Pragmatic loss and compensation of stylistic devices in the translation of fantasy literature

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the phenomenon of pragmatic loss and the strategies of compensation in the translation of fantasy literature, with particular attention to irony, metaphor, and simile. Examples are taken from George R. R. Martin's fantasy novel A Game of Thrones. The study highlights how these stylistic devices undergo transformation in translation and to what extent pragmatic equivalence is achieved. The research emphasizes the translator's role in preserving aesthetic and cognitive effects while ensuring cultural and linguistic relevance.]

Keywords: pragmatic loss, compensation, translation strategies, stylistic devices, fantasy literature, metaphor, irony, simile, George R. R. Martin, A Game of Thrones

Fentezi adabiyoti tarjimasida stilistik vositalarning pragmatik yo'qolishi va kompensatsiyasi

ANNOTATSIYA

Ushbu maqolada fantastik adabiyot tarjimasida pragmatik yo'qotish hodisasi va uni kompensatsiya qilish strategiyalari tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotda ironiya, metafora va o'xshatish kabi badiiy tasvir vositalariga alohida e'tibor qaratilgan. Misollar Jorj R. R. Martinning "Taxtlar o'yini" asaridan olingan. Maqolada ushbu stilistik vositalarning tarjima jarayonida qanday o'zgarishga uchrashi va pragmatik ekvivalentlik darajasi qay darajada ta'minlanganligi tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqot, shuningdek,

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tarjimonning estetik va kognitiv ta'sirni saqlash, hamda madaniy va lingvistik moslikni ta'minlashdagi rolini yoritib beradi.

Прагматические потери и компенсация стилистических приемов при переводе фэнтезийной литературы

АННОТАЦИЯ

В данной статье рассматривается феномен прагматической потери и стратегии компенсации в переводе произведений фантастической литературы, с особым вниманием к таким стилистическим средствам, как ирония, метафора и сравнение. Примеры взяты из романа Дж. Р. Р. Мартина «Игра престолов». В исследовании анализируется, как указанные стилистические приёмы трансформируются в процессе перевода и в какой степени достигается прагматическая эквивалентность. Особое внимание уделяется роли переводчика в сохранении эстетического и когнитивного эффекта, а также в обеспечении культурной и языковой адекватности перевода.

INTRODUCTION

In the academic study of literature, fantasy can be characterized as a narrative genre that generates alternative, imaginary worlds shaped by magical, supernatural, or mythical forces. It departs from empirical reality, introducing invented settings, extraordinary beings, and events that challenge or suspend the conventional laws of nature. Although fantasy is considered a relatively modern literary genre, it has already produced numerous remarkable works and influential novels that have secured its place among other types of fiction.

Fantasy literature is rich in stylistic devices such as metaphor, hyperbole, and simile, which create a unique imaginative world for readers. These devices serve as essential means by which the author constructs a mystical and immersive narrative, enhancing both the aesthetic quality of the text and the reader's engagement with it. Because stylistic devices are deeply embedded in the cultural and sociolinguistic context of a language community, achieving full adequacy in their literary translation is particularly challenging. Numerous scholars have investigated stylistic devices and their translation, providing valuable theoretical and practical insights into the complexities of preserving stylistic effect across languages.

LITERATURE REVIEW

French scholars Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet carried out comparative studies on the stylistics of French and English. In their seminal work *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais* (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958), they laid the foundation for one of the most influential comparative stylistic approaches in translation studies. Their research primarily focused on the systemic differences between French and English; however, their insights have had a far-reaching impact on the general theory and practice of translation.

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Central to their framework is the recognition that translation is not a mere word-for-word substitution but a process that often demands stylistic adaptation to preserve meaning, nuance, and expressive effect. To address this, they introduced a taxonomy of translation procedures, distinguishing between direct translation methods (borrowing, calque, literal translation) and oblique translation methods (transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation). Among these, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation are of particular importance when dealing with stylistic devices, as they allow the translator to reshape the text in a way that conveys not only semantic content but also pragmatic and aesthetic dimensions in the target language.

Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) emphasized that stylistic adaptation is often necessary when cultural or linguistic asymmetries make a literal transfer impossible or undesirable. For instance, modulation enables a shift in perspective or category of thought to achieve naturalness, while equivalence provides a means of conveying idiomatic or culturally embedded expressions through functionally analogous forms in the target language. Adaptation, as the most dynamic of their procedures, permits substantial transformation of source text elements to maintain communicative effect and stylistic resonance. Through these strategies, they argue, the translator can reproduce the expressive and rhetorical qualities of the source text, ensuring that the translation is not only accurate but also stylistically effective.

German scholar and translator Christiane Nord, in her influential work *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained* (Nord, 1997), advances a functionalist perspective that has profoundly shaped contemporary translation studies. Drawing on and extending Hans J. Vermeer's Skopos theory, Nord argues that translation is best understood as a purpose-driven activity, where every decision made by the translator must align with the communicative needs of the target audience and the intended function of the translation. In her view, the translator assumes the role of an active intercultural mediator rather than a mere linguistic transmitter, adapting linguistic and stylistic resources to ensure the communicative effectiveness of the target text.

A particularly important aspect of Nord's (1997) theory is her treatment of stylistic devices. She maintains that rhetorical and stylistic features—such as metaphor, irony, or hyperbole—cannot be carried over mechanically into the target language. Instead, they must be translated about their function within the source text and their intended effect on the target audience. If preserving the form of a stylistic device compromises its function or effect, Nord allows for modification, substitution, or even compensation in another part of the text. This principle underscores her conviction that translation is not about preserving surface forms but about ensuring functional equivalence in terms of meaning, style, and communicative impact.

In this study, particular attention is devoted to the comparative analysis of stylistic devices in English and Uzbek, to identify both their linguistic and cultural specificities. The research seeks not only to describe the formal features of these devices but also to examine the challenges that arise in the process of translating them from English into Uzbek. Among these challenges, the most significant are the problems of pragmatic and semantic loss, which occur when a stylistic device in the source text does not have a direct equivalent in the target language. At the same time, the study explores various strategies of compensation through which translators

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attempt to restore the expressive, aesthetic, or communicative effect of the original, even if the form is altered. By addressing these issues, the research aims to shed light on the intricate process of stylistic transfer across languages and to highlight the role of translation techniques in preserving both the artistic and functional dimensions of literary texts.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comparative stylistic analysis to investigate the use and translation of stylistic devices in George R. R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones* and its Uzbek translation, *Taxtlar o'yini*. As an outstanding example of the fantasy genre, *A Game of Thrones* was chosen for analysis because it vividly illustrates the abundance and diversity of stylistic devices. The text serves as a representative case for examining how such devices function within fantasy literature and how their translation into Uzbek raises problems of pragmatic loss and necessitates various forms of compensation.

The methodology is structured around the principles of pragmatic equivalence, as outlined by Baker (2011), which emphasize not only the formal transfer of linguistic elements but also the preservation of communicative intent and stylistic effect across languages. The primary corpus consists of selected passages from *A Game of Thrones* that are particularly rich in stylistic devices such as metaphor, hyperbole, simile, epithet, and irony. Corresponding extracts from the Uzbek translation of *Taxtlar o'yini* are examined in parallel.

The passages were chosen based on their stylistic density and their relevance to character development, imagery, and narrative progression, ensuring that the analysis captures a representative range of Martin's literary style. A qualitative comparative analysis is applied, focusing on how stylistic devices are rendered in translation and what strategies are employed to handle challenges of equivalence. Special attention is given to cases of pragmatic loss, where stylistic meaning or effect is diminished, and to instances of compensation, where translators introduce alternative devices to recreate the intended impact in Uzbek.

The analysis proceeds in three stages:
1. Identification of stylistic devices in the English source text.
2. Comparison with their equivalents in the Uzbek target text.
3. Evaluation of translation strategies in terms of pragmatic equivalence, highlighting cases of loss, gain, or compensation.

By combining corpus-based textual analysis with a theoretical framework grounded in pragmatic equivalence, this methodology enables a systematic exploration of how stylistic features are preserved, transformed, or reinterpreted in translation. This approach also allows for an assessment of the effectiveness of translation strategies in maintaining the aesthetic and communicative functions of the original text.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The analysis is based on selected passages from George R. R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones* and its Uzbek translation, *Taxtlar o'yini*. The focus is placed on stylistic devices that carry significant pragmatic load and on how these devices are transferred, modified, or lost in translation. The discussion highlights both instances of pragmatic loss and the strategies of compensation employed by the translator.

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For instance, in the novel, the phrase *"I shall fear the Dothraki the day they teach their horses to run on water"* represents a striking example of hyperbole. The author employs an utterly impossible image—the act of horses running on water—to express Robert's conviction that the Dothraki pose no real threat. This hyperbolic statement also carries an ironic undertone, revealing Robert's bravado, stubbornness, and dismissive attitude toward danger.

In the Uzbek translation, however, the line appears as *"Otlarining suzishni o'rganib olgan kuni qo'rqishim mumkin"* ("I may fear them the day their horses learn to swim"). While this rendering remains semantically close to the source, it diverges stylistically. The original hyperbole relies on an impossibility, whereas in the translation, the notion of horses swimming is unusual but still physically possible. Consequently, the exaggerated effect and ironic tone of the original are diminished, and the dramatic force of Robert's words becomes less intense. Thus, although semantic equivalence is maintained, a clear pragmatic loss occurs. The stylistic impact of the hyperbole—which depends on impossibility—is weakened in the target text.

In such cases, the translator's task is not only to preserve meaning but also to reproduce stylistic effect as far as possible. A rendering such as *"the day their horses run on water"* would have more faithfully retained the hyperbolic and ironic force of the source text.

Furthermore, this passage illustrates a clear case of metaphorical loss in translation. In the source text, the fight is described as *"a dance where the smallest misstep meant death"*, where the dance metaphor operates on two levels. On the one hand, it highlights the rhythmic, patterned movements of the combatants; on the other, it emphasizes the deadly consequences of even the slightest error. Thus, the metaphor not only conveys the intensity of the duel but also adds strong aesthetic and emotional value to the narrative.

In the Uzbek translation, however, the phrase is rendered as *"Rejadan tashqari arzimas harakat ham o'limga sabab bo'lishi hech gapmas"* ("Even the slightest unintended movement could easily lead to death"). While the core semantic content—the danger and fatal risk—is retained, the imagistic quality of the metaphor has been entirely omitted. Instead of a vivid metaphorical image, the target text offers a straightforward informational statement, which diminishes the stylistic richness of the original.

In translation studies, this shift can be explained as a form of pragmatic loss, where the translator prioritizes communicative clarity over stylistic equivalence. Such losses can significantly alter the reader's perception, particularly in a genre like fantasy literature, where stylistic devices play a crucial role in world-building and evoking atmosphere.

To counterbalance this loss, a strategy of compensation could have been applied, preserving the metaphorical image in the target text. For example: *"Jang raqsida har qanday noto'g'ri harakat o'limga boshlashi mumkin"* ("The fight was like a dance, yet the slightest wrong step could bring death"). This version maintains both the literal meaning and the metaphorical imagery, allowing the target readership to experience the same stylistic and emotional effect as the source text.

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Therefore, this example demonstrates how the omission of metaphor in translation reduces the aesthetic and genre-specific qualities of the text, shifting it from a richly figurative description to a merely informative rendering.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this analysis suggest that instances of pragmatic loss most frequently occur in stylistic devices deeply embedded in cultural and historical contexts—such as medieval honorifics, forms of address, and culturally specific idiomatic expressions. These elements, being intimately tied to a particular socio-historical milieu, often lack direct equivalents in the target language and thus pose significant challenges for translators. In contrast, universal figures of speech such as hyperbole, which rely on general cognitive and rhetorical mechanisms rather than culturally exclusive codes, tend to be transferred with greater fidelity across languages. This distinction highlights a crucial point: while translation strategies can often preserve the semantic and stylistic effects of universal devices, the rendering of culturally bound stylistic markers frequently entails a degree of meaning reduction or adaptation, reflecting the persistent tension between linguistic translatability and cultural specificity.

Compensation strategies emerge as an indispensable component of the translation process, particularly when dealing with stylistic devices that resist direct transfer between languages. Techniques such as lexical substitution, contextual reinforcement, and stylistic elevation serve not only as practical solutions to semantic gaps but also as deliberate means of maintaining the aesthetic and emotive resonance of the source text. By introducing alternative linguistic or rhetorical resources in the target language, translators can re-establish balance between form and meaning, thereby mitigating potential losses in expressive force. In this sense, compensation functions not merely as a remedial measure but as a creative strategy that enables the translated text to fulfill its artistic and communicative functions for the target readership.

Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that compensation, while highly effective, cannot eliminate pragmatic loss. Instead, it operates as a mitigating mechanism that reduces the impact of such losses by striving for functional equivalence, allowing the target text to reproduce, as closely as possible, the stylistic and communicative power of the original. This observation reinforces the views of translation theorists such as Newmark and Baker, who regard translation as an inherently dialogic and negotiate process in which loss is unavoidable but can be balanced through creative recovery. Ultimately, compensation underscores the dual role of the translator as both mediator and creator—negotiating the tension between fidelity to the source text and responsiveness to the target culture—and affirms that translation is less an act of mechanical reproduction than one of interpretive re-creation.

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