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Cognitive-Semiotic Perspective on Literary Translation, Focusing on John Green's Novel "the Fault in Our Stars" and its Russian and Uzbek Versions

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Abstract: This study adopts a cognitive-semiotic perspective, examining literary translation as the reconstruction of meaning and impact inside a new semiotic system, utilising John Green's The Fault in Our Stars and its Russian and Uzbek translations as a case study. An analysis grounded in frame and pragmatics concerning metaphors, minimalist formulae, names, intertexts, and wordplay reveals that successful translations integrate retention, modulation, explicitation, and compensation to maintain frames and cultural implications while ensuring artistic integrity; this culminates in a pragmatic workflow for translators.

Keys words: cognitive-semiotic translation; frame semantics; conceptual metaphor; pragmatics; effect equivalence; cultural connotation; compensatory techniques; The Fault in Our Stars; Translations in Russian and Uzbek.

Introduction

Contemporary translation studies primarily focus on the interplay between language, cognition, and culture, viewing translation as a multifaceted form of intercultural communication, wherein the "linguistic operation" represents merely the visible aspect, while the underlying components encompass cognitive and semiotic mechanisms (Artemyeva, 2014). Within this approach, translation is not merely a transfer of words, but a reconstruction of meanings within a different semiotic system: the translator aligns the conceptual structures, cultural contexts, and pragmatic dispositions of the source culture with the capabilities of the destination language.

Consequently, semantics and semiotics function as the foundational frameworks of the translation process. The translator's role extends beyond mere dictionary knowledge; it encompasses the ability to identify, interpret, and communicate the meanings of language units within their specific context and cultural milieu. This is particularly evident when analysing metaphors, phraseological units, culturally specific realities, and authorial neologisms: each form is underpinned by a network of cognitive attributes, prototypes, and frames (Fillmore), which can vary considerably across different language cultures. The meanings of polysemantic words are activated by context and communicative purpose; from the potential collection of meanings, only those relevant to a specific usage are engaged (Sternin, 2011). A word in a text is simultaneously less and more than a dictionary entry: less because only a portion of the semes is manifested, and more because contextual interpretation can enhance meaning with supplementary connotative dimensions. The contemporary theoretical landscape of translation encompasses machine translation, formal and functional methodologies, with theories of untranslatability, which are intricately linked to linguistic relativity. The category of cultural connotation

is significant as a linguacultural phenomenon that conveys value-laden information, recognised and deemed "self-evident" within a certain society (Ivanova, Chernysheva, 2014). This connotation possesses stereotypicality (set evaluative frameworks), axiologicality (value attribution), associativity (a collection of cultural associations), and cognition (dependence on the encyclopaedic knowledge of the local speaker). For a translator, this signifies that a formally "correct" counterpart may be pragmatically inappropriate if it evokes alternative cultural connotations or fails to convey a crucial value signal to the target audience. This establishes a fundamental principle: a translator must concurrently possess proficiency in both the language and culture of the source and target languages. Merely selecting a dictionary equivalent is insufficient; it is crucial to ascertain and convey the semantic structure of the text, including its denotative framework, connotative nuances, pragmatic stance, and the author's stylistic approach. Semiotics and semantics in this process facilitate the transmission of both "meanings" and meanings: implicit, interlinear, and culturally mediated (Artemyeva, 2014). This is particularly evident in literary translation: while non-fiction texts aim for "transparent" functional equivalency, literary translation necessitates the retention of effects—intonation, imagery, rhythm, and intertextual links. This method redefines the principle of the "unit of translation" from minimum linguistic signs to units of meaning (Artemyeva, 2014). Variations in linguistic systems and semiotic resources result in the minimal integrity possessing a comprehensive semantic force that holds practical significance. This may consist of a word, phrase, statement, microtext, or "passage"—a compositional element through which the overarching semantics of the work is reconstructed. The quality of a translation is assessed not by literal accuracy, but by the retention of function and effect: in many instances, a verbatim translation undermines the text's dynamics and cultural significance, whereas a translation based on meaning maintains the original's intent and communicative efficacy.

The context influences meaning in various ways (cf. Sternin, 2011), all of which are frequently seen in literary translation:

A. Determining the intended meaning of a polysemous word.

The context emphasises one interpretation while negating the others. In several narratives, the Russian "guest" is only a visitor, while in others, she embodies a status symbol, and in yet others, she serves as a metaphor for a "uninvited presence." The translator's responsibility is to identify the existing profile. Actualisation of particular semes.

The term "woman" in the phrase "A tall woman was sitting on the bench" refers specifically to "an adult female face," but other connotations (such as social role, career, or age group beyond adulthood) remain unengaged. In literary translation, the translator may artificially "shift" the profile if the author subsequently develops the motif (for instance, "slender," "thin" - to foreshadow the character).

Modification of distinct semes.

A seme might be generalised or specified. Depending on cultural perceptual tendencies, "дом" may necessitate modulation: "home" in English frequently conveys a warmer connotation than "дом"/"дача," prompting the translator to select "дом" or "дача" in alignment with the rhythm and tone. Introducing significance.

The context introduces meanings that are lacking in the fundamental vocabulary. In an ironic context, a neutral lexeme assumes a sardonic connotation; the translator communicates this not through a "thick hint," but via subtle adjustments in intonation—such as word order, punctuation, and rhythm.

B. Concurrent actualisation of several meanings (pun).

Polysemy and homonymy serve as stylistic devices in the author's work. The potential tactics in translation include preserving the play (if an appropriate counterpart exists in the target language), substituting it with a functionally equal play (compensation), or elucidating it through context (rarely via a note).

It is essential to include in this list

C. Frame shift (Fillmore): the identical phrase triggers various “scenarios”—for instance, the term star in a fictional context can oscillate between “celestial star,” “theatrical star,” and “fate” (“stars aligned”). Translation necessitates the selection of a framework and, if required, micro-adjustments within the surrounding environment.

The matter of cultural connotation constitutes a distinct domain of risk. Ivanova and Chernysheva (2014) assert that cultural connotation is a cognitive construct "linked" to several forms of knowledge, ranging from widely recognised encyclopaedic information (lexical meaning as a component of collective knowledge) to regional, ethnospecific, and individual-personal knowledge. A differentiation is established between primary connotations (emerging during the naming process and the stabilisation of the assessment within the sign) and secondary connotations (comprising layers of ethnocultural and linguistic influences). A misinterpretation of connotation results not only in an imprecise term but also in a breakdown of meaning—the reader perceives a different nuance than the author intended. This elucidates why even closely related languages frequently necessitate transformations (modulations, transpositions, explications) that deviate from literal interpretation. The metalanguage for describing meaning warrants particular consideration. Lexicographic and translation studies employ many metalanguages, ranging from natural language to formal component frameworks. The identical seme can be articulated through several metalanguage units (synonymous series, paraphrases, categorical labels), which indicates not arbitrariness, but the multidimensionality of cognitive attributes. Consequently, semantic description necessitates verification through cognitive assessment (alignment with speakers' intuitive definitions), synonymous/antonymous analysis (distributional examination), translation (evaluation of stable counterparts), and corpus analysis for typical situations. The translator must not only comprehend the term intuitively but also substantiate its characteristics to oneself.
In the realm of literary translation, the content from John Green's novel "The Fault in Our Stars" serves as a pertinent example. Multiple "complex" domains intersect here:

Metaphors and symbols. The emblematic metaphor “I am a grenade” encapsulates the concepts of abruptness, devastation, and inevitability; its literal counterpart in Russian conveys notable conciseness and intensity, whereas in other cultures, the imagery may be less impactful, prompting the translator to adjust the rhythm, pauses, and placement of beats in neighbouring lines. The emblem of a “unlit cigarette” represents a pragmatic exercise of control: the protagonist clutches “death” between his teeth, therefore denying it power (the modality of purpose is significant). Literalness is suitable in this context; yet, the desired impression is attained by scene editing and intonation.

Phraseology and minimalism. Essential formulae such as “Okay? — Okay.” and “Always.” are minimalistic in structure yet maximal in impact. They cannot be enhanced by elaborate explanations: the objective of translation is to maintain the invariant effect (tact, intimacy, recognition). This pertains to the necessity of functional equivalence rather than formal symmetry.

Intertextuality and cultural memory. The atmosphere in the Anne Frank Museum exemplifies a high ethical standard; the language employed must be "transparent," devoid of rhetorical embellishment. The translator upholds a balance: reverence for memory, precision of details, and the exclusion of "sentimental superstructures."

Identifiers and records. The antagonism between Augustus/Gus encompasses not only onomastics but also the semantic dimensions of "greatness" and "vulnerability." In translation, it is crucial to maintain this gradation using any accessible methods (transliteration, rhythm, adjacent status markers); otherwise, the hero's trajectory of disillusionment is compromised. Translation decisions are theoretically grounded in various approaches: dynamic equivalence (Nida), skopos theory (Vermeer), overt/covert translation (House), norms (Turi), domestication/foreignization (Venuti), and relevance theory (Sperber, Wilson). They unanimously concur on the pragmatic conclusion: the communicative objective and reader impact take precedence over meticulous word-by-word accuracy. Simultaneously, machine translation,

including neural networks, remains inadequate in addressing cultural connotations, subtext, and rhetorical economy—precisely where creative meaning resides. To effectively communicate the semantic attributes of a literary work, a translator must do a multi-tiered semantic analysis of a word or fragment within its context. This analysis encompasses:

1. Lexicographic level: documenting the dictionary definition (core + primary variants); verifying against many dictionaries.
2. Psycholinguistic level: intuitive definitions and associations of speakers (if feasible — corpus data, collocation profile).
3. Communicative level: rhetorical functions inside the text (subtext, implicatures, irony, tone, and address).
4. Cultural level: antecedents, symbolic domains, "local" evaluative criteria.
5. Translation heuristics: a collection of methods (metaphor preservation, metaphor to comparison, metaphor to paraphrase, compensation in adjacent context; for phraseology — similar idiom, tracing with contextual elucidation, functional substitution).
6. Verification: do a self-assessment for "false friends," examine for undesirable implications in the target language, and evaluate readability within the context of a page or chapter (rather than in isolation).

When elucidating meaning, it is advantageous to distinguish between the denotative macrocomponent (subject-logical core) and the connotative aspects (judgement, expression, stylistic register, cultural associations). In a fictional narrative, the connotative dimension frequently defines the style: elements such as irony, tenderness, and a subdued tragic tone are present therein. In this context, the translator engages not just with vocabulary but also with rhythm, grammar, and punctuation—elements that contribute to the "sound" of the phrase.

It is crucial to acknowledge the concept as a mental unit articulated through language: the nominative field of the concept (keywords, synonym hierarchy, and peripheral designations) enables us to discern which facets of the idea are engaged inside the text. In “The Fault in Our Stars,” the themes of time, mortality, intimacy, and memory are conveyed metaphorically rather than explicitly, as illustrated by sequences with water/Amsterdam, museum/memory, and cigarette/control. Concept analysis facilitates the development of a coherent translation strategy: if "time" is characterised as "fluidity," then elsewhere the translation should reinforce the "water" lexicon, rather than oscillating between incongruous imagery.

It is essential to highlight the distinction between a word's meaning within the linguistic system and its actual significance in discourse. The systemic meaning serves as a repository of potential semes, whereas the actual meaning is the use of these semes for a given purpose. The translator engages with speech and its pragmatics, focussing not on the universal meanings of words but rather on their specific implications in context and the perception of the reader in the target language. Conclusion. The translation of semantic elements in artworks is an endeavour that intersects linguistics, semiotics, cultural studies, and translation studies. Effective translation is accomplished not through interlinear "arithmetic," but through contextual and cultural comprehension, considering connotations, rhetoric, intertexts, and pragmatic impacts. The pragmatic algorithm encompasses contextual semantic analysis, selection of transfer method (prioritising functional-pragmatic equivalence), refinement of rhythm/register, and obligatory verification for latent cultural signals. Consequently, the translation adheres to the original not merely in a strict literal sense, but in terms of artistic veracity: it communicates not only “what is articulated,” but also “how it resonates” and “the impression it imparts” in the reader’s consciousness.

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