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The Formation and Development of the Pragmalinguistic Approach in the Theory of Literary Translation

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Abstract: This article examines the emergence and evolution of the pragmalinguistic approach within literary translation theory, tracing its development from Charles Morris's foundational semiotics (1938) through contemporary applications. The pragmalinguistic approach integrates pragmatic theory with linguistic analysis, focusing on how contextual meaning, communicative intentions, and cultural pragmatic norms transfer across languages in literary texts. Through analysis of key theoretical contributions, this study demonstrates how this approach has revolutionized translation theory by addressing the complex interplay between form and function in cross-cultural literary communication. The findings suggest that the pragmalinguistic approach provides essential tools for navigating culture-specific expressions while preserving aesthetic and communicative functions of literary works.

Keywords: pragmalinguistics, literary translation, translation theory, communicative approach, pragmatic equivalence

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Introduction

The emergence of the pragmalinguistic approach in literary translation theory represents a paradigmatic shift that fundamentally transformed how scholars understand cross-cultural literary communication. This approach bridges the crucial gap between linguistic form and communicative function, offering sophisticated frameworks for analyzing how meaning operates across cultural boundaries in literary contexts.

The theoretical foundations of pragmalinguistics trace back to Charles Morris's groundbreaking 1938 work, which established the tripartite division of semiotics into syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics [Morris, 1938]. Morris positioned pragmatics as "the science of the relation of signs to their interpreters," concerned with psychological, biological, and sociological phenomena in sign functioning [Morris, 1938: 30]. This vision provided conceptual groundwork for understanding how contextual factors influence meaning construction across cultures.

However, the application of pragmatic principles to translation theory developed gradually. Early translation studies were dominated by linguistic approaches privileging formal correspondence over communicative function [Ghanooni, 2012]. The breakthrough came with Eugene Nida's influential work

in the 1960s, particularly his distinction between formal and dynamic equivalence, which acknowledged the importance of achieving equivalent communicative effects rather than structural correspondence [Nida, 1964]. This marked the beginning of understanding translation as fundamentally communicative activity.

The true flowering of the pragmalinguistic approach emerged in the 1980s as scholars recognized that literary texts function as complex communicative acts embedded within specific cultural frameworks. Basil Hatim and Ian Mason proved instrumental in this development, establishing comprehensive frameworks for understanding translation as communication that must account for pragmatic dimensions [Hatim & Mason, 1997]. Their approach emphasized that translators function as cultural intermediaries navigating complex pragmatic relationships between authors, readers, and cultural contexts, rather than mere linguistic mediators.

This perspective positioned translation as sophisticated intercultural communication requiring deep pragmatic awareness. Hatim and Mason demonstrated how translators must consider not only what is said but how it is said, why it is said, and how it will be received within different cultural contexts [Hatim & Mason, 1997]. This insight proved particularly valuable for literary translation, where pragmatic choices carry aesthetic, cultural, and ideological significance.

Literature review. Juliane House's influential work on translation as recontextualization further enhanced the approach. House's theory posits that translation involves fundamental shifts in communicative context, requiring translators to navigate between "overt" and "covert" translation strategies [House, 2006]. Overt translation acknowledges its status as translated text while maintaining source-cultural markers, whereas covert translation employs a "cultural filter" to adapt pragmatic elements to target-cultural expectations [House, 2006: 356]. This framework provided translators with principled approaches to pragmatic adaptation.

The incorporation of speech act theory added theoretical sophistication. The application of Austin and Searle's work to translation revealed how performative utterances present unique challenges due to the cultural specificity of felicity conditions [Blum-Kulka, 1981]. Literary texts frequently employ speech acts to achieve specific aesthetic effects, requiring translators to preserve or adapt performative dimensions while maintaining cultural accessibility.

Relevance theory, developed by Sperber and Wilson, provided another crucial advancement. Translation scholars began analyzing how translators must consider not only information conveyed but how readers process that information in specific cultural contexts [Gutt, 1998]. Relevance theory's emphasis on cognitive effects and processing effort offered frameworks for understanding how cultural differences in background knowledge affect translated literary work reception.

Ernst-August Gutt's concept of "interpretive resemblance" proved particularly valuable, enabling translators to make principled decisions about preserving or adapting source-cultural pragmatic markers for optimal relevance to target readers [Gutt, 1998]. This approach moved beyond simplistic domestication-foreignization binaries toward nuanced understanding of pragmatic adaptation.

Contemporary developments have incorporated insights from intercultural pragmatics. Research by Istvan Kecskes demonstrates how pragmatic norms vary significantly across cultures, affecting directness preferences, politeness strategies, and implicit meaning interpretation [Kecskes, 2013]. This research highlights the need for sophisticated understanding of both source and target pragmatic systems.

Discussion. Recent developments have also integrated relational work theory, examining how linguistic

choices construct and negotiate interpersonal relationships. This perspective, developed by Miriam Locher and Richard Watts, provides frameworks for understanding how pragmatic choices contribute to character development, narrative voice, and reader positioning [Locher & Watts, 2005]. Applied to translation studies, this reveals how pragmatic adaptation involves maintaining complex interpersonal dynamics that literary texts create.

Corpus-based translation studies have provided empirical evidence for theoretical claims about pragmatic patterns. Research by Mona Baker reveals systematic differences in how pragmatic phenomena are treated across translation traditions, genres, and cultural contexts [Baker, 2006]. This empirical foundation strengthens theoretical credibility while providing practical insights for translator training.

The analysis of culture-specific pragmatic phenomena has proven particularly significant. Elements such as honorifics, discourse markers, and indirect speech acts present complex challenges requiring sophisticated pragmalinguistic analysis [Sidiropoulou, 2021]. The pragmalinguistic approach provides tools for addressing these through nuanced strategies that preserve communicative functions while ensuring cultural accessibility.

Contemporary research increasingly focuses on multimodal meaning construction, recognizing that literary works often combine textual elements with visual and interactive components. This requires sophisticated frameworks for analyzing how pragmatic meaning emerges from multiple semiotic modes and how translators navigate these complexities.

The pedagogical implications have gained attention as translation programs recognize the need to train students in pragmatic awareness and intercultural communication skills, reflecting understanding that effective literary translation requires sophisticated knowledge of how pragmatic systems operate across cultural boundaries [Morini, 2019].

Looking forward, the pragmalinguistic approach continues evolving with changing technological contexts. Digital platforms and artificial intelligence present challenges and opportunities, as these technologies often struggle with pragmatic dimensions, highlighting continued relevance of human expertise in literary translation.

The growing importance of translation in global cultural circulation has led to increased attention to ethical dimensions of pragmalinguistic choice. Scholars recognize that pragmatic adaptation decisions affect how cultural identities are represented and how intercultural understanding is facilitated [Locher & Sidiropoulou, 2021].

Conclusion. The pragmalinguistic approach has fundamentally transformed literary translation theory by providing sophisticated frameworks for understanding how meaning emerges from the complex interaction of linguistic form, communicative context, and cultural pragmatic systems. This approach has moved translation studies beyond simplistic linguistic equivalence toward nuanced understanding of translation as intercultural communication requiring deep pragmatic awareness and sophisticated cultural mediation skills. The continued evolution promises even more sophisticated understanding of translation as complex communicative practice embedded within broader systems of cultural exchange, contributing to both translation theory and broader conversations about intercultural communication in our globalized world.

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