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METHODS OF PRESERVING SOCIAL-HISTORICAL COLOURING IN THE TRANSLATION OF LITERARY WORKS

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Abstract

The preservation of social-historical colouring in literary translation represents one of the most complex and intellectually demanding tasks in translation studies. Literary texts frequently embody the historical atmosphere, social stratification, cultural realities, ideological tendencies, linguistic peculiarities, and national worldview of a particular epoch. Consequently, translators are expected not only to transfer semantic meaning but also to reproduce the cultural and historical identity embedded within the source text. The present article examines the principal methods used to preserve social-historical colouring in the translation of literary works. Particular attention is devoted to the translation of historical realia, archaic vocabulary, dialectal expressions, culture-specific references, and sociolects. The article also investigates the significance of compensation, transliteration, descriptive translation, footnotes, contextual adaptation, and stylistic equivalence as major techniques in conveying the historical and social atmosphere of literary texts. Furthermore, the study analyses the challenges faced by translators when working with historically marked works and discusses the balance between domestication and foreignization strategies. Examples from English and Russian literary traditions are employed to illustrate the practical application of these methods. The findings demonstrate that the successful preservation of social-historical colouring requires not only linguistic competence but also profound historical, cultural, and literary awareness.

Keywords: literary translation, social-historical colouring, translation strategies, historical realia, compensation, archaic vocabulary, cultural adaptation, foreignization, domestication, stylistic equivalence

Literary translation has long been regarded as one of the most sophisticated forms of intercultural communication. Unlike technical or scientific translation, literary translation transcends the mere transmission of information and seeks to recreate aesthetic value, emotional resonance, and cultural authenticity. One of the most essential aspects of literary translation is the preservation of social-historical colouring, which refers to the linguistic and cultural features reflecting the social structure, historical background, traditions, customs, and worldview of a particular era. Social-historical colouring performs several important functions in literary texts. Firstly, it establishes the temporal and geographical setting of a narrative. Secondly, it characterizes social classes, professional groups, and cultural identities. Thirdly, it contributes to the authenticity and artistic atmosphere of the work. When translating literary texts, preserving these elements becomes particularly challenging because the target audience may not possess the same cultural or historical background as the readers of the original text. According to Newmark (1988), translation involves not only the transfer of language but also the transfer of culture. Similarly, Venuti (1995) emphasizes that translation is deeply connected with ideological and cultural representation. The translator must therefore act as both a linguistic mediator and a cultural interpreter. In the context

of historical literary works, this responsibility becomes even more significant because the translator must preserve the historical authenticity of the text while ensuring readability for modern readers. The issue of preserving social-historical colouring has attracted considerable scholarly attention within translation studies. Researchers have explored various methods and strategies aimed at maintaining the historical and cultural atmosphere of literary texts. Nevertheless, the problem remains relevant because each literary work contains unique stylistic and historical features requiring individual translation solutions. The present article aims to investigate the principal methods used to preserve social-historical colouring in literary translation and to evaluate their effectiveness in conveying the historical and cultural essence of the original work.

The Concept of Social-Historical Colouring

Social-historical colouring may be defined as the totality of linguistic, stylistic, and cultural elements that reflect the social and historical context of a literary work. These elements include archaic vocabulary, historical realia, idiomatic expressions, dialects, sociolects, titles, forms of address, references to customs and traditions, and culturally specific phenomena. In literary works, social-historical colouring serves as an artistic mechanism that immerses readers in a particular epoch. Historical novels, for instance, rely heavily on historically marked vocabulary and stylistic features to recreate the atmosphere of a specific period. Charles Dickens's novels vividly depict Victorian England through descriptions of class inequality, urban poverty, and social customs. Similarly, the works of Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky reflect the social and ideological complexities of nineteenth-century Russian society. Nida (1964) argues that language is inseparable from culture because linguistic forms inevitably reflect cultural realities. Consequently, when translating socially and historically marked texts, translators encounter the challenge of conveying not only lexical meaning but also cultural associations and historical implications. The preservation of social-historical colouring is especially significant because its loss may result in cultural neutralization. If translators excessively modernize or simplify historical language, the literary work may lose its authenticity and artistic depth. Therefore, translators must carefully balance intelligibility and historical accuracy.

Historical Realia and Their Translation

One of the primary components of social-historical colouring is historical realia. Realia are culture-specific words and expressions denoting objects, institutions, customs, titles, and phenomena unique to a particular historical or cultural environment. Examples of historical realia include words such as "samovar," "kimono," "sheriff," "tsar," "countess," and "yeoman." These terms possess not only denotative meaning but also historical and cultural associations.

According to Vlakhov and Florin (1980), realia constitute one of the most difficult categories in translation because they frequently lack direct equivalents in the target language. Translators therefore employ various methods to preserve their historical and cultural significance.

Transliteration and Transcription

Transliteration involves transferring the original form of a word into the target language using corresponding letters, whereas transcription reproduces pronunciation. These methods preserve the foreign and historical character of the source text. For example, the Russian word "самовар" is commonly translated as "samovar" rather than replaced with a generic phrase such as "tea kettle." This strategy allows readers to encounter the cultural specificity of Russian life. Similarly, titles

such as “tsar” or “boyar” are usually preserved through transliteration because replacing them with approximate equivalents like “king” or “nobleman” would distort historical meaning. However, transliteration alone may create comprehension difficulties for readers unfamiliar with the cultural context. Consequently, translators often combine transliteration with explanatory notes.

Translation of Archaic Vocabulary

Archaic vocabulary constitutes a significant marker of historical atmosphere in literary works. Authors often employ archaic words and grammatical structures to evoke a sense of antiquity and historical distance. Examples include words such as “thou,” “thee,” “hath,” and “wherefore” in English literature. In historical fiction, archaic vocabulary contributes to stylistic authenticity and temporal characterization. The translation of archaic language presents considerable difficulties because the target language may lack corresponding historical forms. Translators must therefore decide whether to preserve archaism, modernize the text, or employ stylistic approximation.

Stylistic Equivalence

One effective method involves the use of stylistic equivalence. Instead of reproducing exact archaic forms, translators select target-language expressions that create a similar historical impression. For example, translators of Shakespeare into Uzbek or Russian often employ elevated or old-fashioned vocabulary to imitate the stylistic effect of Elizabethan English. This method prioritizes functional equivalence rather than literal reproduction. According to Catford (1965), successful translation depends on achieving equivalence of communicative effect rather than formal similarity.

Partial Modernization

Some translators choose partial modernization to ensure readability for contemporary audiences. In this approach, archaic structures are simplified while key historical markers remain intact. For example, modern translations of medieval texts may replace obsolete grammar with contemporary syntax but preserve historical terminology and stylistic tone. Although modernization improves accessibility, excessive simplification may eliminate the historical atmosphere of the original work.

Dialects and Sociolects in Literary Translation

Dialects and sociolects play a crucial role in representing social identity, regional background, and class distinctions in literary works. Authors frequently use nonstandard speech to characterize individuals and social groups. Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, and William Faulkner extensively employed dialectal speech to portray social diversity and regional identity.

Translating such linguistic variation presents serious challenges because dialects are deeply connected to specific cultural and geographical contexts.

Functional Substitution

One common strategy involves functional substitution. Translators replace the source-language dialect with a target-language variety capable of producing a comparable social effect. For example, a rural dialect in an English novel may be translated using colloquial or regionally marked

expressions in the target language. However, this method carries certain risks. Substituting one dialect with another may introduce unintended cultural associations and distort the original setting.

Neutralization

Some translators choose neutralization by reducing dialectal features and focusing primarily on semantic meaning. This method improves readability but weakens social characterization. The loss of dialectal speech may diminish the individuality of characters and reduce the sociocultural richness of the literary work.

In conclusion, preserving social-historical colouring is a multidimensional process that combines linguistic accuracy, cultural sensitivity, historical awareness, and creative interpretation. The translator's task is not simply to reproduce words but to reconstruct an entire cultural and historical reality for readers belonging to another linguistic community. Therefore, the preservation of social-historical colouring remains one of the primary indicators of high-quality literary translation.

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