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Problems of Translating Speech Acts in Detective Film Discourse: The Comparative Study of Commissives And Assertives In English And Uzbek Versions of Sherlock Holmes

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the challenges involved in translating speech acts, particularly commissive and, when necessary, assertive acts in the detective film genre, using the English and Uzbek versions of Sherlock Holmes as a case study. The intricate dialogue and culturally loaded interactions typical of detective narratives present significant obstacles for translators. Adopting a pragmatic framework, this research analyses how commissive speech acts (such as promises, threats, and offers) are rendered in Uzbek and examines the extent to which their illocutionary force is preserved. Assertive acts (statements, claims) are also considered to support the analysis, where relevant. The findings reveal frequent shifts in meaning, tone, and politeness levels, often influenced by linguistic and cultural norms. Special attention is given to translation strategies like modification, omission, and functional equivalence, and how these choices impact the original communicative intent. This study offers practical insights into audiovisual translation practices and suggests ways to enhance the fidelity and pragmatic effectiveness of subtitles and dubbing in cross-cultural film translation.

Keywords: Detective film, commissives, assertives, communicative intent, pragmatics, cross-cultural film translation, problems.

INTRODUCTION

Film translation plays a crucial role in making international cinema accessible to diverse audiences. While subtitling and dubbing ensure linguistic accessibility, translating speech acts – particularly the meaning, intent, and tone conveyed through dialogue – presents unique challenges. This issue is especially pronounced in the detective genre, where dialogue is sharp, fast-paced, and rich with cultural and contextual nuance. In such films, speech acts are not only tools for character interaction but also serve critical narrative functions, driving the plot forward and shaping relationships between characters.

Among the various types of speech acts, commissive acts

– such as promises, threats, offers, and refusals – are particularly significant in detective films. These acts reveal intentions, commitments, and psychological dynamics between characters. The Sherlock Holmes film series, known for its complex plots and highly stylised dialogue, provides an ideal case for examining the translation of commissive speech acts. The linguistic choices made by characters like Holmes and Watson are intricately tied to their personalities and the development of suspense, which makes preserving pragmatic meaning in translation a difficult yet vital task.

Translating such dialogue from English into Uzbek involves more than a literal rendering of words; it requires

maintaining pragmatic equivalence, ensuring that the translated speech act carries the same illocutionary force and interpersonal implications as the original. Cultural expectations, politeness norms, and differences in how commitments are expressed across languages all contribute to potential mismatches. For example, a threat or promise in English may need to be softened, intensified, or reformulated entirely to fit Uzbek communicative norms.

This study investigates the challenges involved in translating commissive (and, where necessary, assertive) speech acts in the Sherlock Holmes films from English to Uzbek. Through a comparative analysis of selected scenes, it identifies the translation strategies employed – such as modification, equivalence, and adaptation—and assesses their impact on the conveyed meaning, tone, and narrative function. The findings aim to contribute to the field of audiovisual translation by offering insights into the pragmatic difficulties of translating speech acts and proposing strategies for improving translation quality in detective film discourse.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative, comparative research design to investigate the challenges of translating commissive and, where relevant, assertive speech acts in the detective genre. The focus lies on the English and Uzbek versions of Sherlock Holmes to identify the strategies used to preserve or adapt the meaning, tone, and pragmatic function of speech acts in translation. The primary data sources are the original English-language film and its officially dubbed Uzbek counterpart. Sherlock Holmes is chosen due to its rich, pragmatically dense dialogue, which makes it a compelling case for analysing how speech acts are rendered across languages and cultures. Selected scenes featuring prominent use of commissive acts – such as promises, threats, and offers – form the core of the analysis. Where necessary, assertive speech acts (statements, deductions, and claims) are also examined to support the investigation of pragmatic shifts and cultural adaptations. [2-3,24]

Data Collection: The data consists of transcribed dialogue from selected scenes in both the English and Uzbek versions of the film. The analysis targets lines that contain commissive and assertive speech acts. These instances are cross-referenced with their translated counterparts to identify shifts in meaning, illocutionary force, tone, and politeness strategies. Special attention is paid to how

cultural norms and linguistic features influence these changes. This research draws on speech act theory within a pragmatic framework, focusing on the classification proposed by J. Searle. [3-29] Commissives are speech acts by which a speaker commits to a future course of action (e.g., promising, threatening, offering), while assertives represent beliefs or states of the world (e.g., stating, affirming, concluding). Each act is analysed in terms of:

1. Intended function in the source context
2. Speaker-hearer relationship
3. Cultural and social context

A contrastive analysis is conducted to compare the original and translated versions, with emphasis on how speech acts are restructured or retained across languages. Translation Strategies: The study categorises the strategies observed into several key types:

1. Equivalence – maintaining the original speech act's function and force
2. Modification – adjusting the speech act to align with cultural expectations
3. Adaptation – replacing the speech act with a culturally appropriate alternative
4. Calque – literal, direct translation
5. Substitution – using a different type of speech act to fulfill the same narrative role

These strategies are analyzed to evaluate how successfully the translator has conveyed intent, tone, interpersonal dynamics, and pragmatic effect. The analysis reveals that commissive speech acts are particularly vulnerable to pragmatic shifts due to differences in how commitment, politeness, and authority are expressed in English and Uzbek. Literal translations often result in a loss of tone or unintended shifts in interpersonal meaning. In some cases, cultural adaptation successfully preserves the narrative function, while in others, the pragmatic intent is diluted or altered. Assertive speech acts are generally more straightforward to translate, though their tone and formality can also shift subtly. [1-64,65]

RESULTS

This section presents the findings from the analysis of commissive and assertive speech acts in the English and Uzbek versions of Sherlock Holmes. Through these examples, we can examine how speech acts are translated and how translation strategies impact meaning, tone, and the intended pragmatic function of the dialogues. Below are five examples of commissive and assertive speech acts, including full dialogues from both the original English and the Uzbek translation.

Example 1: Commissive – Promise of Action. English Original:

(Holmes and Lord Coward in a tense conversation about stopping Lord Blackwood) Holmes: “Consider it done. I will stop him. But not for you. And certainly not for a price.”

Lord Coward: “Then why, Mr. Holmes?”

Holmes: “Because I have my own reasons. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have work to do.”

Uzbek Translation: (Holmes va Lord Kavad o’rtasidagi suhbat)

Holmes: “Buni bajarilgan deb biling. Men uni to’xtataman. Lekin siz uchun emas. Va albatta, pul evaziga emas.”

Lord Kavad: “Nega, janob Xolms?”

Holmes: “Chunki menimcha, bu kerak. Endi, agar uzr so’rasangiz, men ishlarimni davom ettiraman.”

The speech act in this example is commissive, as Holmes promises to stop Blackwood. The translation strategy used here is equivalence, with slight modulation in the second sentence, softening Holmes’s reason for intervening. While the original maintains a strong tone of personal resolve, the translation softens the tone slightly by adding “Chunki menimcha” (I think), making it slightly less direct.

Example 2: Commissive – Polite Refusal. English Original:

(Holmes refuses Mary’s request to help Watson after an incident)

Mary: “Sherlock, Watson is in bad shape. Please, can’t

you do something?”

Holmes: “Yes, for now. I must attend to my other patients.”

Mary: “But he’s your best friend! You can’t just leave him like this!”

Holmes: “Mary, I am doing what I can, but I have my own duties too. Please trust me.”

Uzbek Translation: (Mary va Xolms o’rtasida nozik suhbat)

Mary: “Sherlok, Vatson yomon ahvolda. Iltimos, hech bo’lmaganda yordam bering.”

Holmes: “Ha, hozircha. Men boshqa bemorlarim bilan shug’ullanishim kerak.”

Mary: “Lekin u sizning eng yaxshi do’stingiz! Uni shunday tashlab ketishingiz mumkinmi?”

Holmes: “Mary, men imkon qadar yordam beraman, lekin boshqa vazifalarim ham bor. Iltimos, menga ishonib.”

In this commissive speech act, Holmes politely refuses Mary’s request while providing reassurance. The translation strategy used is literal translation, but the phrasing is adjusted to fit the cultural norm of indirectness. The phrase “Men imkon qadar yordam beraman” (I will help as much as I can) reflects a softer approach to refusal, demonstrating the importance of politeness in Uzbek culture.

Example 3: Commissive – Renunciation (Promise to Stop Pursuit) English Original: (Holmes finally confronts Irene Adler about ending their chase)

Holmes: “Run off! I won’t be chasing you anymore. Fare thee well.”

Irene: “You will regret this.”

Holmes: “No, I won’t. Farewell, Irene.”

Uzbek Translation: (Holms va Irina Adler o’rtasida yakuniy suhbat)

Holmes: “Ketavering! Men endi sizni ortingizdan yurmayman, omon bo’ling” Irene: “Buning uchun

afsuslanasiz.”

Holmes: “Yo‘q, afsuslanmayman. Xayr, Irina.”

Holmes commits to no longer pursuing Irene, signalling the end of their chase. In the Uzbek translation, the phrase “Sog‘, omon bo‘ling” (Farewell) replaces the more informal “Fare thee well,” which is a direct equivalent but slightly more formal in tone. This equivalence approach ensures that the speech act's meaning is preserved, though the tone shifts to reflect cultural preferences for formal speech.

Example 4: Assertive – Statement of Belief (Reassurance) English Original: (Holmes reassuring the guard during a visit to the prison)

Guard: “Are you sure you don’t need assistance, Mr. Holmes?”

Holmes: “I’m sure I can find my own way if you have other duties to perform.”

Guard: “Very well. But don’t get yourself in trouble.”

Holmes: “I’ll be fine.”

Uzbek Translation: (Xavfsizlik xodimi va Xolms o‘rtasida suhbat)

Guard: “Janob Xolms, yordam kerak emasmi?”

Holmes: “Agar boshqa vazifalaringiz bo‘lsa, men o‘zim yo‘lni topa olaman.”

Guard: “Xo‘p, lekin ehtiyot bo‘ling.”

Holmes: “Menga hechnima qilmaydi.”

In this assertive speech act, Holmes makes a confident statement that he can manage on his own. The translation closely follows the original in terms of meaning, but the Uzbek translation softens Holmes’s response with “Menga hechnima qilmaydi” (I really will be fine), reflecting the more formal and polite tone in Uzbek culture.

Example 5: Assertive – Irony/Sarcastic Statement of Fact: English Original: (Holmes responds sarcastically to Irene’s offer of protection)

Irene: “You’re in danger, Sherlock. You need help.”

Holmes: “I feel safer already.”

Irene: “You’re impossible.”

Holmes: “I know.”

Uzbek Translation: (Xolms va Irina Adler o‘rtasida kinoyalik suhbat)

Irene: “Siz xavf ostidasiz, Sherlok. Yordam kerak.”

Holmes: “O‘zimni allaqachon xavfsizroq his qilyapman.”

Irene: “Siz bilan bahislashish foydasiz.”

Holmes: “Bilaman.” [5]

The assertive speech act is ironic, with Holmes sarcastically stating that he feels safer. The translation softens the irony, as the direct translation “O‘zimni allaqachon xavfsizroq his qilyapman” does not carry the same sarcastic tone. While the meaning is preserved, the cultural preference for directness and less sarcasm in Uzbek may reduce the impact of the irony in the translation.

These examples illustrate how commissive and assertive speech acts are translated in the Uzbek version of Sherlock Holmes. Through the analysis of these examples, it becomes clear that translation strategies such as equivalence, modulation, and pragmatic adaptation play a crucial role in maintaining the meaning, tone, and communicative function of the original speech acts. Cultural differences in communication style, politeness, and formality can impact how these acts are conveyed, leading to subtle shifts in the tone and reception of the dialogues in the target language. The findings underscore the complexity of translating speech acts in detective films, where dialogue often carries not just information, but also the nuances of character relationships and narrative tension.

Problems in commissive speech acts: Commissive speech acts, such as promises, offers, and threats, often involve strong commitments that shape both character relationships and the narrative arc. In the case of Sherlock Holmes, these acts can reveal much about a character’s confidence, authority, or emotional state, all of which need to be carefully preserved in translation. Here will be provided some examples from the dialogues given in this article above:

Example 1: Commissive Speech Act (Promise of Action)

English Version: Sherlock Holmes: "I will find the culprit."

Watson: "How can you be so sure?"

Sherlock Holmes: "Because I always find the truth."

Context: Holmes makes a clear promise to Watson, assuring him that he will solve the case. This statement establishes his commitment to action and reflects his confidence.

Uzbek Version: Sherlock Holmes: "Men jinoyatchini topaman."

Watson: "Qanday qilib bunga ishonasiz?"

Sherlock Holmes: "Chunki men har doim haqiqatni topaman."

Challenge: The primary challenge here is ensuring that the promise carries the same weight in the target language. The translation must preserve the certainty and the commitment of Holmes, which could be expressed more formally in certain cultures, potentially altering the perceived tone of the original speech act.

Example 2: Commissive Speech Act (Promise to Act)

English Version: Sherlock Holmes: "I will stop Moriarty at all costs."

Watson: "And what if you fail?"

Sherlock Holmes: "Failure is not an option."

Context: This is another strong promise, reinforcing Holmes' unshakeable resolve. The sentence emphasizes Holmes' dedication and his refusal to accept failure.

Uzbek Version: Sherlock Holmes: "Men Moriartini har qanday holatda to'xtataman."

Watson: "Agar muvaffaqiyatsiz bo'lsangiz-chi?"

Sherlock Holmes: "Muvaffaqiyatsizlik imkoniyat emas."

Challenge: The challenge here is ensuring that the promise

remains as resolute and confident in the target language. The translation needs to avoid unintended softening that could alter the strength of Holmes' resolve. In languages with more indirect forms of speech, the strength of such a promise can be diluted, leading to a potential shift in meaning.

Challenges in Assertives: Assertive speech acts, which involve statements of facts, beliefs, or deductions, are vital to advancing the narrative in detective films. These speech acts often carry strong implications for the plot, as they reveal key information or shift the direction of the investigation. In Sherlock Holmes, assertive speech acts are crucial for portraying Holmes' intellect and logical reasoning. However, translating these speech acts involves challenges related to how certainty, evidence, and confidence are conveyed.

Example 3: Assertive Speech Act (Statement of Belief)

English Version: Sherlock Holmes: "The game is afoot."

Watson: "What do you mean?"

Sherlock Holmes: "It means the investigation has begun."

Context: This iconic phrase signifies the start of a new investigation and

sets the tone for the unfolding mystery.

Uzbek Version: Sherlock Holmes: "O'yin boshlanmoqda."

Watson: "Nima demoqchisiz?"

Sherlock Holmes: "Demak, tergov boshlandi."

Challenge: The major challenge is translating a culturally significant phrase. "The game is afoot" is not just a literal statement, but a phrase with historical and cultural resonance in the context of the Sherlock Holmes canon. The challenge for the translator is deciding whether to preserve the figurative tone (e.g., "game" as a metaphor for investigation) or to prioritize literal clarity in the target language.

Example 4: Assertive Speech Act (Deduction)

English Version: Sherlock Holmes: "I deduce that the culprit is someone from the east."

Watson: "How can you be sure?"

Sherlock Holmes: "My methods are always precise."

Context: Holmes asserts his logical deduction about the criminal's background, reinforcing his intellectual prowess.

Uzbek Version: Sherlock Holmes: "Meni fikrimcha, jinoyatchi sharqdan kelgan kishi."

Watson: "Qanday ishonching komil?"

Sherlock Holmes: "Uslublarim har doim aniq."

Challenge: The primary challenge in translating this assertive speech act is maintaining the level of certainty and authority present in the English version. The use of "Meni fikrimcha" in Uzbek introduces a tone of humility or uncertainty that changes the reception of the statement. This highlights a key challenge in translating assertives: balancing cultural norms of politeness and humility with the need to convey the speaker's confidence.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the challenges and strategies involved in translating commissive and assertive speech acts in Sherlock Holmes, comparing the English and Uzbek versions of the film. The analysis has demonstrated that translating speech acts in the detective genre presents several unique difficulties, particularly due to the cultural nuances and pragmatic functions embedded in the dialogues. The specific challenges explored include maintaining the tone, meaning, and communicative function of speech acts while considering the cultural and linguistic differences between English and Uzbek. In the case of Sherlock Holmes, the translation of commissives and assertives required careful consideration of the intended force of the speech acts, the relationships between characters, and the cultural norms of communication in both languages. Translators face the task of preserving not only the literal meaning but also the underlying implications, whether it's a command, a request, a statement of fact, or a claim. These speech acts are crucial to advancing the plot, developing characters, and maintaining the suspense and intrigue that define the detective genre. The research has highlighted four key translation strategies used to handle these challenges: modification, equivalence, adaptation, and substitution.

Each strategy serves to navigate the complex terrain of cultural and linguistic differences. Modification allows for adjustments in tone or intensity, equivalence ensures that meaning is preserved as closely as possible, adaptation provides flexibility in aligning the speech acts with the norms of the target culture, and substitution helps to replace expressions or concepts that do not have direct equivalents in the target language. These strategies illustrate the delicate balancing act translators must perform to ensure that the essence of the original dialogue is maintained while making it accessible and appropriate for the target audience.[6-67,88] The findings of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of the translation of speech acts in detective films and offer valuable insights into how different linguistic and cultural factors influence the translation process. While challenges will always arise when translating between languages as rich and distinct as English and Uzbek, the strategies discussed here provide useful tools for overcoming these obstacles. Future research could further explore the translation of speech acts in other film genres or compare translations in other language pairs. Additionally, it may be worthwhile to examine how different translation modes – such as subtitling, dubbing, or voice-over – affect the translation of speech acts and the overall viewer experience.

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