THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE OF THE TRANSLATORS

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Abstract. *The effectiveness of translation depends not only on linguistic accuracy but also on the translator's ability to interpret and convey cultural meanings embedded in the source text. Linguistic competence provides the structural and grammatical foundation for translation, while cultural competence ensures pragmatic appropriateness and semantic adequacy across cultural contexts. This article examines the interdependent relationship between linguistic and cultural competence in translation, highlighting their roles in achieving functional equivalence, preventing pragmatic failure, and enhancing communicative effectiveness. The study argues that linguistic competence without cultural awareness leads to formal but inadequate translations, whereas cultural competence without strong linguistic grounding results in interpretive inconsistency. The article emphasizes the necessity of integrating both competences in translator training.*

Keywords: *translation competence, linguistic competence, cultural competence, intercultural communication, pragmatics*

Introduction

Translation is no longer perceived as a purely linguistic operation involving the mechanical replacement of words and structures from one language into another. Contemporary translation studies view translation as an intercultural act that mediates between different linguistic systems, value frameworks, and worldviews. Within this paradigm, the translator functions as both a language specialist and a cultural mediator.

The increasing globalization of communication has intensified the demand for translators who possess not only advanced linguistic skills but also deep cultural

awareness. Misinterpretation of cultural references, pragmatic norms, or sociolinguistic conventions can distort meaning even when grammatical accuracy is achieved. Therefore, understanding the relationship between linguistic and cultural competence is essential for both translation theory and practice.

Linguistic competence refers to a translator's knowledge of the grammatical, lexical, phonological, and syntactic systems of both the source and target languages. It includes mastery of vocabulary, sentence structure, idiomatic usage, and stylistic variation. Linguistic competence enables the translator to decode the source text accurately and encode the message in a grammatically acceptable and stylistically appropriate form in the target language.

In translation, linguistic competence manifests in the ability to recognize semantic nuances and polysemy inherent in lexical units of the source language. Many words and expressions carry multiple meanings that are activated depending on context, genre, and communicative intention. A translator with strong linguistic competence is able to identify the relevant meaning within a specific context and select an appropriate equivalent in the target language, thereby avoiding ambiguity, mistranslation, or semantic loss.

Linguistic competence also enables the translator to maintain coherence and cohesion in the target text. This involves the accurate use of grammatical structures, logical connectors, referential devices, and textual organization that ensure the internal consistency and readability of the translation. Coherence at the discourse level is essential for preserving the logical flow of ideas, while cohesion helps link individual sentences into a unified and comprehensible whole, reflecting the structure of the source text.

Moreover, linguistic competence allows the translator to preserve stylistic features such as tone, register, and genre conventions. Different text types demand different linguistic strategies, ranging from formal academic discourse to informal conversational language. Sensitivity to stylistic variation enables the translator to reproduce the communicative effect of the original text, ensuring that the translation

aligns with the norms and expectations of the target language while remaining faithful to the author's intent.

However, linguistic competence alone is insufficient for producing an adequate translation. Language is inseparable from the culture in which it functions, and many linguistic units carry culturally specific meanings that cannot be interpreted correctly without contextual knowledge.

Cultural competence involves knowledge of social norms, traditions, values, beliefs, historical references, and behavioral conventions of both source and target cultures. It allows the translator to understand implicit meanings, connotations, and pragmatic intentions that extend beyond literal language forms.

Cultural competence enables the translator to interpret culture-bound elements such as idioms, metaphors, realia, and humor, which are deeply rooted in the historical, social, and value systems of a particular linguistic community. Such elements often lack direct equivalents in the target language and require the translator to go beyond literal meaning in order to reconstruct the intended message. Without sufficient cultural awareness, idiomatic expressions and figurative language may be translated inaccurately, leading to semantic distortion or loss of expressive effect.

Furthermore, cultural competence allows the translator to adapt the source text to the expectations, norms, and background knowledge of the target audience. This adaptation involves sensitivity to differences in communicative conventions, stylistic preferences, and sociocultural assumptions. By anticipating how the target audience interprets certain references, forms of politeness, or implicit meanings, the translator ensures that the translated text remains accessible, natural, and functionally equivalent to the original.

Finally, cultural competence helps the translator avoid cultural misunderstandings and pragmatic failures that may arise from inappropriate language choices or misinterpretation of context. Pragmatic errors, unlike grammatical ones, often go unnoticed but can seriously affect the communicative success of a translation. Awareness of cultural norms governing speech acts, discourse strategies, and

interpersonal relations enables the translator to convey not only what is said, but also what is meant within a specific cultural framework.

For example, forms of politeness, address, and indirectness vary significantly across cultures. A linguistically accurate translation that ignores these differences may sound unnatural, inappropriate, or even offensive in the target culture.

Linguistic and cultural competence are not separate or hierarchical components but interdependent aspects of overall translation competence. Linguistic competence provides the technical tools for translation, while cultural competence guides their appropriate use.

The relationship between linguistic and cultural competence in translation is dynamic and reciprocal, as each competence compensates for the limitations of the other. Linguistic competence without cultural competence often leads to excessive literalism, where the translator reproduces formal structures and lexical units accurately but fails to convey the intended meaning of the source text. In such cases, the translation may appear grammatically correct yet semantically impoverished, as culturally embedded implications, connotations, and pragmatic functions remain unrecognized or distorted.

Conversely, cultural competence without sufficient linguistic competence results in vague or inaccurate reformulation of the source message. Although the translator may understand the cultural context and communicative intention of the original text, a lack of precise linguistic control prevents the accurate expression of these meanings in the target language. This imbalance often leads to overgeneralization, stylistic inconsistency, or loss of textual precision, ultimately weakening the informational and aesthetic value of the translation.

Effective translation emerges only when linguistic and cultural competences operate simultaneously and in close interaction. The translator must integrate detailed linguistic analysis with cultural interpretation in order to achieve functional and pragmatic equivalence. This synergy enables the translator to preserve meaning,

stylistic intent, and communicative effect, ensuring that the translated text functions naturally within the target culture while remaining faithful to the source text.

This interdependence is particularly evident in the translation of idiomatic expressions, figurative language, and discourse-level meaning. Such elements require both precise linguistic analysis and cultural interpretation to achieve functional equivalence.

The close relationship between linguistic and cultural competence has important implications for translator education. Traditional language-focused training is insufficient in preparing translators for real-world professional challenges. Translator training programs should incorporate cultural studies, intercultural communication, pragmatics, and discourse analysis alongside intensive language instruction.

Effective training should focus on:

- comparative cultural analysis;
- context-sensitive translation strategies;
- development of intercultural awareness and critical thinking.

Such an integrated approach helps future translators develop the ability to make informed decisions that balance linguistic accuracy with cultural appropriateness.

Conclusion

The relationship between linguistic and cultural competence is central to the translator's professional effectiveness. Translation is a complex cognitive and communicative activity that requires more than mastery of language structures. Cultural competence enriches linguistic knowledge by providing the contextual framework necessary for accurate interpretation and meaningful transfer.

A competent translator must therefore be both a linguist and a cultural mediator. Recognizing and developing the synergy between linguistic and cultural competence is essential for producing translations that are not only correct but also communicatively successful and culturally resonant.

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