

**VERBAL AND NONVERBAL LACUNAE IN JAPANESE AND UZBEK:
LINGUOCULTURAL FEATURES AND TRANSLATION ISSUES****Kodirova Shakhnoza Abdurakhmonovna**

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Abstract: This article presents a comparative linguocultural analysis of verbal and nonverbal lacunae in Japanese and Uzbek, with particular emphasis on the challenges they pose for translation and intercultural communication. The study aims to identify culturally specific gaps in verbal expressions and nonverbal behavior that lack direct equivalents across the two languages. Drawing on recent research in cultural linguistics, pragmatics, and translation studies, the analysis examines how linguistic and extralinguistic lacunae emerge from culturally embedded norms, values, and communicative conventions. Verbal and nonverbal examples from Japanese and Uzbek are analyzed with English translations provided in parentheses. The findings reveal that many lacunae arise from differences in social hierarchy, emotional restraint, collectivist versus community-based orientations, and culturally regulated nonverbal conduct. The study contributes to linguocultural theory and offers practical implications for translation practice and intercultural competence development.

Keywords: lacunae, linguoculture, verbal lacunae, nonverbal communication, translation studies, Japanese, Uzbek.

In modern linguistics, increasing attention is paid to culturally specific phenomena that resist direct translation and interpretation. One such phenomenon is the lacuna, understood as a linguistic or cultural gap that emerges when a concept, expression, or behavior in one language has no direct equivalent in another. Lacunae are particularly salient in intercultural communication, where differences in values, norms, and communicative behavior become visible [Sharifian, 2020].

Japanese and Uzbek represent two linguocultural systems with distinct historical, social, and communicative traditions. While Japanese culture emphasizes restraint, indirectness, and nonverbal regulation, Uzbek culture prioritizes openness, communal interaction, and expressive social behavior. These differences result in numerous verbal and nonverbal lacunae that pose challenges for translation and intercultural understanding.

In linguocultural theory, lacunae are understood as culturally conditioned gaps that emerge when a concept, practice, or communicative behavior in one linguistic community lacks a direct or functionally equivalent counterpart in another [Sharifian, 2020]. Such gaps arise not from lexical deficiency but from deeper differences in cultural conceptualization, social organization, and communicative priorities. As a result, lacunae represent points at which language, culture, and cognition intersect most visibly. Lacunae are commonly classified into verbal and nonverbal types. Verbal lacunae involve lexical items, phraseological units, or conventionalized expressions whose meanings are embedded in culture-specific experiences and value systems. Nonverbal lacunae, by contrast, manifest through gestures, facial expressions, body posture, silence, and other forms of culturally regulated behavior that carry communicative significance within one culture but may be opaque or misinterpreted in another. From a pragmatic perspective, lacunae reflect fundamental differences in communicative norms and expectations. They signal divergences in how speakers manage politeness, emotional expression, social hierarchy, and interpersonal distance. Importantly,

failure to recognize lacunae typically results not in grammatical error but in pragmatic misinterpretation, where an utterance or behavior is formally correct yet culturally inappropriate or misleading [Kádár & House, 2021]. Such misunderstandings often remain unnoticed by speakers themselves, making lacunae a particularly subtle source of intercultural communication breakdown. In this sense, lacunae function as indicators of culturally specific meaning-making processes. Their analysis allows researchers to uncover implicit cultural assumptions that shape communication and to explain why certain expressions or behaviors resist straightforward interpretation across linguistic boundaries.

Translation and Cultural Untranslatability. Within translation studies, lacunae are commonly associated with the notion of cultural untranslatability, understood not as absolute impossibility but as the absence of direct equivalence between source and target languages. In such cases, meaning cannot be transferred through literal translation alone and must instead be reconstructed through interpretive strategies such as explanation, paraphrase, adaptation, or contextual framing [Baker, 2021].

This issue is particularly salient in the translation of culturally loaded verbal expressions and nonverbal signals. Verbal lacunae often encode values, emotions, or social relations that are not lexicalized in the target language, requiring translators to prioritize communicative effect over formal correspondence. Nonverbal lacunae present an even greater challenge, as gestures, silence, or spatial behavior may carry culturally specific meanings that are neither verbalized nor explicitly recognized by speakers within the source culture.

Translation scholars increasingly emphasize that successful mediation of lacunae depends on the translator's linguocultural competence rather than linguistic knowledge alone. Translators must be capable of identifying culturally implicit meanings and anticipating how these meanings will be interpreted by target-language audiences. In many cases, this involves making culturally implicit information explicit or selecting functionally equivalent strategies that fulfill similar communicative purposes within the target culture.

Lacunae highlight the limits of equivalence-based models of translation and reinforce the view of translation as an interpretive and culturally situated practice. Addressing lacunae effectively requires sensitivity to both source and target cultures and an awareness of how meaning is shaped by shared social knowledge, communicative conventions, and cultural experience [Baker, 2021].

Verbal lacunae in Japanese. Japanese contains numerous culturally bound expressions that lack direct equivalents in Uzbek.

Example 1:

お疲れ様です。

(Thank you for your effort / You must be tired)

This expression functions as a multifunctional social marker acknowledging effort and solidarity. Uzbek lacks a single expression combining these meanings, resulting in a verbal lacuna.

Example 2:

よろしくお願いします。

(Please take care of this / I rely on you)

The phrase conveys humility, expectation, and social alignment simultaneously, which cannot be rendered by a single Uzbek equivalent.

Verbal lacunae in Uzbek. Uzbek verbal lacunae often reflect communal and ethical values.

Example 3:

Yaxshi yuribsizmi?

(*Are you doing well?*)

This greeting implies moral and social well-being rather than mere physical condition, a nuance absent in Japanese.

Example 4:

Kattani hurmat qil.

(*Respect your elders.*)

The ethical imperative embedded in this expression lacks a direct lexical equivalent in Japanese and must be culturally explicated.

Nonverbal lacunae in Japanese. Japanese nonverbal communication is highly regulated.

Example 5:

Bowing depth and duration

The cultural meaning encoded in different types of bows has no equivalent in Uzbek culture, constituting a nonverbal lacuna.

Silence (*chinmoku*) also functions as a communicative act, signaling respect or disagreement without verbalization.

Nonverbal lacunae in Uzbek. Uzbek nonverbal behavior is more expressive.

Example 6:

Hand-to-chest gesture during greeting

This gesture conveys sincerity and respect but lacks a functional equivalent in Japanese nonverbal behavior.

Prolonged eye contact and expressive facial reactions, common in Uzbek interaction, may be interpreted differently in Japanese contexts.

Verbal and nonverbal lacunae present substantial challenges for translators, as they involve culturally embedded meanings that cannot be transferred through direct lexical or structural equivalence. Literal translation in such cases often results in semantic distortion or pragmatic inadequacy, while omission or simplification may lead to significant loss of communicative intent. As a result, the translation of lacunae requires strategies that go beyond word-for-word rendering. Among the most effective strategies are descriptive translation, cultural substitution, and pragmatic commentary. Descriptive translation allows the translator to explicate culturally implicit meanings by expanding the source expression in the target language. Cultural substitution involves replacing a culture-specific element with a functionally similar concept from the target culture, thereby preserving pragmatic effect rather than formal structure. Pragmatic commentary, either explicit or implicit, enables translators to contextualize lacunary elements and guide the reader toward an appropriate interpretation.

The choice of strategy depends largely on genre, communicative purpose, and target audience. In literary and educational texts, explanatory strategies may be preferred, whereas in audiovisual or pragmatic translation, functional adaptation often proves more effective. In all cases, translators must demonstrate not only linguistic proficiency but also advanced linguocultural awareness, enabling them to recognize culturally implicit meanings and anticipate their reception by target-language audiences [Baker, 2021]. Thus, translation is best understood as a process of cultural mediation rather than mere linguistic transfer.

The analysis demonstrates that verbal and nonverbal lacunae in Japanese and Uzbek arise from fundamentally different cultural orientations toward communication, emotion, and social interaction. Japanese lacunae frequently reflect values of institutional restraint, indirectness, and implicit understanding, where meaning is often conveyed through silence, formality, or nonverbal cues. Such lacunae are closely tied to culturally regulated behavior and shared contextual knowledge within Japanese society. In contrast, Uzbek lacunae are largely rooted in communal ethics, moral obligation, and expressive social norms. Communication in Uzbek culture tends to emphasize interpersonal warmth, explicit verbalization of respect, and visible nonverbal engagement. As a result, many Uzbek culturally significant expressions and gestures resist direct translation into Japanese, where similar meanings may be conveyed implicitly or avoided altogether. These differences underscore the necessity of linguocultural competence in both translation and intercultural communication. Misinterpretation of lacunae often does not stem from insufficient language knowledge, but from a lack of awareness of culturally specific communicative conventions. Consequently, successful mediation between Japanese and Uzbek requires sensitivity to underlying cultural logics rather than reliance on surface-level linguistic equivalence.

This study has demonstrated that verbal and nonverbal lacunae in Japanese and Uzbek are culturally motivated phenomena that resist direct translation due to differences in communicative norms, social values, and interactional practices. By adopting a linguocultural perspective, the research highlights the importance of cultural interpretation in identifying and addressing such lacunae.

The findings suggest that effective translation and intercultural communication depend on the ability to recognize culturally implicit meanings and to apply adaptive strategies that preserve pragmatic intent. Future research may expand the empirical scope of lacuna studies through corpus-based analysis, ethnographic observation, or experimental approaches to intercultural perception. The results of the present study have practical relevance for translation studies, foreign language education, and intercultural communication training, where raising awareness of lacunae can significantly enhance communicative competence.

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