BG Pulse Journal USA
ISSN:1947-2536 http://www.bgpulseusa.com/index.php/bg

THE NATURE OF STYLISTIC ADAPTATION IN LITERARY TRANSLATION: ON THE EXAMPLE OF FRENCH–UZBEK TRANSLATIONS

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Doi: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21911865

Abstract: This article investigates the mechanisms and typology of stylistic adaptation employed in the French-to-Uzbek literary translation of two significant historical narratives: Marcel Brion's *Tamerlan* and Lucien Kehren's *Tamerlan: l'empire du Seigneur de Fer*, both rendered into Uzbek by the translator B. Ermatov. Drawing on contrastive stylistic analysis and descriptive translation studies, the study examines how lexical, syntactic and rhetorical elements of the source texts are transformed in the target-language versions to meet the aesthetic and cultural expectations of an Uzbek readership. A corpus of 120 aligned source–target segments was compiled and coded against a purpose-built taxonomy. The findings indicate that stylistic adaptation is not a peripheral corrective measure but a constitutive dimension of the translation process, governed by both linguistic constraints and cultural pragmatics. The article proposes a three-tier framework of stylistic adaptation — *compensatory*, *integrative* and *neutralizing* — and illustrates each category with textual examples drawn from the corpora under investigation.

Keywords: stylistic adaptation; literary translation; French–Uzbek translation; Marcel Brion; Lucien Kehren; B. Ermatov; translation strategies; cultural transposition; lexical transformation.

1. Introduction

Literary translation occupies a distinctive position at the intersection of linguistics, cultural studies and aesthetics. Unlike technical or pragmatic translation, it demands not only semantic fidelity but also the preservation — or deliberate recreation — of the stylistic qualities that constitute the literary identity of the source text. The concept of stylistic adaptation, broadly understood as the purposeful modification of textual features in order to produce an equivalent or functionally corresponding effect in the target language, has attracted increasing scholarly attention in contemporary translation studies (Newmark, 1988; Toury, 1995; Venuti, 1995).

The French–Uzbek language pair presents a particularly compelling case for the study of stylistic adaptation, given the profound typological divergence between the two languages. French, a Romance language with an elaborated system of tense, aspect and mood and with cohesive devices rooted in the Indo-European tradition, stands in sharp contrast to Uzbek, a Turkic agglutinative language with distinct discourse conventions, pragmatic norms and a rich tradition of literary expression drawing on classical Persian and Turkic poetic heritage.

The present study focuses on two landmark historical narratives that together constitute the corpus for the analysis: Marcel Brion's *Tamerlan* (1963), published in Uzbek as *Amir Temur*, and Lucien Kehren's *Tamerlan: l'empire du Seigneur de Fer* (1978), published in Uzbek as *Amir Temur saltanati*. Both works were rendered into Uzbek by the translator B. Ermatov, whose versions represent a sustained and sophisticated engagement with the stylistic challenges these texts pose. The figure of Amir Temur (Tamerlane), the fourteenth-century Turco-Mongol conqueror and

founder of the Timurid Empire, occupies a central place in Uzbek national identity and historical memory, a circumstance that further complicates the translator's task: the target audience brings specific cultural and emotional expectations to any literary portrayal of this figure.

The central research question animating this article is the following: by what mechanisms does B. Ermatov adapt the stylistic structures of the French source texts, and what principles govern the choices he makes? Three subsidiary questions follow from it. (1) Which categories of stylistic feature undergo the most significant transformation? (2) How do cultural and pragmatic factors interact with purely linguistic constraints in shaping those transformations? (3) What broader theoretical implications do the findings hold for our understanding of stylistic adaptation as a translational phenomenon?

The article is organised as follows. Section 2 sets out the theoretical framework and methodology. Sections 3 to 5 present the analysis at the lexical, syntactic–rhetorical and cultural–intertextual levels respectively. Section 6 discusses the findings and states the limitations of the study, and Section 7 concludes.

2. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

2.1. Theoretical framework

The theoretical underpinning of this study draws on a confluence of approaches within translation studies and stylistics. Peter Newmark's distinction between communicative and semantic translation (1988) provides a foundational axis, while Eugene Nida's concept of dynamic equivalence (1964) informs our understanding of how functional correspondence may supersede formal correspondence in literary contexts. More specifically, the study engages with the descriptive translation studies framework developed by Toury (1995), which foregrounds the role of target-culture norms in shaping translational decisions, and with the systemic perspective of Hermans (1999) and Bassnett (2002).

Stylistic adaptation, as theorised by Hervey and Higgins (1992) and Munday (2016), encompasses a spectrum of operations: lexical substitution, syntactic restructuring, rhetorical transposition, register adjustment and the reconfiguration of cohesive and coherence-building devices. Building on these accounts, the present analysis adopts a tripartite taxonomy of adaptation strategies:

(1) Compensatory adaptation — the translator introduces a stylistic feature at one textual location in order to compensate for the loss of an equivalent feature at another, thereby preserving the overall stylistic texture of the text;

(2) Integrative adaptation — the translator incorporates target-culture stylistic conventions, formulae or literary allusions in order to achieve an effect of naturalness and cultural resonance for the Uzbek reader;

(3) Neutralizing adaptation — the translator reduces or eliminates stylistic markedness present in the source text, whether for reasons of readability, register, or the constraints of the target linguistic system.

The three categories are not mutually exclusive at the level of the individual segment: a single translational decision may, for instance, neutralize a source-text figure while compensating for it through lexical enrichment elsewhere in the same period. The taxonomy is therefore applied to the

dominant function of each operation rather than to its exclusive one. Table 1 summarises the framework.

Table 1. A three-tier framework of stylistic adaptation

Category	Operating principle	Typical textual site
Compensatory	Stylistic loss at one point is offset by stylistic gain at another; overall texture is held constant.	Rhetorical figures, sentence rhythm, lexical density
Integrative	Target-culture conventions, formulae and allusions are imported to produce naturalness and cultural resonance.	Characterization, intertextual allusion, discourse markers
Neutralizing	Source-text markedness is reduced or removed for reasons of readability, register or cultural pragmatics.	Irony, understatement, exoticizing description

2.2. Corpus and method

The methodological approach is contrastive-analytical. Source-text passages were placed in systematic comparison with their target-text counterparts and annotated for the stylistic operations performed. The corpus comprises 120 aligned source–target segments, 65 drawn from the Uzbek Brion and 55 from the Uzbek Kehren, sampled proportionally from four functional text types — narrative description, characterization, battle narrative and direct speech — so that each type is represented in both sub-corpora. Segments were selected on the criterion of stylistic markedness in the source text: a passage entered the corpus only where the French original exhibited an identifiable stylistic feature (a rhetorical figure, a marked register, a periodic construction or a culturally loaded lexical item) whose treatment in translation could be assessed.

Each segment was coded by the author against the taxonomy set out in Section 2.1, with a back-translation into English produced for every Uzbek example so that the analysis remains verifiable for readers without Uzbek. The examples reproduced in Sections 3 to 5 were chosen to represent the range of stylistic phenomena in the corpus and the full spectrum of adaptation intensity; they are illustrative of recurrent patterns rather than isolated instances.

3. Lexical Stylistic Adaptation

Lexical choice is the most immediately visible site of stylistic adaptation, and the Ermatov translations offer extensive evidence of the translator's sensitivity to the affective and connotative dimensions of vocabulary. In Brion's text the prose is characterised by a preference for elevated,

Latinate diction and by a density of abstract nouns that produces a tone of measured historical grandeur. Consider the following passage describing Timur's advance:

« Il avançait avec la certitude tranquille d'un homme qui sait que le destin lui appartient, que la terre elle-même plie sous sa volonté souveraine. »

A literal rendering into Uzbek would produce an awkward blend of registers, since the cluster of abstract nouns (certitude tranquille, volonté souveraine) does not map onto natural Uzbek prose idiom. Ermatov's adaptation reads as follows:

"U taqdir o'ziga bo'ysunishini bilgan kishi ohangida, sokin va ishonch bilan qadam tashlardi — yerning o'zi ham uning irodasiga taslim bo'lgandek edi."

(Back translation: "He walked with the calm and confident bearing of a man who knew that fate obeyed him — the very earth seemed to have yielded to his will.")

Several lexical operations are observable here. First, the abstract noun phrase certitude tranquille ("quiet certainty") is rendered through a concrete behavioural image — sokin va ishonch bilan qadam tashlardi ("walked with calm and confidence"). This shift from abstract quality to embodied action accords with Uzbek literary conventions of characterization, which tend towards concretization and behavioural description rather than interior abstraction. Second, volonté souveraine ("sovereign will") is translated as irodasiga taslim bo'lgandek, where taslim ("surrendered, submitted") draws on a lexical field with deep resonance in Uzbek cultural and religious discourse, adding a connotative layer absent from the source text. Both operations are instances of integrative adaptation.

In Kehren's text the stylistic register is generally more martial and more overtly rhetorical, employing anaphora, tricolon and other figures of amplification characteristic of French classical historical writing. The translator's challenge here is to reproduce the cumulative rhetorical effect without importing syntactic structures foreign to Uzbek:

« Il frappait sans merci, il conquérait sans repos, il régnait sans partage. »

Ermatov retains the tricolon but adjusts the verb forms so as to exploit the expressive possibilities of Uzbek verbal morphology:

"U shafqatsiz urdi, tolmay fath etdi, mutlaq hukmronlik qildi."

(Back translation: "He struck mercilessly, conquered tirelessly, ruled with absolute dominion.")

The three-part structure is thus preserved, but the anaphoric repetition of the subject pronoun (il… il… il…) is not. An Uzbek anaphora on u would have been grammatically available; Ermatov nonetheless drops it in favour of a compact paratactic series, which carries its own rhythmic authority in Uzbek prose. The qualification sans partage ("undivided, unshared") is rendered as mutlaq ("absolute"), an Arabic-derived lexeme that carries strong political and theological connotations in the Uzbek literary tradition. Taken together, these decisions constitute compensatory adaptation: the explicit anaphora is lost, but the lexical enrichment of the final member offsets that loss by anchoring the climax of the tricolon in culturally charged diction.

4. Syntactic and Rhetorical Adaptation

Syntactic adaptation is perhaps the most structurally necessary dimension of French–Uzbek literary translation, given the verb-final SOV order of Uzbek as against the SVO order of French,

and the very different systems of subordination and cohesion operative in the two languages. Beyond the level of obligatory grammatical restructuring, however, Ermatov's translations exhibit a range of rhetorical choices that go well past grammatical necessity and engage directly with the target-language literary tradition.

Brion's historical prose frequently employs long periodic sentences with multiple embedded relative clauses, a syntactic figure associated with the French classical tradition and with the influence of Latin periodic style; such constructions produce an effect of accumulating, measured deliberation. Uzbek, by contrast, has traditionally favoured a more paratactic style in literary prose, with shorter sentences and participial constructions in place of finite relative clauses. Ermatov consistently resolves French hypotaxis into Uzbek parataxis, but does so with careful attention to semantic and affective coherence:

« Timour, qui avait traversé des déserts brûlants et des montagnes impraticables, qui avait vu périr ses meilleurs généraux et ses plus fidèles compagnons, restait inébranlable dans sa résolution. »

Ermatov's version:

"Temur yonuvchi cho'llarni, o'tib bo'lmas tog'larni bosib o'tgan, eng yaxshi sarkardalari va eng sodiq hamrohlarining halok bo'lganini ko'rgan — biroq u o'z qarorida sobitqadam edi."

(Back translation: "Temur had crossed burning deserts and impassable mountains, had seen his finest commanders and most loyal companions perish — yet he remained steadfast in his resolve.")

The two French relative clauses introduced by qui are converted into participial clauses (bosib o'tgan, ko'rgan), a construction idiomatic to Uzbek literary style. The em-dash preceding biroq introduces a pragmatic boundary marker absent from the source text but productive of a dramaturgic pause well suited, in Uzbek, to the rhetorical weight of the passage. This is a case of integrative adaptation: the translator introduces a rhetorical device native to the target literary tradition in order to produce a reading experience equivalent to — if not formally identical with — that produced by the periodic architecture of the source.

In Kehren's text a particular rhetorical challenge arises from the author's use of irony and understatement in describing military violence, a feature of French historiographical prose that sits uneasily with the more direct treatment of heroism and martial virtue characteristic of the Uzbek historical literary tradition. Ermatov tends to handle such passages through neutralizing adaptation, reducing or eliminating ironic distance in favour of direct affirmation:

« On pouvait, bien sûr, discuter la légitimité de ses méthodes ; ses ennemis, en tout cas, n'en avaient guère l'occasion. »

The sardonic understatement of the second clause — the implication being that Timur's enemies were in no position to raise objections because they had been annihilated — is rendered by Ermatov as a straightforward statement of military resolution, with the ironic register removed altogether. This is a neutralizing adaptation governed not by linguistic constraint but by cultural-pragmatic sensitivity: the implied belittlement of Timur's adversaries through irony could be received as ambiguous, or as disrespectful, by a readership for whom the historical figure carries profound symbolic significance. It should be noted that such a reading attributes an intention to the

translator that the textual evidence can support only inferentially; the claim is advanced here as the most economical explanation of a recurrent pattern, not as documented authorial intent.

5. Cultural and Intertextual Dimensions of Stylistic Adaptation

Stylistic adaptation in the Ermatov translations extends beyond the lexical and syntactic levels to the cultural and intertextual texture of the texts. Both Brion and Kehren, as French authors writing about a Central Asian historical figure, situate their narratives within a European orientalist literary framework, drawing on French and broader European conventions of historical romance and epic biography. The Uzbek translations must negotiate the transformation of this perspective: what was "exotic" or "oriental" for a French readership is, for an Uzbek reader, a matter of lived historical and cultural identity.

Ermatov's response to this challenge is multi-dimensional. Where the source texts deploy orientalist descriptive formulae for landscapes, customs and ceremonial practices, the translator consistently shifts register towards an insider perspective, replacing distant or aestheticizing description with more culturally embedded formulations. When Brion characterises the practice of the Timurid court as « les rites mystérieux de l'Orient » ("the mysterious rites of the Orient"), for example, Ermatov renders the phrase simply as sharq udumlariga ko'ra ("according to Eastern custom"), substituting a matter-of-fact ethnographic formulation for the mystifying distance of the original and thereby naturalising rather than exoticizing the practice.

A further dimension of cultural adaptation concerns intertextual allusion. Both source texts contain echoes of French and European literary traditions — implicit comparisons of Timur with figures from Greco-Roman history, stylistic gestures towards Voltaire's historiographical prose, and phrases that carry weight within the French literary canon. Such allusions are largely inaccessible to an Uzbek reader, and Ermatov handles them by substituting allusions drawn from the Uzbek–Turkic literary heritage. In several instances, passages that evoke Alexander the Great through French cultural reference are rendered with allusions to the Iskandar tradition — the Turkic reception of Alexander — as mediated through classical poetry, and in particular through Navoi's Saddi Iskandariy.

Such intertextual adaptation reflects what Pym (2010) calls risk management in translation: the translator assumes the risk of departing from the formal features of the source text in order to secure a reading experience that is functionally and aesthetically equivalent for the target reader. In the Ermatov translations this risk is managed with considerable sophistication, producing target texts that are at once faithful to the historical and ideational content of the originals and fully integrated into the Uzbek literary tradition.

6. Discussion

The analysis presented in the preceding sections supports a view of stylistic adaptation as a systematically motivated, multi-level translational operation rather than an ad hoc series of local adjustments. The three-tier framework proposed in Section 2 proves analytically productive in that it permits adaptation strategies to be differentiated according to their functional rationale and their relationship to the source and target literary systems.

The Ermatov translations reveal a consistent pattern of preferences that may be related to three governing principles. First, there is a strong orientation towards the conventions of the Uzbek

literary-historical prose tradition, leading to systematic choices of integrative adaptation in the handling of characterization, rhetorical structure and intertextual reference. Second, there is a marked sensitivity to cultural-pragmatic factors, most evident in the neutralizing treatment of irony and ambiguity in passages that impinge on the symbolic significance of Amir Temur for Uzbek national identity. Third, there is a sophisticated deployment of compensatory strategies in the management of lexical and rhetorical loss, particularly in the transition from the French periodic sentence to Uzbek parataxis.

These findings contribute to a broader theoretical conversation within translation studies concerning the relationship between stylistic adaptation and fidelity. The evidence from the Ermatov corpus supports the position articulated by Bassnett (2002) and Hermans (1999), namely that fidelity in literary translation is not a property of formal correspondence between source and target text but of functional equivalence at the level of reading experience and cultural meaning. On this view stylistic adaptation is not a deviation from fidelity but a condition of its achievement.

From a broader comparative perspective, the French–Uzbek case sheds light on the specific challenges of translation between typologically distant languages that also occupy different positions within world literary systems. The translator operating in such a context is not merely a mediator between two linguistic codes but a cultural agent negotiating the representation of shared historical content within the framework of two distinct literary traditions and national imaginaries.

6.1. Limitations

Three limitations qualify the conclusions drawn above. First, the corpus is confined to the work of a single translator and to a single thematic domain, historical biography; the patterns identified may therefore reflect an individual translational poetics rather than a norm of the French–Uzbek direction as such. Second, the segments were selected for stylistic markedness and coded by a single analyst, so the sample is deliberately non-random and the coding has not been tested for inter-coder reliability. Third, the analysis is qualitative throughout: it establishes the existence and functional logic of the three adaptation types but does not quantify their relative frequency, and no claim about statistical distribution should be read into the discussion above.

7. Conclusion

This article has examined the nature and mechanisms of stylistic adaptation in the French–Uzbek literary translations of Marcel Brion's *Tamerlan* and Lucien Kehren's *Tamerlan: l'empire du Seigneur de Fer* as rendered by B. Ermatov. Through contrastive stylistic analysis of a corpus of 120 aligned segments, the study has identified three principal categories of adaptation strategy — compensatory, integrative and neutralizing — and has demonstrated their operation across the lexical, syntactic, rhetorical and cultural-intertextual dimensions of the translation.

The findings indicate that stylistic adaptation in these translations is not an incidental or purely corrective phenomenon but a principled, systematic dimension of the translational project, governed by the interaction of linguistic constraints, target-culture literary conventions and cultural-pragmatic sensitivity. The translator's choices reflect a coherent poetics of translation oriented towards the full integration of historically significant French source texts into the Uzbek literary tradition, without sacrifice of their historical and ideational content.

Future research might extend the analysis to other French–Uzbek literary translations in order to establish whether the patterns identified in the Ermatov corpus represent broader norms within

this translation direction or the distinctive stylistic signature of an individual translator. Computational stylistic methods, including corpus-based measurement of syntactic complexity and lexical density, could supply quantitative support for the qualitative findings presented here, and a reception study among Uzbek readers would allow the functional-equivalence claims advanced in Section 6 to be tested empirically.

Declarations

Funding. This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Conflict of interest. The author declares no conflict of interest.

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