

INTERCULTURAL PRAGMATICS IN LITERARY TRANSLATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF UZBEK AND ENGLISH NARRATIVE PROSE

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Abstract

The act of literary translation extends far beyond linguistic substitution—it is an intercultural negotiation that requires deep sensitivity to pragmatic meaning. This study examines the transfer of pragmatic functions in the translation of narrative prose from Uzbek to English and vice versa, focusing on how cultural norms, politeness strategies, and speech acts are preserved, adapted, or transformed. Drawing on intercultural pragmatics, speech act theory, and narratology, we compare selected passages from Abdulla Qodiriy's *O'tkan Kunlar* and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, alongside their published translations. A mixed-method approach—combining pragmatic annotation, qualitative interviews with translators, and reader reception surveys—was employed. Results indicate that while basic narrative structure is retained, subtle pragmatic cues (such as honorifics, indirectness, and culturally coded compliments) often shift dramatically in translation. These shifts can alter character portrayal, interpersonal dynamics, and even thematic emphasis. We propose a model for pragmatic equivalence in literary translation, integrating context-sensitive adaptation with narrative voice preservation. This research contributes to translation theory by highlighting the need for translators to operate as cultural anthropologists as much as linguistic mediators.

Introduction

Intercultural pragmatics explores how language use is shaped by cultural norms, values, and expectations. In literary translation, this dimension becomes critical because fiction operates not only through what is said, but how it is said.

Uzbek narrative prose—rooted in traditions of oral storytelling, poetic idioms, and Islamic politeness norms—often employs honorifics, layered indirectness, and kinship terms that carry rich interpersonal meaning. For example, a simple greeting like “Assalomu alaykum” in *O'tkan Kunlar* is not just a salutation but an enactment of social hierarchy, respect, and mutual acknowledgment. English prose, especially from

the Regency era as in Jane Austen's works, embeds pragmatic meaning in forms of address, degrees of directness, and nuanced politeness strategies reflective of British class consciousness. "Mr. Darcy" versus "Darcy" is not merely a nominal shift but a recalibration of social distance. Twenty perspectives expanding this section: Uzbek uses formulaic politeness as narrative realism. English Regency speech reflects strict social stratification. Pragmatic cues guide reader interpretation of character relationships. Cultural greetings encode power relations. Kinship terms in Uzbek extend to non-family for social harmony. Indirect requests carry more weight in Uzbek than in English. Speech act intensity varies cross-culturally. Narrative voice can mask or reveal pragmatic intent. Some pragmatic markers have no direct linguistic equivalent. Translators must decide between retaining foreignness or domesticating forms. The omission of honorifics alters social positioning. Narrative irony in Austen depends on polite understatement. Qodiriy's humor often emerges from pragmatic mismatch. Pragmatic meaning may conflict with literal meaning. Dialog pacing shifts with pragmatic condensation. Misinterpretation of politeness levels can distort character arcs. Literary style is partly defined by pragmatic signature. Cultural taboos shape what can be said directly. Pragmatic softening devices differ structurally. Readers interpret translated pragmatics through their own cultural lens.

Methods

Our methodology integrates pragmatics, narratology, and comparative translation analysis. Data selection involved: Choosing 50 dialogue-rich scenes (25 from each novel). Including both intimate and formal exchanges. Using published Uzbek-English and English-Uzbek translations.

Analysis techniques:

Annotating pragmatic markers (greetings, requests, compliments, refusals). Comparing direct speech with free indirect discourse.

Measuring frequency of pragmatic markers pre/post translation.

Identifying narrative function of politeness breaches.

Using concordance tools for address form analysis.

Coding metaphorical speech acts.

Cross-checking against historical etiquette manuals.

Including translator footnotes in analysis.

Examining back-translation for pragmatic loss.

Comparing translation strategies across different publishers.

Results

Key findings reveal that pragmatic equivalence is highly variable: Uzbek honorifics are often omitted in English translations. English titles (“Mr.,” “Mrs.”) are sometimes replaced with kinship terms in Uzbek. Indirect refusals in Uzbek become direct in English. Austen’s ironic understatement is weakened in Uzbek renderings. Qodiriy’s formal greetings are shortened in English. Compliment structure changes affect character politeness perception. Social hierarchy becomes less visible after translation. Kinship metaphors are often literalized. Uzbek mitigation markers are dropped without compensation. Emotional intensity can be amplified unintentionally. Twenty further observations: Back-translation shows asymmetrical pragmatic retention. Some politeness markers are replaced with neutral phrasing. Narrative pace increases with pragmatic reduction. Address form simplification reduces reader immersion. Cultural humor dependent on pragmatic mismatch is lost. Speech act force can invert in translation. Honorific plural pronouns disappear in English versions. Indirect offers become explicit commands in some cases. Target readers misinterpret social closeness levels. Pragmatic compression benefits plot speed but harms realism.

Discussion

The discussion underscores that pragmatic meaning is as essential to literary fidelity as semantic meaning. Losing or altering pragmatic cues reshapes the reader’s perception of relationships, power dynamics, and even plot trajectory. Twenty analytical points: Translators act as sociolinguists in reconstructing pragmatic meaning. Literal translation often erases politeness strategies. Humor translation benefits from pragmatic adaptation. Speech act analysis can predict reader reception patterns. Training in intercultural pragmatics should be part of translator education.

Conclusion

Literary translation is an intercultural act where pragmatic equivalence plays a decisive role in narrative authenticity. Preserving speech acts, politeness strategies, and culturally coded address forms is essential for maintaining the relational and thematic depth of the source text. Key takeaways: Pragmatic fidelity enhances character realism. Cultural awareness prevents unintentional tone shifts. Honorifics and address forms must be handled strategically. Directness/indirectness balance is culturally

relative. Historical etiquette informs accurate translation. Translator's role is both linguistic and anthropological. Reader reception research should inform translation practice. Annotated editions help bridge pragmatic gaps. Collaboration between linguists and translators yields better results. Intercultural pragmatics is a vital component of literary translation studies.

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