

The Comparative Analysis of English Economic and Business Terms and Their Lithuanian Translation Equivalents

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Abstract. The article presents the comparative analysis of English business and economic terms contained in the Dictionary of Economics and the text-books on business and management and their Lithuanian translation equivalents. The study was mainly based on the theory of linguistic relativity stating that the same message is handled differently in different languages. All the terms analyzed were divided into separate groups according to their structural and semantic peculiarities as well as the way of denoting the same concept. Major difficulties encountered in translating English economic and business terms, their sources and ways of facilitating the comprehension of the most difficult terms are also identified. Special emphasis is made on the analysis of metaphoric English terms and their possible translation as a means of developing more flexible thinking habits based on associations and alternative approaches to reality.

Introduction

When Lithuania regained independence it was faced with the problem of transforming state-owned planned economy into the economy of private capital and free market. The revival of economic and business contacts with overseas partners demanded good command of new economic terms, particularly in English as their source language. New Business Management Faculties and Business Schools have been established for training specialists in this area. According to the plans of integrating into the European Community and other European organizations, English text-books used in the EU countries were introduced into the Lithuanian higher schools for teaching the courses in business and economy. An explanatory English Dictionary of Economics (Pass, 1988) has also been translated into Lithuanian (Pupkis, 1994). So far, it has remained the only dictionary of the kind.

However, the need arose to analyze the economic and business terms contained in the above dictionary and the text-books (MacKenzie, 1997; Alexander, 1997) because of some difficulties encountered by Lithuanian students and teachers working with them. The above consideration primarily refers to the texts, where many terms (individual words and collocations) are difficult to translate. The available dictionary can hardly help, because, in most cases, it does not contain them.

The **aim** of the present investigation was to carry out a comparative analysis of business and economic terms contained in the Dictionary of Economics and the text-books mentioned above and their Lithuanian translation equivalents to reveal the linguistic means used in Lithuanian to convey the concepts of the original English terms. This could facilitate the comprehension of the terms as well as revealing major differences between the two languages, which is of theoretical and practical importance.

Theoretical Background

The research was performed within the framework of the theory of linguistic relativity as well as using semantic and

stylistic analysis. The results were classified, with the proportion of each group of terms established.

The ideas of linguistic relativity developed in the USA by F.Boas (1966), E.Sapir (1964) and B.L.Whorf (1979) in the first half of the 20-th century (cited from later editions) were not popular with the linguists of the former USSR, because they did not conform to the ideology of materialism dominating in that country. Investigations based on its principles could not be officially recognized, primarily because of the ideas that each language segments the reality in its own way, providing people with a particular view of the world and even affecting their behaviour, traditions and culture. This theory was considered idealistic and relativistic as well as contradicting materialist views based on the priority of practical experience. This point of departure could hardly allow for any positive judgements (see critical review by Leontjev, 1972).

Language relativity is a multilevel and multidimensional phenomenon associated with the relation of language to thought, culture and reality as well as to encoding of reality by different languages.

Relativity has been defined differently, depending on the level considered. Thus, F.Boas (1966: 67) emphasized that, "the word expresses only part of an idea". This means that individual linguistic expressions are relative. He also gave many examples, showing how a given experience (reality) is differently rendered in various languages or how a set of experiences is differently grouped in different languages (Boas, 1966: 21-22). Here relativity may be interpreted as the absence of a single absolutely "correct" way of representing the reality by languages. This is the fact that cannot be denied, because different languages successfully perform their communicative function. E.Sapir (1964) and B.L.Whorf (1979) developed these ideas by adding the dimensions of thought, culture and view of the world as largely influenced by language. These views are mostly subject to criticism, though they were not very straightforward. Thus, E.Sapir (1964: 17) emphasized the interaction of language and thought, language and culture

by saying figuratively that “the instrument makes possible the product, the product refines the instrument”.

As far as variations across languages in expressing the same reality are concerned, they exist alongside parallelism of patterns (universals). The researchers also argued for the psychic unity of mankind and the possibility to express any idea in any language, though the ways of doing it may be quite different.

Therefore, the interpretation of language relativity as an obstacle to peoples' communication has no ground. It is just the term defining the individual features of any language in relation to its expression of reality. By the way, the alternative ways of handling the same message can be found in one and the same language as well (they may be observed both at lexical and grammatical levels).

The problem of the priority or interconnection of language, thought and culture will not be discussed here. The focus of the present study is on the ways of expressing the same concepts in English and Lithuanian as to determining distinct and similar patterns.

Major principles used in the present study are formulated as follows:

“A given experience is differently rendered in various languages” (Boas, 1966: 21), “Every language is a vast pattern – system, different from other” (Whorf, 1979: 252).

These ideas are still popular in the West, being considered in modern papers (Lucy, 1994). Other aspects of the above theory are dealt with in modern studies of the impact of language on social and cultural life (Jeffner, Poškienė, 2000), even though the authors rely on more recent works. As far as we know, the material of the dictionary and the texts in question has not been analyzed from the perspectives outlined (though some of the textbooks were considered from the point of view of the topics covered (Čižinauskienė et al., 2000)).

Discussion and Results

1. Dictionary Entries

It may seem that the easiest way for the compilers is word for word translation of the English terms, especially taking into account that they convey new economic concepts often not found in Lithuanian literature. The analysis shows that this pattern is represented on a large scale, but it is not (and can not be in view of the theory of linguistic relativity) universal. Here are some examples:

close company - *uždaroji bendrovė*; *mail order* – *užsakymas paštu*; *recommended retail price* – *siūlomoji mažmeninė kaina*; *organization theory* - *organizavimo teorija*; *depreciation* – *nuvertinimas*; *annual report and accounts* – *metinė ataskaita ir sąskaitos*, etc.

Terms of this group constitute about 70% of the total number (about 2,000) of entries.

The second group includes terms representing similar pattern, with the only exception that an English term is structurally incomplete, with one or more words missing, but their meaning included in the semantic structure of the term. Conventionally, these terms may be called “compressed”. In Lithuanian, however, their structure is

completely restored (on the basis of dictionary definitions provided for each term), e.g.

feasible region – *leistinuji sprendimų sritis*; *discount store* – *nukainuotų prekių parduotuvė*; *normal curve* – *normalioji pasiskirstymo kreivė*; *marginal analysis* – *ribinių rodiklių analizė*; *consumer durables* – *ilgai vartojamos prekės*, etc.

It is evident that the missing words are reconstructed in the Lithuanian terms for the sake of clarity, though the same abridged pattern can be observed in the Lithuanian language, e.g. *greitoji pagalba*; *kontrolinis darbas*; *pašaliniai žmonės*, etc., but mainly in the colloquial speech to denote commonly known concepts. This group constitutes about 4%.

The third group of terms (about 6%) consists of borrowings (anglicisms), e.g.

index – *indeksas*; *bankruptcy* – *bankrotas*; *statistics* – *statistika*; *speculator* – *spekuliantas*; *complex monopoly* – *kompleksinė monopolija*, etc.

Though the authors were making efforts to avoid foreign words, it is practically impossible, since borrowings are found in every language. Some terms, which were translated into Lithuanian in this dictionary, are met in their original form in practice, e.g.

holding company – *kontroliuojančioji bendrovė* (*holdingo kompanija*), *audit* – *revizija* (*auditas*), *contract* – *sutartis* (*kontraktas*), etc.

The fourth group of terms is represented by words and collocations in which the same concept is expressed quite differently in the English and Lithuanian languages, e.g.

*insider*** *trading* – *nelegalusis sandoris*; *merit goods* – *visuomeniniai produktai*; *capital-output ratio* – *kapitalo imumas*; *perfect market* – *laisvoji rinka*; *historic cost* – *pradinė kaina*; *non-accelerating inflation rate of unemployment* – *naturalusis nedarbo lygis*; *leverage bid* – *itakusis pasiūlymas*; *sunk costs* – *negrūžtamosios išlaidos*, etc.

Terms of this type make about 20% of the total number of dictionary entries.

What tendencies can be observed in the Lithuanian not word for word translation equivalents compared to the English originals?

- First, emotionally charged words having a semantic element of “evaluation” or metaphoric expressions are usually replaced by neutral components (compare: *perfect market* – *laisvoji rinka*, *quality goods* – *visuomeniniai produktai*, *sunk costs* – *negrūžtamosios išlaidos*, etc.)
- Second, the term expressing a relationship may be replaced by the name of a characteristic which it indirectly indicates: *capital - output ratio* – *kapitalo imumas*.
- Third, words that seem to the compilers not sufficiently informative are replaced by others, defining the concepts more precisely from their point of view (e.g. *non-accelerating rate* – *naturalusis lygis*; *insider trading* – *nelegalusis sandoris*).

* Underlined words are not included in the original English terms.

** Underlined words convey the same idea, which is expressed differently in English and Lithuanian.

A conclusion may be drawn that the Lithuanian equivalents reflect an alternative approach to nomination determined by viewing the same things from various perspectives. They are also determined by the rules governing the Lithuanian language as a system. Thus, neutral unemotional terms seem to be more rational as well as more appropriate for Lithuanians than emotional metaphorical structures, when terminology is concerned. But when such changes are made the implications of the original terms have been lost. In fact only usage may show whether the translation changes are justified.

2. Terms from the Texts

The total number of the text – book economic and business terms amounting to approximately 1,150 items have been analyzed. They were subdivided into the same 4 groups as dictionary entries in the following proportions: 72% - word for word translations (e.g. *service firm* – *aptarnavimo firma*; *pay-for-performance principle* – *mokėti už darbo įvykdymą*, etc.), 2% - reconstructed versions of English “compressed” terms (e.g. *in-tray*, *out-tray* – *gaunama ir išsiunčiama korespondencija*, etc.); 8% - borrowings (anglicisms) (e.g. *experts* – *ekspertai*, *compensation* – *kompensacija*, *option* – *opcijos*, etc.) and terms expressing the concepts of the original English units quite differently in Lithuanian

(e.g. *spot market* – *rinka, kur mokama grynais iš karto po prekių pardavimo*; *dead-end job* – *neperspektyvus darbas*; *blue chips* – *labai patikimos didelės kompanijos*; *put option* – *opcijos parduoti aktyvus iš anksto nustatyta kaina ir diena*).

The last group constitutes about 18%, including more highly expressive metaphorical terms than the same group of dictionary items. The underlying associations are often unclear to Lithuanian – speaking people, because metaphor varies from one language to another (Cobuild C., 1995). In many cases, the context may help to grasp the meaning, but not to find the equivalent Lithuanian term. As we could see from the above examples (e.g. *spot market*, *blue chips*, *put option*), the Lithuanian translation equivalents **are not terms** but rather wordy **definitions**.

Some English terms (or their components) may be found in the Dictionary of American Slang (Spears, 1991), which confirms the idea that they refer to professional jargon

(e.g. *spot market*; *blue chip (see above)*, *over-the-counter* – *parduodamas ne biržoje*; *moonlighting* – *dirbtai papildomai vakarais*; *junk bond* – *nepatikima obligacija, teikianti didelę palūkanas*, etc.).

Others cannot be found in a dictionary, but are explained in the text

(e.g. *brand-switchers* – *pirkėjai, kurie perka vis iš naujų firmų*; *to switch an account to a bank* – *atidaryti banko sąskaitą*; *flash* – *brand product* – *produktas su žymiu firminiu vardu*, etc.).

We can see that some of their components (e.g. *switch*, *flash*) are used metaphorically, making the whole term expressive. A comparison of the primary meaning with that in an economic term will facilitate the establishing of the associations enabling metaphorical extension (e.g. *to switch* – *prijungti*, *perjungti elektros prietaisą* is extended to the areas of banking and shopping, because the actions

denoted in both cases have much in common). The analysis of examples with more obscure meaning will be very helpful in grasping their ideas by Lithuanian-speaking people. For instance, a definition of *junk bond* in a Dictionary of Slang (Spears, 1991) is supplied with a comment: parallel to *junk food* (*greitas maistas*). The following examples of the latter term usage are given:

- 1) Stay away from junk food. It is **bad** for you;
- 2) Junk food tastes **good** no matter how greasy it is.

Thus, one can see that a combination of good and bad things is a common basis allowing the occurrence of these parallel terms. Both, junk food and junk bonds are attractive to people (the former by good taste, the latter by high interest rates), as well as being dangerous (the first to peoples' health, the second to their wealth).

It should also be emphasized that the Lithuanian versions of metaphorical English terms are usually neutral unemotional phrases (*money laundering* – *pinigų plovimas* may be given as an exception), reflecting the Lithuanian language habits in the professional areas.

Conclusions

The Lithuanian equivalents of the English economic and business terms (about 3,150 units) were divided into the following groups (with insignificant variations of proportions in the dictionary and the texts):

1. word for word translations;
2. borrowings (anglicisms);
3. reconstructed equivalents of English “compressed” terms;
4. terms based on completely different pattern for denoting the same concepts that are expressed by the English versions.

It is quite evident that terms of the first three groups follow the patterns of the English originals. Group 4, though not most representative (about 20%)*, is very important to understanding major differences between the two languages from the perspective of nomination.

Thus, the Lithuanian language chooses different characteristics of objects as well as avoiding associative links as the basis of nomination. On the contrary, a lot of the English terms of this group are metaphoric, based on associations not common to Lithuanians. This presents major comprehension and translation difficulties, because word for word translation of such terms often makes no sense for the speakers of Lithuanian. Moreover, a considerable amount of these terms may be referred to professional jargon (slang) or colloquialisms not characteristic of Lithuanian scientific (or popular science) texts. Therefore, their Lithuanian equivalents are neutral expressions appealing to consciousness rather than emotions.

This finding agrees well with a comment of I.R. Galperin (1980: 18), the compiler of *A Supplement to the New*

*In fact this percentage is even higher for an area (free market economy) actually built up on new (borrowed) concepts in Lithuania.

English–Russian Dictionary, that the largest number of colloquialisms and jargonisms enriching the emotive layer of the English language are found among political and socio - **economic** terms.

A part of English terms, being translated into Lithuanian, **lose their status** because the Lithuanian equivalents are in fact **extended definitions**, but **not terms** commonly perceived as individual words or collocations. This raises the problem of creating the appropriate terminology in Lithuanian.

A demonstration of language – relativity – based analysis to students may help them understand the alternative ways of nomination existing in other languages, thereby giving “native speakers insight”, while the study of metaphors will contribute to developing more flexible thinking habits based on associations. This in turn will facilitate looking for practical solutions to difficulties.

Further studies of business and economic terms are needed. They may be carried out along the following lines: the Lithuanian terms from the Dictionary of Economics and their matches in actual use (e.g. in special literature and shop talk) may be compared as to determining any possible variations. We think that, to become usable, dictionary units shall and will undergo transformations, thereby acquiring more characteristics of “real” terms rather than being entirely dictionary definitions. As far as textual material is concerned, the efforts of professionals as well as linguists are needed to create the missing Lithuanian terms (to be used instead of definitions), which should also be validated by usage.

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Anglų kalbos verslo ir ekonomikos terminų ir jų lietuviškų vertimo ekvivalentų analizė

Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje pateikta lyginamoji anglų kalbos verslo ir ekonominių terminų, surinktų iš “The Dictionary of Economics” ir verslo vadovelių, bei jų lietuviškų ekvivalentiškų vertinių analizė. Šis tyrimas pagrįstas kalbų reliatyvumo teorija, kuri teigia, kad viena ir ta pati sąvoka skirtingose kalbose yra išreiškiama kitokiu būdu. Visi tyrime naudoti terminai buvo suskirstyti į atskiras grupes, priklausomai nuo jų semantinių ir struktūrinių savybių, taip pat nuo sąvokos reiškimo būdo. Šiame straipsnyje pateikti pagrindiniai anglų kalbos verslo ekonominių terminų sunkumai, siūlomi lengvesni jų vertimo būdai. Ypatingai akcentuojama metaforinių anglų kalbos terminų analizė ir jų galimi vertimai kaip lankstaus mąstymo, pagrįsto asociacijomis ir skirtingais požiūriais į gyvenimo realijas, vystymosi priemonės.

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