

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL LANGUAGE IN TRANSLATION

I. G. Chernenok¹, E. M. Gordeeva¹

¹ Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University
236016, Russia, Kaliningrad, 14 Nevskogo Str.
Submitted on September 12, 2020
doi: 10.5922/2225-5346-2021-1-4

The article presents a comparative analysis of the translation of basic epistemological terms and attempts to analyse cognitive factors underlying the construction of meaning in the translation process. Apart from linguistic expertise, the translation of philosophical texts requires a profound understanding of the subject matter. Ambiguity of philosophical terms, which appears as a result of the development of a particular concept within a specific philosophical school of thought, may lead to inconsistencies in the translation decision-making. The paper aims to apply a cognitive approach to the translation of epistemological terms into the German and English language: Erkenntnis/cognition vs knowledge. In this study, context is interpreted as a verbalization of a specific conceptual frame facilitating the identification of the appropriate meaning of the term on a deeper, conceptual level. The article contains numerous examples from the works of Immanuel Kant translated into English as well as the data from multilingual translation corpora which are used to describe translation-relevant aspects of conceptual integration in philosophical discourse.

Keywords: comparative analysis, translation, epistemology, knowledge, cognition

The translation of philosophical texts is a highly demanding task, as they express highly abstract content creatively formed by a particular thinker. So, the deciphering of the ideas hidden behind a specific term poses serious problems arising from the symbolic nature of this terminology.

To maintain the integrity of the target language text, one has to balance between the meaning and the form in any kind of translation. However, in philosophical discourse there seem to be no clear terminological equivalents, since the intention of the initial expression is not always evident from the context. Different readings of the German concept *Erkenntnis* may, for instance, refer to historic or etymological factors considerably complicating the translation process. We suggest that abstract elements of the lexicon having various meaning structures may require specific research methods to elicit the proper word choice for their verbalization. So, this paper focuses on comparative analysis of German epistemological term *Erkenntnis* and its most common translation equivalents in the English language *cognition* and *knowledge* representing the key issues of philosophical discourse.

Since modern times, the concepts of cognition and knowledge have been at the center of philosophical discourse. In Europe, the discussion about



cognition and knowledge gained great importance for intellectual and cultural progress. It was essentially influenced by the contributions of English (David Hume) and German thinkers (Immanuel Kant), who elaborated on subject and object of cognition, also its result (knowledge), its sources, ways and limits as the key questions in German and English epistemological research.

The basic term *epistemology* goes back to the Greek *epistēmē* (knowledge). However, there is a fundamental difference concerning the frame of reference of this key concept in German and English epistemological discourse. In British philosophy (Bertrand Russell, Gilbert Ryle), epistemology is the field dealing with knowledge, while the German branch (Gottlob Frege, Ludwig Wittgenstein) focuses on a broader concept of cognition (*Erkenntnis*) also including such topics as intentionality and reference. In the English philosophical discourse they are often considered in the philosophy of mind or the philosophy of language (Gabriel, 2013, p. 25).

The expressions *cognition* and *knowledge* can be both translation equivalents to the German term *Erkenntnis* being one of the prime examples of ambiguous epistemological terms. The German word *Erkenntnis* goes back to the Middle High-German *erkantnisse* with the meaning "recognition" (process), insight (result). The noun *erkantnisse* was derived from the Middle High German *erkennen*, originally from the ancient High-German *irchennan* ("to grasp spiritually", "to remember"). The verb *irchennan* is a derivation of the Old High German *chennan*, which means "to be able to know", "understand", and actually "make understand" in its original meaning.

The modern dictionary of philosophy defines *Erkenntnis* (*cognition*) as a kind of knowledge, namely reasoned knowledge; knowledge that can provide reasons for its justification. *Erkenntnis* (*knowledge*) becomes knowledge when the knowledge is valid independently of the recognizing subject (Handwörterbuch Philosophie.de).

Now let us take a closer look at translation fragments from the introduction to Kant's major work *Critique of Pure Reason* into English.

Original passage in German:

Daß alle unsere *Erkenntniß* mit der Erfahrung anfangt, daran ist gar kein Zweifel; denn wodurch sollte das *Erkenntnißvermögen* sonst zur Ausübung erweckt werden, geschähe es nicht durch Gegenstände, die unsere Sinne rühren und theils von selbst Vorstellungen bewirken, theils unsere Verstandestätigkeit in Bewegung bringen, diese zu vergleichen, sie zu verknüpfen oder zu trennen, und so den rohen Stoff sinnlicher Eindrücke zu einer *Erkenntniß der Gegenstände* zu verarbeiten, die Erfahrung heißt? Der Zeit nach geht also *keine Erkenntniß* in uns vor der Erfahrung vorher, und mit dieser fängt alle an (Kant, 1990, S. 380).

First translation by Francis Haywood, published in 1838:

That all our *Cognition* begins with Experience, there is not any doubt; for how otherwise should the *faculty of cognitive* be awakened into exercise, if this did not occur through objects which affect our senses, and partly of themselves produce representations, and partly bring our Understanding-capacity into action, to compare these, to connect, or to separate them, and in



this way to work up the rude matter of sensible impressions into a *cognition of objects*, which is termed experience? In respect of time, therefore, *no cognition* can precede in us experience, and with this, all commences (Kant, 1838, p. 3).

F. Haywood interpreted Kant's term Erkenntniß as cognition, i. e. as a process, though in the expression „Erkenntniß der Gegenstände“, and in the passage «Der Zeit nach geht also *keine Erkenntniß* in uns vor der Erfahrung vorher...» the context implies rather the result of the process.

Translation by Norman Kemp Smith, published in 1929:

There can be no doubt that all our *knowledge* begins with experience. For how should our *faculty of knowledge* be awakened into action did not objects affecting our senses partly of themselves produce representations, partly arouse the activity of our understanding to compare these representations, and, by combining or separating them, work up the raw material of the sensible impressions into that *knowledge of objects* which is entitled experience? In the order of time, therefore, we have *no knowledge* antecedent to experience, and with experience all our knowledge begins (Kant, 1929, p. 41).

N. Kemp Smith interpreted “Erkenntniß” as knowledge, i. e. result of the process, whereby “Erkenntnißvermögen” is a process resulting in knowledge, which is rendered in the following translation much better.

Translation by Paul D. Guyer and Allen W. Wood, published in 1998:

There is no doubt whatever that all our *cognition* begins with experience; for how else should the *cognitive faculty* be awakened into exercise if not through objects that stimulate our senses and in part themselves produce representations, in part bring the activity of our understanding into motion to compare these, to connect or separate them, and thus to work up the raw material of sensible impressions into a *cognition of objects* that is called experience? As far as time is concerned, then, *no cognition* in us precedes experience, and with experience every cognition begins (Kant, 1998, p. 136).

More examples of this kind can be found in translation corpora, where the choice of the translation equivalent comes down to interaction of linguistic and extra-linguistic factors. The philosophical translation suggests, therefore, the ability to conceive the logic of philosophical reasoning, which requires a certain degree of experience in the philosophical field:

Jede *Erkenntnis* enthält eine dreifache "Synthesis" (s. d.): die Synthesis der Apprehension (s. d.), der Reproduktion (s. d.) und der Rekognition (s. d.).

He suggests that this synthesis of *recognition* follows the act of apprehension and synthesis of association (also called the synthesis of reproduction).

Eine subjektive Perzeption ist "Empfindung" (s. d.), eine objektive Perzeption "*Erkenntnis*".

A perception which relates solely to the subject as the modification of its state is sensation (*sensatio*), an objective perception is *knowledge* (*cognitio*).

The above examples let suggest that it is up to the translator to elicit the implied level of knowledge from the context, which is not particularly helpful in terms of the proper word choice. The main difficulty in translation of



such expressions as *Erkenntnis* is therefore the inference of their intended meaning. Since their frame of reference is constructed in context, different extensions of the expression caused by the context lead to various interpretations.

In cognitive terms such expressions as *Erkenntnis* are viewed as so-called *cluster concepts* (internally complex, cluster concept). According to E. Connolly, these concepts have a complex internal structure, because they comprise several dimensions of one and the same concept (Connolly, 1983, p. 10). Since the rules of use of such concepts are relatively open, the context constructs the frame of reference anew each time and implies different dimensions of the concept. In this regard it would be not wrong to look at the theoretical approaches that go beyond word semantics as a hierarchy of semantic features and consider the construction of meaning in discourse as a dynamic process (Halliday, 1999; Pörings, Schmitz, 1999; Fraas, 1998).

For this study the research approach of M. Halliday is of interest (Halliday, 1999, p. 164). He combines prototype theory with discourse analysis and assumes that the construction of reality in terms of events or virtual entities is also based on prototypical processes in discourse. In his view, the categorization of mental experience goes back to a prototypical *symbolic processing, conscious processing*. M. Halliday describes mental representation of this process as *figure of sensing and saying*. The experiencing subject, which consciously perceives a fragment of reality, is the prototypical center.

German researchers R. Pörings and U. Schmitz consider this prototypical symbolic process as an experience frame (Erfahrungsschema) (Pörings, Schmitz, 1999, p. 193). The verbalization of this model is done through verbs that refer to mental processes: know / *wissen*, think / *denken*, recognize / *erkennen*, mean / *meinen*... and nouns *knowledge / Wissen* and *cognition / Erkenntnis*. It also should be noted that the experiencing subject as a center of experience is not necessarily mentioned explicitly.

If we apply this frame approach to the translation-relevant analysis of the epistemological terms *Erkenntnis, cognition vs knowledge* and consider the context in which they appear as a verbalization of an experience frame structure, the choice of an appropriate translation equivalent takes place on a more deeper level of comprehension.

Based on the definitions from the DWDS and the comparative analysis of the text examples from the on-line translation corpora, the experience frame for the concept *Erkenntnis / Cognition vs. knowledge* comprises three components or slots. These slots are *Experiens* (the experiencing subject), *Patens* (object, objective reality or fact), and *type and manner of experiencing reality* like one's own conscious participation in the cognitive process or an existing versus new experience.

Our analysis shows that the reinterpretation of the term *Erkenntnis* in translation is mainly associated with filling in the third slot in the experience frame, which relates to extra-linguistic factors. Since the conceptualization of these factors differs in the German and English mental spaces, the choice of verbalization in the particular language is driven by those conceptual dis-



parities: *Erkenntnis as insight – insight, awareness; Erkenntnis as perception – perception, cognizance; Erkenntnis as recognition – recognition, realization; Erkenntnis as understanding – awareness, understanding.*

Let us look at another passage from the “Critique of Pure Reason” from this point of view:

Ich werde also nicht sagen: daß in der Erscheinung zwei Zustände aufeinander folgen; sondern nur: daß eine Apprehension auf die andere folgt, welches bloß etwas Subjektives ist, und kein Objekt bestimmt, mithin gar nicht vor *Erkenntnis* irgendeines Gegenstandes (selbst nicht in der Erscheinung) gelten kann (Kant, 1968, p. 131).

I would therefore not say that in appearance two states follow one another, but rather only that one apprehension follows the other, which is something merely subjective, and determines no object, and thus cannot count as *the cognition* of any object (not even in the appearance) (Kant, 1998, p. 307).

Now it becomes clear that the context implies a conscious experiencing of reality as a main semantic feature of the symbolic process. The terminological equivalent “cognition” appears therefore to be an appropriate word choice as it corresponds to the intention of the term *Erkenntnis* in the given context much better than *perception, cognizance or recognition*.

However, the translation product in the philosophical discourse cannot be a full equivalent of the original. The proposed approach can be viewed as an explanatory model for the translation of highly abstract texts. We suggest that this could help assess the semantic volume of the verbalization in question, so as to express it in a more meaningful way and minimize semantic losses during translation.

References

- Connoly, W. E., 1983. “Essentially Contested Concepts.” *The Terms of Political Discourse*, 2nd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Fraas, C., 1998. Interpretations- und Gebrauchsmuster abstrakter Nomina – ein korpusbasierter Beschreibungsansatz, in: *Deutsche Sprache* 26/3, S. 256–272.
- Gabriel, M., 2013. *Die Erkenntnis der Welt – Eine Einführung in die Erkenntnistheorie*. München: Verlag Karl Alber.
- Graesser, A., Zwaan R., 1995. An Inference Generation and the Construction of Situation Models, in: Weaver Ch., Mannes S., Fletcher Ch. (Hg.), *Discourse comprehension: essays in honor of Walter Kintsch*, New York, S. 117–140.
- Halliday, M., 1999. *Constructing experience through meaning: a language-based approach to cognition*. Padsow: Cornwall.
- Kant, I, 1968. *Werke: Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. 1. Aufl. 1781. *Prolegomena. Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten. Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaften*. Berlin, Boston.
- Kant, I, 1998. *The critique of pure reason*. Translated by P.D. Guyer and A.W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kant, I., 1838. *Critique of pure reason*. Translated by F. Haywood. London: William Pickering,
- Kant, I., 1929. *Critique of pure reason*. Translated by N. Kemp Smith. London.
- Kant, I., 1990. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Hamburg: Meiner Verlag.



Pörings, R., Schmitz, U., 1999. *Sprache und Sprachwissenschaft. Eine kognitiv orientierte Einführung*. Tübingen.

Dictionaries

Carpenter, A., 2014. *Kant Glossary*. Available at: <http://dictionary.babylon-software.com/arts/philosophy/kant-glossary/> [accessed 15 May 2020].

Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache. DWDS. Available at: <https://www.dwds.de/> [accessed 20 May 2020].

Eisler, R., 1930. *Kant-Lexikon. Nachschlagwerk zu Immanuel Kant*. Available at: <http://www.textlog.de/32824.html> [accessed 15 May 2020].

Etymology Dictionary. Available at: <http://www.etymonline.com/> [accessed 20 May 2020].

Glosbe. Available at: <https://glosbe.com/> [accessed 15 May 2020].

Handwörterbuch Philosophie. Available at: <http://www.philosophie-woerterbuch.de> [accessed 15 May 2020].

Linguee. Available at: <https://www.linguee.com/> [accessed 15 May 2020].

Philosophy Dictionary. Available at: <http://www.philosophy-dictionary.org/Kant-Dictionary> [accessed 15 May 2020].

The authors

Dr Irina G. Chernenok, Associate Professor, Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University, Russia.

E-mail: ichernenok@kantiana.ru

Dr Elena M. Gordeeva, Associate Professor, Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University, Russia.

E-mail: egordeeva@kantiana.ru

To cite this article:

Chernenok, I.G., Gordeeva, E.M. 2021, Comparative analysis of the epistemological language in translation, *Slovo.ru: baltic accent*, Vol. 12, no. 1, p. 63–70. doi: 10.5922/2225-5346-2021-1-4.

СРАВНИТЕЛЬНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ ЭПИСТЕМОЛОГИЧЕСКИХ ТЕРМИНОВ В АСПЕКТЕ ПЕРЕВОДА

Е. М. Гордеева¹, И. Г. Черненко¹

¹ Балтийский федеральный университет им. И. Канта
236016, Россия, Калининград, ул. Александра Невского, 14

Поступила в редакцию 12.09.2020 г.

doi: 10.5922/2225-5346-2021-1-4

Статья посвящена сопоставительному анализу основных эпистемологических терминов в немецком и английском языках, а также рассмотрению когнитивных факторов, влияющих на построение смысла в процессе перевода. Как и в любой профессиональной сфере, помимо глубокого владения иностранным языком перевод философских текстов требует знания и понимания узкоспециализированной предметной об-



ласти. Наибольшую сложность при переводе философского дискурса представляет собой неоднозначность трактовки эпистемологических терминов, являющаяся следствием развития того или иного концепта в рамках конкретной философской традиции.

Цель статьи – показать применение когнитивного подхода к переводо-релевантному анализу эпистемологических терминов в немецком и английском языках: *Erkenntnis / cognition vs. knowledge*. Контекст, в котором используются эти термины, рассматривается в качестве вербализации специфической фреймовой структуры. Таким образом, учет когнитивных факторов позволяет проанализировать выбор переводческого соответствия на более глубоком уровне понимания. В качестве материала исследования используются работы Иммануила Канта, переведенные на английский язык, а также данные электронных переводческих корпусов.

Ключевые слова: сопоставительный анализ, перевод, эпистемология, знание, познание

Список литературы

Connolly W.E. *Essentially Contested Concepts* // *The Terms of Political Discourse*. 2nd ed. Princeton, 1983.

Fraas C. *Interpretations- und Gebrauchsmuster abstrakter Nomina – ein korpusbasierter Beschreibungsansatz* // *Deutsche Sprache*, 1998. Vol. 26, №3. S. 256–272.

Gabriel M. *Die Erkenntnis der Welt – Eine Einführung in die Erkenntnistheorie*. München, 2013.

Graesser A., Zwaan R. *An Inference Generation and the Construction of Situation Models* // Weaver Ch., Mannes S., Fletcher Ch. (ed.). *Discourse comprehension: essays in honor of Walter Kintsch*. N. Y., 1995. P. 117–140.

Halliday M. *Constructing experience through meaning: a language-based approach to cognition*. Padsow, 1999.

Kant I. *Critique of pure reason* / transl. by F. Haywood. L., 1838.

Kant I. *Critique of pure reason* / transl. by N. Kemp Smith. L., 1929.

Kant I. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Hamburg, 1990.

Kant I. *The critique of pure reason* / transl. by P.D. Guyer, A.W. Wood. Cambridge, 1998.

Kant I. *Werke: Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. 1. Aufl. 1781. Prolegomena. *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*. *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaften*. Berlin ; Boston, 1968.

Pörings R., Schmitz U. *Sprache und Sprachwissenschaft. Eine kognitiv orientierte Einführung*. Tübingen, 1999.

Словари

Carpenter A., 2014. *Kant Glossary*. URL: <http://dictionary.babylon-software.com/arts/philosophy/kant-glossary/> (дата обращения: 15.05.2020).

Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache. DWDS. URL: <https://www.dwds.de/> (дата обращения: 20.05.2020).

Eisler R., 1930. *Kant-Lexikon*. *Nachschlagwerk zu Immanuel Kant*. URL: <http://www.textlog.de/32824.html> (дата обращения: 20.05.2020).

Etymology Dictionary. URL: <http://www.etymonline.com/> (дата обращения: 20.05.2020).

Glosbe. URL: <https://glosbe.com/> (дата обращения: 20.05.2020).

Handwörterbuch Philosophie. URL: <http://www.philosophie-woerterbuch.de> (дата обращения: 20.05.2020).



Linguee. URL: <https://www.linguee.com/> (дата обращения: 20.05.2020).

Philosophy Dictionary. URL: <http://www.philosophy-dictionary.org/Kant-Dictionary> (дата обращения: 20.05.2020).

Об авторах

Ирина Геннадьевна Черненко, кандидат филологических наук, доцент,
Балтийский федеральный университет им. И. Канта, Россия.

E-mail: ichernenok@kantiana.ru

Елена Матвеевна Гордеева, кандидат филологических наук, доцент,
Балтийский федеральный университет им. И. Канта, Россия.

E-mail: EGORDEEVA@kantiana.ru

Для цитирования:

Черненко И.Г., Гордеева Е.М. Сравнительный анализ эпистемологического языка в переводе // Слово.ру: балтийский акцент. 2021. Т. 12, №1. С. 63–70. doi: 10.5922/2225-5346-2021-1-4.