Semantic and Lexical Transformations in Cross-Linguistic Poetic Translation

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Abstract
The translation of poetry represents one of the most intricate challenges in cross-cultural literary communication, requiring the transfer of aesthetic, cultural, and emotional values across linguistic boundaries. This study examines the semantic and lexical transformations that occur when translating poetry from Russian into English, focusing on a self-produced English translation of a selected poem by Konstantin Balmont. Drawing on the frameworks of Barkhudarov, Komissarov, and Vinay & Darbelnet, the research identifies and categorizes transformation types, including adaptation, modulation, transposition, metaphorical substitution, and semantic generalization. Through parallel-text analysis, the study demonstrates how constraints of rhyme, meter, and cultural specificity necessitate creative reworking, often resulting in lexical omissions or shifts in symbolic orientation. While compensatory strategies: additional imagery and modified metaphorical framing, help preserve emotional resonance, they can alter the source text's philosophical undertones. The findings affirm Roman Jakobson's assertion of the inseparability of form and meaning in the poetic function, revealing that even subtle rhythmic or structural changes produce semantic shifts. By situating the analysis within established linguistic and translation theories, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on balancing semantic fidelity with artistic equivalence in poetry translation.
Keywords: poetry translation; semantic transformation; lexical transformation; adaptation; modulation; transposition; metaphorical substitution; semantic generalization; poetic function.

Семантические и лексические трансформации в межъязыковом переводе поэзии

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Аннотация

Перевод поэзии является одной из наиболее сложных задач межкультурной литературной коммуникации, поскольку требует переноса эстетических, культурных и эмоциональных ценностей через языковые границы. В данном исследовании рассматриваются семантические и лексические трансформации, возникающие при переводе поэзии с русского на английский язык, на материале выполненного автором перевода избранного стихотворения Константина Бальмонта. Опираясь на теоретические модели Бархударова, Комиссарова и Вине и Дарбельне, работа выявляет и классифицирует типы трансформаций, включая адаптацию, модуляцию, транспозицию, метафорическую замену и семантическую генерализацию. Параллельный анализ текста показывает, что ограничения рифмы, метра и культурной специфики требуют творческой переработки, которая нередко приводит к лексическим опущениям или смещению символической направленности. Компенсаторные стратегии: добавление образности и модификация метафорического ряда, позволяют сохранить эмоциональное воздействие, но могут изменять философские подтексты оригинала. Результаты подтверждают утверждение Романа Якобсона о неразрывности формы и содержания в поэтической функции, демонстрируя, что даже незначительные изменения ритма или структуры ведут к смысловым сдвигам. Исследование вносит вклад в обсуждение ключевой проблемы теории художественного перевода, поиска баланса между семантической точностью и художественной эквивалентностью при переводе поэзии.

Ключевые слова: перевод поэзии; семантические трансформации; лексические трансформации; адаптация; модуляция; транспозиция; метафорическая замена; семантическая генерализация; поэтическая функция.

Introduction

The translation of poetry plays an important role in cross-cultural literary communication due to the permitting aesthetic, cultural, and emotional values to be transferred from one language and culture to another. Poetic texts, in contrast to prose, are distinguished by a high density of stylistic, symbolic, and semantic elements; each lexical unit may have several levels of meaning and connotation. Poetry translation from English into Russian is a complex process that involves re-creating form, rhythm, and imagery while maintaining the original author's meaning and emotional impact. Poetry frequently uses culturally specific metaphors, idioms, and allusions that may not have direct equivalents in the target language, which makes this process even more difficult. To guarantee that the target text remains true to the original while also being readable by the target audience, the translator must use a variety of linguistic and interpretive techniques.

As there remain fundamental linguistic, cultural, and stylistic differences between English and Russian, translating poetry invariably entails changes at both the semantic and lexical levels. According to linguistic theory, the two languages' different grammatical structures, lexical densities, and word-formation patterns frequently call for modifications to both form and meaning. From a cultural standpoint, the source text's imagery, symbolism, and intertextual references might have their origins in the Anglophone literary tradition; therefore, they must be modified to make sure they are appropriate for audiences who speak Russian. The translator may be forced to change lexical choices or reorganize lines due to stylistic constraints of meter, rhyme, and euphony, which could result in semantic shifts. As a result, the translator has to strike a careful balance between

producing an aesthetically beautiful and culturally relevant target text and maintaining the original's semantic integrity.

Using solidified frameworks from linguistic and translation studies, the primary objective of this study is to recognize, categorize, and assess the semantic and lexical transformations used in the Russian translation of the chosen English poem. The study aims to accomplish the following goals: (1) compare the original and translated texts, concentrating on changes in meaning, word choice, and stylistic devices; (2) categorize the transformations found using accepted typologies, including those put forth by Barkhudarov, Komissarov, and Vinay & Darbelnet; and (3) evaluate how these transformations affect the poem's thematic, emotional, and aesthetic aspects. By doing this, the study hopes to advance knowledge of how linguistic limitations and artistic judgment interact when translating poetry.

Main part

Poetry translation requires a solid theoretical foundation encompassing both general translation principles and poetry-specific considerations as it lies at the intersection of linguistics, literary studies, and cultural communication. Translators constantly have to deal with the difficult choice of whether to mimic the original's emotional and aesthetic impact or to focus on linguistic accuracy. This decision-making process is illuminated by Eugene Nida's dichotomy of formal and dynamic equivalence, which remains a cornerstone of translation theory. As Nida explains, "Formal equivalence focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content... one is concerned that the message in the receptor language should match as closely as possible the different elements in the source language" [1; p. 129]. Conversely, "A translation of dynamic equivalence aims at complete naturalness of expression, and tries to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture" [1; p. 129–130]. This theoretical distinction is particularly pertinent to poetry translation, where formal equivalence may ensure semantic accuracy yet compromise rhythm and imagery, while dynamic equivalence may require substantial deviations from the source text to preserve its emotional resonance.

Peter Newmark's differentiation between communicative and semantic translation further explains this dichotomy. As Newmark notes, "Semantic translation must take more account of the aesthetic value compromising on 'meaning' where appropriate so that no assonance, word-play or repetition jars in the finished version," while communicative translation "attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the original in such a way that both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership" [2; p. 47]. While communicative translation aims to maximize clarity and reader engagement in the target culture, semantic translation emphasizes the original author's intent and stylistic uniqueness. These methods are not mutually exclusive when translating poetry; rather, they frequently work in dynamic interactions where the translator modifies their approach based on the formal constraints, cultural specificity, and semantic density of the text.

The study of lexical and semantic changes becomes essential to comprehending how poetic form and meaning function in translation within this broad theoretical framework. According to Barkhudarov, "Achieving translation equivalence ("adequacy of translation"), despite the differences in the formal and semantic systems of two languages, requires above all the translator's ability to carry out numerous and qualitatively diverse interlingual transformations, so that the target text conveys as fully as possible all the information contained in the source text, while strictly

observing the norms of the target language" [3; p. 190]. Barkhudarov categorizes these transformations into four basic categories for the purpose of descriptive clarity: additions, replacements, omissions, and permutations [3; p. 190]. These changes frequently go beyond simple structural changes in poetry translation, connecting with cultural, rhyming, and rhythmic factors requiring for imaginative reworking while maintaining the essential semantic meaning. By introducing transformations such as generalization and concretization, that affect the degree of specificity, as well as logical development, Komissarov broadens the framework [4; p. 172]. "The following translation techniques are used in the process of translation involving various source and target languages: transcription and transliteration, calquing, and lexico-semantic transformations: concretization, generalization, modulation," [4; p. 172] he explains. "The most common grammatical transformations include: syntactic assimilation (literal translation), sentence splitting, sentence combining, and grammatical substitutions (word forms, parts of speech, or sentence elements)." [4; p. 173]. "Complex lexico-grammatical transformations include antonymic translation, explication (descriptive translation), and compensation." [4; p. 173].

Aforementioned semantic changes in poetry are frequently driven by two factors: first, the translator must deal with the limitations imposed by rhyme, meter, and euphony; second, the translator must modify metaphor and imagery that may be strongly ingrained in the original culture. Since a change in meaning often requires a corresponding shift in word choice, this is where semantic and lexical transformations meet. The distinctive feature of translating poetry can be observed in the fact that these lexical and semantic changes are incorporated into the formal and expressive structure of the poem rather than existing as separate linguistic operations. By stating that "the set toward the message as such, focus on the message for its own sake, is the poetic function of language" and that it "promotes the palpability of signs, and deepens the fundamental dichotomy of signs and objects," Roman Jakobson's concept of the poetic function emphasizes the inseparability of form and meaning [5; p. 153]. This approach emphasizes how any modification to the rhythm, sound pattern, or visual arrangement invariably changes the meaning that is translated. According to a summary of Vinay and Darbelnet's framework, "seven translation procedures are divided into direct or literal translation, consisting of borrowing, calque and literal translation; and oblique translation, which consists of transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation" [6; p. 133].

The study compares a self-produced English translation of a chosen poem by Konstantin Balmont to the Russian original, line by line. The author of the study translated the source material from an authoritative edition, guaranteeing firsthand knowledge of the decision-making process. According to Barkhudarov, Komissarov, and Vinay & Darbelnet, the analysis employs the parallel-text method to identify lexical and semantic transformations. Komissarov provides concretization, generalization, descriptive translation, and antonymic rendering to Barkhudarov's model, which covers reordering, substitution, addition, and omission. Vinay and Darbelnet add more categories consisting of modulation, equivalence, and adaptation. The results are shown in a table that compares the original and translated lines along with insightful commentary, enabling methodical classification and critical assessment of translation techniques.

Table № 1

№	Original	Translation	Analysis
1.	Я люблю тебя больше,	I love you more than the sky and the sea	By expanding "Пение" into a metaphorical clause and

	чем Море, и Небо, и Пение,	Than music that sings in the wind wild and free.	adding imagery "sings in the wind wild and free", the translation alters the order and moves the emphasis from an abstract noun to sensory motion.
2.	Я люблю тебя дольше, чем дней мне дано на земле.	I love you longer than life can extend, Beyond every breath, beyond every end.	The translation transforms the concrete existential measure into philosophical infinity by elevating this to a metaphysical abstraction: "life," "breath," "end", which is a change in temporal framing and a semantic generalization.
3.	Ты одна мне горишь, как звезда в тишине отдаления,	You shine like a star in the silence of night, A fire that glows with unwavering light.	The concept "тишина отдаления" is changed to "silence of night" in the translation, which eliminates the sentimental meaning. Additionally, "горишь" is mellowed into "shine."
4.	Ты корабль, что не тонет ни в снах, ни в волнах, ни во мгле.	A ship that won't sink, no storm pulls it deep, Not in the darkness, nor even in sleep.	By reducing this to "storm," "darkness," and "sleep," the translation modifies metaphorical specificity and substitutes emotional adversity for mystical ambiguity. This is a lexical distortion as well as a metaphorical substitution.
5.	Я тебя полюбил неожиданно, сразу, нечаянно,	I loved you at once, unexpected, unplanned,	While "unexpected" and "unplanned" convey spontaneity, they overlap and miss the emotional nuance of "нечаянно" - accidentally, unintentionally. The original line builds emotional intensity through rhythm and escalating surprise, which is flattened in the translation.
6.	Я тебя увидал - как слепой вдруг расширит глаза	Like someone who suddenly sees and can stand.	The translation of the used simile changes the metaphor's focus to physical revival by adding "can stand," an

			interpretation not present in the original.
7.	И, прозрев, поразится, что в мире изваянность спаяна,	Who looks at the world with astonished delight,	The translation of the philosophical idea of "изваянность спаяна" is "colors that burst into sight," a lexical substitution that substitutes sensory perception for ontological insight.
8.	Что избыточно вниз, в изумруд, излилась бирюза.	And marvels at colors that burst into sight.	It completely loses the image of turquoise flowing into emerald, which represents emotional excess and beauty, whch is an instance of severe semantic loss and lexical omission.
9.	Помню. Книгу раскрыв, ты чуть-чуть шелестела страницами.	I remember a book lay so still in your hand, Its pages were whispering, soft as the sand.	While the translator shifts the sensory register by introducing a new metaphor "soft as the sand", "Шелестела" evokes subtle auditory imagery. This is a stylistic departure and lexical addition.
10.	Я спросил: "Хорошо, что в душе преломляется лед?"	I asked, "Isn't it strange when the cold starts to fade, When ice turns to water and walls slip away?"	The addition of "walls slip away" in the translation makes introspection a more literal and psychologized metaphor, which can be semantic over-explanation.
11.	Ты блеснула ко мне, вмиг узревшими дали, зеницами.	You turned, and your eyes held a shimmer so bright, Like windows thrown open to infinite light.	"Windows… to infinite light" is used in place of the metaphor of the eyes suddenly seeing great distances. Despite its vividness, this is a creative compensation that changes symbolic orientation by moving from inner perception to outer radiance.
12.	И люблю - и любовь - о любви - для любимой - поет.	And love found its voice in a song meant to be, A song full of love, just for you, just for me.	Balmont's line indicates linguistic mastery by employing polyptoton and anaphora to create a rhythmic structure. This is reduced to a

			flat sentence in the translation, which causes lexical condensation and stylistic loss.

The analysis of source and target texts shows that the translation primarily implements Vinay and Darbelnet's concept of oblique translation, with methods like modulation, transposition, and adaptation, to balance the source and target cultures' semantic and aesthetic requirements. The ontological and symbolic density of Balmont's poetics is diminished by these changes, which frequently lead to lexical omission, metaphorical substitution, and semantic generalization, such as the substitution of "тишина отдаления" to "silence of night". The translator re-encodes the poetic message in a way that prioritizes emotional immediacy over formal and rhythmic fidelity by introducing compensatory strategies through additional imagery and modified metaphorical framing. This method emphasizes that any change in rhythmic, phonetic, or visual patterning inevitably alters the meaning, which is consistent with Roman Jakobson's (1960) theory that the poetic function is inseparable from form. As a result, the target text reframes the aesthetic experience while maintaining the macro-semantic content, moving the reader's focus from philosophical introspection to a more narrative and sensory engagement.

Conclusion

According to the analysis, the most common transformation types applied to translation are adaptation, transposition, and modulation. These are frequently combined with metaphorical substitution and semantic generalization. The translator's attempts to maintain rhythm, imagery, and emotional resonance as well as structural and metalinguistic differences between the source and target languages made these processes necessary. But in a number of instances, these tactics resulted in lexical omissions or changes in symbolic orientation, which changed the source text's philosophical undertones. In recognition of the high level of cultural and aesthetic untranslatable nature of poetic discourse, oblique procedures were more common than direct translation techniques.

The results highlight how difficult it is to translate poetry between languages that are typologically and culturally different, like English and Russian. The study supports Jakobson's (1960) claim that any alteration in sound, rhythm, or visual patterning results in a corresponding change in meaning because of the poetic function—the inseparability of form and meaning. The observed changes also lend credence to Komissarov's (1990) theory that poetic translation invariably entails a creative metamorphosis in which the target audience's aesthetic and emotional expectations must be weighed against the original text's fidelity. These findings add to the discussion of a persistent problem in literary translation theory: the conflict between artistic equivalency and semantic fidelity.

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