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## IMPORTANCE OF NON-EQUIVALENT LEXICAL UNITS IN TEACHING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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**ABSTRACT:** The study of non-equivalent lexical units is crucial in foreign language teaching as it enriches learners' understanding of cultural nuances and linguistic diversity. Non-equivalent lexical units, or words and expressions in one language that lack direct equivalents in another, present unique challenges and opportunities in the language acquisition process. This article explores the significance of these lexical units, their impact on language learning, and effective strategies for teaching them.

**KEYWORDS:** Non-equivalent lexical units, Foreign language teaching, Cultural-specific terms, Semantic gaps, Idiomatic expressions, Polysemy, Homonymy, Linguistic diversity.

### INTRODUCTION

Language learning is more than acquiring the ability to communicate; it involves understanding the cultural, historical, and social contexts that shape a language. Non-equivalent lexical units—words and expressions in one language that have no direct counterparts in another—are linguistic phenomena that highlight these contexts. These units often represent unique cultural concepts, practices, or objects that do not have a direct translation in other languages. As such, they present both challenges and opportunities in the process of foreign language acquisition. Non-equivalent lexical units are significant in teaching a foreign language because they encapsulate the essence of a culture and provide insights into the worldview of its speakers. For example, the Japanese term "wabi-sabi" refers to a comprehensive aesthetic centered on the acceptance of transience and imperfection, a concept that has no single-word equivalent in English. Similarly, the Spanish word "sobremesa" describes the time spent lingering at the table after a meal, a cultural practice that is not directly named in many other languages.

Understanding and effectively teaching these non-equivalent units can enhance learners' linguistic and cultural competence. It enables learners to not only communicate more effectively but also to appreciate and engage with the cultural nuances that inform language use. However, teaching these units poses unique challenges, such as the need to convey complex and unfamiliar cultural concepts, contextual usage, and ensuring retention and correct application by learners. This article explores the nature and importance of non-equivalent lexical units in foreign language teaching. It delves into the various types of these units, their role in enriching linguistic competence, and the challenges they present. Additionally, it offers effective strategies for teaching non-equivalent lexical units, aiming to equip educators with the tools needed to enhance

learners' language acquisition and cultural understanding. By addressing these aspects, the article underscores the crucial role that non-equivalent lexical units play in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps in the realm of foreign language education.

Non-equivalent lexical units are words or phrases in one language that lack direct translations in another, highlighting the linguistic and cultural uniqueness inherent to each language. These units reflect specific cultural concepts, practices, and social norms, making them crucial for comprehensive language learning. Understanding the different types of non-equivalent lexical units is essential for effectively incorporating them into foreign language education. Here, we categorize these units into four primary types: cultural-specific terms, semantic gaps, idiomatic expressions, and polysemy and homonymy.

### **Cultural-Specific Terms**

Cultural-specific terms are words that describe concepts, practices, or objects unique to a particular culture. These terms often encapsulate cultural values, traditions, and social norms that are not present or as prominent in other cultures. For example:

- "Gezellig" (Dutch): This term refers to a cozy, convivial atmosphere or a sense of togetherness, which is central to Dutch culture. It cannot be directly translated into English with a single word.
  - "Saudade" (Portuguese): A deep emotional state of nostalgic longing for something or someone that is absent, often with the knowledge that the object of longing may never return.
- These terms are deeply rooted in their cultural contexts and often require extensive explanation to convey their full meaning in another language.

### **Semantic Gaps**

Semantic gaps occur when a word in one language does not have a single-word equivalent in another language. These gaps highlight differences in how languages categorize and conceptualize the world. Examples include:

- "Schadenfreude" (German): This term means taking pleasure in another person's misfortune. English speakers often use the German word directly, as there is no concise equivalent in English.
- "Jayus" (Indonesian): Refers to a joke so poorly told and unfunny that one cannot help but laugh.

Semantic gaps require learners to understand the underlying concept rather than search for a direct translation.

### **Idiomatic Expressions**

Idiomatic expressions are phrases whose meanings cannot be inferred from the individual words. These expressions are often culturally specific and can be challenging for language learners. Examples include:

- "Kick the bucket" (English): An idiom meaning to die, with no direct equivalent in many other languages.

- "Laisser tomber" (French): Literally translating to "let fall," but idiomatically meaning to give up or abandon.

Teaching idiomatic expressions requires providing context and cultural background to help learners grasp their figurative meanings.

#### Polysemy and Homonymy

Polysemy refers to a single word having multiple related meanings, while homonymy involves words that sound alike but have different meanings. These linguistic features can vary significantly between languages. Examples include:

- "Bark" (English): Can refer to the sound a dog makes or the outer covering of a tree.
- "Bank" (English): Can mean the financial institution or the side of a river.

Understanding polysemy and homonymy in the target language helps learners navigate its semantic complexity and avoid misunderstandings.

Non-equivalent lexical units are integral to understanding the target language's cultural and conceptual landscape. They provide insights into the native speakers' worldview and societal values, enhancing cultural competence alongside linguistic proficiency. Mastering these units can improve communication skills by enabling learners to express nuanced ideas and emotions accurately. Additionally, dealing with non-equivalent units fosters cognitive flexibility, as learners must navigate and reconcile different linguistic and conceptual frameworks.

### CONCLUSION

Non-equivalent lexical units represent the rich tapestry of cultural and linguistic diversity. Recognizing and effectively teaching these units is crucial for comprehensive language learning. By categorizing these units and understanding their significance, educators can develop strategies to help learners navigate the complexities of non-equivalent lexical units, ultimately enriching their linguistic and cultural competence.

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