Journal of Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis
DOI: 10.32996/jpds
Journal Homepage: www.al-kindipublisher.com/index.php/jpds

JPDA
AL-KINDI CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Pragmatic Aspects of Translation

Habiba Nakhli
Doctoral Center, Linguistics, Communication and Translation, Faculty of Letters, University Abdelmalek Essaadi, Tetouan, Morocco
Corresponding Author: Habiba Nakhli, **E-mail**: habibanakhli@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT

With the advent of pragmatic and functional theories of language, linguistics was able to offer a broader framework that approaches translation as an act of communication. Therefore, translators were able to move outside the rigid circle of linguistic meaning and textual equivalence to contextual meaning and the set of extra-linguistic factors enveloping the text. Noteworthy, these circumstantial configurations are relevant to the specific situation, social system, and culture, where the text is written. Similarly, the linguistic choices made by the text producer reflect the system of beliefs, preferences, and world experience in that culture. What follows is that the task of the translator is twofold. The analysis of the context is important to fully understand the source text's (ST) meaning. On the other hand, the production of the target text (TT) requires awareness of the target culture's characteristics and peculiarities, as well as the target reader's expectations and knowledge of the world. This paper puts forth some pragmatic aspects of translation to highlight their relevance and importance in translation. The literature review provides an overview of the pragmatic aspects of language that represent translation challenges. These difficulties are illustrated by examples of the pitfalls translators may face when translating speech acts in legal documents and irony in literary texts.

| KEYWORDS

Translation, pragmatics, speech acts, irony, strategies

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 19 December 2022 **PUBLISHED:** 21 December 2022 **DOI:** 10.32996/jpda.2022.1.1.4

1. Introduction

Following the shifting paradigms of its theory, translation has been defined and approached from different perspectives. However, in the long-run of its history, developments in translation theory were, to a great extent, influenced by the advances in linguistic theories that guided translation research and practice. Linguistics provides the necessary toolkit to describe and account for language use, within one language as well as between different languages. No wonder then, that, for centuries, the history of translation was marked by a debate about the nature of the relationship between linguistics and translation.

Linguistically-oriented translation studies extended from the mid 1950's to the mid 1980's. In the context of the early approaches, translation was defined in terms of the relationship between languages, thus, perceiving of translation as "an operation performed on languages: a process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another. Clearly, then, any theory of translation must draw upon a theory of language— a general linguistic theory" (Catford, 1965:1). However, this view narrows down the meaning and scope of translation, as an intercultural phenomenon. In addition to its linguistic dimension, translation draws on other disciplines, including anthropology, cultural studies and sociology.

Clearly, an adequate translation from one language to another requires considering different levels of language use. Adequate translation takes place when the translator is able to transfer texts from one culture to another to fulfill a given function within new contexts. Text function is realized by means of the semantic, pragmatic and textual choices made by the translator (House, 2015). Once this network of relationships is well-configurated and understood, the translator can reproduce it for a different cultural context.

Before we finish with this line, it is worth noting, that languages have different expressive potentials. They differ in terms of the variety of their lexical resources and grammatical categories as well as in the value given to these items in every culture. To face these discrepancies, translators make use of different translation strategies to avoid or, at least, minimize the loss of meaning that may result from translation.

2. Theoretical Background

Translation is, by definition, a socially and culturally-embedded activity. As a human phenomenon, the earliest evidence of translation dates back to about 2500 BC, in the form of clay tablets with bilingual vocabularies in Sumerian and Eblaite[1]. It was self-defined as a social human need, a long time before anyone tries to theorize it.

In 1916, Ferdinand De Saussure made a significant contribution to the study of language. His basic dichotomy, langue – parole, distinguishes between language as a system (langue) and how it is used by individual human beings (parole). It follows that the meaning of words depends on their relationship to other words, and not on their form. He also distinguished between syntagmatic and paradigmatic structures. He used 'syntagmatic sequence' to refer to the way words are juxtaposed to make meaningful sentences, whereas 'paradigmatic' structure refers to the choices available to a speaker within a syntagmatic sequence. This has, on the one hand, defined language use as a continuous process of choices made by the speaker, and linked language to real world experience on the other.

Although this view was not meant to address translational issues, it has lots of implications for translation as it provided insights about how a given social context determines the linguistic choices made by the speaker and how context information helps to reveal the different layers of meaning. Consequently, while transferring meaning from one language to another, the translator has to consider the target context and culture, which suggests adjustment as an ultimate option for the translator:

> a translation theory cannot draw on a linguistic theory alone (…). What it needs is a theory of culture to explain the specificity of communicative situations and the relationship between verbalized and non-verbalized situational elements". (Nord, 1997, p.11)

Deriving from the views of J. R Firth and De Saussure's notion of paradigmatic axis, Halliday built up his theory of Systemic-Functional Linguistics. The SFL theory moved beyond the interests of formal approaches to relate language to its social function pointing out that every act of communication involves a series of choices made by the speaker in the light of the surrounding circumstances in order to fulfill a specific function in a particular sociocultural context. According to Halliday the communication act is influenced by the sociocultural environment in which it takes place. The sociocultural environment conditions the genre or type of the text, its function, its register, and the lexico-grammatical choices made by the text producer (Munday,2008).

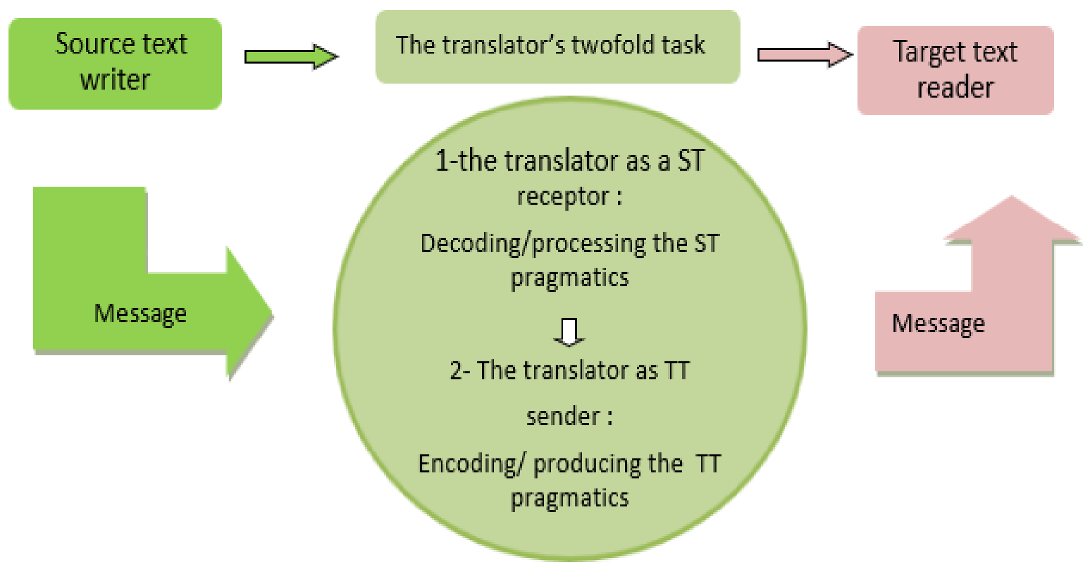
Halliday (1992) gives a direct statement of the relationship between linguistics and translation. He defines translation as "a meaning-making activity (…). It is not just creation of meaning; it is guided creation of meaning. And this tends to determine where linguistics comes into the picture" (p.15). This view implies that a theory of language that is applicable to translation is one that focuses on the process of meaning creation. The value of this statement lies in the fact that it explains what happens when we are translating instead of setting norms for good translation.

Halliday goes further to confirm that, for a linguistic theory to be relevant to translation, it has to account for meaning as a choice. Language is used to serve a function in its original context. With respect to this view, "what the translator is doing when translating or interpreting is taking decisions all the time about what is the relevant context within which this functional equivalence is being established" (Halliday, 1992, p. 15)

Therefore, in the context of translation, this view suggests that, before translating a text, the translator has to fully understand the pragmatics of the message as well as the author's intention. His task is not limited to reporting or informing but also to producing an effect on the listener or reader. Certainly, understanding a message requires more than linguistic knowledge, "it involves understanding the culture as well as the social practices of the community of speakers in question" (Sorea, 2007, p. 26).

As a matter of fact, pragmatics does not only operate on the processing or decoding of the source text but also at the re-verbalization or encoding of the target text for a target culture. The production of an adequate translation requires awareness about relevant social and cultural differences. This twofold process can be illustrated as follows:

[1] Eblaite or Eblan is an extinct Semitic language named after the ancient city of Ebla in Syria, where the tablets were found.



Obviously, the more distant the languages are in membership, the more challenging translation becomes. As English and Arabic, for instance, belong to different language families, translation problems are likely to occur, on a linguistic, textu al or cultural level. Unless the translator adopts appropriate approaches to overcome these challenges, mistranslating or omitting some problematic items may result in meaning distortion and reduce the quality of the translated text. On the top of these challenging pragmatic aspect we find speech acts and irony. In the following section we will study some of the difficulties posed by these two aspects and the strategies used by translators to overcome these challenges.

3. Data Analysis

3.1 Speech acts

In real-life situations, there are generally communicative goals related to every utterance we produce. Speakers express their emotions, ask questions, make requests, and commit themselves to actions; they do things with words. In pragmatics, the term speech act is used to describe such language actions. A wide range of what we say can qualify as speech acts.

According to Austin, verbs like 'certify, apologize or request' are called 'performative verbs' because an action is performed by uttering them. From a grammatical point of view, performatives occur with the first person singular in the present active form because by uttering the 'statement' the speaker performs the act named by the verb. Explicit performatives are widely used in legal documents.

Translators generally encounter several challenges trying to find verbal / functional equivalents in the target language legal system. Bearing in mind the sensitiveness of legal texts, the translator has to identify and preserve the intended meaning and function of the document which corresponds to identifying and preserving the illocutionary and perlocutionary force.

In their book, the Legal Translator at Work, Hatim and Abdullah Ashannaq (1995), suggest a list of equivalent performative speech acts to translate Arabic legal documents into English. In their translation, they make use of different translation strategies:

One of these strategies is addition. In the examples in section (a) below, the adverb 'hereby' is added in the TT. This addition is justified by the fact that archaic expressions like 'herein' or 'hereby', which mean 'by means of this act, these words, this document', are frequent in the English legal discourse, as a device asserting that the act is officially undertaken. Although, 'hereby' can be considered as a part of the prototypical style of some legal document s, it can be left out without affecting the meaning, as explicit performatives are assertive. Similarly, the expression 'بموجب هذا العقد', which can be taken as a functional equivalent of 'hereby', is not used in the ST, since the legal force of the document is evident and the meaning is the same.

	ST	TT
a	1. **أصرح** بأن أفراد عائلتي... 2. **نشهد** بأن المتقاعد... 3. **أقر وأعترف**...	1. **I hereby declare** that the abovementioned members... 2. **We hereby certify** that the pensioner... 3. **I hereby confirm and acknowledge**...

In the following set of examples (b), the Arabic makes use of the present participle 'اسم الفاعل', generally used to describe current states (الحال) or expected events in the future(الاستقبال), while the TT uses an explicit performative, as in (5), or indirect performatives, as in (4, 6 and 7). Pragmatically, the choice of indirect/explicit performatives in requests, can be explained by the kind of social relationship holding between the participants.

b	وأنا **مستعد** لإعادته	.4	4.	**I am prepared** to return it
	لذلك **جئت مسترحما**	.5	5.	**I** therefore **appeal**
	راجيا منكم التفضل بالموافقة	.6	6.	I **hope that you will consent**
	وإرسال الموافقة إلى عنواني	.7	7.	**Please send** your acceptance to the above address

The examples in (c), contain a shift in tense. The past tense in the Arabic text is translated as simple present. In Arabic, the use of the simple past can be justified by the existence of fixed expressions for marriage contract, widely acknowledge as the legitimate formulae to be used in this context. Similar simple past formulae exist for divorce (طلقتك), and sale (بعتك)contracts, whereby the meaning is that the action was officially executed by writing the present document, as a proof of a prior commitment.

In the same way, the movement from the perfective form in Arabic to the present simple is pragmatically justified. Unlike in Arabic, it is conventional to use the simple present in marriage contract, to preserve clarity, neatness and forcefulness:

The simplest and strongest form of a verb is present tense. A document written in the present tense is more immediate and less complicated. Using the present tense makes your document more direct and forceful. (p. 22)2

c	**زَوَّجتك وأنكحتك موكلتي**	.8	8.	**I give my daughter to you in marriage**
	رضيت بزواجها ونكاحها لنفسي	.9	9.	**I accept daughter in marriage**
	أبرأت ذمة زوجي	.10	10.	**I absolve** my husband

The same writing conventions account for the use of two synonymous verbs, in examples (6) and (8), which are rendered by one equivalent verb in English to avoid redundancy. As a strategy, adjustment to the target culture text conventions is necessary to respond to the addressee's expectations, especially when dealing with documents that have a legal function.

In section (d), the Arabic version uses the main verb in the imperfective aspect (المضارع), which can be used in Arabic with a present and future meaning to convey continuity of the action. This makes the idea of promise clear although not explicitly stated, as is the case for the English text. In (13), dissolution is used as a strategy to translate the verb 'أوكل', as it has no equivalent in English.

d	**أدفع** بموجب هذه الكفالة	.11	11. **I promise to pay** against this bill
	أكفل...	.12	12. **I hereby act as guarantor**
	أوكل...	.13	13. **I appoint as my representative**

Faced by the lack of equivalents, translators opt for omission by discarding formulaic expressions commonly used in legal documents and replace them with available equivalents, that are accessible to the target culture audience, as long as this does not distort the meaning and function of the text. For instance, culturally embedded collocations in Arabic, such as 'نكح لنفسه' and 'أبرأ ذمته', have no equivalent collocations in English, and are thus translated as 'accept in marriage' and 'absolve'.

Polysemous performative verbs are another issue that faces translators, especially in translating legal texts or documents. An example of these is 'repudiate' that can be translated as 'تنصل" (disclaim) 'in repudiate a duty', 'أنكر ' (deny) as in 'repudiate a charge', or ' خلع' (abandon), as in 'repudiate a spouse'. Knowing the relevance of each term to a specific context is crucial in determining the equivalent performative verb to use in Arabic.

Briefly, the difficulty in translating legal documents is not only due to the unavailability of legal equivalents in different languages due to cultural differences and legal systems particularity, but also to the fact that legal translation imposes tight constraints on the translator's creativity. However, equipped with practical and theoretical knowledge, translators can overcome these pitfalls by implementing the right translation strategies.

3.2 Irony

Irony is another pragmatic aspect of language that relies on context. Verbal irony has been traditionally defined as saying one thing and meaning another. However, irony cannot be conceived of as a stylistic or linguistic feature of a text since there are no words or utterances that are ironic or humorous out of context. As a matter of fact, words acquire their irony when joined to

[2] Federal Plain Language Guidelines, March 2011, Rev. 1, May 2011

other words in a given situation. Accordingly, understanding irony requires a series of interpretations in the light of the situation, as irony is not communicated literally. Sometimes irony is created when what is said contradicts or diverges from reality as when someone says "What a nice day today!" on a rainy day, or "You're so clever" to someone who has just said something stupid. Yet, the listener, after hearing this, does not stop at the contradiction between reality and the utterance but activates all possible implicatures to decode the intention of the speaker based on available contextual means and their shared experience.
In literary texts, there is an interaction between the ironic devices and the text which constitute a framework for meaning. Consequently, the reader makes use of the co-text to decode meaning. As for translators of literary texts, in their attempt to transfer meaning, more care should be given to stylistic devices such as irony so as to preserve the aesthetic dimensions of language and the expressive function of the text.

In this context, we will provide a number of examples, extracted from Najib Mahfud's Al Midaq Alley, and compare them to their English translations by Le Gassick (1975), in order to investigate the strategies used by the translator in translating irony:

ST	TT
لم تكن المرأة تعرف التردد، ولا كان **الحياء** من أسباب ضعفها **في يوم من الأيام**" (p.97)	"The woman scarcely knew the meaning of hesitation, and **shyness was not her weakness**" (p.63)

In the example above, the ironical effect is created by means exaggeration. The use of 'لم' to negate the verb in the past and the emphasis created by means of the phrase 'في يوم من الأيام', which means that she has never experienced feelings of embarrassment or humiliation in her life. Hyperbolizing the behavior and attitude of the character created a humorous effect that was reduced by the addition of the adverb 'scarcely' and the omission the phrase ' في يوم من الأيام' .

1. " **أنت بغل بلا زيادة ولا نقصان**، فلماذا تروم احتراف الشحاذة؟!" (p. 65) 2. "جننت **يا بن القديمة**! " (p.121)	1. "**You are an ox of a man!** Why do you want to become a beggar?"(p.41) 2. "**you son of an old hag**" (p.79)

In the examples above, the humorous effect is produced first by means of culture specific metaphors with negative connotations, as they are used, in the Egyptian dialect, to insult someone amusingly. Associating a man to a mule, does not only imply a reference to his strength and ability to work hard, but also to his insensibility because in this context, he wants the speaker to maim him, so that he can become a beggar. Second, the use of the idiomatic expression, ' بلا زيادة ولانقصان', is intended to highlight the speaker's rudeness, especially that he is addressing the client directly.

In the second example, the irony is created by associating the adjective 'القديمة' to a person. The adjective is not conventionally used to describe people in Arabic, although the insult is common in the Egyptian dialect. Besides, calling someone 'ابن القديمة' is insulting, because it defines a man by his kinship to his mother, who is ironically described as very old, instead of his father. The irony here is created by deviating from the conventional use of the adjective ' القديمة'. Although this deviation is not reproduced in the TT, the ironical effect is reproduced by the use of the English idiomatic expression 'old hag'. The compensation strategy, opted for here, succeeded in preserving the stylistic effect. In contrast, the verbal irony in the first example is lost because the idiomatic expression 'an ox of a man' implies only power.

Examples (1) below is an instance of dramatic irony. The speaker is shocked because one of the characters, wants to marry her foster daughter, despite all her despicable flaws. The irony is created by means of the metaphor she uses, comparing her daughter's frequent fights with other women to a battle, in an allusion to her ferocity and lack of good manners. The following phrase 'يا ويل الرجال من لحم النساء' expresses the speaker's malignant pleasure at the misfortune of the man, who sees only flesh in her daughter. The translator explicitation of the metaphor and his omission of the last phrase resulted in a loss of this humorous effect. Omission is equally opted for in example (2), resulting in a loss of the sarcastic effect created by the unusual

image created by the expression 'قنصل الإوز'

1-ألم يشهد **معركة من معاركها؟ يا ويل الرجال من لحم النساء!** ثم قالت لها دون أن تحول عنها عينيها" (p.149) 2-من الطبيعي أن ترتاد حياة أخرى، تليق **بمقامك العالي يا بن قنصل الإوز**!(p.122)	1-"Has he never seen one of her **tantrums**?" Without taking her eyes off the girl, Umm Hamida made a clucking sound and commented" (p. 97) 2-it's only natural that you should want to lead another life, more appropriate to **your lordship's position**!" (p.79)

Taken together, we can deduce that it's easier for the translator to preserve irony when the it is not associated with culture specific metaphors, fixed expressions or idiomatic expressions. In other words, it is easier for the translator to preserve in the ironic effect when the interpretation of irony relies on the circumstances, and the reader can infer the implicit meaning based on his knowledge of the text. Noteworthy, the translator's success depends of course on the linguistic resources available in the target language.

4. Conclusion

When translating some pragmatic aspects of the text, the translator may not find available equivalents in the target language. To cope with such difficulties, the translation has to use different translation strategies. The choice of which should be determined by different factors, including the text function, the text type, and the target text reader expectations and knowledge of the world.

Given that translation is an act of communication, similar to real life interactions between people, the translator has to make sure effective communication is achieved in terms of situationality, intentionality and acceptability (Bell, 1991). In other words, the translated text has to use an appropriate context to express the intentions of the original text and produce an effect on the receptor. This is why some aspects of language, which rely on the cultural and situational context, are more difficult to translate than others.

For translators, it is important to situate texts into specific contexts when translating from one language into another. So as to avoid mistranslation, the translator has to be well acquainted with the target language and source language pragmatics so that he could translate in a way that is acceptable and accessible to the target culture reader.

Funding: This research received no external funding.
Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

[1] Austin, J. (1962). How to do things with words. Oxford University Press.
[2] Bell, R. (1991). Translation and translating: theory and practice, London: Longman.
[3] Halliday M.A.K. (1992). Language theory and translation practice, *Rivista internazionale di tecnica della traduzione*, (n. 0), pp. 15-25. Retrived from: https://www.openstarts.units.it/bitstream/10077/8905/1/M.A.K.%20Halliday.pdf
[4] Hatim, B. and Ashannaq, A. (1995). The Legal translator at work. Dar Al-Hilal for Translation and Publishing
[5] House, J. (2015). Translation quality assessment: Past and present. Routledge.
[6] Munday, J. (2008). Introducing translation studies. Routledge.
[7] Nord, C. (2001). Translating as a Purposeful Activity, Functionalist Approaches Explained. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
[8] Sorea, D. (2007) Translation. theory and practice. Bucureşti, Editura Coresi.