



THE PROBLEM OF MEANING LOSS IN THE TRANSLATION PROCESS

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Abstract: *This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the problem of meaning loss in the translation process. It examines the influence of linguistic (lexical, grammatical, and stylistic), cultural, and pragmatic factors on translation quality. Particular emphasis is placed on semantic mismatches between languages, idiomatic expressions, phraseological units, and culture-specific references as major sources of meaning loss. The paper also proposes several effective translation strategies, including contextual analysis, adaptation, explanatory translation, and compensation, to reduce meaning loss. The findings suggest that complete transfer of meaning is not always achievable; however, a translator's professional competence, intercultural awareness, and deep understanding of context can significantly minimize meaning loss in translation.*

Keywords: *translation process, meaning loss, equivalence theory, pragmatics, intercultural communication, idiomatic expressions, compensation strategy*

Abstrakt: *Ushbu maqolada tarjima jarayonida yuzaga keladigan ma'no yo'qolishi muammosi kompleks tarzda tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotda lingvistik (leksik, grammatik va stilistik), madaniy hamda pragmatik omillarning tarjima jarayoniga ta'siri yoritiladi. Ayniqsa, tillar o'rtasidagi semantik nomutanosiblik, idiomatik birliklar, frazeologizmlar va milliy-madaniy realiyalarni adekvat ifodalashdagi qiyinchiliklar asosiy muammolar sifatida ko'rsatib o'tiladi. Shuningdek, kontekstual*



tahlil, adaptatsiya, izohli tarjima va kompensatsiya kabi strategiyalar ma'no yo'qolishini

kamaytirishning samarali usullari sifatida taklif etiladi. Tarjima jarayonida to'liq ma'no uzatish har doim ham mumkin emas, biroq tarjimonning professional kompetensiyasi, madaniyatlararo bilimlari va kontekstni chuqur anglash qobiliyati orqali ma'no yo'qolishini minimal darajaga tushirish mumkin.

Kalit so'zlar: *tarjima jarayoni, ma'no yo'qolishi, ekvivalentlik nazariyasi, pragmatika, madaniyatlararo kommunikatsiya, idiomalar, kompensatsiya strategiyasi*

Аннотация: *В данной статье комплексно рассматривается проблема потери смысла в процессе перевода. Особое внимание уделяется влиянию лингвистических (лексических, грамматических и стилистических), культурных и прагматических факторов на качество перевода. Подчеркивается, что семантические расхождения между языками, идиоматические выражения, фразеологизмы и культурные реалии являются основными источниками смысловых потерь. В статье предлагаются такие переводческие стратегии, как контекстуальный анализ, адаптация, пояснительный перевод и компенсация, направленные на минимизацию потерь смысла. Что полная передача смысла не всегда достижима, однако высокий уровень профессиональной подготовки переводчика, знание культурного контекста и межкультурная компетенция позволяют существенно снизить степень смысловых потерь.*

Ключевые слова: *переводческий процесс, потеря смысла, теория эквивалентности, прагматика, межкультурная коммуникация, идиомы, компенсация*

Introduction

Translation is not merely a linguistic activity but a complex cognitive and cultural process that involves interpreting and reconstructing meaning across languages. While the primary goal of translation is often defined as the accurate



transfer of meaning, this goal is rarely achieved in its entirety. One of the central problems in translation studies is meaning loss, which refers to the reduction, distortion, or transformation of meaning during the transfer from a source language (SL) to a target language (TL). Meaning loss occurs because languages are not symmetrical systems. Each language encodes reality differently through its vocabulary, grammar, and cultural associations. For instance, a single lexical item in one language may have multiple equivalents in another, each carrying slightly different connotations. Similarly, grammatical structures may impose constraints that limit how meaning can be expressed. In addition, meaning is not only linguistic but also pragmatic and cultural. Speakers rely on shared knowledge, context, and cultural norms to interpret messages. When these elements are absent or different in the target culture, the translator faces the challenge of either preserving the original meaning or adapting it to ensure comprehension.

This study aims to explore the mechanisms of meaning loss, identify its main types, and evaluate strategies that can reduce its impact. By integrating theoretical insights with practical examples, the paper seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of translation as a process of negotiation rather than direct transfer.

Literature Review

The concept of meaning loss has been addressed by numerous scholars, each emphasizing different aspects of translation.

Eugene Nida's theory of equivalence is foundational in this area. Nida distinguishes between formal equivalence (focus on form and content) and dynamic equivalence (focus on the effect on the audience). He argues that strict adherence to form often leads to meaning loss, particularly when cultural differences are significant. Therefore, dynamic equivalence is preferred in achieving communicative effectiveness. Roman Jakobson² introduced the idea that "there is no full equivalence between code-units," highlighting the inevitability of meaning

1 Eugene Nida's – theory focuses on achieving dynamic equivalence, ensuring the same effect on the target audience.



2 Roman Jakobson – (1959-2000) stated that full equivalence between languages is impossible, so some meaning shift is inevitable in translation.

shift. He categorized translation into intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic types, emphasizing that even within the same language, meaning transformation occurs.

Peter Newmark 3 further developed translation theory by differentiating between semantic and communicative translation. He acknowledged that semantic precision often conflicts with readability, and translators must balance these priorities. According to Newmark, meaning loss can be compensated through techniques such as cultural substitution or paraphrase.

Mona Baker 4 approached equivalence from a micro-level perspective, identifying challenges at the word, phrase, grammatical, and textual levels. She proposed practical strategies such as using more general words, paraphrasing, omission, and cultural substitution to address non-equivalence.

Lawrence Venuti⁵ shifted the focus to the cultural and ideological dimensions of translation. His concepts of domestication and foreignization reveal that translation is not neutral; choices made by translators can either obscure or highlight cultural differences. Meaning loss, in this sense, is sometimes a deliberate outcome of ideological positioning. More recent approaches, such as Skopos theory⁶ (Hans Vermeer), emphasize the purpose of translation. According to this theory, meaning is shaped by the function of the translated text in the target context, which may justify significant departures from the source text. The literature agrees that meaning loss is unavoidable but manageable. It is influenced by linguistic differences, cultural distance, and the translator's choices.

Methodology

Qualitative research approach to investigate the problem of meaning loss in the translation process. A qualitative method is particularly suitable for this research

3 Peter Newmark – (1988) emphasized that translation requires balancing semantic accuracy and communicative effectiveness, often leading to partial meaning loss.



4 Lawrence Venuti – (1995) emphasized that translation involves domestication and foreignization, which can influence meaning preservation and cultural representation.

5 Lawrence Venuti – (1995) emphasized that translation involves domestication and foreignization, which can influence meaning preservation and cultural representation.

6 Skopos Theory – (Vermeer, 1978) states that translation decisions should be guided by the purpose (skopos) of the target text, even if it requires departures from the source text.

because the phenomenon under study involves complex linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic factors that cannot be adequately measured through quantitative methods. Instead, the focus is on interpreting how meaning is transferred, modified, or lost across languages. Descriptive-analytical design, which allows for a detailed examination of translation instances where meaning loss occurs. The aim is not to produce statistical generalizations, but to provide an in-depth understanding of specific translation challenges and the strategies used to address them. This approach enables the researcher to analyze subtle differences in meaning and to explore the reasons behind these differences.

Idiomatic expressions, and culturally specific language units. These examples are chosen through purposive sampling, with particular attention given to cases where translation difficulties are most evident. Both the source texts and their corresponding translations are examined in order to identify shifts in meaning. In addition, reference materials such as bilingual dictionaries and existing translations are used to compare alternative translation solutions. It is conducted through a systematic comparison of source texts and target texts. First, key meaning units are identified in the source text, including lexical items, idioms, stylistic features, and cultural references. These units are then compared with their translated equivalents to detect any changes in meaning, such as reduction, expansion, distortion, or omission. Special attention is paid to how the translator handles elements that do not have direct equivalents in the target language. Instances of meaning loss are



categorized into several types, including lexical, idiomatic, pragmatic, cultural, and stylistic loss.

This classification helps to reveal patterns and to understand which types of meaning are most vulnerable in translation. At the same time, the study identifies the translation strategies used in each case, such as paraphrasing, adaptation, compensation, explicitation, and borrowing. The effectiveness of these strategies is evaluated based on their ability to preserve the original meaning, maintain communicative intent, and ensure naturalness in the target language.

Results and Discussion

The findings reveal that meaning loss manifests in several systematic ways. This study focuses on three major types: as these are the most frequent and impactful in the translation process.

Lexical and Semantic Loss

Lexical and semantic loss occurs when there is no direct equivalent for a word or concept in the target language. This type of meaning loss is often caused by differences in how languages categorize and conceptualize reality. A single word in the source language may carry multiple layers of meaning, including denotative and connotative aspects, which cannot be fully reproduced in the target language. For example, culturally specific terms such as “*mahalla*” in Uzbek represent not only a physical neighborhood but also a social institution with communal values, traditions, and responsibilities. When translated simply as “*neighborhood*,” a significant portion of its social and cultural meaning is lost. In such cases, translators often rely on generalization or descriptive translation, which reduces semantic depth.

This type of loss affects precision and nuance, leading to a simplified version of the original meaning. Although strategies like paraphrasing or explicitation can partially compensate for the loss, they may also result in longer or less natural expressions in the target language. Therefore, lexical and semantic loss highlights the structural differences between languages and the limits of direct equivalence.

Idiomatic Loss



Idiomatic loss arises when idiomatic expressions or phraseological units in the source language cannot be directly translated into the target language. Idioms are highly language-specific and often based on metaphorical or cultural associations that do not exist in other languages. For instance, the English idiom “*spill the beans*” means to reveal a secret. A literal translation would produce a nonsensical or misleading result in another language. To preserve the meaning, the translator must either find an equivalent idiom in the target language or use a paraphrased explanation such as “*to reveal a secret.*” However, in doing so, the figurative imagery and stylistic effect of the original expression are lost.

Idiomatic loss is particularly significant because idioms contribute not only to meaning but also to tone, expressiveness, and cultural identity. When idioms are replaced with neutral or literal expressions, the text may lose its emotional impact and stylistic richness. While adaptation is often the best solution, it inevitably involves a shift away from the original form and imagery.

Cultural Loss

Cultural loss occurs when elements tied to the source culture—such as traditions, social norms, humor, or historical references—cannot be fully understood or transferred into the target culture. This type of loss is especially common in literary and media translations, where meaning is deeply embedded in cultural context.

For example, humor based on wordplay, social behavior, or cultural stereotypes often becomes untranslatable. A joke that is effective in the source language may lose its impact entirely in translation because the target audience lacks the necessary background knowledge. Similarly, references to local customs or institutions may not have equivalents in the target culture. To address cultural loss, translators may use strategies such as adaptation or cultural substitution. However, these strategies often involve replacing the original cultural element with one that is more familiar to the target audience, which can alter the authenticity of the text. In some cases, explanatory notes are used, but these may interrupt the reading flow.

Conclusion



This study has examined the problem of meaning loss in the translation process by analyzing its major types, including lexical and semantic loss, idiomatic loss, and cultural loss. The findings confirm that meaning loss is an inevitable phenomenon due to structural differences between languages, as well as variations in cultural and pragmatic contexts. That lexical gaps reduce semantic precision, idiomatic expressions lose their figurative and stylistic value, and cultural elements often become inaccessible or distorted in translation. These challenges demonstrate that translation is not a simple act of replacing words, but a complex process of interpreting and reconstructing meaning across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

At the same time, the study highlights that meaning loss can be minimized through the use of appropriate translation strategies such as paraphrasing, adaptation, compensation, and explicitation. The effectiveness of these strategies largely depends on the translator's linguistic competence, cultural awareness, and ability to make informed decisions based on context and purpose.

The research emphasizes the active role of the translator as a mediator between cultures. Rather than striving for absolute equivalence, translators should focus on achieving functional and communicative equivalence that preserves the intended message and effect of the original text. While complete preservation of meaning is rarely possible, a careful and strategic approach to translation can significantly reduce meaning loss. Future research may further explore the role of modern technologies, including machine translation and artificial intelligence, in addressing this issue and improving translation quality.

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