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On the degree of equivalence of Latinate terms in English and Slovak linguistics

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Abstract

The present research focuses on terms of Latinate origin in English and Slovak linguistics. They show formal resemblance, yet their semantic scope and function may differ. The underlying research question is whether the Latinate origin of linguistics terms guarantees one-to-one correspondence of content in recipient languages. The research tests two hypotheses: 1) total equivalence of the semantic content of the studied terms is largely not shared; 2) the biggest imbalance is in morphosyntax. Based on attesting to the conceptualization of the present corpus, 59% of the terms manifested other than one-to-one correspondence, and the biggest imbalance was in lexicology.

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1. Introduction

The present research falls in the field of lexicographic and translation studies. It is part of the research grant project aimed at compiling a linguistics dictionary. To prepare its inventory, it is necessary to explore the issue of equivalence between English and Slovak terminologies. Our present focus is terms of Latinate origin; hence, Latin and Greek serve as donor languages. It can be assumed that formal resemblance also implies resemblance of

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semantic scope and function; e.g. Slovak speakers of English commonly perceive terms like “phrase” vs. “fráza” as interchangeable. The underlying research question is whether the Latinate origin of a term guarantees one-to-one equivalence of semantic content in recipient languages; here, English and Slovak. Our hypotheses are as follows: H1) despite the frequent use of Latinate terms in Slovak linguistics, one-to-one correspondence is less than common across the core language fields when Slovak-English and English-Slovak relationships are concerned; H2) based on anecdotal evidence we are inclined to believe that the distribution across the core linguistic levels is not balanced: the biggest imbalance will be at a morphosyntactic level, and only small imbalance at phonic and lexical levels.

2. Methodology of the study

2.1. *The theoretical framework*

The theoretical framework is built up of three concepts: term, conceptualization, and equivalence. The notion of a dictionary entry as a textual unit requires us to understand what a term represents. Unlike a common lexical unit, the meaning of a term is perceived as being deeper since a term results from scholarly study and exploration. The link between content and form is, however, more tenuous here than in non-terms, which is caused by the necessity to convey an identical concept by various forms depending on socio-cultural advances (*cf* Furdík, 2008). In becoming aware of a term, hermeneutic understanding takes place, which strictly involves hermeneutic prejudice (Gadamer, 1994) as the knowledge of the term in the mother tongue, and refiguration (Ricoeur, 2000) as a result of the process of encoding differences in the meaning of a term in the source and target languages. Therefore, hermeneutic understanding plays a vital role in the process of cultivating sensitivity towards the differences between the terminologies of both languages involved, and allows conceptualization of the term in both languages. Based on the concept of human being as a language animal (Taylor, 1985), conceptualization is to be understood as the competence of assigning meanings to the slices of extralingual reality which is allowed by a human’s ability to recognize potential interpretation of the text within the broad socio-cultural context (Dolník, 2009). In order to identify the differences in the conceptualization of terms residing in the lexicon of the two languages, a helpful tool is identifying a degree of equivalence (hereinafter DoE). The concept of equivalence holds a central position in translation theory. Nonetheless, it has also been a controversial one, causing heated debates among scholars due to its definition, nature, and applicability. Thus, we find scholars who consider equivalence an important concept (e.g. Nida 1964, Kade 1968, Koller 1979, House 1977, & Pym 1998, 2010), but there are very vocal others who view equivalence as rather unnecessary (e.g. Chesterman, 1998, & Baker, 1992), denying its legitimate status. In terminological and lexicographic research, however, it is of immense importance because it may be one of the major causes of imprecise and inaccurate translations.

2.2. *Research plan*

We compiled a corpus of 80 English and Slovak orthographically (though not phonologically) similar terms of Latinate origin (20 per field: phonetics and phonology, morphosyntax, lexicology, and stylistics). To ensure unbiased classification of the DoE, the terms were chosen randomly and as representatives of the core. Then the semantic content of every term was cross-checked (the dictionaries that served as reference sources are provided in References). In doing so, the conceptualization was attested to and the DoE could be arrived at: Kade’s typology of equivalence (1968) served as a primary tool; yet, in line with the research goal, we adapted the typology so that we could assess the DoE of the semantic content:

1. One-to-one correspondence – a source language (hereinafter SL) unit has a permanent equivalent in the target language (hereinafter TL), with the same function, scope, and significance;
2. One-to-many correspondence – a given SL unit has several senses in the TL;
3. One-to-part-of-one correspondence – the meaning of a SL unit is broader than that of TL equivalent; a TL unit covers part of a concept designated by a single SL unit;
4. One-to-nil correspondence – the SL unit does not have a TL equivalent on the content level; the content, function, or significance of the TL equivalent is different.

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