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THE ART OF LITERARY TRANSLATION: NAVIGATING LANGUAGE, SPEECH ACTS AND CULTURE

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Abstract

Literary translation stands as a nuanced bridge between languages and cultures. It involves not only the accurate rendering of meaning but also the preservation of an author's unique voice, imagery, and emotional tone. This paper explores the central challenges in literary translation, including speech acts, idiomatic expressions, cultural references, poetic devices, and grammatical structures. Drawing on examples from Uzbek, Russian, and English, it analyzes how translators must employ creativity, linguistic sensitivity, and cultural insight to produce translations that are both faithful and emotionally resonant. Through practical comparisons and examples, this paper argues that a successful literary translation is not a mechanical process, but rather a form of artistic recreation that ensures literature transcends linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Keywords: Literary translation, speech acts, request, cultural equivalence, poetic expression, idioms, stylistic adaptation, emotional fidelity, linguistic creativity.

Introduction

Literary translation is one of the most intricate forms of linguistic practice. It requires the translator to go beyond the literal meanings of words and engage with the emotional and aesthetic core of a text. Rather than offering a word-for-word

rendition, the translator must recreate the spirit of the original work in a new cultural and linguistic context.

The role of **speech acts of request** in Uzbek and English literature is rich and multifaceted, often serving as a lens through which power dynamics, character relationships, social norms, and politeness strategies are revealed.

One of the primary challenges in literary translation is conveying idioms and culturally embedded expressions. For example, the English proverb “Don’t count your chickens before they hatch” is rendered in Uzbek as “Jo‘jani kuzda sanashadi,” and in Russian as “Цыплят по осени считают.” While these expressions share the same core meaning, they differ in cultural resonance and emotional tone. A competent translator must therefore understand the cultural implications and choose equivalents that preserve the original's intent and emotional nuance.

Emotional coloration is another critical component. Consider the English sentence: “Her heart sank when she read the letter.” This phrase conveys a sudden emotional collapse—grief, dread, or disappointment. In Uzbek, an effective equivalent might be “Xatni o‘qigach, yuragi uvishib ketdi,” which expresses silent inner turmoil. In Russian, it could be translated as “Когда она прочитала письмо, у неё сердце сжалось,” where “сердце сжалось” suggests a physical tightening caused by emotional distress. These versions all express the same idea, but their literal translations differ. A word-for-word translation would fail to deliver the emotional impact unless adjusted creatively.

Poetic translation is particularly demanding. Translators must preserve rhyme, rhythm, and meaning. For instance, in translating a couplet by Alisher Navoi from Uzbek:

Original:

“Ey yor, sening vasling men uchun hayot o‘zagi,
Sen yo‘q joyda hayot o‘z-o‘zidan bo‘lak bir o‘lim.”

English translation:

“Oh beloved, your presence is the essence of my life,
Without you, life itself turns into another death.”

Here, the translator retains the structure, emotion, and metaphor of the original, demonstrating how translation becomes a poetic act itself.

Lexical ambiguity also presents significant challenges. In Shakespeare's iconic line from Hamlet, "To be or not to be, that is the question," the verb "to be" carries philosophical weight. Its Uzbek equivalent, "Bo'lish yoki bo'lmaslik, mana shu savol," captures the existential tension. However, the translator must ensure that the translation preserves the abstract notions of identity, existence, and mortality embedded in the phrase.

Linguistic structures also vary significantly across languages. English typically prefers concise syntax and a direct use of tenses, while Russian and Uzbek often rely on complex clauses. Compare:

Russian: "Когда я пришёл домой, мама уже приготовила ужин."

Uzbek: "Uyga kelganimda, onam allaqachon kechki ovqatni tayyorlagan edi."

English: "By the time I got home, my mother had already made dinner."

In this case, the use of the past perfect in English must replace the time-based clauses of Uzbek and Russian. Grammar becomes an active part of meaning-making in translation.

Preserving cultural identity is also vital in literary translation. Many national works are deeply rooted in local customs, traditions, and social environments. Consider this example from Qodiriy's "Bygone years":

Uzbek: "Choyxonada yig'ilganlar chaqchaqlashib, sho'xlik qilishar, shovqin-suron go'yoki kechani yoritar edi."

English: "In the teahouse, the gathering was lively, filled with jokes and laughter, as if the noise illuminated the night."

The term "choyxona" (teahouse) is retained in the translation because there is no true cultural equivalent in English that captures its atmosphere. Leaving the term untranslated helps preserve cultural specificity while providing insight into local life.

In literary translation, it is not just about rendering words from one language to another—it is about recreating the meaning, tone, cultural nuance, and intention behind those words. Here's how speech act theory plays in:

1. Preserving Illocutionary Force

A character in a novel might threaten, beg, or mock. A translator must preserve this illocutionary force. For example, sarcasm in English might not have a direct equivalent in Japanese or Arabic. The translator must find a culturally and contextually appropriate way to express the same act.

2. Cultural Differences in Speech Acts

What counts as a polite request in English may be seen as overly direct or indirect in other cultures. Translators often adapt speech acts to fit cultural expectations while keeping character integrity and plot function intact.

3. Perlocutionary Effects and Reader Response

A translator might adjust tone or formality so that the target reader feels the same way a source-language reader would.

Example: Humor, irony, or threats—these all depend on context and delivery. Getting the reader’s reaction right is often more important than word-for-word fidelity.

In conclusion, literary translation is more than a linguistic task—it is an art form that involves interpreting language, emotion, and culture with sensitivity and creativity. A good literary translation does not simply carry over meaning; it evokes the same emotional and aesthetic response in the target reader as the original does in its native audience. The translator becomes a co-creator, shaping a new experience that honors the original while resonating within a different cultural context. As such, literary translation demands both academic rigor and artistic intuition, ensuring that literature remains alive and meaningful across borders and generations. When analyzing literature, looking at how characters ask for things—and how others respond—can reveal: the moral compass of characters, thematic tensions (e.g., between duty and desire), and underlying societal pressures.

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