



## Review article

## Linguistic and cultural aspects of relationship status on Facebook and Vkontakte

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## ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the differences and similarities of relationship status lexical realization in two social networks Facebook (Fb, American) and Vkontakte (Vk, Russian). This cross-cultural work reveals the variety of lexical forms available to tag a relationship status in four languages (American English, German, French, and Russian) conditioned by cultural and social oriented values. It also discusses translation problems and mistakes caused by different cultural realities. The analyzed translation cases are divided into literal translation, borrowing, transposition, modulation, and adaptation. The authors compare the translations in the two social networks and suggest more adequate and culturally adapted options. In general, there is a prevalence of literal translation (58 % on Fb; 54% on Vk) over other techniques (42% on Fb; 46% on Vk). The results of the analysis show that Fb translations are more adequate and culturally adapted (with only one inaccuracy) than Vk translations (with seven inaccuracies). The findings can be used as recommendations for the social network translators and further linguistic research in cross-cultural issues involving language, culture and society.

## 1. Introduction

This section views social networks, in general, as a distributed, co-constructed process influenced by self and others where language and culture are in causal interdependence. Social networks are extended, distributed, and diverse with definite culturally oriented values.

Being structurally determined and autopoietic in Maturanian terms (Maturana, 1970), humans tend to strive for “openness” and “dispersion” among other people, in other words, to go beyond their boundaries and surmount the “aloofness of human consciousness” (Arkhipov, 2008). The information that people post on social networks is directed “to the world”, it becomes “distributed”, common, and its power to influence more people is growing. Posting has been defined as “masspersonal communication” (O’Sullivan, 2005; Carr et al., 2008). By posting and writing comments people collaboratively co-construct reality orienting each other in the e-environment. By posting updates on relationship statuses if they feel secure in that relationship, people share their personal information and seek encouragement from “third parties” (others, who read their update on the relationship status and put “likes” or comments). Recent research findings claim that those who display their relationship status on Fb are more dependent and committed in their

relationship than those who do not display it (Lane et al., 2016).

A particular comment can alter perceptions of a Fb relationship status update: positive comments bring about favorable attitudes toward the status and negative comments result in poorer attitudes (Ballantine et al., 2015). It also proves the orienting character of comments and the distributed interconnected nature of social networks.

Apart from posting a relationship status as an initial trigger for possible comments, Kim and Yang (2017) speculate on two other behaviors which are present in Fb interaction – ‘like’ and ‘share’. They assert that different message features generate different behaviors: sensory and visual features result in ‘likes’, rational and interactive result in ‘comments’, and sensory, visual, and rational features result in ‘shares’. Further, this leads to the assumption that a ‘like’ is an affectively triggered behavior, a comment is cognitively triggered, and a ‘share’ is either affective or cognitive or a combination of both. Relationship statuses mostly excite ‘likes’ and ‘comments’ while ‘shares’ are rarely observed, for example in situations where parents feel happy for the new relationship status of their children and are eager to ‘share’ it with their friends.

The current research compares the options of relationship statuses on Fb and Vk in American English, German, French, and Russian on a lexical level and on a cultural level, and explains why the two social networks,

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from different countries, allow users to post different relationship statuses. The paper also touches upon the problems of translation in general and culturally adapted translation in particular which is used when simple translation is not enough and needs cultural adaptation to the target language.

Vygotsky (1983), Luria (1976), and their followers argue for a cultural influence on the formation of the subjective experience. Falikman and Cole (2014) review works devoted to experimental psychology, neuroscience, cultural anthropology, and genetics outlining the cultural revolution in cognitive sciences as a new trend, and show that there is a breakthrough in understanding the influence of culture on perception, action, and cognition. Culture is regarded not as a stable environment but as a process, which dynamically influences biochemical processes in the brain and formation of the functional brain systems.

There is recent evidence that perceptual processes are influenced by culture. Westerners tend to engage in context-independent and analytic perceptual processes by focusing on a salient object independently of its context, whereas Asians tend to engage in context-dependent and holistic perceptual processes (Nesbett, Miyamoto, 2005). The division into holistic styles of perception, attention, and memory in 'collectivist' (Eastern) cultures and categorization in 'individualistic' (Western) cultures (Martinez et al., 2013) encouraged the analysis of cultural and linguistic peculiarities of birthday greetings posted on Fb, where holistic thinking is traced in general wishes for the whole year or years to come while analytical thinking focuses on the particular day (Karamalak, 2016). Andersen (2012) gives an example of how cognition influences the language we speak: in Western cultures people introduce themselves starting with the name followed by the surname (analytical thinking: perception from object to background), while in Eastern cultures it is the opposite (holistic thinking: perception from background to object). He continues speculating on how we perceive and talk differently due to language-culture differences, distinguishing three types of languages: reality-oriented (Russian, Chinese), speaker oriented (Georgian, Bulgarian), and hearer-oriented (Danish, English). Culture and society shape our language and language shapes our reality.

Language influences our cognition (Whorf, 1956), the way we conceptualize and categorize reality. "Concepts are two-sided – on the one hand they dominate our thinking; on the other, they enable us to transform ourselves. Language can be seen as potentially both imprisoning and liberating" (Beaken, 1996: 37). Therefore, culturally-oriented values and language are in mutual co-dependence and co-influence.

## 2. Method

The methodology of the research consists of three stages and presents a comparative analysis. First, two 'lexemes' allow users to enter relationship information, whereby 'lexemes' we mean a meaningful phrase to tag a relationship status based on the definition presented by Oxford Dictionary, "a basic lexical unit of a language consisting of one word or several words, the elements of which do not separately convey the meaning of the whole" (English Oxford Living Dictionaries, 2018). The same procedure was performed in German, French and Russian. Then we compiled data on the 11 possible relationship status options in American English on Fb. The results are comparative tables with 8 (Table 1) and 44 (Table 2) 'lexemes'.

Second, Vk was analyzed from the same perspective: eight options to update a relationship status in Russian were outlined with the

**Table 1**  
Options to add Family and relationship information.

	English	German	French	Russian	
1	Family and relationships	Familie und Beziehungen	Famille et relation	Семья и отношения	Sem'ja i otoshnenija
2	Relationship status	Beziehungsstatus	Situation amoureuse	Семейное положение	Semejnoe polozhenie

corresponding translation to American English, German, and French (32 lexemes) (Table 3). Then we formed a comparative table including 27 'lexemes' of relationship status on Fb and Vk (Table 4). We used an introspective analysis (Talmy, 2005) of the concepts triggered by the words describing different conceptual categories with the help of lexicographic information (online dictionaries and corpora) to make a comparative analysis.

The translations were analyzed based on the classification advanced by Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) because this classification is considered to be basic in translation theory and it is still referred to by many scholars. Out of the seven proposed techniques we chose five: borrowing, literal translation, transposition, modulation, and adaptation which are crucial for the current research and can be witnessed throughout the social networks.

Finally, we created two comparative graphs where we compared the relationship statuses on Fb and Vk. Fig. 1 shows the scope of possible variants to determine relationship statuses on Fb and Vk: the percentage of those statuses which overlap or differ. We also emphasized the extra opportunities of life events suggested by Fb. Fig. 2 shows the difference and similarities of the 5 translation techniques applied to both social networks.

## 3. Relationship status analysis

### 3.1. Relationship status, marital status and "love situation"

Cultural differences lead to differences in language expressions and vice versa. If we examine relationship statuses on Fb in American English, German, French and Russian, we find that the semantic realization of them is different in different languages. In most cases they are not just translated from American English to other languages but localized culturally.

First, the section "Family and relationships" in American English, German, French and Russian are similarly translated (see Table 1): in all these languages the first word stands for family and the second means relationship and dating.

However, "Relationship status" acquires different interpretations (see Table 1) because the original English word "relationship" is not just translated but localized according to the perception, cognition, temperament, cultural values, and understanding of the essence of the notion "relationship" itself.

On Russian Fb "Relationship status" is localized into "Semejnoe polozhenie" (see Table 1) which corresponds to the English "marital status" instead of a literal translation "Status otoshnenij". The localized variant seems to take into consideration cultural peculiarities, sounding more serious, official and conservative by appealing to family relations. "Marital status" is defined by Merriam-Webster as "the state of being married or not married —used on official forms to ask if a person is married, single, divorced, or widowed" (Merriam-Webster). "Relationship status" is used in different social networks, where a relationship is defined as "the state of being related or interrelated and the relation connecting or binding participants in a relationship such as kinship" (Merriam-Webster). "Marital status" is more conservative and legally confirmed than "relationship". "Relationship" has a more general meaning, can be of different characters (for example, it's complicated) while "marital status" tends to be more specific and law-abiding.

An option for "Semejnoe polozhenie" can be the tag "Lichnaja zhizn" ("personal life") which implies all kinds of personal relations irrespective of whether they are legally recognized. According to the Russian National Corpus, this phrase is widely used in informal speech (Russian National Corpus). However, "Lichnaya zhizn" means not only interpersonal relationships but also has a broader meaning "the course of an individual's life, especially when viewed as the sum of personal choices contributing to one's personal identity" (authors' translation from kartaslov.ru). There is even a book written by the wife of Boris Yeltsin, the former President of Russia, which is entitled "Lichnaya zhizn" (Personal life) where she

**Table 2**  
Facebook relationship status in American English and its translations.

English	German	French	Russian
1 Single	Single (bor.)	Célibataire (lit.)	Без пары (mod.) Bez pary
2 In a relationship	In einer Beziehung (lit.)	En couple (mod.)	В отношениях (lit.) V otoshenijah
3 Engaged	Verlobt (lit.)	Fiancé(e) (lit.)	ПоМолвлен(а) (lit.) Pomolvlen(a)
4 Married	Verheiratet (lit.)	Marié(e) (lit.)	В браке (transp.) V brake
5 In a civil union	In einer eingetragenen Lebenspartnerschaft (adapt.)	En union civile (lit.)	В гражданском партнерстве (adapt.) V grazhdanskom partnerstve
6 In a domestic partnership	In einer Lebensgemeinschaft (adapt.)	En concubinage (adapt.)	В домашнем партнерстве (lit.) V domashnem partnerstve
7 In an open relationship	In einer offenen Beziehung (lit.)	En union libre (mod.)	В свободных отношениях (mod.) V svobodnyh otoshenijah
8 It's complicated	Es ist kompliziert (lit.)	C'est compliqué (lit.)	Все сложно (lit.) Vse slozhno
9 Separated	Getrennt (lit.)	Séparé(e) (lit.)	Раздельное проживание (transp.) Razdel'noe prozhivanie
10 Divorced	Geschieden (lit.)	Divorcé(e) (lit.)	В разводе (transp.) V razvode
11 Widowed	Verwitwet (lit.)	Veuf/veuve (transp.)	Вдовец/вдова (transp.) Vdovec/vdova

**Table 3**  
Vkontakte relationship statuses in Russian and their translations.

Russian	American English	German	French
1 Не Женат/не замужем	Single (mod.)	Single (mod., bor. fr. Eng.)	Célibataire (mod.)
2 Встречаюсь	In a relationship (transp.)	In einer Beziehung (transp.)	Je sors avec (lit.)
3 ПоМолвлен(а)	Engaged (lit.)	Verlobt (lit.)	Fiancé(e) (lit.)
4 Женат/замужем	Married (lit.)	Verheiratet (lit.)	Marié(e) (lit.)
5 В гражданском браке	In a civil union (lit.)	In einer außerehelichen Beziehung (adapt.*)	En faux ménage (adapt.*)
6 Влюблен/влюблена	In love (transp.)	Verliebt (lit.)	Amoureux/amoureuse (lit.)
7 Все сложно	It's complicated (lit.)	Kompliziert (lit.)	C'est compliqué (lit.)
8 В активном поиске	Actively searching (transp.)	Auf Partnersuche (mod.)	A la recherche de quelqu'un (mod.)

**Table 4**  
Facebook vs. Vkontakte family and relationship statuses.

Facebook (English)	Vkontakte (Russian)	Transliteration
1 Single	Не Женат/замужем	Ne zhenat/ne zamuzhem
2 In a relationship	Встречаюсь	Vstreichajus'
3 Engaged	ПоМолвлена	Pomolvlen(a)
4 Married	Женат/замужем	Zhenat/Zamuzhem
5 In a civil union		
6 In a domestic partnership	В гражданском браке	V grazhdanskom brake
7 In an open relationship		
8 It's complicated	Все сложно	Vse slozhno
9 Separated		
10 Divorced		
11 Widowed	В активном поиске	V aktivnom poiske (seeking a relationship)
	Влюблен/влюблена	Vljubljen/vljubljen(a) (in love)

writes about the course of his life rather than his personal relationships. This might be one of the reasons why this phrase is not on Fb. Moreover, "Semejnoe polozhenie" is also used on Vk which shows the usage of this collocation beyond the limit of legally recognized relationships.

The casual and semantically broad meaning of the English "relationship" is translated as "Beziehungsstatus" in German (relationship status), "Situation amoureuse" in French ("love-life situation" instead of a literary translation "état/situation de la relation") (see Table 1). As seen from the example, English and German are similar having the common word "relationship", in French there is a lexical substitution for the word "amoureuse", the focus is shifted to the emotional part of the relationship. This leads to the assumption that, stereotypically, French people pay more attention to the emotions they invest, rather than the stability and legality of the romantic alliance. French birthday postings are also very emotional, expressing love (hearts) and kisses (Karamalak, 2016).

Analyzing the lexemes of Fb relationship statuses, we assume that Russians are conservative and marital status is important for them. Russian society belongs to collectivist, holistic cultures (Alexandrov and

Alexandrova (2009); Durst-Andersen (2011)), where marriage as a legal institution symbolizes the beginning of a family and the idea of community is strong in self-identification and self-realization. This formality plays a very important role in society. For example, 2008 was announced as the year of the family. Moreover, every year Russia celebrates the 8<sup>th</sup> of July, which is viewed as a family day called "The Day of Family, Love and Faithfulness" or "The Day of Saint Peter and Saint Fevronia" to maintain the moral, spiritual and family values in Russian people. Due to globalization, Russia and Russian speaking countries are experiencing a shift towards Western ideas where cohabitation is no longer an exception but a normal phenomenon. Some scholars relate it to the ease of ideological control during the 1980s (Gorbachev's perestroika) and the decline of the male population after the WWII (Gerber, Berman, 2010).

The western understanding of marriage is not seen as something obligatory; the priority is set on comfortable co-existence. One does not have to be married to feel complete. In analytical individualistic cultures, people are taught to feel complete by themselves. In Europe, marriages happen later, if at all. In the USA, for example, it varies from region to region. In big cities, people prefer to feel self-realized and marry at a later age while in small towns many couples do get married and consider a wedding as a sacred ceremony performed in a church. As Pamela (2000) argues cohabitation in the USA has skyrocketed and nowadays, the USA witnesses a complexity of living arrangements. Other findings show the rising popularity of unmarried cohabitation in Western Europe (Ver-gauwen et al., 2017). They correlate this tendency for children to be born outside of marriage with increasing individualization, a growing number of highly educated people and hence their economic independence, which is likely to lead to cohabitation.

Coming back to the semantic realization of personal, family and relationship information, the analysis assumes that the notion "relationship" is broader than "marital status". Fb is more informal and displays different types of romantic relations which might not be legally formalized; neutral forms are more preferably used in American English and German; French valence is even more informal, with the focus on love-life and the corresponding emotions. The adjective "amoureuse" (in love, collocation "Situation amoureuse") sounds as something situational (here-and-now), emotional, perhaps temporary and can be associated

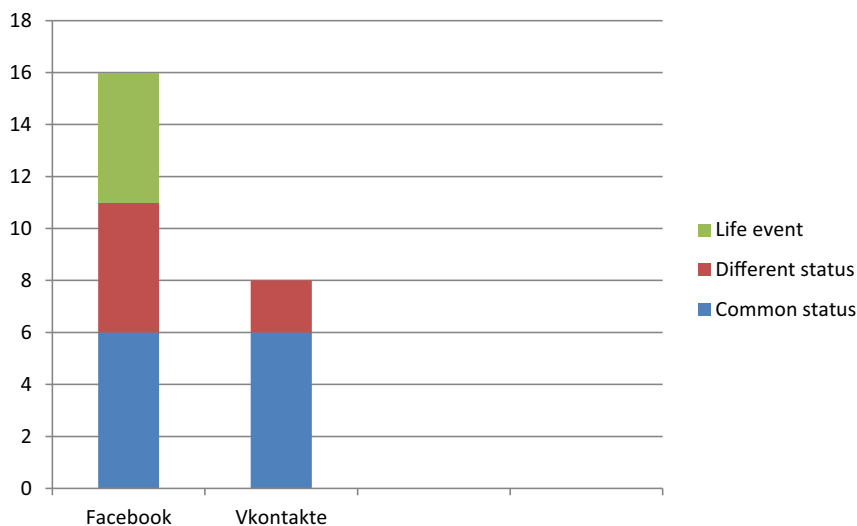


Fig. 1. Facebook vs Vkontakte relationship status options.

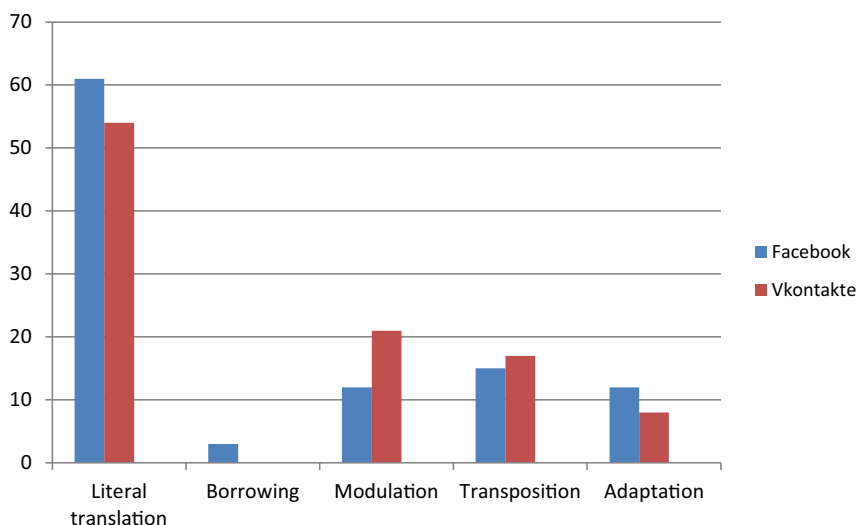


Fig. 2. Translation techniques used on Facebook and Vkontakte.

with the expression of love feelings, for example “je suis amoureuse” (I am in love). However, the Russian variant is the opposite, sounding formal and conservative.

### 3.2. Facebook relationship information in American English and its translation into German, French, and Russian

This section is dedicated to translation problems since Fb originated in the USA in 2004 and relationship statuses were translated from American English into other languages. The current section analyzes the translations, investigating whether cultural peculiarities are taken into account, and reflects on possible variations.

Having analyzed the relationship statuses, we outlined, as mentioned, five relevant techniques of translation: borrowing, literal translation, transposition, modulation, and cultural adaptation.

Borrowing is a translation technique when a translator uses the same word or phrase in the target text as it is found in the source text. Literal translation presupposes word-for-word translation. Transposition is moving from one grammatical category to another. Modulation is about changing the form of the text by introducing a semantic change or perspective; it is a logical development of the notion expressed by the

word. Modulation differs from literal translation considerably. The idea or meaning is the same, but the phrases that are used in the source and target languages are different. This achieves a more familiar and comprehensive text in the target language. According to [Munday \(2008: 57\)](#), it changes the semantics and point of view of the source language. [Molina and Albir \(2002\)](#) consider it to be a shift in cognitive category, which can occur not only on the word level but also on the phrase, clause and sentence level ([Barth, 1971: 41](#)).

Following [Newmark \(1988\)](#), we consider adaptation as cultural equivalence. Adaptation occurs when something specific to one language culture is expressed in a totally different way that is familiar or appropriate in another linguistic culture. It is a shift in the cultural environment.

“Single”<sup>1</sup> has a broad semantic meaning “unmarried or not in a romantic relationship” ([Dictionary.com](#)) and is literally translated into French with the help of the literary translation technique: “Célibataire”. In German the translator preferred to use the borrowing from the English variant “Single” instead of “Ledig” or “Alleinstehend”. This shows that

<sup>1</sup> All statuses discussed in the article are capitalized due to the capitalized way they are written on Fb and Vk.

the word “Single” has become widely used in German speaking environments and has a connotation of a particular lifestyle. “Alleinstehend” has a negative connotative meaning “staying alone, without any partner” (allein, ohne Partner) as something which people do not choose but have to put up with. Compare these two examples taken from the forum ([Word reference](#)): “Sie ist wieder Single, geht viel aus, man sieht sie in Begleitung gutaussehender Männer” (She is single again, goes out a lot, you can see her being accompanied by handsome men) vs “Sie ist eine alleinstehende (ältere) Dame” (She is an old lady living alone, a spinster). “Being Single is a lifestyle whereas being alleinstehend is a sad fact”, as one of the forum users wrote ([Word reference](#)). “Ledig” as “unverheiratet” (unmarried) has a narrower meaning than “Single” – being not legally married. For example, “Was meinen Familienstand betrifft, bin ich ledig (nie früher verheiratet) und habe keine Kinder” (Linguee). “Single” is usually capitalized in German since firstly, it is a borrowing from English (to mark this trace to English and being not fully immersed into German), secondly, it is substantivized and cannot be used either attributively (\*ein Singler Mann) or adverbially (\*Er lebt Single).

For Russian, “Single” corresponds to the antonymic translation (modulation) (adjective in the source language shifts to prep. + noun in the target language) “Bez pary”. This option can be explained by the following: “Bez pary” has a general meaning of not being in any relationship, where “para” in this context is defined as “two people being together, taking some actions together, and united by having something in-common, for example, to go in pairs, a dancing pair, a married couple” (authors' translation from [Ozhegov's Dictionary of the Russian Language](#)). Thus, this translation strategy (modulation) is semantically close to the original because it refers to not only unmarried people but also to those who are not in a romantic relationship. For example, “Bez pary ni chelovek, ni ptica ne mogut zhit' na svete.” (Process edy i besedy. 100 kulinarnyh i intellektual'nyh receptov//«Oktjabr'», 2003 from [Russian National Corpus](#) (1). Neither a bird nor a person can live without a partner (the authors' translation).

The option “Ne zhenat/ne zamuzhem” (not married) has a narrower meaning than Am.E. “Single” and does not seem appropriate. Another choice could be “Svoboden/svobodna” (free) which semantically has a positive validity and corresponds to “Single” as self-sufficient. However, it has an implicit meaning that a person is open for a new relationship or even a marriage. For example, “Tanja dejstvitel'no hotela i byla gotova vyjti zamuzh. No ne svoboden byl zhenih, svjazannyj tainstvom venchanija s Annoj Gorenko.” (cited from [Kolmogorov \(2013\)](#), [Russian National Corpus](#) (2)). Tanja really was eager and ready to get married. But the man was not single, he had already had a church wedding with Anna Gorenko (authors' translation). The dictionary meaning of the adjective “svoboden” is broad: having the right or opportunity to act of your own will or discretion (authors' translation from [Efremova's dictionary 2000](#)).

One more possibility may be the use of the literal translation ‘odin/odna’ which means ‘not living in a family, not having a family, relatives, relatives; alone’ (authors' translation from [Efremova's dictionary 2000](#)). However, the definition has a negative connotation and the meaning itself is broader than “Single” implying also without a family. To sum up, the Fb variant “Bez pary” seems adequate and does not require changes.

The second option “In a relationship” has a literal translation “In einer Beziehung” in German. However, in French it is translated with the help of modulation as “En couple” instead of a one-to-one variant “Dans une relation”. If it had been translated that way, then a certain ambiguity would have occurred because French “relation” can be of different character. Consequently, it would have required a specifying adjective like “relation amoureuse”. The chosen modulated variant “En couple” from an abstract notion (“in a relationship”) to a more concrete one (“En couple”) is preferable because it has the same concept of having a romantic relationship and together making a couple. The example brings about a shift of perspective from relationship to togetherness (forming part of a couple) and presents a modulation strategy of translation. In Russian, it is translated as a parallel nominal expression “V otnoshenijah” (in a relationship) (literal translation).

“Engaged” in French and Russian has gender defining flexions. In French “Fiancé(e)” which derives from Latin, “fidare” literally meaning “to trust,” combined with the suffix -ance, which is used to form nouns from existing verbs. The masculine form “Fiancé” is used to describe an engaged man, while the feminine form “Fiancée” is used to describe an engaged woman. The pronunciation of both fiancé and fiancée is identical ([Dictionary.com](#)). The Russian translation “Pomolvlen(a)” has a gender flexion too. It is translated in German as a participle “Verlobt” (sich verloben). Nowadays “verlobt” is used rarely due to the preference of living together without any official ceremony. The latter might even be outdated. More and more people prefer being “In einer Lebensgemeinschaft” (in a domestic partnership).

The fourth option is “Married” and it is translated in German “Verheiratet” and “Marié(e)” in French with the gender mark. In Russian, it is translated as a substantivized (nominal) expression “V brake” (in marriage) with using the translation strategy of transposition. It has a common gender unlike the equivalent phrase “Zhenat/zamuzhem” (married).

According to the [Russian National Corpus](#), “V brake” is less frequent than “Zhenat/zamuzhem” (there are 403 documents with 721 entries while “zhenat” is witnessed in 1,687 documents with 3,227 entries and “zamuzhem” 1,389 documents with 2,476 entries) ([Russian National Corpus](#)). Considering the frequency in the [Russian National Corpus](#) and the usage on Vk, we assume that the variant “zhenat/zamuzhem” is culturally more common and, thus, better than “v brake” which sounds more formal<sup>2</sup>.

According to [Merriam-Webster Dictionary](#), a civil union is “the legal status that ensures to same-sex couples specified rights and responsibilities of married couples” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). In other words, a “civil union” (also known as a civil partnership) is a legally recognized arrangement similar to marriage, created primarily as a means to provide recognition in law for same-sex couples. Russian speaking societies do not accept any other legally bounded unions other than marriage between a man and a woman. While in the US and European countries same sex partnerships are legalized, in Russia and Russian speaking countries there is no law that proves such partnerships valid. Consequently, based on the lack of such a reality there is a need to fill this lacuna. The translator used the option “V grazhdanskom partnerstve” (a literal translation or even a calque) which is a new term not found in the [Russian National Corpus](#) and reflecting the source meaning.

The German and French translations “In einer eingetragenen Lebenspartnerschaft” (lit. in a registered living partnership) is an equivalent that is culturally adapted and “En union civile” (lit. tr.) also means a legally valid relationship – the same as a “civil union”. L'union civile est celle qui unit deux personnes aux yeux de la loi. Il peut s'agir d'un mariage (parfois juste religieux suivant la législation du pays), d'un PACS, ou d'un partenariat enregistré comme c'est le cas en Suisse (The civil union is the one that unites two people in the eyes of the law. It can be a marriage (sometimes just religious according to the legislation of the country), a PACS, or a registered partnership as is the case in Switzerland) (translated from [Linternaute Dictionnaire Français](#)).

The term “En union civile” seems to have a broad meaning and includes all types of registered partnerships or civil marriages. PACS (“Le pacte civil de solidarité”) is one of the types of civil marriages and “Pacsé(e)” is used to define a person in this kind of relationship. PACS (pronounced [paks]), is a contractual form of civil union between two adults for organizing their joint life. It brings rights and responsibilities, but less than marriage. The PACS was voted by the French Parliament in October 1999, largely to offer some legal status to same-sex couples. In 2012, 94% of PACS were nonetheless between opposite-sex couples.

<sup>2</sup> There is a homonym “brak” which means deficiency of an object. This homonymic meaning has given birth to a pun “A good thing cannot be called ‘brak’ (deficiency/marriage)” hinting at the difficulties which occur being married and implying a detrimental effect of marriage. Probably it might bring a negative connotation to the phrase “v brake”.

From a legal standpoint, a PACS is a contract drawn up between the two individuals, which is stamped and registered by the clerk of the court. In some areas, couples signing a PACS have the option of having a formal ceremony at the city hall identical to that of a civil marriage. Since 2006, individuals who have registered a PACS are no longer considered single in terms of their marital status; their birth records will be amended to show their status as PACS (Godard, 2007).

In Germany, civil partnerships were recognized legally in 2001 and were mostly aimed at same-sex unions. Everybody entering into a civil partnership in Germany must first appear physically at a Standesamt for a civil ceremony. Other German speaking countries, for example Switzerland and Austria, also recognize same-sex civil partnerships. Switzerland has allowed registered partnerships for same-sex couples since 1 January 2007, after a 2005 referendum; Austria adopted the same law on 1 January 2010.

"In a domestic partnership" in contrast to legal relations means to have an interpersonal relationship, live together and share a common domestic life without a legal document. The literal translation which it has in Russian "V domashnem partnerstve" seems doubtful and alien to Russian culture. Moreover, the [Russian National Corpus](#) does not give any usage. Judging from the meaning of "domestic partnership", we suggest that it would be advisable to change it for "V grazhdanskom brake" (cultural adaptation). In fact, "V grazhdanskom brake" has two different meanings: formal ("married" since after the 1917 Revolution only civil marriages are recognized in contrast to religious ones) and informal ("cohabitation without legal binding"). The latter is used more frequently while the former has become outdated.

The German variant "In einer Lebensgemeinschaft" (lit. "in a living community") is an adequate cultural adaptation to domestic partnership.

"En concubinage" is a culturally adapted translation because it also means cohabitation or living together, the trend towards couples living together before marriage ([Reverso Dictionnaire](#)).

"In an open relationship" is translated into German as "In einer offenen Beziehung" having similar constructions and adjectives "open" and "offenen" while in French there is some lexical modulation "En union libre" (free). This is an example of a one-to-one translation with one lexical modulation. The Russian variant is closer to the French one "V svobodnyh otnoshenijah" (lit. in free relationship) because the adjective has the same meaning "free".

The status "It's complicated" is equivalent to "Es ist kompliziert" in German, "C'est compliqué" in French, and "Vse slozhno" in Russian (literal translations).

The notion "Separated" exists in Russian though there is no legal concept which in some countries of the Western world means a pre-stage of divorce. In Russian, a substantivized form is applied (transposition) "Razdel'noe prozhivanie" as it explains the main essence of the concept "separate living". German and French are similar to English "Getrennt" and "Séparé(e)" (literal translations).

"Divorced" has similar participial constructions in German "Geschieden" and French "Divorcé(e)" (literal), while in Russian it is translated with a nominal construction and the preposition of localization (transposition): "V razvode" (in the state of being divorced).

"Widowed" is translated as a past participle "Verwitwet" in German (literal), and as adjectives with the gender markers "Veuf/Veuve" in French (transposition), and also in Russian "Vdovets/vdova" (transposition).

Having analyzed the American English relationship status and their translations in other languages (German, French and Russian), we concluded that in most cases the statuses are rendered with the help of literal translation (19 examples). Sometimes it is not fully adequate and can be improved if cultural differences are taken into account, for example, "In a domestic partnership" (Am.E.) should have been translated as "V grazhdanskom brake" (Rus.) because it has a similar meaning of cohabitation and the proposed translation "V domashnem partnerstve", a calque from the American English, sounds foreign to Russian speakers. Besides one case of borrowing, we singled out five cases of

transposition:

- "Married" (Am.E.) – "V brake" (Rus.);
- "Separated" (Am.En.) – "Razdel'noe prozhivanie" (Rus.);
- "Divorced" (Am.Eng.) – "V razvode" (Rus.);
- "Widowed" (Am.En.) – Veuf/veuve" (Fr.);
- "Widowed" (Am.En.) – "Vdovets/vdova" (Rus.).

There are four cases of modulation:

- "Single" (Am.En.) – "Bez pary" (Rus.);
- "In an open relationship" (Am.En.) – "En union libre" (Fr.)
- "In an open relationship" (Am.En.) – "V svobodnyh otnoshenijah" (Rus.);
- "In a relationship" (Am.En.) – "En couple" (Fr.);

There are four cases of adaptation to the target culture:

- "In a civil union" (Am.En) – "In einer eingetragenen Lebenspartnerschaft" (Ger.);
- "In a domestic partnership" (Am.En.) – "In einer Lebensgemeinschaft" (Ger.);
- "In a domestic partnership" (Am.En.) – (3) En concubinage (Fr.);
- "In a domestic partnership" (Am.En.) – "V grazhdanskom partnerstve" (Rus.).

In American English and German, a literal translation or metaphor is mostly used and works successfully as both are Germanic languages. In French and Russian, belonging to Romance and Slavic languages respectively, the corresponding relationship statuses required transposition: "Married" (Am.E.) – "V brake" (Rus.) or "Divorced" (Am.E.) – "V razvode" (Rus.) and a reformulation when a better equivalent was found which we consider cultural adaptation or localization "in a civil union" (Am.E.) – "In einer eingetragenen Lebenspartnerschaft" (Ger.); and 2 other examples. The following change might be suggested: "In a domestic partnership" (Am.E.) – "V grazhdanskom brake" (Rus.).

### 3.3. *Vkontakte relationship information in Russian and its translation in American English, German, and French*

In this section, we analyze the way Russian relationship statuses are translated into American English, German, and French on Vk.

The first tag is a modulation: "Ne zhenat/ne zamuzhem" (Rus.) (not married or unmarried) – "Single" (Eng.) – "Single" (Ger.) – "Célibataire" (Fr.). A short form of the adjective together with a negative particle is rendered by adjectives in the positive form. The German form, as discussed, is also a borrowing from English.

The second relationship option "Vstrechajus" (lit. I date) needs to be analyzed. In Ozhegov's dictionary it is defined as "to meet or date/hang out with somebody, maintain an acquaintance or, a close relationship often to hang out with old friends" (authors' translation from Ozhegov's Dictionary of the Russian Language). In English, "dating" is more superficial, friendly rather than deeply romantic. Dating is a temporary action perceived usually as a first stage of a romantic relationship while in Russian it means "having a boyfriend or a girlfriend" and "being in a relationship". Therefore, "Vstrechajus" is translated into English and German being reformulated with the help of a modulation translation technique: "in a relationship" (Eng.) (modulation from active verbal construction "Vstrechajus" (lit. I date) to a passive nominal one "In a relationship" (Am.En.) and "In einer Beziehung" (Ger.). In French the translator used a simple literal translation "Je sors avec" (I date with). After that tag there is a possibility to add the person who you are dating, choosing "your love" from the list of your friends. This literal phrase might mean not only romantic but also friendly relations (going out/hanging out). The Fr translation variant "En couple" (modulation) seems to be more appropriate for this relationship tag.

“Engaged” and “Married” are translated literally and correspond to the same statuses on Fb: “Pomolvlen(a)” (Rus.) – “Engaged” (Eng.) – “Verlobt” (Ger.) – “Fiancé(e)” (Fr.); “Zhenat/zamuzhem” (Rus.) – “Married” (Eng.) – “Verheiratet” (Ger.) – “Marié(e)” (Fr.).

The next Russian status “V grazhdanskom brake” has a meaning of “cohabitation without any legal rights or responsibilities” which partially corresponds to the tag in Am.E. “In a domestic partnership”. People in domestic partnerships receive benefits that guarantee for example right of survivorship and hospital visitation. We said partially because as we can see from the definition, people in this partnership may enjoy some rights whereas in Russia and Russian speaking countries such cohabitation is without any legal rights or responsibilities.

As mentioned above, “V grazhdanskom brake” has two opposite meanings: formal and informal. Formally and originally, it means being in a marriage performed, recorded and recognized by a government official without any religious affiliation. In Russia before 1917, civil marriage did not exist, only religious marriages were considered legal. But after the revolution of 1917 the decree on civil marriage, children and civil registration was enforced. Since then, civil marriage is has been the only recognized form of marriage in Russian speaking countries.

Nowadays the informal meaning is more frequently used. In the [Russian National Corpus](#) there are a lot of examples: “A dejstvitel'no, zachem? Esli ja ne hochu raspisyvat'sja, otchego ne zhit' v grazhdanskom brake?” [Andreeva \(2010\)](#) from [Russian National Corpus \(3\)](#)). “Why indeed? I don't want to have a stamp in my passport. Why can't we live in a domestic partnership?” (authors' translation). This example illustrates that “V grazhdanskom brake” means cohabitation without any legal responsibilities.

On Vk this status refers to the meaning “cohabitation” first because of the informal style of this social network and the more frequent use of this sense in everyday situations; and second because of the existence of the status “Zhenat/Zamuzhem” (married) it is impossible to have again the status “in a civil marriage” (married), which would have been equivalent.

Thus, the translation proposed by Vk “In a civil union” appears to be wrong since it has a different meaning in English “a legal relationship between two people of the same sex that gives them some of the same rights and responsibilities that married people have” ([Learner's Dictionary](#)).

The German option should be translated “In einer Lebensgemeinschaft” (Ger.). The suggested German collocation “In einer außerehelichen Beziehung” is considered as an inappropriate adaptation (equivalence or reformulation) since it is not used among German speakers. However, this collocation does exist and can be found in dictionaries with the meaning of a relationship outside marriage (extra-marital). The word “außerehelich” is used usually when people speak about a child or children born outside the marriage. The German Corpus “Projekt Deutscher Wortschatz” provides one of the examples “Ob die elterliche Sorge zum Wohl des Kindes einem Elternteil allein zugeteilt werden soll, entscheidet bei einer Scheidung das Gericht und bei einem außerehelich geborenen Kind die Kinderschutzhilfe” (“Whether the parental care for the best interests of the child to be assigned to a parent alone, the court decides in a divorce and the child protection authority for a child born out of wedlock”) (authors' translation from the [WORT-SCHATZ Korpus](#)). That is why, the translation proposed by Fb “in einer Lebensgemeinschaft” seems better as it focuses on cohabitation.

The French “En faux ménage” (inappropriate cultural adaptation) means “vie commune entre homme et femme”, union libre” (“a shared or common life between a man and a woman, a free union”) (authors' translation from [Le Parisien Dictionnaire](#)). This equivalent/reformulation does exist in dictionaries but is not used by French speakers. The proposed Fb option “concubinage” – “État de deux personnes non mariées qui vivent ensemble maritalement” (“the status of two not married people who live together in the union”) (translated from [LAROUSSE Dictionnaire](#)) – is what French speakers use to state this type of relationship. Moreover, “En faux ménage” has a negative connotation due to the word “faux” (false).

The technique of translation applied in both German and French to translate from Russian “V grazhdanskom brake” is an unsuccessful cultural adaptation or an equivalence/reformulation since both “In einer außerehelichen Beziehung” (Ger.) and “En faux ménage” (Fr.) exist in dictionaries but are not used by speakers.

The next tag “In love” is translated using the strategy of transposition in English and French: “Vljublenn(a)” (Rus.) (a short form of the participle “vljublenn (yj/ya)” from the verb “ljubit”) – “In love” (Eng.) (a noun with preposition); “Amoureux/amoureuse” (Fr.) (an adjective). A literal translation can be witnessed in German – “Verliebt”.

The seventh type of relationship status – “Vse slozhno” (Rus.) – “It's complicated” (Eng.) and “C'est compliqué” (Fr.) is a literal translation like on Fb but the German variant lacks the subject (pronoun) and predicate (verb) “es ist” which corresponds to “it is” and is used to show the status or characteristics of something. “Es ist Kompliziert” (Ger.) is a grammatically correct option, whereas on Vk it is “Kompliziert”, basically a grammatically wrong translation. Thus, we suggest changing it to the Fb option “Es ist Kompliziert”.

The last tag “V aktivnom poiske” does not exist on FB and expresses the desire to find a partner. The transposition in English “Actively searching” seems too desperate. For example, “Actively searching for a job” means to look for it intensely. We suggest “seeking a relationship” which refers to a single person who wants to date. In German they suggest a modulation (from abstract “actively searching” to concrete “looking for a partner”) “Auf Partnersuche” which corresponds to the initial idea or meaning of looking for a partner. In French “A la recherche de quelqu'un” is a modulation (in search of someone) which sounds alien in French and triggers many questions: who is that someone? Why is a person searching for him or her? We suggest changing it for “A la recherche de l'amour”. The use of the word “amour” can be justified by the importance of feelings for French people and their constant emphasis. For example, on FB “Situation amoureuse” is used with the same root “amour”. When birthday greetings were analyzed, French Fb birthday greetings are very emotional and express love, which can be observed through the abundant use of emoticons (smiles, hearts, kisses) and a great number of exclamation marks. The word “kiss” is written very often; however, the spelling of this word in most cases is not correct showing that the emotional state prevail over grammatical regularities ([Karamalak, 2016](#)).

The Vk translation from Russian to American English, German and French is, in most cases, literal (13 cases). Adaptation to the target culture is not very successful since the collocations do exist but are rarely used (two cases: “V grazhdanskom brake” (Rus.) – “In einer außerehelichen Beziehung” (Ger.) – “En faux ménage” (Fr.). There are four cases of transposition (“Vstrechajus” (Rus.) – “In a relationship” (Am.E.) – “In einer Beziehung” (Ger.); “Vljublenn(a)” (Rus.) – “In love” (Am.E.); “V aktivnom poiske” (Rus.) – “Actively searching” (Am.E.)) and five cases of modulation (“Ne zhenat/Ne zamuzhem” (Rus.) – “Single” (Am.E.) – “Single” (Ger.) – “Célibataire” (Fr.); “V aktivnom poiske” (Rus.) – “Auf Partnersuche” (Ger.); “A la recherché de quelqu'un” (Fr.)).

To sum up, the following changes are suggested: “Vstrechajus” (Rus.) – En couple (Fr.); “V grazhdanskom brake” (Rus.) – “In a domestic partnership” (Am. E.) – “En concubinage” (Fr.) – “In einer Lebensgemeinschaft” (Ger.); “Vse slozhno (Rus.) - “Es ist Kompliziert” (Ger.); “V aktivnom poiske” (Rus.) - “Seeking a relationship” (Am.E.) - “A la recherche de l'amour” (Fr.).

#### 3.4. Facebook vs. Vkontakte: differences and similarities in American English and Russian

This section is devoted to the analysis of the relationship statuses available on Fb and Vk. Fb gives 11 options starting from “Single” to “Married” to “Widowed” while Vk allows eight options starting from “Single” (Ne zhenat/ne zamuzhem) to “In love” (vljublenn(a)). Due to cultural and linguistic differences some concepts have different meanings.

“Single” corresponds to “Ne zamuzhem” while “Single” has a broader semantic meaning “unmarried or not in a romantic relationship” ([Dictionary.com](http://Dictionary.com)) in comparison with the Russian version which only means “unmarried”. In Russian there are other lexemes to define this state “Bez pary” (without a partner), “Svobodn/svobodna” (free/single) but they were not chosen. On Vk, the phrase “Ne zamuzhem” (unmarried) means that a person is not in a legal relationship but could be in a romantic relationship, while on Fb “Single” means neither married nor having a romantic partner.

The next notion “In a relationship” consists of a noun with a preposition and can be called a substantivized phrase while “Vstrechajus” is a verb and presupposes a process.

The past participle functioning as an adjective “Engaged” has a corresponding past participle in Russian “Pomolvlen(a)” with marked for grammatical and lexical gender; the same as “Married” “Zhenat/zamuzhem”.

“In an open relationship” means an interpersonal relationship in which the parties want to be together but agree to a non-monogamous relationship. In other words, two persons are in sexual relationship in which both partners are “allowed” to enter other relationships. This option does not exist on Vk. The other status “Ne zhenat/ne zamuzhem” can presuppose dating, flirting or an open relationship.

The universal tag “It’s complicated” is presented also on Vk and corresponds to “Vse slozhno”.

Such relationship statuses as “Separated”, “Divorced” and “Widowed” are not present on Vk. The explanation can be traced to the Western analytic thinking where people tend to focus on concrete notions and states differentiating the state of being unmarried or single in three more categories following the marriage stage. The term “Separated” does not even exist formally in Russian but can be understood as being officially married but living separately. “Divorced” and “Widowed” have corresponding equivalents “Razveden(a)” and “Vdovets/vdova”, but they are not included there. They can be substituted by a general notion “Ne zhenat/ne zamuzhem” (generalized).

The options “Seeking a relationship” and “In love” are available on Vk but absent on Fb. The status “Seeking a relationship” gives an opportunity to flirt and find a dating partner. The status “In love” sounds intriguing and focuses on the emotional part of this feeling sometimes not disclosing the person or whether it is mutual or unrequited.

Fb has the option for a “life event” where users can add any events connected with their relationship either choosing from the following 5 options: “New Relationship”, “Engagement”, “Marriage”, “First Met”, “Coming out”. All these tags present detailed and often intimate states of the relationship or creating his or her own entering a title.

#### 4. Discussions

Fb and Vk allow different relationship statuses having six similar or equivalent statuses (“Single”, “In a relationship”, “Engaged”, “Married”, “In a domestic partnership”, “It’s complicated”) and five statuses which are present only on Fb (“In a civil union”, “In an open relationship”, “Separated”, “Divorced”, “Widowed”) and two which can be found only on Vk (“V aktivnom poiske” (seeking a relationship), “Vljubl(a)” (in love). Fb allows 11 relationship options, while Vk only eight. Fb allows five more life events about a relationship mentioned in the previous section (Fig. 1).

Firstly, these differences are conditioned by cultural factors since in Russian there is a lack of the concepts “Civil union” and “Separated”. Secondly, “In an open relationship” is an intimate detail, which would not be shared willingly in public and corresponds to the status “Single” as not married. “Divorced” and “Widowed” can also be generalized as “Single”. The absence of such statuses might be explained by the little value this information has for Vk users and the holistic way of thinking which is characteristic for Russian culture in general. It can be also explained by the Russian cultural context, in particular in the heritage of the Soviet past when life was more controlled and restricted by ideology.

Supporting family values made other forms of personal life undesirable in the eyes of society.

The difference in the lexemes which represent the first stage of choosing a status “Semejnoe polozhenie” (marital status/condition) vs “Relationship status” shows cultural differences where Russian culture is viewed as more traditional and conservative with the importance of marriage as an institution, however this has declined due to globalization.

The translation techniques applied to translate from American English into German, French and Russian (Fb) and from Russian into American English, German and French (Vk), are borrowing, literal translation, modulation, transposition and adaptation. There are 19 cases of literal translations, 1 borrowing, 4 modulations, 5 transpositions and 4 cultural adaptations out of 33 presented cases of translations on Fb. Correspondingly, there are 13 cases of literal translations, 5 modulations, 4 transpositions and 2 unsuccessful cultural adaptations which can be called “reformulations/equivalents” out of 24 lexemes on Vk.

Fig. 2 shows the prevalence of literal translation in percentage (58 % on Fb; 54% on Vk) over other techniques (42% on Fb: 3% borrowing, 12% modulation, 15% transposition, 12% adaptation; 46% on Vk: 21% modulation, 17% transposition, 8% adaptation). The results look similar with more transposition and modulation on Vk than on Fb, whereas Fb has more borrowing and adaptation than Vk. Nevertheless, the analysis shows that Fb translations are better and culturally adapted.

#### 5. Concluding remarks

Culture and language are enmeshed in our daily activities. The research shows that relationship statuses are not as universal as they seem to be, and there are various cultural differences that predetermine the difficulties of translation and interpretation. Two different yet similar social networks were compared in terms of tagging a relationship status. They allow different options depending on the countries and societies where they were designed, American analytical culture striving for details, Russian holistic culture viewing things as a whole. Translations seem more successful on Fb because only one deficiency was found while on Vk there were seven. Transformation strategies in translation (modulation, transposition, adaptation) should be applied for the adequate translation taking into account cultural realities since there are some concepts which exist in one culture and can be absent in another.

We summarized inaccuracies of translations on both social networks and advanced better options. On Fb one inaccuracy is detected as a result of the analysis: “In a domestic partnership” (Am.E.) should not be translated as “V domashnem partnerstve” (Rus.) as it is alien to the Russian culture. Consequently, it should be changed to “V grazhdanskom brake” (Rus.) as it means the same as “cohabitation without legal marriage”.

As for Vk, seven inadequate translations are singled out. The French literal translation “Je sors avec” (Fr.) from “Vstrechajus” (Rus.) should be changed to “En couple” (Fr.) as proposed on Fb. The English translation “In a civil union” (Am.E.) from Russian “V grazhdanskom brake” is wrong and should be changed to “In a domestic partnership” (Am.E.). It is recommended that “En faux ménage” (Fr.) should be changed to “En concubinage” (Fr.) since the former is not used and sounds alien in French. The German translation “In einer ausserehelichen Beziehung” (Ger.) should be changed for the Fb version “In einer Lebensgemeinschaft” (Ger.) being more adequate, clear and frequently used by German speaking people. “Vse slozhno” (Rus.) should be grammatically corrected into “Es ist Kompliziert” (Ger.). Finally, “V aktivnom poiske” (Rus.) should be changed to “Seeking a relationship” (Am.E.) and “A la recherche de l’amour” (Fr.) to make it more culturally adapted.

Based on the results of the analysis we found that Fb allows more options for relationship status than Vk having such statuses as “In a civil union”, “In an open relationship”, “Separated”, “Divorced”, “Widowed”. We tried to explain what might be the reasons for not including these statuses on Vk. One way or another, it is because of the low value they



seem to present for the Russian speaking society due to the lack of some concepts on the social, cultural and also language levels as “Separated” and “In a civil union” or the unimportance of details as “Divorced” and “Widowed” since these statuses can correspond to the status “Not married”. The status “In an open relationship” is also not so important and gives details about personal relationship and might be also generalized as “Not married”.

Vk allows two statuses which are not present on Fb. They are “Seeking a relationship” and “In love”. The first serves the purpose of finding a partner. Social networks are known as a good platform for flirting, meeting new people and finding a partner. The second status is more emotional than informative since it does not give you any information if a person is in a relationship, married or separated.

The role of translators who work on digital social networking projects should not be underestimated. The present study shows this and can contribute to further research on the cultural and language differences and similarities, social laws and everyday reality which bring to the emergence of new meanings and lexical expressions. Since Fb and Vk are subject to constant changes, new statuses and new translations might appear depending on new digital affordances, social and linguistic changes.

## Declarations

### Author contribution statement

Olga Karamalak: Conceived and designed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Wrote the paper.

Elena Pozhidaeva: Performed the experiments; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data.

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