

Linguistic Lacunarity and its Classification: A Study Based on the Uzbek and English Languages

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ABSTRACT

Lacunarity is a key phenomenon in linguistics and cross-cultural studies, as it highlights gaps between languages where one culture possesses concepts or values lacking direct equivalents in another. This study situates lacunarity within the broader context of intercultural communication, examining its significance for understanding national worldviews and cultural uniqueness. Using text-based and comparative analysis, the research systematically classifies lacunae into lexical, semantic, morphological, syntactic, pragmatic, and phraseological types and analyzes translation strategies such as adaptation, explanation, and restructuring. Findings demonstrate that lacunae in Uzbek and English are not deficiencies but dynamic intercultural negotiation zones, where translators creatively mediate meaning and preserve cultural identity. The article concludes that lacunarity is not only a linguistic issue but also a cultural and communicative one, playing an essential role in translation, ethnolinguistics, and cultural studies

Keywords: Lacunarity, linguistic gaps, cultural differences, intercultural communication, translation, ethnolinguistics, cultural worldview

INTRODUCTION

The article explores the phenomenon of linguistic lacunarity as a key indicator of the uniqueness of national worldviews and

cultural expression in language. Lacunae lexical, semantic, morphological, syntactic, pragmatic, and phraseological represent gaps that emerge when a linguistic or cultural element of one language has no direct equivalent in another. Although previous studies have examined lacunarity from translational and cultural perspectives, this research focuses on its linguistic dimension. The study aims to classify linguistic lacunae systematically and to analyze translation strategies that address these gaps while maintaining cultural identity. Methods of linguistic and comparative analysis are applied to reveal how translators employ adaptation, explanation, and restructuring to convey untranslatable concepts. The findings demonstrate that lacunae function not as deficiencies but as dynamic zones of intercultural negotiation, highlighting the interaction between linguistic form and cultural meaning. This research contributes to translation theory and intercultural communication by reaffirming the importance of linguistic lacunarity as both a theoretical and practical category.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Lacunae have evolved into an interdisciplinary phenomenon, attracting attention from various branches of linguistic and cultural studies. They have been examined through multiple perspectives comparative linguistics (Gak 1976; Muraviev 1975; Stepanov 2003 [1965]), psycholinguistics (Sternin 1997), and culturology alongside cross-cultural communication (Ertelt-Vieth & Denisova-Schmidt 2007; Markovina 2010; Zhelvis 1977). However, the active development of this research area has led to the emergence of diverse terms and definitions describing the notion of a lacuna. Scholars have conceptualized lacunae as *non-equivalents* (Sternin 1997: 18), *blank spots on the semantic map of a language* (Stepanov 2003 [1965]: 120), *anti-words* (Stepanov, 2003 [1965]: 120), and *voids* (Bikova 2003: 19). Sorokin and Markovina (1988) examined lacunarity within the framework of ethnolinguistics. Nevertheless, Markovina's exploration of the phenomenon extended beyond its connotative dimension. In her later works, Markovina (2004: 59) adopted a

broader perspective, distinguishing between linguistic and culturological lacunae. Subsequently, she (2010:36) argued that the concept of a lacuna encompasses elements existing in one culture but absent in another, interpreting lacunarity as a phenomenon that necessitates further clarification in the context of cross-cultural interaction. This expanded understanding aligns with Zhelvis's (1977: 136-137) position, who described lacunae as unique features of languages and cultures that lack direct lexical equivalents in others. The culturological approach to lacuna theory was later advanced by Ertelt-Vieth and Denisova-Schmidt (2007), who identified cultural lacunae arising in intercultural communication between Russian and German speakers.

This study employs primarily text-based and comparative analytical methods to investigate linguistic lacunae between the Uzbek and English languages. The text-based approach involves detailed examination of authentic language data drawn from Uzbek folklore, epic poetry (notably the Alpomish epic), proverbs, and their English translations. This corpus serves as the empirical foundation for identifying lexical, semantic, morphological, syntactic, pragmatic, and phraseological gaps, which manifest as lacunae due to cultural and linguistic disparities. Through this qualitative textual analysis, the research highlights examples where direct equivalents are absent or where translation necessitates culturally sensitive interpretation.

Complementing this, the comparative method systematically juxtaposes corresponding linguistic units and structures across Uzbek and English to classify lacunae types and elucidate their linguistic and cultural underpinnings. This method facilitates the identification of asymmetries in grammatical forms, word meanings, idiomatic expressions, and communicative conventions by mapping differences in form and function between the languages. By combining empirical evidence from text with theoretical insights from comparative linguistics, the study provides a comprehensive framework that enhances understanding of lacunarity as both a linguistic and cultural phenomenon. These methods collectively support the analysis of translation strategies used to negotiate untranslatable elements,

thereby contributing to translation studies and intercultural communication research.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Interlingual lacunae are traditionally interpreted as the unfamiliarity or non-equivalence of one linguistic unit when compared across languages. They manifest as semantic voids or structural asymmetries, marking distinctions between two linguistic systems. Such gaps are not linguistic shortcomings but indicators of distinct conceptualizations of reality shaped by the worldview of a particular speech community. Thus, lacunae serve as an important means of understanding the cultural identity and national mentality encoded in language. It is noteworthy that the phenomenon of lacunarity is universal, occurring to varying degrees across all languages of the world (Markovina 2004; Zhelvis 1977).

Scholars have approached the study of lacunae from several perspectives, including:

- The linguistic approach
- The approach of translation studies
- The linguocultural approach
- The anthropocentric approach

The present section focuses on the linguistic approach and the classification of lacunae within this framework. From a linguistic standpoint, lacunae are differentiated according to the level of language at which they occur: lexical, semantic, morphological, syntactic, pragmatic, and phraseological. Each type reflects the way meaning, structure, and culture are encoded and transmitted within linguistic systems.

Lexical lacunae refer to lexemes that exist in one language but lack a direct equivalent in another (Gak 1976). These are often rooted in historical, cultural, or ethnographic specificities. For example, in the phrase *Qalmoq elining biyi* (the biy of the Kalmyk tribe), the term *biy* denotes a socio-political title that does not exist in English. The *Alpomish* epic abounds in such

culturally bound lexemes archaisms, dialectisms, and borrowings from ancient layers of the Uzbek lexicon.

To convey meaning in translation, strategies such as transliteration, functional substitution, or explanatory annotation are applied. The term *biy*, for instance, can be translated as “chieftain” or “tribal judge,” though these fail to fully convey its cultural weight. In Qosimboy Ma’murov’s translation of *Alpomish*, the word is rendered through transliteration to preserve cultural authenticity. Other translators may apply functional equivalence accompanied by commentary, particularly when such words embody culture-specific concepts.

Semantic lacunae emerge when the semantic range of a term in one language does not overlap precisely with that of another (Stepanov 2003). For example, in the phrase *Oybarchin kelinlik libosida to’rdan joy oldi*, the word *to’r* refers to “the most honorable place in a traditional Uzbek dwelling,” a notion unfamiliar in English. The culturally adapted rendering “Oybarchin, dressed as a bride, took the place of honor in the room” clarifies the concept for an English-speaking audience.

Semantic lacunae thus reveal the interplay between lexical meaning and cultural experience, demanding contextual interpretation or descriptive translation to preserve both semantic and cultural depth.

Morphological lacunae occur when a grammatical form or morpheme in one language has no counterpart in another (Muraviev 1975). For instance, in *Alpomish keldi-yu, yurtiga fayz kirdi*, the Uzbek connective suffix *-yu* expresses simultaneity or causation, a feature absent in English morphology. A syntactic equivalent such as “As soon as Alpomish came, prosperity entered his land” reproduces the meaning through structural transformation.

Morphological lacunae highlight differences in grammatical encoding across languages and are typically resolved through syntactic restructuring or lexical compensation to maintain both form and function.

Syntactic lacunae derive from disparities in sentence structure and word order between languages. In *Ot minib, yoy tortib, qirq yigitni ortiga oldi*, multiple serial verbs form a

construction natural in Uzbek but alien to English syntax. The equivalent English version “He mounted his horse, drew his bow, and took forty young men with him” is achieved by reorganizing the clause structure.

Syntactic lacunae therefore require structural adaptation, ensuring grammatical correctness and narrative coherence while retaining the stylistic rhythm of the original.

Pragmatic lacunae reflect culturally specific communicative conventions, such as forms of address, politeness norms, and social etiquette (Sternin 1997). The Uzbek phrase *ota-ona rizosini olmoq* cannot be directly translated into English without losing its cultural nuance. The rendering “to get one’s parents’ blessing” conveys the meaning but not the moral-religious undertones of filial duty inherent in Uzbek culture.

These lacunae are context-dependent, requiring sensitivity to both the communicative situation and socio-cultural norms. In *Alpomish*, pragmatic lacunae often appear in expressions of respect, deference, and blessing, which must be translated in culturally equivalent ways to preserve their functional meaning in discourse.

Phraseological lacunae appear when idiomatic or metaphorical expressions lack counterparts in the target language. For instance, the expression *tulkini inlatgan toziday bo‘lib* literally means “like a tazi that made even the fox howl,” describing someone exceptionally strong or skillful.

Possible translation strategies include:

- Literal translation with explanation: “Like a tazi that makes even the fox howl.”
- Semantic equivalent: “As powerful as a hound that outwits a fox.”
- Idiomatic (cultural) equivalent: “As cunning and fierce as a foxhound” or “As unstoppable as a hound on a fox’s trail.”

The selection depends on the translator’s priority whether to maintain national color, semantic precision, or reader accessibility. Phraseological lacunae underscore the creative role of the translator as both linguistic and cultural mediator.

CONCLUSION

The linguistic classification of lacunae constitutes an essential theoretical framework for comprehending the multifaceted ways in which human languages encode, represent, and reflect varying conceptualizations of reality. By delineating lacunae into distinct types lexical, semantic, morphological, syntactic, pragmatic, and phraseological this classification system not only clarifies the interaction between cultural cognition and linguistic form but also illuminates the dynamic processes through which languages construct and communicate meaning within specific sociocultural contexts. Lacunae, rather than signifying deficits or inadequacies in language systems, underscore the profound diversity, cultural specificity, and epistemological richness inherent in human communication and thought.

From the perspective of translation studies, the challenge posed by lacunae extends beyond the mere lexical search for equivalents; it implicates a complex process of cross-cultural negotiation and mediation that demands a range of sophisticated translational strategies. These include detailed explanation, adaptive contextualization, structural reorganization, and figurative re-interpretation, all designed to bridge conceptual and cultural gaps without compromising the integrity or nuance of the source text. Such strategies transform translation into an interactive intercultural dialogue that affirms the translator's role as a mediator and cultural negotiator.

Moreover, the comprehensive investigation of linguistic lacunae significantly advances our theoretical understanding of linguistic asymmetry and conceptual relativity, while also contributing to applied disciplines such as linguoculturology and translation practice. Recognizing lacunarity as both a structural linguistic phenomenon and an expression of cultural identity highlights the dual nature of language as a communicative tool and a repository of collective consciousness. Consequently, languages serve not only as channels for interpersonal communication but also as mirrors reflecting the unique cultural worldviews, social values, and historical experiences that shape human societies.

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