

دور البراغماتية في ترجمة التعبيرات التواصلية من الإنجليزية إلى الكردية

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The Role of Pragmatics in Translating Phatic Expressions from English into Kurdish

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خلاصة

تلعب التعبيرات التواصلية دوراً محورياً في التواصل بين الأفراد، فهي لا تقتصر على نقل المعلومات فحسب، بل تُسهم في بناء العلاقات الاجتماعية والحفاظ عليها وتعزيزها. ونظراً لاعتمادها الكبير على المعايير الثقافية والاجتماعية والتداولية، يُمثل ترجمة هذه التعبيرات تحدياً كبيراً للمترجمين، لا سيما عند اختلاف المعايير الاجتماعية والثقافية بين اللغتين المصدر والهدف. تتناول هذه الدراسة دور التداولية في ترجمة التعبيرات التواصلية من الإنجليزية إلى الكردية، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على كيفية الحفاظ على المعنى التداولي والوظائف التواصلية في اللغة الهدف. يتبنى البحث منهجاً وصفيّاً تحليليّاً لدراسة مجموعة من التعبيرات التواصلية الإنجليزية المختارة من أعمال أدبية وأفلام وسياقات محادثات يومية. تُصنف البيانات المُجمعة وفقاً لوظائفها التواصلية، بما في ذلك التحيات والوداع وعبارات الشكر والإطراء والاعتذار.

والحديث العابر وغيرها من أشكال التفاعل الاجتماعي. تم تحليل الترجمات ضمن إطار براغماتي لتحديد الاستراتيجيات المستخدمة في نقل المعاني التواصلية إلى اللغة الكردية، ولتقييم مدى تأثير العوامل الثقافية والسياقية على تفضيلات الترجمة. تكشف النتائج أن الترجمة الحرفية غالبًا ما تفشل في نقل الوظائف الاجتماعية والبراغماتية المقصودة للتعبيرات التواصلية، مما يؤدي إلى قصور في التواصل وسوء فهم ثقافي. في المقابل، وُجد أن استراتيجيات الترجمة الوظيفية والمُكيّفة ثقافيًا أكثر فعالية في الحفاظ على الأهمية الشخصية والاجتماعية والثقافية لهذه التعبيرات. كما تُبين الدراسة أن الترجمة الناجحة للتعبيرات التواصلية لا تتطلب الكفاءة اللغوية فحسب، بل تتطلب أيضًا فهمًا عميقًا للمبادئ البراغماتية والأعراف الثقافية في كل من الإنجليزية والكردية.

Abstract

Phatic expressions play a crucial role in interpersonal communication, not merely conveying propositional information, but establishing, maintaining, and strengthening social relationships. Due to their strong dependence on cultural, social, and pragmatic norms, translating phatic expressions presents significant challenges for translators, particularly when the sociocultural norms of the source and target languages differ. This study examines the role of pragmatics in translating phatic expressions from English into Kurdish, focusing specifically on how pragmatic meaning and communicative functions are preserved in the target language. The research adopts a descriptive-analytical approach to examine a corpus of English phatic expressions selected from literary works, films, and everyday conversational contexts. The collected data are categorized according to their communicative functions, including greetings, farewells, expressions of gratitude, compliments, apologies, small talk, and other forms of social interaction. The translations are analyzed within a pragmatic framework to identify the strategies used in transferring phatic meanings into Kurdish and to assess the extent to which cultural and contextual factors influence translation preferences. The findings reveal that word-for-word translation often fails to convey the intended social and pragmatic functions of phatic expressions, leading to communicative shortcomings and cultural misunderstandings. In contrast, functional and culturally adapted translation strategies were found to be more effective in preserving the interpersonal and sociocultural significance of these expressions. The study also demonstrates that successful translation of phatic expressions requires not only linguistic proficiency but also a deep



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understanding of pragmatic principles and cultural conventions in both English and Kurdish.

Introduction

Language is a multifaceted system used not only to transmit information but also to establish, maintain, and negotiate social relationships. While traditionally much linguistic research has focused on the transmission of propositional meaning, there is a growing interest in the interpersonal functions of language. One of the most significant manifestations of this interpersonal dimension is phatic communication, which refers to linguistic and non-linguistic expressions employed used primarily to establish and maintain social contact rather than to exchange factual information. The concept of phatic communion was first introduced by Malinowski (1923), emphasizing its role in fostering social solidarity and interpersonal connection among members of a conversational community. Phatic expressions form an integral component of daily communication and encompass a wide range of linguistic forms, including greetings, farewells, compliments, apologies, expressions of gratitude, inquiries about health and well-being, and other ritualized conversational formulas. Although these expressions may seem semantically simple, their communicative value extends beyond their literal meanings. Their interpretation is largely determined by pragmatic and sociocultural factors such as context, social distance, power relations, age, gender, and shared cultural knowledge. Consequently, the successful use and interpretation of phatic expressions require speakers to possess not only linguistic competence but also pragmatic and cultural competence (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996). Recent developments in pragmatics and sociolinguistics have highlighted the fundamental role of phatic communication in social interaction. Research has shown that phatic interactions significantly contribute to the development of interpersonal trust, social cohesion, and group solidarity (Coupland, 2014). These seemingly routine interactions function as crucial communicative strategies that enable individuals to connect, reduce social distance, and facilitate smooth conversational interaction. In both personal and professional contexts, phatic communication allows participants to act effectively in social situations and maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships. As cross-cultural communication becomes increasingly prevalent in a globalized world, understanding the pragmatic importance of phatic expressions has become essential for successful cross-cultural interaction.

The translation of phatic expressions represents a particularly challenging area within translation studies because these expressions are



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deeply embedded in the cultural and pragmatic traditions of a conversational community. Unlike informative expressions, phatic expressions often carry implicit social meanings that cannot be adequately conveyed through literal translation. Consequently, translators often need to go beyond lexical equivalence, seeking functional or pragmatic equivalence to preserve the communicative intent of the source text. According to Nida (1964), effective translation should aim to reproduce the intended effect of the original message on the target audience; House (2014), on the other hand, argues that the successful transfer of pragmatic meaning is essential for achieving communicative competence across languages and cultures. These challenges become even more pronounced in the translation of phatic expressions between English and Kurdish. The two languages stem from different linguistic, cultural, and social traditions and employ different rules for expressing politeness, respect, solidarity, and interpersonal relationships. As a result, while many English phatic expressions may not have a direct Kurdish equivalent, some Kurdish expressions may contain cultural values and communicative functions that are difficult to accurately represent in English. In such cases, translators must rely on pragmatic awareness and cultural sensitivity to ensure the intended interpersonal meaning is effectively conveyed. Failure to consider these pragmatic dimensions can lead to semantic distortion, pragmatic loss, or cultural misunderstanding. Despite increasing interest in pragmatics and its applications in translation studies, limited research has been devoted to the translation of phatic expressions between English and Kurdish. While most previous studies have focused on pragmatic equivalence, speech acts, and cultural translation from a broader perspective, the pragmatic transfer of phatic expressions has received relatively little attention. Since phatic expressions are highly dependent on cultural norms, contextual factors, and interpersonal relationships, their translation presents unique challenges requiring further research. Accordingly, this study aims to examine how pragmatic meaning is transferred in the translation of English phatic expressions into Kurdish and to analyze the strategies used to preserve their communicative effectiveness and cultural appropriateness.

Thus, this study examines the role of pragmatics in translating phatic expressions from English into Kurdish. It aims to investigate the extent to which pragmatic meaning can be preserved in translation, identify the challenges faced by translators, and analyze the strategies used to achieve pragmatic equivalence. By addressing these issues.



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Statement of the Problem

Phatic expressions constitute a fundamental component of daily communication, serving to establish, maintain, and strengthen social relationships rather than conveying propositional meaning. Their interpretation depends largely on pragmatic, cultural, and contextual factors, making them particularly challenging to translate across languages and cultures. While the literal meaning of phatic expressions is relatively simple, their communicative function often reflects culturally specific norms of politeness, solidarity, and interpersonal interaction. In the context of English–Kurdish translation, phatic expressions present significant challenges because many lack direct linguistic or cultural equivalents in the target language. Consequently, word-for-word translation may fail to convey the intended pragmatic meaning and social function of the source expression, leading to pragmatic loss, cultural misunderstanding, or communicative inadequacy. The challenge becomes more evident when translators encounter culture-specific expressions whose meanings are closely linked to the social and cultural traditions of the source language community.

Despite the significant role of phatic expressions in intercultural communication, limited research has examined the role of pragmatics in translating these expressions from English into Kurdish. Therefore, there is a need to investigate how pragmatic meaning is conveyed across the two languages, identify the challenges involved in the translation process, and explore effective strategies for preserving the communicative and cultural functions of phatic expressions in Kurdish. Such an investigation will contribute to a deeper understanding of pragmatic equivalence and enhance the quality and effectiveness of English–Kurdish translation.

Accordingly, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do English phatic expressions have pragmatic and cultural equivalents in Kurdish?
2. What challenges do translators encounter when translating phatic expressions from English into Kurdish?
3. What is the role of pragmatics in preserving the communicative functions of phatic expressions in translation?

Literature Review

2.1 Translation: Concept and Significance

Translation is a fundamental communication tool that enables the transmission of meaning across linguistic and cultural boundaries. It is generally understood as the process of transferring a text from a source language (SL) to a target language (TL) while preserving its meaning, function, and communicative impact. According to Munday (2022),



translation involves the interpretation and reformulation of textual meaning across languages. Similarly, Newmark (1988) defines translation as the process of reproducing the intended meaning of a text in another language in a way that reflects the author's original intent. Contemporary translation studies have moved beyond viewing translation as a purely linguistic activity. Scholars such as Bassnett (2013) and Baker (2018) argue that translation is essentially an intercultural act that requires an understanding of both linguistic structures and cultural traditions. Since language is embedded within culture, successful translation requires sensitivity to the social values, beliefs, and communicative practices of both source and target language communities. The importance of translation has significantly increased in the modern world due to globalization and intercultural communication. Translation facilitates the exchange of information, literature, technology, and cultural values among different societies. Furthermore, it enhances linguistic awareness and cultural understanding while enabling communication between speakers of different languages (Grossman, 2011). Therefore, to ensure effective communication, translators need not only linguistic competence but also cultural and pragmatic competence.

2.2 Pragmatics and Translation

Pragmatics is the branch of linguistics concerned with how meaning is constructed and interpreted within context. Unlike semantics, which focuses on the literal meaning of linguistic expressions, pragmatics examines how speakers convey and interpret meaning based on contextual factors such as social relationships, intentions, and shared knowledge (Mey, 2004). According to Yule (2022), pragmatics investigates the relationship between linguistic forms and their users in specific communicative situations. Pragmatic competence plays a crucial role in translation because the intended meaning of an expression often extends beyond its literal interpretation. House (2014) argues that successful translation requires the transmission of both semantic and pragmatic meaning to achieve communicative equivalence. Similarly, Hatim and Mason (2005) emphasize that translators must consider contextual and sociocultural factors to preserve the communicative function of the source text. The translation of pragmatically charged expressions presents particular challenges, as equivalent linguistic forms may not produce the same communicative effect across cultures. Consequently, translators often have to adapt, modify, or reconstruct meanings to maintain pragmatic equivalence between the source and target texts.





2.3 Phatic Communication and Phatic Expressions

The concept of phatic communication was first introduced by Malinowski (1923), and defined as language used primarily to establish and maintain social relationships rather than exchange information. Therefore, Phatic expressions are communicative tools that facilitate social interaction and interpersonal solidarity. Phatic expressions include greetings, farewells, compliments, apologies, expressions of gratitude, asking about well-being, congratulations, and other routine forms of social interaction. These expressions fulfill important interpersonal functions by establishing, expressing politeness, and maintaining social cohesion (Coupland, 2014). Although phatic expressions may seem semantically insignificant, they play a central role in human communication. Zuckerman (2021) argues that phatic communication contributes to social cohesion by strengthening interpersonal relationships and fostering a sense of belonging. Similarly, Li (2025) emphasize that phatic interaction functions as a mechanism for maintaining social networks and promoting social solidarity. Recent studies have further emphasized the psychological and social importance of phatic communication. Research indicates that routine conversational exchanges facilitate trust-building, reduce social distance, and positively contribute to interpersonal well-being (Gabriel, 2021). Consequently, communicative expressions should be considered not merely as conversation fillers, but as meaningful communication tools embedded within cultural and social contexts.

2.4 Cultural Dimensions of Phatic Expressions

Phatic expressions are strongly influenced by cultural norms, values, and social conventions. Their meanings are often context-dependent rather than lexical content, making them highly culturally specific. What is considered an appropriate greeting, farewell, or expression of politeness in one culture may differ significantly from corresponding practices in another. According to Kramsch (2013), language reflects cultural identity and social practices. Therefore, understanding phatic expressions requires knowledge of the cultural context in which they arise. Al Mahrooqi and Denman (2015) emphasize that the successful interpretation of ritualized expressions is essential for effective cross-cultural communication. Since phatic expressions reflect culturally embedded patterns of interaction, translating them involves more than simply finding lexical equivalents. Translators must consider the communicative purpose and social significance of the expression in both cultures. Failure to do so can lead to a pragmatic failure, resulting in the translated expression becoming inappropriate, unnatural, or misleading within the target culture.



2.5 Translating Phatic Expressions

The translation of phatic expressions presents a unique challenge because their primary function is interpersonal rather than informational. Nida (1964) argues that translation should aim for functional equivalence, meaning the target text should evoke a response in the target audience similar to that evoked in the original audience of the source text. This principle is particularly important in the translation of phatic expressions whose meanings are context-dependent and culturally bound. Baker (2018) notes that translators often encounter difficulties when dealing with expressions that do not have a direct cultural equivalent. In such cases, various translation strategies such as cultural substitution, functional equivalence, paraphrasing, borrowing, and adaptation can be used. These strategies help to ensure naturalness and acceptability in the target language while preserving the communicative intent of the source text. Newmark (1988) also emphasizes the importance of communicative translation in the translation culturally loaded expressions. Communicative translation prioritizes preserving the intended pragmatic effect rather than focusing solely on lexical equivalent. This approach is particularly suitable for the translation of communicative expressions where social meaning often outweighs literal meaning.

2.6 Previous Studies

Several studies have examined phatic communication from pragmatic and and cross-cultural perspectives. Rahardi (2022) investigated the functions of phatic in Indonesian culture and identified multiple pragmatic categories, including politeness, greetings, disagreement, apology, and social interaction. The study demonstrated the strong relationship between phatic communication and cultural norms.

Rao (2023) investigated pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication and found that insufficient pragmatic competence often leads to misunderstandings and inappropriate language use. The study emphasized the importance of developing pragmatic awareness in language learning and cross-cultural interaction.

Li et al. (2025) examined the theoretical foundations of phatic communication and highlighted its role in interpersonal relationship management. Their findings demonstrate that phatic expressions are fundamental components of social interaction rather than merely environmental linguistic phenomena.

Research on the translation of phatic expressions is relatively limited. Current studies have primarily focused on the translation of phatic expressions in languages such as Arabic, Indonesian, and Chinese. These studies consistently show that literal translation often fails to convey the



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intended pragmatic and cultural meanings of phatic expressions, while functional and culturally adapted translations provide more effective communication.

3. Analysis and Findings of Phatic Expressions in English and Kurdish

The analysis of English phatic expressions and their Kurdish equivalents demonstrates that the successful translation of phatic language extends beyond lexical correspondence and depends primarily on preserving pragmatic meaning, communicative intention, and sociocultural appropriateness. Unlike referential expressions that convey factual information, phatic expressions function to establish, maintain, reinforce, and politely terminate interpersonal relationships. Consequently, their meanings are largely determined by contextual, cultural, and interpersonal factors rather than by their literal linguistic forms. The findings therefore confirm that pragmatic competence is the most significant factor in achieving communicative equivalence in English–Kurdish translation.

The analysis reveals that greetings and opening expressions exhibit the highest degree of equivalence between English and Kurdish because both languages employ conventionalized formulas to initiate interaction and establish social contact. Expressions such as Hello, Good morning, and Good evening have direct Kurdish equivalents that successfully preserve both their semantic content and pragmatic function. However, expressions such as How are you? and How have you been? illustrate important pragmatic differences. In English, these expressions frequently function as routine greetings requiring only brief responses, whereas Kurdish speakers often interpret them as sincere inquiries about the listener's health, personal circumstances, or emotional condition. This difference demonstrates that lexical equivalence alone cannot guarantee pragmatic equivalence. Translators must therefore consider contextual factors, speaker intention, and interpersonal relationships to reproduce the intended communicative effect naturally in the target language.

Similarly, the analysis of inquiries about well-being highlights the influence of cultural values on interpersonal communication. Both English and Kurdish employ these expressions to express concern, politeness, and solidarity; however, Kurdish communication typically reflects a stronger collectivist orientation by extending inquiries to include family members, health, employment, and other aspects of personal life. The findings indicate that literal translation of English expressions may appear emotionally distant or socially incomplete in Kurdish. Consequently, pragmatic adaptation becomes essential for





preserving the interpersonal warmth and social intimacy expected within Kurdish communicative practices.

Expressions of gratitude demonstrate relatively high functional equivalence across both languages because they primarily serve to acknowledge kindness, appreciation, and respect. Simple expressions such as Thank you and Thank you very much can generally be translated directly without significant pragmatic loss. Nevertheless, more elaborate expressions such as I appreciate it often require functional rather than literal translation because Kurdish speakers frequently reinforce appreciation through additional expressions of humility, respect, or goodwill. The findings therefore indicate that translators should prioritize the communicative effect of gratitude rather than lexical similarity in order to preserve interpersonal harmony.

The analysis further reveals that compliments and positive remarks are strongly influenced by sociocultural norms governing politeness, modesty, age, gender, and social hierarchy. Although many English compliments possess lexical equivalents in Kurdish, their appropriateness varies according to contextual and cultural expectations. Literal translation may produce expressions perceived as exaggerated, overly direct, or culturally inappropriate. The findings suggest that successful translation requires sociopragmatic adaptation, enabling translators to preserve the intended positive evaluation while ensuring that the expression conforms to Kurdish norms of politeness and interpersonal interaction.

Apologies constitute another category in which pragmatic interpretation outweighs literal meaning. Expressions such as Sorry, Excuse me, and Please forgive me perform multiple communicative functions, including expressing regret, requesting permission, attracting attention, interrupting politely, or repairing damaged interpersonal relationships. The analysis demonstrates that Kurdish distinguishes these communicative intentions through different lexical choices depending on context. Consequently, identifying the speaker's communicative purpose is essential before selecting an appropriate translation. These findings emphasize that literal translation frequently weakens or distorts the intended pragmatic force of apology expressions.

Among all categories examined, small talk and conversation-maintenance expressions present the greatest translation challenges because they are highly culture-dependent. Expressions such as What's up?, Nice weather today, and How's life? primarily function to establish rapport, maintain conversational flow, and prevent silence rather than exchange factual information. The findings reveal substantial differences between English



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and Kurdish conversational routines, making literal translation appear unnatural or pragmatically ineffective. Functional translation, cultural adaptation, and pragmatic substitution therefore emerge as the most effective approaches for reproducing these expressions while maintaining their interpersonal function within Kurdish discourse.

Expressions of agreement and acknowledgment also demonstrate the importance of contextual interpretation. Phrases such as Exactly, I see, That's true, and No problem function primarily as discourse markers that regulate conversation, signal comprehension, indicate acceptance, and facilitate conversational coherence. Their meanings are determined by discourse context rather than lexical content. The analysis confirms that literal translation may alter or diminish these pragmatic functions. Accordingly, translators should focus on preserving communicative intent and discourse function rather than reproducing the literal wording of the source language.

The analysis of farewell expressions indicates a relatively high degree of equivalence between English and Kurdish because both languages employ conventional formulas to terminate interaction politely. Expressions such as Goodbye, See you later, and Take care generally have acceptable Kurdish equivalents. Nevertheless, Kurdish farewell practices frequently incorporate blessings, prayers, and expressions of goodwill that strengthen interpersonal relationships and reinforce social solidarity. The findings therefore demonstrate that translators often need to expand or pragmatically adapt English farewell expressions to preserve their emotional and cultural significance within Kurdish society.

Expressions of good wishes and congratulations represent one of the most culturally embedded categories of phatic communication. Expressions such as Congratulations, Good luck, Best wishes, and Happy birthday primarily function to express encouragement, shared happiness, goodwill, and social solidarity. Although Kurdish contains equivalent expressions, speakers commonly reinforce these messages through blessings, prayers, and additional expressions of encouragement. The findings demonstrate that preserving the emotional impact and interpersonal value of these expressions requires pragmatic adaptation rather than literal translation, thereby ensuring that the target text reflects authentic Kurdish communicative practices.

Overall, the integrated analysis demonstrates that the translation of phatic expressions is fundamentally a pragmatic process in which successful communication depends on preserving interpersonal functions rather than lexical forms. Although English and Kurdish share many phatic expressions that perform similar communicative roles, their realization is

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significantly influenced by differences in cultural values, politeness conventions, interpersonal distance, and discourse practices. These sociocultural differences frequently prevent literal translation from achieving communicative equivalence.

The findings further establish that functional equivalence, communicative translation, pragmatic adaptation, cultural substitution, and paraphrasing constitute the most effective strategies for translating phatic expressions from English into Kurdish. These strategies enable translators to preserve the communicative intention, interpersonal function, emotional effect, and cultural appropriateness of the source expressions while producing fluent and natural target-language texts. Consequently, effective translation requires not only linguistic competence but also advanced pragmatic awareness, intercultural communicative competence, and comprehensive knowledge of the sociocultural conventions governing both English and Kurdish discourse. The study therefore confirms that the successful translation of phatic expressions is achieved through the integration of linguistic accuracy with pragmatic and cultural sensitivity, ensuring that the translated expressions maintain the same interpersonal impact and communicative effectiveness as the original text.

Conclusion

This study investigated the role of pragmatics in translating phatic expressions from English into Kurdish, with particular emphasis on preserving their communicative functions and cultural meanings. The findings demonstrate that English phatic expressions generally have pragmatic and functional equivalents in Kurdish; however, these equivalents are not always direct lexical correspondences. Their successful translation depends on contextual interpretation, cultural conventions, and the interpersonal functions they perform within each language community. The analysis also highlights the multifaceted challenges involved in translating phatic expressions, whose meanings and communicative functions are closely influenced by linguistic context, cultural traditions, and pragmatic norms. These challenges arise from differences in cultural norms, politeness conventions, social relationships, and discourse practices between English and Kurdish. Consequently, literal translation often fails to convey the intended pragmatic meaning and may result in pragmatic loss, unnatural expressions, or cultural misunderstanding.

Finally, the study confirms that pragmatics plays a fundamental role in preserving the communicative functions of phatic expressions in translation. Pragmatic competence enables translators to interpret speaker intention, recognize contextual and cultural meanings, and select



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translation strategies that maintain the interpersonal, emotional, and sociocultural functions of the original expressions. Among the most effective strategies identified are functional equivalence, communicative translation, pragmatic adaptation, cultural substitution, and paraphrasing. Therefore, successful translation of phatic expressions requires not only linguistic competence but also a thorough understanding of pragmatic principles and intercultural communication, ensuring that the translated text achieves the same communicative effect and social significance as the source text.

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