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Lexical gaps and non-equivalent vocabulary in russian, uzbek, and english: a functional-typological analysis

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Abstract: Lexical gaps and non-equivalent vocabulary represent a significant challenge in cross-linguistic comparison, translation studies, and intercultural communication. These phenomena arise when a concept expressed by a single lexical item in one language lacks a direct counterpart in another. This article presents a functional-typological analysis of lexical gaps and non-equivalent vocabulary in Russian, Uzbek, and English—three languages belonging to different language families and cultural traditions. The study aims to identify the main types of lexical gaps, examine their linguistic and cultural motivations, and analyze the strategies used to compensate for non-equivalence. Using a qualitative comparative methodology based on lexical-semantic analysis, descriptive grammars, and previous typological research, the paper demonstrates that lexical gaps are closely linked to cultural specificity, grammatical structure, and patterns of conceptualization. The findings show that while Russian, Uzbek, and English share universal semantic domains, each language lexicalizes experience in unique ways, resulting in systematic non-equivalence. The study contributes to functional typology and translation theory by highlighting the interaction between language, culture, and cognition.

Keywords: lexical gaps, non-equivalent vocabulary, functional typology, Russian, Uzbek, English, lexical semantics, translation.

Introduction. Lexical non-equivalence is a widely recognized phenomenon in linguistics, particularly in lexical typology, contrastive linguistics, and translation studies. It occurs when a word in one language has no direct or single-word equivalent in another language. Such lexical gaps are not accidental but reflect differences in cultural practices, social structures, and patterns of conceptualization.

Russian, Uzbek, and English provide a productive basis for examining lexical gaps due to their typological, cultural, and historical diversity. English, as a global language, has developed a highly differentiated vocabulary in domains such as technology and social relations. Russian preserves a rich system of emotionally and stylistically marked lexemes. Uzbek, deeply rooted in Central Asian culture, contains culturally specific vocabulary related to kinship, social hierarchy, and traditional life. The aim of this article is to conduct a functional-typological comparison of lexical gaps and non-equivalent vocabulary in Russian, Uzbek, and English. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What types of lexical gaps occur between Russian, Uzbek, and English?
2. What linguistic and extralinguistic factors motivate non-equivalent vocabulary?
3. How are lexical gaps compensated for in translation and communication?
4. What typological generalizations can be drawn from the comparison?

By addressing these questions, the study seeks to demonstrate that lexical gaps are a natural outcome of linguistic and cultural diversity.

Literature review. Lexical gaps have been discussed under various terms, including lacunae, non-equivalence, and unlexicalized concepts (Lyons, 1977; Cruse, 2011). From a typological perspective, lexical gaps arise because languages differ in how they categorize and label experience.

Functional linguists emphasize that lexicalization patterns are shaped by communicative needs and cultural relevance (Givón, 2001). What is lexically encoded in one language may be expressed periphrastically or remain implicit in another.

In translation studies, non-equivalent vocabulary is considered a major source of difficulty (Baker, 2018). Scholars distinguish between various types of non-equivalence, including culture-specific items, lexicalized vs. non-lexicalized concepts, and differences in semantic scope.

Russian lexical semantics has been noted for its abundance of evaluative and expressive vocabulary, particularly diminutives and aspect-related verbs (Wierzbicka, 1992). Uzbek lexical studies emphasize the richness of kinship terms and culturally bound expressions (Johanson & Csató, 1998). English, by contrast, often exhibits lexical economy in kinship terms but greater differentiation in technical and abstract domains.

Despite extensive research on lexical non-equivalence, comparative studies involving Russian, Uzbek, and English remain relatively limited, especially within a functional-typological framework.

Methodology. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive-comparative approach grounded in functional and lexical typology. The focus is on identifying systematic patterns of non-equivalence rather than isolated lexical mismatches.

Data Sources

The analysis is based on:

-Monolingual and bilingual dictionaries of Russian, Uzbek, and English

-Examples from descriptive grammars and lexical-semantic studies

-Constructed examples illustrating lexical gaps and compensation strategies.

Analytical Framework

Lexical gaps are analyzed according to:

-Semantic domain (e.g., kinship, emotions, social relations)

-Type of non-equivalence (cultural, structural, semantic scope)

-Compensation strategies (borrowing, paraphrase, explanation).

The IMRAD structure ensures clarity and academic coherence.

RESULTS. Lexical Gaps in Russian

Russian contains numerous lexemes with no direct English or Uzbek equivalents, particularly in the domains of emotion and interpersonal relations.

Example:

Тоска (toska) — a complex emotional state combining sadness, longing, and existential distress.

This concept lacks a single-word equivalent in English or Uzbek and requires descriptive translation.

 Lexical Gaps in Uzbek

Uzbek displays culturally specific vocabulary related to kinship and social relations.

Example:

-Qaynona — 'husband's mother'

-Qaynota — 'husband's father'

English expresses these meanings through descriptive phrases (mother-in-law, father-in-law), while Russian partially lexicalizes them but with less cultural salience.

Lexical Gaps in English

English contains lexical items related to social and institutional practices that lack direct equivalents in Russian and Uzbek.

Example:

-Privacy — a culturally loaded concept related to personal space and individual rights.

In -Russian and Uzbek, this concept is expressed through multiple words or contextual explanations.

Types of Non-Equivalent Vocabulary

The analysis reveals several recurring types:

-Culture-specific lexical gaps (e.g., traditions, social roles)

-Semantic scope differences (one word vs. several words)

Grammaticalized meanings absent in another language

Discussion. From a functional-typological perspective, lexical gaps reflect differences in how languages prioritize and structure experience. Concepts that are socially or culturally significant tend to be lexicalized, while less relevant distinctions remain unmarked or implicit.Russian emphasizes emotional nuance, Uzbek foregrounds social relations and kinship, and English lexicalizes abstract and institutional concepts. These differences lead to systematic patterns of non-equivalence rather than random gaps.

In translation and intercultural communication, lexical gaps are typically addressed through strategies such as borrowing, paraphrasing, or cultural adaptation. The choice of strategy depends on communicative goals and audience expectations.

   The findings support the view that lexical systems are shaped by both cognitive universals and culture-specific factors.

Conclusion. This study has examined lexical gaps and non-equivalent vocabulary in Russian, Uzbek, and English from a functional-typological perspective. The analysis demonstrates that lexical non-equivalence is a natural and systematic feature of cross-linguistic comparison, rooted in cultural specificity and patterns of conceptualization. Russian, Uzbek, and English differ not only in what they

lexicalize but also in how they distribute meaning across lexical and grammatical structures. Understanding these differences is crucial for translation studies, language teaching, and intercultural communication. Future research may extend this study through corpus-based analysis or experimental methods in lexical semantics.

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