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THE TRANSLATOR'S VOICE AND ITS IMPACT ON LITERARY AUTHENTICITY

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ARTICLE INFORMATION

ABSTRACT:

The concept of the translator's voice has become central to contemporary translation studies, challenging long-standing assumptions about neutrality, equivalence, and fidelity. At the same time, literary authenticity remains an elusive and contested notion, often implicitly defined through source-text primacy. This article reconceptualizes the relationship between the translator's voice and literary authenticity by situating both within post-structuralist, descriptive, and sociocultural paradigms of translation. Drawing on theoretical contributions from translator-style research, narrative theory, and cultural translation studies, the article argues that authenticity in literary translation is not a property transferred from the source text but a negotiated effect co-produced by author, translator, and target readership. Through qualitative stylistic analysis, the study demonstrates that the translator's voice functions not as a distortion of authenticity but as a condition for its re-articulation across linguistic and cultural systems.

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Introduction

The persistent expectation that translators should efface their presence in literary texts reflects a deeply rooted logocentric ideology, in which meaning is presumed to reside stably within the source text. This ideology has historically positioned the translator as a secondary, derivative figure, tasked with reproducing an already complete literary object. However, contemporary translation theory increasingly rejects this model, emphasizing the translator's interpretative agency and socio-cultural situatedness.

The emergence of the concept of the translator's voice marks a decisive shift away from mechanical equivalence toward a view of translation as an act of rewriting. Yet this shift has generated renewed anxiety around literary authenticity, particularly regarding the perceived erosion of authorial originality. This article contends that such anxiety stems from an essentialist understanding of authenticity—one that fails to account for the mediated nature of all literary meaning.

By bringing the translator's voice and literary authenticity into direct theoretical dialogue, this study aims to destabilize the binary opposition between fidelity and creativity that continues to shape evaluative discourses in literary translation.

Theoretical framework

The translator's voice as discursive presence

The notion of the translator's voice extends beyond stylistic idiosyncrasy to encompass ideological positioning, narrative framing, and pragmatic orientation. Early descriptive studies revealed that translators exhibit consistent stylistic patterns across texts, suggesting the presence of an identifiable translatorial idiolect. These findings undermined the assumption of translator invisibility and reframed translation as a form of authored discourse.

From a narratological perspective, the translator operates as a secondary narrator, whose voice is embedded within the translated text through shifts in modality, evaluation, and focalization. This embedded voice does not merely transmit meaning but actively constructs narrative reality for the target reader.

Deconstructing literary authenticity

Literary authenticity has traditionally been aligned with notions of originality, authorial intention, and textual purity. However, post-structuralist thought problematizes these assumptions by emphasizing the instability of meaning and the absence of a single, authoritative interpretation.

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Within this framework, authenticity cannot be understood as a recoverable essence of the source text. Instead, it emerges as a relational construct, shaped by cultural norms, reader expectations, and translational conventions. A translated text is therefore not a copy of an original but a new textual event whose authenticity lies in its functional legitimacy within the target culture.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, theory-driven analytical approach informed by stylistics, discourse analysis, and translation sociology. Rather than measuring equivalence at the micro-linguistic level, the analysis focuses on:

a)   recurrent stylistic patterns attributable to the translator
b)   narrative and evaluative shifts
c)   pragmatic adaptations affecting reader alignment

This methodology allows for an examination of how authenticity is constructed discursively rather than reproduced mechanically.

Discussion

❖   **Translatorial voice and narrative reconfiguration**

The presence of the translator's voice is most visible in moments of indeterminacy—ambiguity, irony, cultural reference, and emotional nuance. In resolving such moments, the translator necessarily interprets and reconfigures the narrative. This reconfiguration does not constitute a betrayal of the source text but reflects the inherent openness of literary meaning.

By foregrounding certain interpretative paths while backgrounding others, the translator participates in the ongoing semiosis of the literary work.

❖   **Authenticity as effect, not essence**

Authenticity in translation should be conceptualized as an effect of coherence, achieved through stylistic consistency, cultural plausibility, and narrative credibility. A translation may diverge lexically or syntactically from the source text while remaining authentic at the level of literary function.

This understanding aligns with functionalist and reception-oriented models, which prioritize reader engagement over formal replication.

❖   **Ethical visibility and translational responsibility**

Acknowledging the translator's voice does not imply unrestrained subjectivity. On the contrary, it foregrounds the ethical dimension of translation. The translator's responsibility lies in negotiating between creative agency and interpretative accountability, ensuring that

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personal stylistic tendencies do not override the textual and cultural logic of the source work.

Implications for Translation Studies

This reconceptualization has several implications:

a) evaluative criteria should shift from equivalence-based metrics to discourse-oriented analysis

b) translator training should integrate narrative theory and stylistics

c) authenticity should be treated as a dynamic, context-dependent phenomenon

Conclusion

This article has argued that the translator's voice is not an extraneous element contaminating literary authenticity but a constitutive force in its reconstruction. By abandoning essentialist models of authenticity and embracing a relational, discourse-based perspective, translation studies can more accurately account for the complex realities of literary transfer. Authenticity, in this sense, is not preserved—it is produced.

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