

**LINGUISTIC CORRESPONDENCES AND NON-CORRESPONDENCE IN
TRANSLATION: HOW TRANSLATORS PRESERVE MEANING**

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Abstract: Linguistic correspondence in translation refers to the relationship between source-language units and target-language units that function as equivalents in context, while non-correspondence arises when no ready-made equivalent can be used. This article explains how translators move from regular correspondences (permanent and variable equivalents) to occasional, context-built solutions when correspondence breaks down. Drawing on equivalence-centered accounts that treat an equivalent as a potential substitute selected by context, the study highlights the decisive role of linguistic and situational context in choosing appropriate correspondences. It also uses shift-based perspectives to show that correspondence is often achieved through systematic departures from formal similarity rather than literal matching. Through focused examples, the analysis demonstrates how translators handle polysemy, culture-specific items, and equivalent-lacking terms using transposition, modulation, explicitation, borrowing, and descriptive translation. The article concludes that correspondence competence is best understood as a decision skill: knowing when to trust regular equivalents and when to construct an occasional solution without distorting meaning.

Keywords: linguistic correspondence; non-equivalence; regular equivalents; occasional equivalents; translation shifts; context; polysemy; culture-specific items; explicitation; translation strategies

Introduction

In translation practice, some source-language (SL) units have predictable target-language (TL) matches, while others resist direct matching. The first case is often described as linguistic correspondence: the translator can rely on regular equivalents, because the TL community has established common substitutes for the SL unit. The second case can be described as absence of correspondence (non-correspondence or non-equivalence): the translator cannot simply “pick the dictionary equivalent,” either because no stable equivalent exists or because the context makes the regular equivalent unusable. A classic equivalence-oriented description explains that an equivalent is a potential substitute, and the translator’s choice depends heavily on context. This is especially important because the same SL form may require different TL choices across contexts (variable equivalence), and sometimes it must be replaced by a contextual substitute

(occasional equivalent) to preserve meaning.

Modern translation pedagogy reinforces this by treating meaning as contextualized and text-based rather than isolated at word level. Baker's coursebook approach highlights that equivalence operates at multiple levels and that translators often need to widen the unit of analysis to cohesion, coherence, and pragmatic inference. In parallel, shift-based frameworks remind us that correspondence is not always achieved through formal similarity. Catford distinguishes textual equivalence (what is observed as equivalent in actual translation) from formal correspondence (category-to-category similarity), and he defines "shifts" as departures from formal correspondence during translation. Together, these perspectives suggest a practical thesis: translators maintain meaning by moving along a spectrum from stable correspondences to context-driven constructions whenever correspondence is absent.

This article addresses three questions: What counts as correspondence in translation? Why does correspondence sometimes disappear? And what procedures help translators preserve meaning when regular equivalents fail?

Methods

This study uses qualitative analysis grounded in established translation frameworks. First, it outlines types of linguistic correspondence—permanent and variable equivalents, plus contextual (occasional) substitutes—based on equivalence-oriented descriptions that emphasize context selection. Second, it integrates a shift-based lens (formal correspondence vs textual equivalence) to explain why "non-correspondence" is often resolved through systematic structural changes rather than literal matching. Third, it applies a procedure-based toolkit (e.g., transposition and modulation) and explicitation theory to show how translators construct meaning-preserving solutions when lexical or cultural gaps appear. The analysis relies on short, representative examples typical of English–Uzbek translation training contexts; each example is followed by a brief explanation of what would be lost in a literal rendering and how the chosen solution restores meaning.

Results

Regular correspondence can be observed when an SL unit consistently maps to a stable TL unit. Equivalence-centered descriptions often call these permanent equivalents and note that they are typical for proper names, geographical names, and specialized terms whose meaning is relatively independent of local context. For example, in many translation situations, a place name or a technical term has a standardized TL form (transcription, established term), and using a different form would confuse readers rather than help them. The supportive point is that permanent equivalents function as anchors: they reduce translator uncertainty and increase terminological consistency, which is especially important in technical and institutional texts.

Variable correspondence appears when one SL unit has multiple plausible TL equivalents. In such cases, correspondence exists, but it is one-to-many: the translator must select among regular options depending on contextual meaning and nuance. Consider a classic polysemy scenario: the English noun "attitude" can map to different equivalents depending on whether it means "opinion," "stance," or "posture." When context triggers are clear, variable correspondence is manageable. After this example type, the key observation is that variable equivalence is not a weakness of translation; it is a normal reflection of how languages divide semantic space differently.

Occasional correspondence occurs when none of the regular equivalents fits the context, so the

translator constructs a contextual substitute. Equivalence-based descriptions stress that regular equivalents are not mechanical substitutes and may be replaced when context demands it. A common way to produce an occasional equivalent is restructuring (changing part of speech or syntax) while preserving meaning. For example, an English sentence may naturally use a noun (“He gave me an answer”), while Uzbek often prefers a verbal structure (“U menga javob berdi”). This is a correspondence at the level of meaning and function, even though formal categories differ; the translator achieves textual equivalence rather than strict formal correspondence.

Absence of correspondence becomes visible in equivalent-lacking items: culture-specific objects, institutions, and newly coined terms. In these cases, the translator cannot rely on a ready-made equivalent, so correspondence must be created through borrowing, calque, descriptive translation, or other semantic transformations. Procedure-based frameworks explicitly include these options: Vinay and Darbelnet list borrowing and calque among direct procedures and reserve transposition/modulation/equivalence/adaptation for cases where literal matching fails. The key result across examples is consistent: correspondence is not “found” in the dictionary; it is “built” by the translator using context, procedure, and audience design.

Discussion

What counts as linguistic correspondence

In practical terms, correspondence is not identical form; it is functional substitution—TL units that perform the same communicative job as SL units in context. Equivalence-oriented descriptions explicitly note that equivalence relationships are established between correlated units in two texts and that TL units substitute for SL units as functional equivalents. This is why correspondence can exist even when grammar changes: the translation can be equivalent in meaning while shifted in form. Catford’s distinction clarifies the point: a “textual equivalent” is what is observed as equivalent in actual translation, and “shifts” are departures from formal correspondence needed to achieve that.

A useful implication for translator training is that “correspondence” should be taught as a hierarchy. At the top are permanent equivalents that should usually be preserved for consistency (standard names/terms). Next are variable equivalents where context selects the best candidate. Finally are occasional equivalents where the translator must restructure or paraphrase because the regular options do not fit. This hierarchy matches how meaning-preserving decisions are made under time pressure: translators start with the most stable solutions and only move to deeper transformation when necessary.

Why correspondence disappears: main causes

One cause is polysemy with weak context. If a sentence is short and underspecified, a polysemous word may remain ambiguous, and any chosen equivalent risks being wrong. For example, “bank” can refer to a financial institution or a river bank; if the surrounding text lacks cues (money, account, river, water), MT systems and humans may both guess incorrectly. After such a case, the practical lesson is to widen context: check adjacent sentences, domain topic, and genre cues before selecting an equivalent. This aligns with Baker’s emphasis on moving beyond word-level equivalence toward discourse-level interpretation.

A second cause is cultural specificity. Culture-specific items are frequently discussed as translation problem zones because the target reader may not share the same cultural knowledge or because the TL lacks a direct lexical label. Studies discussing culture-specific items

emphasize that such elements may be unknown to TT readers and therefore require special procedures. Here correspondence disappears not because the translator lacks vocabulary, but because the TL community does not have an established unit that matches the SL concept.

A third cause is pragmatic mismatch. A literal equivalent may exist, but it produces a different pragmatic force (too rude, too formal, wrong connotation). For instance, translating an English polite request into a direct imperative in Uzbek changes interpersonal stance. Even if the proposition remains similar, the relationship meaning shifts, and readers perceive a different speaker attitude. This is a correspondence failure at the pragmatic level: the form matches, but the function changes.

How translators restore correspondence: key strategies with examples

Transposition (category change). Vinay and Darbelnet treat transposition as a change in grammatical category that preserves meaning, used when a literal rendering is grammatically correct but unidiomatic. Example: EN “Make a decision” → UZ “qaror qabul qilish” (noun → verb phrase). After this example, the key point is that transposition protects naturalness without sacrificing content; it maintains meaning by using the TL’s preferred packaging.

Modulation (viewpoint change). Modulation shifts perspective to avoid awkward literalness and preserve intended sense. Example: EN “It’s not impossible” → UZ “Bu mumkin.” After this example, the supportive explanation is that double negation may be acceptable but stylistically heavy; modulation preserves the communicative effect (possibility) and improves readability.

Borrowing and calque for absent correspondence. When the TL lacks a label, borrowing or calque can create one, especially for new terms or institutions. Example: “impeachment” often enters other languages as a borrowed form plus explanation on first mention. The supportive point is that borrowing preserves referential precision, but it may require a brief gloss to ensure comprehension if the audience is non-specialist.

Descriptive translation and guided explicitation. When an item is culturally dense or unfamiliar, a short description can restore coherence. Explicitation theory notes that translations often become more explicit, and it distinguishes system-driven explicitness from translator-driven choices. Example: EN “Harrods” → “Londondagi mashhur Harrods do‘koni.” After this example, the key principle is restraint: explicitation should be minimal and purpose-driven, otherwise it risks changing narrative voice and emphasis.

Occasional equivalents through restructuring. When regular equivalents do not fit, the translator creates a contextual substitute. Equivalence-based descriptions underline that regular equivalents may be rejected when context demands it. Example: EN “He has a friendly attitude towards all” can be rendered more naturally through a verb phrase (“u hammaga do‘stona munosabatda bo‘ladi / u hammaga do‘stona munosabatda”). The supportive point is that this is not “free translation”; it is textual equivalence achieved by shifting form. Catford’s shift concept provides vocabulary to describe this systematically.

A practical decision routine

To manage correspondence and non-correspondence, translators can apply a short routine: (1) check whether the item is likely to have a permanent equivalent (names/terms); (2) if not, identify context triggers to choose among variable equivalents; (3) if none fits, decide which procedure restores meaning with least distortion (transposition, modulation, descriptive translation, borrowing+gloss); (4) verify collocation, register, and coherence in the full

paragraph. This routine is consistent with Baker's emphasis on meaning above word level and with explicitation scholarship that warns against unnecessary additions.

Conclusion

Linguistic correspondence in translation is best understood as functional equivalence achieved through context-sensitive choice, not as formal similarity between words. Regular correspondences (permanent and variable equivalents) provide stable starting points, but translators frequently encounter absence of correspondence due to polysemy, cultural specificity, pragmatic mismatch, and reader presupposition gaps. Shift-based perspectives explain why meaning is often preserved through systematic departures from formal correspondence, while procedure-based frameworks describe the practical tools that make this possible (transposition, modulation, borrowing, calque, equivalence/adaptation). The central finding is pragmatic: high-quality translation depends on knowing when to rely on regular equivalents and when to construct an occasional solution that preserves meaning, tone, and coherence for the target reader.

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