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Definition

Literary translation consists of the translation of poetry, plays, literary books, literary texts, as well as songs, rhymes, literary articles, fiction novels, novels, short stories, poems, etc.

Translation of Literary Styles

Style is the essential characteristic of every piece of writing, the outcome of the writer´s personality and his emotions at the moment; a single paragraph can´t be put together without revealing to some degree the personality of the author. Every writer has a literary style and his style is reflected in his writing. Some authors say that a translation should reflect the style of the original text while others say that a translation should possess the style of the translator.

The literary translator has to take into account the beauty of the text, its style, the lexical, grammatical and phonological features. Some of these may not be the same in the target language. For example, in the Arabic language there is no “you,” which may be fundamental for a good translation. The aim of the translator is that the quality of the translation be the same as the original text without leaving out any of the content.

In general, in literary translation we translate messages, not meanings. The text must be seen as an integral and coherent piece of work.

For example, if we are translating from Arabic into English or vice versa, we must take into account that the two realities are very different, their cultures have sometimes opposite views on certain matters, as well as on scientific and technological development. So the search for equivalent words is more complex.

Some ideas or characteristics are not even known or practised in the other culture. The practice of literary translation has changed as a matter of globalisation, texts have become more exotic, and these translations should contribute to a better and more correct understanding of the source culture of a country.

Translation of Poetry

In poetry, form is as essential to preserve as contents. If the form is not preserved then neither is the poetry. Susan Bassnett-McGuire says: “The degree to which the translator reproduces the form, metre, rhythm, tone, register, etc. of the SOURCE LANGUAGE text, will be as much determined by the TARGET LANGUAGE system and will also depend on the function of the translation. One of the more difficult things to translate is poetry. It is essential to maintain the flavor of the original text.”

A good translation discovers the “dynamics” of poetry, if not necessarily its “mechanics” (Kopp, 1998). As Newmark says, “Translation of poetry is an acid test showing the challenging nature of translating.” In the translation of poetry, puns, allusions, analogies, alliterations, figures of speech, and metaphors are always common.

Translation of Prose Poems

Most translation authorities believe in some sort of stylistic loss in translating prose poems, let alone for rendering a poem into its equivalent verse. We must bear in mind that we should always be faithful to the meaning of the original poem.

Translation of Plays :

The translator should say aloud the words that he is translating for a play, to hear how they sound on stage. One thing is to read and another is to “say” something. A text can be well translated in a book, but sound awful on stage. The work of the translator does not end when the work is given to be performed. It is advisable for the translator to work with the director and the actors to resolve problems when the text is put on stage. It is important to take into account the words used at the time the play takes place as well as the audience to which it is directed.[[1]](#footnote-2)

1. https://conalti.org/literary-translation/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)