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A THEORETICAL EXAMINATION OF DIRECT TRANSLATION STRATEGIES

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Abstract. *This expanded article offers a comprehensive theoretical investigation of direct translation strategies, drawing on foundational and contemporary scholarship in translation studies. By examining literalism, borrowing, and calque within linguistic, cultural, and functional frameworks, the study clarifies the conditions under which direct translation is effective or problematic. It engages with structuralist, functionalist, and pragmatic perspectives to show how direct translation operates across varying text types and language pairs. The analysis emphasizes both the enduring relevance and the inherent limitations of literal strategies, ultimately advocating for a context-sensitive approach to translation.*

Key words: *direct translation, literal translation, linguistic equivalence, calque, borrowing, semantic fidelity, translation theory, comparative linguistics, structural correspondence.*

Introduction. Direct translation – often used interchangeably with literal translation – has been a central topic of debate in translation studies since the mid-twentieth century. Early theoretical models regarded direct translation as the default method when structural similarities exist between languages. Vinay and Darbelnet's classic model positioned direct translation as one of two overarching methodological categories, emphasizing its role in preserving syntactic and lexical correspondences (Vinay & Darbelnet 1995, p. 31). Their structuralist stance underscored the idea that translation is, in its essence, a form of linguistic transfer where form and meaning are tightly bound. Later scholarship complicated this view by introducing cultural, functional, and cognitive dimensions. Nida's dynamic equivalence theory foregrounded the importance of the receptor's response and argued that literal translation cannot always reproduce communicative intent across cultural boundaries (Nida 1964, p. 159). Catford highlighted the concept of "formal correspondence," acknowledging that literalism is appropriate only when structural parallels exist (Catford 1965, p. 27). In contemporary translation theory, direct translation continues to be both widely practiced and critically scrutinized. The significant expansion of multilingual communication, scientific discourse, and digital translation tools has strengthened the practical relevance of literal strategies. However, their use remains highly dependent on linguistic typology, text function, and cultural context. This article aims to present an expanded theoretical examination of direct translation, exploring its principles, constraints, and evolving conceptualization within modern translation studies.

The core principle behind direct translation is fidelity to the linguistic form of the source text. Vinay and Darbelnet include literal translation alongside borrowing and calque, forming a methodological triad grounded in structural correspondence (Vinay &

Darbelnet 1995, p. 34). Literal translation, in their model, is appropriate when languages share "parallel categories and conceptual structures." Borrowing and calque further illustrate how direct translation adapts words or structures from the source language without significant modification. Borrowing (e.g., piano, tsunami, democracy) allows technical or culturally specific terminology to enter the target language unchanged, while calque reproduces syntactic structures or compound expressions in a way that reflects the internal logic of the source language. Catford's analysis expanded these ideas by distinguishing between "formal correspondence" and "textual equivalence." He emphasized that literal translation is possible only when the grammatical categories of two languages align sufficiently (Catford 1965, p. 28). This underscores a crucial point: direct translation is not purely a stylistic choice but is shaped by linguistic systems themselves.

Direct translation is feasible when the syntactic, morphological, and semantic features of two languages approximate one another. When the distance between languages is significant – as between English and Arabic, or Japanese and French – literal translation becomes more limited. Nida's research emphasizes that meaning resides not only in individual words but also in patterns, structures, and cultural conventions. He asserts that literalism can obscure meaning when languages differ in expressions of politeness, modality, or idiomaticity (Nida 1964, p. 166). For instance, many languages use metaphorical idioms to express emotional states, which cannot be transferred literally without distorting the intended meaning. Cognitive linguistics also provides insights into why direct translation may fail. Conceptual metaphors, image schemas, and cultural models influence how speakers encode meaning. When these differ, literal rendering may produce pragmatically incorrect or awkward translations. For example, idioms like "kick the bucket," "break the ice," or Uzbek expressions like "ko'ngli ko'tarildi" cannot be rendered literally without semantic loss.

Despite its limitations, direct translation plays an essential role in many domains.Technical fields such as medicine, engineering, law, and academia rely heavily on precise terminology. Direct translation ensures consistency and accuracy. Borrowing is especially prevalent in scientific texts because specialized concepts often originate in one linguistic community and gradually enter global usage. Direct translation can preserve logical relationships between clauses, maintain the structure of argumentation, and avoid misinterpretation. In legal documents, contracts, and international agreements, altering syntactic structures may lead to ambiguity. Hence, literal translation is often mandated by institutional guidelines. It is often ineffective when languages encode meaning through culturally specific metaphors, idioms, or pragmatic conventions.

Pragmatic meaning – such as politeness, irony, emotion, or social hierarchy – cannot always be conveyed literally. Japanese honorifics, Arabic rhetorical amplifications, and English understatement are culturally encoded. Rendering these directly may distort communicative intent. In literature, literal strategies tend to disrupt rhythm, tone, and aesthetic coherence. As Newmark observes, literal translation is only ideal "when it successfully conveys the referential meaning without violating style or communicative effect" (Newmark 1988, p. 81). Literary texts often require creative adaptation to preserve emotional and stylistic resonance. In modern translation theory, especially within

functionalist and sociolinguistic frameworks, direct translation is not rejected but repositioned. Reiss and Vermeer's Skopos theory asserts that the appropriateness of literal translation depends on the purpose of the translation. If the aim is legal precision, academic neutrality, or terminological stability, direct strategies are ideal, if the aim is cultural adaptation, literalism is counterproductive. Corpus-based studies also reveal that professional translators frequently employ literal strategies more than expected, particularly in international journalism, digital localization, and scientific research. This suggests that globalized communication patterns increasingly favor structural and semantic transparency.

Conclusion. Direct translation strategies constitute an indispensable part of translation practice and theory. Their value lies not in their universality but in their contextual applicability. When languages share structural similarities and when texts demand precision, clarity, or terminological consistency, direct translation is not only appropriate but necessary. However, as shown by structuralist, functionalist, and pragmatic theorists alike, literalism is limited by linguistic divergence, cultural encoding of meaning, and rhetorical complexity. Effective translation therefore requires a nuanced understanding of both linguistic systems and communicative purpose.

Ultimately, direct translation should be seen not as a rigid rule or outdated method but as a flexible tool whose success depends on informed, critical application. Mastery of translation involves discerning when literal strategies preserve meaning – and when they obscure it.

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