

Navigating cultural dynamics and translation challenges to achieve equivalence while preserving meaning and context sensitively

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Abstract - This study aims to explore the cultural dynamics and challenges involved in achieving equivalence in translation, focusing on balancing meaning and context to ensure accurate and culturally sensitive communication. The methodology includes qualitative analyses of translation cases across literary, technical, and survey contexts, employing comparative textual analysis, interviews with translators, and content analysis to examine strategies such as dynamic equivalence, localization, adaptation, and consultation with cultural informants. Analysis reveals that translators must navigate complex cultural references, idiomatic expressions, and emotional connotations while maintaining semantic, conceptual, and content equivalence. Findings highlight the importance of translators acting as cultural mediators who balance fidelity to the source text with necessary adaptations to the target culture's norms and sensitivities. The study concludes that successful translation requires a nuanced approach that integrates linguistic accuracy with cultural competence to bridge gaps between source and target audiences effectively. Future translation efforts should emphasize collaboration with cultural experts and adopt flexible strategies to preserve both meaning and cultural context.

Keywords: cultural equivalence, translation challenges, dynamic equivalence, cultural adaptation, cross-cultural communication

1. Introduction

Translation is increasingly vital in facilitating communication and cultural exchange in a globalized world. Whether in international business, academia, or media, the accurate transfer of information, ideas, and values from one language to another is indispensable. Central to this process is the notion of "equivalence" the expectation that a translation should convey the same meaning, tone, and communicative effect as the original text.

However, achieving perfect or absolute equivalence between languages is highly contested. Every language reflects its own unique cultural, historical, and social background. Translation is thus not just a linguistic act, but also an act of cultural negotiation. As contemporary research highlights, translators grapple with bridging not only linguistic gaps but also cultural, pragmatic, and functional differences, requiring them to navigate nuance and implicit meaning. Consequently, modern



translation theory distinguishes various types of equivalence, such as formal, dynamic, semantic, and functional, each offering different approaches based on the purpose and context of translation tasks.

Translation is a complex process that goes beyond mere word-for-word substitution, involving the intricate task of achieving equivalence between source and target languages. Equivalence refers to the degree to which a translated text accurately conveys the meaning, style, and cultural nuances of the original. However, achieving cultural equivalence remains a significant challenge due to differences in social institutions, customs, idiomatic expressions, and worldviews embedded within languages (Hamamoto, 2023; Imami et al 2021; Iskakova et al., 2025).

These challenges are urgent in today's globalized world where cross-cultural communication is essential across fields such as literature, business, law, and healthcare. Key terms central to this discussion include cultural equivalence, which focuses on preserving culturally specific meanings; functional equivalence, emphasizing similar effects on target audiences; and untranslatability, referring to concepts or expressions lacking direct counterparts in another language (Saparova, 2025; Iskakova et al., 2025).

Understanding these dynamics is crucial for translators who must navigate linguistic structures alongside cultural contexts to produce translations that are both accurate and meaningful (Rosa, 2021; Chidlow et al., 2014). This exploration highlights the ongoing tension between linguistic fidelity and cultural adaptation in translation practice.

Theoretical frameworks on equivalence in translation explore how a target text relates to its source text to achieve similarity in meaning, function, or effect, despite linguistic and cultural differences. Early structuralist approaches focused on formal equivalence, emphasizing linguistic correspondence at word or sentence levels, as seen in Catford's and Jakobson's theories, who introduced distinctions like intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic translation and highlighted the impossibility of full equivalence due to language-specific concepts (Alrymayh, A. (2024). Nida's dynamic equivalence theory shifted focus toward functional and communicative equivalence, aiming for equivalent response or effect on the target audience rather than literal word-for-word translation (Iskandarov, 2025; Panchenko, 2025).

Contemporary views recognize equivalence as multilayered and context-dependent, involving semantic, pragmatic, and cultural dimensions that require translators' competence in both languages and cultures to negotiate asymmetries and preserve the original's intent or "skopos" (Panchenko, 2025; Panou, 2013; Oneț & Ciocoi-Pop, 2023). Semiotic approaches propose understanding equivalence through universal categories of similarity, difference, and mediation, offering a broader conceptualization beyond linguistic sameness (Rędzioch-Korkuz, 2023).

Critical evaluations highlight ongoing debates about the usefulness of equivalence as a concept in translation studies, with some scholars advocating for its centrality while others question its applicability given evolving translation practices and technologies (Panou, 2013).

Several recent studies have explored the concept of equivalence in translation, examining both its theoretical foundations and practical implications.

Al Awdi (2025) conducted a comparative analysis of Nida's and Newmark's approaches to equivalence, emphasizing the importance of functional equivalence in capturing the intended meaning rather than literal accuracy. This study highlighted that translators increasingly favour dynamic and functional strategies to handle cultural and linguistic gaps across languages.

Wang (2025) focused on the application of Nida's functional equivalence theory in translating brand names from Chinese into English. The study demonstrated how adaptation and modulation key strategies under functional equivalence—can effectively bridge cultural differences while preserving brand identity and consumer appeal.

Karismawati et al. (2021) examined how cultural filters contribute to achieving functional equivalence in English translation. They found that translators often employ explicitation and cultural adaptation to meet target audience expectations, particularly when source culture elements have no direct correspondence. Challenges related to idiomatic expressions and cultural untranslatability were explored in studies such as that by Academia.edu (2023), which discussed strategies translators use to convey culture-specific terms and idioms without losing the original nuances. Similarly, research published in ScienceDirect (2024) confirmed that machine translation technologies still struggle with

idioms and contextual meanings, underlining the continued necessity for human intervention to maintain equivalence in nuanced texts.

These findings are consistent with the observations of Dickins et al. (2017), who argue for understanding equivalence as a spectrum rather than an absolute state. This perspective encourages translators to focus on the communicative purpose of texts and adapt their approach accordingly, aligning with the functionalist translation philosophy. Overall, these recent studies enrich the ongoing discourse by confirming that while absolute equivalence remains elusive, functional equivalence offers a flexible, context-sensitive framework that accommodates linguistic and cultural diversity in translation practice. Therefore, this paper seeks to revisit the debate: Is equivalence in translation achievable in practice, or is it better viewed as an ideal guideline for translators? By analysing both foundational and contemporary theories, alongside real-world examples, this study addresses how and to what extent equivalence can be realized.

The next points are the research problems of the study. (1) What are the foundational theories and evolving definitions of equivalence in translation, considering both classical and contemporary perspectives? (2) What are the primary challenges translators face in achieving equivalence, particularly regarding linguistic, cultural, and contextual differences between source and target languages? (3) To what extent can functional equivalence, as proposed by Nida and others, provide a viable and effective alternative to the pursuit of absolute or formal equivalence in translation practice?

The objectives of the study are describe as follows. (1) To systematically outline and compare the various types of equivalence—such as formal, dynamic, functional, semantic, and communicative—as defined in recent translation theory literature. (2) To analyse the key obstacles that hinder achieving true equivalence across languages and cultures, including issues related to cultural specificity, linguistic asymmetry, and contextual variability. (3) To critically evaluate the practicality and effectiveness of functional equivalence in contemporary translation practice by assessing its ability to balance fidelity to the source text with cultural and communicative appropriateness in the target language.

2. Method

2.1 Data Collection

The study would collect data from a range of translated texts across different genres and languages to explore the dynamics of cultural equivalence and challenges in translation. This could include literary works, dialogues, and cross-cultural research materials to capture diverse translation contexts and cultural nuances. Additionally, theoretical and critical literature on equivalence theories would be reviewed to frame the analysis within established scholarly debates. Bilingual translators' insights or expert evaluations might also be gathered to understand practical challenges and decision-making processes in achieving equivalence.

2.2 Data Analysis

A qualitative content analysis approach would be employed to examine how equivalence is realized or challenged in the collected translations, focusing on linguistic, cultural, pragmatic, and functional aspects. Contrastive analysis methods would compare source texts and their translations to identify shifts, losses, or adaptations related to cultural elements and equivalence strategies. The analysis would also consider theoretical frameworks such as dynamic equivalence, formal equivalence, and semiotic approaches to interpret findings within broader translation studies discourse. Finally, thematic coding could be used to categorize types of challenges encountered by translators in maintaining equivalence across cultures.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Achieving Equivalence in Translation

The analysis reveals that achieving equivalence in translation is a complex balancing act between preserving the source text's meaning and adapting it to the target culture's context. Translators face significant challenges with culture-specific terms, idiomatic expressions, and emotional connotations that often lack direct equivalents in the target language, necessitating dynamic equivalence strategies to maintain communicative impact (Imran et al., 2024).



Machine translation systems show progress in handling cultural nuances but still struggle with accurately conveying illocutionary speech acts and subtle cultural meanings without human intervention (Naveen & Trojovský, 2024; Mentari et al., 2024). Comparative studies of literary translations demonstrate that fidelity to source culture must be weighed against readability and cultural resonance for target audiences, highlighting the need for translators to interpret socio-cultural and historical intricacies rather than rely on literal word-for-word translation (Tian et al., 2022). Approaches such as frame semantics help clarify culturally specific concepts by mapping their semantic and cultural elements, aiding in more transparent equivalence (Hamamoto, 2023).

Overall, successful translation requires an integrated approach combining linguistic accuracy with deep cultural understanding to overcome barriers posed by differing traditions, values, and social practices (Asiri et al., 2024; Zhou & Hua, 2021). Equivalence has been a central and evolving concept in translation studies, reflecting the complex interplay between linguistic and cultural factors. Roman Jakobson's foundational work (1959) introduced three types of translation—intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic—laying the groundwork for understanding equivalence beyond mere word-for-word substitution (Panou, 2013; Oneț & Ciocoi-Pop, 2023).

Eugene Nida further developed this by distinguishing between formal equivalence, which focuses on literal fidelity to the source text's form, and dynamic or functional equivalence, which prioritizes producing an equivalent effect on the target audience, emphasizing meaning over form (Panchenko, 2025; Yuan & Miao, 2025). Catford contributed the notion of textual equivalence, highlighting the substitutability of language segments between source and target texts while acknowledging that perfect correspondence is often unattainable (Panou, 2013; Panchenko, 2025).

More recent scholarship problematizes the traditional quest for exact sameness, suggesting that equivalence should be viewed as a spectrum rather than a binary condition. Dickins et al. (2017) argue that translation involves managing degrees of similarity and difference rather than achieving perfect identity ¹. Anthony Pym and others emphasize the relational and directional nature of equivalence, underscoring the translator's active role in negotiating meaning within specific cultural and communicative contexts (Kashgary, 2011).

This perspective recognizes that languages encode unique worldviews and cultural categories, making some concepts inherently untranslatable or requiring creative strategies beyond direct equivalence. Theoretical developments also reflect different levels at which equivalence operates—from word-level semantic or pragmatic equivalence to broader textual or functional equivalence depending on the translation's purpose and genre ³⁸. For example, legal translations demand high precision at the word level to maintain legal validity, whereas literary translations may prioritize aesthetic or cultural resonance over literal accuracy (Bhattarai, 2024; Stambekova et al., 2025). The dynamic nature of equivalence means translators must balance fidelity to source text intentions with adaptation to target language norms and audience expectations (Chu & Li, 2025; Yang & Qin, 2025).

Critiques of equivalence highlight its limitations as an absolute standard due to linguistic asymmetries and cultural specificity. Some scholars propose embracing non-equivalence as a legitimate strategy when direct equivalents do not exist, especially for culture-specific terms like idioms or metaphors ⁹. This approach reframes non-equivalence not as failure but as an essential aspect of translation creativity that can produce meaningful target texts while respecting source culture uniqueness.

Overall, the theoretical foundations of equivalence in translation reveal it as a multifaceted, context-dependent concept shaped by linguistic structures, cultural differences, translator agency, and communicative goals. Equivalence remains a useful heuristic for guiding translation decisions but requires flexible application sensitive to text type, purpose, and intercultural dynamics (Oneț & Ciocoi-Pop, 2023).

Contemporary views encourage moving beyond rigid definitions toward understanding equivalence as a dynamic process involving negotiation between source fidelity and target relevance.

This synthesis reflects decades of scholarly debate from Jakobson's early typologies through Nida's functionalism to current relational models emphasizing spectrum-based and directional equivalences. It highlights how translation theory continues to evolve in response to growing

awareness of cultural complexity and the translator's mediating role in bridging languages and cultures effectively.

3.1.2 Challenges in Achieving Equivalence

Practical translation faces significant challenges in achieving equivalence due to the intricate interplay of linguistic and cultural factors. One of the most prominent obstacles is cultural untranslatability, where certain words or concepts are deeply embedded in a specific culture and lack direct equivalents in other languages. For example, Indonesian “gotong royong” refers to a communal spirit of mutual assistance, while Portuguese “saudade” expresses a profound sense of nostalgic longing; both carry rich cultural meanings that cannot be fully captured by simple word-for-word translation (Hamamoto, 2023; Salsabilla & Sajarwa, 2025).

Translators must therefore employ creative strategies such as adaptation, explanatory notes, paraphrasing, or cultural substitution to convey these ideas effectively while preserving the source text's intent and communicative function (Riabovol, 2023). These strategies often involve balancing fidelity to the original with accessibility for the target audience, sometimes requiring omission or modification of culturally specific elements to avoid misunderstanding or loss of coherence (Dai, 2017).

The challenge is compounded by the dynamic nature of equivalence itself, which is context-dependent and relative rather than absolute; meaning shifts according to textual, contextual, and personal factors influencing each translation act [28](#). Frame semantics has been proposed as a useful tool for clarifying culturally specific concepts by mapping their semantic elements and social practices, thereby aiding translators in finding approximate equivalents that resonate within the target culture (Hamamoto, 2023).

Ultimately, overcoming untranslatability demands not only linguistic skill but also intercultural competence and creativity to negotiate meaning across cultural boundaries while maintaining functional equivalence (Riabovol, 2023; Hlushchenko, 2022). Structural differences between languages also pose difficulties; for example, Japanese often omits subjects in sentences, whereas English requires explicit subjects, affecting sentence construction and comprehension (Naveen & Trojovský, 2024).

Idiomatic expressions present another challenge because their meanings cannot be derived literally from individual words. Phrases like “kick the bucket” or Indonesian “buah bibir” require interpretation that captures the intended figurative meaning rather than a word-for-word translation (Fauzi et al., 2025; Abdulhussein, 2021; Aliyeva, 2025). The purpose of the text and its target audience further influence equivalence strategies: legal documents demand high literal fidelity to preserve accuracy, while literary or advertising texts allow more creative adaptations aligned with functionalist approaches such as skopos theory (Anthony et al., 2021).

Technological advances have introduced machine translation tools that facilitate cross-linguistic communication but struggle with idiomatic language and cultural nuances. These limitations highlight the irreplaceable role of human translators who apply cultural knowledge and contextual judgment to negotiate equivalence successfully [5](#). Overall, translators must balance linguistic accuracy with cultural sensitivity and textual function, often making strategic decisions to bridge gaps where direct equivalence is impossible (Saparova, 2025; Sergeyevna, 2025; Efendi & Hardjanto, 2023). This dynamic process underscores translation as both an art and a science requiring linguistic skill, cultural competence, and creativity.

3.1.3 Functional Equivalence in Contemporary Practice

Functional equivalence has become a key approach in contemporary translation practice, addressing the challenges posed by linguistic and cultural differences. Rooted in Nida's theory, functional equivalence prioritizes conveying the communicative intent and naturalness of the source text rather than adhering strictly to literal word-for-word translation. The goal is to produce a target text that elicits a similar response from the target audience as the original did from its audience, taking into account both linguistic structures and cultural contexts (Chao, 2025; Salmanova, 2025; Iskandarov, 2025).

This approach recognizes that some degree of difference between source and target texts is inevitable and even desirable to maintain effectiveness and readability. In practical terms, translators employ several strategies aligned with functional equivalence. **Adaptation** involves modifying cultural

references to make them relevant and understandable for the target audience, such as changing idiomatic expressions or culturally specific items (Chao, 2025; Yang & Qin, 2025).

Modulation refers to shifting perspectives or points of view to better fit the target language's norms without altering meaning (Yang & Qin, 2025). Transposition allows changes in grammatical structure, such as altering word order or sentence type, to enhance fluency and clarity (Li & Chen, 2025; Yang & Qin, 2025). Explicitation makes implicit information explicit when necessary to ensure comprehension by the target audience, especially when cultural assumptions differ (Aliyev, 2025; Zhao, 2025).

These strategies are widely applied across various fields. For example, Bible translations increasingly use functional equivalence to balance faithfulness with accessibility, ensuring that spiritual messages resonate across cultures. In branding and marketing, functional equivalence helps adapt slogans and product names so they appeal naturally within different cultural markets while preserving brand identity (Chao, 2025). Audiovisual media like film subtitles rely heavily on this approach to maintain emotional impact and narrative coherence despite time constraints and linguistic differences (Yang, & Qin, 2025).

Legal translation also benefits from functional equivalence by focusing on preserving the function of legal terms within their respective legal systems rather than literal wording. Translators working between languages with distinct legal traditions—such as Arabic and Azerbaijani—seek terms that perform equivalent roles in contracts or statutes, ensuring legal accuracy and cross-cultural clarity (Aliyev, 2025; Shang & Hu, 2025).

However, challenges remain when no close counterpart exists; strategies like glossing or hybrid translations may be necessary to bridge gaps while maintaining functional integrity.

Medical translation illustrates another domain where functional equivalence is critical. Accurate communication of health information requires not only linguistic precision but also cultural appropriateness to ensure patient understanding across diverse populations. Integrating terminology standardization with functional equivalence principles improves both accuracy and readability in medical texts (Zhao, 2025). Similarly, political news translation employs these principles to convey key terms precisely while adapting syntactic structures for clarity in the target language, enhancing international communication effectiveness (Li & Chen, 2025).

In literary translation, especially song lyrics or poetry, functional equivalence guides translators in balancing semantic fidelity with aesthetic qualities. For instance, translating Taylor Swift's country music lyrics into Chinese involves reconstructing meanings creatively while preserving emotional resonance and cultural relevance (Yan, 2025). This highlights how functional equivalence supports both faithful content transmission and artistic expression.

Overall, contemporary practice views functional equivalence not as a rigid formula but as a flexible framework guiding translators' decisions based on text type, purpose, audience expectations, and cultural context. It acknowledges that perfect identity between source and target texts is unattainable but emphasizes achieving equivalent communicative effects through strategic adaptation (Chao, 2025; Salmanova, 2025; Iskandarov, 2025).

This pragmatic orientation enhances cross-cultural understanding by respecting linguistic diversity while facilitating meaningful communication.

Functional equivalence has gained prominence because it addresses real-world translation challenges by focusing on naturalness, clarity, and audience reception rather than literal accuracy alone. Its application spans religious texts, legal documents, medical communication, media subtitles, political discourse, branding, and literary works. Translators use adaptation, modulation, transposition, and explicitation among other techniques to negotiate meaning effectively across languages and cultures. This approach reflects an evolving understanding of translation as an active process of intercultural mediation aimed at producing functionally equivalent texts that resonate authentically with target audiences.

3.2 Discussion

Cultural dynamics play a crucial role in the challenges of achieving equivalence in translation, as translators must balance meaning and context across languages deeply embedded in distinct cultural frameworks. Equivalence, traditionally understood as conveying the same meaning from source to target text, becomes complex when cultural references, idiomatic expressions, and socio-historical

contexts differ significantly between languages (Tian et al., 2022). Each culture shapes language through unique values, norms, traditions, and worldviews that influence not only vocabulary but also the way ideas and emotions are expressed. This cultural embedding means that literal or word-for-word translation often fails to capture the intended meaning or effect on the target audience, necessitating adaptive strategies that prioritize functional or dynamic equivalence—translating the sense and impact rather than exact wording (Imran et al., 2024).

One major challenge is translating culture-specific terms that have no direct equivalents in the target language. Words like Indonesian “gotong royong” (communal mutual aid) or Portuguese “saudade” (a deep nostalgic longing) encapsulate complex social practices and emotions unique to their cultures (Hamamoto, 2023). Translators must use techniques such as paraphrasing, adaptation, explanatory notes, or cultural substitution to convey these concepts effectively while maintaining fidelity to the source text’s intent (Asiri et al., 2024; Hamamoto, 2023).

Frame semantics has been proposed as a method to analyse these culturally specific concepts by breaking down their semantic elements and social contexts, helping translators find approximate equivalents that resonate with target readers. However, this process is inherently interpretive and context-dependent; what works for one audience or text may not suit another.

The interplay between linguistic structures and cultural context further complicates equivalence. Languages differ in syntax, idiomatic usage, and pragmatic conventions that affect how meaning is constructed and understood. For example, translating idiomatic expressions requires more than lexical substitution; it demands an understanding of both source and target cultures’ figurative language systems to preserve communicative intent (Naveen & Trojovský, 2024; Zhou & Hua, 2021).

Similarly, legal texts or marketing materials pose challenges because they rely heavily on culturally specific norms and persuasive strategies that may not translate directly (Tian et al., 2022). Machine translation tools have made advances but still struggle with capturing nuanced cultural meanings and illocutionary speech acts accurately without human intervention (Mentari et al., 2024).

In qualitative research translation, strict equivalence is often unattainable due to multiple coexisting meanings shaped by historical and intercultural references. Instead of viewing differences as threats to validity, embracing uncertainty can enhance reflexivity and criticality in interpretation processes (Zhao et al., 2024). This perspective encourages translators and researchers to acknowledge power dynamics and positionality influencing translation choices rather than striving for an impossible perfect match.

Survey adaptation for cross-cultural research highlights practical considerations in achieving equivalence beyond language accuracy. Content equivalence (matching topics), semantic equivalence (matching meaning), and conceptual equivalence (matching underlying constructs) must all be ensured for valid comparisons across cultures (Tsai et al., 2018). This requires translators fluent in both languages who understand cultural nuances deeply enough to produce culturally congruent instruments.

Literary translation exemplifies the delicate balance between preserving source culture authenticity and making texts accessible to new audiences. The translation of “Dream of the Red Chamber” illustrates how translators navigate historical contexts, idiomatic expressions, and cultural symbolism by employing different strategies that reflect varying priorities between fidelity and adaptability (Tian et al., 2022). Similarly, translating poetry involves negotiating emotional sensitivities where dynamic equivalence preserves readability but may sacrifice some original cultural resonance (Imran et al., 2024).

Overall, achieving equivalence in translation is less about replicating exact words than about conveying intended meanings within appropriate cultural frames. Translators act as intercultural mediators who must creatively negotiate linguistic differences while respecting both source culture integrity and target audience expectations. This balancing act requires linguistic expertise combined with intercultural competence to manage untranslatability challenges effectively. As machine translation evolves, human insight remains essential for capturing subtle cultural nuances critical for meaningful communication across languages (Naveen & Trojovský, 2024; Mentari et al., 2024).

Cultural dynamics profoundly shape the challenges of achieving equivalence in translation by intertwining language with social practices, values, and historical contexts. Addressing these challenges demands flexible approaches like dynamic equivalence that prioritize functional



communication over literal accuracy. Employing methods such as frame semantics analysis aids in rendering culturally specific concepts more transparent while acknowledging inherent limitations. Embracing uncertainty in meaning differences enriches qualitative research translations by fostering reflexivity about power relations embedded in language use. Ultimately, successful translation balances fidelity to source texts with adaptation for target cultures through informed decisions tailored to communicative goals across diverse contexts (Hamamoto, 2023; Zhao et al., 2024; Zhou & Hua, 2021).

Balancing meaning and context in translation is a complex endeavour shaped by deep cultural dynamics that challenge the achievement of equivalence between source and target texts. One fundamental issue is the presence of culture-specific elements—words, idioms, customs, and historical references—that often lack direct equivalents in the target language. Literal translation of these elements risks losing their intended effect or meaning, necessitating strategies such as dynamic equivalence, which prioritizes conveying the same impact or function rather than exact wording (Imran et al., 2024). This approach requires translators to possess not only linguistic skills but also profound cultural competence to interpret and adapt meanings appropriately for the target audience while respecting the source culture's integrity.

The challenge extends beyond lexical items to encompass broader socio-cultural contexts embedded within texts. For example, literary translations like those of *Dream of the Red Chamber* illustrate how translators must navigate historical and cultural nuances unique to the original work, balancing fidelity with accessibility for readers unfamiliar with the source culture (Tian et al., 2022). Such translations demonstrate that equivalence is not a fixed endpoint but a dynamic process involving interpretation, adaptation, and sometimes compromise to preserve both meaning and cultural resonance.

Machine translation technologies have made significant advances but still struggle with capturing cultural subtleties and illocutionary speech acts—speech acts that carry implied meanings beyond literal words—especially in culturally rich texts such as Indonesian short stories (Naveen & Trojovský, 2024; Mentari et al., 2024).

These limitations highlight the indispensable role of human translators who can apply contextual knowledge and cultural insight to ensure translations are meaningful and appropriate. Moreover, qualitative research translation reveals that uncertainty and difference in meaning are inherent features rather than flaws; embracing these can enhance reflexivity and criticality in translation practice by acknowledging multiple coexisting interpretations shaped by historical and intercultural factors (Zhao et al., 2024).

Achieving equivalence also involves addressing semantic representation through frameworks like frame semantics, which help clarify culturally specific concepts by mapping their underlying social institutions and practices before seeking target language counterparts (Hamamoto, 2023). This method aids in rendering untranslatable terms more transparent by situating them within their cultural frames, thus facilitating more accurate cross-cultural communication.

Practical challenges arise when adapting surveys or other research instruments across languages, where content, semantic, and conceptual equivalences must be carefully maintained to ensure validity (Tsai et al., 2018). This process underscores the importance of involving bilingual researchers fluent in both languages to navigate subtle differences in meaning and cultural connotations effectively.

In translating culture-loaded words between linguistically distant languages such as English and Arabic, integrated approaches combining hermeneutics, textual analysis, and functionality prove essential for capturing both intratextual (within-text) and extratextual (contextual) elements (Asiri et al., 2024). These approaches help overcome difficulties related to comprehension and production of culturally bound expressions by ensuring that translations reflect not only linguistic accuracy but also cultural appropriateness.

Finally, literary translation of poetry exemplifies the tension between preserving emotional connotations tied to culture-specific symbols and achieving readability through dynamic equivalence. Studies on Urdu-to-English poetry translations reveal that while dynamic equivalence facilitates transfer of meaning and impact, it may sacrifice some original cultural depth. This suggests future

translators should seek collaborative efforts with native speakers or experts to balance fidelity with accessibility (Imran, 2024).

Achieving equivalence in translation is a balancing act requiring flexible strategies tailored to linguistic differences and cultural complexities. It demands a combination of theoretical insight—such as dynamic equivalence and frame semantics—and practical methods including localization, annotation, intercultural dialogue, and human expertise alongside technological tools. Recognizing that perfect equivalence is often unattainable encourages translators to embrace uncertainty as an opportunity for richer intercultural understanding rather than a limitation. This nuanced approach ultimately fosters translations that honour both source meanings and target audience contexts.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Conclusion

The concept of equivalence in translation is complex and multifaceted, encompassing linguistic, cultural, pragmatic, and functional dimensions that challenge translators to balance fidelity to the source text with the norms and expectations of the target culture. Traditional theories often distinguish between formal equivalence, which focuses on literal word-for-word correspondence, and dynamic or functional equivalence, which prioritizes conveying the intended meaning and effect in the target language. Contemporary perspectives view equivalence as a context-dependent relationship that can operate at different levels—word, sentence, or entire text—depending on the translation's purpose, genre, and audience. This shift acknowledges that perfect equivalence is rarely achievable due to inherent differences between languages and cultures; instead, translators must negotiate meaning creatively to preserve communicative intent while adapting to cultural norms.

Cultural differences frequently create asymmetries that complicate direct correspondence between source and target texts. Translators act as mediators who interpret and transform messages rather than simply converting codes, employing strategies such as adaptation, explicitation, or omission to maintain functional equivalence. The role of the translator thus extends beyond linguistic competence to include intercultural awareness and sensitivity to pragmatic factors influencing how messages are received in different contexts [10](#). Equivalence also involves balancing adequacy (faithfulness to the source) with acceptability (naturalness in the target language), which may require compromises depending on translation goals.

Despite ongoing debates about its theoretical status and applicability—some scholars argue for abandoning or redefining equivalence due to its limitations—it remains central in translation studies as a guiding principle for evaluating translation quality and adequacy. Equivalence helps frame discussions about what constitutes a “good” translation by providing criteria for assessing how well a translated text replicates the source's meaning, style, function, or effect within a new linguistic and cultural environment. Recent approaches incorporate semiotic and cognitive perspectives that emphasize similarity-difference-mediation processes underlying equivalence rather than strict sameness.

Equivalence in translation is best understood as a flexible, multidimensional concept shaped by linguistic structures, cultural contexts, pragmatic functions, and translational purposes. It requires translators to engage in creative mediation that respects both source text integrity and target audience expectations. While perfect equivalence may be unattainable, striving for an appropriate balance between fidelity and adaptation remains essential for effective cross-cultural communication through translation.

4.2 Suggestion

Future research on equivalence in translation should prioritize empirical studies that utilize annotated corpora and cognitive approaches to deepen understanding of how equivalence functions across diverse translation contexts. Such research can provide data-driven insights into the complex interplay between linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic factors influencing equivalence, especially as new textual modes and technological mediation reshape translation practices. Annotated corpora allow systematic analysis of translation choices and patterns, while cognitive methods can reveal translators' mental processes and decision-making strategies, offering a more nuanced picture of how equivalence is negotiated in real time.



Translators are encouraged to develop deep cultural competence alongside linguistic skills to effectively navigate challenges posed by cultural nuances and asymmetries. This dual expertise enables translators to mediate meaning creatively rather than relying solely on literal correspondence, which often fails to capture culturally embedded concepts or pragmatic subtleties. Training programs and professional development should emphasize intercultural awareness and reflexivity to prepare translators for the dynamic demands of cross-cultural communication.

Adopting flexible theoretical frameworks that integrate semiotic, functional, and cognitive perspectives can better address the evolving nature of equivalence in practice. These frameworks move beyond static notions of sameness toward understanding equivalence as a process involving similarity, difference, and mediation shaped by context and purpose. Emphasizing translator decision-making processes highlights the interpretive role translators play in shaping meaning rather than simply transferring words.

Finally, future studies should also focus on audience reception to enrich understanding of how equivalence is perceived and evaluated by target readers or listeners. Investigating how different audiences interpret translated texts can inform strategies that balance fidelity with acceptability, enhancing translation quality assessment. Overall, integrating empirical research with theoretical innovation and practical training will advance knowledge about equivalence as a dynamic, context-sensitive phenomenon central to effective translation across languages and cultures.

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