

Article

The Role of Context in Translating Medical Terminology

Shahlo F. Sharobidinova¹

1. Lecturer, Department of English Translation Theory, Faculty of Translation Studies, Uzbekistan State University of World Languages

*Correspondence: shaaxloshka@gmail.com


Citation: Sharobidinova, S. F. The Role of Context in Translating Medical Terminology. Central Asian Journal of Literature, Philosophy, and Culture 2026, 7(3), 354-357.

Received: 10th May 2026

Revised: 25th May 2026

Accepted: 30th May 2026

Published: 10th June 2026

 2026 by the authors. Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

Annotation: This article examines the role of context in translating medical terminology. Medical terms are often polysemous, and their accurate interpretation depends on the communicative purpose of the text, clinical situation, and professional field of application. The study analyzes semantic challenges encountered in the translation of medical terms from English into Uzbek, issues of terminological equivalence, and the influence of contextual factors on translation quality. Particular attention is paid to examples from pathology, pharmacology, and clinical practice that demonstrate how the meaning of medical terms may vary across different contexts. The findings indicate that careful contextual analysis is essential for ensuring terminological accuracy, effective professional communication, and patient safety. The study highlights the importance of context-sensitive translation strategies in modern medical discourse.

Keywords: medical translation, medical terminology, context, terminological equivalence, semantics, clinical communication, medical discourse

1. Introduction

Medical translation is one of the most challenging fields of specialized translation because it requires not only linguistic competence but also a thorough understanding of medical science. The accuracy of translated medical information directly affects clinical communication, scientific research, healthcare documentation, and patient safety. Therefore, even minor translation errors may lead to serious misunderstandings and potentially harmful consequences. In medical discourse, terminology serves as the primary means of professional communication. Medical terms are expected to be precise, standardized, and unambiguous. However, in practice, many medical terms are context-dependent and may convey different meanings depending on the field of medicine, clinical situation, or communicative purpose. Consequently, translators must pay close attention not only to the lexical meaning of a term but also to the context in which it is used. The concept of context plays a crucial role in translation studies. Context can be defined as the linguistic, situational, cultural, and professional environment in which a word or expression occurs. In medical translation, context helps determine the intended meaning of a term and allows translators to select the most appropriate equivalent in the target language. Without proper contextual analysis, translators may choose inaccurate or misleading interpretations. The increasing globalization of healthcare and medical research has intensified the need for high-quality translation of medical texts. English has become the dominant language of international medicine, and a large number of scientific articles, clinical guidelines, treatment protocols, and pharmaceutical documents are produced in English. As a result, medical translators frequently encounter complex terminology that requires contextual interpretation rather than direct lexical substitution.

This study aims to examine the role of context in translating medical terminology from English into Uzbek. The research focuses on the influence of linguistic, clinical, and cultural context on translation accuracy and explores common challenges faced by medical translators. Furthermore, the study analyzes practical examples from medical discourse to demonstrate how contextual factors affect terminological equivalence.

2. Methodology

This study employs descriptive, comparative, and semantic methods of analysis. Medical terms and expressions were collected from English-language scientific articles, clinical reports, pathology reports, oncology guidelines, and pharmacological documentation. The collected terminology was compared with its Uzbek equivalents in translated medical literature and professional healthcare communication. Particular attention was paid to terms whose meanings vary according to context.[1]

The analysis focused on three major types of context:

Linguistic context

Clinical context

Cultural and communicative context

Examples from different medical specialties were used to illustrate how contextual factors influence translation decisions.[2]

Types of context in medical translation.

Linguistic context refers to the surrounding words, phrases, and sentences that help determine the meaning of a term. In medical texts, many terms acquire their specific meaning only within a particular linguistic environment.[3]

For example, the English word *positive* may have different meanings depending on context.

Positive test result

Positive surgical margin

Positive prognosis

In general English, "positive" usually carries a favorable meaning. However, in medical discourse, a positive test result often indicates the presence of a disease or abnormal condition.[4]

For instance: "The patient tested positive for tuberculosis."

A literal translation suggesting a favorable outcome would be incorrect. The translator must understand the clinical meaning of the term within its linguistic context. Similarly, the word *negative* may indicate the absence of disease rather than an unfavorable condition.[5]

Examples include:

Negative biopsy result

Negative lymph nodes

Negative screening test

3. Result and Discussion

These examples demonstrate that contextual analysis is essential for accurate medical translation.

Clinical context refers to the medical situation in which a term is used. Many medical expressions have different meanings across specialties. The term *lesion* provides a good example.[6]

In radiology, a lesion may refer to:

An abnormal area detected through imaging.

In dermatology, a lesion may indicate:

a visible skin abnormality.

In pathology, a lesion may refer to:
tissue damage or pathological change.

Therefore, translating the lesion simply as "zararlanish" or "shikastlanish" may not always be accurate. The translator must determine the intended meaning based on the clinical context. Another example is the term *staging*. In oncology, staging refers to the process of determining the extent of cancer spread.[7]

Example: "Cancer staging revealed distant metastases."

The term cannot be translated literally because it represents a specific oncological concept associated with the TNM classification system. Clinical context helps ensure terminological precision and prevents misinterpretation.[8]

Cultural and communicative context often involves interaction between healthcare professionals and patients. In such situations, the cultural and communicative context becomes particularly important.[9]

Many medical terms that are acceptable in scientific communication may be difficult for patients to understand.[10]

For example:

malignancy

metastatic disease

terminal cancer

When translating patient information materials, translators may need to provide explanatory or simplified equivalents. The choice of terminology depends on the target audience, educational level, and communicative purpose. In professional communication between physicians, technical terminology is preferred. [11] In patient-oriented texts, comprehensibility often becomes more important than terminological precision. This demonstrates the significant influence of communicative context on translation decisions.[12]

Context-dependent medical terms

Several medical terms frequently create translation difficulties because their meanings vary according to context.[13]

Margin

General meaning:

edge or boundary

Pathology meaning:

tissue surrounding a removed tumor

Example: "Positive margin detected after surgery."

In this context, margin refers to the surgical resection border rather than a simple edge.

Invasive

General meaning:

entering or spreading aggressively [14]

Medical meaning:

penetrating surrounding tissues

Example: "Invasive ductal carcinoma."

The term describes tumor behavior rather than a general characteristic.

Progression

General meaning:

advancement or movement forward

Oncological meaning:

worsening or spread of disease

Example: "Disease progression was observed during follow-up."

Without contextual knowledge, the term may be misunderstood. These examples

illustrate the necessity of professional expertise in medical translation. [15]

4. Conclusion

The present study has demonstrated that context plays a decisive role in the translation of medical terminology from English into Uzbek. Medical terms often possess multiple meanings, and their accurate interpretation depends on linguistic, clinical, and communicative factors. The analysis revealed that relying solely on dictionary equivalents may result in semantic inaccuracies and misunderstandings, particularly in specialized medical fields such as oncology, pathology, pharmacology, and surgery. The findings indicate that contextual analysis enables translators to identify the intended meaning of medical terms and select the most appropriate target-language equivalents. Furthermore, the study highlights that professional medical translation requires not only linguistic competence but also sufficient knowledge of medical concepts and healthcare communication. Clinical context, in particular, significantly influences the interpretation of diagnostic, therapeutic, and pathological terminology. As English continues to dominate international medical discourse, the number of medical texts translated into Uzbek is expected to increase. Therefore, the development of standardized medical terminology, specialized bilingual dictionaries, and professional training programs for medical translators is essential. Accurate context-based translation contributes to effective communication among healthcare professionals, improves patient understanding, and enhances the overall quality of medical services. Future research may focus on corpus-based studies of medical terminology, the role of artificial intelligence in medical translation, and comparative analyses involving additional languages and medical specialties.

REFERENCES

- [1] J. C. Catford, *A Linguistic Theory of Translation: An Essay in Applied Linguistics*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1965.
- [2] J. Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications*, 4th ed. London, UK: Routledge, 2016.
- [3] P. Newmark, *A Textbook of Translation*. New York, NY, USA: Prentice Hall, 1988.
- [4] E. A. Nida and C. R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1969.
- [5] S. Sharobidinova, "Lexical-semantic ways in medical terms formation," in *Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference on Linguistics and Medical Terminology*, 2024, pp. 112–116.
- [6] S. F. Sharobidinova, "Training student translators in medical terms," *Foreign Linguistics and Language Teaching Studies*, vol. 3, no. 7, pp. 45–51, 2024.
- [7] S. F. Sharobidinova, "Translating medical terminology in English and Uzbek," *Excellencia: International Multi-Disciplinary Journal of Education*, vol. 2, no. 11, pp. 411–415, 2024.
- [8] S. F. Sharobidinova, "Identifying and classifying translation issues in medical language," *European Journal of Modern Medicine and Practice*, vol. 5, no. 5, pp. 128–134, 2025.
- [9] J. P. Vinay and J. Darbelnet, *Comparative Stylistics of French and English: A Methodology for Translation*, J. C. Sager and M. J. Hamel, Trans. Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1995.
- [10] H. R. Wulff, *The Language of Medicine*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.
- [11] M. Fischbach, *Translation and Medicine*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1998.
- [12] V. Montalt-Resurrecció and M. Shuttleworth, "Research in medical translation," *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 145–168, 2012.
- [13] M. Baker, *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*, 3rd ed. London, UK: Routledge, 2018.
- [14] L. Bowker, "Terminology and translation," in *Handbook of Terminology*, vol. 1, H. J. Kockaert and F. Steurs, Eds. Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2015, pp. 345–365.
- [15] S. As-Safi, *Translation Theories, Strategies and Basic Concepts*. Amman, Jordan: Petra University, 2011.