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# The Theoretical and Practical Foundations of Equivalence in The Korean Language: On the Example of The Verbs '가다' (To Go) And '오다' (To Come)

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes the concept of equivalence in linguistics, with particular focus on the theoretical and practical aspects as illustrated by the Korean auxiliary verbs “가다” (to go) and “오다” (to come), which express direction of movement and semantic change. The research is grounded in the study of verb valency and various models of equivalence (formal, dynamic, semantic, pragmatic), exploring the internal structural units of the language system and their syntactic and semantic functions. The article contributes to a deeper understanding of the linguistic features of the Korean language and offers insights into resolving issues of equivalence that arise in the translation process.

**Keywords:** Equivalence, linguistics, language theory, verb valency, Korean language, auxiliary verbs, verbs “가다”, “오다”, lexical-semantic equivalence, grammatical-syntactic equivalence, pragmatic equivalence, intralingual equivalence.

**Introduction:** In linguistics, the concept of equivalence is one of the central issues of language analysis. Initially interpreted merely as formal correspondence, over time it has come to include semantic, pragmatic, and functional dimensions. This article covers the theoretical foundations of equivalence and offers an analysis of structural models that express direction of movement and semantic shifts in the Korean language.

In particular, it examines the semantic functions within the language of Korean auxiliary verbs like “가다” (to go) and “오다” (to come) and their relation to the notion of equivalence. The issue of equivalence holds significant importance in linguistics, especially in language theory, contrastive linguistics, and language education. This concept involves identifying and analyzing linguistic units that correspond in meaning, function, and context within a single language or between two or more languages (Jakobson, 1984).

## METHODS

The methodological framework of this research incorporates several approaches. Firstly, using the contrastive analysis approach, the study identified semantic and syntactic correspondences between Korean and Uzbek. This approach made it possible to analyze how linguistic units are similarly or differently realized across the two languages. In addition, through a descriptive approach, the study clarified the place of Korean auxiliary verbs in the linguistic system and examined their functional and semantic capacities. Based on the theory of verb valency, drawing on the ideas of Tesnière, Mel'čuk (1988), Kim (2001), the research deeply investigated how verbs combine with actants within syntactic structures.

The theoretical foundation of the article was built upon translation studies theories, particularly the models of equivalence proposed by Nida, Newmark, and House. Through these frameworks, the research analyzed literal and functional correspondences in translation, dynamic equivalence, and pragmatic matches.

As research material, the study used examples from written and spoken Korean texts, specifically focusing on sentences containing the verbs “가다” and “오다.” Additionally, a comparative analysis was carried out based on modern Korean grammar references, translated texts, and their equivalents in Uzbek.

## Analysis of Types of Equivalence and Verb Valency

Earlier approaches mainly focused on lexical and syntactic correspondence; however, the need to consider semantic and pragmatic factors later emerged. Grammatical-semantic equivalence emphasizes not only grammatical correspondence but also the accurate conveyance of the primary meaning. This requires an analysis of semantic roles, verb valency, and other content-related factors.

Modern research aims to define various levels of equivalence, ranging from “formal” to “dynamic” (Newmark, 1988).

Formal equivalence seeks to preserve the form, word order, and grammatical structure of the source text as

closely as possible. This approach is typically applied to scientific, technical texts and poetic translations, but in other contexts, it may hinder the full conveyance of meaning.

For example, the Korean sentence “나는 학교에 갑니다” is translated as “I go to school.” From the perspective of formal equivalence, this could also be rendered in fuller grammatical and stylistic form as “I am heading to school” or “I set out towards school.”

Dynamic (or functional) equivalence focuses on ensuring that the target audience perceives the message with the same effect as intended in the source text. According to linguists Eugene A. Nida and Charles Russell Taber (1969), the aim is for the audience to understand and interpret the text as if it were originally written in the target language. This approach considers cultural and contextual differences.

For instance, in Korean, the expression “진지 드셨어요?” literally means “Have you eaten?” in an honorific form. In dynamic translation, this may be adapted as “Have you had breakfast?” or “Have you had lunch?” depending on the situation, to better reflect the intended meaning.

## Semantic equivalence

Semantic equivalence focuses on preserving both the denotative (primary) and connotative (additional, implied) meanings of words as fully as possible. This approach emphasizes the importance of subtle nuances of meaning. In Korean, for instance, there are verbs like “맑다” (clear, clean) and “개다” (to clear up, become clear after being cloudy), both of which describe weather conditions. However, “맑다” refers to the quality of the weather itself, while “개다” denotes the process or result of the weather clearing after it was previously cloudy. When translating them, it is important to consider these distinctions in line with the principle of semantic equivalence: “The sky is clear” (맑다) vs. “The weather has cleared up” (개다).

## Pragmatic equivalence

Pragmatic equivalence is a type of equivalence aimed at conveying the communicative purpose of the text and its effect on the listener (or reader). Here, pragmatic factors such as the aim of the text, context, and audience play a significant role (House, 1977). For example, the Korean expression “다녀오세요” is usually said to someone who is about to go somewhere and literally means “Go and come back.” Pragmatically, however, it is better rendered as “Have a safe trip,” “Take care on your way,” or “Go safely and return well,”

which better reflects its intended emotional effect on the listener.

### **Adequacy and absolute equivalence**

Due to differences in the structure of language systems, cultural connotations, and stylistic means of expression, it is recognized that achieving absolute equivalence in translation is practically impossible. As a result, the concept of “adequacy in translation” has been developed. According to this concept, a translation should meet the communicative purpose and the expectations of the target audience. Adequacy is a broader notion than equivalence; it includes various levels of equivalence and helps to find the optimal solution for conveying meaning within and between languages.

### **Verb valency: The core category of equivalence**

Verb valency refers to the syntactic and semantic capacity of a verb to combine with a certain number and type of actants (participants). Actants are syntactic units usually expressed by nouns, pronouns, or nominal groups, and they can be obligatory or optional depending on their role. Valency thus determines the verb’s syntactic “environment” (Tesnière, 1959). In linguistics, valency is an essential category that reflects a verb’s ability to connect with other units, and it can be divided into two main types: quantitative valency and qualitative valency.

#### **Quantitative valency**

Quantitative valency shows how many syntactic actants (subject, object, destination, etc.) the verb requires:

- A monovalent verb requires only a subject. Example: 울다 (to cry) → 아이가 운다. – The child is crying.
- A divalent verb requires a subject and an object. Example: 만나다 (to meet) → 친구를 만났다. – I met my friend.
- A trivalent verb requires a subject, an object, and an indirect object or destination. Example: 보내다 (to send) → 그녀가 친구에게 편지를 보냈다. – She sent a letter to her friend.

#### **Qualitative valency**

Qualitative valency determines the semantic roles and grammatical forms required by the actants. Example: 보다 (to see) requires the object in the accusative case (-을/를): 그는 영화를 보고 있다. – He is watching a movie. Here, 영화를 (the movie) functions as the object and semantically performs the role of “the thing

being watched.”

Valency can be further divided into obligatory and optional types:

- Obligatory valency refers to actants that are necessary for the verb to form a complete grammatical and semantic meaning.
- Optional valency refers to actants that may appear depending on the context but whose omission does not break the grammatical completeness of the sentence.

Example of obligatory valency: 그녀가 전화를 받았다.

– She answered the phone. 전화 (the phone) is obligatory because removing it leads to ambiguity: 그녀가 받았다. – She received (received what?).

Example of optional valency: 그녀가 집에서 전화를

받았다. – She answered the phone at home. Here, 집에서 (at home) is optional; it adds contextual detail but is not essential to the grammatical structure.

### **The importance of verb valency**

Studying verb valency is essential for understanding sentence structure, developing automatic syntactic parsers, improving natural language processing algorithms, and enhancing translation systems. In particular, accurate knowledge about which actants are required by verbs is necessary when creating valency dictionaries and grammar guides. In Korean, valency structures require in-depth analysis because auxiliary verbs often expand the semantic and functional components of verbs. Equivalence relies on these valency structures to show the connections between language units (Kim, 2001).

### **Valency structure and intralingual equivalence**

A verb’s valency structure is identified by the number and syntactic positions of its arguments. The intralingual equivalence model, on the other hand, studies the functional correspondence of lexical and grammatical units within a single language. This model highlights potential linguistic and semantic problems that can arise even within the same language system (Mel’čuk, 1988).

### **Main and auxiliary verbs in Korean**

In Korean, main verbs carry the primary semantic load and have their own syntactic and semantic valency. Auxiliary verbs add extra meanings, enhance the semantics, or clarify the meaning in ambiguous contexts. This layered semantic structure reveals the linguistic functions of auxiliary verbs (Lee, 2010).

### **The verbs “가다” (to go) and “오다” (to come)**

In Korean, these verbs function both as independent

verbs and as auxiliary verbs. As auxiliaries, they express various additional semantic functions such as direction of action, completion of an action, or change of state. Finding their intralingual equivalents can be challenging because their meaning depends heavily on context and the specific grammatical system of the language (Nida, 1964).

These verbs are highly productive in Korean and their auxiliary use illustrates the language's rich expressive capacity. They can specify starting and ending points of an action, its duration, result, or direction of effect. Let's consider other Korean grammatical forms or lexical units that reflect these meanings.

### “가다” as an auxiliary verb

The auxiliary verb “가다” is often used to express completion of an action, its progression, or the fact that the action happens away from the speaker:

- a) Completion or finalization of an action (Complete an action / Finish): In Korean, it can show that the action has finished and moved away from the present focus or become irreversible.

Original usage: 책을 읽어 갔다. – Finished reading the book. (The reading process is completed and the action is seen as having moved into the past.)

Equivalent form 1: -아/어 버리다 (to finish, to throw away, often implying regret or relief) 책을 읽어 버렸다. – Finished reading the book (completely, sometimes with a nuance of regret or finality). Here, “버리다” more strongly conveys the sense of irreversibility and completion.

Equivalent form 2: -고 말다 (to ultimately end up doing something, often unexpectedly or against intention)

책을 읽고 말았다. – (He/She) ended up finishing reading the book.

This construction also expresses the completion of an action, but it often carries a nuance of inevitability, regret, or an unexpected outcome. It highlights that the action was completed despite external or internal resistance, or in an undesirable way.

Equivalent form 3: -다 끝나다 (to completely finish)

책 읽는 것을 다 끝냈다. – Finished reading the book entirely. Here, the particle “다” (meaning “all” or “entirely”) and the verb “끝나다” (to end) together emphasize the total completion of the reading action, leaving nothing unfinished.

### b) Gradual progression / Continuation

In this context, the auxiliary verb “가다” indicates that a certain state is gradually changing or that a process is continuing over time.

Original usage: 날씨가 추워져 갔다. – The weather gradually became colder. This construction captures not only the progression of coldness but also implies that the state is moving further away over time.

### Equivalent forms:

- -아/어 지다 (change of state): 날씨가 점점 추워지고 있다. – The weather is gradually getting colder. This form clearly expresses “gradual change.” However, the nuance of “distancing” present in “가다” is not included here.

- -게 되다 (to come to be, to turn out): 날씨가 추워지게 되었다. – The weather came to be cold / The weather turned colder. This emphasizes reaching a certain result or state as an outcome.

- 점점 ~다 (gradually ~): 날씨가 점점 추워진다. – The weather is gradually becoming cold. Here, the adverb “점점” (gradually) itself indicates gradual change.

### c) Direction of action and distant result

In this usage, “가다” shows that after the action is completed, its effect or result becomes distant or moves away from the speaker.

Original usage: 저쪽으로 가 버려요. – Go over there and get rid of it / Let it go away to that side. This shows directionality and the idea of sending something away or letting it go.

### Equivalent forms:

- 떠나다 (to leave, depart): 저쪽으로 떠나세요. – Go and leave for that direction. Highlights the act of leaving and the direction explicitly.

- 향하다 (to head toward): 저쪽을 향하세요. – Head toward that direction. Emphasizes movement towards a specific target.

- 떠나가다 (to go away, to depart and keep going): 그는 멀리 떠나갔다. – He went far away. This compound verb underlines both the act of leaving and the result of distancing.

The auxiliary verb “오다” (to come): extended meanings and equivalents

The Korean verb “오다” is not limited to physical

motion. As an auxiliary verb, it can describe entering a new state, starting to experience a process, emotional changes, and more. Its equivalents in Uzbek (and English) vary depending on the context, but always aim to preserve naturalness.

#### I. Beginning of an action / Approaching

The most basic meaning of “오다” is movement toward the speaker or the start of a state.

Example: 잠이 오고 있다. – Sleep is coming on / I am starting to feel sleepy.

Here, “오다” is used with an abstract noun (sleep) to describe how the feeling gradually comes over the subject.

Equivalent forms: -기 시작하다 (to begin to): 잠이 오기 시작했다. – Sleep started to come. Emphasizes the exact starting point of the state.

- -아/어 오다 (to gradually come closer, to progress toward a result): 점점 잠이 늘어오고 있다. – Sleepiness is gradually increasing / I am getting sleepier over time. Adds nuance of continuity and gradual accumulation.
- 생기다 (to appear, to arise): 갑자기 잠이 생겼다. – Suddenly, sleepiness appeared. Focuses on the sudden, unexpected emergence of the state rather than physical movement.

#### II. Other semantic aspects of “오다” and their equivalents

1. Coming as a result or consequence: 소식이 오다. – News has arrived.
2. Arrival of time or season: 봄이 오다. – Spring has come.
3. Emergence of thoughts or emotions: 생각이 오다. – A thought comes. 화가 오다. – Anger comes (I become angry).
4. Occurrence of an event: 비가 오다. – It is raining.

In each case, the core idea of “approaching,” “starting,” or “emerging” remains central.

Equivalent forms: -아/어 지다 (change of state): 상황이 점점 나빠지고 있다. – The situation is gradually worsening. Focuses on transformation rather than movement toward the speaker.

- 점점 ~다 (gradually ~): 상황이 점점 나빠진다. – The situation is getting worse. Emphasizes progressive worsening.

- 계속 ~다 (continuously ~): 상황이 계속 나빠지고 있다. – The situation keeps getting worse. Stresses uninterrupted continuity.

#### III. Result of a previous action

Sometimes, “오다” shows that an action was performed and its result affects the current state.

Example: 결과를 보고 왔다. – (I) went to see the result and have now returned.

Analysis: This implies the speaker went somewhere, observed the result, and returned, so now they possess the information.

#### Equivalent forms:

- -아/어 다니다 (to go and come repeatedly): 결과를 보고 다녔다. – (I) went and checked the result several times / regularly. Emphasizes repetition and habituality.
- 완료하다 (to complete): 결과를 보는 것을 완료했다. – I completed seeing the result. Clearly shows the action was fully carried out.
- -아/어 두다 (to do and keep the result for future use): 결과를 확인해 두었다. – I checked the result and kept it noted for later. Emphasizes doing something in advance and preserving the outcome.

Conclusions about the rich expression system in Korean These examples demonstrate that the meanings conveyed by Korean auxiliary verbs “가다” (to go) and “오다” (to come) are not limited to these verbs alone. Instead, the language uses multiple grammatical constructions, auxiliary verbs, and lexical items to express similar or overlapping semantic functions.

This highlights several key points:

- Semantic complexity: Simple verbs like “go” or “come” in Korean can carry diverse, layered meanings that require detailed analysis.
- Understanding linguistic universals: Studying how different languages express concepts like movement, change of state, or result helps identify universal and language-specific features.
- Importance in translation: Translators should avoid overly literal translation and instead choose target language expressions that reflect equivalent meaning and nuance, making the text sound natural. In Korean-



to-Uzbek translation, understanding such internal equivalence ensures fluency and clarity.

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## CONCLUSION

In linguistics, equivalence is studied drawing on achievements from cognitive science and language theory. Verb valency is not only a linguistic term; it is a key feature defining a verb's syntactic behavior and interaction with other sentence elements. An in-depth study of verb valency helps analyze language structure and improves tasks in natural language processing.

The multi-layered semantic functions of Korean auxiliary verbs like “가다” and “오다” create challenges in finding their exact equivalents. In cases where absolute equivalence is hard to achieve, functional and context-based approaches become essential. Viewing equivalence as a dynamic and multi-dimensional phenomenon helps reduce semantic distortion and supports effective, natural translation.

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