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Translation as a Reconstruction Process of Meaning: An Interdisciplinary Approach and Conceptual Challenges

Adriana Gjika¹, Dorjana Flett¹

¹University “ Ismail Qemali ” Vlorë, Albania

Corresponding author: adigjika123@gmail.com

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Abstract

This theoretical paper examines translation as a dynamic process of meaning reconstruction and cultural mediation, moving beyond simple linguistic transfer. Drawing on previous theoretical studies, the central idea is that meaning is not fixed but intrinsically linked to context, cultural references, and the translator's strategic choices. The paper argues that translation requires a delicate balance between fidelity to the original text (preserving intent, tone, style, emotion) and necessary adaptation for the target audience. The translator is presented as a creative co-author. The analysis explores cognitive and semiotic approaches, the impact of cultural differences, challenges of multilingual contexts, transformations of meaning across time and space, and the relativization of equivalence and fidelity. The conclusion posits that equivalence and fidelity are

relative and contextual, depending on cultural differences, text purposes, audience, and situational constraints.

Keywords: *translation, meaning, culture, choice, context, language.*

Introduction

Our paper draws on previous theoretical studies that view translation as a dynamic and complex act of meaning reconstruction and cultural mediation, going beyond simple linguistic transfer. The central idea is that meaning is not fixed, but is intrinsically linked to the context, cultural references and the translator's strategic choices. Translation requires a delicate balance between

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fidelity to the original text – which extends to preserving intent, tone, style and emotion – and the adaptation necessary to ensure that the message is understandable and meaningful to the intended audience. The translator is seen as a creative co-author who must make strategic choices. This process involves a deep cultural transfer. The translator acts as a true cultural interpreter, adapting references (idioms, symbols, customs) to avoid misunderstandings and maintain the desired effect. Cultural adaptation is essential in all fields. The complexity increases in multilingual contexts, where the translator must manage the coexistence of many languages and cultural references, sometimes carrying strong political or identity connotations (for example, in Albania). Moreover, meaning evolves over time and space, requiring the translator to be particularly sensitive in adapting classical or historical texts to contemporary sensibilities.

Cognitive and Semiotic Approaches: Translation as Dynamic Meaning Reconstruction

Cultural adaptation is often essential because cultural references, idiomatic expressions, or concepts present in a text do not always have a direct equivalent in the target language. The translator faces a delicate choice: should formal fidelity to the text be given priority, even if that means losing some meaning or effect? Or should a freer adaptation be favored, avoiding misunderstandings but potentially modifying aspects of the text? This dilemma is particularly acute in sensitive fields such as literature, where style and emotional impact are essential, or in cross-cultural translations related to history and memory, where emotional and social expectations are as important as accuracy. The debate between fidelity and adaptation reflects a broader, contemporary concept of translation as a living, dynamic process based on strategic choices and the ethical responsibility of the translator toward the two cultures in contact. The goal is to find a delicate balance that respects the original voice while making the translation

accessible and meaningful to the target reader. Discussing this tension means understanding that translation is as much an art as a science. Examples include Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, where translators balance fidelity to period language with contemporary readability, and the translation of idiomatic expressions, where either literal reproduction or cultural equivalence may be chosen.

Impact of Cultural Differences on Reception and Interpretation

Translation is not limited to simple linguistic transfer; it also involves deep cultural transfer. Each language carries a system of values, references, customs, and norms specific to its society. Thus, internal cultural elements of the source text – idiomatic expressions, proverbs, cultural symbols, historical references, lifestyles – must be interpreted and adapted for the target culture. Without such adaptation, translation risks causing unintended misunderstandings (e.g., the French expression *avoir le cafard* loses emotional meaning when translated literally). The translator must have sharp cultural sensitivity, be deeply familiar with both cultures, and make strategic choices that sometimes go beyond the original text, using explanation, annotation, replacement, or adaptation. Thus, translation becomes a cultural bridge, and its success depends as much on an insightful interpretation of the source text as on effective adaptation to the recipient's cultural context.

Translation Challenges in Multilingual Contexts

Studying translation challenges in a multilingual context – where several languages and cultural references intersect – raises complex issues related to the diversity of linguistic and cultural systems in contact. This involves not only managing linguistic diversity but also navigating different cultural matrices that affect meaning, communication, and interpretation.

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In the contemporary Albanian context, for example, Albanian, Greek, Serbian, Italian, and English coexist. A translator must not only master these languages but also understand the cultural and historical implications associated with them. Certain terms may have strong political or identity connotations in one language while being neutral or absent in another. In international organizations or diplomatic meetings, multilingual translation must ensure message clarity while respecting each speaker's cultural sensitivity, sometimes requiring cross-cultural dictionaries or language mediation strategies.

Transformations of Meaning Across Time and Geographical Space

Considering transformations of meaning across time and geographical space is essential, particularly in literary and historical translation. The meaning of a text is inseparably linked to its original historical and geographical context. Translation involves a migration of the text across different time periods and cultural spaces. For example, translating *Don Quixote* into a contemporary language requires considering not only the linguistic gap but also the evolution of cultural, historical, and social norms.

Similarly, in historical translation – e.g., diplomatic documents or war accounts – the temporal gap can transform the perception of facts. A translation of the Treaty of Versailles may be reinterpreted in light of contemporary values. Geographical spaces introduce cultural specificities that affect reception. This perspective emphasizes translation as a living process where meaning transformation across time and space requires creativity and sharp sensitivity from the translator.

Equivalence and Fidelity in the Creative Process

In the creative process of translation, questioning equivalence and fidelity is essential because

these concepts cannot be reduced to simple mechanical correspondence between source and target texts. Modern research shows that equivalence is often relative, contextual, and partial (Mounin). Fidelity is based not only on strict reproduction of literal meaning but also on preserving the purpose, tone, emotion, and style of the original work.

Examples include translations of Baudelaire's poetry into English (Benjamin, Howard), where musicality and atmosphere were prioritized over literal translation, and film or literary titles, where a new title may be invented to capture the spirit of the content. In legal or scientific translation, strict equivalence is sometimes impossible, requiring clarification or reformulation. Thus, translation is a dynamic and creative process where correspondence must be understood in terms of intercultural mediation and strategic adaptation.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, we have found that translation is much more than a simple linguistic transfer. It constitutes a genuine process of meaning reconstruction, in which the translator plays an active role in cultural and linguistic mediation. This perspective, supported by contemporary theories such as Danica Seleskovitch's Interpretive Theory, holds that meaning does not reside in fixed words or structures but results from dynamic construction dependent on context, cultural references, and communicative purposes.

In summary, the paper has: (a) explored cognitive and semiotic approaches that consider translation as a dynamic reconstruction of meaning; (b) analyzed how cultural differences affect reception and interpretation of translated texts; (c) studied translation challenges in multilingual contexts; (d) considered transformations of meaning across time and geographical space; and (e) questioned the notions of equivalence and fidelity in this creative process.

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