**Interdisciplinary Journal of Linguistics**
**Volume [17] 2024, Pp. 163-172**

# ROLE OF PRAGMATICS IN EFFECTIVE TRANSLATION

**Saleha Zaini***

**ABSTRACT**

*The translation process involves more than just the conversion of words from one language to another; it is a complex endeavour that requires a deep understanding of the cognitive processes underlying language comprehension and production. Pragmatics, the study of language in context, plays a crucial role in translation, as it helps translators navigate the nuanced and contextual nature of communication. (Triki, 2015). Translators must not only be proficient in the linguistic structures of the source and target languages but also be adept at recognizing and conveying the pragmatic aspects of language. Translating cultural terms, as discussed by Adhikary (2020), is a prime example of the importance of pragmatic awareness in translation. Certain words or concepts that are common in one culture may not have direct equivalents in another, leading to a loss of meaning during the translation process. To overcome this challenge, translators must possess a deep understanding of the cultural context of the source text and the target audience, allowing them to make appropriate adjustments and adaptations. This paper aims to discuss the key pragmatic considerations, challenges and strategies for effective translation.*

**Key Words**: Pragmatics, Translation, Cultural Translation

## 1. **Introduction**

A fundamental objective of translation is to ensure effective communication. However, many translation students are often surprised to find that, despite producing grammatically accurate translations, they may still face difficulties at the pragmatic level (Tirki, 2015). Pragmatics, which examines how context affects meaning, is crucial in translation. While linguistic accuracy is important, understanding the cultural and social contexts that influence communication is also essential for delivering the intended message.

Pragmatics explores how contextual factors impact meaning during communication, incorporating social, cultural, and situational elements that shape language use and interpretation. According to Yule (1996), pragmatics focuses on how context influences meaning, emphasizing the importance of the speaker's intention, the listener's interpretation,

* Al Barkaat Educational Institutions, Aligarh

and the surrounding circumstances of communication. This knowledge is vital for effective communication, allowing individuals to navigate the complexities of language across different contexts. The intersection of pragmatics and translation is a significant research area, highlighting the role of context, intention, and cultural conventions in achieving communicative success. Taguchi underscores the importance of pragmatic knowledge for language learners, helping them use language appropriately in various social settings. Yarema, in "Pragmatics and Translation" (2023), evaluates the significance of understanding pragmatic aspects like speech acts and politeness strategies in translation. Al-Aadili (2023) illustrates that religious texts need a pragmatic approach to translation to preserve intended meanings, which can be lost through simple syntactic and semantic translations. Kahditani's (2022) research on translating from English to Dari also shows that most translators recognize the importance of pragmatics in overcoming translation challenges. These studies suggest that incorporating pragmatic elements into translation methods is essential for enhancing accuracy and cultural acceptability, as they help address ambiguity, cultural variations, and pragmatic markers without direct counterparts in the target language (Alsairi & Qadha, 2024)

### 1.1. Background and Rationale

Pragmatics, or context-dependent meaning, is crucial in translation as it influences how meaning is conveyed and perceived across languages. This is particularly relevant when cultural understanding and contextual factors lead to different interpretations of the same text. Existing literature shows that translators often struggle with these pragmatic aspects, which can lead to misinterpretations and a loss of meaning in translations (Kahditani, 2022; Tirki, 2015). There is a need for further research into how pragmatic errors occur during translation. Studies have shown that non-native translators may overlook socio-pragmatic factors, potentially resulting in significant translation inaccuracies (Hutauruk & Puspita, 2020). Additionally, the role of cultural context in interpreting pragmatic meaning in translation remains underexplored. This highlights the need for research on how cultural elements impact pragmatic interpretation and how these can be effectively integrated into translation practices (Kahditani, 2022; Tirki, 2015). Understanding these issues is essential for improving translation quality, especially in contexts where cultural nuances are critical, such as in literature, where language subtleties can significantly affect reader engagement (Sato, 2017).

Addressing these gaps may also help develop better training programs for translators, equipping them with skills to handle pragmatic challenges effectively (Triki, 2015). Moreover, these findings could improve machine translation systems by enhancing their ability to handle pragmatic aspects, thus increasing their accuracy and reliability (Singh, 2022). This research aligns with the goals of NEP 2020, aiming to tackle the complexities of context-dependent language use and contribute to a better understanding of the challenges and

opportunities in translating educational materials across languages. This study aims to bridge language barriers and support equal educational opportunities for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds, advancing the aims of the National Education Policy for a multilingual and inclusive education system.

### 1.2. Objectives

This research paper aims to explore the complex relationship between pragmatics and translation, investigating how pragmatic factors affect translation practices. The research questions addressed in this paper are:

A) What are the common pragmatic challenges translators face?

B) How do cultural contexts impact the pragmatic interpretation of translated texts?

C) What strategies can mitigate pragmatic failures in translation?

The specific objectives include identifying common pragmatic issues, examining the influence of cultural context, and developing practical strategies for translators to improve their effectiveness in conveying meaning across languages. The premise is that increased awareness of pragmatic factors will lead to better translation outcomes. Translators who recognize and address these factors are expected to produce translations that more accurately reflect the original text's intent and meaning, reducing occurrences of pragmatic failure. This study will contribute to translation studies by addressing existing knowledge gaps and providing a foundation for further theoretical and practical advancements.

## 2. Pragmatic Challenges in Translation

### Ambiguity and Implicature

Translating implied meanings often presents difficulties due to cultural variations and context-dependent interpretations. Ambiguity can be a significant challenge in translation, especially when dealing with implicatures—meanings that are suggested rather than explicitly stated. Peterlin and Moe (2016) note that translators frequently struggle with conveying intended implicatures accurately, which can lead to misunderstandings. For example, cultural nuances that are clear in one language may not have direct equivalents in another, requiring the translator to find alternative ways to express the intended meaning.

### Examples

- English: "I could eat a horse."

Hindi: "मैं घोड़ा खा सकता हूँ।" (Literal translation)

Intended meaning: I'm very hungry.

- English: "Let's meet up sometime."

Hindi: "कभी मिलते हैं।" (Literal translation)

Intended meaning: A suggestion for a future meeting.

- English: "That's a tall order."

  Hindi: "यह एक लंबा आदेश है।" (Literal translation)

  Intended meaning: It's a difficult or challenging request.

**Contextual Variability**

Context is fundamental in determining meaning, and appropriateness can vary greatly depending on the situation. Dayter et al. (2023) emphasize that a translator's ability to evaluate the context of language use is crucial for producing accurate translations. Understanding social, cultural, and situational factors that affect communication is essential; ignoring these aspects can result in translations that lack contextual relevance or are misleading.

**Examples**

- English: "He's a pain in the neck."

  Hindi: "वह गर्दन में दर्द है।" (Literal translation)

  Intended meaning: He's annoying or irritating.

- English: "It's raining cats and dogs."

  Hindi: "बिल्ली और कुत्ते बारिश हो रही है।" (Literal translation)

  Intended meaning: It's raining heavily.

- Hindi: "चलो, चलचित्र देखने चलते हैं।" (Chalo, chalchitra dekhne chalte hain.)

  English: "Let's go watch a movie."

Misinterpretation: The English translation might not convey the same level of enthusiasm or invitation as the Hindi original.

**Pragmatic Markers**

Pragmatic markers, such as discourse markers and hedges, often create challenges in translation. These elements convey information about the speaker's attitude or stance and can affect how the conversation flows. The omission or misinterpretation of pragmatic markers can lead to loss of meaning and coherence. Translators must carefully identify and convey these markers in the target language to maintain their function.

**Examples**

- English: "Maybe we should go."

  Hindi: "शायद हमें जाना चाहिए।"

**Examples from Hindi to English**

- Hindi: "शायद मैं कल आऊंगा।" (Shayad main kal aaunga.)

English: "Maybe I'll come tomorrow."

Misinterpretation: The English version might be perceived as less certain than the Hindi original.

**Examples from English to Hindi**

- "Maybe": The English word might be translated as "शायद" (shayad) in Hindi, which could be interpreted as more hesitant or uncertain in some contexts.
- "Could you please...": This phrase is used for polite requests in English and might be translated as "क्या आप कृपया... कर सकते हैं?" (Kya aap kripya... kar sakte hain?) in Hindi, potentially perceived as more formal or indirect.

**Cultural Differences**

Cultural values, beliefs, and customs significantly impact language use and interpretation. Cultural differences can pose challenges in translation, potentially leading to misunderstandings if not properly addressed. Translators need to navigate the intricacies of cultural context, including values, beliefs, and norms that influence language. By understanding these cultural elements, translators can improve the quality and effectiveness of their translations.

**Examples**

- English: "He's as quiet as a mouse."

  Hindi: "वह चूहे की तरह शांत है।" (Literal translation)

  Intended meaning: He's very quiet.

**Differences in Connotations and Usage:**

- "House" vs. "Maison": While "maison" in French often connotes elegance, "house" in English is more general.
- "Brother" vs. "Bhai": "Bhai" in Hindi can refer to a biological brother or a close friend, whereas "brother" in English typically refers to a biological sibling.
- Hindi: "वह मेरा जिगरी दोस्त है।" (weh mera jigri dost hai)

  English: "bosom friend"

The Hindi term "jigri dost" implies a deep friendship that might not be fully captured by "bosom friend" in English.

**Idioms, Proverbs, and Cultural References**

Idioms, proverbs, and cultural references often present unique challenges in translation due to their deep cultural roots. Translating these expressions requires a profound understanding of both cultures to preserve their intended meaning. For instance, the English idiom "the ball is in your court" signifies that it is someone else's turn to act. Translating this into Hindi as "अब तुम्हारी बारी है" (ab tumhari baari hai) conveys the general idea but may not fully capture the idiomatic essence.

**Examples**

- English: "The early bird gets the worm."

  Hindi: "जल्दी उठने वाला चिड़िया कीड़ा पकड़ता है।"

- English: "A stitch in time saves nine."

  Hindi: "एक समय में एक सिलाई नौ बचाता है।"

- English: "Let's not beat around the bush."

  Hindi: "चलो झाड़ियों के आसपास नहीं पीटते।"

**3. Strategies for Addressing Pragmatic Challenges**

**Cultural Competence**

Building a thorough understanding of both the source and target cultures is crucial for effective translation. Strategies such as cultural adaptation and localization play a significant role when translating texts with culture-specific elements. Cultural adaptation involves altering language to make it more relevant and accessible to the target audience, while localization includes the broader process of tailoring content to meet the linguistic, cultural, and technical needs of a specific market (Baker, 2019). For instance, the English term "Thanksgiving dinner" may not have the same cultural resonance in Hindi, as Thanksgiving is not celebrated in India. A translator might adapt this phrase to "सालाना परिवार का खाना" (salaana parivaar ka khaana), which translates to "annual family dinner," thereby maintaining the concept of family gatherings without relying on cultural specifics. This approach ensures the translation is relevant and understandable to the target audience while retaining the essence of the original message (Aliurridha & Setiawan, 2019). Additionally, regional variations must be considered; for example, "pants" in American English is often rendered as "trousers" in British English. A translator for an Indian audience might opt for "trousers" to align with local usage, enhancing the relatability of the translation (Zou, 2016).

**Contextual Awareness**

Accurate translation requires a deep understanding of the situational context of the text, as it significantly influences the meaning and interpretation of utterances (Baumgarten, 2017). This includes information about the speaker and who they are speaking to, as well as any assumptions or implicit knowledge upon which they might be relying in their communication. Translations that fail to consider the contextual cues inherent in language can lead to inaccurate word choices or missed connotations, resulting in a less effective translation. Neglecting the contextual aspects of language can compromise the overall meaning and impact of the translated message."The sky is falling" is a metaphorical expression used to convey a sense of impending doom. A literal translation into another language might not capture the intended meaning. Understanding these differences is crucial for effective communication and cultural sensitivity.

**Pragmatic Analysis**

To address pragmatic challenges, it is essential for translators to analyze texts for implied meanings, speech acts, and politeness markers. Training programs should enhance translators' ability to recognize and handle contextual factors and cultural subtleties. For example, translating the Hindi phrase "तुम्हें क्या लगता है?" (tumhe kya lagta hai?) into English requires understanding its context to convey the correct tone and intent. Similarly, when translating "I could care less" into Hindi, a literal translation might miss the intended meaning of indifference. A more appropriate translation might be "मुझे कोई फर्क नहीं पड़ता" (mujhe koi fark nahi padta), which accurately reflects the sentiment.

**Pragmatic and Functional Equivalence**

Pragmatic equivalence focuses on conveying the intended meaning and effect of the source text, while functional equivalence emphasizes the translation's purpose. For instance, "आपका स्वागत है" (aapka swagat hai) in Hindi translates to "You are welcome" in English, achieving pragmatic equivalence by preserving the polite sentiment. In contrast, translating "Break a leg" which means "good luck" or "I wish you success", translated into Hindi involves functional equivalence, as a literal translation would be टांग तोड़ना which has its colloquial usage, meaning, "to annoy or irritate someone." Instead, "आपको शुभकामनाएँ" (aapko shubhkaamnaayein) conveys the intended meaning of wishing good luck.

**Adaptation and Localization**

Adaptation and localization are crucial for aligning translations with the target culture while preserving the intended meaning. Cultural adaptation modifies content to suit the target audience, and localization involves adjusting content to meet linguistic, cultural, and technical needs (Baker, 2018). For example, translating the Hindi term "रक्षाबंधन" (Raksha Bandhan) as "a festival celebrating the bond between brothers and sisters" provides necessary context for readers unfamiliar with the festival. This approach enhances the translation's relevance and ensures it meets the expectations of the target audience (Zou, 2016).

**Translation Memory and Machine Translation**

Technology plays a role in addressing pragmatic challenges. Machine translation tools can assist in generating initial drafts, but human oversight is essential for ensuring pragmatic accuracy. For instance, translating "तुम बहुत अच्छे हो" (tum bahut acche ho) into English might produce "You are very good" from a machine, but a human translator would refine it to "You are very nice" or "You are great" to better capture the intended meaning. Similarly, machine translation might provide a starting point for complex English sentences like "She has a way with words," but human refinement is necessary to ensure cultural resonance, potentially translating it as "उसकी बातें बहुत प्रभावी होती हैं" (uski baatein bahut prabhavi hoti hain).

**4. Conclusion**

The relationship between pragmatics and translation is complex and significantly impacts translation quality. Translators must navigate challenges related to cultural differences, contextual variability, and pragmatic markers to ensure accuracy and cultural relevance. By developing pragmatic competence, utilizing technology, and fostering collaborative practices, translators can improve their ability to convey meaning across languages and cultures. Understanding pragmatics will be essential for effective communication in an increasingly interconnected world.

**References**

Adhikary, R. P. (2020). Degrees of Equivalence in Translation–A Case Study of Nepali Novel 'Seto Bagh'into English As 'The Wake Of The White Tiger'. *European Journal of Multilingualism and Translation Studies*, *1*(1).

Al-Aadili, A. (2023). The Pragmatic Approach to Translating Religious Texts: Challenges and Strategies. *Journal of Language and Linguistics in Society,* 25(48), 56-70. doi:10.55529/jlls.25.48.56.

Farwell, D., & Helmreich, S. (2023). *Pragmatics-Based Machine Translation.* Routledge. doi:10.4324/9781003168348-10.

Aliurridha, A., & Setiawan, T. (2019). Shifts and Equivalencies of Idiomatic Expressions in Novel "The Name of Rose". *Journal on English as a Foreign Language*, *9*(2), 163-180.

Alsairi, M. A., & Qadha, A. (2024, March). The Effect of Pragmatic Competence on Saudi Translators' Performance. *Journal of Social Studies.* https://doi.org/10.20428/jss.v30i1.234

Alsubhi, W. O. (2024). Lost in Adaptation: Exploring the Phenomenon of Over Translation in Arabic Translations of English Movies. *Arab World English Journal for Translation & Literary Studies* 8 (1), 30-50. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awejtls/vol8no2.3

Baker, J. J., Storbacka, K., & Brodie, R. J. (2019). Markets Changing, Changing Markets: Institutional Work as Market Shaping. *Marketing Theory*, *19*(3), 301-328.

Baumgarten, N. (2017). Pragmatics and translation/interpreting. *The Routledge handbook of pragmatics* (pp. 521-534). Routledge

Dai, L. (2017, September). On Translation Equivalence from the Perspective of Cultural Gaps. In *3rd Annual International Conference on Social Science and Contemporary Humanity Development (SSCHD 2017)* (pp. 103-107). Atlantis Press.

Dayter, D., et al. (2023). *Pragmatics in Translation*. Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/9781009261210.

Huang, B., Cadwell, P., & Sasamoto, R. (2023). Challenging Ethical Issues of Online Ethnography: Reflections from Researching in an Online Translator Community. *The Translator*, 29(2), 157-174. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13556509.2023.2188700#d1e190

Hutauruk, R., & Puspita, R. (2020). A Metapragmatic Analysis: A Study of Pragmatic Failure Found in Indonesian EFL Students. Linguistics and Literature Journal, 1(2), 589. doi:10.33365/llj.v1i2.589.

Kahditani, A. J., (2022). The Function of Pragmatics in Translation and the Pragmatic Challenges Translators Face. *Journal of Language and Linguistics in Society*, *2*(05), 48–56. https://doi.org/10.55529/jlls.25.48.56

Koike, D. A., & Félix-Brasdefer, J. C. (2020). *The Routledge handbook of Spanish pragmatics*. New York: Routledge. 10.4324_9780429455643_previewpdf.pdf

Sato, M. (2017). Interaction Mindsets, Interactional Behaviors, and L2 development: An Affective-social-cognitive Model. *Language learni ng*, *67*(2), 249-283.

Singh, S., & Beniwal, H. (2022). A Survey on Near-Human Conversational Agents. *Journal of King Saud University-Computer and Information Sciences*, *34*(10), 8852-8866.

Triki, M. (2015). The Important Role Teaching Pragmatics Plays in Translation Classes: with Reference to Translation Teachers' Questionnaire. *Journal of Human Sciences*, 53-64.

Yarema, I. (2023). Pragmatics and Translation: Understanding Speech Acts and Politeness Strategies. *Pragmatics and Translation,* 337. doi:10.1075/pbns.337.

Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford university press.

Zou,Y. (2023).A Brief Analysis on the Differences of Chinese and English Cultural Customs and Translation. *Communications in Humanities Research*,20,40-45