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PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS IN THE TRANSLATION OF WORLD LITERATURE

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Abstract

The translation of world literature plays a significant role in promoting intercultural communication, preserving literary heritage, and facilitating the exchange of ideas between nations. However, literary translation involves numerous linguistic, cultural, stylistic, and interpretative challenges that cannot always be resolved through direct linguistic equivalence. Translators must convey not only the meaning of the original text but also its aesthetic qualities, cultural references, emotional depth, and authorial intentions. This article examines the major problems encountered in translating world literature, including structural differences between languages, culture-specific items, idioms and metaphors, the preservation of authorial voice, historical context, wordplay and humour, and explores possible solutions through established translation theories and practical strategies. The theoretical concepts of Nida, Catford, Newmark, Venuti, Vinay and Darbelnet are considered in terms of their practical application to literary texts. Particular attention is given to cultural realia, idiomatic expressions, metaphors, stylistic features, and the preservation of literary meaning. The article argues that successful literary translation requires a combination of linguistic competence, cultural awareness, creativity, and methodological flexibility. It also discusses the potential contribution of digital technologies and artificial intelligence to contemporary





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translation practices and offers practical recommendations for translators and translator training programmes.

Keywords: literary translation, world literature, translation equivalence, cultural realia, translation strategies, intercultural communication, artificial intelligence.

ПРОБЛЕМЫ ПЕРЕВОДА МИРОВОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ И ПУТИ ИХ РЕШЕНИЯ

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Аннотация Перевод мировой литературы играет важную роль в развитии межкультурной коммуникации, сохранении литературного наследия и обмене идеями между народами. Однако художественный перевод сопряжён с многочисленными языковыми, культурными, стилистическими и интерпретационными трудностями, которые не всегда могут быть преодолены путём прямого языкового соответствия. Переводчик должен передать не только смысл оригинального текста, но и его эстетические качества, культурные отсылки, эмоциональную глубину и авторский замысел. В статье рассматриваются основные проблемы, возникающие при переводе мировой литературы, в том числе структурные различия между языками, культурно-специфические элементы, идиомы и метафоры, сохранение авторского голоса, исторический контекст, игра слов и юмор, а также предлагаются возможные пути их решения на основе общепризнанных теорий перевода и практических стратегий. Теоретические концепции Ю. Найды, Дж. Кэтфорда, П.

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Ньюмарка, Л. Венути, Ж.-П. Вине и Ж. Дарбельне рассматриваются с точки зрения их практического применения к художественным текстам. Особое внимание уделяется реалиям, идиоматическим выражениям, метафорам, стилистическим особенностям и сохранению художественного смысла. В статье доказывается, что успешный художественный перевод требует сочетания языковой компетенции, культурной осведомлённости, творческого подхода и методологической гибкости. Кроме того, рассматривается возможный вклад цифровых технологий и искусственного интеллекта в современную переводческую практику, а также даются практические рекомендации для переводчиков и для программ их профессиональной подготовки.

Ключевые слова: художественный перевод, мировая литература, переводческая эквивалентность, культурные реалии, переводческие стратегии, межкультурная коммуникация, искусственный интеллект.

1. Introduction

World literature represents the intellectual, cultural, and artistic achievements of different nations. Through literary works, readers gain access to unfamiliar cultures, historical experiences, philosophical perspectives, and diverse systems of values. Translation serves as a bridge between languages and cultures, allowing literary works to reach audiences beyond their original linguistic communities.

Nevertheless, translating literary texts is considerably more complex than transferring information from one language into another. Literary works frequently contain culturally specific references, figurative expressions, wordplay, stylistic variations, and implicit meanings that are deeply rooted in the source culture. Consequently, a translator must make numerous decisions concerning the relationship between linguistic accuracy, cultural authenticity, readability, and artistic expression.

Nida [5] emphasizes the importance of reproducing the relationship between a message and its audience, while Newmark [4] discusses different approaches to semantic and communicative translation. These perspectives demonstrate that literary

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translation requires more than grammatical knowledge; it involves interpretation, cultural mediation, and creative decision-making [1, 3].

The purpose of this article is to identify the principal problems associated with translating world literature and to suggest practical solutions that can improve the quality, adequacy, and effectiveness of literary translations.

2. Major Problems in Translating World Literature

2.1. Linguistic and Structural Differences

One of the most common problems in literary translation arises from structural differences between languages. Languages differ in their grammatical systems, sentence structures, word order, morphological features, and lexical resources. A construction that sounds natural in one language may appear awkward or excessively complicated when translated literally into another.

For example, English frequently employs complex subordinate clauses and compact noun phrases, whereas Uzbek may require a different sentence structure to convey the same meaning naturally. Similarly, grammatical categories and expressions of tense, modality, and emphasis may not correspond directly across languages.

Literal translation can therefore result in unnatural phrasing, ambiguity, or the loss of stylistic effect.

Possible solutions: Translators should consider grammatical transformation, transposition, modulation, and sentence restructuring. Rather than reproducing the original structure mechanically, they should preserve the intended meaning and communicative function of the passage. Catford [2] provides a theoretical foundation for understanding linguistic shifts in translation, while Vinay and Darbelnet [7] discuss procedures that can help translators address structural differences between languages.

2.2. Cultural Differences and Culture-Specific Elements

Cultural differences represent one of the most challenging aspects of translating world literature. Literary works often contain references to traditional clothing, food, religious practices, social institutions, historical events, customs, and forms of address. Such elements are frequently referred to as *realia* or culture-specific items.

A cultural concept familiar to readers of the original text may be completely unfamiliar to readers of the translated version. Replacing it with a seemingly equivalent concept from the target culture can distort the historical or cultural identity of the



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original work. Conversely, retaining every foreign expression without explanation may make the text difficult to understand.

For instance, the terms *kimono*, *samovar*, and *mahalla* refer to cultural realities that cannot always be adequately represented by a single equivalent in another language. Their significance may extend beyond their immediate denotative meanings and reflect specific traditions, social relationships, or cultural practices.

Possible solutions: Translators should select an appropriate strategy according to the function of the cultural element and the intended readership. Possible approaches include borrowing, transliteration, descriptive translation, contextual explanation, and the use of footnotes or a glossary. The decision should preserve cultural authenticity while ensuring that the translated text remains accessible.

Venuti [6] examines the relationship between domestication and foreignization, two influential approaches to cultural representation in translation. Domestication adapts certain features to the expectations of target readers, whereas foreignization retains elements of the source culture to make its distinctiveness visible. A balanced application of these approaches can help translators preserve both cultural identity and readability.

2.3. Idioms, Metaphors, and Figurative Language

Idiomatic expressions and figurative language are essential components of literary style. Writers use metaphors, similes, irony, symbolism, proverbs, and idioms to communicate complex meanings and create particular emotional effects. However, such expressions often depend on cultural associations and linguistic conventions that cannot be transferred directly into another language.

For example, the English idiom “*to spill the beans*” means to reveal a secret. A word-for-word translation into another language would communicate the literal image of spilling beans rather than the intended meaning.

Metaphors create similar difficulties. An author may use a particular image to represent fear, freedom, isolation, or social conflict. If the translator replaces that image without considering its symbolic function, the literary meaning may be weakened or altered.

Possible solutions: Translators should first identify the intended meaning and stylistic function of the expression. They can then use an equivalent idiom, reproduce the metaphor where it remains understandable, replace it with a functionally comparable expression, or provide a more explicit rendering when necessary.

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The most appropriate strategy depends on the relationship between meaning, imagery, and literary effect. Where the original image is central to the author's artistic vision, retaining it may be preferable to replacing it with a culturally familiar but less precise expression.

2.4. Preservation of Style and Authorial Voice

Every literary author develops a distinctive voice through lexical choices, sentence patterns, rhythm, tone, imagery, and narrative techniques. Some writers use short and direct sentences, while others employ elaborate descriptions, complex syntax, or poetic language. Dialogue may also reveal differences in age, social class, education, personality, or regional background.

A translation that conveys the plot accurately but changes the author's distinctive style may fail to reproduce the full literary experience.

For instance, simplifying a deliberately fragmented narrative can eliminate its psychological tension. Similarly, making the dialogue of every character equally formal may erase important differences between their personalities and social positions.

Possible solutions: Translators should conduct a stylistic analysis before beginning the translation. This involves examining the author's vocabulary, syntax, register, figurative language, narrative perspective, and use of dialogue. Maintaining a consistent translation style is equally important, particularly in long novels and literary series.

Close reading, comparative analysis, and revision can help ensure that the translated work preserves the original author's voice without producing unnatural language in the target text.

2.5. Historical and Social Context

Many literary works reflect particular historical periods, political circumstances, social hierarchies, and intellectual movements. References that were immediately recognizable to contemporary readers of the original text may be unfamiliar to modern readers or readers from different cultural backgrounds.

Historical distance can also affect the interpretation of words. A term may have acquired new meanings over time, while a seemingly ordinary expression may carry political, religious, or social implications in its original context.

Possible solutions: Translators should undertake historical and contextual research before interpreting unfamiliar references. Reliable dictionaries, historical documents, scholarly commentaries, and previous translations can provide useful evidence. When

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necessary, translators may include explanatory notes to clarify information that is essential to understanding the text.

However, explanations should be used selectively. Excessive commentary can interrupt the narrative and weaken the aesthetic experience. The objective is to provide sufficient context without unnecessarily burdening the reader.

2.6. Wordplay, Humour, and Ambiguity

Wordplay, puns, and humour are particularly difficult to translate because they frequently depend on the phonological, grammatical, or semantic characteristics of a particular language. A joke may be based on two meanings of a word, similar-sounding expressions, or a cultural reference that has no direct equivalent in the target language.

Translating such expressions literally may preserve their surface meaning while eliminating their humorous effect. In other cases, a translator may reproduce the joke but lose an important connection with the surrounding narrative.

Possible solutions: Translators should identify the primary function of the wordplay before selecting a strategy. Depending on the context, they may create a new linguistic pun, use a different form of humour, compensate for the lost effect elsewhere in the text, or provide a brief explanation.

Compensation can be especially useful when a linguistic effect cannot be reproduced at the same point in the translated text. Nevertheless, creative adaptation should not introduce meanings that contradict the author's intentions or significantly alter the plot.

3. Translation Theories and Their Practical Application

Translation theories provide useful frameworks for addressing the challenges described above. Although no single theory can resolve every literary translation problem, different approaches can guide translators in making informed decisions.

Nida's [5] distinction between formal and dynamic equivalence highlights the relationship between the original message and the response of the target audience. Formal equivalence places greater emphasis on the form and content of the source text, whereas dynamic equivalence focuses on producing a comparable effect on the target readership.

Newmark [4] distinguishes between semantic and communicative translation. Semantic translation seeks to preserve the contextual meaning of the original while respecting its linguistic characteristics. Communicative translation places greater emphasis on clarity and the effect of the message on target readers. In literary translation,

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the translator may need to combine these orientations according to the text's genre, purpose, and stylistic features.

Venuti's [6] discussion of domestication and foreignization is particularly relevant to culturally specific elements. These approaches help explain why translators must decide whether to adapt unfamiliar references or preserve their foreign characteristics.

The practical value of these theories lies in their flexibility. Translators should not apply one method mechanically to every expression. Instead, they should evaluate the function of each linguistic or cultural element within the broader literary context.

4. The Role of Technology and Artificial Intelligence

Digital technologies have significantly changed contemporary translation practices. Machine translation systems, electronic dictionaries, digital corpora, terminology databases, and artificial intelligence tools can assist translators in identifying possible equivalents, comparing expressions, and checking linguistic consistency.

These technologies are particularly useful during the preliminary stages of translation and revision. They can help identify alternative wordings, detect repeated terminology, and provide initial interpretations of unfamiliar expressions.

However, automated systems continue to present limitations in literary translation. They may misinterpret irony, overlook historical references, produce culturally inappropriate equivalents, or fail to recognize the symbolic significance of a particular expression. They may also generate fluent sentences that subtly alter the author's meaning or tone.

Possible solutions: Artificial intelligence should be treated as a supporting tool rather than an independent substitute for literary expertise. Translators should verify machine-generated suggestions against the original text, consult reliable reference materials, and evaluate the cultural and stylistic implications of each proposed equivalent.

Human judgement remains essential because literary translation involves interpretative responsibility and artistic decision-making. The most effective approach combines technological assistance with linguistic knowledge, cultural competence, and careful editorial revision.

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5. Recommendations for Improving Literary Translation

Based on the problems discussed above, several practical recommendations can be proposed.

First, translators should develop strong competence in both the source and target languages. This includes not only grammar and vocabulary but also idiomatic usage, stylistic variation, discourse conventions, and literary traditions.

Second, cultural competence should be considered an essential part of translator education. Translators need to understand the historical and social contexts in which literary works were produced, as well as the expectations and background knowledge of target readers.

Third, literary translation should involve systematic revision. Comparing the translated text with the original can help identify omissions, semantic shifts, inconsistencies, and stylistic weaknesses. Independent proofreading and feedback from subject specialists can further improve the quality of the final text.

Fourth, translators should establish clear principles for handling cultural realia, metaphors, idioms, and explanatory notes. Consistent decision-making is especially important when translating a novel or a series of interconnected works.

Fifth, collaboration between translators, literary scholars, editors, and cultural experts should be encouraged. Such cooperation can improve the interpretation of complex references and reduce the risk of cultural misrepresentation.

Finally, translator training programmes should combine theoretical knowledge with practical exercises. Students should analyse alternative translations, justify their choices, identify potential losses of meaning, and evaluate how different strategies affect the target readership.

6. Conclusion

The translation of world literature is a complex intellectual and creative activity that requires much more than linguistic substitution. Translators must negotiate differences in grammar, vocabulary, cultural knowledge, figurative language, historical context, and literary style while attempting to preserve the meaning and artistic identity of the original work.

The principal challenges include linguistic and structural differences, culture-specific items, idiomatic expressions, metaphors, authorial voice, historical references,

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humour, and ambiguity. These problems can be addressed through a combination of contextual analysis, appropriate translation strategies, cultural research, systematic revision, and the selective use of technological tools.

Translation theories developed by Nida, Catford, Newmark, Venuti, and other scholars provide valuable conceptual frameworks for understanding these challenges. Nevertheless, successful literary translation depends on the translator's ability to apply theoretical principles critically and creatively rather than mechanically.

Ultimately, the quality of a literary translation should be evaluated not only by its linguistic accuracy but also by its ability to communicate the cultural depth, emotional resonance, stylistic richness, and artistic intentions of the original. By combining linguistic precision with cultural sensitivity and creative responsibility, translators can contribute to a deeper understanding of world literature and strengthen intercultural communication.

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