HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

THE ROLE OF SOCIOPRAGMATICS IN THE TRANSLATION OF SPECIALIZED TEXTS

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Abstract. Sociopragmatics — the intersection of social context and pragmatic meaning — has emerged as an indispensable theoretical and methodological lens for the analysis and practice of specialised text translation. While earlier translation paradigms prioritised lexical equivalence and terminological accuracy, contemporary scholarship recognises that specialised texts — including legal, medical, scientific, and technical documents — are embedded in complex socio-institutional contexts that fundamentally shape their pragmatic meaning. This article investigates the role of sociopragmatic competence in the translation of specialised texts, examining how social variables such as power relations, institutional register, politeness norms, speech act structure, and cultural context interact with terminological and discoursal decisions in translation. Drawing on a qualitative case-study analysis of 24 parallel source-target text pairs across three specialised domains — legal, medical, and scientific-technical — the study identifies and categorises sociopragmatic translation challenges, including pragmatic failure, illocutionary force loss, register mismatch, and face-threatening act mismanagement. The findings demonstrate that sociopragmatic competence constitutes a critical, yet systematically undertrained, dimension of translator expertise. The article proposes an integrated sociopragmatic translation framework (ISTF) that provides translators with structured analytical tools for identifying, assessing, and resolving sociopragmatic asymmetries across specialised text types. Pedagogical and professional implications for translator education and specialised translation practice are discussed.

Keywords: *sociopragmatics; specialised text translation; pragmatic equivalence; speech act theory; legal translation; medical translation; register; politeness theory; translational competence*

Introduction. The translation of specialised texts has traditionally been framed as a predominantly terminological enterprise: the principal challenge was understood to be the accurate identification and rendering of domain-specific vocabulary across linguistic boundaries. While terminological precision remains an indispensable requirement of specialised translation, this paradigm has been increasingly challenged by scholarship demonstrating that specialised texts are not merely repositories of technical vocabulary, but complex socio-institutional artefacts whose meaning is fundamentally shaped by context, power relations, institutional norms, and communicative intent [1], [2].

Sociopragmatics, as defined by Leech G. N. [3], refers to the study of the social conditions that govern language use: it concerns the interface between pragmatic meaning and the social structures — hierarchies, institutions, norms, relationships — within which language acts are performed. In translation, sociopragmatic competence involves the ability to recognise how source-text communicative acts are socially conditioned and to reproduce their pragmatic force appropriately within the socio-cultural framework of the target text. This competence is distinct from purely linguistic or terminological knowledge: a translator may render every technical term accurately while entirely misrepresenting the institutional register, power dynamic, or illocutionary intent of the source text [4].

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The importance of sociopragmatics for specialised translation is particularly acute in three high-stakes domains: legal translation, medical translation, and scientific-technical translation. In legal texts, the pragmatic force of modal verbs (shall, must, may), hedging strategies, and address forms carries direct institutional and juridical consequences [5]. In medical texts, the management of face-threatening acts — delivering diagnoses, obtaining informed consent, communicating risk — requires careful calibration of politeness strategies that vary substantially across cultures [6]. In scientific-technical texts, the epistemic stances encoded through hedging and evidentiality markers constitute an integral dimension of scholarly and professional communication that must be preserved in translation [7].

Despite these imperatives, sociopragmatic competence remains a systematically undertrained and under-theorised dimension of translator education. Most specialised translation curricula focus on terminology management and domain knowledge, with limited explicit attention to the pragmatic and sociolinguistic dimensions of specialised discourse [8]. This study addresses this gap by providing a systematic analysis of the role of sociopragmatics in specialised text translation and proposing an integrated sociopragmatic translation framework (ISTF) to support translators' pragmatic decision-making.

The article is structured as follows. Section II surveys the relevant theoretical literature on sociopragmatics, translation studies, and specialised discourse. Section III describes the methodology, including the case-study corpus and analytical framework. Section IV presents the results, organised by domain (legal, medical, scientific-technical) and by sociopragmatic challenge type. Section V discusses the findings in relation to existing literature and proposes the ISTF. Section VI concludes with pedagogical and professional recommendations.

Literature review and research methodology. **Sociopragmatics: Theoretical Foundations**. The concept of sociopragmatics was introduced by Leech G. N. [3] to designate the sociological interface of pragmatics, distinguishing it from pragmalinguistics — the study of the linguistic resources available for pragmatic expression. While pragmalinguistics concerns the formal means of performing speech acts (how a request is linguistically encoded), sociopragmatics concerns the social conditions that determine when, whether, and how such acts are appropriately performed (the social norms governing requesting behaviour).

Brown P. and Levinson S. C.'s [9] politeness theory provides a foundational framework for sociopragmatic analysis. Their model of face — the public self-image that interactants seek to maintain — and the concept of face-threatening acts (FTAs) has generated extensive cross-cultural research demonstrating that politeness strategies vary systematically with social variables including power differential, social distance, and the degree of imposition. House J. [10] extended this analysis to translation contexts, demonstrating that overt and covert translation strategies differ in their handling of politeness and register, and introducing the concept of a 'cultural filter' that shapes pragmatic choices in covert translation.

Grice H. P.'s [11] cooperative principle and its associated conversational maxims (quantity, quality, relation, and manner) provide a complementary analytical lens for understanding how implicature — meaning that exceeds the literal content of an utterance — is generated and interpreted in discourse. In translation, the preservation of implicature is a fundamental sociopragmatic challenge: an utterance that deliberately floats the maxim of quantity in the source language to imply irony may, if translated literally, produce a different or absent implicature in the target language [12].

Austin J. L.'s [13] speech act theory, extended by Searle J. R. [14], provides a framework for analysing the communicative functions of utterances in terms of their locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary dimensions. In translation, the preservation of illocutionary force — what the source

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text is doing, not merely what it says — is a defining criterion of pragmatic adequacy. Bruti S. [15] demonstrates that illocutionary force can be systematically altered through translation choices at the lexical, syntactic, and discourse levels, with significant consequences for communicative effectiveness.

Pragmatics and Translation: Theoretical Connections. The theoretical connection between pragmatics and translation has been explored from multiple angles. Nida E. A. [16] anticipated the pragmatic turn in translation studies through his concept of dynamic equivalence, which prioritises the functional and communicative effect of the target text on its audience over formal correspondence with the source text. This equivalence is inherently sociopragmatic in orientation: it concerns not lexical or syntactic matching, but the reproduction of the communicative act as experienced by the target-language audience.

House J. [10] developed a functionally oriented model of translation quality assessment grounded in systemic functional linguistics, in which register — comprising field, tenor, and mode — provides the analytical frame for evaluating the sociopragmatic adequacy of translations. Hatim B. and Mason I. [17] extended this approach to discourse analysis, arguing that translators must engage with texts as social practices embedded in ideological and institutional contexts. Their concept of 'socio-textual practices' captures the layered nature of meaning in specialised discourse: texts simultaneously encode propositional content, interpersonal relationships, and ideological positions.

The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Pragmatics [18] represents the most comprehensive recent synthesis of pragmatic approaches to translation, covering speech act translation, implicature, relevance theory, politeness, impoliteness, and cross-cultural pragmatic variation. As Taylor C. [19] notes in the Cambridge Handbook of Sociopragmatics, translation constitutes a form of re-contextualisation: the translator is simultaneously a reader who decodes the sociopragmatic structure of the source text and a writer who re-encodes it in accordance with the sociopragmatic norms of the target context.

Sociopragmatics in Legal Translation. Legal translation has been the most extensively studied domain from a sociopragmatic perspective. Cao D. [5] provides a comprehensive analysis of legal pragmatics, documenting how the modal system of legal English — the precise distributional semantics of shall, must, may, and should — encodes deontic and epistemic meanings that are the juridical substance of legal instruments. Mistranslation of these modals can alter the legal force of obligations, permissions, and prohibitions with potentially severe consequences.

Sarcevic S. [20] situates legal translation within a communicative framework emphasising the functional equivalence of legal acts across legal systems. Since legal concepts are system-bound — deriving their meaning from the institutional and normative context of their originating legal system — legal translation requires not merely linguistic competence but deep knowledge of comparative law and legal pragmatics. Alcaraz Varo E. [21] demonstrates that pragmatic equivalence in legal translation extends beyond the terminological level to encompass thematisation, cohesion, and the coherence patterns that constitute the pragmatic meaning of legal discourse.

Sociopragmatics in Medical Translation. Medical translation raises distinct sociopragmatic challenges related to the management of face and the communication of sensitive information. Scarpa F. [22] analyses the pragmatic dimensions of scientific and technical translation, introducing the concept of 'pragmatic equivalence' as a function of the situational and intentional factors that shape the meaning of specialised texts. In medical contexts, the mitigation of face-threatening acts — through hedging, euphemism, and indirect speech — varies substantially across cultures, creating systematic sociopragmatic asymmetries between source and target texts [23].

The translation of patient-provider communication is particularly sensitive to sociopragmatic variation. Politeness strategies that are standard in English medical discourse — such as the use of

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indirect requests ('Would you be able to...?') and epistemic hedges ('It appears that...') — may map onto culturally different politeness norms in the target language, requiring adaptation rather than literal translation to maintain appropriate institutional register and relational meaning [6].

Sociopragmatics in Scientific-Technical Translation. Scientific and technical texts present a distinctive sociopragmatic profile characterised by epistemic hedging, impersonal constructions, and citation practices that collectively constitute the community's norms of knowledge claim and attribution [7]. Hyland K. [24] documents how hedges and boosters in scientific discourse encode degrees of certainty and signal adherence to disciplinary norms of epistemic caution. In translation, the preservation of hedging strategies is a sociopragmatic requirement that is frequently neglected in practice, as translators — under time pressure — substitute hedged formulations with more assertive equivalents, subtly altering the epistemic stance of the source author.

Scientific-technical translation also involves the management of intertextual references and citation norms that vary across academic cultures and disciplines [8]. The decision to translate, adapt, retain, or expand citation practices in the target text involves sociopragmatic judgements about the target audience's expectations and the norms of the target disciplinary community.

Research design. This study employs a qualitative case-study design grounded in corpus-assisted discourse analysis. The case-study approach is selected as appropriate for the investigation of complex sociopragmatic phenomena that are sensitive to contextual and domain-specific variation and that require close textual analysis rather than large-scale quantitative measurement. The analysis is conducted at multiple linguistic levels — lexical, syntactic, discoursal, and pragmatic — guided by the theoretical frameworks outlined in Section II.

Corpus composition. The analytical corpus comprises 24 parallel source-target text pairs, distributed equally across three specialised domains: (1) legal texts (n=8), including contracts, legislative instruments, and court judgements translated from English into Uzbek and Russian; (2) medical texts (n=8), including patient information leaflets, clinical guidelines, and informed consent documents translated from English into Uzbek; and (3) scientific-technical texts (n=8), including research articles and technical manuals translated from English into Uzbek and Russian. All translations were produced by professional translators with domain-specific expertise, with a minimum of five years of specialised translation experience. Source and target texts were compiled from publicly available institutional repositories and published translations.

Analytical framework. The analysis proceeds in three stages. In the first stage, each source text is subjected to sociopragmatic profiling using House J.'s [10] register analysis model, identifying the field (subject matter), tenor (social roles and relationships), and mode (textual organisation) of the source text and the sociopragmatic expectations these dimensions create for translation. In the second stage, each translation is compared with its source text to identify sociopragmatic translation shifts — systematic differences in speech act type, illocutionary force, politeness strategy, register, or epistemic stance between source and target texts.

In the third stage, identified shifts are classified into four categories of sociopragmatic translation challenge: (1) pragmatic failure (inability to reproduce the intended communicative act); (2) illocutionary force loss or gain (attenuation or amplification of the performative dimension of source-text utterances); (3) register mismatch (incongruence between the social register of source and target texts); and (4) face-threatening act mismanagement (inappropriate handling of speech acts that threaten positive or negative face). This classification draws on the analytical frameworks of Leech G. N. [3], Brown P. and Levinson S. C. [9], and Cao D. [5].

Results and discussion. Legal texts: Modal ambiguity and illocutionary force loss. Analysis of the legal sub-corpus identified illocutionary force loss as the most prevalent sociopragmatic

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translation challenge, occurring in 31 of the 64 translation units analysed (48.4%). The primary source of illocutionary force loss was the handling of modal verbs. The English legal system deploys a precise modal hierarchy in which shall encodes a mandatory obligation, must denotes logical necessity or strong prescription, may signals a discretionary permission, and should indicates a recommendation without binding force.

In the Uzbek translations examined, this hierarchy was systematically collapsed: all four English modals were rendered by a restricted set of Uzbek modal constructions (primarily kerak — 'need/must' and mumkin — 'can/may') that do not preserve the juridical distinctions of the source system. For example, the contractual provision 'The contractor shall complete all works by the specified date' was rendered as 'Pudratchi barcha ishlarni belgilangan muddatga qadar bajarishi kerak', using the general obligation marker kerak rather than a construction that would encode the binding contractual force of shall. As documented by Cao D. [5], this type of modal collapse can have direct legal consequences, potentially transforming binding obligations into recommendations in the eyes of a target-language reader.

Register mismatch was the second most frequent legal translation challenge (23 instances, 35.9%). Legal English deploys a highly formalised, impersonal, and performative register characterised by Latinate vocabulary, passive constructions, and archaic formulae (hereinafter, notwithstanding, whereas). Uzbek legal register, while formal, lacks direct equivalents for many of these features, leading translators to adopt either hyper-formalised calques from Russian legal register or colloquial Uzbek formulations, neither of which adequately reproduces the socio-institutional positioning of the source text.

Scientific-technical texts: Epistemic hedging and register. Scientific-technical texts presented a distinct but equally significant pattern of sociopragmatic challenges. Epistemic stance misrepresentation — the alteration of the source author's expressed degree of certainty — was identified in 27 instances (42.2%) of the scientific-technical sub-corpus. Following Hyland K.'s [24] framework, epistemic hedges in scientific discourse (appears to, suggests, may indicate, it is possible that) signal the author's commitment to the proposition and their membership in a community that values epistemic caution.

In Uzbek translations of research articles, hedging was systematically reduced: hedged formulations in English were routinely rendered as assertive statements in Uzbek. The English 'The results suggest a possible correlation between X and Y' was frequently translated as 'Natijalar X va Y orasidagi korrelyatsiyani ko'rsatadi' ('The results show the correlation between X and Y'), eliminating both the hedging verb suggest and the epistemic adjective possible. This shift subtly misrepresents the source author's epistemic commitment and may mislead target-language readers about the strength of the evidential basis for the claim.

Terminological register mismatch was the second most prevalent challenge in this sub-corpus (19 instances, 29.7%). Technical manuals translated from English into Uzbek displayed systematic inconsistency in the use of technical versus colloquial terminology, reflecting the absence of standardised technical Uzbek vocabulary in many domains and the tendency of translators to default to Russian technical terms or colloquial Uzbek approximations when standardised Uzbek equivalents were unavailable.

Cross-Domain Patterns. Across all three domains, four cross-cutting patterns of sociopragmatic challenge were identified. First, institutional register was the dimension most frequently inadequately rendered, accounting for 38.4% of all identified shifts. Translators demonstrated stronger competence in terminological accuracy than in register reproduction, consistent with the emphasis on terminology management in specialised translation training [8]. Second, face-

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threatening act management was the dimension most susceptible to cross-cultural pragmatic failure, with translators frequently applying source-language politeness norms to target-language contexts where different norms apply.

Third, implicit pragmatic meaning — including implicature, presupposition, and indirect speech — was systematically undertranslated: translators tended to render explicit propositional content while neglecting the pragmatic enrichment that contextual inference provides to the source-text reader. Fourth, the direction of sociopragmatic shift was asymmetric: in legal and medical texts, translations tended toward pragmatic attenuation (reduced force, reduced politeness), while in scientific-technical texts, the dominant tendency was toward pragmatic amplification (increased assertiveness, reduced hedging).

The integrated sociopragmatic translation framework (ISTF). The findings of this study support the development of an Integrated Sociopragmatic Translation Framework (ISTF) as a structured tool for supporting translators' pragmatic decision-making in specialised text translation. The ISTF comprises four analytical stages: (1) Sociopragmatic Profiling, in which the source text's register, speech act structure, illocutionary force distribution, and politeness/face management strategies are systematically identified; (2) Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Mapping, in which identified source-text sociopragmatic features are compared with the corresponding norms and conventions of the target socio-institutional context; (3) Translation Strategy Selection, in which appropriate strategies are chosen to reproduce, adapt, or compensate for sociopragmatic features that cannot be directly transferred; and (4) Target Text Pragmatic Auditing, in which the completed translation is reviewed specifically for sociopragmatic adequacy.

The ISTF draws on and integrates House J.'s [10] register analysis model, Leech G. N.'s [3] sociopragmatic competence framework, Brown P. and Levinson S. C.'s [9] politeness theory, and Austin J. L.'s [13] and Searle J. R.'s [14] speech act framework. It is designed as a practical analytical instrument rather than a purely theoretical model, providing translators with a structured checklist of sociopragmatic features to attend to at each stage of the translation process.

Conclusion. This article has argued that sociopragmatic competence constitutes a critical, yet systematically undertrained, dimension of specialised translator expertise. Through qualitative case-study analysis of 24 parallel source-target text pairs across legal, medical, and scientific-technical domains, the study has documented systematic patterns of sociopragmatic translation challenge — including illocutionary force loss, register mismatch, face-threatening act mismanagement, and epistemic stance misrepresentation — that cannot be addressed through terminological or linguistic training alone.

The proposed Integrated Sociopragmatic Translation Framework (ISTF) offers a structured analytical tool for supporting translators' sociopragmatic decision-making across specialised domains. The framework's four-stage structure — profiling, mapping, strategy selection, and auditing — provides a practically applicable procedure grounded in established sociopragmatic and translation theory.

The study contributes to translation studies by extending sociopragmatic analysis to a systematic comparative examination of three specialised domains, identifying both domain-specific and cross-cutting patterns of sociopragmatic challenge. The finding that legal and medical translations tend toward pragmatic attenuation while scientific-technical translations tend toward epistemic amplification constitutes a novel contribution to the empirical literature on specialised translation quality.

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ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
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