

PAPER

THE CHALLENGE OF INTERLINGUAL EQUIVALENCE AND A TYPOLOGY OF NON-EQUIVALENT BINOMIAL UNITS: A RUSSIAN-UZBEK CONTRASTIVE STUDY

M.X.Tursunova^{1,*}

¹ Independent researcher, Termez State University Termez, Uzbekistan

*m49179046@gmail.com

Abstract

The study addresses the structural and semantic gaps between Russian, Uzbek, and English binomial units (BUs). Binomials are a fundamental part of the phraseological system, but their translation is complicated by the typological distance between the three languages: the agglutinative nature of Uzbek, the fusional structure of Russian, and the analytical character of English. This paper proposes a four-part typology of non-equivalent units, highlighting how English often serves as a structural “middle ground”. The analysis shows that while English and Russian frequently utilize coordinating conjunctions (e.g., and/и), Uzbek “pair-words” often function as single, asyndetic semantic units, requiring complex structural and functional transformations during the translation process. The findings suggest that achieving interlingual equivalence in these units depends on “dynamic equivalence” rather than formal literalism.

Key words: binomial units, interlingual equivalence, contrastive linguistics, the Uzbek language, the Russian language, the English language, non-equivalent vocabulary, pair-words, translation transformations, typological distance.

Introduction

Interlingual equivalence is a relative concept, defined by the degree of semantic and functional proximity between the source and target texts. As Mona Baker argues, the professional translator’s task is to find the closest functional equivalent,

even when direct lexical matches are absent [1]. In the context of Russian and Uzbek, this task is particularly difficult due to the different ways these languages categorize reality.

Binomial units (BUs) — pairs of words like law and order or ota-ona — reflect the rhythmic and cognitive preferences of a linguistic community.

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While Russian binomials are often analytical, Uzbek binomials (often called “pair-words” or “juft so‘zlar”) represent a unique synthetic phenomenon where two components merge into one concept. The lack of a systematic approach to these units leads to significant translation errors [2].

The inclusion of the English language into this contrastive framework provides a necessary analytical benchmark. English binomials, such as bread and butter or heart and soul, demonstrate a high degree of idiomaticity and structural stability, yet they remain strictly analytical due to the mandatory use of coordinating conjunctions. By comparing the synthetic “pair-words” of Uzbek with the conjunction-heavy structures of both Russian and English, we can better identify the universal and language-specific barriers to achieving functional equivalence in trilingual communication.

Methods

The research employs a contrastive linguistic method and corpus-based analysis to investigate the structural and semantic behavior of binomial units. The data consists of 450 binomial units extracted from Russian-Uzbek and Uzbek-Russian dictionaries, as well as English phraseological lexicons and contemporary literary texts. This trilingual approach allows for a broader perspective on how different language types (agglutinative, fusional, and analytical) process paired concepts.

We apply the “equivalence levels” theory proposed by V.N. Komissarov [3] to determine where the semantic breakdown occurs between the source and target languages. By examining the units at the levels of lexical meaning, syntactical structure, and situational context, we identify the specific point where direct correspondence fails. Additionally, the study utilizes component analysis to compare the “semantic density” of Uzbek pair-words against the analytical constructions found in English and Russian, ensuring a systematic classification of non-equivalent units.

Results

Our comparative analysis reveals that the nature of non-equivalence varies significantly depending

on the language pair. While English and Russian often share similar analytical structures, the Uzbek language demonstrates a unique synthetic approach. Based on the empirical data, we propose the following typology:

1. Hendiadys and Semantic Compression

Uzbek binomials often consist of two synonyms that merge to form a single, unified concept (hendiadys). In English and Russian, these units frequently encounter “structural non-equivalence”, as they must be compressed into a single word to avoid redundant repetition. Uzbek: *Oziq-ovqat* (literally: food-provisions). Russian: *Продовольствие* (single noun). English: *Foodstuffs or Provisions*.

As noted in the “Russian-Uzbek Dictionary” [2], translating such units literally into Russian or English results in a stylistic violation, as the second component in the target languages would be perceived as a lexical tautology.

2. Structural-Asyndetic Mismatch and “Zero-Conjunction”

A major barrier in the trilingual comparison is the use of conjunctions. English and Russian binomials are predominantly syndetic (connected by *and/и*), while Uzbek BUs are typically asyndetic (juxtaposition).

Uzbek: *Ota-ona* (father-mother). Russian: *Отец и мать* (conjunction required). English: *Father and mother or Parents*.

According to N.M. Mahmudov, the asyndetic bond in Uzbek creates a “semantic monolith” that is much tighter than the coordinating structures in Indo-European languages [4]. This structural gap requires translators to add grammatical elements (conjunctions) that are absent in the source text, which E.A. Nida identifies as a necessary shift to maintain naturalness in the target language [5].

3. Cultural-Specific Binomials (Realeme)

Certain binomials reflect social practices that exist in the Uzbek culture but have no structural or semantic equivalent in English or Russian.

Uzbek: *To‘y-hashar* (celebration-collective labor).

Analysis: Russian and English lack a single binomial pair for this concept. Translation requires “descriptive expansion”: “общественные праздничные мероприятия” in Russian or “community festivities and social rituals” in

English. The lack of a 1:1 match highlights the cultural-specific nature of binomials [2].

4. Semantic Polarities and Modulation

In all three languages, there are units where two antonymic components create a new, abstract meaning. However, the logic of these pairings often differs.

Uzbek: *Oldi-berdi* (gave-took).

English: *Transactions or Settlements*.

Russian: *Взаиморасчеты or Купля-продажа*.

Vinay and Darbelnet emphasize that such cases require “modulation” — a change in the point of view or a category of thought [6]. While the Uzbek unit focuses on the action of giving and taking, the English and Russian equivalents often shift the perspective toward a formal or legalistic term, losing the original binomial structure.

Discussion

The results of this contrastive study indicate that the phenomenon of interlingual equivalence in binomial units is far more complex than simple lexical substitution. When comparing Uzbek, Russian, and English, we observe a fundamental tension between synthetic and analytical ways of organizing human experience. The discussion of these findings can be centered around three major linguistic conflicts: structural density, semantic shifts, and the pragmatics of translation.

First, the structural disparity between the asyndetic Uzbek pairs and the syndetic English and Russian binomials creates a “grammatical vacuum” during the translation process. In Uzbek, a pair like *oq-qora* (white-black) functions as a single conceptual block. When rendered into English as *black and white* or into Russian as *черное и белое*, the mandatory introduction of a conjunction (and/и) inevitably dilutes the rhythmic and conceptual tightness of the original unit. According to the levels of equivalence established by V.N. Komissarov, this transition often forces the translator to move from the level of “word-for-word correspondence” to the level of “message identification” [3]. The translator is not merely translating words; they are reconstructing a relationship between concepts that is expressed through different grammatical “glue” in each language.

Furthermore, the comparison reveals that English often occupies a middle ground. Like Russian, it is analytical, but like Uzbek, it possesses a vast repertoire of fixed, irreversible binomials (odds and ends, pros and cons). However, the “non-equivalence” of Uzbek hendiadys (synonymic pairs) remains a unique challenge. While an English speaker might say *null and void*, the Uzbek speaker uses synonymic pairing much more frequently to indicate intensity or totality. In these cases, formal equivalence is often impossible. As Eugene Nida points out, in such situations, “dynamic equivalence” must take precedence over formal correspondence [5]. If a literal translation of an Uzbek binomial sounds redundant or unnatural in English or Russian, the translator must prioritize the impact on the target audience, even if it means collapsing a two-word unit into a single, powerful term.

Another critical point of discussion is the “asymmetry of reality” reflected in these units. The non-equivalence of cultural binomials (realemes) like *to'y-hashar* or *opa-singil* (which in Uzbek covers a specific range of female sibling relationships not present in the English “sisters”) suggests that binomials are not just linguistic ornaments but cognitive maps. The failure to find a 1:1 match in Russian or English is not a “weakness” of the language, but a reflection of different social priorities.

Finally, the study highlights that the typology of non-equivalence is not static. In the age of globalization, we observe the “calquing” of English binomials into both Russian and Uzbek. However, the core of the Uzbek language — its asyndetic, reduplicative, and hendiadys structures — remains resistant to simple analytical translation. This reinforces Komissarov’s assertion that the highest level of equivalence is achieved only when the situational context and the communicative intent are preserved, regardless of the structural changes made to the binomial unit [3].

Thus, the “challenge” mentioned in the title of this paper is not just a linguistic barrier, but an opportunity for “functional adaptation”, where the translator acts as a bridge between the synthetic compactness of the East and the analytical clarity of the West.

Conclusion

The contrastive analysis of binomial units (BUs) across Russian, Uzbek, and English linguistic systems leads to several fundamental conclusions regarding the nature of interlingual equivalence. This study has demonstrated that the “challenge” of translating these units is not merely a matter of finding lexical synonyms, but a complex process of navigating different typological architectures and cultural worldviews.

Firstly, the research confirms that structural non-equivalence is the most pervasive barrier. The transition from the synthetic, asyndetic “pair-words” of the Uzbek language to the analytical, conjunction-based structures of English and Russian represents a significant shift in linguistic logic. While Uzbek treats binomials as a “semantic monolith”, English and Russian treat them as coordinated pairs. This divergence necessitates a move away from formal literalism toward a functional-communicative approach.

Secondly, the proposed four-part typology provides a systematic framework for understanding where and why equivalence fails. We have identified that:

1. Hendiadys (synonymic pairs) in Uzbek require semantic compression in English and Russian to avoid stylistic redundancy.
2. Structural asyndeton requires the grammatical addition of connectors (and/и) to satisfy the norms of Indo-European syntax.
3. Cultural realities demand descriptive expansion, as the binomial form often cannot contain the depth of specific social traditions.
4. Semantic polarities necessitate “modulation”, shifting the perspective from a concrete pairing to an abstract concept.

Thirdly, the inclusion of the English language as a benchmark has highlighted that even within analytical systems, there is a spectrum of idiomatic stability. English irreversible binomials share some functional characteristics with Uzbek pair-words, yet they remain structurally distinct. This suggests that while the “concept” of pairing is universal, the “manifestation” of that pairing is strictly governed by the morphosyntactic rules of the specific language family.

In final summary, achieving high-level

equivalence in the translation of binomial units requires a deep understanding of the “asymmetry of reality” between the East and the West. For the professional translator, the goal is not to preserve the two-word structure at any cost, but to preserve the pragmatic impact of the unit. Future research should expand this contrastive framework to include other Turkic and Slavic languages to determine if these typological patterns are universal across language families. Additionally, the development of specialized trilingual dictionaries of binomial units is essential for improving the quality of machine translation and academic cross-cultural communication.

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