

Phraseological non-equivalence: Possibilities of lexicographic fixation in bilingual dictionaries

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discussion of the problem of interlanguage equivalence, which remains challenging in the modern theory of translation. One promising solution is to use bilingual diachronic dictionaries based on parallel translation corpora, containing both authentic texts in the source language (L1) and professional translations of the same texts into the target language (L2). Drawing on the materials of two Russian-German dictionaries, this study addresses the nature of interlanguage phraseological non-equivalence in diachrony and explains the rationale behind creating a diachronic corpus of parallel translations. It presents a corpus-based diachronic translation phraseological dictionary, which is based on a series of investigations into the technique and quality of 30 parallel translations of five major novels by F.M. Dostoevskij into German performed between 1882 and 2003. The concept, structure and principles of building such a novel type of dictionary are described and illustrated by using fragments of the Russian-German diachronic translation dictionaries of lexical and syntactic phraseological units. The provisions underlying the development of a diachronic corpus of parallel translations are formulated. The importance of relying on translation techniques in the development of a diachronic corpus of parallel translations is substantiated.

Keywords: translation; non-equivalence; bilingual dictionary; phraseography; lexical and syntactic phraseological units

1. Introduction

Interlinguistic non-equivalence remains one of the central issues in the modern theory of translation. It cannot be embraced in its entirety, for non-equivalence is among perennial questions, which preserve their meaning and timeliness at all stages of translation development, and which are constantly redefined as factual material and new knowledge gained. However, this does not mean that the problem is impossible to solve. Progress in understanding the lack of direct

equivalents is becoming visible in terms of strategies: in refocusing on new aspects, presenting new theoretical justifications, searching for possibilities of lexicographic registration of non-equivalent units.

In solving the problem of non-equivalence, bilingual diachronic dictionaries based on corpora of translated texts are of particular value. Recently, scholars have repeatedly emphasized the usefulness of parallel corpora for retrieving evidence of lexical non-equivalence not from the intuition of dictionary makers, but from authentic sources in the original language and their professional translations into the target language (Baranov and Dobrovol'skij 2009, 41). The present study highlights the need to create translation dictionaries that present non-equivalence in synchronic and diachronic aspects and introduces a new type of resource – a diachronic translation dictionary.

Lexicographers point out that non-equivalent units are often overlooked in teaching and translation practice (Devkin 2005, 372). To address the practical challenges of teaching foreign languages, translation and compiling dictionaries, it is essential to identify and describe the differences in the use of phraseological units and to determine the most appropriate way to convey the meaning of a given expression in L1 by means of L2 (Baranov and Dobrovol'skij 2009). It is therefore useful to compile bilingual dictionaries of non-equivalent words, expressions, and structures that show possible translation variants for source-language units lacking direct equivalents, based on large corpora of parallel translations produced in different periods.

This paper presents a dictionary compiled by the author, focusing on the translation of non-equivalent units in the works of F. M. Dostoevskij. The choice of Dostoevskij's texts as source material is deliberate: he is among the most translated authors in the world. The Romanian scholar Kovach (2008) emphasizes that according to the world citation frequency, F. M. Dostoevskij's works come second only to the Bible and Shakespeare's plays; notably, most of these citations come from translations. Despite being thoroughly studied in their receptive aspect, translations of Dostoevskij's works have not been given due attention in terms of the technique and quality of translation. Only at the end of the 20th century, did Translation Studies start to develop, including the analysis of translation strategies, the quality of communicating the author's style and other factors influencing translators' choices and solutions. At the beginning of the 21st century, this aspect is still being actively developed. A stimulus for developing this approach, at least in the Russian theory of translation, has been provided by Dobrovol'skij, whose corpus-based analyses of literary translation (Dobrovol'skij 2009) provide the theoretical and methodological foundation of the current study.

The appearance of parallel corpora has revolutionized linguistic research, making it possible to set and solve completely new tasks related to the examination of large arrays of texts, and the study of language change dynamics

(Plungjan 2009). They allow us to study linguistic units of any level in their real use in discourse (Zacharov and Bogdanova 2011, 147). A new “corpus era” in translation lexicography has begun. Parallel translation corpora are now used to select translation options for bilingual dictionaries.

Currently, the focus in bilingual phraseography has shifted towards identifying individual features of the functioning of comparable phraseological units in discourse and improving their lexicographic representation in dictionaries (Dobrovolskij 2011). Of particular interest is bilingual historical phraseography (Filatkina 2012). The corpus-based methodology makes it possible to expand the boundaries of translation studies and bilingual phraseography (Alekseyeva and Pavlova 2019; Dobrovolskij 2020; Mellado Blanco 2021; Olimpio 2016). By means of a diachronic corpus of translations it is possible to see new non-standard solutions to the problem of phraseological non-equivalence. The lexicographic documentation of non-equivalent units in diachrony reveals a wide range of strategies for conveying phraseology in L2, and highlights both the possibilities and boundaries of the target language, as well as the evolution of translation techniques over time. In this paper, I present my experience of using a diachronic corpus in the development of a Russian-German diachronic phraseological dictionary.

2. Theoretical background of the research

The creation of a diachronic corpus of parallel translations has a long history, as multiple studies have examined the technique and quality of 30 parallel translations of five major novels by F.M. Dostoevskij from 1882 to 2003 (Aleskeyeva 2007, 2008, 2013, 2016, 2021; Alekseyeva and Pavlova 2019).

Since there are no complete correspondences in the system of the target language, non-equivalent units are fixed in bilingual dictionaries in different ways. The method depends on the type of phraseological units, being either lexical (descriptively, using substitutions with close correspondences, using words with a narrower or wider meaning, etc.) or syntactic (calquing with preservation of the image, translation through a sentence similar to a construction, using a modal meaning, a particle, an adverb).

In bilingual lexicography, the search for methods of representing non-equivalent units continues (Balabanova 2004; Schafroth 2014; Schafroth and Imperiale 2019; Zolotareva and Nguyen 2018). I propose a new method – recording non-equivalent units by means of diachronic, corpus-based translation dictionaries and reference books. Due to the lack of equivalents at the level of the two language systems, it is advisable to rely on professional translators’ experience. Such experience is essential, as multiple translations provide a wealth of material for bilingual lexicography and allow a deeper study of the phenomenon of non-equivalence, covering the work of several generations of

translators. The works of classical world literature are especially well-suited as a material for creating such dictionaries.

The data for this study were drawn from phraseological units used in five most famous novels by F.M. Dostoevskij: *Demons*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *The Idiot*, *The Gambler*, *Crime and Punishment*, and 30 parallel translations of these works into German, made from the late 19th to the early 21st century¹. Interestingly, changes in the translation technique occurred roughly every 20 years. Table 1 illustrates the periods that reveal the dynamics of these changes: the 1880-1890s, 1900-1920s, 1920-1930s, 1950-1960s, 1970-80s, and 1990-2000s.

Table 1: Parallel diachronic corpus of Dostoevskij's translations into German (1882-2003)

Title of the novel	Translations into German					
	1880-90s	1900- 1920s	1920-30s	1950-60s	1970-80s	From 1990s
<i>The Gambler</i> , 1866	L.A. Hauff, 1890	E.K. Rahsin, 1910	H. Röhl, 1921	H. Lorenz, 1958	W. Creutziger, 1971	E. Markstein, 1992
<i>The Idiot</i> , 1868	A. Scholz, 1889	E. Rahsin, 1912	H. Röhl, 1923	H. Lorenz, 1958	H. Herboth, 1986	S. Geier, 1996
<i>Demons</i> , 1873	H. Putze, 1888	E.K. Rahsin, 1906	H. Röhl, 1921	M. Kegel, 1961	G. Dalitz, 1985	S. Geier, 1998
<i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> , 1880	H. von Samson – Himelstjer-na, 1884	E.K. Rahsin, 1906	R. von Walter, 1930	H. Ruoff und R. Hoffmann, 1958	W. Creutziger, 1981	S. Geier, 2003
<i>Crime and Punishment</i> , 1866	W. Henckel, 1882	H. Röhl, 1909	W. Bergengrün, 1935	R. Hoffmann, 1960	M. Bräuer und R. Bräuer, 1984	S. Geier, 1994

As a result, the first diachronic Russian-German dictionaries of realia appeared: two printed diachronic Russian-German dictionaries of realia (Alekseyeva 2007, 2016), an electronic, colour-illustrated diachronic Russian-German reference dictionary of realia (Alekseyeva 2008), and a diachronic Russian-German dictionary of non-equivalent lexical phraseological units, and a diachronic Russian-German dictionary of non-equivalent syntactic phraseological units, currently under development.

1 All cited text fragments and translated examples are reproduced in accordance with scholarly quotation standards and copyright exceptions for research and criticism. Each example includes clear attribution to the original author, translator, and publication year. No complete passages or commercially sensitive material are reproduced in full, and all examples serve solely to illustrate linguistic and translational phenomena discussed in this study.

3. Findings

The structure of the diachronic translation dictionary is as follows. Each dictionary entry includes six translation equivalents for an input unit from parallel translations that belong to different periods and thus reflect a particular stage of translation history. For each period, the equivalent chosen represents the most frequent or contextually representative variant occurring in that translation. If several variants appeared within one period, the most salient idiomatic form was selected. These dictionaries show translation multiplicity: a large variety of possible translation decisions, trends in translation practice, diachronic lexical and phraseological changes.

The phraseological units are arranged alphabetically by the first letters of the reference components, provided with interpretations, if necessary, historical references-comments, stylistic marks, and parallel translations in chronological order. Also, the frequency of use of phrases in speech is indicated in accordance with the data of the main corpus of the *Russian National Corpus*.

A dictionary entry of the diachronic translation dictionary comprises a lemma with parallel translation equivalents, explanations, and illustrations. It consists of a dictionary unit, an explanation of the meaning of the word taken from definition dictionaries, a context with the page number and asynchronous parallel translations with the specification of the translator, the year of publication, and the number of the page containing this word. The entry word and its German variants of translation are given in bold.

Thus, each dictionary entry comprises the following main parts:

- lemma (an entry word or word combination);
- semantization (a definition of the meaning of the entry word);
- illustration area (the entry word in the context of the original work);
- equivalent area (variants of translation in the context of a particular translation of the work).

As distinct from bilingual dictionaries of the main type with the structure “lexeme of the input language → lexeme of the output language”, the diachronic translation dictionary contains six parallel variants of translation in context with comments.

3.1 Diachronic Russian-German dictionary of non-equivalent lexical phraseological units

The microstructure of the dictionary contains several clear-cut areas:

- area 1 – a dictionary unit: a phraseological unit (and its variants, if available);
- area 2 – explanations of the meaning of a word taken from the explanatory dictionaries of the Russian language (if necessary, historical references-comments are introduced), stylistic labels, indications of the frequency of use in written and oral speech (w/o) based on data from the main corpus of the *Russian National Corpus* (RNC);

- area 3 – the dictionary unit in the context of the writer’s novel (equal to one sentence) in the original language with the indication of the page, which allows, if necessary, referring to a broader context;
- area 4 – six parallel translations indicating the initials of the translator, the year of the first publication of the translation, and the page on which the word is located; this is followed by the German translation options in chronological order;
- area 5 (optional) – translation explanations (if available) are entered immediately after the translation, indicating their form: page footnotes or endnotes.

Below is a fragment from the Russian-German dictionary of lexical phraseological units:

(1)

Phraseological unit	<i>glaza žagorelis</i> ²
Dictionary	kogo-libo strastno chočet imet', polučit' čto-libo ³
Style	colloquial style, occas. disapproval or humor
Frequency	w/o 84/high
Russian context	On pokrasnel, glaza ego žagorelis', guby vzdrognuli (“The Brothers Karamazov”, p. 143). ⁴
Translation 1:	Sein Antlitz rötete sich, die Augen flammten, die Lippen zitterten (S. H. 1884, 183).
Translation 2:	Er wurde rot, seine Augen flackerten auf, und die Lippen erbebtm (E. R. 1906, 224).
Translation 3:	Er wurde rot, seine Augen brannten, die Lippen bebten (R. W. 1930, 117).
Translation 4:	Er war rot geworden, seine Augen glühten, die Lippen zitterten ihm (H. R. und R. H. 1958, 191).
Translation 5:	Röte war ihm in die Wangen geschossen, in seinen Augen war etwas aufgeflackert, seine Lippen zuckten (W. C. 1981, 221).
Translation 6:	Er wurde rot, seine Augen flackerten, die Lippen zuckten (S. G. 2003, 224).

As (1) shows, professional translators perfectly cope with their task, selecting units (words or phrases having a metaphorical meaning) with a similar meaning in the absence of formal similarity, or conveying them descriptively, by various means of the translation language using a free combination of words, while the choice of translated equivalents varies widely. But descriptive translations are not units of the phraseological system of another language. This dictionary

2 *Lit.* ‘eyes lit up’, meaning ‘has developed a strong desire to definitely obtain somebody, appropriate something.’

3 *Lit.* ‘has developed a strong desire to definitely obtain, appropriate something.’

4 *Lit.* ‘He flushed, his eyes lit up, and his lips twitched.’

outlines the possibilities and boundaries of the language, shows possible translation techniques, the dynamics of changes in translation techniques in diachrony, and the creative individuality of translators. It helps us identify the most appropriate ways to convey a phraseological unit by means of another language using an idiom, sometimes a free combination, a single word, an occasional figurative expression, or a paraphrase.

Dictionary entries are ordered alphabetically by the basic constituent of the phraseological unit, which is highlighted with an underscore (for example, *dva aršina s malym*, lit. ‘two yards with a small one’). When choosing a reference constituent, we rely on the concept proposed in the “Phraseological Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian Language” based on the following hierarchy by Baranov and Dobrovolskij (2009, 16): a noun, an adjective, an adverb, a numeral, a verb, a pronoun, a preposition, a conjunction, a particle, and an interjection.

If there are two constituents of the same level, ordering is carried out according to the first of them. For example, the phraseological unit *ne ostalos’ v duše i sleda*, lit. ‘not left in the soul and even a trace’, should be searched for by the reference word *duša*, lit. ‘soul’. If there are no nouns, then adjectives should be chosen, etc.

Optional constituents in square brackets are not taken into account when establishing the order of succession. So, for example, the phraseological unit *v maline [byt’/ žit’]*, lit. ‘in raspberry [to be / live]’ is ordered in the dictionary under the word *malina*, lit. ‘raspberry’.

The sequence number of the phraseological unit is determined by the first letter of the reference constituent and then the order of idioms for this letter is taken into account, as illustrated in (2):

(2)

A – 1. *dva aršina s malym*⁵,

D – 1. *ne ostalos’ v duše i sleda*⁶,

D – 2. *duch zamiraet*⁷,

D – 3. *duch zachvatyvaet*⁸.

Variants of phraseological units’ constituents are given next to the main one using a slash, for instance: *glaza žagorelis’/ razgorelis’ u kogo-to na čto-to*, lit. ‘eyes lit up/flared up at somebody for something.’

The morphological features of the dependent constituents of a phraseological unit are indicated in italics (without bold), for example: *znat’ čto-libo/ kogo-libo kak pjat’ pal’cev*, lit. ‘to know something/somebody like five fingers.’

5 *Lit.* ‘two yards with a small one’

6 *Lit.* ‘not left in the soul and even a trace’

7 *Lit.* ‘breath is seizing’

8 *Lit.* ‘breath is captured’

Verbs are introduced in the infinitive, , except for verb phraseological units that occur in a fixed personal form, for example: *sletelo s jazyka*, lit. ‘flew off the tongue’; *sled prostyl*, lit. ‘the trace is gone.’

Notations are also shown in italics, see (3):

(3)

ševelit' mozgami

*prost. ekspres.*⁹

The frequency of phraseological units in written and oral discourse (W/O frequency) is determined according to the data from the main corpus of the *Russian National Corpus* comprising 389,471,513 tokens. For written discourse, the number of occurrences in the main corpus search results is indicated.

The comment area is used when it is necessary to provide additional information about the functioning or origin of a phraseological unit. Several types of comments are introduced in the dictionary:

- grammatical, for example, ‘to be used only as part of an exclamation sentence’; implemented in the infinitive form or in the form of the 2nd, less often the 1st person singular in the future tense;
- cultural and historical: about the origin;
- compatibility, for example, is usually used with the words *neobchodimo*, lit. ‘necessary’; *nužno*, lit. ‘needed’; or in the form of an imperative;
- pragmatic – when commenting on individual meanings, for example, when referring to a non-literary work, the effect of irony is possible.

Comments include information about the fixed order of constituents, stating, for example, that word order change is impossible.

3.2 Diachronic Russian-German dictionary of non-equivalent syntactic phraseological units

Syntactic phraseological units are stable multi-word grammatical forms that are usually partially filled with “small” (more often service) words (“anchors”) and open vacant positions (“slots”), which are filled directly in speech by various lexemes or combinations of lexemes. Such constructions are idiomatic, as their meaning is not deducible from the sum of grammatical and lexical meanings of their constituent elements.

For example, in order to adequately understand the expression *vsem gorodam gorod*, lit. ‘to all cities city’, meaning ‘the best city’; or *vsem učiteljam učitel*, lit. ‘to all teachers teacher’, meaning ‘the best teacher’, it is not enough to know the possible grammatical meanings of the nominative and dative case and the lexical meanings of the words *all*, *city*, *teacher*. It is required to perceive and understand the construction as a whole, possessing its own special meaning, not deducible

⁹ Lit. ‘to move your brain *uneducated speech, expressive*’

from its elements and their sum, even though concrete nouns in the dative plural and in the nominative singular in this construction are dependent on the meaning of the elements and their sum.

This construction generally means appreciation, praise and is used in the syntactic role of the predicate. The pronoun *all*, the repetition of the noun following it, its use first in the Dative plural and then in the nominative singular are constant, so the construction model immediately emerges: *vsem*, lit. 'to all' N1dat.pl. N1nom.sg., where N1dat.pl. is a noun in the dative plural and N1nom.sg. is the same noun in the nominative singular.

Such stable syntactic models, which are constantly reproduced and filled in speech with concrete lexicon, are retrieved from memory not element by element, but as a whole, and have, as already mentioned, idiomatic character. They reveal all the features of phraseological units (stability, reproducibility, idiomaticity, fixed prosodic contour) and syntactic constructions (multicomponent, presence of constant and variable components, and fulfilment of a certain syntactic role in a sentence):

A syntactic phraseme is a surface-syntactic tree containing no full lexical nodes (its nodes are labelled with either lexemic variables or structural words) but possessing a specific signified, having as its signifier a specific syntactic construction, and a specific prosody, and featuring as well a specific syntactics. (Meřčuk 1995, 215)

The structure of the Russian-German dictionary of syntactic phraseological units is the same as that of the previous dictionary. The microstructure contains the same clear-cut areas: lemma (syntactic phraseological unit), semantization (a definition of the meaning of the entry unit), illustration area (syntactic phraseological unit in the context of the original work) and equivalent area (variants of translation in the context of a particular translation of the work).

Below is a fragment from the Russian-German dictionary of syntactic phraseological units (4):

(4)

Phraseological unit	Da kakoj (-aja, -oe, -ie) + [že / ž/ už] + eto + N1! ¹⁰
Dictionary	expresses scepticism or implicit denial
Style	colloquial style, occas. disapproval or humor
Frequency	high
Russian context	Sonja vsplesnula rukami. - Da neužel', neužel' eto vse vžpravdu! Gospodi, da kakaja ž eto pravda! Kto že etomu možet poverit'? ("The Brothers Karamazov", p. 199) ¹¹

10 Lit. 'what a + [same / w/ already] + this is + N1!'

11 Lit. 'Sonja threw up her hands. - Yes, really, really, it's all real! My God, what a truth it is! Who can believe it?'

Translation 1:	Sonja schlug die Hände zusammen. «Ist es denn wirklich, wirklich möglich? Herr Gott, wie war denn das möglich! Wer kann das glauben?...» (S. H. 1882, B. II, 153).
Translation 2:	Not translated (E. R. 1906).
Translation 3:	Sonja schlug die Hände zusammen. «Aber ist denn das alles wirklich wahr? Herr Gott, wenn das wahr wäre! Wer soll das denn glauben?...» (W.B. 1930, 496).
Translation 4:	Sonja rang die Hände. «Aber ist es denn wirklich wahr, ist es wirklich wahr? O Gott, wie kann das nur wahr sein! Wer vermag das zu glauben?...» (H. R. und R. H. 1960, 528).
Translation 5:	Sonja rang die Hände. «Ist denn das wirklich, wirklich alles wahr? Großer Gott, wie soll das wahr sein! Wer kann so etwas glauben?...» (M.B. and R.B. 1984, B. I, 529).
Translation 6:	Sonja schlug die Hände zusammen. «Kann denn das wirklich, wirklich alles wahr sein? Mein Gott, was ist das für eine Wahrheit! Wer kann das glauben?...» (S. G. 2003, 558).

Translation options are presented in chronological order. The first publication of each translation was taken into account.

3.3 The purpose of the dictionary

The purpose of the dictionary is to provide information about the meaning of the input unit, suggesting variants of translation, compactly and vividly demonstrate the traditions of its translation, and thus help the translator either to make their own decision in a particular context on the basis of the experience accumulated by many generations of translators, or to use one of the correspondences provided in the dictionary.

This dictionary is designed primarily for specialists in the field of the theory, practice, history, and lexicography of translation, as well as for practicing translators, university students, teachers of foreign languages, translation, and a wide range of foreign language learners.

4. Conclusion

Adequate translation of the idiomatic meaning remains one of the most difficult tasks of bilingual phraseography, since the lemma and its foreign-language correspondences must preserve the syntactic and lexical structure, meaning and internal form. The development of diachronic translation dictionaries is a promising direction in bilingual phraseography, as the study of a large number of translated equivalents can shed light on temporary changes in the language, the possibilities of translating phraseological units, as well as translation strategies, translation preferences and translation quality.

The problem of non-equivalence remains one of the central problems in modern translation theory. It is impossible to cover it in its entirety since non-equivalence is one of the eternal questions that retain their significance and relevance at all stages of the development of translation theory and lexicographic theory, being constantly reconsidered as the accumulation of factual material and new knowledge. This, however, does not mean that the problem is unsolvable. Progress in its understanding is manifested in a strategic attitude: re-orientation to new aspects, presentation of new theoretical justifications, search for opportunities for lexicographic fixation of non-equivalent lexical units.

The development of the type of dictionary described in this paper can help address this problem. This study highlights the need to create bilingual dictionaries that represent the phenomenon of non-equivalence in both synchronic and diachronic perspectives and proposes the concept of a dictionary functioning as a reference work for non-equivalent lexical units. Such dictionaries demonstrate how the problem of non-equivalence at the level of the language system is solved at the level of discourse – in translation practice. Translators use different methods; in this way, it becomes possible to analyze multiple recurring equivalents, determine the most successful translation solutions and trace the dynamics of changes in translation technique and language use over time.

These dictionaries can serve both as dictionaries and reference works on phraseology of the late 19th century. The translation experience, compactly and systemically presented in diachronic translation dictionaries, can provide valuable illustrative and research material for further studies in translation practice.

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