

Translexeme Theory and the Teaching of Pragmatic Competence: Toward a Cross-Linguistic Framework for Formulaic Language in Second Language Education

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Abstract

Teaching pragmatic competence has received increasing attention in the fields of second language education, English language teaching (ELT), applied linguistics, and intercultural communication research. Despite the fact that a plethora of research has been conducted in the areas of formulaic language, phraseology, pragmatics, speech acts, and translation equivalence, the cross-linguistic relationship between formulaic expressions and their pragmatically unmarked realizations in target languages has not received due attention. Drawing on the ideas in articles where the author introduced the concept of translexeme (Ghaemi & Ziafar, 2011; Khatib & Ziafar, 2012), this article elaborates on a theoretical framework centered on the new concepts of translexeme, translex, and allotranslex. A translexeme is defined as an abstract cross-linguistic formulaic unit representing the pragmatically and culturally unmarked realization of a communicative function across languages. A translex refers to the language-specific realization of a translexeme, whereas an allotranslex represents a contextually conditioned variant realization within the same language. Based on a critical review of literature on formulaic language research, interlanguage pragmatics, sociocultural theory, translation studies, phraseology, and communicative competence, this study puts forward the idea that translexemic competence may represent a neglected feature of pragmatic competence in second language learning. The author has attempted to synthesize and discuss the theoretical underpinnings of the proposed framework, introduce the pedagogical implications of translexemic instruction, and propose directions for future empirical research and validation. The main argument of this study is that grammatically proficient second language learners frequently experience communicative failure partly because of their insufficient command of pragmatically sanctioned formulaic correspondences across languages. Hence, the translexemic framework provides a theoretically integrated model for understanding pragmatics in multilingual communication and language pedagogy.

Keywords: translexeme, translex, allotranslex, formulaic language, pragmatic competence, interlanguage pragmatics, phraseology, communicative competence, second language acquisition

1. Introduction

Effective communication in a second language requires abilities that extend beyond grammatical and lexical competence alone. Learners are expected to develop the capacity to express themselves through socially, culturally, and pragmatically appropriate language that functions effectively in relation to contextual demands. The recognition of this multidimensional nature of language ability gained momentum following Dell Hymes' formulation of communicative competence, which challenged purely structural views of language knowledge and contributed to the development of communicative language teaching (Canale & Swain, 1980; Bachman, 1990; Kasper & Rose, 2002). Hymes (1972) emphasized that successful communication depends not only on grammatical well-formedness but also on the ability to judge what is socially appropriate in specific communicative contexts.

Subsequent models of communicative competence expanded this view by incorporating sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic dimensions (Canale & Swain, 1980). Within these frameworks, pragmatic competence gradually gained prominence as a central component. Pragmatic competence is generally understood as the ability to comprehend and produce language appropriately in relation to sociocultural expectations, contextual constraints, interpersonal relationships, and communicative intentions. As a result, second language learners may produce grammatically accurate utterances that nonetheless appear pragmatically marked, socially inappropriate, culturally incongruent, or interactionally unnatural to target-language users.

This issue has been extensively investigated within interlanguage pragmatics, a field concerned with how second language learners comprehend, produce, and acquire pragmatic knowledge in additional languages (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993). A central finding in this research tradition is that even grammatically proficient learners frequently experience pragmatic failure. As Jenny Thomas (1983) explains, pragmatic failure may be divided into two types: pragmalinguistic failure and sociopragmatic failure. Pragmalinguistic failure refers to the inappropriate linguistic encoding of intended meanings, while sociopragmatic failure concerns the inability to appropriately assess or conform to sociocultural norms governing communication.

A major source of pragmatic difficulty arises when learners transfer expressions directly from their first language into the target language without recognizing that native speakers often rely on different formulaic sequences to realize equivalent communicative functions. Research in interlanguage pragmatics and speech act realization, particularly the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) and subsequent studies on pragmalinguistic mapping, has shown that such differences in realization patterns are systematic and strongly shaped by sociocultural conventions. Consequently, learners with substantial grammatical competence may still produce language that sounds pragmatically awkward or culturally marked, despite being semantically comprehensible.

While the CCSARP framework primarily operationalizes speech act realization strategies at the level of request/response forms, the present model abstracts these realizations into higher-order cross-linguistic pragmatic units (translexemes) that capture systemic correspondences across languages.

In many cases, formulaic language offers a key resource for addressing such difficulties. Native speakers rarely construct communicative acts entirely through on-the-spot grammatical computation. Instead, they frequently rely on conventionalized formulaic expressions when performing acts such as expressing sympathy, softening disagreement, refusing invitations, managing politeness, responding to compliments, or organizing discourse. Learners who translate such expressions literally from their first language may therefore fail to achieve pragmatically natural communication, since communicative appropriateness often depends on selecting formulaic realizations that are culturally conventional within specific discourse communities. This observation highlights the need for theoretical models that explain how formulaic sequences operate across languages as pragmatically sanctioned realizations of communicative intentions.

Formulaic language has consequently become a major focus of research in applied linguistics and second language acquisition. According to Wray (2002), formulaic sequences consist of stretches of language that are processed and retrieved holistically rather than being generated word by word through grammatical rules. Collocations, lexical bundles, idioms, routines, conversational formulas, discourse markers, and institutionalized utterances all constitute examples of formulaic language. Research has consistently demonstrated that formulaic language contributes significantly to fluent communication, native-like proficiency, discourse organization, pragmatic appropriateness, processing efficiency, and interactional competence (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Schmitt, 2004; Wood, 2010; Zavialova, 2023). Native speakers typically rely on extensive repertoires of such expressions in both spoken and written discourse, whereas learners without comparable access may produce language that appears less natural or interactionally marked.

Given this body of research, the importance of formulaic language in communication is widely recognized, particularly in enabling learners to process language more efficiently and produce expressions that are more natural, socially appropriate, and comprehensible to native speakers. Formulaic competence has therefore come to be regarded as a central dimension of communicative competence. Although earlier models often assigned formulaic language a secondary role relative to grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980), more recent scholarship has emphasized its fundamental role in authentic language use. For instance, Celce-Murcia's (2007) model of communicative competence highlights formulaic competence as an essential component operating alongside interactional and sociocultural competence, enabling natural communication through conventionalized and socially situated expressions rather than exclusively analytically generated language.

Formulaic language provides access to conversational routines, politeness strategies, discourse markers, interactional patterns, and institutionalized expressions that are essential for effective communication. As a result, interactional and sociocultural competence are often realized more naturally through formulaic resources. Consequently, learners who lack sufficient formulaic competence may experience pragmatic difficulty, interactional awkwardness, and sociocultural markedness even when their grammatical competence is advanced.

Despite extensive research on formulaic language in acquisition, processing, and pedagogy, relatively less attention has been given to how formulaic expressions function in cross-linguistic pragmatic equivalence. In particular, interlanguage pragmatics research has not yet fully integrated formulaic language studies with systematic models of cross-linguistic equivalence in pragmatic realization. More specifically, there is still a need for a comprehensive conceptual framework explaining how formulaic language interacts with cross-linguistic pragmatic equivalence within communicative competence and second language learning.

Although Ziafar (2020) did not find a statistically significant advantage for the contrastive lexical approach over the comparison conditions, the study highlights the complexity of the relationship between explicit instruction, translation, and pragmatic development. The findings suggest that the role of cross-linguistic comparison in pragmatics instruction warrants further investigation rather than providing conclusive evidence for its effectiveness.

Ziafar further suggested that the removal of contrastive instruction involving formulaic expressions may have reduced the effectiveness traditionally associated with explicit instruction and proposed this as a possible explanation for discrepancies between his findings and those of previous studies. However, this interpretation remains speculative and was not directly confirmed by the study's results. Consequently, the findings should not be viewed as evidence for the superiority of contrastive instruction, but rather as raising important questions about the potential role of translation and cross-linguistic comparison in pragmatic learning. These questions are relevant to the present framework, which proposes translexemic correspondences as a theoretical construct and a possible avenue for future empirical investigation.

Building on the earlier introduction of the concept of the translexeme (Ghaemi & Ziafar, 2011; Khatib & Ziafar, 2012), the present article addresses this gap by integrating insights from interlanguage pragmatics, formulaic language research, phraseology, and sociocultural theories of communicative competence. It introduces the notion of translexemic competence, defined as learners' ability to identify and employ pragmatically and culturally unmarked formulaic correspondences across languages. This competence may represent an important yet underexplored dimension of cross-linguistic pragmatic and formulaic competence in second language learning.

The present article therefore aims to provide a theoretical basis for explaining how formulaic language functions across languages and how learners may develop pragmatically appropriate communicative competence through engagement with comparative formulaic units. It also explores the pedagogical implications of translexemic competence for second language instruction, curriculum design, teacher education, translation pedagogy, intercultural communication, and artificial intelligence-mediated language practices.

Finally, this review article synthesizes research from formulaic language studies, phraseology, sociolinguistics, interlanguage pragmatics, translation theory, and communicative competence research in order to establish the theoretical foundations of the proposed translexemic framework.

Although prior research in interlanguage pragmatics and translation studies has extensively addressed pragmalinguistic equivalence, cross-linguistic speech act realization, and formulaic transfer, this stratification enables a structured representation of cross-linguistic pragmatic correspondence within a formally hierarchical framework. This may support more systematic and potentially predictive modeling of variation in pragmatic-formulaic realization across languages.

The concept of the translexeme is proposed not as a terminological replacement for pragmatic equivalence, but as an analytically distinct construct that organizes pragmatic-formulaic correspondence into a three-level model: (1) the translexeme as an abstract cross-linguistic pragmatic prototype representing a communicative function; (2) the translex as its language-specific instantiation; and (3) the allotranslex as its contextually conditioned variant within a language.

This stratification enables explanatory and predictive extensions beyond existing frameworks. First, it allows systematic modeling of cross-linguistic pragmatic variation as a function of probabilistic alignment between translexemes and their realizations, rather than treating equivalence as binary or purely descriptive. Second, it provides a basis for predicting zones of pragmatic instability in second language acquisition, particularly where a single translexeme maps onto multiple competing translexes or where no culturally unmarked equivalent exists. Third, it explains recurrent patterns of pragmatic transfer by identifying cases where learners default to structurally transparent but pragmatically non-canonical translexes. In this sense, translexemic theory reframes pragmatic equivalence as a structured mapping system with internal variability, thereby extending beyond existing accounts of speech act realization and formulaic language use.

Although Construction Grammar, pragmatics, interlanguage pragmatics, and phraseological approaches have each contributed substantially to our understanding of formulaic language and communicative competence, none of these frameworks alone provides a fully integrated account of cross-linguistic pragmatic behavior. Construction Grammar primarily models form–meaning pairings within individual languages, pragmatics and interlanguage pragmatics focus largely on situated language use and speech-act realization, and phraseological traditions mainly investigate language-internal formulaicity and fixed expressions. Consequently, these traditions tend to treat pragmatic function, formulaic realization, sociocultural variation, and learner transfer as partially independent phenomena. The present framework proposes that a cross-linguistic hierarchical abstraction layer—distinguishing among translexemes, translexes, and allotranslexes—may provide a principled means of integrating these dimensions by linking abstract communicative functions to their language-specific and contextually conditioned realizations. Such a hierarchy may offer a unified account of pragmatic function, formulaicity, sociocultural variability, and recurrent patterns of learner transfer within a single explanatory model.

2. Existing Theoretical Traditions Relevant to Translexemic Theory

2.1: Translexemic Theory in Relation to Construction Grammar and Usage-Based Linguistics

Construction Grammar provides one of the most compatible theoretical traditions for situating translexemic theory because it conceptualizes language as a structured inventory of conventionalized form–meaning pairings, known as constructions (Goldberg, 1995, 2006; Croft, 2001). Within this framework, constructions may range from individual lexical items to idioms, discourse routines, and highly schematic grammatical patterns. Unlike formal linguistic approaches that privilege abstract syntactic rules, Construction Grammar assumes that linguistic knowledge emerges from language use and that form, meaning, and communicative function constitute inseparable components of linguistic representation.

This perspective aligns closely with translexemic theory because both frameworks assign a central role to conventionalized and formulaic language in communication. Formulaic expressions such as greetings, apologies, refusals, and politeness routines may be analyzed as constructions whose meanings cannot be reduced solely to their constituent lexical elements. Instead, their interpretation depends on recurrent usage patterns, sociocultural conventions, and interactional contexts.

From a translexemic perspective, a translexeme may be viewed as an abstract cross-linguistic pragmatic construction representing the pragmatically unmarked realization of a communicative function across languages. Individual translexemes constitute language-specific instantiations of this abstract construction, while allotranslexemes represent contextually conditioned variants shaped by factors such as register, social distance, discourse genre, and institutional setting.

Usage-based approaches similarly emphasize that linguistic knowledge develops through repeated exposure to recurrent patterns in discourse (Bybee, 2006; Ellis, 2002). Because translexemic competence also develops through learners' repeated encounters with culturally sanctioned formulaic realizations, translexemic theory is fundamentally compatible with usage-based and constructionist accounts of language learning. Both perspectives assume that communicative competence depends heavily on speakers' ability to access conventionalized linguistic patterns acquired through social interaction and language use.

Nevertheless, translexemic theory extends Construction Grammar by moving beyond language-internal constructions to examine cross-linguistic pragmatic correspondences. Whereas Construction Grammar primarily investigates the organization of constructions within individual languages, translexemic theory focuses on how pragmatically and culturally unmarked formulaic constructions correspond across linguistic and cultural systems. In this sense, translexemic theory may be regarded as a cross-linguistic extension of constructionist principles into the domain of intercultural pragmatics and second language communication.

Although translexemic theory is principally aligned with usage-based and cognitive-linguistic traditions, certain psycholinguistic notions of abstract representation offer useful heuristic parallels. Earlier generative models, such as Chomsky's (1965) framework of linguistic competence, introduced influential distinctions between underlying representations and surface

structures; however, their primary focus lies in abstract syntactic organization rather than situated language use. As such, their primary explanatory focus lies outside the domain of formulaic and sociopragmatic phenomena. Nevertheless, the notion of abstract lexical representation in generative linguistics has been echoed in psycholinguistic models of speech production. For example, the concept of the lemma (Levelt, 1989) refers to an abstract lexical representation containing semantic and syntactic information prior to phonological encoding, while Kempen and Huijbers (1983) similarly describe lexical access as a staged process from abstract activation to surface realization.

In this respect, a cautious and metaphorical parallel may be drawn between the lemma–lexeme distinction and the relationship between translexemes and translexes. Translexemes may be understood as abstract cross-linguistic pragmatic–formulaic patterns, while translexes represent their language-specific realizations shaped by sociocultural conventions and discourse norms. This parallel is intended as a processing-oriented analogy rather than a structural equivalence, highlighting how abstract representations may guide observable formulaic production.

However, translexemic theory is more closely aligned with cognitive-linguistic and usage-based frameworks than with formal generative accounts. In contrast to models that prioritize syntactic competence as an autonomous system, usage-based approaches such as Construction Grammar conceptualize linguistic knowledge as networks of conventionalized form–meaning pairings that emerge from repeated use in communicative contexts. Accordingly, formulaic expressions are central to linguistic competence rather than marginal exceptions.

Accordingly, translexemic theory foregrounds pragmatic appropriateness, sociocultural embedding, and cross-linguistic formulaic equivalence as core explanatory dimensions. It extends beyond formal representation by emphasizing how speakers select culturally and contextually appropriate formulaic expressions in real-time communication. In this sense, it is more directly compatible with contemporary cognitive and usage-based accounts of language than with classical generative models.

2. 2: Translexemic Theory in Relation to Phraseology and Idiomaticity

Phraseological studies have looked into idioms, collocations, lexical bundles, and prefabricated patterns. Sinclair (1991) maintained that language users depend heavily on the idiom principle, according to which speakers draw on semi-preconstructed phrases rather than producing language only through grammatical rules.

Phraseme theory appeared primarily within phraseology, lexicology, and Meaning-Text Theory to account for conventionalized multiword expressions that operate as semi-fixed or fixed linguistic units. Scholars such as Mel'čuk (1995; 2012) conceptualize phrasemes as non-free combinations of lexical items whose meaning, usage, or collocational behavior cannot be entirely predicted from their constituent components. There are different types of phrasemes including

idioms, collocations, lexical bundles, conversational routines, and institutionalized expressions such as “make a decision,” “How are you?,” or “kick the bucket.” Central to phraseme theory is the idea that language users rely extensively on prefabricated expressions rather than generating language exclusively through grammatical rules. Consequently, phraseme theory primarily investigates the internal phraseological organization of a language, including fixedness, compositionality, collocational restrictions, and lexical co-occurrence patterns.

Although translexemic theory shares with phraseme theory an emphasis on formulaic and conventionalized language, the two frameworks differ fundamentally in scope and orientation. Phraseme theory is principally language-internal because it focuses on conventionalized expressions within a single linguistic system. Translexemic theory, by contrast, is inherently cross-linguistic and pragmatically oriented. Rather than examining only the phraseological structure of formulaic expressions, translexemic theory investigates how pragmatically and culturally unmarked formulaic correspondences are realized across languages. In this framework, a translexeme does not merely represent a fixed expression, but an abstract cross-linguistic pragmatic-formulaic unit connecting culturally appropriate realizations of comparable communicative acts across different linguistic communities. Thus, while a phraseme may describe a conventionalized expression within one language, a translexeme accounts for the sociopragmatic relationship among pragmatically equivalent formulaic realizations across languages. In this sense, translexemic theory extends phraseological inquiry beyond language-specific formulaicity into the domain of intercultural pragmatics, communicative competence, and cross-linguistic pragmatic equivalence.

2. 3: Translexemic Theory in Relation to Pragmeme Theory

Jacob Mey’s (2001) concept of the pragmeme provides another important theoretical foundation. A pragmeme refers to a situated pragmatic act embedded within sociocultural contexts. The pragmeme framework emphasizes that meaning emerges not solely from linguistic forms but also from institutional settings, social expectations, and contextual conditions.

Pragmeme theory, proposed by Jacob Mey, emerged as an attempt to explain how pragmatic meaning is fundamentally shaped by situated social action rather than by isolated linguistic forms alone. In Mey’s framework, a pragmeme refers to a generalized pragmatic act embedded within a recurrent sociocultural situation. Unlike traditional speech act theory, which primarily focuses on individual utterances and speaker intentions, pragmeme theory emphasizes the broader contextual and institutional conditions that make particular communicative acts socially meaningful and pragmatically appropriate. A pragmeme therefore represents an abstract situational prototype that becomes realized in discourse through specific contextual instantiations known as practs. For example, expressions such as “Can I help you?,” “May I take your order?,” or “What can I get for you?” may all instantiate the same underlying pragmeme associated with institutional service encounters. Meaning, consequently, is not generated solely through linguistic structure but through the interaction between language, context, social conventions, and communicative expectations.

Pragmeme theory is highly relevant to translexemic theory because both frameworks emphasize the inseparability of language and sociocultural context in pragmatic communication. Both

theories also move beyond purely semantic understandings of language by foregrounding conventionalized communicative behavior and socially situated meaning. The concept of the translexeme particularly aligns with pragmeme theory in that pragmatically appropriate formulaic expressions are viewed as realizations of culturally recognizable communicative acts. In many cases, translexemes may function as the language-specific formulaic realizations through which pragmemes are instantiated in actual interaction. However, despite these conceptual similarities, the two theories differ substantially in their primary scope and orientation. Pragmeme theory is principally concerned with situated pragmatic action within a particular sociocultural context, whereas translexemic theory focuses specifically on cross-linguistic pragmatic-formulaic correspondences across languages. A pragmeme explains how communicative acts derive meaning from context, while a translexeme explains how pragmatically and culturally unmarked formulaic realizations of comparable communicative acts may correspond across different linguistic systems. Thus, pragmeme theory operates primarily at the level of sociocultural pragmatic action, whereas translexemic theory extends this perspective into the domain of intercultural pragmatics, second language learning, translation, and cross-linguistic communicative competence.

2. 4: Translexemic Theory in Relation to Sociocultural Theory

Vygotskian approaches to language learning emphasize the social nature of language development. Language learning involves participation in sociocultural practices and the internalization of culturally mediated communicative tools. Formulaic expressions themselves function as sociocultural tools. Learners acquire not merely vocabulary and grammar but culturally appropriate patterns of interaction. Translexemic theory aligns with sociocultural perspectives by viewing formulaic language as socially situated and culturally mediated.

Sociocultural Theory (SCT), primarily associated with Vygotsky, aligns closely with translexemic theory because both frameworks conceptualize language as a socially mediated and culturally situated phenomenon rather than merely an abstract grammatical system. According to Vygotsky (1978), higher mental functions develop through social interaction and are mediated by cultural tools and symbolic systems. In turn, language functions not simply as a vehicle for expressing thought but as a mediational means through which individuals participate in socially organized practices and internalize culturally shared knowledge. Formulaic language occupies a particularly important role within this framework because recurrent expressions, routines, and interactional patterns function as socially accumulated mediational resources that learners appropriate through communicative participation. Similarly, Lantolf and Thorne (2006) emphasize that second language development emerges through mediated social activity rather than through isolated cognitive processing alone.

This sociocultural perspective strongly resonates with translexemic theory, which conceptualizes formulaic expressions as socioculturally embedded pragmatic units whose meanings and functions emerge through repeated social use. A translexeme represents not merely a lexical or semantic correspondence across languages but a culturally mediated pragmatic-formulaic relationship shaped by historically accumulated communicative conventions. In this sense,

translexes may be viewed as mediational tools through which learners gain access to culturally appropriate interactional behavior in the target language. As learners encounter and internalize pragmatically unmarked formulaic expressions, they gradually develop the ability to participate more effectively in target-language discourse communities. Wood (2002), drawing on Vygotskian perspectives, similarly argues that formulaic language plays a central role in organizing thought and facilitating communicative fluency.

Sociocultural Theory also emphasizes the importance of mediation, scaffolding, and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in language learning (Vygotsky, 1978). From a translexemic perspective, learners' first language may serve as an important mediational resource rather than merely a source of negative transfer. Cross-linguistic comparison of formulaic expressions may scaffold learners' awareness of pragmatic similarities and differences between languages, thereby facilitating the development of translexemic competence. Through guided interaction, metapragmatic reflection, and contrastive awareness, learners may progressively internalize pragmatically appropriate target-language formulaic expressions and reduce sociopragmatic markedness in communication. Donato (2000) similarly emphasizes the collaborative and socially mediated nature of language learning in classroom interaction.

Furthermore, Sociocultural Theory's emphasis on internalization aligns particularly well with the acquisition of formulaic language. Many formulaic expressions are initially encountered as socially shared interactional routines before becoming internalized as part of learners' communicative repertoires. Swain, Kinnear, and Steinman (2011) argue that learners develop communicative competence through participation in socially situated discourse activities that gradually become internalized cognitive resources. Translexemic theory extends this sociocultural perspective into the cross-linguistic domain by emphasizing how learners negotiate and internalize pragmatically equivalent formulaic realizations across languages and cultures. Consequently, translexemic competence may be understood as a socially mediated form of pragmatic development grounded in interaction, cultural participation, and formulaic language use.

A key distinction, however, is that Sociocultural Theory constitutes a broad theory of cognitive and social development, whereas translexemic theory specifically focuses on cross-linguistic pragmatic-formulaic equivalence. SCT explains how learning occurs through mediation and social interaction, while translexemic theory explains how learners access pragmatically and culturally unmarked formulaic realizations across linguistic systems. Thus, translexemic theory may be viewed as compatible with and partially informed by Sociocultural Theory while offering a more specialized framework for understanding formulaic language, pragmatic competence, and intercultural communication in second language learning.

2.5: Translexemic Theory, Situation-Bound Utterances, and Pragmatic Competence

The theoretical foundations of translexemic theory may be further clarified through its relationship with research on formulaic language, situation-bound utterances (SBUs), and pragmatic action. Scholarship in phraseology and interlanguage pragmatics has repeatedly

demonstrated that successful communication depends not only on grammatical competence, but also on the ability to employ socially conventionalized and pragmatically appropriate formulaic expressions within culturally recognizable communicative situations. Formulaic language therefore functions as an important mediational resource through which speakers access shared sociocultural knowledge and interactional expectations during communication.

Within this tradition, Kecskes (2000) defines situation-bound utterances (SBUs) as highly conventionalized and prefabricated expressions whose occurrence is closely tied to recurrent communicative situations. According to Kecskes, formulaic expressions may be arranged along a continuum of situational predictability and obligatoriness, with SBUs occupying the highest end of the continuum because their usage is strongly constrained by particular social contexts. As expressions become increasingly situation-bound, their semantic transparency tends to diminish while their pragmatic specificity increases. In such cases, formulaic expressions function less as analytically compositional structures and more as culturally recognizable communicative routines associated with recurrent social interaction.

This perspective aligns closely with the present formulation of translexemic theory. From a translexemic perspective, communicative equivalence across languages cannot be adequately understood through semantic correspondence alone. Instead, pragmatically successful communication frequently depends on identifying culturally sanctioned and pragmatically unmarked formulaic realizations associated with comparable communicative situations. Consequently, translexemes are conceptualized not merely as lexical or semantic equivalents, but as abstract cross-linguistic pragmatic-formulaic units emerging within recurrent sociocultural and interactional frames. Their significance therefore lies primarily in pragmatic naturalness and sociocultural appropriateness rather than literal lexical correspondence.

A related contribution emerges from frame-semantic approaches to formulaic language. Kiefer (1996) argues that situation-bound utterances should be interpreted within the framework of frame semantics because stereotypical expressions derive their communicative value from culturally structured frames and scripts. Frames provide interpretive structures through which communicative situations are understood, while scripts organize the expected sequence of actions and sub-events associated with those situations. From this perspective, particular formulaic expressions evoke culturally recognizable interactional scenarios and derive meaning through their association with those scenarios.

This frame-based interpretation is highly relevant to translexemic theory. A translexeme may similarly be conceptualized as an abstract pragmatic-formulaic unit connected to recurrent sociocultural scripts across languages. Individual translexemes, however, constitute the language-specific realizations of those communicative scripts within particular speech communities. In this sense, translexemes function as culturally preferred realizations of recurrent communicative frames. Although communicative intentions may remain broadly comparable across languages, the formulaic realizations through which such intentions are conventionally expressed frequently differ according to sociocultural convention and discourse norms.

Kecskes's (2010) socio-cognitive perspective further strengthens this relationship by distinguishing between conventions of language and conventions of usage. He argues that situation-bound utterances occupy a unique position because they encode prior sociocultural experiences of language use. Formulaic expressions therefore function as repositories of historically accumulated communicative experience, carrying traces of previous interactional contexts within their conventionalized forms. Speakers consequently retrieve not only linguistic structures but also culturally shared pragmatic knowledge when employing such expressions.

This observation strongly resonates with the assumptions underlying translexemic theory. Translexemes may similarly be viewed as repositories of accumulated sociocultural and pragmatic usage through which speakers gain access to culturally sanctioned communicative behavior. Formulaic expressions are therefore not context-free linguistic entities; rather, they embody embedded histories of social interaction that shape interpretation and production in discourse. Consequently, translexemic competence involves learners' ability to recognize and appropriately employ formulaic realizations carrying encoded sociopragmatic knowledge within the target language.

An important contribution of Kecskes's socio-cognitive approach lies in his critique of theories that overemphasize either linguistic form or situational context independently. Kecskes proposes that pragmatic interpretation operates simultaneously "from the outside in" and "from the inside out," meaning that communicative meaning emerges through the interaction between actual situational context and the prior contexts encoded within formulaic expressions themselves. This dialectical relationship between encoded context and actual context also constitutes one of the central assumptions of translexemic theory. Formulaic expressions carry embedded sociocultural histories that regulate their appropriate use across communicative situations. Consequently, translexemes provide learners not only with linguistic forms but also with access to encoded interactional expectations and culturally preferred communicative behavior.

These perspectives hold important implications for second language acquisition and pragmatic instruction. Kecskes (2000) argues that second language learners frequently experience difficulty comprehending and producing situation-bound utterances because they rely heavily on first-language conceptual systems and possess limited conceptual fluency within the target language. However, the present framework proposes that learners' first language may also function as a valuable mediational resource for developing pragmatic competence. Through conscious comparison of translexemic correspondences across languages, learners may develop greater sensitivity to pragmatically appropriate formulaic realizations in the target language.

This argument aligns with scholarship advocating the pedagogical value of translation and cross-linguistic comparison in pragmatics instruction. For example, House (2018) argues that translated texts are contextually constrained in two distinct ways: those of the source text and those of the target audience's context. House views pragmatic competence as the translator's ability to interpret and reproduce meaning appropriately across differing sociocultural and communicative contexts. She connects translation studies with contrastive pragmatic analysis, which compares how languages realize meaning differently in social interaction. More relevantly, researchers such as Kasper and Schmidt (1996), Schmidt (1983), Sawyer (1992), Bardovi-Harlig (1996; 2001, 2009), Conklin and Schmitt (2008), and Wood (2002) all stress the

important role of formulaic language in pragmatic development and natural communicative language processing.

Accordingly, contrastive lexical pragmatics emerges as an especially valuable pedagogical approach. Rather than conceptualizing learners' first language solely as a source of pragmatic interference, contrastive lexical pragmatics views cross-linguistic formulaic comparison as a means of developing metapragmatic awareness. Through identifying translexemic correspondences, learners may become more sensitive to the sociocultural, interactional, and pragmatic dimensions regulating formulaic language use across languages.

Ghaemi and Ziafar (2011) first introduced and elaborated on the concept of the translexeme using the term *transleme*. The terminology was later refined by Khatib and Ziafar (2012), who adopted the term *translexeme* to refer to the concept more systematically. In its earlier formulation, the concept was primarily defined as a stereotypical first-language/second-language pragmatic equivalent associated with particular pragmemes across languages. In other words, the notion originally referred to culturally and pragmatically corresponding formulaic expressions used to realize similar communicative acts in different linguistic systems (Ghaemi & Ziafar, 2011). The present framework substantially expands and refines this earlier formulation by conceptualizing translexemes not simply as translation equivalents, but as abstract cross-linguistic pragmatic-formulaic units whose realizations are shaped by sociocultural markedness, contextual appropriateness, discourse convention, and formulaic naturalness.

Consequently, translexemic competence may be understood as learners' ability to recognize, interpret, and employ pragmatically and culturally unmarked formulaic realizations across languages. Such competence extends beyond semantic understanding and includes sensitivity to sociocultural expectations, register variation, interactional norms, situational appropriateness, and culturally preferred communicative behavior. The development of translexemic competence may therefore constitute a central dimension of pragmatic competence and intercultural communicative ability in second language learning.

2.6: Translexemic Theory and Translation Equivalence

Translation studies has long been preoccupied with the notion of equivalence as one of its central theoretical concerns. Major scholars such as Nida (1964), Nida and Taber (1969), Catford (1965), Koller (1979), House (2018), and Baker (1992), explored different dimensions of equivalence, including semantic, formal, dynamic, textual, functional, and pragmatic equivalence. Among these approaches, Nida's (1964) concept of dynamic equivalence proved especially influential because it shifted attention away from strict literal correspondence toward the communicative effect produced on the target audience. Within this perspective, successful translation is not necessarily achieved through word-for-word transfer, but rather through producing an equivalent communicative response in the target language. Despite the substantial contributions of equivalence theory to translation studies, many traditional approaches remain too broad to account adequately for the formulaic and pragmatically situated nature of authentic communication. In numerous equivalence-based models, the primary focus continues to rest on semantic transfer and propositional meaning, while comparatively less attention is devoted to socially unmarked phraseological realization and formulaic naturalness. However, in actual

communicative interaction, speakers frequently rely on culturally preferred formulaic expressions whose appropriateness cannot always be predicted through semantic correspondence alone.

Recent research in translation studies increasingly shows that translation is best understood as a pragmatic activity involving context, inference, and social meaning negotiation, rather than simple linguistic transfer. For example, the special issue of the *Journal of Pragmatics* on translation highlights how phenomena such as politeness, identity construction, and relational work are systematically reshaped in translation and interpreting, showing that translators must manage pragmatic meaning across cultures and interactional settings (Locher & Sidiropoulou, 2021). In a similar vein, Baker (2006) argues that translation should be understood through the lens of contextualization, showing that translators and interpreters actively construct and reconstruct context in ways that reveal ideological positioning and communicative intent, rather than simply transferring linguistic meaning. Similarly, Dayter et al. (2023) develop an interpersonal pragmatics framework for translation, focusing on relational work, participation structures, and mediality, and demonstrating how pragmatic meaning is co-constructed across languages and media. Wang and Ma (2023) further systematize the interface by showing how core pragmatic concepts such as implicature, deixis, speech acts, politeness, and relevance theory are directly applied in translation analysis and practice. Valdeón (2023) adds to this by examining how pragmatic force is affected in machine and human translation, particularly in intercultural settings where meaning, tone, and illocutionary force may shift across languages. Together, these studies show that translation is fundamentally a pragmatic activity, since it requires constant adjustment of meaning according to context, communicative intention, and audience expectations.

Consequently, literal or semantically accurate translation may still result in pragmatically awkward, interactionally unnatural, or socioculturally marked language. From the perspective of translexemic theory, this limitation reveals the need for a more pragmatically grounded understanding of equivalence. Communicative success across languages depends not merely on transferring semantic content, but also on identifying pragmatically and culturally appropriate formulaic realizations associated with recurrent communicative situations. Translexemic theory therefore extends traditional equivalence frameworks by foregrounding formulaicity, pragmatic naturalness, sociocultural appropriateness, and culturally sanctioned communicative convention as central dimensions of cross-linguistic correspondence. A growing body of scholarship additionally supports the pedagogical value of formulaic language in translation practice and cross-linguistic learning. Such findings further reinforce the importance of comparative formulaic exercises in helping learners and translators achieve more natural and acceptable equivalences across languages. For example, Jian Liu (2015) concluded that the acquisition and application of lexical chunks substantially improve the quality and effectiveness of translation performance. Because formulaic sequences are processed and retrieved holistically, learners who possess greater command of lexical chunks may access pragmatically appropriate target-language realizations more efficiently than learners relying primarily on analytical word-by-word translation strategies.

The close relationship between equivalence processes and formulaicity in the human brain may be viewed as broadly compatible with the notion of interlanguage formulaic competence as a

psychologically meaningful construct. Neurocognitive findings reported by Abutalebi and Green (2007) suggest that second language learners may recruit additional surrounding brain areas during lexical processing tasks as a compensatory strategy when target-language proficiency remains limited. However, as learners develop greater proficiency, these additional neural activities gradually diminish. Such findings imply that increasing familiarity with formulaic and pragmatically appropriate language patterns may contribute to more automatic and efficient language processing. These observations also challenge assumptions that the use of learners' first language necessarily creates harmful and irreversible first-language dependence in second language acquisition. Instead, cross-linguistic comparison and first-language mediation may function as valuable cognitive and pedagogical resources facilitating pragmatic development and formulaic awareness. From a translexemic perspective, learners' first language may therefore serve as a mediational system (scaffold) through which learners gradually develop sensitivity to pragmatically unmarked target-language realizations. The relationship between formulaic language and communicative efficiency has likewise been emphasized extensively in phraseological and pragmatic research. Pawley and Syder (1983) famously argued that native speakers achieve fluent and idiomatic communication largely because they possess access to thousands of lexicalized sentence stems and prefabricated expressions stored in memory. According to their argument, fluent language production depends not solely on grammatical creativity, but also on rapid retrieval of conventionalized formulaic units. This perspective strongly aligns with translexemic theory because pragmatically appropriate communication frequently depends on selecting culturally preferred formulaic realizations rather than generating entirely novel utterances through analytical grammatical processes.

Similarly, research conducted by Gabriele Kasper, Anne Barron, Susan Bardovi-Harlig, and other scholars in interlanguage pragmatics has repeatedly highlighted the critical role of formulaic language in the acquisition of pragmatic competence. In particular, Schauer and Adolphs (2006) demonstrated the important contribution of formulaic language to learners' pragmatic development in expressions of gratitude. Their findings revealed that learners who acquire pragmatically appropriate formulaic routines become more capable of producing socially acceptable and interactionally natural communication. Furthermore, Bardovi-Harlig (2001, 2009) consistently emphasizes the indispensable role of formulaic language in the development of pragmatic competence. She argues that pragmatic development involves not only knowledge of speech acts and sociocultural rules, but also familiarity with the formulaic expressions through which communicative acts are conventionally realized in authentic discourse. In turn, pragmatic competence and formulaic competence are deeply interconnected because formulaic language frequently constitutes the primary vehicle through which sociocultural norms and interactional expectations are enacted during communication. Taken together, these findings strongly support the assumptions underlying translexemic theory. Successful communication across languages depends not solely on grammatical accuracy or semantic equivalence, but also on the ability to identify and employ pragmatically and culturally unmarked formulaic correspondences appropriate to specific communicative situations. Consequently, translexemic competence may represent a crucial yet underrecognized dimension of communicative competence, translation ability, pragmatic development, and intercultural interaction.

3. Defining the Core Concepts

Translexeme, Translex, Allotranslex and Tanslexicon

A translexeme is defined as an abstract cross-linguistic formulaic unit representing the pragmatically and culturally unmarked realization of a communicative function across languages. The translexeme exists at an abstract level analogous to the linguistic notion of the lexeme. However, unlike ordinary lexical units, translexemes are fundamentally pragmatic and formulaic.

A translexeme does not refer to a single expression in a single language. Rather, it refers to a communicative-pragmatic unit that may be instantiated differently across languages while preserving a comparable pragmatic function. For example, the communicative act of politely declining an invitation may be realized through different formulaic expressions across languages and cultures. The translexeme represents the abstract pragmatic-formulaic correspondence underlying these realizations.

Within this framework, a translex refers to the actual formulaic expression in a particular language that realizes a translexeme within a specific sociopragmatic context. Thus, translexes are language-specific manifestations of translexemes. For instance, if the translexeme involves expressing gratitude in a socially unmarked way, individual languages may realize that translexeme through distinct translexes.

Finally, an allotranslex is a contextually conditioned variant realization of a translex within the same language that preserves the core pragmatic function of the underlying translexeme. Allotranslexes allow for sociolinguistic variation, register variation, dialectal differences, interpersonal distance, and contextual adaptation. For example, multiple expressions within the same language may perform similar pragmatic functions while differing according to formality, social intimacy, institutional setting, or discourse genre.

A translexicon is the cross-linguistic repository of translexemic knowledge consisting of pragmatically and culturally unmarked formulaic correspondences that multilingual speakers or language learners draw upon to interpret and produce socially appropriate communication across languages. Similar to the lexicon in lexical theory, which represents a speaker's mental repository of lexical knowledge, the translexicon refers to the mental and sociocultural repository of translexemic knowledge through which speakers access pragmatically appropriate formulaic realizations across languages.

4. Contextual Markedness and the Dynamic Nature of Translexemes

A potential challenge for translexemic theory concerns the notion of pragmatically and culturally unmarked realization. Contemporary sociolinguistic and interactional research has demonstrated that markedness is neither fixed nor uniform across an entire speech community. Rather, what is perceived as pragmatically appropriate may vary across dialects, regions, social groups,

generations, institutional settings, discourse genres, and interactional contexts. Consequently, translexemic theory does not assume the existence of a monolithic target-language culture or a single universally acceptable expression shared by all speakers.

Instead, translexemes are conceived as abstract and dynamic pragmatic prototypes representing the most widely conventionalized realizations of communicative functions within particular sociocultural communities. Their identification is therefore probabilistic rather than absolute and emerges from recurrent usage patterns observed across discourse communities. Because pragmatic norms are continuously negotiated and reshaped through social interaction, translexemes should be understood as historically and socially emergent constructs rather than fixed entities.

Variation around these prototypical realizations is captured through the notion of allotranslexes. Allotranslexes represent contextually conditioned realizations of a translexeme shaped by factors such as regional dialect, social identity, institutional setting, register, age, gender, discourse genre, and communicative purpose. From this perspective, translexemic theory accommodates the fluid and negotiated nature of pragmatic markedness by recognizing that multiple pragmatically acceptable realizations may coexist within a language while still reflecting an underlying communicative function.

Accordingly, translexemic theory adopts a prototype-based rather than categorical conception of pragmatic unmarkedness. Translexemes therefore function as abstract centers of sociopragmatic gravity around which contextually variable allotranslexical realizations are organized.

5. Analogies to make Translexemic theory more vivid

Because translexemic theory introduces several new conceptual categories related to cross-linguistic formulaic pragmatics, analogical explanations may help clarify the relationships among its major constructs more concretely. Linguistic theories frequently rely on analogies to make abstract concepts more accessible and theoretically coherent. In a similar manner, the following analogies draw upon established concepts from phonology, lexicology, and related linguistic domains in order to illustrate how translexemes, translexes, allotranslexes, and translexicons function within multilingual communication. These comparisons do not suggest complete equivalence between the theories; rather, they serve as heuristic devices intended to make the structure and operation of translexemic theory more vivid, systematic, and conceptually transparent.

5.1: A Phonological Analogy for Translexemic Theory

Drawing on an analogy from the field of pronunciation studies, a phone is defined as the actual physical sound produced in speech, whereas a phoneme represents the abstract sound category that distinguishes meaning within a language. Different contextual realizations of the same phoneme are referred to as allophones. For example, the English phoneme /t/ may be realized phonetically as aspirated [t^h], unaspirated [t], or flap [ɾ], depending on linguistic context, while still functioning as the same underlying phonemic unit.

Similarly, the present framework proposes a hierarchical relationship among the concepts of translexeme, translex, and allotranslex in the domain of formulaic language and pragmatic competence.

A translexeme is an abstract cross-linguistic pragmatic-formulaic unit representing the pragmatically and culturally unmarked realization of a communicative function across languages. Like a phoneme, the translexeme exists at an abstract level and serves as the underlying unit connecting formulaic expressions that fulfill comparable communicative purposes in different linguistic and cultural systems.

A translex refers to the actual language-specific realization of a translexeme within a particular sociopragmatic context. In the same way that a phone represents the concrete pronunciation of a phoneme, a translex constitutes the concrete formulaic expression through which a translexeme is instantiated in a given language.

An allotranslex is a contextually or socioculturally conditioned variant realization of a translex within the same language that preserves the core communicative and pragmatic function of the underlying translexeme. Analogous to allophones in phonology, allotranslexes may vary according to factors such as formality, register, dialect, social distance, institutional setting, or discourse genre while still representing the same underlying pragmatic-formulaic unit.

The hierarchical organization of translexemic theory may be further clarified through analogy with phonological theory. Just as phonology distinguishes between abstract sound categories and their contextual realizations, translexemic theory distinguishes between abstract cross-linguistic pragmatic-formulaic units and their language-specific or contextually conditioned realizations. The following table summarizes the proposed parallels between phonological concepts and translexemic theory.

Phonological Theory	Translexemic Theory
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phoneme	translexeme
phone	translex
allophone	allotranslex
phonology	translexemics

5.2: A Lexical Analogy for Translexemic Theory

In lexical studies, a distinction is commonly made among lexeme, lexical item, and lexicon. A lexeme is generally understood as an abstract lexical unit underlying the various inflectional forms that appear in actual language use. For example, the forms *speak*, *speaks*, *speaking*, and *spoken* are regarded as realizations of the same lexeme, conventionally represented as *SPEAK*. The lexicon, meanwhile, refers to the mental or structural repository of lexical knowledge

available to language users, encompassing lexical items, semantic relations, collocational patterns, and usage constraints.

Drawing an analogy from lexical theory, the present framework conceptualizes the translexeme as an abstract cross-linguistic pragmatic-formulaic unit that underlies multiple language-specific realizations. Similar to how a lexeme functions as an abstract lexical category encompassing related surface forms, a translexeme functions as an abstract pragmatic-formulaic category encompassing pragmatically corresponding expressions across languages.

Within this framework, individual translexes may be viewed as language-specific realizations of a translexeme. For example, communicative acts such as greeting, apologizing, expressing gratitude, softening disagreement, or declining invitations may be realized through different formulaic expressions in different languages while still representing the same underlying translexemic unit. Thus, the translexeme exists at a higher level of abstraction than the individual expressions that instantiate it.

Furthermore, the concept of the translexicon may be proposed to refer to the repertoire of translexemic knowledge available to multilingual speakers or second language learners. The translexicon consists not merely of vocabulary knowledge but of pragmatically and culturally sanctioned formulaic correspondences across languages. In this sense, translexicon knowledge involves awareness of how communicative intentions are conventionally realized within different sociocultural systems.

This analogy further reinforces the hierarchical structure of translexemic theory. Just as lexical theory distinguishes between abstract lexical units and their contextual realizations, translexemic theory distinguishes between abstract cross-linguistic pragmatic-formulaic units and their language-specific or contextually conditioned manifestations. Such a framework helps explain why second language learners may possess extensive grammatical and lexical knowledge while still experiencing pragmatic difficulty: learners may know lexical meanings without possessing sufficient translexical or translexemic competence necessary for pragmatically unmarked communication.

The conceptual structure of translexemic theory may also be clarified through analogy with lexical theory. In lexical studies, distinctions are commonly drawn between abstract lexical units, their concrete realizations, and the broader systems in which they operate. Similarly, translexemic theory proposes a hierarchical organization consisting of abstract cross-linguistic pragmatic-formulaic units, their language-specific realizations, and their contextually conditioned variants. The following table summarizes the proposed parallels between lexical theory and translexemic theory and demonstrates how the present framework extends lexical principles into the domain of cross-linguistic formulaic pragmatics.

Lexical theory Translexemic Theory

lexeme	translexeme
lexical item	translex
allex	allotranslex

Lexical theory Translexemic Theory

lexicon

translexicon

6. Translexemic Theory as a Convergence Framework for Real-World Communication

Taken together, the theoretical perspectives discussed throughout this article suggest that translexemic theory functions as a convergence framework capable of integrating insights from many earlier linguistic, pragmatic, sociocultural, phraseological, and communicative theories into the realities of authentic language use. Numerous linguistic traditions have independently emphasized particular dimensions of communication, including grammatical competence, sociocultural mediation, pragmatic action, formulaic language, interactional competence, phraseology, and abstract linguistic representation. However, these perspectives have often remained relatively fragmented, with each focusing primarily on a specific component of communicative behavior. Translexemic theory attempts to synthesize these diverse insights into a unified framework centered on the role of pragmatically and conventionally sanctioned formulaic correspondences in actual communication across languages.

From this perspective, translexemic theory operationalizes abstract theoretical constructs by grounding them in recurrent communicative realities encountered in everyday interaction. Concepts derived from phraseology, pragmatics, sociocultural theory, communicative competence, interactional linguistics, and formulaic language research become interconnected through the notion that much of successful communication depends on the retrieval and deployment of culturally sanctioned formulaic realizations. In this sense, translexemic theory bridges the gap between abstract linguistic knowledge and socially effective communicative performance by emphasizing how language users navigate authentic interaction through pragmatically conventionalized patterns rather than through grammar alone.

The theory also provides a framework through which earlier attempts to account for communicative competence may be integrated more coherently. Chomskyan notions of abstract representation, Vygotskian sociocultural mediation, Mey's pragmeme theory, phraseme theory, formulaic competence, and interactional competence all contribute partial explanations regarding how language functions in communication. Translexemic theory brings these perspectives together by focusing specifically on how communicative intentions become realized through pragmatically and culturally appropriate formulaic units across linguistic systems. Consequently, the theory does not seek to replace earlier linguistic traditions but rather to connect and contextualize them within the realities of multilingual communication and intercultural interaction.

Importantly, translexemic theory also responds to a long-standing tension between theoretical models of language and the lived realities of communicative practice. In authentic discourse, speakers rarely generate language exclusively through conscious grammatical computation. Instead, communication is heavily mediated through formulaic sequences, interactional routines, sociocultural expectations, discourse conventions, and pragmatically preferred expressions

shaped by recurrent social use. Translexemic theory foregrounds this communicative reality by positioning formulaic pragmatics at the center of communicative competence and cross-linguistic interaction.

Ultimately, the theory may be understood as an attempt to reconceptualize language learning, language use, and intercultural communication through a more socially grounded and pragmatically realistic lens. By emphasizing pragmatically natural formulaic equivalence across languages, translexemic theory offers a framework capable of connecting linguistic theory to the practical realities of communication, pedagogy, translation, intercultural interaction, and even artificial intelligence-mediated discourse. In this way, the theory seeks to transform abstract understandings of language into a more comprehensive account of how communication is actually realized in multilingual social life.

7. Translexemic Competence as a Dimension of Pragmatic Competence and Communicative Competence

This article proposes the concept of translexemic competence. Translexemic competence refers to the ability to recognize, interpret, select, and produce pragmatically and culturally unmarked formulaic correspondences across languages. Translexemic competence includes:

1. Recognition of formulaic pragmatic patterns
2. Awareness of sociocultural markedness
3. Ability to select pragmatically appropriate translexes
4. Sensitivity to contextual variation
5. Understanding of allotranslexical variation
6. Ability to avoid literal pragmatic transfer

Translexemic competence may represent a significant yet largely underrecognized dimension of pragmatic and communicative competence. While existing models of communicative competence have traditionally emphasized grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, strategic, interactional, and formulaic dimensions, comparatively limited attention has been devoted to learners' ability to access and employ pragmatically and culturally unmarked formulaic correspondences across languages. The present framework proposes that such competence may play an important role in facilitating natural, fluent, and socially appropriate communication. This proposition remains theoretical and requires empirical investigation.

From this perspective, future models of communicative competence may become more comprehensive and theoretically robust through the incorporation of translexemic competence as an independent yet integrative component. Such an inclusion may help explain how learners are able to achieve more native-like communicative performance through rapid access to pragmatically appropriate formulaic expressions rather than through constant reliance on conscious grammatical computation or strategic monitoring. In many communicative situations, translexemic competence may be conceptualized as a theoretical construct that helps explain how learners coordinate other competencies, including interactional competence, sociocultural competence, discourse competence, and formulaic competence. If the assumptions of the

framework are empirically supported, learners with greater translexemic competence might be expected to require less deliberate activation of compensatory communicative strategies because pragmatically appropriate formulaic realizations become more readily accessible during interaction.

Furthermore, the incorporation of translexemic competence into broader models of communicative competence may help clarify why some second language learners demonstrate high grammatical proficiency while continuing to experience pragmatic awkwardness or sociocultural markedness in authentic communication. The difficulty often lies not in the absence of linguistic knowledge itself, but in the inability to retrieve culturally appropriate formulaic realizations corresponding to particular communicative situations. Consequently, translexemic competence may constitute a crucial mediating dimension between linguistic knowledge and socially effective communication, enabling learners to participate more naturally and appropriately in intercultural interaction.

Before introducing translexemic competence, it is important to emphasize that the present framework is theoretical in nature. The concept of translexemic competence is proposed as an analytical category intended to describe a particular dimension of cross-linguistic pragmatic knowledge. The framework does not claim that translexemic competence has been empirically established as a distinct cognitive mechanism. Rather, its potential relationship to fluency, processing efficiency, pragmatic development, and communicative performance should be regarded as a set of hypotheses requiring future empirical validation.

8. Theoretical Significance of Translexemic Theory

The introduction of translexemic theory addresses several theoretical gaps in existing scholarship. First, the framework integrates formulaic language research with interlanguage pragmatics. Previous studies often examined formulaic sequences and pragmatic competence separately. Translexemic theory positions formulaicity as central to pragmatic communication.

Second, the framework offers a more precise account of pragmatic equivalence than traditional translation theories. Rather than focusing solely on semantic correspondence, translexemic theory foregrounds culturally sanctioned formulaic realization.

Third, the theory offers a theoretical account of why advanced learners frequently sound pragmatically marked despite grammatical proficiency. Many learner difficulties arise not because learners lack vocabulary or grammar but because they fail to access pragmatically appropriate translexes.

Fourth, the framework contributes to multilingual and intercultural communication research by conceptualizing pragmatic correspondence as socially embedded rather than merely lexical.

9. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

This article introduced the concepts of translexeme, translex, allotranslex, and translexicon as a theoretical framework for understanding cross-linguistic formulaic pragmatics. The article argued that second language learners frequently experience pragmatic difficulties not because they lack grammatical knowledge but because they fail to access pragmatically and culturally preferred formulaic correspondences across languages.

Drawing on scholarship from formulaic language studies, translation theory, phraseology, pragmatics, sociocultural theory, and communicative competence research, the article proposed translexemic competence as a central but underexplored dimension of second language communicative ability. The proposed framework contributes to theoretical discussions concerning formulaic language, pragmatic competence, intercultural communication, and multilingual discourse. Pedagogically, translexemic theory highlights the importance of teaching learners not merely what expressions mean semantically but how communities conventionally and pragmatically realize communicative intentions.

Ultimately, language learning involves more than mastering grammatical systems; it involves acquiring culturally sanctioned formulaic patterns of interaction and communication within speech communities. Accordingly, the following can be proposed as the educational implications of the current study:

1. Traditional language teaching often prioritizes grammatical accuracy and vocabulary acquisition while underemphasizing formulaic pragmatics. However, learners who possess grammatical knowledge may still fail to communicate naturally if they lack translexemic competence. Pedagogical approaches informed by translexemic theory would emphasize:

- formulaic routines,
- sociopragmatic appropriateness,
- pragmatic naturalness,
- interactional conventions,
- and culturally sanctioned communicative patterns.

Traditional language teaching has historically prioritized grammatical accuracy, vocabulary acquisition, and syntactic development as the primary foundations of communicative ability. In many instructional settings, successful language learning is still largely measured by learners' capacity to produce grammatically correct sentences and demonstrate lexical knowledge. While these dimensions unquestionably constitute important aspects of language proficiency, such approaches often underemphasize the crucial role of formulaic pragmatics in authentic communication. As a result, learners may develop substantial grammatical competence while continuing to experience difficulty participating naturally and appropriately in real interactional contexts.

From the perspective of translexemic theory, communicative effectiveness depends not solely on the ability to generate grammatically accurate utterances but also on the ability to access pragmatically and culturally appropriate formulaic realizations associated with recurrent communicative situations. Native-like communication frequently relies on conventionalized expressions, interactional routines, discourse patterns, and socioculturally sanctioned formulaic

sequences that are retrieved and employed holistically during interaction. Consequently, learners who possess extensive grammatical knowledge may nevertheless sound pragmatically marked, interactionally awkward, overly direct, excessively formal, or culturally unnatural if they lack sufficient translexemic competence.

This distinction helps explain a common phenomenon in second language learning whereby grammatically proficient learners continue to struggle with authentic communication. Learners may produce sentences that are structurally correct yet pragmatically infelicitous because they rely excessively on literal translation or analytically generated language rather than culturally preferred formulaic realizations. In many cases, communication breakdowns emerge not from grammatical errors but from sociopragmatic mismatch, inappropriate register selection, interactional rigidity, or failure to employ pragmatically acceptable formulaic expressions expected within the target discourse community.

Pedagogical approaches informed by translexemic theory would therefore place much greater emphasis on the teaching and acquisition of formulaic routines that regulate everyday communication. Greetings, apologies, refusals, requests, compliments, expressions of gratitude, turn-taking signals, conversational openings and closings, hesitation markers, discourse organizers, and politeness routines all constitute essential components of authentic communicative interaction. Rather than treating such expressions as peripheral conversational supplements, translexemic pedagogy would recognize them as central mechanisms through which communicative competence is realized in practice.

Another important pedagogical principle involves fostering sociopragmatic appropriateness. Learners need to understand not only what particular expressions mean semantically but also when, where, with whom, and under what social conditions they may be appropriately used. Formulaic expressions are often shaped by factors such as power relations, social distance, age, institutional context, formality level, interpersonal intimacy, and cultural norms. Translexemic instruction would therefore help learners develop greater awareness of the sociocultural constraints regulating pragmatic appropriateness across communicative contexts.

Closely related to this is the development of pragmatic naturalness. Many second language learners produce language that is grammatically understandable but interactionally unnatural because they fail to employ the formulaic realizations conventionally preferred by native speakers. Translexemic pedagogy would emphasize exposure to authentic discourse and naturally occurring translexes in order to help learners internalize pragmatically sound communicative patterns. Through repeated exposure and guided practice, learners may gradually develop greater sensitivity to how target-language speakers conventionally realize recurrent communicative acts.

Translexemic approaches would also foreground interactional conventions governing real-time communication. Natural interaction depends heavily on formulaic mechanisms that facilitate conversational management, including turn-taking routines, agreement and disagreement patterns, conversational repair strategies, topic transitions, backchanneling expressions, and politeness mitigation devices. Learners who lack familiarity with such conventions may struggle to maintain conversational flow despite possessing considerable grammatical knowledge.

Consequently, instruction informed by translexemic theory would integrate interactional formulaicity into communicative practice rather than focusing exclusively on isolated sentence-level production.

Finally, translexemic pedagogy would emphasize culturally sanctioned communicative patterns as central to successful intercultural communication. Different linguistic communities often organize communicative behavior according to distinct sociocultural expectations regarding politeness, indirectness, emotional expression, interpersonal alignment, and discourse organization. Formulaic realizations therefore function not merely as linguistic expressions but as manifestations of broader cultural communication norms. Helping learners acquire translexemic competence may consequently facilitate more effective intercultural participation by enabling learners to navigate sociocultural expectations more naturally and appropriately.

Taken together, these pedagogical implications suggest that translexemic theory offers a broader and more socially grounded understanding of communicative competence than approaches focusing predominantly on grammar and vocabulary alone. By integrating formulaic language, pragmatic appropriateness, interactional conventions, and sociocultural sensitivity into language instruction, translexemic pedagogy may help learners achieve communication that is not only linguistically accurate but also pragmatically natural, culturally appropriate, and interactionally effective.

2. Many textbooks teach speech acts through decontextualized examples. Yet learners need exposure to authentic translexes that native speakers actually employ in real interaction. For instance, learners may understand the semantics of direct disagreement but fail to produce pragmatically softened disagreement patterns common in target-language discourse.

Teaching translexes could help learners acquire:

- conversational mitigation,
- politeness routines,
- discourse framing,
- institutional communication,
- and interactional fluency.

Many language textbooks introduce speech acts such as requesting, apologizing, refusing, complimenting, or disagreeing through highly simplified and decontextualized examples that often fail to reflect authentic interactional practices. Although such materials may present the semantic meaning or grammatical structure of particular speech acts, they frequently overlook the sociocultural and formulaic dimensions that regulate how these acts are naturally realized in real communicative contexts. As a result, learners may develop declarative knowledge of speech acts without acquiring the pragmatically appropriate formulaic resources necessary for socially effective interaction. This gap becomes especially visible when learners produce grammatically accurate but interactionally marked expressions that diverge from the communicative norms preferred by native speakers.

From the perspective of translexemic theory, effective pragmatic instruction requires learners to be exposed not merely to isolated speech-act formulas but to authentic translexes that native speakers actually employ in naturally occurring discourse. Formulaic expressions used in authentic interaction are often shaped by contextual variables such as social distance, institutional setting, interpersonal relationships, power dynamics, politeness expectations, discourse genre, and cultural norms. Consequently, pragmatic competence involves learning procedurally how communicative acts are conventionally realized within specific sociocultural contexts rather than simply learning their literal semantic content.

For example, learners may fully understand the semantic meaning of direct disagreement while still struggling to produce pragmatically softened disagreement patterns that are commonly preferred in target-language interaction. A learner might produce a grammatically accurate but pragmatically abrupt expression such as “You are wrong,” whereas native speakers may more naturally employ mitigated translexes such as “I’m not sure I completely agree,” “I see your point, but...,” or “That’s an interesting perspective, although...”. The communicative challenge in such situations lies not primarily in grammatical accuracy but in selecting pragmatically and culturally appropriate formulaic realizations appropriate to the interactional context.

Teaching translexes may therefore help learners acquire important dimensions of communicative competence that are frequently underrepresented in traditional instructional materials. One important area involves conversational mitigation, through which speakers soften potentially face-threatening acts such as disagreement, criticism, correction, refusal, or complaint. Exposure to pragmatically appropriate mitigation patterns may help learners navigate interpersonal interaction more diplomatically and reduce the risk of sociopragmatic failure.

Similarly, translexemic instruction may facilitate the acquisition of politeness routines that regulate socially appropriate interaction across diverse communicative contexts. Greetings, expressions of gratitude, apologies, requests, invitations, condolences, and leave-taking routines often rely heavily on culturally preferred formulaic realizations that cannot always be predicted through direct translation. Learners who internalize such translexes may therefore become more capable of participating naturally in target-language interactional practices.

Another important dimension concerns discourse framing. Native speakers frequently employ formulaic discourse organizers, hedges, stance markers, topic-transition expressions, and interactional signals to structure communication smoothly and coherently. Through exposure to authentic translexes, learners may develop greater sensitivity to how discourse is pragmatically managed in real interaction. Such competence contributes not only to linguistic cohesion but also to interactional naturalness and conversational flow.

Translexemic instruction may also prove valuable in the domain of institutional communication. Academic discourse, professional interaction, workplace communication, service encounters, and administrative exchanges often rely on highly conventionalized formulaic patterns associated with specific institutional contexts. Learners who lack familiarity with these translexes may experience difficulty participating effectively in institutional interaction despite possessing

substantial grammatical competence. Explicit attention to institutional translexes may therefore support learners' professional, academic, and intercultural communicative development.

Finally, the acquisition of translexes may substantially enhance interactional fluency. Because formulaic expressions are often retrieved holistically rather than analytically generated in real time, they reduce cognitive processing demands during communication and facilitate smoother interactional performance. Learners who internalize frequently occurring translexes may therefore communicate with greater automaticity, confidence, and conversational flexibility. In this sense, translexemic instruction contributes simultaneously to pragmatic competence, sociocultural appropriateness, and communicative fluency, thereby supporting more natural and effective second language use.

3. Formulaic sequences contribute significantly to fluency because they reduce cognitive processing load. Translexemic instruction could therefore improve not only pragmatic competence but also fluency and interactional confidence. Learners who internalize translexes may access communication more automatically and naturally.

Formulaic sequences contribute substantially to communicative fluency because they reduce the cognitive processing demands associated with real-time language production and comprehension. Rather than constructing every utterance analytically through conscious grammatical computation, speakers frequently rely on prefabricated formulaic units that can be retrieved and processed holistically. Research on formulaic language processing has consistently shown that conventionalized expressions are often recognized, retrieved, and produced more rapidly than novel language combinations because they function as ready-made communicative resources stored in long-term memory. As a result, formulaic language facilitates smoother discourse production, faster processing, greater interactional flow, and more efficient allocation of attentional resources during communication.

From the perspective of translexemic theory, this processing advantage has particularly important implications for second language learning and pragmatic development. Translexemic instruction may have the potential to contribute to the development of pragmatic competence and possibly to increased fluency, although these relationships remain to be tested empirically. The framework hypothesizes that learners who internalize pragmatically and culturally appropriate translexes may gain more automatic access to formulaic realizations associated with recurrent communicative situations, thereby reducing the cognitive burden involved in generating language under real-time interactional pressure. Instead of relying excessively on conscious grammatical monitoring, literal translation, or strategic repair mechanisms, learners may increasingly retrieve culturally sanctioned formulaic expressions as unified pragmatic units.

This increased automaticity may also positively influence learners' interactional confidence. One major source of communicative anxiety among second language learners stems from uncertainty regarding the pragmatic appropriateness and naturalness of their language use. Even

grammatically proficient learners frequently hesitate during interaction because they are unsure whether their expressions sound socially acceptable, culturally appropriate, or pragmatically natural to native speakers. The internalization of translexes may potentially help alleviate such uncertainty, a proposition that warrants empirical investigation.

Furthermore, formulaic language plays an important role in managing conversational organization and maintaining interactional continuity. Routine expressions associated with greeting, turn-taking, agreement, disagreement, clarification, politeness, hesitation, topic transition, and conversational closure frequently operate as interactional scaffolds that sustain communicative flow. Through the acquisition of translexemic competence, learners may become more capable of participating in interaction dynamically and naturally because formulaic realizations become more readily available during communication. Translexemic competence may be viewed as a theoretical dimension of pragmatic knowledge that could contribute to fluency, interactional adaptability, and communicative efficiency. These proposed relationships require empirical validation.

From a broader pedagogical perspective, this relationship suggests that pragmatic instruction and fluency development should not necessarily be treated as separate instructional domains. Because formulaic language simultaneously supports pragmatic appropriateness and processing efficiency, translexemic instruction may contribute to multiple dimensions of communicative competence at once. Learners who successfully internalize translexes may therefore achieve communication that is not only grammatically accurate and pragmatically appropriate but also more fluent, automatic, and interactionally natural.

4. Language curricula could integrate translexemic instruction by:

- organizing lessons around communicative functions,
- teaching culturally preferred realizations,
- comparing cross-linguistic pragmatic patterns,
- incorporating authentic corpora,
- and highlighting allotranslexical variation.

Language curricula informed by translexemic theory could move beyond traditional grammar-centered instruction by placing greater emphasis on the development of pragmatically and culturally appropriate formulaic competence. Rather than teaching language primarily through isolated vocabulary items and decontextualized grammatical structures, translexemic instruction would organize learning around communicative functions and recurrent interactional situations. In such an approach, lessons may be structured around communicative acts such as greeting, apologizing, requesting, refusing, complimenting, expressing disagreement, offering sympathy, or managing interpersonal relationships. This functional orientation would allow learners to develop greater sensitivity to the socially appropriate formulaic realizations commonly employed by native speakers in authentic interaction.

An important component of translexemic instruction would involve teaching culturally preferred realizations of communicative acts rather than relying exclusively on literal semantic equivalence. Different linguistic communities often realize similar communicative intentions

through distinct formulaic patterns shaped by sociocultural norms, politeness conventions, institutional expectations, and discourse traditions. Explicitly teaching these culturally sanctioned realizations may help learners avoid pragmatically marked or unnatural language use. Such instruction could also increase learners' awareness that communicative appropriateness depends not solely on grammatical correctness but on the selection of pragmatically acceptable formulaic expressions within particular contexts.

Translexemic pedagogy may further incorporate systematic comparison of cross-linguistic pragmatic patterns in order to foster metapragmatic awareness and intercultural communicative sensitivity. Through contrastive analysis of formulaic expressions across languages, learners may become more conscious of both similarities and differences in how communicative acts are conventionally realized in different sociocultural systems. Rather than viewing the first language merely as a source of interference, this approach conceptualizes learners' prior linguistic knowledge as a mediational resource that may facilitate pragmatic development through guided comparison and reflection. Such cross-linguistic awareness may be especially valuable in helping learners recognize instances in which direct translation produces pragmatically infelicitous or culturally marked expressions.

Another important pedagogical implication involves the incorporation of authentic corpora and naturally occurring discourse data into classroom instruction. Because formulaic language is highly context-sensitive and interactionally situated, exposure to authentic spoken and written discourse may help learners observe how translexes operate in real communicative environments. Corpus-informed instruction may enable learners to identify recurrent formulaic sequences, discourse routines, politeness markers, register differences, and sociocultural interactional patterns across contexts. Authentic data may therefore facilitate the development of both formulaic competence and translexemic competence by exposing learners to naturally occurring pragmatic variation.

Finally, translexemic instruction should highlight the existence of allotranslexical variation, namely the contextually conditioned variants of translexes shaped by factors such as formality, social distance, institutional setting, dialect, age, gender, discourse genre, and communicative purpose. Just as allophones represent contextual realizations of phonemes, allotranslexes represent context-sensitive realizations of underlying translexemic units. Learners therefore need to understand not only the core pragmatic function of formulaic expressions but also the sociocultural and interactional conditions regulating their appropriate use. Developing awareness of allotranslexical variation may help learners achieve greater pragmatic flexibility and interactional adaptability across diverse communicative contexts.

Taken together, these pedagogical principles suggest that translexemic instruction may contribute substantially to the development of communicative competence by integrating formulaic language, pragmatic appropriateness, intercultural awareness, and sociocultural sensitivity into language education.

5. In translation pedagogy and translation studies, professional translators frequently encounter substantial challenges related to formulaic language, pragmatic equivalence, and sociocultural appropriateness. Many formulaic expressions are deeply embedded within the cultural,

institutional, and interactional conventions of a particular speech community, making them resistant to direct or literal translation. As a result, semantically accurate translations may nevertheless sound pragmatically awkward, culturally marked, or interactionally unnatural to native speakers of the target language. Conventional word-for-word translation often fails because the communicative value of formulaic expressions extends beyond literal meaning and involves socially shared pragmatic expectations, discourse routines, politeness conventions, and culturally recognizable communicative scripts.

Within this framework, translexemic theory offers a valuable framework for understanding and analyzing pragmatic naturalness in translation. Rather than treating translation merely as the transfer of semantic content between languages, translexemic theory emphasizes the identification of pragmatically and culturally unmarked formulaic correspondences capable of fulfilling comparable communicative functions across linguistic systems. In this framework, successful translation depends not only on lexical equivalence but also on the translator's ability to recognize the translexemic relationships underlying culturally appropriate formulaic realizations. Such an approach may help explain why highly proficient bilingual speakers occasionally produce translations that are grammatically correct yet pragmatically infelicitous.

The pedagogical implications of this perspective are particularly significant for translator education. Developing translexemic competence may help translation learners become more sensitive to sociocultural nuance, pragmatic appropriateness, register variation, and interactional naturalness in cross-linguistic communication. Through explicit attention to formulaic correspondences, learners may acquire greater awareness of how comparable communicative acts are conventionally realized in different languages and cultural contexts. Consequently, translexemic theory may contribute not only to translation quality and intercultural mediation but also to broader understandings of pragmatic competence in multilingual communication.

6. Translexemic theory may also contribute to the development of artificial intelligence models for language processing and language production, particularly in ways that support language education and multilingual communication. As artificial intelligence systems and machine translation technologies increasingly mediate global interaction, the challenge of producing pragmatically appropriate and naturally formulaic language has become more apparent. Although many computational systems are capable of generating semantically accurate translations, they frequently struggle to produce expressions that are pragmatically appropriate, culturally appropriate, and interactionally natural for native speakers.

Viewed through this lens, translexemic theory may offer a valuable framework for improving computational language models by encouraging the prioritization of pragmatically and culturally sanctioned formulaic correspondences rather than relying exclusively on literal semantic equivalence. Incorporating translexemic principles into artificial intelligence systems could facilitate more naturalistic language production, enhance pragmatic sensitivity in machine translation, and improve the sociocultural appropriateness of automatically generated discourse. Such developments may prove particularly valuable in educational technologies, intelligent tutoring systems, intercultural communication platforms, and AI-assisted language learning environments where pragmatic naturalness and formulaic appropriateness play a central role in communicative effectiveness.

10. Future Research Agenda and Empirical Operationalization of Translexemic Theory

To move translexemic theory beyond conceptual formulation toward empirical validation, this section outlines a structured research program. While translexemic theory provides a conceptual framework for understanding cross-linguistic pragmatic-formulaic correspondence, its explanatory value ultimately depends on empirical validation. Future research must therefore move beyond descriptive extensions of the model and toward hypothesis-driven investigation, focusing on the operationalization, measurement, and psycholinguistic validation of translexemic competence as a distinct dimension of communicative ability.

10.1: Toward a Hypothesis-Driven Research Program

A primary direction for future work is the formulation and testing of explicit hypotheses concerning the cognitive and pedagogical status of translexemic competence. In particular, translexemic theory predicts that learners' ability to map pragmatically and culturally unmarked formulaic expressions across languages constitutes a separable component of communicative competence that is not reducible to grammatical or general pragmatic knowledge.

Accordingly, future studies may test the following hypotheses:

H1 (Independence Hypothesis):

Translexemic competence constitutes a statistically separable construct from general pragmatic competence, lexical competence, and grammatical proficiency, as evidenced through factor-analytic modeling.

H2 (Predictive Validity Hypothesis):

Translexemic competence is a stronger predictor of perceived naturalness and pragmatic appropriateness in second-language production than general lexical or grammatical proficiency.

H3 (Cross-Linguistic Mapping Hypothesis):

Learners with higher translexemic competence demonstrate significantly greater accuracy in selecting pragmatically equivalent formulaic expressions across languages in translation- and interpretation-based tasks.

H4 (Developmental Hypothesis):

Translexemic competence develops non-linearly with proficiency and is particularly sensitive to explicit contrastive exposure to formulaic sequences rather than general input quantity alone.

These hypotheses position translexemic theory as a falsifiable and empirically testable framework rather than a purely descriptive construct.

10.2: Operationalizing Translexemic Competence

A central challenge for future research is the operational definition and measurement of translexemic competence as distinct from other components of communicative competence. To address this issue, translexemic competence may be operationalized through task-based and judgment-based instruments that specifically target cross-linguistic pragmatic-formulaic mapping.

(1) Translexemic Judgment Test (TJT)

This instrument assesses learners' ability to identify pragmatically appropriate formulaic equivalents across languages. Participants are presented with a communicative intention in their first language and are required to select the most appropriate second-language formulaic realization (translex) from a set of options.

Distractors are designed to include:

grammatically correct but pragmatically unnatural expressions

literal translations lacking sociocultural appropriateness

overgeneralized or context-inappropriate formulaic sequences

This design ensures that performance cannot be explained solely by grammatical or lexical knowledge, thereby isolating translexemic competence.

(2) Translexemic Production Task (TPT)

Participants are prompted with situational contexts requiring pragmatic responses (e.g., refusing an invitation, expressing disagreement, offering apology). Responses are evaluated using native-speaker judgment scales measuring:

pragmatic appropriateness

formulaic naturalness

sociocultural alignment

interactional acceptability

Crucially, scoring emphasizes the use of conventionalized formulaic expressions rather than syntactic complexity, allowing researchers to distinguish translexemic competence from general linguistic proficiency.

(3) Cross-Linguistic Mapping Task (CLMT)

This task directly operationalizes the core theoretical construct of translexemic theory. Participants are presented with formulaic expressions in their first language and asked to select or produce their closest pragmatically equivalent realization in the target language.

Performance is analyzed in terms of:

accuracy of pragmatic equivalence mapping

degree of literal translation interference

sensitivity to sociocultural constraints

variability across contextual conditions

10.3: Isolating Translexemic Competence from Other Competences

A key methodological requirement is the ability to isolate translexemic competence from overlapping constructs such as grammatical knowledge, vocabulary size, and general pragmatic competence. Future studies should therefore incorporate control measures including:

standardized proficiency tests (grammar and vocabulary)

independent pragmatic competence assessments (non-contrastive speech act tasks)

discourse-based production measures without cross-linguistic prompts

By statistically controlling for these variables, translexemic competence may be modeled as a unique predictor of performance in cross-linguistic pragmatic tasks.

10.4: Analytical and Validation Approaches

To establish construct validity, future research should employ:

exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis to determine whether translexemic competence emerges as an independent latent factor

structural equation modeling to test predictive relationships between translexemic competence and communicative performance

mixed-methods analysis combining quantitative performance data with qualitative discourse analysis of formulaic usage

Such approaches would allow researchers to determine whether translexemic competence is empirically distinct from existing constructs within pragmatic competence theory.

10.5: Pedagogical Research Directions

In addition to psycholinguistic validation, classroom-based intervention studies are needed to evaluate the pedagogical effectiveness of translexemic instruction. Experimental designs may compare:

traditional grammar-based instruction

pragmatic instruction without cross-linguistic comparison

translexeme-based instruction incorporating contrastive formulaic mapping

Dependent variables should include:

pragmatic appropriateness ratings

interactional fluency

formulaic expression recall

real-time production accuracy under communicative pressure

Such studies would clarify whether explicit attention to translexemic mappings leads to measurable gains in communicative performance.

10.6: Summary

Future research should therefore transition translexemic theory from a conceptual model to an empirically testable framework. By operationalizing translexemic competence through controlled experimental instruments and validating its independence from existing competence constructs, the theory can be rigorously evaluated within applied linguistics and second language acquisition research. This program not only strengthens the theoretical robustness of translexemic theory but also establishes its relevance for language pedagogy, translation studies, and intercultural communication research.

11. Limitations of the Proposed Framework

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the framework remains primarily theoretical at this stage and requires empirical validation. Second, determining what constitutes the “most unmarked” realization may vary according to community norms, discourse genres, regional variation, and sociolinguistic contexts. Third, formulaicity itself exists on a continuum rather than as a binary category. Furthermore, because pragmatic appropriateness is context-dependent,

translexemic mappings may remain fluid rather than fixed. Despite these limitations, the framework provides a useful conceptual basis for future inquiry and remains open to verification.

Finally, although the present article discusses possible relationships between translexemic competence, communicative fluency, and processing efficiency, these relationships remain theoretical. Future psycholinguistic, corpus-based, and instructional studies are needed to determine whether translexemic competence corresponds to a distinct and measurable construct and whether it contributes to observable communicative outcomes.

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