

Competence-Based Models and Translation Universals in Translation Education

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Abstract: This article highlights the theoretical and methodological foundations of the competence-based approach in translation education as well as the concept of translation universals. The study analyzes modern models of translation competences (linguistic, pragmatic, cultural, strategic, and technological components) and reveals their interrelationship with translation universals. In addition, the manifestations of such translation universals as simplification, normalization, explicitation, and interference in the educational process are examined. The article scientifically substantiates the necessity of integrating competence-based models with translation universals in translator training and concludes with methodological implications aimed at improving translation education.

Keywords: Translation education, translation competence, competence-based model, translation universals, linguistic competence, pragmatic competence, cultural competence, strategic competence, translation process, normalization, simplification, exploitation, interference, methodological approach.

Introduction: A modern translator is no longer merely a “word-for-word translator,” but rather a problem solver, an intercultural mediator, an analyst, and a specialist proficient in technological tools. Merely having a strong command of grammar or knowing two languages well is no longer sufficient to meet the demands of today’s real translation market. For this reason, the competence-based approach has become central in contemporary translation education. Although the notion of translation competence is widely used, it is often understood superficially. Competence is not simply knowledge; it is the integration of knowledge, skills, practice, and reflection – that is, the learner’s ability to manage and control the translation process independently.

For example, when a student translates the expression “law enforcement” as “huquqni muhofaza qilish organlari,” they are not merely consulting a dictionary but also understanding how this term functions within the Uzbek socio-cultural and legal context. This is not merely linguistic competence; it represents integrated translation competence.

“The primary goal of translator training should be to prepare a flexible and specialized professional who is capable of making independent strategic decisions in

real-life situations.”

Among contemporary approaches in translation education, competence-based teaching is recognized as one of the most effective and methodologically grounded approaches. In particular, the PACTE model (Processes of Acquisition of Translation Competence and Evaluation), which scientifically conceptualizes translation competence, represents one of the major research initiatives in this field and can serve as a valuable theoretical framework for Uzbek translation education as well. This model has been developed since the late 1990s by a research group on translation competence at the Autonomous University of Barcelona in Spain. The head of the group is Professor Amparo Hurtado Albir, a recognized specialist in translation pedagogy, translator training, and translation quality assessment.

“Translation competence is not a single simple skill, but a complex, dynamic system composed of multiple interrelated components.”

Main Part

Scholars have demonstrated through empirical research that linguistic knowledge alone is not sufficient in translator training. According to them,

genuine translation is an integrated activity that combines knowledge, skills, experience, and strategic thinking. The PACTE model divides translation competence into six main components. They are as follows: Translation Competence.

This is the core “controlling competence.” The translator reads the text, understands its purpose, identifies its stylistic features, and determines which strategy should be selected accordingly. A student’s independent decision to use a translation memory (TM) tool in order to ensure terminological consistency represents a strategic and autonomous action. For example, the following sentence is given to a student:

“The decision was made behind closed doors.”

If translated literally, it would be rendered as:

“Qaror yopiq eshiklar ortida qabul qilindi.”

This version is grammatically correct. However, a student with well-developed translation competence may choose another variant from a stylistic and connotative perspective, for example:

“Qaror yashirin ravishda qabul qilindi.”

This competence controls the adequacy of the translation in terms of meaning, purpose, and style.

Linguistic Competence refers to a thorough knowledge of both languages involved in translation (the source language and the target language), an accurate understanding of grammatical and lexical units, and the ability to use them appropriately in context.

For instance, translating the phrase “economic policy” not always as “iqtisodiy siyosat” but, depending on the context, as “moliya siyosati” is the result of linguistic sensitivity.

Cultural Competence involves understanding cultural codes, realia, and connotations, and representing them appropriately in translation in accordance with the context. For example, rather than providing a literal translation of the holiday “Thanksgiving,” offering an explanatory rendering that is accessible to Uzbek readers reflects sensitivity to cultural differences.

Thanksgiving is a religious and family-oriented holiday celebrated in the United States (and also in Canada). Its history dates back to 1621 and is associated with the celebration of the first moderate harvest shared by Puritans (American Protestant settlers) and Native Americans. The main idea of the holiday is giving thanks to God, abundance, family gatherings, and the symbol of peace. In the United States, it is celebrated annually on the fourth Thursday of November, during which turkey is traditionally prepared, families gather around a single table, and television broadcasts feature sports events (especially football) and parades.

One of the practical advantages of the PACTE model analyzed above is that it views the learner or student translator as being in a process of development. Teaching translation is not limited to simply “producing a correct translation.” It teaches thinking, analysis, and learning from mistakes. If training sessions are designed on the basis of this model, they may be structured as follows:

Each exercise is aimed at developing a specific competence;

Independent tasks and assessment criteria are defined for each competence;

Students identify which competences they are strong in and which ones require improvement;

Lessons are organized according to the “analysis–practice–reflection” sequence.

According to translation scholar Amparo Hurtado Albir, “translation competence is a complex ability that simultaneously encompasses cognitive, linguistic, cultural, technological, and reflective elements.”

The development of this competence requires a comprehensive and multifaceted approach in education.”

Competence-based translation education is not merely a set of exercises; it is a professional training strategy. Each competence has its own priority; however, genuine results can only be achieved through their integrated development.

Following the PACTE model, the conceptual model of translation competences known as EMT (European Master’s in Translation) was also developed.

The EMT is a competence-based model for translator education proposed by the European Commission starting from 2009 and updated in 2017. Its main objective is to evaluate master’s-level translation programs according to unified criteria, enhance their quality, and train professional translators who meet the demands of the European market. This model is not merely a theoretical framework; rather, it has been developed as a practical educational tool by teachers, methodologists, and professionals, and it is currently implemented in more than 60 universities across Europe.

“The EMT model defines a competence-based approach, rather than theoretical knowledge, as the primary criterion for describing the profession of a translator.”

The updated 2017 EMT model defines translation competence as consisting of six core components. Each of them reflects skills that strengthen the translator’s professional and cultural activity. Below, the

translation competences of the EMT model are outlined. They include the following:

Translation service provision competence – the ability to plan translation projects, communicate with clients, meet deadlines, prepare documentation, and work in compliance with professional ethics.

Language competence – a thorough command of the source and target languages, the correct application of their grammatical, lexical, and stylistic features, and the ability to produce accurate and coherent translations.

Technological competence – the skill of effectively using computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools, corpora, translation memories, and machine translation tools.

Intercultural competence – the ability to translate while taking into account ethical, stylistic, and social differences present in various cultures and contexts.

Information mining competence – the ability to search for necessary information, analyze sources, and carry out translation based on reliable data.

Personal and interpersonal competence – the ability to work independently, engage in self-assessment, accept criticism, work collaboratively in a team, and strive for professional development.

In translation theory and practice, there are two major approaches, and a modern translator must understand their differences and similarities, as well as how they are applied in the translation process and translation research. These are the prescriptive and descriptive approaches to translation. They are discussed in more detail below.

The prescriptive approach can be defined as an approach that distinguishes between “correct” and “incorrect” translations at the levels of grammar, lexis, and syntax. In assessing translations, it relies on normative criteria. This approach is particularly important in the translation of textbooks, legislative documents, and official texts.

The descriptive approach in translation theory examines the question of “how translation is actually carried out in practice.” This approach observes, describes, and analyzes the translation process as a real phenomenon. In the descriptive approach, there are no strict norms; its main objective is to identify what kinds of decisions translators make and which strategies and techniques they employ. This approach is based on corpus linguistics, historical translation practice, and the socio-cultural context, and it studies translations on an empirical basis. In other words, it proceeds not from how translation should be, but from how it is. It takes into account the multiplicity and contextual nature of

translation and also examines in depth cultural and stylistic adequacy in the target language.

In contrast to the prescriptive approach, Eugene Nida explains the translation process not as mere linguistic transfer, but as the transfer of meaning and concepts from one language system to another. This process is divided into two main stages: decoding and re-encoding.

At the decoding stage, the language of the source text is analyzed semantically; that is, the deep meaning underlying the surface linguistic forms of the original text is identified. At this stage, the following operations are carried out:

- a) lexical and grammatical analysis;
- b) identification of semantic structures;
- c) understanding of the pragmatic context;
- d) extraction of cultural and referential information.

For example, let us analyze the translation of the expression “break the ice.” At the level of literal decoding, it is rendered as “to break the ice.” However, semantic decoding reveals meanings such as breaking social silence, easing the atmosphere, and encouraging freer interpersonal communication.

Re-encoding is the stage at which the decoded semantic information is re-expressed in the target language in a natural and contextually appropriate form. The stages of re-encoding include the following:

- a) using the lexical and syntactic resources of the target language;
- b) adapting the information to the cultural context of the target audience;
- c) ensuring stylistic and functional adequacy.

In Uzbek, re-encoded translation variants may include meanings such as “suhbatni jonlantirdi” (livened up the conversation), “sukutni buzdi” (broke the silence), “yuzlarni kuldirdi” (made people smile), or “gapni boshladi” (started the conversation). For example, the sentence:

“She told a funny story to break the ice.”

can be re-encoded into Uzbek as:

“U suhbatni ochish uchun kulgili voqea aytib berdi / hazil qildi.”

If this expression were translated literally as “U muz sindirdi” (“She broke the ice”), it would be contextually incorrect or unclear. Therefore, at the decoding stage, the original meaning is extracted, and at the re-encoding stage, it is replaced with a variant that is appropriate to social communication in Uzbek. In this process, the principle of dynamic equivalence is observed: the semantic core is preserved, while the

lexical form changes. In this case, the re-encoding stage creates a semantic equivalent of the original expression in the target language; even if it does not correspond exactly in grammatical or stylistic terms, it remains semantically and communicatively adequate.

Eugene Nida views this model as a psycholinguistic process. According to him, the translator must not only process words, but also understand ideas, concepts, and cultural connotations and re-express them accordingly.

As a decoder, the translator transforms linguistic units into semantic units.

As a re-encoder, the translator reshapes semantic units within a new linguistic code.

For Nida, translation is not merely a transfer from one language to another, but a means of ensuring communication between cultural contexts. The decoding–re-encoding model operates not only at the lexical level, but also at the level of cultural cognition. For example, in Bible translations, the expression “Lamb of God” is re-encoded in some languages as “an innocent sacrifice sent by God,” because a direct animal metaphor may not always be correctly understood.

The decoding–re-encoding model forms the foundation of the functional-semantic transfer approach in translation theory. Through this model, Nida conceptualizes the translator as a linguistic mediator who serves as a bridge between two cultures. This model is recognized as one of the most logically coherent and practically grounded forms of prescriptive translation theory.

One of the scholars who laid the foundations of the descriptive approach is Gideon Toury, who developed the methodological, empirical, and theoretical foundations of this approach in his seminal work *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*, published in 1995.

The main characteristics of the descriptive approach are as follows:

Translation is approached empirically: real translated texts are observed and analyzed.

It is guided not by the question “How should translation be?” but rather by “How is translation actually carried out?”

Translation is studied within its cultural, social, and historical context.

It focuses on observation rather than on evaluative judgment of quality.

Conclusion

Today, corpus linguistics has further strengthened the

descriptive approach. Through corpora, thousands of translations can be analyzed statistically. Mona Baker, based on the Translational English Corpus (TEC), identified tendencies in translated texts such as reduced lexical diversity and increased stylistic neutralization. Sara Laviosa analyzed phenomena such as stylistic simplification and normalization in translated texts using the TEC. These studies demonstrate that certain stylistic shifts occur systematically in translations. The descriptive approach provides a scientific explanation for precisely these recurrent phenomena. When translation classes are conducted using the descriptive approach, the following outcomes can be achieved:

Students abandon rigid templates and the notion of an “ideal translation” and learn to understand real translation variants.

Reflective thinking develops within translation competence, prompting questions such as: “Why did I choose this word?” and “In what style am I translating?”

Stylistic shifts are analyzed in the classroom through the use of parallel corpora.

The descriptive approach in translation studies is based on observing real translation practices and analyzing stylistic, lexical, and grammatical tendencies. This approach offers significant opportunities not only for academic research, but also for translation education, translator training, and the systematic study of translation quality.

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