

PRESERVING PSYCHOLOGICAL REALISM IN TRANSLATION: THE CASE OF LITERARY TEXTS

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Abstract: *Psychological realism is one of the most significant features of literary texts, allowing readers to understand characters' emotions, thoughts, and inner conflicts. In literary translation, preserving psychological realism presents a considerable challenge because translators must convey not only the semantic meaning of the original text but also its emotional and psychological depth. This article critically examines the concept of psychological realism in literary translation and discusses the views of prominent scholars on the issue. Through the analysis of literary translation theories and selected literary examples, the paper highlights the importance of maintaining the psychological authenticity of characters across languages and cultures.*

Keywords: *psychological realism, literary translation, characterization, equivalence, emotional expression, translation studies.*

INTRODUCTION

Literary translation differs from other forms of translation because it involves the transfer of artistic, cultural, and psychological elements. One of the most delicate aspects of literary texts is psychological realism, which refers to the realistic portrayal of characters' mental states and emotional experiences. When a translator fails to preserve these psychological nuances, readers may perceive characters differently from the way they were intended by the author.

The issue has attracted the attention of many translation scholars who argue that literary translation should reproduce not only linguistic meaning but also the psychological effect of the original text. Therefore, preserving psychological realism remains a crucial objective in literary translation.

Psychological Realism and Literary Representation

The concept of psychological realism emerged prominently in nineteenth-century literature, particularly in the works of writers such as Fyodor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy, and Henry James. Their novels focused on the inner lives of characters, exploring emotions, motivations, and moral dilemmas rather than merely describing external actions.

According to Mikhail Bakhtin, literary characters possess a unique psychological voice that contributes to the polyphonic nature of fiction. This perspective suggests that translators must preserve not only what characters say but also how their consciousness is represented. A literal translation may reproduce words accurately while distorting the psychological identity embedded in them.[2; p-62]

Similarly, Dorrit Cohn emphasizes that narrative techniques such as interior monologue and free indirect discourse are essential tools for revealing psychological reality. When these techniques are altered during translation, the reader's understanding of the character's mental state may change significantly.

Scholarly Perspectives on Psychological Realism in Translation

One of the most influential scholars in translation studies, Eugene Nida, introduced the concept of dynamic equivalence. Nida argued that a translation should create an effect on target readers similar to that experienced by source-language readers. This idea is particularly relevant to psychological realism because emotional responses often matter more than formal linguistic structures. If a translator preserves grammatical form but loses emotional impact, psychological realism may be weakened.

However, Nida's theory has also been criticized. Lawrence Venuti argues that excessive adaptation to the target culture can erase important aspects of the original text. From Venuti's perspective, translators should avoid domesticating characters' psychological experiences to such an extent that they become culturally unrecognizable. This criticism demonstrates the tension between readability and authenticity in literary translation.

Another important contribution comes from Antoine Berman, who warns against the deformation of literary texts through translation. Berman identifies several tendencies that may distort the original work, including rationalization and clarification. These tendencies often affect psychological realism because translators may simplify ambiguous emotional states that are intentionally complex in the source text.

Critical Analysis of Literary Translation Practices

The translation of psychological realism becomes particularly challenging when literary texts contain culturally specific emotional expressions. Different languages conceptualize emotions in different ways, and direct lexical equivalents are not always available.

For example, in the novels of Virginia Woolf, characters' thoughts often flow through fragmented and associative patterns. Translators frequently face difficulties in reproducing this stream-of-consciousness technique. Excessive grammatical correction may improve readability but simultaneously reduce the authenticity of the character's psychological experience.

A similar challenge can be observed in translations of Fyodor Dostoevsky. His characters often express contradictory emotions and abrupt shifts in thought. Scholars have noted that some translations smooth out these inconsistencies, thereby diminishing the psychological complexity that defines Dostoevsky's narrative style.

From a critical perspective, successful literary translation requires a balance between linguistic accuracy and psychological fidelity. Translators must understand the emotional logic of the text rather than focusing solely on individual words and sentences. The translator's role is therefore interpretive as well as linguistic.

Discussion

The preservation of psychological realism depends on several factors, including the translator's literary competence, cultural awareness, and sensitivity to narrative techniques.[5;p-23] Modern translation theories increasingly recognize that literary texts function on multiple levels simultaneously. Meaning is conveyed not only through vocabulary but also through tone, rhythm, narrative perspective, and emotional resonance.

Contemporary scholars suggest that translators should adopt a reader-oriented yet text-sensitive approach. Such an approach enables them to reproduce the psychological depth of characters while maintaining the stylistic uniqueness of the original work. Psychological realism should therefore be viewed not as a fixed linguistic feature but as a dynamic interaction between text, translator, and reader.

Conclusion

Preserving psychological realism remains one of the most demanding tasks in literary translation. The views of scholars such as Nida, Venuti, Berman, and Bakhtin demonstrate that psychological authenticity cannot be reduced to simple linguistic equivalence. Literary translators must carefully reconstruct the emotional and mental dimensions of characters while respecting both source-text integrity and target-reader comprehension. Ultimately, the success of a literary translation depends on its ability to recreate the psychological reality that gives literary characters their human depth and credibility.

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