

TRANSLATION STRATEGIES: ADAPTATION, CALQUE, AND LITERAL TRANSLATION

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Abstract

Translation is a crucial activity that bridges linguistic and cultural divides. Among the wide array of translation strategies, adaptation, calque, and literal translation stand out for their distinct approaches to transferring meaning from one language to another. This paper explores the definitions, applications, and implications of these three strategies, emphasizing how each method contributes to preserving meaning, culture, and communicative function in the target text. Through comparative analysis and practical examples, the article demonstrates how translators strategically select among these techniques depending on context, audience, and purpose.

Keywords: Translation strategies, adaptation, calque, literal translation, intercultural communication, equivalence, Uzbek-English translation

Translation plays a vital role in today's globalized world, serving as a bridge between cultures, communities, and nations. Far from being a mechanical act of replacing words from one language with their equivalents in another, translation is a complex cognitive and cultural activity that requires a deep understanding of both source and target languages, as well as the social, historical, and cultural contexts in which they are used. Translators are often faced with the challenging task of not only preserving the semantic content of the original text but also maintaining its tone, style, and cultural significance. This balancing act is complicated further by the inherent differences in linguistic structures and worldviews embedded in different languages.

One of the central concerns in the study of translation is the choice of appropriate strategies to achieve the desired level of equivalence and communicative effectiveness. Over the years, translation theorists have identified a wide range of strategies that translators may employ depending on the nature of the text, the intended audience, and the purpose of the

translation. Among these, adaptation, calque, and literal translation are frequently discussed and applied in both theoretical and practical domains of translation studies. Each of these strategies reflects a different approach to dealing with linguistic and cultural differences and offers unique advantages and challenges.

Adaptation allows the translator to localize content by replacing culturally specific elements in the source text with ones that are more familiar or appropriate in the target culture. This strategy is particularly effective in literary translation, marketing, subtitling, and children's literature, where emotional impact and cultural relevance are paramount. On the other hand, calque involves a more literal approach, whereby phrases or expressions are directly translated from the source language, sometimes leading to the creation of new terms in the target language. It is often used in academic and scientific discourse where conceptual equivalence is more important than stylistic elegance. Lastly, literal translation is perhaps the most straightforward technique, involving a word-for-word translation that closely follows the grammatical structure of the original text. While it ensures a high degree of fidelity, it may sometimes result in unnatural or ambiguous expressions if not applied with caution.

This article aims to explore these three translation strategies in depth, analyzing their definitions, practical applications, advantages, and limitations. By comparing and contrasting adaptation, calque, and literal translation, the study seeks to shed light on how each strategy contributes to the translator's ultimate goal: to create a text that is both accurate and meaningful for its intended audience. Through illustrative examples and theoretical insights, the article highlights the importance of strategic decision-making in the translation process and underscores the translator's role as both a linguistic mediator and a cultural interpreter.

Adaptation is widely regarded as one of the most dynamic and culturally sensitive strategies in the field of translation. It refers to the process by which a translator replaces a cultural element or linguistic expression in the source text (ST) with one that is functionally equivalent in the target text (TT), even if it differs significantly in form. This method is especially important when a literal or direct translation would fail to convey the intended meaning, tone, or cultural nuance, thereby hindering effective communication between the source and target audiences.

From a theoretical standpoint, adaptation is often associated with the communicative approach to translation, as outlined by theorists such as Eugene Nida and Peter Newmark. Nida, in particular, emphasized the importance of "dynamic equivalence," which focuses on reproducing the same effect on the target audience as that experienced by the source audience.

Adaptation aligns with this principle by prioritizing functional and cultural equivalence over linguistic fidelity. It is not merely a linguistic technique but a cross-cultural operation that often involves significant creative input from the translator.

Adaptation is marked by several distinctive characteristics:

High level of cultural substitution: It often involves replacing source culture-specific items (CSIs) with target culture equivalents.

The primary goal is to preserve the communicative function, not the literal meaning or structure.

Translators must often reimagine expressions, references, or metaphors to fit the target audience's worldview and expectations.

Adaptation is more common in certain text types—such as fiction, drama, advertising, and subtitled media—where emotional or cultural resonance is more critical than literal accuracy.

Adaptation is frequently used in:

Literary translation, where culturally embedded metaphors, idioms, or traditions may not resonate with the target audience.

Advertising and marketing, where slogans or brand names need to evoke similar emotions and values across different markets.

Film and television subtitling or dubbing, where timing constraints and cultural references demand creative equivalents.

Children's literature, where references must be adjusted to align with the cultural knowledge and cognitive levels of the target audience.

Examples

Example 1: Idioms

English ST: "Kick the bucket" (meaning "to die")

Uzbek TT (Adapted): "Ko'zini yumdi" or "Olamdan o'tdi"

A literal translation would make no sense, so the phrase is replaced with a culturally and linguistically appropriate equivalent.

Example 2: Cultural Events

English ST: "April Fool's Day"

French TT (Adapted): "Poisson d'avril"

The concept is similar but the cultural expression differs; adaptation maintains communicative effectiveness.

Example 3: Advertising

English ST: Nike's slogan: "Just do it."

Spanish TT (Adapted): "Simplemente hazlo."

While this is fairly literal, the translator might choose another culturally resonant motivational expression depending on the target market.

Ensures cultural relevance and acceptability: Adapted texts are often better received because they feel natural and familiar to the target audience.

Preserves emotional and aesthetic effect: Especially in artistic or persuasive texts, adaptation maintains the intended impact of the original message.

Enhances readability and engagement: Avoids confusion or alienation caused by unfamiliar references or idioms.

Despite its usefulness, adaptation is not without controversy. Some scholars argue that excessive adaptation may lead to over-domestication, where the target text becomes so tailored to the target culture that it loses the distinctiveness or authenticity of the source culture.

This can result in cultural erasure or distortion. Moreover, adaptation may blur the line between translation and rewriting, raising ethical questions about fidelity and the translator's role.

Another challenge lies in maintaining the balance between intelligibility and authenticity. Translators must be cautious not to simplify or localize to the extent that the richness of the source culture is lost. The success of adaptation depends on the translator's deep knowledge of both cultures and the ability to judge when such a strategy is appropriate.

In sum, adaptation is a powerful and flexible translation strategy that allows the translator to bridge cultural gaps and enhance the communicative effectiveness of the target text. It requires a high degree of cultural competence, creativity, and sensitivity to audience expectations. While it may involve significant departures from the source text in terms of form, its ultimate goal is to ensure that the meaning, tone, and emotional impact are preserved. As such, adaptation is not simply a linguistic maneuver but a cultural negotiation, underscoring the translator's role as both a language expert and a cultural mediator.

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