

## LEXICAL SEMANTIC PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATION

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**Annotation.** This study examines the lexical-semantic challenges encountered in the translation process, focusing on the complex issues that arise when transferring meaning across languages with different semantic fields and cultural backgrounds. The research analyzes various types of lexical-semantic problems including polysemy, homonymy, synonymy, idioms, metaphors, and culture-specific concepts. By investigating both theoretical frameworks and practical translation strategies, this study identifies effective approaches to resolving lexical ambiguities and preserving semantic equivalence between source and target texts.

**Аннотация.** В данном исследовании рассматриваются лексико-семантические проблемы, возникающие в процессе перевода, с акцентом на сложные вопросы, возникающие при передаче значения между языками с разными семантическими полями и культурным фоном. В исследовании анализируются различные типы лексико-семантических проблем, включая полисемию, омонимию, синонимию, идиомы, метафоры и культурно-специфические концепты. Исследуя как теоретические основы, так и практические стратегии перевода, это исследование определяет эффективные подходы к разрешению лексических неоднозначностей и сохранению семантической эквивалентности между исходным и целевым текстами.

**Keywords:** Translation studies, lexical semantics, polysemy, cultural equivalence, semantic fields, translation strategies, sense disambiguation, connotative meaning, lexical gaps, idioms, metaphor translation, cross-cultural communication.

**Ключевые слова:** Переводоведение, лексическая семантика, полисемия, культурная эквивалентность, семантические поля, стратегии перевода, смысловая дезамбигуация, коннотативное значение, лексические лакуны, идиомы, перевод метафор, межкультурная коммуникация.

Translation as a form of interlingual communication inevitably encounters numerous challenges, particularly in the domain of lexical semantics. The lexical-semantic level of language represents one of the most complex aspects of translation work, as it involves transferring not only the denotative meanings of words but also their connotations, cultural associations, and contextual nuances. As Nida observed, "Words are fundamentally symbols for features of the culture," making the translation of lexical items an exercise in cross-cultural communication rather than simple linguistic substitution. The significance of studying lexical-semantic problems in translation lies in their pervasiveness and impact on translation quality. Unlike grammatical structures, which often follow systematic patterns, lexical semantics involves more unpredictable challenges that require creative solutions. Words rarely have exact equivalents across languages; instead, they exist within language-specific semantic networks that reflect different conceptualizations of reality. These differences create what Dagut

termed "translation voids" or what Vinay and Darbelnet identified as "lacunae"—instances where direct lexical correspondence between languages is impossible [1;76].

This study aims to systematically analyze the major lexical-semantic problems encountered in translation, examining their theoretical underpinnings and the practical strategies translators employ to overcome them. By understanding these challenges and their potential solutions, translators can enhance their ability to navigate the complex semantic landscapes that separate languages, ultimately producing translations that effectively communicate the meaning of source texts while respecting the lexical and cultural norms of target languages.

Among the foundational lexical-semantic problems in translation is polysemy—the phenomenon where a single word has multiple related meanings. Polysemous words create significant translation challenges because the translator must select the appropriate sense from several possibilities, based on context, collocations, and subject matter. The English word "run," for example, has dozens of distinct meanings (run a business, run a marathon, run a program, etc.), each requiring a different equivalent in most target languages [2;13].

Context plays a crucial role in resolving polysemy during translation. The linguistic environment surrounding a polysemous word typically provides clues that help narrow down its intended meaning. However, contextual clues may sometimes be insufficient, particularly in texts with limited context or ambiguous usage. In such cases, translators must consider broader textual and extratextual factors, including the subject matter, author's style, and intended audience.

Translation strategies for handling polysemy include specification (selecting the most contextually appropriate equivalent), compensation (adding information to clarify meaning), and occasionally deliberate ambiguity maintenance (when the source text intentionally exploits multiple meanings). The choice among these strategies depends on the purpose of the translation, the nature of the polysemy, and the resources available in the target language.

Homonymy presents another significant lexical-semantic challenge in translation. Unlike polysemy, which involves related meanings of a single word, homonymy refers to different words that share the same form but have unrelated meanings. The English words "bank" (financial institution) and "bank" (riverside) exemplify this phenomenon. While context usually helps translators distinguish between homonyms, difficulties arise in puns, wordplay, and deliberately ambiguous texts that exploit homonymic relationships.

The translation of homonymic wordplay poses particular challenges, as the humorous or rhetorical effect often depends on the formal identity of words with different meanings—a relationship that rarely exists between the same concepts in different languages. When encountering wordplay based on homonymy, translators must decide whether to prioritize meaning or effect, often resorting to creative solutions that preserve the rhetorical function rather than the exact lexical content.

Synonymy—the existence of multiple words with similar meanings—presents translation problems in both directions. When translating from a language rich in synonyms to one with fewer lexical distinctions, translators face the challenge of lexical compression, potentially losing stylistic nuances. Conversely, translation into a language with more synonymic diversity requires making lexical choices not explicitly indicated in the source text [3;56].

The challenge of synonymy becomes particularly evident in literary translation, where subtle connotative differences between near-synonyms may carry significant stylistic and thematic

implications. A novelist's deliberate choice between "walk," "stroll," "amble," and "saunter" reflects nuances that the translator must attempt to preserve, even when the target language lacks equivalent lexical variety.

Translation strategies for handling synonymy include careful analysis of connotative dimensions, attention to register and stylistic level, and consideration of collocation patterns. In some cases, compensation techniques may be necessary, using other linguistic devices to convey stylistic features that cannot be directly replicated through target language synonyms.

Idioms and fixed expressions represent some of the most challenging lexical-semantic problems in translation. These expressions convey meanings that cannot be deduced from their individual components, creating significant obstacles for translators. The English idiom "kick the bucket" (to die) cannot be translated literally into most languages without losing its idiomatic meaning. Baker identifies several challenges in translating idioms: recognizing that an expression is idiomatic; understanding its meaning in context; analyzing its components for potential literal interpretation alongside idiomatic usage; and finding an appropriate equivalent in the target language that preserves both meaning and stylistic effect.

Translation strategies for idioms include finding an equivalent idiom in the target language (ideally with similar meaning and form), finding an idiom with similar meaning but different form, paraphrasing the meaning, or occasionally omitting the idiom when no suitable equivalent exists and the expression is not crucial to the text. The choice among these strategies depends on the idiom's function, the importance of its imagery, and the existence of similar metaphorical expressions in the target language.

Metaphors and figurative language pose complex lexical-semantic problems that extend beyond word-level equivalence. Metaphors operate by mapping concepts from one domain to another, creating meaning through association rather than direct reference. These conceptual mappings are often culturally specific, making them particularly challenging in cross-cultural translation. Newmark distinguishes between dead metaphors (conventional expressions whose figurative origin is barely recognized), stock metaphors (established metaphors in a language), adapted metaphors (standard metaphors with some modification), and original metaphors (created by the source text author). Each type presents different translation challenges and requires different approaches.

Translation strategies for metaphors include preserving the original metaphorical image when it is comprehensible in the target culture, replacing the source language image with a standard target language image, converting metaphor to simile (potentially with explanation), preserving metaphor with added explanation, or converting to plain sense when the metaphorical image would be inappropriate or confusing in the target language. Cultural concepts constitute a fundamental lexical-semantic challenge in translation, as each language encodes culturally specific notions that may have no direct equivalent in other cultures. These "culture-bound terms" or "culturemes" include references to social customs, traditional practices, religious concepts, food items, and historical references that are deeply embedded in the source culture but potentially meaningless to target readers.

Examples of culture-bound terms include the Japanese "wabi-sabi" (an aesthetic valuing imperfection and impermanence), the German "Waldeinsamkeit" (the feeling of solitude in the forest), or the Russian "toska" (a deep sense of spiritual anguish). Such terms encapsulate complex cultural concepts that resist simple translation into languages without similar cultural frameworks [3;47].

These differences in semantic field organization mean that translations often require adjusting lexical specificity, either generalizing (moving from specific to general terms) or particularizing (moving from general to specific). The English term "cousin" might require specification of gender and lineage side when translated into languages that lexically distinguish between maternal and paternal cousins. Understanding semantic field differences helps translators anticipate areas where direct lexical correspondence is impossible, allowing for more systematic approaches to compensating for these structural asymmetries between languages. Connotative meaning represents another significant lexical-semantic challenge in translation. Beyond their denotative meaning (conceptual reference), words carry connotative associations that reflect emotional, stylistic, social, and evaluative dimensions. These associations are often culturally determined and may differ substantially across languages, even when denotative meanings correspond. For example, animal terms used metaphorically to describe human behavior carry different connotations across cultures: "fox" suggests cleverness in many Western cultures but may have different associations elsewhere. Similarly, color terms carry culture-specific symbolic meanings that may create unintended associations when

Translation strategies in specialized domains often prioritize conceptual accuracy over linguistic naturalness, sometimes resulting in terminological borrowing, standardized equivalents, or detailed explanatory approaches. In these contexts, translators must be particularly aware of the danger of "false friends"—terms that appear similar across languages but have different technical meanings.

The strategies discussed in this study—including specification, adaptation, compensation, borrowing, and explanation—form part of the translator's methodological toolkit for addressing lexical-semantic problems. The appropriate selection and application of these strategies depend on multiple factors, including text type, translation purpose, audience expectations, and the specific nature of the lexical-semantic challenge. While perfect equivalence at the lexical-semantic level remains theoretically impossible due to the unique historical development and cultural embeddedness of each language's lexicon, skilled translators can navigate these challenges to create target texts that effectively communicate source meanings while respecting target language norms and reader expectations. The art of translation lies precisely in this ability to bridge lexical-semantic gaps creatively while maintaining fidelity to both source content and target expression [5;72].

Understanding lexical-semantic problems and their potential solutions enhances not only translation practice but also our appreciation of linguistic diversity and the complex relationship between language, thought, and culture. Each translation challenge reveals something about how languages conceptualize reality differently, making translation not merely a linguistic exercise but a form of intercultural mediation that broadens our understanding of human communication.

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