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Teaching Translation of Phraseological Units Representing Family Values and Character Intelligence in *The Great Gatsby*

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Abstract

This article examines the teaching of culture-bound phraseological units in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* from a linguocultural and pedagogical perspective. The principal purpose is to develop and justify a didactic model designed to strengthen students' translation competence and intercultural competence in higher education. The research employs a qualitative textual and pedagogical design comprising analytical reading, contrastive interpretation, instructional modeling, and a small-scale descriptive classroom application. The textual corpus focuses on phraseological units associated with family values and the intellectual characteristics of fictional characters, both of which provide productive material for cultural mediation and reflective translation practice.

The textual analysis identifies four principal categories of translation difficulty associated with these units: non-equivalence, pragmatic loss, register shift, and stylistic redistribution. Building on the textual findings and the descriptive classroom observations, the article proposes and illustrates a six-stage instructional sequence suitable for university courses in translation and foreign languages. The article concludes that the systematic teaching of literary phraseology can support critical interpretation, the mediation of meaning, and evidence-based decisions in translation practice.

Keywords: literary translation, phraseological units, intercultural competence, cultural mediation, translation pedagogy, higher education

1. INTRODUCTION

Translation teaching in higher education increasingly calls for instructional approaches that integrate close textual analysis with intercultural interpretation and reflective decision-making. In contemporary language education, translation is not limited to lexical transfer or formal equivalence; it can also be understood as a process of mediation through which learners interpret meaning, reformulate it for new audiences, and bridge cultural or linguistic differences between texts and their readers [1, 2]. This perspective is especially relevant when students work with phraseological units because idioms and semi-fixed figurative expressions frequently convey culturally embedded meanings that resist direct transfer and require contextual interpretation and informed judgment [3–5].

Phraseological units are pedagogically important because they condense evaluative attitudes, social norms, and figurative meanings into relatively compact and culturally resonant linguistic forms. In literary discourse, their functions extend beyond the meanings of individual words: they shape characterization, irony, narrative perspective, and reader alignment. Consequently, literary translation teaching should not treat phraseology as an exclusively lexical problem; instead, it should examine phraseological meaning as an important point of interaction among language, culture, narrative form, and pedagogy. Studies in phraseology and language teaching have repeatedly shown that phraseological competence is central to advanced language use and interpretive literacy [5, 6].

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* offers particularly rich and accessible material for this pedagogical purpose. An electronic edition of the novel is publicly available through Project Gutenberg, facilitating reproducible textual references and access for classroom learning [7]. It combines colloquial idiom, evaluative description, subtle irony, and symbolically loaded characterization. Research on English–Russian translation of its phraseological units and on colour symbolism in its Thai translations illustrates different ways in which Fitzgerald's figurative and stylistically marked language can create translation challenges [8, 9].

Against this background, the present article addresses a pedagogical question by focusing on phraseological units that represent family values and the intellectual characteristics of characters in *The Great Gatsby*. These domains were selected because they are central to the moral and social architecture of the novel and because they require students to negotiate implicit judgments rather than simply decode denotative meaning. Family-related phraseology frequently invokes legitimacy, loyalty, emotional distance, and domestic respectability, whereas phraseology associated with intellect frames perception, sophistication, superficiality, irony, and symbolic distinction. The study aims to develop and substantiate a pedagogical model for teaching the translation of this material in university-level translation and foreign-language programs. Its objectives are to identify relevant phraseological units, classify the main translation difficulties they raise, propose a didactic sequence, and assess the model's relevance to translation pedagogy and intercultural education [1, 10].

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study follows a qualitative research design combining close reading of the literary text, linguocultural interpretation, contrastive translation analysis, and pedagogical modeling. The primary source is the Project Gutenberg edition of *The Great Gatsby*, which offers a clearly identifiable and publicly accessible text for academic analysis and classroom use [7]. The theoretical framework integrates three complementary perspectives: translation studies on non-equivalence and strategic decision-making, phraseology-oriented research in language pedagogy, and mediation-based approaches to language teaching [1, 3, 5].

The corpus consists of phraseological units, idiomatic expressions, and semi-fixed evaluative patterns selected from passages where family values and intellectual characterization are foregrounded. The study uses a broad operational definition of phraseology that includes both canonical idioms and recurrent figurative constructions whose communicative effects depend on cultural convention, evaluative force, contextual association, or pragmatic implication. This broader definition is pedagogically appropriate because translation students may encounter difficulties not only with dictionary-listed idioms but also with recurrent patterns whose intended meaning depends on their use within a specific literary context [3, 5].

The textual analysis was organized into four connected stages. First, phraseological material was identified through close reading of the novel, with special attention to expressions that frame family relations, social expectations, intelligence, or evaluative judgment. Second, the selected units were classified according to their principal discourse functions, including evaluation, characterization, irony, and the representation of cultural norms. Third, each selected unit was examined for potential translation difficulties, focusing on non-equivalence, pragmatic loss, register shift, and stylistic redistribution. Fourth, the resulting categories were incorporated into a structured pedagogical model for possible classroom application [11, 12].

To examine the practical relevance of the pedagogical sequence, the study also included a small-scale descriptive classroom application. The model was piloted with a group of 12 fourth-year undergraduate students participating in a university translation seminar across two sessions of 90 minutes each. The activity was exploratory and instructional

rather than experimental; it was documented through instructor observation notes, students' written commentaries, and comparisons between their initial and revised translation drafts. Consistent with its descriptive purpose, the classroom application was intended to illustrate instructional feasibility and patterns of student reasoning, not to provide controlled or statistically generalizable evidence of effectiveness [13].

In Session 1, students worked with two short passages containing phraseological material associated with family values and interpersonal judgment. The first task asked students to identify phraseological units, describe their evaluative functions, and explain the cultural assumptions or associations activated by these expressions in context. The second task required students to prepare an initial translation and annotate at least one anticipated difficulty associated with each selected unit. In Session 2, students compared versions in pairs, discussed gains and losses, revised their translations, and wrote a brief justification explaining why they considered the revised strategy better able to preserve the source-text function. This sequence follows mediation-oriented pedagogy by making meaning negotiation and interpretive reformulation visible in classroom practice [1, 2].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The textual analysis suggests that phraseological units in *The Great Gatsby* function as concentrated carriers of cultural meaning and therefore warrant sustained and explicit attention in translation pedagogy. In passages related to family values, phraseological and semi-phraseological expressions frequently encode domestic legitimacy, emotional estrangement, loyalty, social respectability, and implied judgments about relational behavior. Their meaning is often indirect and depends on implication rather than overt moral labeling. A literal translation may therefore preserve referential meaning while diminishing the evaluative nuance and sociocultural associations that shape interpretation [7, 8].

A comparable pattern appears in the representation of intellectual characteristics. Fitzgerald's language repeatedly frames characters through implicit phraseological cues related to perception, sophistication, superficiality, irony, and performative intelligence. These units are especially important in classroom translation because they not only describe a character but also position the reader in relation to that character. For example, research on the novel's colour symbolism and its Thai translations shows how translating figurative and symbolically significant patterns can change readers' interpretations, underscoring the need for careful contextual analysis [9].

The textual analysis distinguished four recurrent categories of translation difficulty relevant to instructional practice. The first is non-equivalence, when the target language lacks a phraseological unit with a sufficiently similar semantic, pragmatic, and stylistic profile. The second is pragmatic loss, particularly in cases where the source expression carries irony, social distance, or culturally shared assumptions. The third is register shift, when an otherwise acceptable translation alters the tone of the original by becoming too colloquial, too neutral, or too formal. The fourth is stylistic redistribution, which occurs when the effect of the source expression can be preserved only through compensation elsewhere in the target text [3, 11, 12].

The descriptive classroom application provided preliminary observations relevant to the pedagogical usefulness of this typology. In their initial drafts, many students tended to prioritize lexical correspondence while paying comparatively less attention to the evaluative and culture-specific load of the phraseological units. Observation notes showed that students initially treated several expressions as isolated idioms rather than as components of characterization. During subsequent peer discussions, however, students referred more frequently to tone, implicit judgment, and the stance of the narrator. In revised drafts, students moved more often from literal rendering to explanatory paraphrase, idiomatic substitution, or compensation, especially when they were required to justify their decision in writing. These observations are compatible with the broader educational emphasis on reflective mediation and explicit intercultural interpretation; they do not, by themselves, establish a causal improvement in translation competence [1, 10, 14].

Two patterns were particularly noticeable in the descriptive observations of the pilot group. First, family-related phraseological units triggered more discussion about values and social expectations than intellectually marked units, suggesting that relational semantics may be more immediately accessible for collaborative cultural interpretation. Second, tasks that combined translation with short written commentary appeared to produce more analytically precise revisions than tasks based on translation alone. Although these observations are descriptive rather than statistical, they suggest that commentary-supported translation tasks may help students externalize interpretive reasoning and become more aware of functional adequacy [15, 16].

Taken together, the textual analysis and classroom observations support a practical pedagogical principle: the function of an expression should be interpreted before a translation substitute is selected. Before attempting a translation, students should determine whether a phraseological unit primarily names, evaluates, characterizes, ironizes, or encodes a culture-specific norm. Only then should they compare possible strategies such as idiomatic substitution, explicitation, descriptive paraphrase, controlled neutralization, or compensation. This sequencing shifts translation work from intuitive approximation toward reasoned decision-making and helps students perceive translation as an analytical and interpretive process [1, 11, 12].

On this basis, a six-stage didactic sequence is proposed. In stage one, students reconstruct the narrative and socio-cultural context of the passage. In stage two, they identify phraseological units and semi-fixed evaluative patterns. In stage three, they write a brief linguocultural commentary explaining the values or judgments encoded in each unit. In stage four, they produce an initial translation draft. In stage five, they compare alternative versions in pairs or small groups and discuss gains and losses. In stage six, they revise the translation and justify their final choices in writing. The educational value of this sequence lies in the fact that it integrates textual analysis, cultural interpretation, reflective writing, and peer collaboration [1, 2, 15].

The proposed model also has implications for formative assessment and the evaluation of translation-related reasoning. When instructors evaluate only the final target text, they may overlook the interpretive reasoning that informs students' linguistic and cultural choices. A process-oriented model of assessment should therefore include annotations, strategy commentaries, peer discussion, and revision notes. These tools make the learner's cultural reasoning visible and allow the instructor to evaluate whether the student has correctly identified the function of the phraseological unit, anticipated possible losses, and justified the final strategy. In pedagogical terms, this shifts assessment from product alone to competence development [10, 14].

The principal limitation is the qualitative, text-centered nature of the research and the limited descriptive scope of its classroom application. It does not provide statistical evidence of learning gains, nor does it compare the proposed sequence with an alternative teaching model. Nevertheless, the pilot offers a preliminary illustration of classroom feasibility and situates the pedagogical proposal within observed teaching and learning activities. Future research may build on this framework by using larger groups, rubrics, delayed revision tasks, or comparative quasi-experimental designs [10, 13].

4. CONCLUSIONS

Explicit instruction in the translation of culture-bound phraseological units in *The Great Gatsby* can contribute meaningfully to translation pedagogy in higher education. Phraseological units associated with family values and intellectual characterization require students to negotiate cultural implication, value judgment, register, and stylistic function simultaneously, which makes them especially productive for competence-based instruction [3, 7, 10].

The analysis supports treating literary phraseology as an opportunity for mediated intercultural interpretation rather than as a collection of isolated lexical problems. A pedagogical sequence based on guided reading, contextual analysis, linguocultural commentary, translation drafting, peer comparison, and revision can help learners develop cultural mediation, interpretive autonomy, and evidence-based translational decision-making [1, 2, 11].

The small descriptive classroom example illustrates the pedagogical plausibility of the model by connecting textual phraseological analysis with classroom tasks, translation revisions, and students' articulated reasons for their choices. The model proposed here is transferable to courses in translation studies, advanced language learning, stylistics, and intercultural communication. Its main value lies in demonstrating that literary translation can become a pedagogically rigorous space where textual analysis and educational methodology reinforce one another [15, 16].

Author contributions

The authors contributed equally to the study, as stated in the submitted manuscript. A detailed description of individual contributions should be confirmed before final submission.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to the research presented in this manuscript.

Data availability

Not applicable.

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