



LINGUISTIC CHALLENGES IN THE TRANSLATION OF BEHAVIORAL VERBS

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Abstract

This article studies the translation of behavioral verbs—verbs that describe human actions, attitudes, and social interactions—poses significant linguistic challenges due to semantic variability, syntactic differences, and cultural nuances. This study investigates these challenges by analyzing a bilingual corpus alongside semi-structured interviews with professional translators. The research identifies key obstacles such as polysemy, verb valency mismatches, and pragmatic shifts that complicate direct equivalence between source and target languages. Translators commonly employ adaptive strategies including contextual modulation, compensation, and specification to preserve intended meaning and communicative effect.

Keywords: Behavioral verbs, translation challenges, semantics, pragmatics, cross-cultural linguistics

1. Introduction

Behavioral verbs are integral parts of language that describe a myriad of human actions, feelings, attitudes, and social behaviors. These verbs—examples include “to encourage,” “to hesitate,” “to complain,” and “to agree”—convey more than mere physical activities; they reveal psychological states, social roles, and interpersonal dynamics that are deeply embedded within cultural contexts. Translating these verbs from one language to another introduces unique challenges because the embedded semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic meanings often do not align neatly across linguistic boundaries.



Translators working with behavioral verbs must overcome issues related to semantic ambiguity, where a single verb may encompass multiple meanings depending on context. For example, the English verb “to resist” can indicate physical opposition or an emotional reluctance, with each requiring different translation choices. Furthermore, syntactic structures differ significantly between languages; where English employs infinitives or gerunds, another language may prefer nominal or adjectival forms to express the same idea. Pragmatic challenges arise from varying cultural values and social norms that influence how behavioral verbs are used and interpreted.

Despite the significance of behavioral verbs in communication, their translation remains underexplored in translation studies. Existing research tends to focus broadly on verb translation without detailed attention to behavioral verbs' unique qualities. This study aims to fill this gap by systematically examining the linguistic challenges involved in translating behavioral verbs between English and Uzbek. It also seeks to identify common strategies translators use to mitigate these difficulties.

To address these aims, the research poses the following questions:

1. What are the primary semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic challenges in translating behavioral verbs?
2. How do cultural differences affect the translation of these verbs?
3. What strategies do professional translators employ to overcome these challenges?

The article is organized into four main sections: methods detailing corpus construction and interviews; results presenting linguistic challenges and translator insights; discussion interpreting findings within linguistic and cultural contexts; and conclusions outlining implications and recommendations for translation theory and practice.

2. Methods

This study adopts a qualitative mixed-methods design integrating descriptive corpus linguistics with qualitative interviews. This approach enables a



comprehensive analysis of the translation challenges experienced with behavioral verbs at both textual and experiential levels.

A bilingual parallel corpus of approximately 200 sentence pairs was compiled from authentic English texts and their official translations into Uzbek. The selected texts consisted primarily of academic, literary, and journalistic materials likely to contain behavioral verbs. Each sentence pair was examined to identify behavioral verbs and their corresponding translations.

2.3 Participants

Ten professional translators participated in semi-structured interviews. Participants were selected based on their experience translating between English and Uzbek, with special emphasis on those who had worked with behavioral verb-rich texts. The translators provided detailed accounts of the specific difficulties they encountered and the techniques they used in their practice.

- **Corpus Analysis:** The corpus was analyzed using software tools to identify patterns in verb usage, semantic fields, syntactic structures, and translational equivalents.
- **Interviews:** A semi-structured interview guide focused on challenges related to semantic ambiguity, syntactic alignment, and pragmatic adaptation. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The corpus analysis involved manual and automated coding of behavioral verbs for semantic categories, syntactic frames, and translation strategies. Interview transcripts were subjected to thematic content analysis using coding software to extract recurring themes and translator strategies.

Translators were informed of the study's aims and provided consent. Confidentiality was maintained, and participants could withdraw at any time. Data was anonymized to protect identities.

3. Results

The analysis revealed frequent cases of polysemy where behavioral verbs exhibited multiple contextual meanings. Translators struggled with conveying these nuances accurately, often opting for context-dependent adaptations rather than literal equivalents. For example, the verb “to resist” appeared in contexts



ranging from physical opposition to emotional restraint, requiring distinct translations in the target language.

Additionally, synonymy within Uzbek caused confusion when selecting the appropriate target verb. Translators reported relying on contextual cues and pragmatic considerations to choose words that best reflected the source text's intention, sometimes at the expense of lexical transparency.

3.2 Syntactic Challenges

Syntactic mismatches emerged when English verbs required complement structures (e.g., infinitives, gerunds) that were not directly translatable into analogous forms in Uzbek. For instance, English phrases like “encourage someone to do something” often forced translators to restructure sentences using nominalizations or relative clauses.

Differences in verb valency—the number and type of arguments a verb governs—led to adjustments in sentence construction to maintain grammaticality and coherence in the target language. These transformation processes affected word order and thematic prominence, impacting the overall tone.

Pragmatic analysis underscored the variation in politeness levels, social roles, and cultural attitudes embedded within behavioral verbs. Translators explained that some verbs loaded with social meaning in English lacked equivalent pragmatics in Uzbek, prompting compensatory strategies such as adding politeness markers or altering verb intensity.

The culturally specific usage of some behavioral verbs – for example, those relating to hesitation or approval – caused difficulties in maintaining the social function or interpersonal stance of the utterance. This often required shifts in modality or voice.

Translators employed several adaptive strategies to address these challenges:

1. **Adaptation:** Modifying verb meaning or structure to align better with target language norms.
2. **Compensation:** Inserting additional explanations or modifying adjacent text to preserve implicit meaning.
3. **Specification and Generalization:** Using more specific or more general verbs when direct equivalents were unavailable.



Interviews indicated that successful translation depended heavily on the translator's cultural competence and linguistic creativity.

4. Discussion

The study demonstrates that translating behavioral verbs cannot be resolved through mere lexical substitution. Instead, translators must negotiate semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic dimensions simultaneously. The interplay of these elements reflects the complexity of verbal behavior as both language and culture phenomena.

Cultural differences considerably influence behavioral verb translation. The pragmatic load of verbs tied to social behaviors requires translators to have nuanced intercultural understanding, supporting findings from cross-cultural communication studies.

Current translator education should incorporate targeted modules focusing on behavioral verb translation, emphasizing cultural pragmatics and syntactic flexibility. Strategies identified here can form the basis for such pedagogical frameworks.

Though comprehensive, this study's scope is limited to English and Uzbek. Future research should broaden the linguistic scope and explore automated translation challenges with behavioral verbs.

5. Conclusion

Behavioral verbs pose intricate challenges in translation due to their multifaceted linguistic and cultural characteristics. This study highlights the necessity of an integrated approach that accounts for semantics, syntax, and pragmatics in ensuring faithful and effective translation. Translators' adaptive strategies play a crucial role in overcoming these barriers, underscoring the importance of specialized training and cultural competence in contemporary translation practice.



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