaman ıslak kar daha az önce yakılmış fenerlerin etrafından* ***tane tane/ağır ağır*** *dönüyor.*

According to Ushakov's (2013, p. 269) dictionary, the primary meaning of the Russian adverb lenivo (лениво) is "unwilling to work," "lazy," or "idle." Its secondary meaning is "slow" (medleno). In the source text, the slowness of falling snow is expressed with the word medleno, corresponding to the secondary meaning, while the word "lazy," associated with the primary meaning, is used. However, in the widely used Lingvo Russian–Turkish Dictionary, the secondary meaning of lenivo, namely "slow," is not specified (ABBYY, n.d.). In translation practice, equivalence-based correspondence within lexical semantics should guide the translator toward selecting the appropriate meaning among dictionary definitions. Here, another nuance that should be emphasized is that, with regard to semantic alignment and translational equivalence, rendering the Turkish word yavaş without reduplication (e.g., yavaş yavaş or ağır ağır) may result in a loss of equivalence. This issue is closely related to the polysemous and heterogeneous nature of lexical items in many languages, which necessitates careful consideration of lexical semantics and equivalence in the translation process.

In another example, a difference in associative meaning is observed. In the source language, a culturally accustomed association is used to describe an object.

> e.g. (2) **Source Text**: *Он согнулся, насколько только возможно согнуться живому телу, сидит* ***на козлах*** *и не шевельнется* (Chehov, 1886, p. 387).

Semantic (formal) approach: *Canlı bir bedenin eğilebileceği kadar eğilmiş* ***oturaklarında/yerlerinde*** *kımıldamadan oturmuş*

Equivalent (functional) approach: *Hiç kımıldamadan* ***oturağında/yerinde*** *oturuyordu.*

An analysis of the example within the framework of semantics and equivalence reveals a grammatical mismatch between the source and target languages. While the dictionary form of the word in the source language is plural, it has been rendered with a singular meaning in the target language. This choice can be explained by the fact that a direct translation of the plural form would result in grammatical inconsistency and a loss of semantic equivalence. The word kozlı (козлы), which in the source language denotes "the place where the coachman sits," has been translated as "was sitting in his place." The word is polysemous in the source language. Its primary meaning refers to the driver's seat in vehicles such as horse-drawn carriages, while its other meanings include a workbench or scaffold used in construction and a sawhorse for cutting wood. In addition, the word is etymologically related to the plural form of the word meaning "goat." Shaposhnikov (2010, p. 408) and Vasmer (1956, p. 268) note that the word derives from "goat" and was borrowed from Polish, entering Russian between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. This is also supported by other lexicographical sources (Bol'šoj sovremennyj tolkovyj slovar' russkogo jazyka, n.d.). In translation, the polysemous nature of words, their grammatical features, and their cultural and etymological background require careful consideration to ensure semantic equivalence. In this respect, Nida's (1964, pp. 159-160) distinction between "formal" and "dynamic equivalence" is relevant. Rather than preserving formal or lexical equivalence, the translator appears to have preferred a contextually appropriate dynamic equivalent, producing a natural and functional expression in the target language.

One of the significant challenges in translation lies in the unique grammar, morphology, lexicon, and syntax structure of each language. In the text, there is an example of Russian's specific motion verb system, which can be considered a distinctive detail during translation. Consequently, this structure can occasionally be an important aspect in translation activities.

e.g. (3) **Source text**: *Ты ездить не умеешь! Права держи! -сердится военный* (Chekhov, 1886, p. 388).

Semantic (formal) approach: ***Gitmeyi*** *beceremiyor musun! Sağa! -Kızıyor asker.*

Equivalent (functional) approach: ***Sürmeyi*** *beceremiyor musun! Sağa! – Kızıyor asker.*

In Russian, motion verbs are divided into two categories: traveling with a vehicle *ezdit* (ездить) and traveling without a vehicle *hodit* (ходить) (Chernenko et al., 2016, pp. 3-4). When the analyzed text in the article is read, the verb "to drive" will naturally come to mind, as it involves a vehicle and a driver. Due to the unique structure of the Russian language, whether the motion verb implies movement with or without a vehicle can be understood even without context. It should be emphasized that translating the verb simply as "to go" without considering the context may semantically align with the target language. However, if the target language does not possess a structure similar to the source language, indicating that the action is performed with a vehicle becomes necessary for equivalence. Therefore, lexical and semantic details are crucial for achieving equivalence during the translation process.

Another example of cultural language differences noticeable during the translation activity can be illustrated as follows.

e.g. (4) **Source Text**: *Извозчик, ты женат? - спрашивает длинный -Я-то? Гы-ы… веселые господа! Таперя у меля одна жена -* ***сырая земля*** (Chehov, 1886, p. 391)

Semantic (formal) approach: *Uzun, arabacı, evli misin sen? diye sordu. - Ben?Ha ha ha şakacı beyler! Benim artık tek karım* ***nemli toprak (ölüm/diriliş).***

Equivalent (functional) approach: *Uzun olanı, arabacı, evli misin sen? diye sordu. -Ben? -Ha ha ha şakacı beyler! Benim artık tek karım* ***kara toprak.***

In Russian, the expression сырая земля (syraya zemlya), when translated literally, corresponds

to "damp," "moist," or "raw earth" in Turkish. However, such expressions often carry multiple layers of meaning even within the source language itself. For this reason, translation into the target language should not rely solely on lexical equivalence; rather, it requires the identification of expressions that convey comparable figurative meanings within the target linguistic and cultural context. In Russian usage, syraya zemlya operates on two principal semantic planes, depending on context. On the one hand, it is personified as a maternal figure associated with fertility, generation, and the nurturing of life; on the other, it evokes the image of damp earth that receives the deceased into its bosom (Kozirev, 2024, p. 7; Skuridina, 2022, pp. 25, 26, 31; kartaslov.ru). In such instances, the literal meanings of individual lexical items recede, giving way to figurative and culturally embedded interpretations. In the translation of idiomatic expressions, priority should be given to identifying an equivalent in the target language that achieves both formal and semantic correspondence. Where such equivalence is unattainable, semantic adequacy alone may be considered sufficient. If neither formal nor semantic equivalence can be established, the meaning should be reformulated using alternative linguistic resources. In rare cases, omission of the translation unit may also be regarded as a viable translational strategy (Yıldız, 2016, p. 127). Within this framework, rendering сырая земля as "black earth" in Turkish may be considered an appropriate choice in terms of its contextual and cultural connotations. The expression "black earth" evokes associations with death and a return to nature, thereby substantially aligning with the semantic range of the original Russian expression. Although it does not constitute a direct formal equivalent, its semantic proximity renders the translation acceptable. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that translation choices must ultimately be determined by context.

Cultural differences between languages also become evident in the translation process at the level of interjections and onomatopoeic expressions. These elements carry not only phonetic properties but also specific emotional functions; therefore, direct formal (phonetic) equivalence from the source language is often insufficient in translation. Consequently, the translation process should prioritize functional equivalence solutions that produce a comparable effect in the target language. Rather than transferring sounds verbatim, restructuring them according to the phonological and cultural system of the target language is inevitable.

e.g. (5) **Source Text***: **Гы-ы**... **гы-ы**... - хохочет Иона* (Chehov, 1886, p. 391).

Semantic (formal) approach: ***Gı-gı*...*gı-gı***...- *kahkaha attı.*

Equivalent (functional) approach: ***ha-ha... ha-ha****... diye kahkaha attı.*

It is evident that direct phonetic transfer of interjections generally fails to produce an equivalent effect for the target-language reader; such reproduction results only in a surface-level sound. Therefore, interjections must be adapted to the phonological and cultural norms of the target language. A similar principle applies to onomatopoeic words and the verbs derived from them. For example, the sound of a dog is rendered as "hav hav" in Turkish, "гав-гав" (gav-gav) in Russian, and "woof woof" in English. This demonstrates that such sounds are not directly transferable across languages but must be restructured according to the linguistic and cultural system of the target language.

Translating elements of the source language solely according to their lexical meaning is often insufficient; translation involves reconstructing these elements in a way that achieves a comparable effect in the target language. In another sentence, religious terminology is observed. This example represents an important vernacular version reflecting cultural and religious differences.

e.g. (6) **Source Text**: ***Накажи меня бог****, правда.*

Это такая же правда, как то, ***что вошь кашляет*** (Chehov 1886, p. 391).

Semantic (formal) approach: ***Allah cezamı*** *versin doğru.*

Öyle doğrudur ki ***bitin öksürdüğü*** *ne kadar doğruysa.*

Equivalent (functional) approach: ***Allah belamı*** *versin doğru.*

*Öyle doğrudur ki **bitin öksürdüğü** ne kadar doğruysa.*

It can be observed that semantic and equivalence shifts, accompanied by a certain degree of lexical variation, are also evident in this example. The word nakaji (накажи) in the text represents the singular imperative form of the verb "to punish." Although the term may, in certain contexts, evoke the meaning of "trouble" or "misfortune," according to the Ushakov Dictionary, "punishment" is defined as a negative sanction imposed by an authority or governing power in response to an offense (Ushakov, 2013, pp. 30, 330). In contrast, the notion of "misfortune" is more appropriately conveyed through words such as beda (беда), neschastie (несчастье), or bedstvie (бедствие). In this respect, the use of the word "punishment" does not constitute a significant deficiency in terms of semantic equivalence; however, it appears that the translator, taking the context into account, opted for a more colloquial expression.

In the second sentence, the expression "the cough of a louse" metaphorically conveys the absence of truthfulness in the statement. In other words, just as a louse cannot cough, the implication is that the addressee does not tell the truth. In the search for an equivalent translation, it is generally expected that a similar idiomatic expression exists in the target language; however, in cases where no such equivalent is available, a semantic translation may be employed through what can be termed a "calculation of strangeness." In such instances, it may also be necessary to provide an explanatory footnote for the semantically translated idiom. Indeed, in translations of world classics published by the Ministry of National Education, this expression has been rendered into Turkish using an established idiom: "Yes, it is so true that even the crows would laugh" (Chekhov, 2016, p. 23).

Finally, the antinomous relationship between literal word meaning and semantic equivalence can be observed through metaphorical expressions. Metaphors, like proverbs, idioms, and aphorisms, are culturally and cognitively dense elements, whose translation often requires strategies that go beyond literal representation, such as functional and cultural equivalence (Yalçın & Büyüksaraç, 2017, pp. 817-829). Translations based solely on dictionary meanings may result in loss of meaning, highlighting the strategic tension between literal and meaning-oriented translation approaches. Therefore, metaphorical expressions serve as examples that underscore the necessity of preserving both meaning and cultural context in the target language.

e.g. (7) **Source Text**: *Сын-то вот помер, **а я жив...** Чудное дело, смерть **дверью обозналась*** (Chehov, 1886, p. 391)**.**

Semantic (formal) approach: *Oğlum yani, **öldü, ama ben yaşıyorum**... Garip iş, **ölüm kapıları karıştırdı/benzetti.***

Equivalent (functional) approach: *Oğlum yani, öldü, **ben ise hala yaşıyorum**... Garip iş, **ölüm yanlış kapıyı çaldı.***

In this example, lexical substitution and addition strategies can be employed depending on the translator's preferences. For instance, the expression "смерть дверью обозналась" can be rendered in the target language as the aphoristic "death knocked on the wrong door," rather than literally as "death mixed up the doors." This serves as an example illustrating that, in translation, the lexical meaning of the words does not always align with semantic equivalence. Indeed, the translation process may give rise to an antinomic relationship between semantic equivalence and the lexical meaning of words, as preserving the literal meanings of individual words can conflict with conveying the intended meaning and effect in the target language. This antinomy can manifest differently depending on factors such as cultural differences between the source and target languages, the length of the text, the linguistic style employed, the period in which the text was written, and even the alphabet used. Dynamic equivalence is closely related to the translator's ability to demonstrate flexibility within the context. The view emphasized by Eugene Nida, particularly in the context of religious texts that the translator should adapt to the linguistic and cultural norms of the target text is also applicable to literary texts. Accordingly, the translator should internalize the atmosphere of the text and reproduce it in the target language

(Nida & Taber, 1982, 3).

The translation of literary and religious texts poses significant challenges, particularly when conducted between languages that are culturally distant. In literary passages where a character's death is mentioned, although details of funerary rituals may be absent, cultural references can be conveyed selectively and concisely; for instance, the text may invoke a ritual element to hint at cultural differences, such as the deceased being placed in a coffin in Orthodox tradition or washed and shrouded in Islamic practice. This brief illustration demonstrates that cultural elements embedded in a text may lack direct equivalents in the target language, complicating the preservation of semantic equivalence and illustrating the antinomy that can arise between lexical meaning and semantic equivalence. In such contexts, dynamic and adaptive approaches to equivalence should be prioritized over purely semantic tendencies, and in situations where even these approaches fall short, the use of footnotes may be appropriate. Some thinkers have long debated the translation of religious and sacred texts, noting that culturally specific practices and terminology can render full semantic equivalence difficult, if not impossible (Hassan, 2016, pp. 117-118; Robinson, 2000, pp. 103-107; Aldahesh, 2014, pp. 25-26). While the discussion on religious texts often centers on untranslatability versus translatability, this debate also highlights a fundamental principle for literary translation: that the lexical meaning of words does not always align perfectly with semantic equivalence in the target language, and translators must navigate this antinomy by prioritizing contextual and cultural understanding over word-for-word rendering.

Conclusion

In translation, particularly in literary translation, meaning centered approaches are generally associated with dynamic frameworks oriented toward equivalence between source and target languages. Within translation studies, such approaches are discussed in relation to source–target text dynamics, where translation is understood as a process extending beyond linguistic transfer to include cultural and cognitive interpretation. The theoretical framework adopted in this study situates translation at the intersection of lexical semantics and semantic equivalence, with particular attention to translational meaning shifts as operational indicators of transformation between languages. In this context, emphasis is placed on how meaning is constructed and reconfigured across linguistic systems through both structural and contextual mediation.

Building on this framework, the analysis is conducted through a qualitative examination of selected lexical items and sentence level units extracted from a predetermined source text. The analytical procedure focuses on identifying semantic and equivalence-related shifts that emerge in the translation process. The findings indicate that literal lexical correspondence is frequently insufficient for preserving intended meaning, thereby necessitating context-sensitive and functionally oriented translational strategies. These strategies involve a systematic shift from formal lexical structure in the source language toward functional equivalence in the target language, where direct substitution may result in partial or complete meaning loss. The empirical observations are consistent with established discussions in translation studies concerning meaning-centered and equivalence-oriented approaches.

The results further demonstrate that lexical semantics and equivalence operate as interdependent analytical categories rather than isolated constructs within translation research. Their inadequate consideration may lead to deviations from semantic equivalence and systematic distortions of meaning, as evidenced in the analyzed data. The study therefore underscores the methodological necessity of semantic awareness and equivalence-oriented strategies for achieving high-quality translation, particularly in linguistically and culturally divergent contexts. The findings also suggest the applicability of this analytical orientation across different source–target language pairs, as illustrated through Russian–Turkish translation examples.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Declaration of AI Use

Any AI-assisted tools, if used, were limited to language editing. No AI tools were used for data collection, analysis, or interpretation of findings. The author(s) assume sole responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and final content of the manuscript.

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