

HARMONY OF FORM AND MEANING IN TRANSLATION STUDIES: A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

Ataboeva Noila Masharipovna

*Lecturer at the Department of Western Languages and Literature, Ma'mun University
noinozimuha@mail.ru Orcid:0009-0005-6248-4789*

Abstract: This article provides a linguistic analysis of one of the most pressing issues in translation studies - the harmony of form and meaning. The study examines the problem of preserving semantic content and adapting formal means in the translation process based on various theoretical approaches. It explores the relationships between form and meaning at lexical, grammatical, syntactic, and pragmatic levels, and analyzes their specific features through examples of literary, scientific, and oral translation.

Keywords: translation studies, form, meaning, harmony, equivalence, linguistic analysis, pragmatics.

Introduction. Translation is a complex linguistic activity that has played a crucial role in the development of human culture and science. In every translation process, the translator functions as an intermediary between two language systems, two cultures, and two communicative environments. One of the most significant challenges in this process is maintaining an appropriate balance between meaning and form. Since linguistic units differ in both semantic content and formal expression across languages, achieving complete formal equivalence is almost impossible. Therefore, modern translation studies prioritize communicative meaning over formal correspondence. Nevertheless, this does not imply a complete rejection of form. Particularly in literary translation, form carries aesthetic value and remains significant alongside meaning.

Materials and methods. Translation is a multifaceted linguistic process that facilitates communication between different languages and cultures. At the core of any translation activity lies the issue of harmony between form and meaning. The formal structure and semantic content of linguistic units in one language cannot be identically reproduced in another. Consequently, contemporary translation studies assess translation quality not through formal equivalence, but through semantic, functional, and pragmatic adequacy. Nonetheless, form cannot be entirely disregarded, especially in literary translation where it plays an essential aesthetic role.

From a linguistic standpoint, meaning refers to the semantic content expressed by linguistic units, whereas form encompasses the phonetic, lexical, grammatical, and syntactic means used to convey that meaning. Although form and meaning are closely interconnected, they are not always preserved in equal proportion during translation. A form that is specific to one language may be absent in another or may require different linguistic resources. For this reason, translators often strive for functional rather than formal equivalence.

Various theoretical approaches address the relationship between form and meaning in translation studies. J. Catford's theory of linguistic equivalence conceptualizes translation as correspondence between language systems. In contrast, E. Nida's theory of dynamic equivalence emphasizes the effect of translation on the target audience. Functionalist approaches and Skopos theory evaluate translation based on its communicative purpose, considering meaning and function as primary criteria while assigning a secondary role to form.

At the lexical level, the relationship between form and meaning is particularly significant. Translation at this level frequently involves strategies such as synonym selection, generalization, specification, or explicitation. A lexical item specific to one language may not have a direct equivalent in another. For instance, the English concept “privacy” may be translated into Uzbek as “personal life”, “solitude”, or “confidentiality” depending on context. In such cases, the form changes while the core meaning is preserved.

Grammatical and syntactic transformations also play a crucial role in translation. At the grammatical level, changes in tense, voice, number, or case frequently occur. For example, passive constructions in English are often rendered in the active voice in Uzbek. At the syntactic level, translators may apply transformations such as sentence division, combination, or reordering to ensure clarity and naturalness in the target language.

Phraseological units and figurative expressions present some of the most challenging issues in translation. Preserving their form is often impossible. For example, the English idiom “to kick the bucket” cannot be translated literally and is instead rendered as “to die”, whereby form is sacrificed in favor of meaning preservation.

Neural Machine Translation (NMT), introduced widely after 2016, is based on artificial intelligence and deep learning technologies and has significantly reduced translation errors. However, despite technological advances, machine translation systems cannot fully replace human cognition. Elements such as cultural context, wordplay, idiomatic expressions, and emotional nuance require human interpretative competence.

Pragmatic and cultural factors must also be preserved to avoid loss of meaning. Pragmatic meaning—including speaker intention, contextual factors, and audience orientation—plays a vital role in translation. Cultural realia are often translated through explanation, adaptation, or the use of functional equivalents, with priority given to meaning and comprehensibility rather than formal correspondence.

The balance between form and meaning varies according to translation type. In literary translation, maintaining aesthetic effect alongside semantic accuracy is essential. In scientific and technical translation, meaning is absolutely dominant and form is standardized. In oral translation, time constraints necessitate simplification of form to ensure rapid and effective transmission of meaning.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the relationship between form and meaning in translation is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. Linguistic analysis demonstrates that form is never an end in itself but serves as a means of conveying meaning. Although the balance between form and meaning differs across text types, the primary objective of translation remains communicative effectiveness. The harmony between form and meaning is one of the key criteria determining translation quality, and a translator’s professional competence is reflected in the ability to achieve an optimal balance between them.

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