



PRAGMATIC PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATION

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Abstract: Translation is not merely a linguistic transformation but also a pragmatic act that requires consideration of context, speaker intention, and cultural nuances. Pragmatic problems in translation often arise when translators fail to accurately convey implied meanings, speech acts, or culturally specific references from the source language into the target language. This article explores the nature of pragmatic issues in translation, including speech act theory, implicature, deixis, politeness strategies, and culture-bound expressions. Through examples and case studies, it highlights how misinterpretations or lack of equivalence in pragmatic elements can lead to distorted meaning or communication failure. The article also discusses possible strategies to overcome pragmatic challenges in translation, emphasizing the importance of contextual awareness and cultural competence.

Keywords: Pragmatics, translation problems, speech acts, implicature, deixis, cultural equivalence, politeness strategies, context, cross-cultural communication

Translation is a dynamic and multifaceted activity that goes beyond simple word-for-word replacement between languages. While the linguistic aspect of translation involves grammar and vocabulary, pragmatics deals with the meanings derived from context, speaker intention, and shared knowledge. The translator's task becomes significantly more complex when pragmatic elements are involved, as they often depend on cultural norms, situational cues, and inferential processes. Pragmatic problems in translation arise when the translator is unable to effectively



transfer the intended meaning of the source message into the target language, leading to miscommunication or loss of meaning.

Pragmatics, as defined by linguistic scholars, refers to the study of language in use, particularly how people understand and produce language in specific contexts. In translation, pragmatics involves the transfer of intended meaning, illocutionary force, and contextual information from one language and culture to another.

Pragmatic aspects include:

Speech acts (e.g., requesting, apologizing, promising)

Implicature (suggested meaning not directly stated)

Deixis (contextual references such as “here,” “you,” “now”)

Presuppositions

Politeness and indirectness

Cultural references and idioms

Translating these elements poses challenges because they are highly dependent on context, shared assumptions, and cultural norms. Speech acts refer to the actions performed via utterances. In different languages, the same speech act may be realized through different structures. For example, an English request like “Could you possibly help me with this?” may seem overly indirect or confusing when translated literally into Uzbek or Russian, where direct forms are more common or expected.

Implicature refers to the meaning inferred by the listener rather than explicitly stated. Translating implicature requires deep understanding of both source and target cultures. Consider:



English: “It’s a bit chilly in here.”

Implied meaning: “Please close the window.”

Direct translation might miss the implied request.

Deictic expressions depend on the speaker’s context. Words like “here,” “there,” “you,” or “this” can become problematic in translation if spatial or temporal references differ. For example, in Japanese, different words are used depending on the direction and relationship to the speaker/listener. Different languages have distinct norms for politeness. English often uses indirectness to show politeness, while other languages may favor directness. Misjudging this in translation can result in speech that is too blunt or too vague. Idioms, metaphors, and humor often do not have equivalents in the target language. For instance:

English: “Kick the bucket” = die

Literal translation into Uzbek or Russian would be confusing without cultural context.

Example 1:

English: “John is quite the expert, isn’t he?”

Intended meaning: Sarcastic, implying John made a mistake.

Literal translation may render it as a compliment in another language.

Example 2:

English: “He passed away.”

A euphemism for death. In cultures with less euphemistic norms, this may be misinterpreted or seem vague.

Example 3:



Japanese indirect refusal: “It may be a bit difficult.”

Meaning: “No.”

Direct translation may confuse English speakers expecting a clearer answer.

Translators must analyze not just what is said, but why and how it is said. Recognizing the function of a statement helps determine its appropriate equivalent. In some cases, a culturally bound term or idiom can be replaced by an equivalent in the target culture. For example:

English: “It’s Greek to me.”

Implied meanings can be made explicit in the target text to preserve communicative intent. For example, translating indirect requests as more direct ones if required by cultural norms. This theory emphasizes that translation should consider the purpose of the text and the expectations of the target audience. Pragmatic equivalence may require adapting or restructuring the message.

Working with cultural consultants or native speakers can help resolve ambiguous or culturally sensitive expressions. The translator must act not only as a linguistic expert but also as an intercultural communicator. Pragmatic awareness includes understanding not only grammar and vocabulary but also societal norms, values, and expectations.

Training in pragmatics and cross-cultural communication is essential for translators. Formal education in these areas can significantly reduce pragmatic errors and improve translation quality.

Pragmatic problems in translation present significant challenges that extend beyond lexical or syntactic issues. These problems stem from differences in cultural norms, communicative styles, and context-specific meanings. A translator who overlooks pragmatics risks misrepresenting the speaker’s intention or



distorting the message. Through context analysis, cultural adaptation, and strategic decision-making, many pragmatic issues can be successfully addressed. As translation increasingly bridges global communication, attention to pragmatics becomes essential for achieving accurate and effective cross-cultural understanding.

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