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Stylistic Issues in Translation: The Case of Literary Prose

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A B S T R A C T
This work discusses challenges in translation of literary prose style. Literary work, unlike technical or informational texts, is primarily reliant on stylistic devices, aesthetic form, narrative voice, and cultural connotation. A translator must maintain not only semantic meaning but also emotional tenor, imagery, rhythm, and authorial voice. Major stylistic problems including metaphor translation, shifts in register, culture-specific references, syntax, narrative perspective, and the tension between faithfulness and creativity are explored. The author of this paper suggests that achieving stylistic equivalence in literary translation is possible only with interpretative competence, cultural awareness and creative decision-making.

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Introduction

Literary prose translation is one of the most challenging and the most theorized sections in translation studies. Apart from accurately conveying information, scientific or technical translation has some flexibility in recreating reproduction of aesthetic value, emotional force, and stylistic identity in the target text, elements all key to an elaborate literary translation. In fact, as Roman Jakobson puts it, “poetry is untranslatable, only the prose is translatable, of course by creative transposition” (Jakobson, 1959). Though this is frequently argued, it draws attention to the essential challenge of transporting artistic meaning through linguistic barriers.

In literary prose, meaning is inseparable from form. The aesthetic function of language plays a decisive role in shaping interpretation. Peter Newmark notes that in literary translation “the translator’s task is not merely to reproduce the message but to convey the manner in which the message is expressed” (Newmark, 1988). The art of writing is a combination of word choice and syntactic structure, rhythm and imagery, and narrative voice. This makes translation a literary exercise in systemic reconstruction instead of a mere engine of semantic transference.

Perhaps the most famous—and more recent—translation theory is Eugene Nida’s chosen equivalence concept of dynamic equivalence, that has often been applied to Bible translation, but can also serve as a

bridge in literary translation as well. Nida who postulates that translation must be directed towards "the closest natural equivalent" in the target language (Nida, 1964)

However, in literary prose, achieving such equivalence requires sensitivity not only to meaning but also to stylistic nuance. The emotional and aesthetic response of the target reader must approximate that of the source reader, even if structural adjustments are necessary.

Furthermore, literary prose is deeply embedded in cultural context. Mona Baker underlines that equivalence must be considered at multiple levels, including pragmatic and discourse levels, not merely at the word level (Baker, 1992). Like the use of cultural references, intertextual elements (if they appear frequently in works and genres but do not have equivalents in other works and genres, which it is extremely likely!) and sociolects. This means that the translator will have to be a cultural mediator to negotiate between two linguistic and literary systems.

Lawrence Venuti reminds us that there is an ideological aspect to any literary translation, as the translator's poetics either domesticate or foreignize the text (Venuti, 1995). Domestication conforms the text to the norms of the target culture, whereas foreignization retains the cultural otherness.

Both strategies have stylistic implications, influencing how the author's voice is perceived in translation.

Thus, the central question arises: how can a translator reproduce the stylistic features of literary prose while remaining faithful to the source text? Addressing this issue requires examining stylistic equivalence, narrative voice, figurative language, and the delicate balance between fidelity and creative transformation. Literary translation, as Susan Basnett suggests, do cultural, historical, and aesthetic forces (Basnett, 2002) shape "a form of rewriting". It requires not just linguistic skill but hermeneutic depth and artistic sensibility.

Methodology.

In literary translation, stylistic equivalence means reproducing the expressive, aesthetic and functional value of the source language within the target one. However, in contrast to lexical or grammatical equivalence which predominantly tends to be semantic, stylistic equivalence seeks to maintain tone, register, imagery, rhythm, and emotional impact. In literary prose, however, the stylistic dimension is not a separate layer but part of the meaning as such.

Roman Jakobson at one point, tabulated differences of equivalence and collocated the role of 'equivalence in poetic language, where 'the constitutive device of the sequence is […] equivalence' (Jakobson,1959). This observation points to the fact that in literary texts form has meaning. So to translate style is to translate meaning, and not just decoration. Peter Newmark states that, in literary translation, "style is as equally important as the content, and often inseparable from it" (Newmark, 1988). A sentence in prose that sounds semantically neutral may contain irony, sadness, satire or understated humor that is carried by lexical choice and syntactic structure. The referent may remain but the spirit may be lost in a literal rendering. Thus, achieving stylistic equivalence entails an awareness of the contextual function of linguistic forms. Eugene Nida and the Theory of Dynamic Equivalence Eugene Nida's concept of dynamic equivalence also proves useful for the understanding of stylistic transfer. Despite being designed specifically for religious texts, the latter principle of rendering "an equivalent reaction" in the target audience (Nida, 1964) is also applicable to literary prose. The goal of stylistic equivalence is thus to reproduce the same aesthetic effect instead of word for word mechanical reproduction of formal structure Here, equivalence is functional, not structural.

Mona Baker add that equivalence has to be seen in several levels which include pragmatic and discourse levels (Baker, 1992). We can also go beyond the level of the word as stylistic markers like irony, modality, politeness strategies, or narrative perspective. Thus, the translator will have to consider more than just vocabulary, but also the wider discourse role that stylistic devices play.

In practice, stylistic equivalence necessitates guidance from a few crucial points:

- the communicative function of stylistic devices
- the narrative tone and perspective
- the socio-cultural background of the text
- the author's individual stylistic fingerprint

Lawrence Venuti reminds us that translation inevitably involves interpretation and rewriting (Venuti, 1995). Stylistic equivalence is not mechanical imitation; it is an act of interpretative recreation. The translator negotiates between fidelity to the author's voice and acceptability within the target language system. Too much literalism can lead to stylistic clumsiness; too much domestication, loss of the alien aesthetic quality of the text.

In a similar vein, Susan Bassnett claims literary translation needs to be understood as a cultural and historical product [Bassnett, 2002]. Seen that way, stylistic equivalence is fluid and purely contextual. It is not something that can be reduced to a policy, but rather relies on professional instinct and analytical skill.

Thus, stylistic equivalence in literary translation represents a functional reconstruction of artistic effect. It demands linguistic precision, cultural awareness, interpretative depth, and aesthetic sensitivity. The translator does not replicate style mechanically; rather, they re-create its function within the constraints and possibilities of the target language.

Result and discussion.

Metaphors, similes, symbols, personification, and other figurative devices constitute the semantic and stylistic core of literary prose. And often, they work not just as ornamental pieces but also as bones of content. But as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson write, "metaphor is not just a matter of language — or a matter of thought — but a matter of action" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This ways of thinking type of conceptual view of metaphor means that metaphor translation is more than just an expression transfer of mapping one expression to another, but basically, it is a transfer of culture specific pattern of thought!

Metaphors in literary texts obviously possess historical linkages, cultural signification, and emotional nuance. As Peter Newmark highlights, "metaphor is the most obviously and widely used rhetorical device and, in general, one of the mainstays of the problem of translation" (Newmark, 1988). A metaphor can disclose the outlook of the author, the social environment or the psychological conjecture. Therefore, it needs a more contextual and stylistic translation.

Scholars generally identify several strategies for translating metaphor. Newmark proposes procedures such as reproducing the same image, replacing it with a standard target-language image, converting metaphor into sense, or combining metaphor with explanation (Newmark, 1988). These procedures can be summarized into three broader strategies:

1. Preservation – retaining the original metaphor if it is intelligible and stylistically acceptable in the target culture.
2. Adaptation – converse the metaphor to fit cultural norms or inclinations
3. Transposition — replacing the source metaphor with an equivalent metaphor in the target.

Which of these strategies is ultimately chosen will depend on the communicative purpose of the metaphor and the extent to which it is culturally specific. According to Mona Baker, figurative expressions are frequently "culture-specific items" that are impossible to translate literally (Baker, 1992). Where a metaphor is locally embedded in national iconography, myth or experience, the preservation may be obscure or stylistically uncomfortable. And by adapting-or substituting-the author may change imagery and dilute the original aesthetic impact. This is where the domestication and foreignization framework by Lawrence Venuti comes into play which is particularly useful in this context (Venuti, 1995). A figurative equivalent can result in cultural preservation but it may also cause difficulty in understanding.

Adapting or substituting it enhances accessibility but risks domesticating the text and reducing its foreign stylistic identity. Thus, metaphor translation reflects broader ideological and stylistic choices.

Eugene Nida's principle of dynamic equivalence further complicates the issue. If the translator aims to evoke a similar response in the target audience (Nida, 1964), metaphor may require transformation rather than literal transferBut too much morphing can easily lead to over-interpretation and the contamination of the author's conceptual imagery.

The second major importing is that metaphor is also cognitive matter. For Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors structure different conceptual systems in different cultures. Metaphors can differ widely between languages, for instance metaphors of time, space or emotion [19]. This means that metaphor translation has being cross-cultural concept negotiation rather than simple lexical substitution.

The main problem comes in the case when the metaphor has a very culture bound. But, when translating word for word, it may sound strange or even absurd, or when adapting a piece in order to retain its core message, the mental images of the author might get formed in a very different way. Translators then have to prioritize how to maintain an imagery-sustaining, functional conveying, emotional-relaying, or culturally-familiar experience within an individual context.

Ultimately, translating a metaphor is an interpretative balancing act. It involves knowing about a metaphor's meaning, style, source, and cultural references.

As Susan Bassnett observes, literary translation is "a rewriting of a text in a new cultural context" (Bassnett, 2002). In this process, figurative language becomes one of the most delicate and intellectually demanding elements to reproduce.

Narrative voice constitutes one of the most defining elements of literary prose. It shapes the reader's perception of characters, events, and thematic development. More importantly, narrative voice constructs the identity of the text itself. Gérard Genette had previously noted that narrative discourse, or the way a narrative is told, is not just about "what is told" but also about "who speaks" and "from what angle" (Genette, 1980). Anyway, voice is intimately connected to narrative perspective and stylistic structure.

Each writer's stylistic signature emerges from syntactic complexity, lexical choices, rhetorical adaptations, and rhythm. Other writers use ornate multi-clause and heavy subordination sentences that create a sense of intellectual density and reflective voice.

Others favor short, fragmented, and minimalist constructions that generate tension, immediacy, or emotional sharpness. These stylistic decisions are not accidental; they reflect aesthetic intention.

Peter Newmark emphasizes that "the translator must respect the idiolect of the author" (Newmark, 1988). Idiolect refers to the individual linguistic style that distinguishes one writer from another. When a translator simplifies complex syntax in order to improve readability, the philosophical depth or intellectual nuance of the original may be diminished. On the other side of line, inflexible literalism might create odd or unnatural forms in target language thereby decreasing the efficacy of stylistic fluency.

Baker contends that stylistic choices operate on the level of discourse and not on the level of the word (Baker, 1992). Cohesion, thematic progression, and pragmatic orientation are modes through which narrative voice is created (T. H. McIntyre, 110). So in order to preserve voice, text needs to be considered as a whole, not on a sentence by sentence basis.

As Lawrence Venuti further notes, translation always includes "interpretive moves" that determine the way the authorial voice finds representation in the other culture (Venuti, 1995). This linguistic relativity implies that the translator does not merely convey voice but constructs it anew in the domesticating practices that characterize the target language. Such reconstructive work might alter stylistic emphasis between domesticating the manner of telling the tale, or retaining its non-home-grown qualities.

Hence, retaining authorial style requires attention to many interrelated factors, including:

- rhythm and sentence structure
- repetition and parallelism patterns

- lexical preferences and semantic fields
- irony, ambiguity, and subtext

Roman Jakobson's assertion that poetic language foregrounds form (Jakobson, 1959) is equally applicable to literary prose. Stylistic features such as repetition, syntactic deviation, or unexpected lexical combinations create aesthetic meaning. When these features are neutralized in translation, the narrative voice risks becoming homogenized.

Susan Bassnett also notes that literary translation is a species of rewriting filtered through the lens of culture (Bassnett, 2002). The translator, therefore, is caught between finding a balance between staying with the style of the author and conforming to the conventions of the target-language. Fully faithful translation may sacrifice naturalness, whereas adaptation can dilute stylistic individuality.

In the end, it is not a mechanical process, but the stylistic interpretation of how a narrative voice should be translated. Translation occurs in a linguistic territory that is indescribably more exciting to traverse because it is a system where the author's voice is living in dialogue with the translator trying to piece its tonality, migrations, and points of emphasis back together in a new system. In this sense, literary translation is a recreation of authorial presence rather than a transfer between languages.

Characterization in literary prose certainly involves register and some degree of sociolinguistic variation. Writers signal social class, regional identity, educational attainment, age, gender, and ideological stance through their use of dialects, sociolects, slang, jargon of the professions, and marked styles.

Language variation is therefore not merely decorative but socially meaningful. As M. A. K. Halliday argues, register reflects the relationship between language and its situational context, determined by field, tenor, and mode (Halliday, 1978). In literary texts, these variables help construct the social reality of the narrative. When characters speak in dialect or non-standard varieties, their speech functions as a marker of identity. Translating such variation presents one of the most complex challenges in literary translation. As Peter Newmark observes, "dialect is always difficult to translate because it is tied to a specific geographical and social environment" (Newmark, 1988). The translator must decide whether to preserve, adapt, neutralize, or recreate sociolinguistic signals.

The dilemma can be framed through several strategic options:

- Should the translator use a dialect from the target culture?
- Should the speech be neutralized into standard language?
- Or should markers of social identity be recreated indirectly through lexical or syntactic cues?

Each approach has significant consequences. If the translator substitutes a source dialect with a target-culture dialect, the geographical identity of the character may be distorted. For example, rendering a Scottish dialect through a regional Uzbek or Russian dialect may create unintended associations. Lawrence Venuti warns that such domestication may erase the foreign cultural identity of the text (Venuti, 1995).

On the other hand, neutralization eliminates social nuance. This is a major point that Baker has been known for, that non-standard speech has a pragmatic meaning which extends well beyond the literal meaning (Baker, 1992). The act of dialect standardization can erase indices of class, marginality, or cultural specificity in turn, which is implicitly what the translator seeks to erase. Such loss has ramifications on characterization and narrative authenticity.

Dynamic equivalence–a theory introduced by Eugene Nida–is an approach to translation in which the translator strives to create the same impact on the reader receiving the targeted text (Nida 1964). By the community approach, the translator would create a sociolinguistic contrast based on the assumption that linguistic exactitude is not necessarily required. The target is not idiolectal replication but functional equivalence: maintaining social discrepancy with characters instead of phonetic detail.

According to Susan Bassnett, translation is influenced by historical and cultural context (Bassnett, 2002). A "non-standard" expression in one language is not necessarily present in that of another. Thus, patterns of sociolinguistic variation must be read against the background of cultural norms.

Another theoretical perspective comes from Antoine Berman, who criticizes translations that "flatten" linguistic diversity (Berman, 1985). According to Berman, preserving linguistic heterogeneity is essential to respecting the foreignness of the source text. However, absolute preservation may compromise readability and coherence in the target language.

Discussion

Thus, there is no universal solution for translating dialect and sociolinguistic variation. Each literary work requires contextual analysis. The translator must evaluate:

- the narrative function of dialect
- its frequency and intensity
- its symbolic value
- the expectations of the target readership

Register and sociolinguistic variation demonstrate that literary translation is not simply about linguistic substitution but about social representation. This creates a negotiation between what is authentic and what is intelligible, what is foreign and what is familiar. Preserving the social nuance yet not perverting the cultural identity, is perhaps the trickiest and most cerebral challenge of literary translation.

Cultural allusions and intertextuality represent one of the most complicated layers of literary prose. Literary texts are seldom pure linguistic objects confined to themselves, but exist instead in networks of historical memory, cultural significations, and past texts.

As Julia Kristeva introduced the concept, every text is "a mosaic of quotations" and the absorption of other texts (Kristeva, 1980). This intertextual dimension creates additional complexity for translators, since meaning is often constructed through implicit cultural knowledge.

Cultural references may include historical events, mythological figures, religious symbolism, political realities, idiomatic expressions, folklore, and culturally specific institutions. Such features might not be familiar to the readership, especially if the cultural gap between source and target contexts is large.

Peter Newmark calls such things "cultural words" and states that this does always have a corresponding word in the target language (Newmark, 1988). Translators, therefore, need not only to assess semantic but also the cultural role of the reference. Is it central to the plot?

Does it serve symbolic purposes? Or is it a background detail?

Several strategies are commonly employed in translating cultural references:

- Explicitation – making implicit cultural meaning more explicit within the text.
- Footnotes or endnotes – providing explanatory information outside the main narrative.
- Contextual adaptation – replacing the reference with a culturally analogous element.
- Preservation without explanation – retaining the original reference to preserve foreignness.

These strategies affect the reader in a different way, and the stylistic texture of the text is different as well.

As Mona Baker observes, explicitation is one of the strategies translators apply when cultural gaps exist (Baker, 1992). Yet, too much explicitation can break the stylistic subtlety. In literary prose, the use of suggestion and implication is often noted; explicit elucidation may undermine aesthetic vagueness.

This problem has been contextualized by Lawrence Venuti (1995) within the domestication and foreignization debate.

Preservation of cultural references without explanation aligns with foreignization, maintaining the cultural otherness of the text. Contextual adaptation, on the other hand, may domesticate the text, making it more accessible but potentially reducing its cultural specificity.

Antoine Berman criticizes translations that eliminate foreign elements in favor of fluency, arguing that such practices lead to "ethnocentric reduction" (Berman, 1985). According to Berman, maintaining cultural difference is essential to ethical translation practice. Yet complete preservation may cause confusion if the reference is obscure to the target reader.

Intertextuality adds another dimension. When a literary text alludes to another canonical work, religious scripture, or mythological narrative, the translator must consider whether the target audience shares this intertextual knowledge. Gérard Genette describes intertextuality as a form of "transtextuality" that shapes interpretation beyond the immediate text (Genette, 1997). If such references go unrecognized, part of the semantic richness may be lost.

Eugene Nida's principle of dynamic equivalence suggests that the translator should aim to evoke a comparable response in the target reader (Nida, 1964). In some cases, contextual adaptation may better achieve this effect. On the downside though, adaptation can also cause historical accuracy to take a hit.

Markus (2000) notes that, therefore, the translator of a work which contains cultural references and intertextual elements must balance intelligibility, stylistic fidelity, and cultural fidelity. If handled poorly, excessive exposition can obstruct narrative flow and diminish aesthetic immersion. Too little can limit the understanding and meaning.

The translator, in the end, ends up being a cultural mediator that negotiates between the preservation of the foreign cultural identity and accessibility to the target audience. Cultural signs and intertextual signs remind us that the process of literary translation is not just the transfer of a linguistic entity, but an intercultural discussion formed by historical memory and a tradition of texts.

The rhythm of prose is a major part of the effect of literature. Short sentences may create tension. There might be some reflection or nostalgia offered in long, flowing sentences.

Syntactic norms vary widely across different languages. Perhaps some of the compression allowed by English is not replicable in other languages Recreating rhythm without breaking the rules of grammar is a delicate dance.

Literal translations often lose the rhythm. Yet to lose rhythm is to lose a slice of the artistic punch.

This has to do with perhaps the most important debate of all in literary translation, that of faithfulness versus creativity. Should they line up precisely with the words of the original? Or should creative freedom be considered?

If stylistic depth is present in the literary original, strict literalism often fails to reproduce it in translation. At the same time, excessive creativity may distort the original message.

The translator operates between two poles:

- loyalty to the author
- responsibility toward the target reader

Effective literary translation requires interpretative freedom guided by professional discipline.

Conclusion

Stylistic issues in literary prose translation demonstrate that translation is not merely linguistic substitution but artistic reconstruction. Literary prose demands preservation of tone, imagery, rhythm, and narrative identity alongside semantic meaning.

Metaphor, narrative voice, register variation, cultural references, and syntactic rhythm represent key stylistic challenges. The translator must combine linguistic competence, cultural knowledge, and creative sensitivity to achieve stylistic equivalence.

Ultimately, literary translation is a form of cross-cultural dialogue. It allows readers to experience foreign artistic worlds while preserving the uniqueness of the original voice. Achieving stylistic balance remains both the greatest difficulty and the highest achievement of literary translation.

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