

## **TRANSLATION AND LEXICAL–SEMANTIC PROBLEMS**

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### **Annotation**

This article explores the main lexical and semantic problems that arise in the process of translation. It discusses the complex relationship between language, meaning, and culture, focusing on issues such as polysemy, synonymy, idioms, and cultural connotations. The paper emphasizes that translation is not a simple word-for-word substitution but an act of interpreting meaning within a specific cultural and linguistic context. It also highlights strategies for achieving equivalence and overcoming challenges related to semantic ambiguity, idiomatic expressions, and cultural differences. Examples from English, Russian, and Uzbek are used to illustrate these issues.

**Keywords:** translation, lexicon, semantics, equivalence, polysemy, idioms, cultural context, linguistic meaning.

### **Аннотация**

В данной статье рассматриваются основные лексико-семантические проблемы, возникающие в процессе перевода. Особое внимание уделяется сложным взаимоотношениям между языком, значением и культурой, а также вопросам многозначности (полисемии), синонимии, идиоматики и культурных коннотаций. Подчеркивается, что перевод — это не простая замена слов из одного языка на слова другого, а акт интерпретации смысла в рамках определённого культурного и языкового контекста. Кроме того, в статье рассматриваются стратегии достижения эквивалентности и преодоления трудностей, связанных с семантической неоднозначностью, идиоматическими выражениями и культурными различиями. Для иллюстрации данных проблем приводятся примеры из английского, русского и узбекского языков.

**Ключевые слова:** перевод, лексика, семантика, эквивалентность, полисемия, идиомы, культурный контекст, языковое значение.

## INTRODUCTION

Translation is one of the oldest and most essential forms of human communication. It allows people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds to exchange knowledge, ideas, and emotions. Without translation, much of world literature, science, and diplomacy would remain inaccessible to other nations. However, translation is far more complex than the simple replacement of words between languages. It involves deep understanding, interpretation, and reconstruction of meaning.

Each language represents a unique worldview shaped by its speakers' history, culture, and environment. Therefore, it is often impossible to find a perfect one-to-one correspondence between words of different languages. Translators must go beyond the surface level of words and focus on lexical–semantic equivalence, which refers to how meaning is conveyed, not just how it is structured grammatically.

This article aims to analyze the main lexical and semantic problems encountered in translation, to explain their causes, and to suggest possible strategies for solving them. It will also discuss the cultural and contextual factors that influence the translation process.

Lexical problems in translation are among the most frequent and challenging aspects of linguistic transfer. They arise because no two languages have identical vocabularies, semantic structures, or word usage patterns. Each word in a language carries not only a denotative (basic) meaning but also connotations, stylistic value, and cultural associations that shape how it is used in context.

In translation, the difficulty lies in choosing words in the target language that preserve the **meaning, tone, and stylistic nuance** of the original. The main lexical problems include **polysemy, synonymy, false friends, and lexical gaps**.

Polysemy means that a single word may have several meanings depending on the situation in which it appears. Translators must analyze the semantic environment—the words that surround the polysemous term—to identify the intended meaning.

For example, in English, the word “*light*” can function as:

- **a noun:** *Turn on the light.* (refers to illumination)
- **an adjective:** *The bag is light.* (means “not heavy”)
- **a verb:** *Please light the candle.* (means “ignite”)

Translating “*light*” into Uzbek requires attention to context:

- *Turn on the light* → *Chiroqni yoqing.*

- *The bag is light* → *Sumka yengil.*
- *Light the candle* → *Shamni yoqing.*

Although the word form remains identical in English, three different Uzbek equivalents are required. This shows that polysemy is language-specific; words in one language often cover multiple concepts that are expressed separately in another.

Another common example is the Uzbek word *ko'ngil*. It may mean *heart*, *mood*, *feeling*, or *desire*, depending on context:

- *Ko'nglim to'ldi* – *I was touched* (emotionally moved).
- *Ko'ngli yo'q* – *She doesn't feel like it / She's not in the mood.*
- *Ko'nglini olish* – *To please someone / make someone happy.*

A literal translation of *ko'ngil* as *heart* would make no sense in many situations. Therefore, translators must interpret polysemous words contextually, not mechanically. In essence, polysemy requires interpretive flexibility—a translator must function like a semantic analyst, decoding the speaker's intention rather than translating the surface form.

Synonymy is another lexical issue that complicates translation. Synonyms are words that share similar meanings but differ in degree, tone, or usage. Choosing the wrong synonym can distort the original message or make the translation sound unnatural.

For instance, English offers several words meaning “to look”:

- *stare* (look fixedly and intensely),
- *glance* (look briefly),
- *gaze* (look steadily, often with admiration),
- *peek* (look secretly).

In Uzbek, these might all be translated as *qaramoq*, but each has a different emotional tone and intention. Therefore, the translator might need to add adverbial or contextual clues:

- *He glanced at her* → *U unga bir qarab qo'ydi.*
- *He gazed at her* → *U unga hayrat bilan tikildi.*

Similarly, in Russian:

- *взглянуть* (to take a look),
- *смотреть* (to watch),
- *пялиться* (to stare rudely).

A sensitive translator recognizes that synonymy is not equivalence. The translator must evaluate:

1. Stylistic register (formal, informal, poetic, technical).
2. Emotional tone (neutral, positive, negative).

3. Collocation patterns (what words commonly appear together).

For example:

- *child* → neutral (*bola* in Uzbek)
- *kid* → informal (*bolakay*)
- *infant* → formal or medical term (*go 'dak*)

Choosing the wrong synonym can alter tone or even social meaning. Translating *kid* as *go 'dak* would sound unnatural because *go 'dak* refers to a baby, not a school-aged child. Thus, word choice must align with the tone and context of the original text.

False friends are words that look similar in two languages but have different meanings. They can easily mislead inexperienced translators. These lexical traps occur particularly in languages that share historical roots or borrowings.

Examples:

- English *magazine* ≠ Russian *магазин* (shop).
- English *actual* ≠ Russian *актуальный* (relevant, not “real”).
- English *fabric* ≠ French *fabrique* (factory).

In Uzbek–English translation, similar issues arise with borrowed terms:

- *Dokon* (store) should not be confused with *document* just because they look alike.
- *Universitet* and *universe* share form but have unrelated meanings.

Translators overcome such problems through semantic awareness—understanding a word’s etymology, domain, and modern usage in each language. It’s not enough to recognize the word visually; its functional meaning in real communication must be verified. Sometimes, a language simply lacks a word that matches a concept from another language. These lexical gaps represent one of the toughest translation challenges. For example, Uzbek has the word *tushlik*, meaning the meal eaten around noon. English uses *lunch*, but *tushlik* may also imply cultural habits—homemade food, tea, and family context—that “lunch” does not. Similarly, in English, the word *privacy* has no exact equivalent in Uzbek. While *shaxsiy hayot* (personal life) or *yolg 'izlik* (solitude) are close, they do not capture the same psychological sense of “personal boundary.” In Russian, *меланхолия* refers to a deep, almost existential melancholy—a concept that English cannot express in one word. The closest equivalents (*sadness*, *longing*, *depression*) only partially cover its emotional range.

To handle lexical gaps, translators use:

1. **Paraphrasing** – explaining the concept in several words.
2. **Borrowing** – adopting the original term (common in modern Uzbek, e.g., *selfie*, *podcast*).

3. **Cultural substitution** – replacing it with a culturally similar term.

These techniques allow translators to maintain meaning even when direct equivalence does not exist. Another lexical aspect often overlooked is **register**—the level of formality and stylistic variation within vocabulary. Words can have similar meanings but differ greatly in social appropriateness.

For example:

- *deceased* (formal), *dead* (neutral), *gone* (euphemistic), *kicked the bucket* (slang).

If translating a news article, *deceased* would be appropriate; in everyday conversation, *dead* fits better. Translating *kicked the bucket* literally into Uzbek (*chet el chelakni tepdi*) would be nonsensical—it is an idiomatic euphemism for “died.”

A skilled translator must identify the intended register of the original text and mirror it accurately in the target language. This preserves not just information, but also voice, tone, and social appropriateness.

Semantic problems often go beyond literal meaning. Words carry connotations—emotional and cultural associations that differ across societies. For example, the English word *home* implies warmth, comfort, and family, while the Uzbek equivalent *uy* simply denotes a physical dwelling. Translating *home* as *uy* conveys denotation but misses the emotional undertone. Cultural differences can make such translations even more complex. The term *Thanksgiving* represents a deeply American tradition with historical and cultural symbolism. Rendering it as *minnatdorchilik kuni* (day of gratitude) only describes the event superficially without transmitting its cultural depth. Hence, translators must aim for cultural equivalence—expressing the same emotional and cultural effect rather than literal words. Ambiguity occurs when a word or phrase has more than one interpretation. Context usually resolves this, but sometimes both meanings are possible, and the translator must decide which is intended.

For example: *He saw her duck*

This sentence could mean either:

He saw the woman’s bird (her duck).

He saw the woman lower her head.

Only by understanding the broader discourse can the translator choose the correct meaning. Therefore, translation involves not only linguistic but also cognitive analysis of context. Translation is never only a linguistic activity — it is primarily a cultural act. Every language is deeply rooted in the culture, traditions, beliefs, and worldview of the community that speaks it. Thus, when translators move meaning from one language to another, they are also transferring cultural identity, values, and social norms. To achieve a successful translation, one must consider not only what the words

*mean* but also how, why, and when they are used in real communication. This is where cultural and pragmatic aspects come into play.

Language reflects the culture and mentality of its speakers. Words often encode cultural experiences, traditions, or beliefs that may not exist in another culture.

For instance, in Uzbek culture, the phrase “*Nonni o‘pib qo‘yish*” (kissing the bread) expresses respect for food and sustenance. Translating it literally into English (*to kiss the bread*) would confuse readers unfamiliar with Uzbek traditions. The translator must either explain it (e.g., *as a gesture of respect for food*) or find a culturally similar expression. Similarly, English expressions like “*break the ice*” or “*spill the beans*” are idioms rooted in specific cultural habits — the first means to start social interaction; the second, to reveal a secret. These cannot be translated word-for-word into Uzbek or Russian without explanation or replacement. Culture also influences how people perceive time, space, politeness, and relationships. For example:

- In Uzbek, greetings such as “*Assalomu alaykum*” or “*Yaxshimisiz?*” are used widely and respectfully, even with strangers.
- In English, saying “*Hi*” or “*Hello*” to strangers is common, but asking “*How are you?*” is often a routine politeness rather than a real inquiry.
- In Russian, “*Здравствуйте*” is formal and shows respect, while “*Привет*” is informal.

If a translator ignores these cultural registers of politeness, the translation might sound rude or overly distant. Therefore, understanding cultural norms ensures sociolinguistic appropriateness — using language that fits the situation and relationships between speakers. Pragmatics is the study of how meaning is shaped by context, intention, and situation. While semantics focuses on what words *mean*, pragmatics focuses on what speakers *intend to communicate*.

In translation, pragmatics helps the translator answer questions like:

- Who is speaking to whom?
- What is their social relationship?
- What is the purpose of the utterance — to inform, persuade, joke, criticize, or comfort?

For example:

English: “*Could you open the window?*”

- Uzbek literal translation: “*Siz derazani ochishingiz mumkinmi?*”

Grammatically, both are requests. However, in Uzbek culture, politeness is often expressed through intonation and word choice, not just modal verbs. A more natural rendering might be:

→ “*Derazani ochib qo ‘ysangiz bo ‘ladimi?*”

Here, the suffix *-ib qo ‘ysangiz* softens the request, aligning with Uzbek politeness conventions. Similarly, in Russian, “*Вы не могли бы закрыть окно?*” (“Could you close the window?”) is more polite than “*Закройте окно.*”

These small pragmatic nuances determine whether a translation feels *natural and respectful* or *awkward and impolite*.

Every culture has its own names, historical events, symbols, holidays, and traditions that may be unknown to other societies. Translating them requires cultural sensitivity and creativity.

For example:

- English: *Thanksgiving* → not just “a day of giving thanks” but a cultural celebration with turkey, family gatherings, and gratitude. Uzbek translators may explain it as “*Amerikaliklarning minnatdorchilik bayrami*” to preserve its cultural context.

- Uzbek: *Navruz* → more than “Spring Festival.” It is a celebration of renewal, friendship, and nature, with deep historical and spiritual meaning. Translating it into English as “*Persian New Year*” captures some but not all cultural elements.

Similarly, Russian has culturally loaded words such as *dacha* (a countryside house used in summer) or *самовар* (a traditional tea-maker). These items are so culture-bound that translators must decide whether to:

1. Keep the original word (using transliteration),
2. Explain it in a footnote or parentheses, or
3. Find a similar concept in the target culture.

For example:

- *He went to his dacha for the weekend* → *U dam olish kunlari dala hovlisiga bordi.*

Here, *dala hovlisi* conveys the same function though not the exact cultural background. The key principle is functional equivalence — preserving how the concept works in its culture, not necessarily its exact name.

Pragmatic differences also appear in how people address each other.

- English: relatively neutral (*you* is used for everyone).
- Uzbek: distinguishes between *sen* (informal, close relationships) and *siz* (formal, polite).
- Russian: *ты* (informal) vs. *вы* (formal).

Translators must reflect these differences accurately to maintain social tone. For example, in a dialogue between a teacher and a student:

- English: “*Can you help me, please?*”
- Uzbek: “*Yordam bera olasizmi, iltimos?*” (formal)

Translating it as “*Yordam bera olasanmi?*” would be impolite, as it uses the informal pronoun *sen*.

Thus, address forms indicate respect, familiarity, and power relations, all of which must be carefully preserved in translation to avoid social misinterpretation. In modern translation practice, especially in media, marketing, and subtitling, translators often engage in localization—adapting content to make it sound natural for the target audience.

For instance, an English advertisement saying:

- “*Enjoy your coffee break with Starbucks!*”

might be localized in Uzbek as:

- “*Starbucks bilan bir finjon dam oling!*”

Here, *dam oling* (take a rest) matches Uzbek cultural preferences for tea or coffee moments as relaxation, not as “breaks” in a strict work context.

Localization ensures that translation feels *familiar* rather than *foreign*. However, it requires balancing cultural adaptation with fidelity to the original message.

Finally, the translator plays the role of a cultural mediator — someone who bridges two worlds, not just two languages. A translator must understand the values, humor, customs, politeness rules, and emotional expressions of both cultures. As Russian scholar A. V. Fedorov noted, “Translation is not only linguistic substitution but a cultural interpretation.” A translator who understands both English and Uzbek societies, for instance, knows that:

- Direct criticism is common and accepted in English-speaking cultures but might sound harsh or disrespectful in Uzbek contexts.
- Expressions of emotion are often more restrained in English, while Uzbek culture values warmth and expressiveness.

Therefore, a skilled translator adapts tone and emotion accordingly, ensuring that the translated text feels authentic and appropriate to its readers.

### **Conclusion**

Translation is a bridge between languages and cultures, but it is also a delicate art that requires both linguistic precision and cultural empathy. Lexical–semantic problems such as polysemy, synonymy, idioms, and connotations make translation intellectually challenging yet profoundly rewarding. A successful translator must be not only

bilingual but also bicultural, capable of understanding the hidden meanings, emotions, and intentions embedded within language. By combining linguistic knowledge with cultural awareness, translators can create works that preserve the integrity of the original while making them accessible and meaningful to new audiences. Ultimately, translation is not about transferring words — it is about transferring meaning, emotion, and human experience across linguistic boundaries.

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