Translation Transformation and Equivalency in Translation Studies

Zokirova Nargiza Savrievna

Senior teacher of Bukhara State University

Abstract: Translation transformation and equivalency are foundational concepts in translation studies, serving as a framework to understand how meaning is carried from one language to another. This article explores the key theories of translation transformation, examining how languages change while retaining meaning. Additionally, it delves into the various types of equivalencies—formal, dynamic, and functional—used to evaluate translation accuracy. The paper aims to synthesize existing research to offer insights into the complexities of achieving equivalency in translation while navigating cultural and linguistic differences.

Key words: translation, equivalency, accuracy, meaning, culture, linguistics, concept, transform, communication.

1. Introduction

Translation is more than just the substitution of words from one language into another; it involves transforming concepts, cultural values, and communication styles to make the target text meaningful for the target audience. In translation studies, two central concepts govern this process: **transformation** and **equivalency**. Transformation refers to the changes a source text undergoes during translation, while equivalency deals with the degree to which the target text corresponds in meaning to the source.

As global communication expands across linguistic and cultural boundaries, understanding these two concepts becomes critical for translators. This paper explores both transformation and equivalency, offering a scientific overview of how these processes influence translation quality and interpretation.

Developed by Hans Vermeer, **Skopos Theory** suggests that the purpose (or "skopos") of a translation should dictate how the translation is approached. This theory stresses functional equivalency over formal or dynamic approaches, emphasizing that the translator's primary objective is to create a functionally appropriate text in the target language.

Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) propose that translations should be studied as they exist, focusing on what translations actually achieve in practice, rather than prescribing what they should accomplish. This approach aligns closely with cultural and functional transformations, placing greater emphasis on how translations are perceived in their target context.

Eugene Nida's work on dynamic equivalency revolutionized translation by promoting a meaning-based rather than a form-based translation process. His theory argues that translation should aim for the closest natural equivalent of the source text, ensuring that it elicits the same emotional and intellectual response in the target audience.

Translation Transformation. In translation studies, *transformation* refers to the process by which a text is modified to fit the grammatical, cultural, and semantic systems of a target language. Unlike direct word-for-word translation, transformation accounts for the flexibility required when translating between languages that do not share structural or cultural similarities.

For example, the translation of idiomatic expressions often requires significant transformation. A phrase like "it's raining cats and dogs" in English cannot be directly translated into many languages without altering its structure and meaning. In such cases, translators must apply transformative techniques to convey the equivalent meaning in culturally appropriate ways. Here are some types of transformations:

Syntactic Transformation: This involves changes in sentence structure. Languages often differ in word order, syntax, and grammatical rules. For instance, Uzbek follows a Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) structure, while English follows a Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) pattern. Translators must transform sentences to comply with the target language's grammar.

Here are some examples of syntactic translation transformations between Uzbek and English: **1. Word Order Transformation**

Uzbek: Men kitobni o'qidim. (Subject + Object + Verb)

English: I read the book. (Subject + Verb + Object)

In Uzbek, the sentence structure is typically Subject-Object-Verb (SOV), whereas English follows the Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) pattern. To translate accurately, the word order is adjusted.

2. Addition of Auxiliary Verbs

Uzbek: U juda yaxshi o'rgandi. (He learned very well.)

English: He has learned very well.

In Uzbek, there may be no direct equivalent for English auxiliary verbs like "has," so they are added in English translations to match the tense and aspect.

3. Change of Passive to Active Voice (*or vice versa*)

Uzbek: Bu kitob ko'pchilik tomonidan o'qilgan. (This book has been read by many.)

English: Many people have read this book.

Passive constructions in Uzbek often translate to active voice in English, depending on which sentence structure is more natural for the target language.

4. Use of Articles (Addition/Omission)

Uzbek: Kitob stol ustida turibdi. (Book is on the table.)

English: The book is on the table.

Uzbek doesn't use articles (like "a" or "the"), so when translating into English, articles are added to specify the noun's definiteness.

5. Transformation of Infinitives

Uzbek: Kitob o'qish yaxshi. (Reading books is good.)

English: It is good to read books.

In Uzbek, nominal forms (like "o'qish" for "reading") are often used instead of infinitives. When translating to English, an infinitive structure ("to read") might be used to maintain fluency.

6. Negative Constructions Transformation

Uzbek: Men hech narsa ko'rmadim. (I didn't see anything.)

English: I saw nothing.

Uzbek may use double negatives ("hech narsa" for "nothing" and "ko'rmadim" for "didn't see"), while in English, a single negative is preferred.

7. Conversion of Idiomatic Expressions

Uzbek: Yigirmata charm poyabzal kiygan (yirtgan) odam. (Literal: A person who has worn out twenty pairs of shoes.)

English: A well-traveled person.

Some expressions in Uzbek require syntactic and idiomatic transformation to retain the intended meaning in English. The literal translation would sound awkward, so the phrase is adjusted to an equivalent English expression.

Each of these transformations addresses structural differences and language-specific nuances to achieve clarity, naturalness, and idiomatic accuracy in translation.

Lexical Transformation: This focuses on word choice, including translation of terms, phrases, or idiomatic expressions. Lexical transformation is often required when there are no direct equivalents for certain words between languages, particularly when translating abstract or culturally specific terms.

Lexical translation transformations involve changes at the word level, where individual words are adapted to suit the vocabulary and meanings in the target language. Here are some examples of lexical translation transformations between Uzbek and English:

1. Transliteration

Uzbek: Компьютер (Kompyuter)

English: Computer

For words that don't have a native equivalent, Uzbek often uses transliterations of foreign terms. Transliteration involves adapting the pronunciation and spelling of the word to the target language's phonetics and script.

2. Borrowing

Uzbek: Интернет (Internet)

English: Internet

Some words are borrowed directly from English into Uzbek, especially in technology, science, and global business contexts. These borrowed words often retain their original form in both languages.

3. Descriptive Translation (Calque)

Uzbek: Havo kemasi (literally "air ship" for "airplane")

English: Airplane

Calque involves translating the components of a word or phrase literally. Here, the Uzbek phrase *havo kemasi* directly translates to "airplane," and each word corresponds to its English part ("havo" = air, "kemasi" = ship).

4. Substitution with a Closely Related Word

Uzbek: Kitobxonlik (literally "the act of being a reader" for "reading habit")

English: Reading habit

Since there may not be a direct translation for "reading habit" in Uzbek, a related word like *kitobxonlik* can be used to describe the same concept. This transformation involves finding the closest equivalent term to convey the same meaning.

5. Lexical Expansion

Uzbek: Shahar atrofidagi joylar (literally "places around the city")

English: Suburbs

In Uzbek, the concept of "suburbs" might be less commonly expressed with a single term. Therefore, a descriptive expansion like *shahar atrofidagi joylar* ("places around the city") is used to represent this idea.

6. Reduction of Meaning

Uzbek: Non (bread)

English: Bread or naan (Uzbek-style bread)

While *non* refers to any type of bread in Uzbek, it can also mean a specific type of traditional Uzbek bread. When translating to English, the word *naan* or "Uzbek bread" might be added or simply translated as "bread" if the specific cultural reference isn't necessary.

7. Lexical Equivalence for Idioms

Uzbek: Suvga tushgan mushukday. (Literal: Like a cat that fell in water, meaning "wet and disheveled")

English: Like a drowned rat.

Uzbek and English use different animals and imagery for the same concept. Here, *suvga tushgan mushukday* translates to the English idiom "like a drowned rat," which conveys the same idea of being soaking wet and untidy.

8. Generalization and Specification

Uzbek: Mehmonxona (could mean "guest room" or "hotel")

English: Hotel

In Uzbek, *mehmonxona* can refer to a "guest room" or a "hotel" depending on context. Translators choose one of these meanings based on the intended usage in English, specifying "hotel" when the context calls for it.

9. Compensation for Missing Lexical Items

Uzbek: Do'st (friend)

English: Friend, buddy, acquaintance

In English, "friend" can range from close friendship to casual acquaintance, with words like "buddy" or "pal" adding nuances of familiarity. Uzbek generally uses *do'st* for "friend" across contexts, so translators might adjust to add these nuances in English.

10. Cultural Adaptation of Lexical Terms

Uzbek: Salom! (Hello, often as a casual greeting)

English: Hi or Hello

In Uzbek, *Salom!* is a warm, friendly greeting that's universally accepted. In English, *hi* might be used to match the same informal friendliness, while *hello* might work in more formal settings. This lexical transformation considers cultural connotations.

These lexical transformations allow translators to select or adapt words that most closely capture the meaning, tone, and cultural nuances of the original language.

Cultural Transformation: Some elements of a source text may need adaptation to fit the cultural context of the target language. This can involve modifying metaphors, symbols, or references that would not make sense to a target audience unfamiliar with the source culture.

Cultural translation transformations are adjustments made to translations to reflect cultural differences between the source and target languages, helping the translated content feel natural and relevant to the target audience. Here are some examples of cultural translation transformations between Uzbek and English:

1. Adjustment for Cultural References

Uzbek: U do'sti bilan osh yedi. (*Literal: He ate* osh *with his friend.*)

English: He had a meal with his friend.

Osh (also known as *plov*, a traditional rice dish) is a culturally specific food in Uzbekistan. In English, translating it directly as "osh" may be unfamiliar to non-Uzbek speakers, so it's often rendered as "a meal" unless cultural context is necessary.

2. Substitution of Culturally-Specific Holidays

Uzbek: Ramazon hayiti muborak bo'lsin! (*Literal: Happy Eid holiday!*)

English (in a more Westernized context): Happy holidays!

In Uzbek culture, *Ramazon hayiti* (Eid) is an important holiday. For broader English-speaking audiences who may not observe Eid, this could be generalized as "happy holidays" to convey the celebratory spirit without requiring specific religious context.

3. Transformation of Formality and Politeness Levels

Uzbek: Sizga qanday yordam bera olaman? (How can I help you? - formal "you" form)

English: How can I help you?

Uzbek uses a formal "you" form (siz) to show respect, which is particularly important in conversations with strangers or elders. English doesn't differentiate between formal and informal "you," so this nuance may be simplified or omitted, unless specific honorifics (like "Sir" or "Madam") are needed to indicate respect.

4. Culturally Relevant Names and Terms

Uzbek: "Alisher Navoiy asarlari" (Works of Alisher Navoi, a famous Uzbek poet and philosopher)

English: Works of Shakespeare.

Alisher Navoi is a well-known literary figure in Uzbek culture, similar to Shakespeare in the English-speaking world. In certain contexts, mentioning Shakespeare instead of Navoi might help English speakers relate to the concept of an esteemed literary figure.

5. Adjusting Metaphors or Proverbs

Uzbek: Bitta o'q bilan ikkita quyonni urmoq. (*Literal: To hit two rabbits with one shot.*)

English: To kill two birds with one stone.

This proverb has an equivalent in English that uses different animals but conveys the same meaning of achieving two results with one action. The cultural transformation adapts the phrase to something familiar for the English-speaking audience.

6. Modification of Place References

Uzbek: Dabdabali to'y bo'ldi. (*Literal: There was a five-story wedding.*)

English: It was an extravagant wedding.

Uzbek weddings are often described as elaborate and multi-storied events, but this concept might be unfamiliar to English speakers. Translating it as "an extravagant wedding" helps convey the intended meaning without confusing readers with the literal "five-story" description.

7. Religion-Based Transformations

Uzbek: Insha'Allah, bu safar ishlaydi. (Literal: God willing, it will work this time.)

English: Hopefully, it will work this time.

The phrase "Insha'Allah" (God willing) is commonly used in Uzbek, particularly by Muslims, as a humble way to express hope. In secular contexts in English, this can be translated as "hopefully" or "I hope," depending on the intended audience.

These cultural transformations make translations more accessible, helping the text resonate more effectively with the target language's cultural background.

Context plays a crucial role in translation transformation. Linguistic elements cannot be fully understood without considering their cultural and situational context. Translators must navigate not only the source text's linguistic features but also its social and cultural settings. As such, successful transformation hinges on the translator's ability to interpret and adapt a text holistically.

Equivalency in translation refers to the degree to which a target text reflects the meaning, style, and function of the source text. Achieving equivalency is challenging, as languages vary in syntax, vocabulary, and cultural nuances. Nonetheless, equivalency remains a central criterion for evaluating translation quality.

Types of Equivalency:

Formal Equivalency: Also known as literal equivalency, this approach focuses on maintaining the form and structure of the source text as closely as possible. Formal equivalency works best when the translator prioritizes accuracy in preserving sentence structure and word meaning. It is often employed in legal, medical, or technical translations, where precise terminology is critical.

Dynamic Equivalency: Dynamic equivalency, championed by theorists like Eugene Nida, emphasizes meaning over form. This approach aims to produce a target text that evokes the same response or effect in the target audience as the original text did in its audience. It allows for greater flexibility in word choice and sentence structure, often used in literary or religious translations.

Functional Equivalency: This type of equivalency focuses on the function of the text in the target culture, ensuring that it serves the same communicative purpose as the source text. It is widely used in marketing, advertising, or audiovisual translation, where the message must be adapted for a particular cultural or societal context.

Achieving equivalency is one of the most debated issues in translation studies due to the inherent difficulties of language differences. Some of the key challenges include:

Untranslatable Words and Concepts: Certain words or concepts in the source language may not have direct equivalents in the target language, often due to cultural differences. For example, the German word "Schadenfreude" (the pleasure derived from another's misfortune) does not have an exact equivalent in English.

Semantic Shifts: Even when two languages share equivalent words, the meanings of those words can shift subtly or significantly depending on cultural usage and context. A word that carries positive connotations in one language may have neutral or even negative connotations in another.

Idiomatic Expressions: Idioms are often highly culture-specific and rarely translate directly. A successful translator must find equivalent idiomatic expressions or rephrase them in a way that makes sense in the target language without losing the original's intent.

Conclusion

Translation transformation and equivalency are vital concepts that enable the cross-cultural exchange of ideas, literature, and information. While transformation ensures that a text is adapted to fit the linguistic and cultural norms of a target language, equivalency ensures that the meaning and function of the text are preserved as faithfully as possible. These processes, though complex and fraught with challenges, are essential to producing effective and accurate translations. The continued evolution of translation theories such as Skopos and Dynamic Equivalency reflects the ongoing need to balance linguistic accuracy with cultural sensitivity in our increasingly interconnected world.

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