Перекладознавство та міжкультурна комунікація

Semantic aspects of translation: English-Ukrainian correspondences

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Abstract

This article offers a comprehensive examination of the semantic dimension of translation, with a particular focus on English-Ukrainian correspondences. It investigates the linguistic, cognitive, and cultural parameters that shape the process of meaning transfer across languages. The relevance of the study lies in the growing demand for precise and culturally attuned translation within an increasingly globalized communicative environment, where accurate intercultural mediation is essential in such domains as diplomacy, science, business, education, and mass media. The primary objective is to elucidate the mechanisms by which semantic relationships are realized in English-Ukrainian translation and to identify strategies that effectively ensure semantic equivalence. The study also classifies types of semantic correspondence and analyzes instances of semantic divergence, with particular attention to the interaction among lexical semantics, contextual meaning, and culturally embedded knowledge – all of which present significant challenges to translation adequacy and equivalence. Methodologically, the research employs a combination of comparative, componential, and semantic field analyses, applied to a corpus of examples drawn from literary, journalistic, and colloquial texts. The theoretical framework integrates insights from both classical and contemporary translation theories, including dynamic and formal equivalence models, as well as cognitive and functional approaches to meaning construction and transfer. The findings demonstrate that English-Ukrainian semantic correspondences are seldom isomorphic, due to substantial discrepancies in lexical organization, semantic categorization, and idiomatic expression between the two languages. While some lexical items exhibit direct equivalents, many others require contextual reinterpretation or transformation. Particular emphasis is put on the translation of polysemous words, idiomatic expressions, and culturally specific elements, which often necessitate the use of functional analogues, descriptive reformulations, or compensatory techniques to preserve both semantic content and stylistic nuance. The study further systematizes key types of semantic transformation – including generalization, concretization, modulation, and semantic development – and underscores their critical role in addressing semantic and cultural asymmetries. Special attention is given to the translation of connotative meanings and culturally loaded references, which demand not only linguistic proficiency but also advanced intercultural awareness and pragmatic sensitivity on the part of the translator. In conclusion, the article contends that translation should not be conceptualized as a mechanical process of linguistic substitution, but rather as a complex act of intercultural communication. Semantic adequacy depends on a nuanced understanding of both source and target languages, along with their respective cultural and communicative contexts. The research contributes to the advancement of translation studies by offering a refined typology of semantic correspondences, methodological guidance for semasiological analysis, and pedagogical recommendations for translator training. The implications extend to improving translation quality, enhancing intercultural competence, and informing the development of more sophisticated theoretical and practical models in translation scholarship.

Keywords: semantic approach, translation studies, semasiological method, semantic equivalence, English-Ukrainian translation

Семантичні аспекти перекладу: англійсько-українські відповідники

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Анотація

У статті схарактеризовано семантичні аспекти перекладу з англійської на українську мову. Актуальність теми зумовлена зростанням потреби в адекватному та культурно релевантному перекладі, що забезпечує ефективне порозуміння в умовах глобалізованого комунікативного середовища, зокрема в дипломатичній, науковій, освітній, медійній та діловій сферах. Метою статті є з'ясування механізмів реалізації семантичних зв'язків у перекладі з англійської мови на українську, а також визначення найбільш ефективних стратегій досягнення семантичної еквівалентності. Основну увагу зосереджено на класифікації типів семантичної відповідності, аналізі явищ семантичної дивергенції, а також на дослідженні взаємозв'язку лексичної семантики, контекстуального значення та культурно зумовлених знань, які ускладнюють процес перекладу з огляду на критерії адекватності й еквівалентності. Методологічна основа дослідження передбачає використання порівняльного, компонентного та семантичного аналізів, що застосовуються під час добирання прикладів із художніх, публіцистичних та розмовних текстів. Теоретичну базу становлять як класичні, так і сучасні перекладознавчі концепції, зокрема теорії динамічної й формальної еквівалентності, а також когнітивні та функціональні моделі передачі значення. З'ясовано, що семантичні відповідники між вихідною (англійською) та цільовою (українською) мовами часто бувають ізоморфними через розбіжності в лексичній структурі та ідіоматичному репертуарі. Переклад полісемічних слів, фразеологізмів і культурно маркованих одиниць вимагає використання функційних аналогів, описових трансформацій або компенсаторних стратегій. Зазначено, що досягнення семантичної відповідності можливе лише за умови глибокого розуміння як вихідної, так і цільової мов, а також релевантних культурних і комунікативних контекстів. Укладнено типологію семантичних відповідників, що сприяє поглибленню теорії та практики перекладу, формує методичні орієнтири для семасіологічного аналізу та напрацювання рекомендацій щодо підготовки фахівців у галузі перекладознавства. Отримані результати можуть бути використані для підвищення якості перекладу, формування міжкультурної компетентності й удосконалення моделей перекладацької діяльності в академічному та професійному середовищі.

Ключові слова: семантичний підхід, перекладознавство, семасіологічний метод, семантична еквівалентність, англійсько-український переклад

Introduction. Translation is not merely a mechanical process of replacing words from one language with their equivalents in another; it is a complex act of transferring meaning across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Among the various approaches to translation, the semantic aspect plays a crucial role in ensuring that the intended meaning of the original text is preserved. Semantic translation prioritizes the sense and nuances of individual words and phrases, aiming to capture their full connotative meanings in the target language. «Semantic translation remains within the original culture and assissts the reader only in its connotations if they constitute the essential human (non-ethnic) message of the text» (Newmark, 1981, p. 39). This approach is particularly attentive to the cultural and contextual dimensions of language, recognizing that words often carry layers of meaning that go beyond their surface definitions. As such, the semantic aspect of translation seeks to bridge not just linguistic differences but also the subtleties of thought embedded in the source text. It pursues «the thought-processes rather than the intention of the transmitter» (ibid.).

In the field of translation studies, the semantic approach is often regarded as the most theoretically nuanced, as it emphasizes the process by which linguistic signs convey conceptual meaning rather than merely referential content. The studies conducted within this theoretical framework evolved within semiotic (linguistic-centric), communicative (functional) and cognitive perspectives. The semiotic view regards translation as the process of transferring the 'meaning' encoded in one set of linguistic signs into a different set, relying on the effective use of vocabulary and grammar (Catford, 1965; Nida, Taber, 1982; Bassnett-McGuire, 2002). Within the communicative perspective, translation is viewed as an act of communication in which the medium ('force') prevails over the content (Newmark, 1981, p. 39). The functionally oriented approach adapts the translation to the target audience's needs: meaning is considered as «information which is offered under the condition that the sender expects it to be of interest (to contain something 'new') for the recipient» (Reiß, Vermeer, 2013, p. 92). The cognitive approach to translation shifts the focus from texts and functions to what happens inside the translator's mind – that is, how meaning is processed, constructed, and transferred cognitively (Halverson, 2017;

Vandevoorde, 2020). Drawing on the foundational principles of semiotics, alongside communicative, functional, and cognitive linguistics, the approach underscores the significance of cross-cultural (Sperber, Devellis, Boehlecke, 1994; Papadakis et al., 2022) and cross-disciplinary (García, Muñoz, Singer, 2023) avenues in the study of semantic translation.

It is evident that the semantic approach exhibits internal diversity and cannot be regarded as monolithic. It branches into various sub-approaches – denotative, significative, communicative, etc. – each focusing on a different aspect of meaning. «Translation is now regarded as complex interlinguistic and intercultural process where the context of communication is of foremost importance» (Cortés, Harding, 2018). The challenge is to define how these sub-approaches relate to one another and to clarify what makes each one distinct.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the semantic approach to translation from English into Ukrainian, with particular emphasis on the semasiological strategies used to preserve both denotative and connotative meanings across languages and cultures. The purpose is threefold: to explore the principles and mechanisms of the semasiological method as applied to translation; to identify and categorize types of semasiological correspondences – identity, inclusion, overlap, and exclusion – in English-Ukrainian translation practice; to demonstrate the practical relevance of the semasiological approach in specialized domains such as legal and scientific translation.

The research material comprises words and phrases with multiple meanings, which describe culturally bound, emotionally charged, or context-sensitive phenomena. These lexical items are analyzed in light of their semantic complexity to illustrate how translators maintain conceptual and expressive equivalence between the source and target texts. The English illustrations are either taken from Oxford English Dictionary (OED, 2009) or generated by ChatGPT.

1. Methodological Framework.

The research is grounded in an interdisciplinary methodology that integrates principles from semantics, semiotics, cognitive linguistics, and translation studies. The study employs a qualitative analytical approach, with particular emphasis on the semasiological method, which moves from word to meaning, focusing on

how lexical items in the source language (English) correspond to equivalent units in the target language (Ukrainian). This study is based on the assumption that translation is a cognitively and culturally mediated process in which semantic equivalence goes beyond literal meaning to include conceptual, connotative, and contextual dimensions. The research procedure includes: examination of the significative process of translation; identification of key elements of the semantic approach to translation; classification of translation correspondences according to the typology of semasiological equivalence (identity, inclusion, overlap, exclusion). Through this methodology, the study aims to demonstrate how semasiological principles can be effectively applied to achieve both linguistic precision and cultural fidelity in translation practice.

2. Examination of the significative process of translation.

The significative process of translation emphasizes conveying the conceptual and connotative components of lexical meaning from the source language to the target language.

The conceptual component of lexical meaning is determined by the word's reference to a mental entity (concept, image, idea, conception, etc.). Within this approach, lexical meaning is treated as a concept (an abstract or generalized idea of objects, processes, and other phenomena) denoted by a word. The relation of the word to the concept is interpreted as its conceptual meaning. The concept comprises the minimum of typical features that characterize the object of designation and distinguish it from other objects. Depending on a translator's intention in selecting those typical features, translation may reveal different degrees of semasiological equivalence, cf. the term *blackball*, which refers to formally rejecting or excluding someone from a group or society, often through a voting process (OED). A direct translation might focus on the equivalent of «to exclude» or «to ostracize», considering the contextual background. The choice reflects the translator's intention to convey both the action (exclusion or ostracism) and its underlying negative connotation within the specific social context, ensuring the translation resonates with Ukrainian readers by maintaining the original's conceptual nuances, cf.:

*Anyone put up for election can be **blackballed**.*

*Будь-яка кандидатура, висунута на вибори, може бути **забалотована**.*

*Most clubs are exclusive in the sense that you can be **blackballed** because people do not want you.*

*Існує велика кількість клубів, які вважаються ексклюзивними лише тому, що там можуть **відмовити** будь-кому, кого не раді бачити.*

*She cuts somebody, and the man is **blackballed** in his club. There is no need to explain why he was blackballed or by whom.*

*Вона втрачає прихильність до вас – і ви вже **не член** клубу. А пояснювати, хто до цього причетний і чому, немає потреби.*

The connotative component of lexical meaning is determined by the speaker's attitude towards a denoted object, the relations between an addresser and addressee, the communication environment, the goal an interlocutor intends to achieve, etc. Realizing the connotative component of lexical meaning in translation involves capturing emotional, evaluative, expressive, cultural, or associative nuances of words beyond their literal meanings. For example, the term *baby-kisser* is colloquially used in English to refer to politicians who kiss babies during campaigns to gain favor with voters. To translate this concept into Ukrainian, one would need to convey not just the literal action but also the implication of seeking public disapproval through superficial or symbolic gestures. A creative equivalent in Ukrainian might focus on this aspect of political behavior, cf.:

*Don't be fooled by that charming smile; he's just another **baby-kisser** looking for votes.*

*Не дайте себе ошукати – це удавана чарівна посмішка чергового **слуги народу**, який намагається **здобути прихильність** електорату.*

*The local news mocked the mayor as a **baby-kisser**, highlighting his photo ops with babies and handshakes at community events.*

*Місцева преса охрестила мера **улесливим популістом** за його показні фотосесії з малюками, обіймами та ручканнями під час громадських заходів.*

3. Key elements of the semantic approach to translation

Key elements of the semantic approach to translation include:

(a) understanding the direct, dictionary definitions of words and how they form a concept in the source language, cf.:

*The defendant was charged with **burglary**.*

*Підсудного звинуватили в **незаконному проникненні до житла з наміром вчинення тяжкого злочину**.*

The translation accurately reflects the legal term *burglary* «the crime of breaking into a house with intent to commit felony» (OED), focusing on the specific denotation of unauthorized entry with the intent to commit a crime, crucial in a legal context;

(b) grasping the cultural meanings words carry, beyond their literal definition. Culturally specific terms have no equivalent in the target culture and necessitate cultural adaptation or explanation to ensure the target audience understands the reference. For example, the English idiom *(as) crafty as a rat*, rendered as *підступний, як пацюк (щур)*, would not reflect its specificity (rats are said to have a premonition when a ship is about to sink, and leave it) in Ukrainian, as for the Ukrainians the concept of 'rat' is hardly associated with 'craftiness, guile, treachery'. It is rather the concept of 'snake' that counts, cf.: *пригріти змію на грудях* «виявити турботу, піклування про того, хто потім віддячує злом»; *лізти змією в душу* «виявляючи удавану люб'язність, приязнь до когось, добиватися його довір'я, прихильності»; hence, *підступний, як змія* might be a more appropriate equivalent, cf.:

*He is hypocritical, ingratiating, agile, and **as crafty as a rat**.*

*Він лицемірний, улесливий, спритний і **підступний, як змія**;*

(c) analyzing how context affects word meaning and choosing translations that maintain the original's nuances, cf.:

*Mr. James Duffy lived in Chapelizod because he wished to live as far as possible from the city of which he was a citizen and because he found all the other suburbs of Dublin **mean**, **modern** and **pretentious**.*

*Пан Джеймс Даффі жив у Чейплізоді, і на те було дві причини: він прагнув бути якомога далі від міста, до громади якого належав, а ще він вважав усі інші передмістя Дубліна **жалюгідними, химерними** та **показними**.*

The original English sentence by James Joyce is stylistically rich and layered with subtle connotations, especially in the adjectives *mean*, *modern*, and *pretentious*. The word *mean* in this context likely connotes both moral pettiness and aesthetic inferiority – a kind of small-minded, unimpressive character. The Ukrainian equivalent *жалюгідні* captures the negative evaluative tone well, conveying something pitiful or contemptible, which aligns with the speaker's disdain. While it slightly amplifies the emotional judgment, it maintains the critical connotation, thus achieving a connotative equivalence. *Modern* in Joyce's context is likely pejorative, suggesting sterility, lack of tradition, or artificiality, rather than technological advancement. The Ukrainian *химерні* (something astonishing, unusual, and hard to understand or explain) leans toward visual or stylistic oddity and captures an aspect of alienation or aesthetic discomfort. This could be categorized as partial overlap in semasiological terms (vide infra), capturing a common undertone of deviation from tradition. *Pretentious* implies affectation, self-importance, or ostentatiousness without substance. *Показні* (showy or ostentatious) is a strong and effective match here, retaining both negative connotation and contextual relevance. It aligns well with the character's likely perception of suburban superficiality and thus ensures contextual and connotative fidelity.

4. Semasiological equivalence in translation

Semasiological equivalence in translation refers to the degree to which the meanings of words or phrases in the source language are matched by their translations in the target language. This can be categorized into four types:

(a) identity (exact match in meaning: A = B – class A and class B reveal the same membership) provides for a complete, or total coincidence of the equivalent terms' lexical meanings. In this type of equivalence, the meaning of a word or expression in the SL aligns perfectly with the meaning of the corresponding word or expression in the TL, cf. *black body* «*in physics*, a surface that absorbs all radiant energy falling on it» vs. *абсолютно чорне тіло* «фіз. тіло, яке цілком поглинає проміння, що падає на нього»:

*Understanding **black body behavior** is crucial in fields such as astrophysics, climate science, and thermodynamics.*

*Розуміння природи та поведінки **абсолютно чорного тіла** як об'єкта, що цілком поглинає проміння, важливе для*

багатьох галузей науки, серед яких астрофізика, кліматологія та термодинаміка.

(b) inclusion (the source meaning is fully contained within a broader target meaning: A ⊂ B – class B is wholly included in class A) is a partial coincidence that is based on the hyponymic relations revealed between the equivalent terms' lexical meanings. Inclusion occurs when the meaning in the TL is broader than in the SL, cf.:

*No amount of begging or pleading will get you the beer, because the owner of the supermarket knows that if she violates N.C. General Statute 18B-1004©, the store's **ABC license** could be revoked and its alcohol sales could end permanently.*

*Жодні прохання та благання не допоможуть вам придбати пиво в обхід правил, адже власниця супермаркету знає: якщо вона порушить Загальний Статут Північної Кароліни 18B-1004(с), їй можуть анулювати **ліцензію на продаж алкоголю** та повністю заборонити продавати алкогольні напої в магазині.*

The English term *ABC license* (SL) refers specifically to a permit issued by the Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission in the U.S. (in this case, North Carolina), governing the legal sale and distribution of alcohol. It's a specific legal document within a regional legal framework. The Ukrainian term *ліцензія на продаж алкоголю* (TL) is a general phrase meaning «license to sell alcohol» and could refer to any such permit in various countries or contexts – not limited to North Carolina's ABC system or U.S. law.

(c) overlap (partial match with some common semantic features: A ∩ B – class A and class B reveal a common membership; however, each has the elements not found in the other) is a partial coincidence that is based on an incomplete intersection of the equivalent terms' lexical meanings. Overlap refers to partial equivalence, where the meaning in the TL partially overlaps with the SL, cf.:

*Apparently, she met her husband through the internet, on one of those **internet** dating **agencies**.*

*Судячи з усього, вона познайомилася зі своїм чоловіком через інтернет на одному з тих **сайтів** знайомств.*

An Internet agency typically refers to an organization or company that provides services related to the Internet. These services can vary widely and may include web development, digital marketing, e-commerce solutions, and more. Therefore, an **internet dating agency** is a platform that facilitates connections between individuals seeking romantic relationships or companionship online. A website, on the other hand, specifically refers to a digital location accessible via the Internet. It is a collection of web pages containing information, multimedia content, or interactive features. However, agencies operate through websites or apps, allowing users to create profiles, search for potential partners, and communicate with others.

(d) exclusion (no match in meaning, requiring a different strategy for translation: A ≠ B – class A and class B reveal no common membership) is a non-coincidence of lexical meanings, with each non-overlapping part preserving its own, unique set of semantic features, cf. *hymn* «a song of praise to God» vs. *гімн* «урочиста пісня, прийнята як символ державної або класової єдності»:

*They sing **hymns** during morning, noon and evening prayers.*

(incorrect): *Вони співають **гімни** під час ранкових, обідніх та вечірніх молитов.*

(correct): *Вони співають **церковні гімни** під час ранкових, обідніх та вечірніх молитов.*

Very often exclusion deals with the concepts that would have something in common but have become estranged, cf. *orbiting* «that is moving in or into an orbit» vs. *orbiting* «a behavior when you cut off direct contact with the person, you are dating but continue to engage with their content on social media». In this case, translators may need to find alternative expressions to expose the concept correctly, cf. *орбіта* «перен. межі, сфера поширення, впливу, діяльності і т. ін. кого-, чого-небудь»:

*After our breakup, he stopped texting me directly, but he's still **orbiting** my social media profiles.*

*Після розриву наших стосунків він перестав писати мені напряму, але все ще **переглядає** мій профіль на сайті.*

*She hasn't replied to my messages, but I noticed she's **orbiting** my Instagram stories.*

*Вона не відповідає на мої повідомлення, але я помітив, що вона **заходить** на мою сторінку в Інстаграм.*

*Even though we're not talking anymore, he keeps **orbiting** my online presence.*

*Попри те, що ми більше не спілкуємося, він продовжує **відстежувати** всі мої контакти в мережі.*

Conclusions. This study has demonstrated that the semantic approach to translation from English into Ukrainian requires a comprehensive framework that goes beyond surface-level lexical correspondence. By adopting the semasiological method, the research emphasized the necessity of attending to both conceptual and connotative components of meaning in order to preserve the integrity of source texts across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Through detailed analysis, the study clarified the principles and mechanisms underlying semasiological translation and offered a typology of semantic correspondences – identity, inclusion, overlap, and exclusion. These categories helped articulate the complexity of interlingual equivalence and underscored the translator's role in navigating degrees of semantic alignment based on contextual, cultural, and conceptual factors. Moreover, the study illustrated that specialized domains such as legal and scientific discourse demand high semantic precision and functional fidelity. In such fields, the semasiological method proves especially effective in preserving terminological accuracy.

Future research on the semantic approach might explore: applying the semasiological framework to multilingual corpora for broader validation; studying cross-cultural semantic shifts in real-time translation scenarios, such as diplomatic communication, international media, or digital content localization; expanding the analysis to include pragmatic equivalence and genre-specific translation strategies in professional contexts.

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