

Chapter 8

Pragmatic Equivalence

Pragmatic equivalence in translation refers to the ability of a translated text to convey the same communicative effect as the source text, taking into account the cultural and contextual aspects of meaning. Unlike lexical or grammatical equivalence, pragmatic equivalence deals with how meaning is inferred rather than directly stated. This section explores the concept of coherence, the role of implicature in interpretation, and translation strategies that ensure pragmatic equivalence.

8.1 Coherence

Coherence is a fundamental aspect of text comprehension and refers to the logical and meaningful connections between different parts of a text. A coherent text allows readers to follow the intended message without confusion. Unlike cohesion, which relies on explicit linguistic markers like conjunctions and references, coherence depends on the reader's ability to infer relationships between ideas based on context and world knowledge.

Types of Coherence

1. **Global Coherence:** Concerns the overall theme or purpose of a text. A well-translated text should maintain its overarching message, ensuring that the reader grasps the general intent and function of the original.
2. **Local Coherence:** Relates to the logical flow between sentences and paragraphs. It ensures that each idea smoothly transitions into the next, even if explicit cohesive devices (e.g., conjunctions) are absent.

Challenges in Translation

- **Cultural Differences:** What is considered coherent in one culture might not be in another. Translators must ensure that cultural references, humor, and rhetorical structures align with the target audience's expectations.
- **Implicit Information:** Some languages rely on explicit markers of coherence, while others depend more on context. A translator must decide whether to add explicit clarifications or maintain the original level of implicature.

8.2 Coherence and Processes of Interpretation: Implicature

Implicature, a concept introduced by philosopher H.P. Grice (1975), refers to meaning that is not directly stated but inferred based on context and conversational principles. In translation, preserving implicature is crucial to maintaining the intended meaning of a text without unnecessary additions or distortions.

Grice's Cooperative Principle

Grice proposed four maxims that guide effective communication:

1. **Maxim of Quantity:** Provide as much information as needed, but no more.
2. **Maxim of Quality:** Provide truthful information.
3. **Maxim of Relation:** Be relevant.
4. **Maxim of Manner:** Be clear and orderly.

In different languages and cultures, these maxims may be followed differently. For example, some cultures favor indirectness (violating the maxim of quantity) to maintain politeness. A translator must recognize these differences and adjust the text accordingly.

Examples of Implicature in Translation

1. **English → Japanese:**
 - **English Original:** "Can you open the window?"
 - **Literal Translation:** 窓を開けることができますか。
 - **Natural Translation:** 窓を開けてくれませんか。
 - (In Japanese, a direct question might sound unnatural; a polite request is preferred.)
2. **English → Arabic:**
 - **English Original:** "That was interesting."
 - **Literal Translation:** كانت مهمة.
 - **Natural Translation:** كانت جميلة لكن معقدة.
 - (In Arabic, understatement is often used to convey polite disagreement, so a literal translation might lose the intended nuance.)

8.3 Coherence, Implicature, and Translation Strategies

To ensure pragmatic equivalence, translators use various strategies to maintain coherence and convey implicatures accurately.

8.3.1 Explicitation

Explicitation involves making implicit information in the source text more explicit in the translation. This is particularly necessary when cultural or linguistic differences make the original implicature difficult to infer.

- **Example:**
 - **English Original:** "She finally spoke."
 - **Translated into Chinese:** 她終於打破了沉默。 (Literally: "She finally broke the silence.")
 - (Since silence can be culturally significant in China, the translation clarifies the context.)

8.3.2 Implication

Implication is the opposite of explicitation. It removes explicit information that is redundant in the target language.

- **Example:**
 - **French Original:** "Il monta en haut." (Literally: "He climbed up to the top.")
 - **Translated into English:** "He climbed up."
 - (The phrase "to the top" is unnecessary in English, as "climb up" already implies it.)

8.3.3 Cultural Adaptation

Cultural adaptation ensures that the translated text resonates with the target audience while preserving the original intent.

- **Example:**
 - **English Original:** "It's raining cats and dogs."
 - **Translated into Spanish:** "Llueve a cántaros." (Literally: "It's raining jugs of water.")
 - (A literal translation would be meaningless in Spanish, so an equivalent idiom is used instead.)

8.3.4 Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing rewords an expression to maintain meaning when a direct translation is not possible.

- **Example:**
 - **English Original:** "He kicked the bucket."

- **Translated into Russian:** “Он ушел из жизни.” (Literally: “He left this life.”)
- (Since “kicked the bucket” is an idiom, a more neutral phrase is used in Russian.)

8.3.5 Retaining Ambiguity

Some texts rely on ambiguity for stylistic or rhetorical effect. A translator must decide whether to maintain or clarify the ambiguity.

- **Example:**
 - **English Original:** “He saw her duck.”
 - **Possible Translations:**
 - **Literal:** “Él vio su pato.” (Implies he saw a bird.)
 - **Clarified:** “Él la vio agacharse.” (Implies he saw her bend down.)
 - (If ambiguity is central to the text’s meaning, it should be preserved.)

Conclusion

Pragmatic equivalence is crucial for ensuring that translations maintain not just the words, but the communicative intent of the original text. Coherence ensures logical flow, while implicature adds depth to meaning by relying on inference. To address these challenges, translators use strategies such as explicitation, implicitation, cultural adaptation, and paraphrasing. Mastering these techniques allows translators to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps, ensuring that translations convey the intended message as naturally as possible.

By understanding coherence, implicature, and translation strategies, translators can navigate the complexities of pragmatic equivalence and produce texts that resonate with their intended audiences while maintaining fidelity to the source material.