LEXICAL PROBLEMS IN TRANSLATION: A CONTEXTUAL AND FUNCTIONAL APPROACH TO EQUIVALENCE

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Abstract

This article examines lexical problems in translation with a focus on partial equivalence, polysemy, and cultural differences between English and Uzbek. The study is based on a contextual and functional approach to equivalence and aims to identify systematic lexical difficulties and propose practical strategies for their resolution. The novelty of the research lies in the classification of lexical problems based on contextual dependency and functional relevance. The findings demonstrate that lexical equivalence is not absolute but context-dependent and requires flexible translation strategies.

Keywords: lexical equivalence, translation theory, polysemy, dynamic

equivalence, contextual meaning, lexical transformation

Introduction

Translation constitutes a complex linguistic and cultural process involving semantic transfer from a source language (SL) into a target language (TL) [1]. One of the central challenges in translation is lexical equivalence, which arises due to differences in semantic structure, cultural specificity, and contextual usage of words. Although equivalence has been widely studied in translation theory by scholars such as Eugene Nida, Roman Jakobson, and Werner Koller, the issue of lexical correspondence between English and Uzbek remains insufficiently systematized. Existing studies primarily focus on general equivalence, while the contextual-functional classification of lexical problems in English-Uzbek translation has not been fully developed.

The aim of this study is to analyze lexical problems in translation and to develop a contextual-functional classification of partial equivalence.

Methods

The study employs a contextual-functional analytical model, combining semantic analysis, contrastive linguistics, and example-based evaluation. Lexical items were selected based on frequency and contextual variability, and analyzed through comparative English-Uzbek translation patterns. A contextual analysis is applied to polysemous and ambiguous words in order to determine how meaning is shaped by linguistic and situational context. In addition, the study incorporates a theoretical review of key translation scholars, including Eugene Nida, Roman Jakobson, and Werner Koller, whose frameworks provide a foundation for understanding lexical equivalence. Overall, the research adopts a functional and context-oriented approach to examining lexical equivalence in translation.

Results

The analysis revealed several significant lexical problems encountered in the process of translation between English and Uzbek. These issues primarily arise from differences in semantic structure, cultural specificity, and contextual usage of lexical units in the two languages [11].The findings demonstrate that such problems are systematic rather than incidental, and they reflect deeper linguistic and conceptual divergences. The major categories of lexical difficulties identified in this study are presented and discussed below.

According to G. Datta , equivalence in translation refers to elements that are similar in their purpose and features, and it includes various types such as linguistic, syntactic, and cultural equivalence[8]. James Dickins et al. propose that equivalence theories in translation can be divided into **descriptive** and **prescriptive** types. Descriptive equivalence examines how elements of the source **t**ext (ST) and target text (TT) correspond in actual translation practice, particularly in terms of translation quality. In contrast, prescriptive equivalence focuses on how a source-language (SL) expression should ideally be translated into the target language (TL), often guided by established rules or pedagogical norms [9].This approach is commonly reflected in methods that recommend specific translation strategies for different text types .Within this broad framework, one of the key lexical challenges is **partial equivalence**, which arises when a word in the source language corresponds only partially to a word in the target language, leading to difficulties in achieving full semantic and functional correspondence.There are three main types of partial equivalence:

Many words are **polysemous**, meaning they have multiple meanings. Polysemy plays a crucial role in translation, as the meaning of a word is largely determined by its

context. Therefore, translators must carefully select synonyms by considering semantic nuances, stylistic differences, and collocational patterns. For instance, verbs such as *to say* and *to tell* are similar but differ in usage, while *to swim, to sail*, and *to float* show how languages distinguish actions differently. The English verb *run* demonstrates high polysemy : *run a company* → boshqarmoq, run fast → yugurmoq, run a program → ishga tushirmoq. This illustrates that lexical equivalence depends on functional context rather than dictionary meaning.This reflects the idea that each language represents reality in its own way, meaning that translation equivalence does not imply complete identity of meaning. Additionally, challenges arise from pseudo-international words and differences in word combinations,[7] such as *strong tea*, which cannot be translated literally . These factors highlight the complexity of achieving accurate and natural translation [1] . For example, the English word *"cover"* can be translated into Uzbek as *yopmoq, to'shamoq, yashirmoq, yoritmoq.* Only one of these meanings is correct depending on the context. Therefore, translators must rely on contextual analysis rather than dictionary definitions alone .

Another type involves **partial overlap** of meanings. For instance, the English word *"ball"* can mean *koptok*, *bal* (dance event). In Uzbek, these meanings are expressed with completely different words, which creates ambiguity during translation. Languages categorize reality differently. For instance, English distinguishes between *hand and arm,* whereas Uzbek employs a single term *qo'l* to cover both concepts, reflecting semantic generalization. Conversely, Uzbek differentiates kinship terms such as *amma* (father's sister) and *xola* (mother's sister), while English uses the more general term *aunt*, demonstrating semantic compression. Such differences reflect cultural and linguistic diversity and create difficulties in achieving precise translation .

In translation one of the central challenges is **non-equivalent vocabulary**, which includes culture-specific items (realia), proper names, and institutional terms. Such

lexical units often lack direct equivalents due to cultural and conceptual differences between languages. For example, English words like *muffin*, *lobby*, and *drugstore*, or Uzbek terms such as *tandir*, *somsa*, and *uloq*, reflect culturally bound concepts that require strategies like borrowing, adaptation, or explicitation in translation. Another related issue is **lexical ambiguity**, as seen in the sentence "*They both married their cousins*,"which cannot be directly translated into Uzbek without additional context, since the verb *married* requires gender specification (*uylanmoq vs. turmushga chiqmoq*), and *cousins* does not indicate gender or familial line. Such cases illustrate how lexical gaps and semantic indeterminacy create significant difficulties in achieving accurate and contextually appropriate translation.

To overcome lexical difficulties in translation, translators employ lexical transformations, which involve the contextual substitution of words. This process is based on several key principles, including the consideration of synonymic differences, understanding the combinability of words, and adapting expressions to the norms of the target language. Furthermore, different languages tend to emphasize different features of the same object, and words may possess either broad or narrow meanings, which must be taken into account during translation. In addition, certain verbs combine both action and manner (for example, "whistled out"), requiring appropriate contextual rendering. Therefore, lexical transformations play a crucial role in ensuring that translation remains natural and meaningful.

Eugene Nida introduced two principal types of equivalence in translation theory.Formal equivalence, which emphasizes structural accuracy, and dynamic equivalence, which prioritizes meaning and the response of the target audience [2]. Dynamic equivalence is particularly significant in addressing lexical problems. While Eugene Nida emphasizes dynamic equivalence as a way to achieve naturalness in translation, Werner Koller provides a more detailed five distinct classification of

equivalence types; denotative, connotative, textual-normative, pragmatic, and aesthetic, each of which reflects different dimensions of meaning and translation practice [3]. However, neither approach fully addresses context-dependent lexical ambiguity, which this study attempts to systematize. Roman Jakobson, however, argues that complete equivalence is unattainable, asserting that translation inevitably involves interpretation. He categorizes translation into three types: intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic, thereby highlighting the unavoidable nature of lexical differences across languages [4]. Further contributing to equivalence theory, Pym distinguishes between natural equivalence and directional equivalence, demonstrating that translation is not always reversible and is largely dependent on direction and purpose[5]. Together, these perspectives underline the complexity of equivalence and its crucial role in managing lexical challenges in translation.

Conclusion

Lexical problems are among the most significant challenges in translation. The novelty of this study lies in the development of a contextual-functional classification model of lexical problems, which categorizes lexical difficulties into context-dependent polysemy, partial semantic overlap, non-equivalent culturally-bound lexical units. The concept of equivalence plays a crucial role in addressing these problems, but context is more important than dictionary meaning, lexical transformations are essential tools, dynamic equivalence provides the most effective approach.Ultimately, successful translation requires not only linguistic knowledge but also cultural awareness and analytical skills. A contextual-functional approach provides a more effective framework for solving lexical problems in translation between English and Uzbek.

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