

LEXICAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN TRANSLATION THEORY:
THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND PRACTICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract: This article examines the theoretical foundations and practical applications of lexical transformations in translation studies. It analyses the semantic mechanisms behind concretization, generalization, contextual substitution, antonymic translation, and compensation, with a particular focus on their role in preserving equivalence and ensuring naturalness in translated texts. Using examples from English and Uzbek, the article highlights how these transformations contribute to accuracy, clarity, and stylistic adequacy in translation practice.

Keywords: lexical transformations, translation, equivalence, compensation, semantics, context.

Introduction

Translation theory occupies a central place in linguistics and intercultural communication, as it focuses on conveying the meaning of a source text accurately, naturally, and effectively. Due to structural, semantic, and cultural differences between languages, literal translation is often insufficient or even misleading. For this reason, translators must rely on various lexical transformations that allow them to maintain semantic equivalence while adapting the text to the norms of the target language.

Lexical transformations are strategies that involve modifying the meaning, form, or contextual function of lexical units in order to produce a more accurate and natural translation. As noted by Komissarov, Newmark, Baker, Vinay & Darbelnet, lexical transformations are essential tools in bridging linguistic gaps and ensuring that the translated text sounds authentic to its readers.

The Essence of Lexical Transformations

Lexical transformations play a crucial role in resolving semantic discrepancies between languages. They are applied whenever a direct lexical equivalent is unavailable,

inadequate, or stylistically inappropriate. Their primary function is to secure equivalence — not only at the word level, but also in terms of style, communicative intent, and cultural meaning.

Below are the major lexical transformations widely recognized in translation theory.

Concretization

Concretization involves replacing a general term in the source language with a more specific term in the target language. This transformation is often used when the target language prefers greater semantic precision.

Example:

He went out. → U ko‘chaga chiqib ketdi.

vehicle → mashina

In Uzbek, specification is frequently necessary to reflect natural usage patterns.

Generalization

Generalization is the opposite of concretization: it replaces a specific term with a more general one. This strategy is applied when the target language does not lexicalize distinctions as precisely as the source language.

Example:

piano → musiqa asbobi

He bought a cottage. → U uy oldi.

English often has more fine-grained lexical distinctions than Uzbek, making generalization an effective tool.

Contextual Substitution

Contextual substitution occurs when a word’s literal meaning does not adequately convey its contextual meaning in the target language. The translator therefore chooses a lexeme that better fits the situational context.

Example:

He is a cold person. → U beparvo, qo‘pol odam.

Although cold literally means “sovuqqon”, the contextual meaning in English refers to emotional distance.

Antonymic Translation

Antonymic translation conveys meaning through the opposite lexical item combined with negation or implied contrast. It is especially effective for stylistic intensification.

Example:

He is not stupid. → U aqlli.

It is not uncommon. → Bu juda keng tarqalgan.

This transformation often produces a more natural and expressive translation.

Compensation

Compensation involves restoring a semantic or stylistic effect that cannot be reproduced in the same place or form in the target language. It is frequently used in poetic, idiomatic, and culturally loaded texts. Compensation enables translators to recreate rhythm, humor, or emotional nuance even when a literal equivalent is impossible.

Practical Analysis

Analyzing transformation examples from authentic English texts illustrates how essential these strategies are in real translation practice.

Example 1: contextual substitution

“But the name had always raised a picture of a region as heavy and unromantic as the pudding of the same name.”

Literal translation would sound unnatural in Uzbek.

A more accurate translation using contextual substitution is:

“Bu nom esa har doim jozibasi kam, zerikarli bir hududni eslatardi.”

The metaphor heavy and unromantic is conveyed through natural Uzbek evaluative adjectives.

Example 2: antonymic translation

He is not young anymore.

More natural rendering:

“He is already old.”

This reflects the real communicative intent of the original statement.

Conclusion

Lexical transformations form an integral part of the translation process. Their proper implementation ensures:

precise semantic transfer stylistic naturalness cultural adaptability compensation for unavoidable meaning shifts overall improvement in translation quality

A translator who masters lexical transformations can skillfully utilize the lexical resources of both languages, producing translations that remain faithful to the original while sounding fully natural and coherent in the target language.

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