

LINGUOCULTURAL FEATURES OF THE TRANSLATION OF LITERARY WORKS

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Abstract. *This paper examines linguocultural aspects of literary translation, showing how cultural differences shape meaning. It discusses literal and free translation strategies and emphasizes the role of cultural adaptation in achieving accurate and effective intercultural communication.*

Keywords: *translation, culture, adaptation, literal translation, free translation, linguocultural analysis.*

INTRODUCTION.

Translation is not only a process of converting words from one language into another; it is also a complex act of transferring cultural meanings, values, and worldviews. A translator functions as a cultural mediator, creating a bridge between two different linguistic and cultural systems. Therefore, translation always involves both linguistic and cultural interpretation, since the text being translated carries not only verbal information but also the cultural knowledge and worldview of its original speakers [1, 10].

The cultural dimension of translation has long been recognized by scholars. Petrus Danielus Huetius defines translation as “a text written in a well-known language that refers to a text in a less-known language” [2, 12]. This definition raises important cultural questions: Why do societies translate foreign texts? What motivates the transfer of ideas across cultural boundaries? According to S. Basnett, when one culture translates foreign texts, it often signals that those texts are perceived as valuable sources of knowledge or perspectives that the recipient culture feels it lacks. Translation thus becomes a way of enriching the target culture through external linguistic and conceptual resources.

Translation plays a crucial role in bringing new ideas into a culture, which may strengthen, challenge, or transform existing traditions. As Lawrence Venuti notes, translation is closely connected to power, ideology, and representation. The translator not only transmits meaning but also influences how the source culture will be perceived by the target audience [1, 18]. This raises important questions regarding agency: Who translates? For what purpose? What cultural values guide their decisions? Venuti emphasizes that translation is never neutral; it involves choices that can either reveal or obscure cultural differences.

The issue of trust in the translator is also central. Huetius discusses the idea of “trustworthy interpreters,” referring to translators whose authority and cultural credibility allowed their versions – such as early translations of the Bible into Greek – to become accepted even when they contained inaccuracies. In such cases, the perceived trustworthiness of the translator outweighed the demand for literal precision [2, 20]. This shows that translation is both a cultural and social act, shaped not only by linguistic competence but also by the translator’s cultural standing.

Taken together, these perspectives highlight translation as a multidimensional activity situated at the intersection of linguistic structure and cultural interpretation. This paper explores the linguocultural features of literary translation by examining the tension between literal and free translation, the role of cultural adaptation, and the translator’s responsibility in shaping intercultural understanding. To illustrate these issues, the study

analyzes several case studies from different historical periods, demonstrating how translation decisions influence the representation of cultural meaning in the target language.

One of the central challenges in linguocultural translation is determining how much of the source culture should be preserved in the target text. This dilemma is traditionally described in terms of two opposite approaches: **literal translation** and **free translation**. Each approach prioritizes different aspects of the original text and offers different solutions to cultural differences. Literal translation attempts to reproduce the lexical, structural, and cultural features of the source text as closely as possible. Its goal is to immerse the target reader in the foreign culture, even if certain elements may seem strange or unfamiliar. In contrast, free translation involves extensive linguistic and cultural adaptation, aiming to make the text more relatable to the target audience by reducing foreignness. Goethe summarized these approaches by stating that either “the foreign author is brought to us” or “we go to the foreigner and adapt to their way of life, their language, their peculiarities” [3, 21]. Free translation often results in an excessive domestication of the text. By adapting cultural elements too heavily, the translator risks erasing important aspects of the source culture, giving readers the false impression that cultural differences do not exist. Historically, this practice has been widespread. Many early translations of Homer and Herodotus into Latin removed Greek cultural elements, replacing them with Roman concepts to make the works more familiar to Roman readers. Such strategies show how free translation can distort the cultural meaning of the original, reducing its authenticity.

At the same time, literal translation also presents significant problems. When a translator follows the structure and cultural logic of the source text too closely, the resulting translation may appear foreign, difficult, or even incomprehensible to the target reader. The principle “Everything that can be translated, should be translated” guided many translators of the 19th century who believed that preserving the original structure was essential. However, such an approach often fails to consider the linguistic norms, literary expectations, and cultural background knowledge of the target audience. This can hinder the reader’s aesthetic appreciation of the work.

It is important to distinguish between **literal translation** and **literalism**. Literal translation is not inherently negative; it can be effective if it maintains clarity and respects the norms of the target language. If the transfer of meaning and structure does not violate linguistic or stylistic standards, a literal translation may successfully achieve equivalence. **Literalism**, however, is always considered negative. It involves blindly copying the surface structure of the source text without acknowledging linguistic or cultural differences. This leads to distortions, awkward phrasing, and a loss of artistic or emotional impact.

To address the cultural dimension of translation, scholars have proposed different levels of cultural adaptation. Cultural differences may create barriers to understanding that require additional contextualization, explanation, or modification during the translation process. When background knowledge is lacking, the pragmatic intent of the original may be lost. Consequently, translators must sometimes introduce cultural or pragmatic adjustments to ensure communicative equivalence.

For example, E. Nida notes that the English phrase “common people” had to be adapted into the Maya language as “people who live on the outskirts of the village,” since in Yucatan culture, physical distance from the village center reflects social status [4, 16]. In another case, A. Neubert explains that translating Shakespeare’s line “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?” literally into Arabic may evoke negative associations, because a summer day in Arab culture is not associated with beauty but with heat. Replacing it with “a spring day” preserves the intended poetic effect [5, 66; 181].

Linguocultural differences are central to translation challenges. Even when words are translatable, their cultural associations may not exist in the target culture, causing misunderstandings that language alone cannot resolve. As A. Neubert notes, communication depends on shared background knowledge; when this differs across cultures, translation must compensate for lost contextual meaning [5].

A major difficulty is translating concepts with no direct cultural equivalent, such as social practices, religious ideas, or historical realities. Translators must decide whether to preserve, explain, or adapt these

elements, influencing how the target culture perceives the source. For example, E. Nida shows that “common people” was rendered as “people who live on the outskirts” in Maya, reflecting local social hierarchy [4, 16].

Linguocultural divergence also affects figurative language. A. Neubert describes translating Shakespeare’s “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?” into Arabic: a literal translation fails, so “summer day” becomes “spring day” to preserve the intended poetic and emotional effect [5, 66; 181]. These examples show that maintaining cultural and emotional resonance often outweighs formal equivalence.

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