

The discursive construction *дело в том, что* and its parallels in other languages: a contrastive corpus study

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Дело в том, что

At first glance, the construction appears to present no difficulty for translation into other languages. It seems to possess complete compositionality, and even its literal translation is confirmed in the parallel corpora. Cf. (1-3).

•(1) **Дело в том, что** редактор заказал поэту для очередной книжки журнала большую антирелигиозную поэму. [М. А. Булгаков. Мастер и Маргарита]

•**The thing was that** the editor had – commissioned from the poet a long anti-religious poem for the next issue of his journal.

- (2) *Ну, все равно, вы простите меня, – продолжал он, – но **дело в том, что** это ужасно, ужасно, ужасно!* [Л. Н. Толстой. Крейцеровна соната (1890)]
- *Nun, gleichviel, nehmen Sie es mir nicht übel, – fuhr er fort, – aber **die Sache ist** eben **die, daß** das alles so entsetzlich, entsetzlich, entsetzlich ist!*
- (3) ***Дело в том, что...** в последнее время, когда бы я ни пытался... что бы я ни сказал, все ее выводит из себя ... как будто она вообще не хочет слушать. **Saken är den...** när jag väl pratar blir hon otålig, som om hon egentligen inte ville höra. Det är som om hon är förbannad på mig och jag vet inte varför.*

Goals and data

Hypothesis

- The Russian *дело в том, что* has a large number of various parallels in other languages, and the choice of each variant depends on specific contextual conditions.
- Despite its apparent simplicity, *дело в том, что* has a complex semantic structure. The configuration of semantic elements comprising the content plane of this construction is unique.
- The expression *дело в том, что* is language-specific with respect to at least one of its parameters.

Data: Sketch Engine, subcorpus of parallel texts OPUS2 Russian; the RNC, subcorpora of parallel texts

Theory and methods

- Analysis of the corpus data allows us to identify the degree of variety in the means of translating a given expression into other languages. When one or another expression lacks a generally accepted standard context-independent translation equivalent, we can speak of an absence of systematic equivalents, i.e., a kind of non-equivalence. Whether such non-equivalence is connected with the category of language-specificity remains an open question. On language-specificity see [Wierzbicka 1992, 1996; Zaliznyak, Levontina, Shmelev 2005, 2012; Zaliznyak 2015, Shmelev 2002, 2014, 2015].

- The method is based on considerations presented in [Buntman et al. 2014] – determining how many translation equivalents exist for potentially language-specific lexical units and then evaluating their dispersion. The expedience of calculating dispersion as a means of determining the statistical value of the scatter is in need of further substantiation. Other statistical instruments may prove to be more adequate.

- ***Дело в том, что*** was submitted to Sketch Engine, OPUS2 Russian for the construction and its translation equivalents in English, German and Swedish. The search was done for each specific pair of languages: Russian and English, Russian and German, Russian and Swedish. Findings were processed manually to avoid information noise.
- Sketch Engine does not indicate from which or into which language a given context was translated.
- To ascertain the means by which *дело в том, что* is translated into other languages and the possibilities appearing in translation from other languages into Russian we used the parallel corpora of the Russian National Corpus (RNC) – English-Russian, Russian-English, German-Russian and Russian-German. Only the corpus query system Sketch Engine contains Swedish-Russian and Russian-Swedish corpora.

- The analysis shows that the construction *дело в том, что* has more than 80 parallels in English, over 30 in German, and about 30 in Swedish.
- In all three languages the most common means of translating the construction is to omit it.
- Also frequent are the English equivalents *the fact/thing/point/truth is (that); (it's/this/that is) because/because of; you see.*
- the German expressions *nämlich; die Sache ist die (dass); aber; es handelt sich darum, dass; es geht darum, dass; es ist (doch) so, dass*
- the Swedish constructions *saken är den att; men; problemet/faktum är att; det viktiga är (att)/det är viktigt att.*

***Дело в том, что*: English-Russian and German-Russian results, the RNC**

Shmelev [2015]: for determining the language-specificity (parameter of non-equivalence), the parallel corpora in which the language of the expression under analysis is the target rather than the source language have the best diagnostic potential.

- **The English-Russian corpus:** even greater scatter among the English equivalents of *дело в том, что*: 54 different translations, of which 6 equivalents occur more than 10 times each, 15 are found in the range from 2 to 10 times, and 33 occur only once.

- Of the most frequent equivalents, only two – zero equivalent and *the fact is (that)* – coincide. Our assumption that translators from Russian to English most often follow the form of the original, using constructions such as *fact is (that); the thing is (that)* and *the point is (that)*, is fully corroborated. Translators from English to Russian, on the other hand, more often employ the language-specific expression whenever it is not dictated by form. Thus the most frequent group in Table 6 includes lexical units such as *for, just, because, you see*. In addition, syntactic means such as cleft sentences are also used. Cf. (4).

- (4) *They didn't believe me at first either, he said. **It's just that** we get a lot of calls like this. But I believe you, Doctor, so why don't you continue with the story?*
[Michael Connelly. City Of Bones (2002)]
- *Они тоже мне сначала не верили, – промолвил Гийо. – **Дело в том, что** мы получаем много подобных звонков. Но я верю вам, доктор, и, прошу, продолжайте.*

The German-Russian corpus

- The formal correlate *die Sache ist die, (dass)* dominates in translations from Russian to German, while in the German-Russian corpus the word *nämlich* often correlates with *дело в том, что* although their formal structures have nothing in common. This confirms what was stated earlier.

- (5) *Wir landeten, und – die ganze Insel bestand aus einem großen Käse. Wir hätten dies vielleicht gar nichtentdeckt, wenn uns nicht ein sonderbarer Umstand auf die Spur geholfen hätte. Es war **nämlich** auf unserm Schiffe ein Matrose, der eine natürliche Antipathie gegen den Käse hatte. [Gottfried August Bürger. Die Abenteuer des Freiherrn von Münchhausen (1786)]*
- *Как выяснилось, весь остров представлял собой большой сыр. Возможно, мы даже не заметили бы этого, если бы не одно обстоятельство, открывшее нам истину. **Дело в том, что** у нас на корабле находился матрос, отроду испытывавший отвращение к сыру.*

Discussion

- The data presented in the investigation show that the construction **ДЕЛО В ТОМ, ЧТО** has many different English, German and Swedish translation equivalents.
- Most of these equivalents are not synonymous among themselves, which means that the choice of one or another of them depends not on the subjective preferences of the translator, but on contextual factors.
- The construction **ДЕЛО В ТОМ, ЧТО** has a complex semantic configuration that is unique relative to English, German and Swedish.

***Дело в том, что:* semantic structure**

Includes at least the following meanings:

- 1) substantiation of something stated previously;
- 2) indication of the reason something has happened;
- 3) emphasis on the special significance of the following clause.

Equivalents from the various groups are selected depending on which meaning is being highlighted in the utterance.

Examples: Sketch Engine and the RNC.

- English *you see* in: **Дело в том, что** это ваша мать — *You see*, it's your mother.
- German *nämlich* in: **Дело в том, что** она была значительно старше меня — Sie war *nämlich* bedeutend älter als ich
- Swedish *det var så att* in: **Det var så att** jag råkade kalla henne subba — **Дело в том, что** я случайно назвал ее кошелкой.

Russian **ДЕЛО В ТОМ, ЧТО** not only substantiates previous statements but also indicates the reason in each statement and emphasizes the significance of the following clause.

Causal conjunctions and constructions such as English (*it is because, the reason is that*), German *denn*, and Swedish *för*.

•То есть, дело в том, что я — женщина!—So *it is because*
I'm a woman

•Может быть, вы поможете мне... дело в том, что мне очень нужно с ним встретиться. Du kanske kan hjälpa mig, för det är viktigt att jag får tag i honom.

English *it is because*, Swedish *för* indicate the reason for something that has been stated in the previous utterance.

Focusing particles and constructions such as English the ***point is, the thing is***, German ***eben, die Sache ist die, (dass)*** or Swedish ***saken är den att, poängen är den att***.

•English the ***point is that*** in: ***Дело в том, что*** ЭТОТ противник никогда не отступает—***The point is that*** this enemy never retreats;

•German ***was die Hauptsache ist*** in Но дело в том, что Анну я вам не отдам—Aber ***was die Hauptsache ist***: ich lasse auf Anna nichts kommen;

•Swedish ***poängen är att*** in: Нет, но ***дело в том, что*** искушение всегда остается—Nej, men ***poängen är att*** frestelsen alltid är där;

focus on the importance of what is said.

- Russian ***дело в том, что*** does not only focus the following clause but conveys other meanings as well—substantiation and indication of the reason.

Conclusion

- The uniqueness of the semantic and conceptual configuration determining the meaning of the construction testifies to its language-specificity relative to the languages examined here.
- The findings of this and similar studies can be useful not only in developing the theory of language specificity but also in lexicography, translation and pedagogy. What we consider to be our primary accomplishment is that we have succeeded in outlining a new approach to working with parallel corpora in contrastive corpus investigations.

Спасибо!