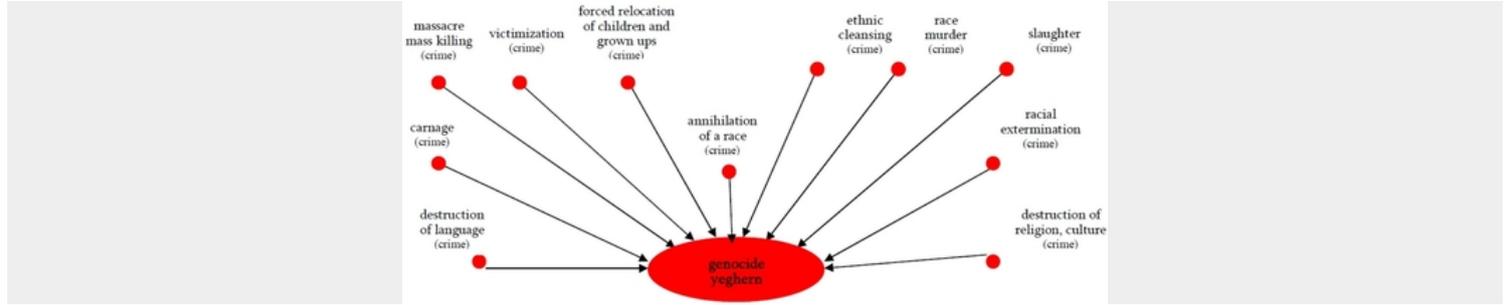


YEGHERN AND ITS EQUIVALENTS IN ENGLISH

Posted on November 9, 2015 by Keghart



Category: [Opinions](#)



Seda Gasparyan, Doctor of Philological Sciences

Professor Armenological Researches Institute, Yerevan State University

This is an abridged version of “[The Word Yeghern and the Semantic Field of its Equivalence in English](#)” by Prof. Seda Gasparyan, Doctor of Philological Sciences and Professor of Armenological Researches Institute at the Yerevan State University. The study is about the semantic field of equivalence of the Armenian word yeghern (եղեռն) and the problem of its translation into English.-- Editor 

Semantic structure of yeghern (եղեռն).

As an initial stage in our investigation it is necessary to clarify the semantic structure of the lexical unit in Armenian. The “Fundamental Etymological Dictionary of the Armenian Language” by Hrachia Acharyan presents the opinion of the great linguist Sophus Bugge who claims that the Armenian words yeghern, yegher, yeghuk (եղեռն, եղեր, եղուկ) originate from the root gel- in the Indo-European protolanguage.

Seda Gasparyan, Doctor of Philological Sciences

Professor Armenological Researches Institute, Yerevan State University

This is an abridged version of “[The Word Yeghern and the Semantic Field of its Equivalence in English](#)” by Prof. Seda Gasparyan, Doctor of Philological Sciences and Professor of Armenological Researches Institute at the Yerevan State University. The study is about the semantic field of equivalence of the Armenian word yeghern (եղեռն) and the problem of its translation into English.-- Editor 

Semantic structure of yeghern (եղեռն).

As an initial stage in our investigation it is necessary to clarify the semantic structure of the lexical unit in Armenian. The “Fundamental Etymological Dictionary of the Armenian Language” by Hrachia Acharyan presents the opinion of the great linguist Sophus Bugge who claims that the Armenian words yeghern, yegher, yeghuk (եղեռն, եղեր, եղուկ) originate from the root gel- in the Indo-European protolanguage.

Comparison with “quelan” in Old High German, “quellian” in Saxon, and “cwelan”----- kill in Old English makes it quite clear that the underlying meaning of all these words is to *kill, to commit a crime*. A. Sukiasyan suggests a whole range of synonyms in his “Monolingual Dictionary of Armenian Synonyms”: ոճիր/crime/, ոճրագործութիւն /felony/, եղեռնագործութիւն /villainy, crime/,

չարագործություն (մարդասպանություն) /malefaction, murder/, ծանր հանցագործություն /grave, serious crime/, սպանություն /killing, murder, homicide/, կոտորած /massacre/, ջարդ /mass killing, massacre/, նախճիր /carnage/, սպանդ /slaughter/, արյուն/ա/հեղություն /blood-shed, carnage, massacre/, սրածություն /massacre, butchery, slaughter/, յաթաղան /killing with a Turkish dagger/, խողխողում /killing cruelly, butchery, slaughter/, եղեռնություն./harm, malice, rascality/, **ցեղասպանություն /genocide/**. These are not absolute synonyms, of course, but they all have the semantic constituent *to kill* (i.e. *to commit a crime*) in their semantic structure.

A study of the data presented in Armenian-English dictionaries provides the following explanations of the word **yeghern (եղեռն)**: *crime* (ոճիր), *misdemeanor* (չար ընթացք, վատարարություն), *offence* (անարգանք), *rascality* (ստորություն, անըզգամություն), *slaughter* (սպանդ, նախճիր, կոտորած, ջարդ), *carnage* (նախճիր), *massacre* (կոտորած, ջարդ) and **genocide** (ցեղասպանություն).

In this comprehensive field of synonyms one can trace similarities as well as obvious differences. For example, the word *crime* is defined as an act (usually grave offence) punishable by law; evil act; such acts collectively; an act committed in violation of law forbidding or commanding it, and for which punishment is upon conviction, while the word *misdemeanor* is used to mean an action, which though being punishable by law, is not so grave or serious as, for instance, stealing or murder.

The presence of the semantic constituent of *crime* in the lexical units *offence* (attacking, aggressive action) and *rascality* (dishonest behaviour), may be said, not to be always obvious. The intention of an offence in the sense of aggression or dishonest behaviour is not necessarily accompanied by murder. While "the modern tendency is to refer to crimes as offences", and the words *offence* and *rascality* carry a negative inherent connotational overtone, this is presented with far less force than in the lexical unit *crime*. As far as the definitions of the words *slaughter* (the killing or slaying of people in large numbers; *carnage* (the slaughter of a great number, especially of men; butchery, massacre), *massacre* (the indiscriminate, merciless killing of a number of human beings) are concerned, they are relatively closer in meaning to **yeghern (եղեռն)** and the prevalent constituent in their semantic structure is **crime** (*criminal act* not conditioned by a lawful necessity).

Genocide is a comprehensive term, and its semantic structure is the most inclusive.

Among the interpretations suggested by various monolingual English dictionaries, the one proposed seems to be the most complete from the point of view of the semantic globality of the word: the use of deliberate systematic measures /as killing, bodily or mental injury, unlivable conditions, prevention of birth/ calculated to bring about the extermination of a racial, political, or cultural group, or to destroy the language, religion or culture of a group. The fact that this lexical unit was introduced into different fields of humanitarian research only after the 1940s is accounted for by the chronology of its occurrence.

The word **genocide** was coined in 1943 by Raphael Lemkin -- a Polish-Jewish lawyer, who, in an article ("Crime of Barbarity") used the word to refer to the Armenian massacre in the Ottoman Empire in 1915 and interpreted **genocide** as a crime against international law. Later he defined **genocide** as any act which is carried out for the partial or total annihilation of any national, ethnic, racial or religious group and, with the encouragement of the US he submitted his definition to the UN General Assembly for consideration. On Dec. 9, '48, the UN adopted the Convention on "the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide" and Lemkin's definition served as the basis for Article II of the Convention.

The word **genocide** originates from the Latin *gens, gentis* (origin, race, gene, type) or the Greek *genos* (with the same meaning) and the Latin lexical unit *cidium* (cutting; killing) which entered the English language through French as *cide* (the act of killing).

Adequate translation.

Re the problem of adequacy, terminological dictionaries offer three definitions of the term *translation*. At the emic level and in the field of lexicography in particular, *translation* is defined as the juxtaposition of two or more languages, with the object of tracing semantic similarities between the units of those languages. In other words, translating means finding elements in the target language which are capable of conveying the semantic contents of the source language words adequately. The study of the aforementioned dictionary data shows that the word as a meaningful unit not infrequently presents a complex structure, and since there can never be absolute coincidence of the minimal distinctive semantic features operating in the semantic structures of different lexical units, we can never speak of absolute synonymy.

Each of the smallest elements making up the content plane of the meaning of a word may be realized through varying applications of the same word depending on the speech situation. It is here that the well-known language/speech dichotomy, which is of fundamental significance in linguistics, should not be underestimated. This proposition makes it possible to regard the problem of adequate translation as a dialectical correlation of equivalence at the level of language, and equivalence at the level of speech. This, however, does not imply that the only precondition for finding the equivalent unit is to examine the original context and the speech situation. The first step in this process is to establish those constituent elements of the target language system which, irrespective of the context and the speech situation, are always equivalent to the corresponding units of the source language. In other words, the first step is to achieve semantic equivalence.

In the semantic field of equivalence of the word **yeghern (եղեռն)** *crime* may be viewed as a non-differentiated unit, as the meaning it expresses is general and can be traced in nearly all the units in the field. The variants *slaughter* (mass killings, execution, massacre), *carnage* (massacre, bloodshed, butchery), *massacre* (mass murder, annihilation, huge loss of life following disease) are considerably closer to **yeghern (եղեռն)**. They nevertheless emphasize different semes contained in the

semantic structure of the word in question, while the complete and global picture of the phenomenon is reflected in the word-unit **genocide**. However, the context plays a highly important role in the adequate choice of the equivalent word. Full equivalence is attained where there is not only semantic, but also functional-stylistic and pragmatic adequacy, i.e. when the target language unit (a word, a sentence, a text, etc.) is equivalent to the source language unit in all the semantic, stylistic and pragmatic values that this carries.

The Swedish Parliament recognized the Armenian Genocide on March 11, 2010, as well as the act of the annihilation of Assyrians and Pontic Greeks, thereby proving the efficiency of this appeal. The word *calamity* (**ւղտւն**) used in this context may be characterized as a lexical unit with an extremely general and non-differentiated semantic meaning. From a study of the wide array of synonyms of *calamity* in dictionaries of English synonyms (1. trouble, distress, misfortune, misery, unhappiness, affliction; 2. referring to an instance of what is calamitous: trouble, misfortune, misery, distress, disaster /implying unforeseen and adverse forces/, catastrophe /with implications of finality/, blow, scourge /implies severe and continued calamity/; curse/spec./ fatality) the following conclusion may be drawn: although any tragedy or evil, including wars, massacres and devastations may be termed a disaster in the broadest sense, the word calamity appears unable to convey the global meaning of the Armenian Genocide in all its manifestations.

Conclusion: the English equivalent of yeghern

The results of the research may be summed up through the following diagram.



Hence, the study of the word **yeghern** (**եղեռն**) in Armenian and the examination of its semantic, stylistic and pragmatic fields of equivalence in English at both language and speech levels reveal that the English equivalent for the Armenian word **yeghern** is **genocide** – the only unit acknowledged internationally and used within the scope of international law.

The present research allows us to conclude that when uttering the phrase “the Medz Yeghern” in his speech on April 24, 2009, referring to the events carried out in the Ottoman Empire in 1915, the US President Barack Obama was well aware of the equivalence of these units. The logically grounded development of this event, must naturally, be the application of the term **genocide** which in the domain of international law seems to be the only established term.

Genocide=Yeghern. Slaughter (crime), ethnic cleansing (crime), race murder (crime), racial extermination (crime), massacre, mass killing (crime), victimization (crime), forced relocation of children and grown-ups (crime), carnage (crime), annihilation of a race (crime), destruction of language (crime), destruction of religion, culture (crime).

