



TRANSLATION OF RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS: A PRAGMATIC APPROACH

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Abstract: The translation of religious and cultural expressions is one of the most complex areas of intercultural communication because such expressions often contain meanings that go beyond their literal linguistic forms. Religious phrases, traditional greetings, blessings, proverbs, rituals, and culturally specific expressions are closely connected with the beliefs, values, history, and social practices of a particular community. Therefore, their translation requires not only linguistic competence but also pragmatic and intercultural awareness. This article examines the pragmatic aspects of translating religious and cultural expressions, focusing on the relationship between linguistic meaning, communicative intention, cultural context, and the expectations of the target audience.

Keywords: translation, religious expressions, cultural expressions, pragmatics, intercultural communication, equivalence.

Introduction

Translation is not simply the replacement of words and grammatical structures from one language with corresponding elements of another language. It is a complex process of transferring meaning between linguistic and cultural systems. This becomes particularly evident when translators deal with religious and culturally specific expressions. Such expressions are frequently associated with traditions, beliefs, social norms, historical experiences, and collective identities. As a result, their meanings cannot always be understood or translated correctly without considering the context in which they are used.

Religious expressions represent an especially sensitive category because they may have spiritual, emotional, symbolic, and social meanings simultaneously. Expressions used in prayers, blessings, greetings, religious discussions, and everyday speech can carry meanings that are familiar to members of one cultural community but unclear to people from another cultural background. A literal translation may therefore preserve the lexical meaning while failing to communicate the intended pragmatic effect.

Main Part

Religious and cultural expressions are closely connected with the worldview of a particular community. They often contain implicit meanings



that cannot be fully understood through dictionary definitions alone. For example, a religious expression may function simultaneously as a statement of belief, a form of politeness, an emotional reaction, or a social convention. Its interpretation depends on who uses it, in what situation, for what purpose, and to whom it is addressed. This demonstrates the importance of pragmatic analysis in translation.

Pragmatics studies meaning in relation to context and language use. In translation, pragmatic meaning includes the speaker's intention, the social relationship between participants, the communicative situation, cultural assumptions, and the expected reaction of the audience. Therefore, a translator should first identify what an expression does in the source text before deciding how it should be rendered in the target language.

Explication can also be used when a religious or cultural reference is unlikely to be understood by the target audience. The translator may provide additional information through a brief explanation, contextual addition, footnote, or translator's note. This strategy is particularly useful in academic, historical, religious, and literary translations where cultural information is essential to understanding the text. At the same time, unnecessary explanation may interrupt the natural flow of the translated text, so it should be used carefully.

Borrowing is another strategy through which the original term is retained in the target text. This method is common when a religious or cultural term has acquired international recognition or when no satisfactory equivalent exists in the target language. Borrowing helps preserve cultural identity and authenticity. However, unfamiliar borrowed terms may require contextual explanation, especially when the target readers do not share the cultural background of the source text.

Contextual substitution may be appropriate when the literal or borrowed expression would not produce the intended pragmatic effect. The translator can replace the source expression with a target-language expression that performs a similar communicative function. This is particularly relevant in translating humor, politeness formulas, idioms, and culturally bound references. The success of such substitution depends on the translator's understanding of both cultures.

Religious texts require additional sensitivity because translation decisions may be influenced by theological traditions. Different religious communities may have established translations of particular concepts, names, prayers, or formulas. In such cases, translators should consult recognized terminology and established textual traditions instead of creating arbitrary equivalents. Accuracy is particularly important because even a small lexical or stylistic change may



affect the interpretation of a religious concept.

Audience expectations are another essential factor. A translation intended for specialists in religious studies can preserve more source-cultural terminology and provide detailed explanations. A translation intended for a general audience may require greater adaptation and contextual clarification. Therefore, translation decisions should always be related to the purpose of the target text and the knowledge of its intended readers.

Technology and machine translation have also influenced the translation of religious and cultural expressions. Automated systems can provide useful preliminary translations, but they may have difficulty identifying implicit cultural meanings, religious connotations, irony, politeness, or context-dependent interpretations. Human translators remain essential when high cultural and pragmatic accuracy is required. Post-editing should therefore include not only grammatical correction but also pragmatic and cultural evaluation.

An effective pragmatic translation process can be organized into several stages. First, the translator identifies the literal and contextual meaning of the expression. Second, the communicative intention and pragmatic function are determined. Third, the cultural significance and possible associations are examined. Fourth, an appropriate translation strategy is selected. Finally, the target expression is evaluated in relation to the target audience, register, cultural expectations, and overall purpose of the text.

The translation of religious and cultural expressions therefore requires a combination of linguistic, cultural, pragmatic, and ethical competence. A translator should not treat culture-specific expressions as isolated lexical units. Instead, they should be understood as components of a broader communicative and cultural system. This approach allows translators to preserve the identity of the source culture while ensuring that the target audience receives a meaningful and comprehensible message.

Conclusion

The translation of religious and cultural expressions is a complex process in which semantic accuracy alone is insufficient. Such expressions frequently contain implicit cultural meanings, emotional associations, social functions, and religious connotations that must be considered during translation. A pragmatic approach makes it possible to analyze these elements and select appropriate translation strategies.

Literal translation, functional equivalence, adaptation, explicitation, borrowing, and contextual substitution can all be effective depending on the communicative situation. The choice of strategy should be determined by the purpose of translation, the nature of the source expression, the cultural distance



between the source and target communities, and the expectations of the target audience.

Religious expressions require particular sensitivity because they may represent important elements of personal and collective identity. Translators should therefore respect established religious terminology and avoid unnecessary distortion of theological meaning. Cultural expressions, meanwhile, should be translated in a way that balances cultural authenticity with accessibility.

In conclusion, pragmatic competence is an essential part of successful translation. The translator's task is not merely to transfer words but to recreate communicative meaning within another linguistic and cultural environment. A pragmatic approach contributes to more accurate, natural, culturally sensitive, and effective translations and plays an important role in promoting intercultural understanding.

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