TRANSLATION PROBLEMS IN COMPARATIVE TYPOLOGY - SEMANTIC UNIVERSALS AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Tojiboyeva Rayhona
Gulistan State Pedagogical Institute
tojiboyevarayhona300@gmail.com

Annotation: This article explores the role of comparative typology in solving translation problems through focusing on how semantic universals, which exist worldwide in all languages, can help translators find common side between different linguistic systems. At the same time, this demonstrates how cultural differences create issues that universals are not able to solve. The study highlights examples where universal meanings are easily translated. The main idea of this demonstration that comparative typology not only studies compares languages but also provides useful tools for understanding translation difficulties in a world of linguistics.

Key words: comparative typology, typology, translation, semantic universals, cultural differences, linguistic equivalence, cross-linguistic analysis, intercultural communication, dynamic equivalence, formal equivalence.

As Bernard Comrie said: "Comparative typology is concerned with classifying languages according to their structural features and explaining the distribution of those features across the world's language" [B. Comrie, 1981; 3]. Comparative typology studies similarities and differences between languages in order to reveal their universal features, so that it has always been one of the essential branches of the field of the linguistics. Translation, is a practical field where these theoretical findings are tested in real communication. While comparing and translating two languages, difficulties inevitably arise.

Initially, Joseph Greenberg's ideas in the 1960s became a foundation for modern typology because J. Greenberg who is the first invented the idea of universals and discussed widely, researched on word order and implicational universals. His work showed that despite their diversity, languages share common structural principles. Later, Bernard Comrie continued this line of study by analyzing tense and paid attention to main systems' aspect across languages, which is highly relevant to translation practice.

From the semantic perspective, being developed "Natural Semantic Metalanguage" theory, Anna Wierzbicka suggested there is a set of basic semantic universals common to all human languages through it. Her approach has been especially useful for translation field, after explaining how different cultures express universal human concepts.

In translation science, Eugene Nida played an important role by introducing the concepts of "formal equivalence" and "dynamic equivalence." His theory highlighted that translation is not only about transforming meaning of the sentences from one language to another one using linguistic structure change but also about cultural meaning.

Mona Baker's works on equivalence and corpus-based translation studies have shown how linguistic typology can be applied to real texts, revealing both universals and culture-specific difficulties.

Consequently, the overlap between comparative typology and translation highlights two aspects of the same issue: universality enables translation, while cultural differences pose challenges. This article seeks to examine how semantic universals assist translators and how cultural disparities continue to act as obstacles in cross-linguistic communication.

1. Semantic universals and their limits in translation: One of the biggest issues in translation is the balance between universality and particularity. Semantic universals, as discussed by Greenberg and Wierzbicka, suggest that all human languages share a core set of meanings such as mother and water concepts. These universals should, in theory, make translation easier

because they provide common ground. However, research shows that even these universals can vary in expression. Languages do not always segment the color spectrum in the same way [J. Lucy, 1997; 46]. For instance, the expression of "blue" does not exist in some languages as a certain and seen color term but is merged with green (as in Russian language it means - "синий" and "голубой", but in some Turkish languages like Uzbek, "ko'k" can mean both "green" and "blue" – ko'm-ko'k maysalar).Translating such terms requires cultural and contextual sensitivity, not just dictionary equivalence.

2. Cultural differences and untranslatable concepts: Another major problem is the existence of culture-specific concepts that do not have direct equivalents in other languages. For instance, the Japanese word of amae (a kind of indulgent dependence in close relationships) has no exact equivalent in English or Uzbek. Similarly, Uzbek has culturally loaded terms like "mahalla" that are hard to translate into English or Russian, since the expression of "community" and "neighborhood" in Uzbek culture carries a set of social practices not found in Western vocabulary.

Typology helps us see why these gaps exist: languages encode reality based on cultural role. Translation scholars such as Eugene Nida and Mona Baker point out that equivalence have to flexible — sometimes using formal equivalence (word-to-word) is impossible process, so dynamic equivalence (meaning-based) should be applied.

3. Structural differences between languages and their effect on translation: A third significant challenge comes out from both grammatical and syntactic sides. Typology shows that languages belong to different structural types: analytic languages like English rely heavily on word order, while agglutinative languages like Uzbek rely on suffixes and inflections. This difference creates difficulties when translating complex sentences. For instance, an English sentence "The story I read last night was pretty engaging" uses relative clauses directly, whereas in Uzbek the structure and word order changes when we want to talk "Kecha o'qigan hikoyam juda qiziqarli edi" A direct word-for-word translation seems to be so useless at that time. This explains like "languages which rich morphology, such as agglutinative languages, tend to prefer non-finite verb forms like participles for relativization, instead of relative pronouns as in English" [T. Givonn, 1990; 541]

Typological research by Comrie and Dryer has shown that relative clauses, tense-aspect markers, and word order patterns shows difference widely in different languages. Translators must be aware of these structural differences to avoid distortions in meaning.

The study has shown that comparative typology plays a significant role in understanding and solving translation problems. At the heart of this relationship lies the tension between universality and cultural diversity. On the one hand, semantic universals identified by Greenberg, Wierzbicka, and others create a shared foundation that makes translation possible across languages. They allow translators to capture core human experiences in different linguistic systems. On the other hand, the limits of these universals reveal the complexity of cultural variation, where even basic categories like color or kinship can shift in meaning from one language to another.

Finally, structural differences between languages were examined as another major source of difficulty. The contrast between analytic and agglutinative systems, or the different ways languages construct relative clauses, illustrates how typological variation directly affects translation. The solution lies in syntactic adaptation, which allows translators to preserve meaning while adjusting structures to fit the natural grammar of the target language. Corpus-based studies confirm that this adaptation is not an exception but a necessary practice in professional translation.

References:

1. Bloomfield, L. (1933). Language. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
2. Chomsky, N. (1965). Aspects of the Theory of Syntax. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
3. Comrie, B. (1981). Language Universals and Linguistic Typology: Syntax and Morphology. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
4. Croft, W. (1990). Typology and Universals. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
5. Dryer, M. S., & Haspelmath, M. (Eds.). (2005). The World Atlas of Language Structures. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
6. Givón, T. (1995). Functionalism and Grammar. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.