

Applying an Empirical Approach to the Search for Equivalents in Translating Administrative Terms Used in Civil Status Records

Akpaca Servais Martial

Département d'Anglais, Faculté des Lettres, Langues, Arts et Communication (FLLAC),
Université d'Abomey-Calavi, Benin
akpacasm@yahoo.fr

How to cite:

Martial, A.S.(2024). Applying an Empirical Approach to the Search for Equivalents in Translating Administrative Terms Used in Civil Status Records. *International Journal of Linguistics and Translation Studies* 5(1).114-130. <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlts.v5i1.391>

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 22/09/2023

Accepted: 13/12/2023

KEYWORDS

Equivalence, term, translation, civil status acts, administrative divisions

Abstract

Equivalence is a central concept in translation theory, but it is also a controversial one. According to Catford 1965; Nida and Taber 1969; Toury 1980; Pym 1992, 1995, 2004; and Koller 1995, translation is defined in terms of equivalence relations. While some authors develop a theoretical notion of equivalence, others have an empirical approach. Indeed, Toury (1980) identified an empirical use of the term: equivalence could be a descriptive term, denoting concrete objects in two languages and subject to direct observation. This paper adopts Toury's conception of equivalence. It aims to discuss how equivalence is achieved in translation. To this end, administrative terms found in civil status records are used as examples to show how the search for equivalence is carried out in a real-life situation. Even though administrative divisions' names may appear normal on birth certificates, death certificates, marriage certificates, etc., searching for their equivalents in translation may pose problems. One of the difficulties is that administrative divisions differ from country to country. Examples cited in this paper consist of administrative terms used in Benin, Nigeria, Ghana, and Senegal. This research takes an empirical approach. Indeed, the search for equivalents in the target language (i.e. English or French) is based on real-life experience and observable data. The findings reveal that source language and target language items rarely have 'the same meaning' in the linguistic sense; but can function in the same situation. The contextual meaning of a term is more important in this discussion than the linguistic sense. Equivalence is not only a theoretical notion but also an empirical concept.

1. INTRODUCTION

Equivalence in translation consists of conveying the meaning of a text, phrase, or word from one language to another while maintaining its intended effect on the target audience. Given that languages have different structures, vocabularies, and cultural contexts, it is impossible to achieve a word-for-word translation that expresses the full nuance and impact of the original text.

Equivalence can be achieved through various translation strategies, depending on the context and purpose of the translation. It is important to note that achieving complete equivalence in translation is often challenging, if not impossible, due to the inherent differences between languages and social contexts. Translators must make choices and compromises based on their understanding of the source text, the target audience, and the purpose of the translation. The goal is to produce a translation that effectively communicates the essence and intent of the original text while being culturally appropriate and linguistically accurate in the target language. In Toury's words, translators navigate between adequacy and acceptability.

It has proven useful and enlightening to regard the basic choice which can be made between requirements of the two different sources as constituting an **initial norm**. Thus, a translator may subject him-/herself either to the original text, with the norms it has realized, or to the norms active in the target culture, or in that section of it which would host the end product. If the first stance is adopted, the translation will tend to subscribe to the norms of the source text, and through them also to the norms of the source language and culture. This tendency, which has often been characterized as the pursuit of adequate translation may well entail certain incompatibilities with target norms and practices, especially those lying beyond the mere linguistic ones. If, on the other hand, the second stance is adopted, norm systems of the target culture are triggered and set into motion. Shifts from the source text would be an almost inevitable price. Thus, whereas adherence to source norms determines a translation's **adequacy** as compared to the source text, subscription to norms originating in the target culture determines its **acceptability**.

Toury (1978, pp. 198-211)

In talking about norms, Toury notes that the target language norms are the epitome of translation. Therefore, translators should make sure that their translations adhere to the target language culture, and traditions. Another important aspect that this paper points out is that translation is not just a linguistic exercise. Indeed, translators constantly need to look for referents in the target language (TL). In linguistics and semiotics, a referent is the object or entity in the world that a word or phrase refers to. It is the actual thing or concept that is being talked about or represented by a particular linguistic expression. At this stage, a problem arises because the referent of an SL word or item may not exist in the TL. For example, the concept of *commune* exists in the territorial administration in Benin but does not exist in Nigeria. Under these conditions, how will a translator find an equivalent for it in English to enable a Nigerian reader to understand the concept? For one thing, the linguistic equivalence (i.e. the English

word commune) would not help solve the problem. Only the referential meaning in the Nigerian context can help solve the problem.

From another perspective, though the word *commune* is used in Benin and Senegal, the concept it refers to is not the same in both countries. About the signifier, Saussure (2005, p. 76) makes the following point:

Il ne doit pas donner l'idée que le signifiant dépend du libre choix du sujet parlant (on verra plus bas qu'il n'est pas au pouvoir de l'individu de rien changer à un signe une fois établi dans un groupe linguistique) ; nous voulons dire qu'il est immotivé, c'est-à-dire arbitraire par rapport au signifié, avec lequel il n'a aucune attache naturelle dans la réalité. (p.76)

The point made by Saussure is that there is no natural link between a word or signifier and the signified or the thing referred to. Indeed, the link between the word *commune* and the reality in Benin and Senegal is not natural; it is rather arbitrary. The signified ‘*commune*’ could as well be called something else.

It is useful to stress that in this research, the target language culture is the reservoir from which all equivalents are selected. By so doing, the paper is in agreement with Toury’s theory of acceptability. By stating that “Translations are facts of target cultures”, Toury (1995:29) adopts a functionalist approach to translation, which has repercussions on the search for equivalents. In the *Nature and Role of Norms in Translation* (1995), Toury says that “As strictly translational norms can only be applied at the receiving end, establishing them is not merely justified by a target-oriented approach but should be seen as its very epitome.” (Ibid)

Against this background, this paper adheres to Toury’s empirical and functional concept of equivalence as well as Koller’s notion of referential or denotative equivalence. The data include administrative publications as well as laws. The method used in this research is empirical. The rest of the paper presents the methodology, the results, and the discussion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of equivalence in translation has been discussed by many authors who have taken different views. Some key authors are mentioned below.

In the *Nature and Role of Norms in Translation* (1995), Toury presents a theory of equivalence, insisting particularly on the concept of norms. A translator can espouse the source language norms or the target language norms. If a translation adopts the SL norms, it is called *adequate* translation even though it reflects incompatibilities with target language norms and practices, especially those that are not purely linguistic. However, if a translator adopts the

target language norms, the translation becomes acceptable in the TL culture. Toury calls *matricial* norms source language materials substituted for the corresponding source language norms.

Eugene Nida in his book titled *Towards a Science of Translating* (1964), introduces the concept of equivalence in translation. There are two types of equivalence: formal correspondence and dynamic equivalence. Formal correspondence reproduces the form and the structure of the source text, whereas dynamic equivalence makes sure that the target language reader has the same understanding of the message as the source language reader and reacts to it in the same way the SL reader reacts.

Peter Newmark in *Approaches to Translation* (1981) discusses the concept of equivalence. He suggests three types of equivalence, namely semantic equivalence, textual equivalence, and pragmatic equivalence. Textual equivalence refers to an equivalent effect on the reader, while pragmatic equivalence means an equivalent function in the target language. Newmark notes that it is not easy to achieve complete equivalence because of inherent differences between languages and cultures. He advises translators to take into account the specific context, the purpose and the target audience in achieving equivalence.

Mona Baker in the book *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation* (1992), discusses the concept of equivalence in translation. The author recommends that cultural, linguistic, and textual factors should be taken into account in achieving equivalence. The book consists of six sections. In the second section, equivalence is discussed at the word, phrase, and sentence levels. Equally important in the book is the allusion to the challenges posed by idiomatic expressions, collocations, and cultural-specific references.

The *foreignisation* and *domestication* techniques suggested by Baker are useful in this discussion because as pointed out earlier, administrative structures and divisions are not the same in all the countries covered by this research. In translating, for example, the Senegalese concept of *région*, which does not exist in Benin and Nigeria, should the translator use the *foreignisation* technique or the *domestication* strategy? If the *foreignisation* procedure is retained by the translator, s/he may use the term *region*, which may mislead a Nigerian reader, for example. The latter would not know that a *region* in Senegal comprises three administrative departments. In case the translator retains the *domestication* strategy, s/he would simply choose LGA as an equivalent of *région*. However, this would hide the peculiar administrative realities in Senegal from the reader.

Lawrence Venuti, in *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (1995) presents the author's views on the concept of equivalence. Venuti challenges the concept of domestication and calls for the visibility of the translator's interventions. Domestication, according to this author, erases the foreign cultural elements contained in a text. This technique is not right because it fails to show that the material is a translation. It ultimately makes the translator invisible. Venuti recommends a more foreignising approach because it promotes intercultural communication and challenges the dominance of the target language and culture.

Indeed, this position contradicts Toury's theory which is rather oriented towards the target language realities. Toury says that translations are facts of target cultures.

In Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies by Baker and Saldanha (2011), Dorothy Kenny makes the following points about the concept of equivalence in translation:

2.1. Typologies of equivalence

At various levels, and loosely following Koller (1979: 187–91, 1989: 100–4), equivalence is commonly established on the basis that the ST and TT words supposedly refer to the same thing in the real world, i.e. on the basis of their referential or denotative equivalence; the ST and TT words triggering the same or similar associations in the minds of native speakers of the two languages, i.e. their connotative equivalence; the ST and TT words being used in the same or similar contexts in their respective languages, i.e. what Koller (1989: 102) calls text-normative equivalence; the ST and TT words having the same effect on their respective readers, i.e. pragmatic (Koller 1989: 102) or dynamic equivalence (Nida 1964); the ST and TT words having similar orthographic or phonological features, or formal equivalence. Baker (1992) extends the concept of equivalence to cover similarity in ST and TT information flow and in the cohesive roles ST and TT devices play in their respective texts. She calls these two factors combined textual equivalence. Newman (1994: 4695) stresses that not all the variables in translation are relevant in every situation and that translators must decide which considerations should be given priority at any one time, thus establishing a kind of functional equivalence (see also Neubert 1994). (Baker & Saldanha, 2011, pp. 96-97)

Koller's concept of *referential or denotative equivalence* is important in this discussion of administrative terms because the point made in this paper is that two concepts used in two different countries would be said to be equivalent if and only if they refer to the same reality. The concept of *text-normative equivalence* is equally important since it stresses that the ST and TT words must be used in the same or similar contexts in their respective languages. This remark introduces the word *context*, which is critically important in this case. In other words, only the (administrative and territorial) contexts can guide a translator to conclude that two

words or concepts are equivalent. The dictionary definition of a word does not apply. The context of usage of a particular word and the referential meaning of two words need to be taken into account in determining whether or not they are equivalents.

Indeed, Catford prioritises referential meaning. Dorothy Kenny notes that:

Catford posits an extralinguistic domain of objects, persons, emotions, memories, history, etc. (**situation** in Firthian/Hallidayan terms), features of which may or must achieve expression in a given language. Translational equivalence occurs, he suggests, when STs and TTs are relatable to at least some of the same features of this extralinguistic reality, that is, when STs and TTs have approximately the same referents (1965: 50, 1994: 4739). Catford thus prioritizes referential meaning here.

(Ibid, p. 97)

However, Bassnett and Frawley are against the idea of extralinguistic referents. “Bassnett (1980/1991: 6), amongst others, has found this focus too narrow, and Frawley (1984) is skeptical of any approach to translation that appeals to the identity of extralinguistic referents: ‘The worlds and possible worlds differ, and the question of referent is not even the question to pose’” (ibid.: 164). (Ibid)

According to Dorothy Kenny, another author who has contributed to the debate on translation equivalence is Pym, who thinks that equivalence is a negotiable entity. “Pym (1992a) avoids this difficulty by moving away from the strictly linguistic to viewing translation as a transaction and equivalence as equality of exchange value. Equivalence becomes a negotiable entity, with translators negotiating. (Ibid)

On this same issue, Toury says, according to Kenny, that equivalence is both an empirical and a theoretical concept. “Toury (1980a: 39) identified two main uses of the term: first, equivalence could be a *descriptive* term, denoting concrete objects – actual relationships between actual utterances in two languages (and literatures), recognized as TTs and STs – which are subject to direct observation’. In this case, equivalence is an empirical category. Furthermore, Toury notes that equivalence is also a *theoretical* term, denoting an abstract, ideal relationship, or category of relationships between TTs and STs, translations and their sources’ (ibid.). (Ibid, p. 98)

A different opinion is given by Gentzler, who points out that equivalence and non-equivalence limit other possibilities of translation practice. He (Gentzler (1993: 4) ‘contends that standards of translation analysis that rely on equivalence or non-equivalence and other

associated judgemental criteria ‘imply notions of substantialism that limit other possibilities of translation practice, marginalize unorthodox translation, and impinge upon real intercultural exchange’.

Kenny stresses that ‘Newman (1994: 4694), on the other hand, describes translation equivalence as ‘a commonsense term for describing the ideal relationship that a reader would expect to exist between an original and its translation’.

Kenny underlines that the debate on equivalence in translation is not limited to the above-mentioned authors because others such as Snell-Hornby (1988), Neubert (1994), and Stecconi (1994) have given their opinions on the issue. ‘Snell-Hornby (1988: 21) suggests that the notion of equivalence in the English-speaking world has become so vague as to be useless, while Pym (1992a, 1995a), Neubert (1994) and Koller (1995) would like to see a more restrictive view of equivalence reinstated’. ‘Pym (2004: 56) quotes Stecconi (1994/1999: 171) in supporting this point: ‘In most western cultures today, equivalence is that unique intertextual relation that only translations, among all conceivable text types, are expected to show’.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Objective

The objective of the paper is to show that the search for equivalents in translation is a complex exercise that should always be based on empirical data when it comes to real-life situations. Furthermore, equivalence is not a standard concept that can suit all situations. In the particular field of administrative terms, equivalence should be determined on a case-by-case basis. If it is established that a *commune* in Benin is the equivalent of an LGA or ward in Nigeria, this does not mean that a *commune* in Senegal is also the equivalent of an LGA or ward in Nigeria. The point is that what they call a *commune* in Senegal is not exactly what is called a *commune* in Benin. The terms may be the same, but the concepts are different.

3.2. Problem Statement

Translating civil status records such as birth certificates, death certificates, marriage certificates, etc., may not be as easy as one may imagine. Indeed, most of these certificates contain some information relating to the country, region, municipality, and locality where a person resides. The problem is that administrative divisions, structures, and regulations are not the same in all countries. In Ghana, for example, Local Government Authorities consist of District Assemblies, Municipal Assemblies, Metropolitan Assemblies, and Regions, whereas in Benin, administrative constituencies comprise the *Départements*, *Communes*, *Arrondissements*, and *Quartiers* or *Villages*. In Nigeria, Local Governments consist of the Local Government Areas (LGA) and Wards. In Senegal, territorial administration includes the

Villages, Arrondissements, and Départements. The point is the following: How does a translator know that an *arrondissement* in Benin is the equivalent of a district, municipality, or metropolis in Ghana? Is a *département* in Senegal the same as a Local Government Area in Nigeria? Translators are helpless because dictionaries do not provide information about these things.

3.3.Data

The data include some information on land administration in Benin, Senegal, Ghana, and Nigeria. The information reveals differences in administrative subdivisions and denominations. Indeed, a report by Langley, P. et al. (2006, p. 19) on the decentralised government structures in Benin presents the following table:

Tableau 1 : “Structuration de l’Etat décentralisé”

Structure	Nombre	Statut	Autorité	Mode de désignation
<i>Département</i>	12	<i>Circonscription administrative</i>	<i>Préfet</i>	<i>Nomination par le conseil des ministres</i>
<i>Commune (ancienne sous-préfecture)</i>	77	<i>Collectivité territoriale décentralisée</i>	<i>Maire</i>	<i>Election en 2003 parmi les conseillers communaux par ses pairs</i>
<i>Arrondissement (ancienne commune)</i>	546	<i>Unité administrative locale</i>	<i>Chef d’arrondissement</i>	<i>Election en 2003 parmi les conseillers communaux par ses pairs</i>
<i>Village/quartier de ville</i>	3628	<i>Unité administrative locale</i>	<i>Chef de village ou quartier</i>	<i>Election en 1990 parmi les délégués de village/ quartier par ses pairs</i>

The table above presents the decentralised government structures in Benin, which comprise *départements*, *communes* (former *sous-préfectures*) *arrondissements* (former *communes*) and *villages* or *quartiers de ville*. The names are mentioned in French at this stage until proper equivalents are found at a later stage. There are 12 *départements* in Benin, and every *département* is an administrative constituency or unit headed by an appointed government representative called *préfet*. The name *commune* (former *sous-préfecture*) refers to every decentralised territorial community (*Collectivité territoriale décentralisée*) headed by an elected mayor. A *village* or *quartier de ville* is a local administrative unit headed by an elected chief.

Langley (Ibid, p. 18) provides some additional information on these administrative units in the following statement:

La commune est divisée en unités administratives locales, sans personnalité juridique ni autonomie financière. Il s'agit des arrondissements divisés à leur tour en villages et quartiers de ville (voir tableau 1.2). La taille moyenne des communes est d'un peu plus de 90 000 habitants. Les nouvelles communes sont constituées sur la base du découpage territorial existant qui est resté presque inchangé depuis les années 1970, chaque ancienne sous-préfecture et circonscription urbaine étant devenue une collectivité territoriale. Il y a désormais 77 communes.

According to the above statement, an *arrondissement* is a subdivision of a commune, and every *commune* is made up of at least 90, 000 people. There are 77 communes and 546 *arrondissements* in Benin. In every *département*, there are several *communes*.

Another piece of legislation dated December 2021, clarifies these concepts further by noting that:

L'administration territoriale en République du Bénin est assurée par les autorités et services déconcentrés de l'Etat et par les collectivités territoriales décentralisées, conformément aux dispositions de la présente loi et aux autres dispositions particulières y relatives. (p.1) Le département est la circonscription administrative en République du Bénin. La commune est la collectivité territoriale décentralisée. D'autres entités administratives ou décentralisées peuvent être créées par la loi. (Présidence, 2021, p. 2)

This recent law points out and confirms the various structures of territorial administration in Benin, namely *département*, *commune*, and other administrative units.

In **Senegal**, territorial administration has been the subject of several (Parliament) Acts and decrees including a piece of legislation dated February 1, 1972, another law dated 1984 and two decrees dated September 10, 2008 and December 28, 2013.

Projet de Loi abrogeant et remplaçant l'article premier et l'article 2 de la Loi N° 72-02 du 1^{er} février 1972 relative à l'organisation de l'Administration territoriale

L'Assemblée nationale a délibéré et adopté la Loi dont la teneur suit :

Article premier : L'article premier et l'article 2 de la Loi N° 72-02 du 1^{er} février 1972 relative à l'organisation de l'Administration territoriale sont abrogés et remplacés par les dispositions suivantes :

“Article premier. – L'organisation de l'Administration territoriale de la République est fixée ainsi qu'il suit :

- *L'ensemble du territoire de la République est divisé en dix régions ;*
- *Chaque région est divisée en trois départements ;*
- *Sauf dans la Région de Dakar, chaque département est divisé en communes d'une part, et en arrondissements d'autre part ;*
- *Dans la Région de Dakar, chaque département comporte une commune et, éventuellement, une ou plusieurs communautés rurales ;*
- *Chaque arrondissement est divisé en communautés rurales ;*
- *La communauté rurale comprend un certain nombre de villages appartenant au même terroir et constitue l'échelon de participation de la population ;*

Le village, constitué par la réunion de plusieurs familles ou carrés en une seule agglomération, est la cellule administrative de base.” (Assemblée nationale, 1984, p. 3)

This Act of Parliament provides for the establishment of *regions*, which consist of three *départements* each; every *département* comprises *communes* and *arrondissements* and every *arrondissement* is subdivided into *communautés rurales/rural communities*; every rural community consists of *villages*; a *village* consists of several *familles/households* or plots existing in one place. However, this Act of Parliament was amended on December 28, 2013 as follows:

“L’organisation administrative, territoriale et locale, de la République du Sénégal est fixée par le décret du 10 septembre 2008 fixant le ressort territorial et le chef-lieu des régions et des départements et la loi n° 2013-10 du 28 décembre 2013 portant Code général des collectivités locales. Le territoire comprend ainsi : - des circonscriptions administratives (14 régions, 46 départements et 133 arrondissements), des collectivités locales (46 départements et 557 communes). Depuis le 28 décembre 2013, les anciennes communautés rurales sont érigées en communes. Les communes de Dakar et de Thiès ont le statut de ville et sont divisées en communes d’arrondissement”.<https://www.au-senegal.com/les-regions-du-senegal,3605.html>

It emerges from this December 2013 Act that the number of regions increased from 10 to 14; there are 46 *départements*, 117 *arrondissements*, and 557 *communes*.

At this stage, it is important to point out that the number of *communes* is higher than that of *arrondissements* in Senegal. This means that the *arrondissements* are not subdivisions of *communes*, unlike Benin. As a result, the contents of the concept of *commune* is not the same in Senegal and Benin. Consequently, it should be noted that concepts (especially administrative concepts) are not universal. They vary from one country to another. Even if the terms are the same, the concepts they refer to may be different. Another important remark is that the concept of *région*, which consists of three *départements* in Senegal, is unknown in the territorial administration structure in Benin. Equally important in this discussion is the notion of *village* which, in the territorial administration in Senegal, means several *familles*/households or plots coexisting in one place. The Senegalese notion of *village* is closer to the notion of *quartier* in Benin. The Senegalese concept of *village*, i.e. “*la réunion de plusieurs familles ou carrés en une seule agglomération, est la cellule administrative de base*” is similar to the notion of *quartier* in Benin because in this country, the term *quartier* is used to refer to a grassroots administrative unit. Furthermore, *Communaute rurale* is a former denomination that is currently replaced by the term *commune* in Senegal. Whereas the territorial administration structure in Senegal is as follows: *départements*, *arrondissements*, and *village*, in Benin, it is different because it is made up of *département*, *commune*, *arrondissement*, and *quartier/village*.

In Senegal, the *régions* are local communities just like the *communes*, unlike the *villages*, *arrondissements*, and *départements*, which are administrative or electoral units within local

communities. (https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/R%C3%A9gions_du_S%C3%A9n%C3%A9gal)

In **Ghana**, there are currently sixteen regions, further divided for administrative purposes into 216 local districts. The regions constitute the first level of sub-national government administration within the Republic of Ghana. Local government is delivered by metropolitan, municipal, and district assemblies. In each assembly area, there are elected councils and unit committees onto which service delivery is devolved. According to the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936),

CHAPTER TWENTY: DECENTRALIZATION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT 240. (1) Ghana shall have a system of local government and administration which shall, as far as practicable, be decentralized. (2) The President may, by Executive Instrument

(a) declare any area within the country to be a district; and (b) assign a name to the district. (3) The President shall, in the exercise of the power under paragraph (a) of subsection (2), direct the Electoral Commission to make appropriate recommendations. (4) The Electoral Commission shall, before making recommendations to the President under subsection (3), consider the following factors including (a) in the case of (i) a district, that there is a minimum population of seventy-five thousand people; (ii) a municipality, that there is a minimum of ninety five thousand people; (iii) a metropolis, that there is a minimum of two hundred and fifty thousand people; (p. 13)

Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936) (file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/LOCAL-GOVERNANCE-ACT-2016.pdf)

This Local Government Act (2016) clearly defines the concepts of district, municipality, and metropolis in terms of number of inhabitants in an area.

According to the 1996 Constitution, **Nigeria** is a federation of 36 states and 1 federal capital territory. It has 774 **Local Government Areas** (LGAs), each administered by a Local Government Council. Each LGA is further subdivided into a minimum of ten and a maximum of twenty wards. There are 8,806 wards. A ward is administered by a councilor, who reports directly to the LGA chairman. The councilors fall under the legislative arm of the local government, the third tier of government in Nigeria, below the State governments and the Federal Government.

The Constitution further provides that:

(6) There shall be 774 Local Government Areas in Nigeria as shown in the second column of Part I of the First Schedule to this Constitution and six area councils as shown in Part II of that Schedule.

(7) The system of local government by democratically elected local government councils is under this Constitution guaranteed; and accordingly, the Government of every State shall, subject to section 8 of this Constitution, ensure their existence under a Law which provides for the establishment, structure, composition, finance, and functions of such councils.

The various official documents consulted so far provide country-specific definitions and approaches to the concepts of local government, district, municipality, metropolis, *commune*, *arrondissement*, *département*, *région*, etc. These concepts are more clearly defined than vague dictionary definitions which read as follows: 1. District: an area of a country or town treated as an administrative unit. (Hornby, 1995, p. 338); 2. Commune: The smallest division of local government in France and certain other countries. (Ibid, p. 229); 3. Metropolis: The chief city of a region or country. (Ibid, p. 735); 4. Province: Any of the parts into which a country is divided for the purposes of government. (Ibid, p. 933); 5. Prefecture: An area of administration (Ibid, p. 909); 6. Department: A division of a large organisation such as a government, business, shop, university, etc. (Ibid, p. 311); 7. Region: An administrative division of a country. (Ibid, p. 982)

3.4. Instruments

The instruments used include the Internet, various administrative and parliamentary publications, and books.

3.5. Method

Samples of civil status records, including birth certificates, death certificates, and marriage certificates, have been collected. Several of them contain some information such as the country name, region, municipality, district, *arrondissement*, and *quartier*. Then, attempts have been made to search for the equivalents of these terms in French and/or English. This exercise proved to be complex because the dictionary definitions of these terms were vague and could not take us far. From that time on, it became necessary to carry out further investigations into the terms currently used in various countries. These investigations revealed that administrative divisions are not similar in the countries concerned by this research. As a result, it became useful to thoroughly research the administrative structures available in the above-mentioned countries to adequately tackle issues about equivalence.

4. RESULTS

- 1- Administrative concepts are not universal because some terms are used in only one country, while others are used in several countries but do not have the same meaning, contents, and functions in all countries.
- 2- The search for the equivalents of administrative terms should not be a mere linguistic exercise because two terms are said to be equivalent if they refer to the same reality or functions in real-life situations.

- 3- There is no perfect fit between two administrative terms in two different countries because the administrative structures as well as territorial divisions and regulations are not the same everywhere.
- 4- Dictionary definitions of administrative and civil status terms do not reflect specific country realities. Therefore, there is no standard equivalence between two terms in two different administrative setups.
- 5- Translating civil status and administrative terms from one language into another is a complex and approximate exercise because territorial demarcation is an evolving and changing reality.
- 6- While some theories of equivalence favour *adequacy* with the source language realities, this research calls for adherence to the principles of *acceptability* by the target language users and target language norms.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Mapping of administrative divisions across countries

Table 2: Mapping of administrative divisions across countries

Benin		Ghana		Nigeria	Senegal	
					<i>Région (local community)</i>	
<i>Département (administrative division)</i>		<i>Region</i>		<i>LGA</i>	<i>Département (administrative division)</i>	
		<i>Metropolis</i>	<i>250,000 people in Ghana</i>			
<i>Commune (ancienne sous- préfecture) (administrative division)</i>	<i>90,000 inhabitants In Benin</i>	<i>Municipality</i>	<i>95,000 people in Ghana</i>		<i>Arrondissement (administrative division)</i>	<i>Commune (local community)</i>
		<i>District</i>	<i>75,000 people in Ghana</i>			
<i>Arrondissement (ancienne commune) (administrative division)</i>	<i>30,000 inhabitants In Benin</i>					
<i>Village/quartier de ville (administrative division)</i>				<i>Ward</i>	<i>Village (administrative division)</i>	

Considering the mapping above, the size of a municipality in Ghana (i.e. 95,000 people) is close to that of a *commune* (i.e. 90,000 people) in Benin. In comparative analysis, the tertium comparationis (i.e. the common or shared attribute or characteristic) that can be used to compare two or more of these administrative divisions includes: 1. The size of the population; 2. The administrative status (i.e. an administrative division or a local community) – As a matter of fact, a region in Senegal is a local community but not an administrative division unlike a *département* and a village; in Ghana, districts, municipalities, and metropolis are all administrative divisions or local government authorities; in Nigeria as well, LGAs and wards are local government areas; 3. The specific roles and functions assigned to each of these administrative divisions can also be a defining criterion.

Determining the equivalence between two terms is a complex exercise that is far beyond the gambit of linguistics.

This is the background against which translators make decisions. In this particular case, should the foreignisation or domestication theory be applied? If a translator decides to apply the domestication theory, how will s/he translate the term *arrondissement* which has different meanings in different places?

6. CONCLUSION

Overcoming the challenges of equivalence requires a deep understanding of both the source and target languages, cultural sensitivity, subject matter expertise, and effective research and communication skills. Translators must make informed decisions and compromises to ensure that the translated text conveys the intended meaning and impact to the target audience. This is problematic because the administrative realities and regulations are not the same in all countries. Under these conditions, finding equivalents in the target culture and language is difficult.

It is important to note that equivalence is the result of an approximation. Equivalence is not sameness. Translators adopt different strategies to achieve equivalence. Some of them adopt a foreignising approach to avoid complex equivalence issues, whereas others adopt the domestication strategy by trying to find in the target culture and language an object or a concept that has some of the characteristics of the SL concept. In this case, the notion of tertium comparationis provides an alternative solution.

Even then, it is often more a matter of apparent than of a genuine identity. Toury argues that after all, significance is only attributed to a norm by the system in which it is embedded, and the systems remain different even if instances of external behaviour appear the same.

This is a critical aspect of translation that needs to be explored further in subsequent research papers.

REFERENCES

Baker, M. & Saldanha, G. (2011). *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies 2nd Edition*, Taylor and Francis Group, London and New York

Bassnett, S. (1980/1991). *Translation Studies*, London & New York: Routledge.

Catford, J. C. (1965). *A Linguistic Theory of Translation: An Essay in Applied Linguistics*, London: Oxford University Press.

Catford, J. C (1994) 'Translation Overview', in R. E. Asher and J. M. Y. Simpson (eds) *The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, Oxford & New York: Pergamon Press, 4738–47.

Frawley, W. (1984) 'Prolegomenon to a Theory of Translation', in William Frawley (ed.) *Translation: Literary, Linguistic, and Philosophical Perspectives*, London & Toronto: Associated University Presses, 159–75.

Gentzler, E. (1993/2001) *Contemporary Translation Theories*, London & New York: Routledge; second edition published 2001, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Hornby, A.S. (1995). *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. Fifth edition, Oxford University Press.

Langley, P. et al. (2006). *LES PREMIERS PAS DES COMMUNES AU BÉNIN : ENSEIGNEMENTS DU PROCESSUS DE LA DÉCENTRALISATION* Série : Décentralisation et gouvernance locale, Edition de : Gerard Baltissen et Thea Hilhorst, Institut Royal des Tropiques (KIT) – Amsterdam KIT, Bulletin 371

Newmark, P. (1981). *Approaches to Translation*, Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press

Nida, E. (1964). *Towards a Science of Translating*, E.J. Brill, Leiden Netherlands

Présidence de la République (2021). Loi N°2021 - 14 DU 20 DECEMBRE 2021 portant code de l'Administration territoriale en République du Bénin.

Pym, A. (1992a) *Translation and Text Transfer*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

Saussure, F. (2005). *Cours de linguistique générale*. Charles BALLY ET ALBERT SECHEHAYE (eds.), Arbre d'Or, Genève

Snell-Hornby, M. (1988) *Translation Studies. An Integrated Approach*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Snell-Hornby, M. (1990) 'Linguistic Transcoding or Cultural Transfer? A Critique of Translation Theory in Germany', in Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (eds) *Translation, History and Culture*, London & New York: Pinter Publishers, 79–86.

Toury, G. (1978). "The Nature and Role of Norms in Translation", in: Lawrence Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*. London. New York: Routledge. 198–211.

Applying an Empirical Approach to the Search for Equivalents in Translating Administrative Terms Used in Civil Status Records

Toury, G (1980a). *In Search of a Theory of Translation*, Tel Aviv: Porter Institute.

Toury, G (1980b) 'The Translator as a Nonconformist to be Or: How to Train Translators to Violate Translational Norms', in Sven-Olaf Poulson and Wolfram Wilss (eds) *Angewandte Übersetzungswissenschaft*, Arhus, Denmark, 180–84.

Venuti, L. (1995). *The Translator's Invisibility A History of Translation*, Routledge London and New York