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Navigating the Linguistic and Cultural Depths of Literary Translation

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Abstract. Translation is a complex phenomenon that requires specialized skills to accurately render a text from the source language into the target language.

There exist literary and technical/scientific translations which differ from each other significantly in terms of purpose, style, language use and approach. The main goal of the technical/scientific translation is to convey precise ad accurate information about specialized topics regarding medicine, technology, engineering, etc. Consequently, during the technical/scientific translation, the main focus is on functionality rather than style or creativity. While during the literary translation the principal purpose is to convey the artistic, cultural and emotional nuances of the original text to the reader.

That is why especially literary translation is both an art and a science, requiring not only linguistic proficiency but also a deep understanding of cultural nuances and literary traditions. The translation of literary texts is particularly complex, as it involves the intricate task of conveying not just the words, but also the emotional depth, cultural context, and stylistic elements that shape the original work.

This article examines the translation process of Playing with Fire by Otia Ioseliani, with a particular emphasis on the strategies and techniques used to render this Georgian literary work into English. Through an analysis of the translation choices made, we explore how these decisions have influenced the reception of the text in its new linguistic and cultural context. In addressing the specific challenges and solutions encountered throughout the translation process, this study aims to shed light on the complexities involved in translating linguistic units—such as phrases, words, and entire sentences—while accounting for cultural and ethnic nuances. Additionally, this article highlights the broader implications for translation studies, contributing to a deeper understanding of the dynamic relationship between language, culture, and literature, with a focus on how our decisions shape the final product.

Key Words: Otia Ioseliani, Playing with fire, Literary translation, cultural nuance, linguistics, translation process

Introduction

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technical/scientific translation, the main focus is on functionality rather than style or creativity. While during the literary translation the principal purpose is to convey the artistic, cultural and emotional nuances of the original text to the reader.

That is why especially literary translation is both an art and a science, requiring not only linguistic proficiency but also a deep understanding of cultural nuances and literary traditions. The translation of literary texts is particularly complex, as it involves the intricate task of conveying not just the words, but also the emotional depth, cultural context, and stylistic elements that shape the original work. According to Grossman (2005), translation is vital to understanding and accessing foreign literatures and emphasizes our role as a translator in rendering the author's voice in a way that speaks to readers of a different language. This is especially true when translating works from a language like Georgian, which belongs to the Kartvelian language family and carries a rich cultural heritage and unique expressions that are often challenging to render in English.

Literary translation is a complex process that, in addition to a deep knowledge of the language, demands a wide range of skills from the translator. When translating a literary work, the translator strives to preserve the linguistic and cultural nuances of the original text while ensuring that its charm and essence are retained in the translation. Achieving a high level of accuracy in translating linguistic and cultural idioms can be challenging, and it may not always be possible to achieve a perfect equivalence. However, the translator must be adept at selecting alternative expressions or variations that convey the intended meaning and tone, thereby maintaining the integrity and impact of the original work in the translated text.

As mentioned above, translators in this field require specialized skills to convey the text accurately, preserving its style, nature, and cultural context. Bassnett (1991) explores the nuances of literary translation, emphasizing the interaction between the source text and its cultural context. She highlights the unique challenges of translating literary works, such as preserving the author's voice and style while ensuring the text resonates with the target culture.

In a similar vein, Cronin (2003) examines the relationship between identity and literary translation, focusing on how translators navigate their own cultural identity while interpreting the text. He argues that literary translation is not only a process of cultural mediation but also involves the creation of new literary forms.

Methodology

Correspondingly, this article examines the translation process of **Playing with Fire** by Otia Ioseliani, with a particular emphasis on the strategies and techniques used to render this Georgian literary work into English. Through an analysis of the translation choices made, we explore how these decisions have influenced the reception of the text in its new linguistic and cultural context. In addressing the specific challenges and solutions encountered throughout the translation process, this study aims to shed light on the complexities involved in translating linguistic units—such as phrases, words, and entire sentences—while accounting for cultural and ethnic nuances. Additionally, this article highlights the broader implications for translation studies, contributing to a deeper understanding of the dynamic relationship between language, culture, and literature, with a focus on how a translator's decisions shape the final product.

Throughout the study, I employed several research methods at various stages of the translation process, as I am both the translator of the source text and the author of this article. Specifically, I utilized a textual analysis method, carefully reading the source text to identify

and interpret nuances, colloquialisms, metaphors, idioms, and expressions unique to the Georgian language. This approach allowed me to pinpoint untranslatable words, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references, while exploring how I, as the translator, addressed and resolved these challenges. In parallel, I applied a pragmatic analysis approach to identify key pragmatic issues throughout the text, such as politeness, formality, and speech acts, within the Georgian context, and how these would be interpreted and conveyed in English. Additionally, I employed a case study approach, conducting an in-depth analysis of specific translation cases that focused on particular linguistic or cultural challenges encountered during the translation process.

Results

We have already mentioned that the study is based on the analysis of the 20th-century prominent writer Otia Ioseliani's novella "Playing with Fire." This work, belonging to the writer's early period, represents love conveyed with the intense passion characteristic of youth.

In general, Ioseliani's literary works are renowned for their extensive use of idioms, set phrases, old sayings, and archaic words, which imbue them with a distinctive humorous tone. Translating such works presents a fascinating challenge for translators, as it requires a deep understanding of the text's nuances to accurately convey its inner nature to the reader.

Discussion

From the outset, the title captures the reader's attention, figuratively crafted by the author to reflect the central themes of the novella. The expression **Playing with Fire** conveys the same meaning as its Georgian counterpart, **636bcos6** osoosoo [tsetskhltan tamashi], and the word-for-word translation is fully appropriate in this context. In both languages, the metaphor of 'playing with fire' refers to engaging in risky, dangerous, or reckless behavior that could lead to negative consequences. Just as actual fire can cause burns or destruction, metaphorically, 'playing with fire' signifies behavior that may result in harm, trouble, or unintended fallout.

A word-for-word translation is also possible in the case of the phrase "მე რომ მკითხო, ბროლის კოშკს მიწური ფაცხა მირჩევნია, შიგ შუაცეცხლი გენთოს და ელოდე ვინმეს..." [me rom mkitkho, broils koshks matsuri patskha mirchevnia, shig shuatsetskhli gentos da elode vinmes...], which conveys the speaker's preference for genuine human connections and emotional warmth over material wealth and social status. The speaker values a humble, cozy space where they can feel a sense of connection with both others and themselves.

In this context, ზროლის კოშკი [broils koshki], literally "crystal tower," symbolizes something of grandeur and social status. However, the phrase is meant to contrast that with მიწური ფაცხა [mitsuri patskha], which refers to a simple mud hut—a symbol of humility and simplicity. Therefore, ზროლის კოშკი can be translated as "crystal tower," while მიწური ფაცხა would be translated as "mud hut." Thus, the sentence would be translated as: "If you ask me, I prefer a mud hut to a crystal tower, with a fire burning inside, waiting for someone."

The author also uses the archaic form სასთუმალთან [sastumaltan] in the sentence "სასთუმალთან წიგნი დავდე" [sastumaltan tsigni davde], where the modern Georgian equivalent would be საწოლი [satsoli] (bed). To preserve the archaic tone of the original text in the translation, this phrase was rendered as: "I placed my book on the pillow-couch." The term "pillow-couch" was chosen because it conveys the sense of a couch that functions like a

bed, offering comfort and relaxation, which mirrors the original meaning of სასთუმალთან. Additionally, for the verb დავდე [davde], which means "I put," the verb "to place" was used instead of the more neutral "to put." This choice subtly enhances the archaic feel of the sentence, aligning with the tone of the original Georgian text.

In the sentence "მერე მივყე-მოვყე და კარგა გვარიანად გამიგრძელდა" [mere mivke-movke da karga gvarianad gamigrdzelda], which translates to "Subsequently, I engaged in various activities, and the situation progressed favorably," the adverb გვარიანად [gvarianad] (quite) is an archaic form in the source language. Additionally, the expressions მივყე-მოვყე [mivke-movke] and კარგა [karga] are dialectal forms in Georgian, and when combined with the archaic გვარიანად, they lend the sentence an old-fashioned or regional flavor.

To preserve the archaic tone of the original text in the translation, the sentence was rendered as: "I was beating around the bush." This English expression, meaning to avoid the main topic or not address an issue directly—often due to discomfort or uncertainty—was chosen to reflect the indirect nature of the activities described in the original sentence.

To convey more cultural and ethnic nuances, the author uses several other dialectal words in the novella. For example, "sδs δηφο, βρθη δεδεος" [aba modi, chemo babaya], where the word "δεδεος" [babaia] is a dialectal term primarily used in western Georgia. It is an affectionate or colloquial way of referring to one's grandfather or an elderly man, similar to "grandpa" or "old man" in English. In Georgian culture, terms of endearment for family members are common, and "δεδεος" is one such term, often used in familial settings. In this instance, however, the phrase "εδε δηφο, βρθη δεδεος" is directed towards the son, and I chose to render it as "Come on, my dear." Substituting the Georgian word "δεδεος" with the English word "dear" seems more logical, as "dear" also expresses affection and endearment for a loved one.

Colloquialism is also preserved in the following example: მამაცხონებულმა რა უნდა დაწეროს... [mamatskhonebulma ra unda datseros...] which, when translated word-for-word, means 'What should the blessed one write?' However, since 'მამაცხონებული' [mamatskhonebuli] generally refers to someone who is virtuous, honorable, or respected—often with a sense of being blessed or highly regarded—a better English equivalent would be 'stand-up guy,' which carries a positive connotation of being trustworthy, honorable, and decent, aligning with the meaning of 'მამაცხონებული.

The presence of colloquialisms in the writer's work is evident in the following example: "გავაგზავნე და პირდაპირ ჯვარს ვეცვი" [gavagzavne da pirapir jvars vecvi], which is directly translated as, "I sent it and directly fell to the cross." However, while the key phrase "ჯვარს ვეცვი" [jvars vecvi] literally means "fell on the cross," this word-for-word translation doesn't adequately fit the context in English. In English, there is a well-known idiom, "go through hell and back," which expresses the idea of enduring a very difficult, painful, or challenging situation. Given the similarity in meaning, we chose to render the sentence as: "I sent it and went through hell and back." This idiom is particularly fitting because, in Christian theology, hell is traditionally viewed as a place of torment and suffering. Thus, "going through hell" metaphorically conveys the experience of enduring severe challenges or suffering, while "and back" suggests not only surviving but overcoming those challenges and emerging stronger or victorious.

Another colloquial idiom we encounter in the text is <u>"დასწყევლოს ღმერთმა,</u> რა მომდის-მეთქი, და წავედი" [dastkevlos ghmertma ra momdis-metki, da tsavedi]. While a

direct translation would be "God curse him/her, what's happening to me, I thought, and I left," this phrasing doesn't quite capture the same tone in English. The phrase "დასწყევლოს დმერთმა" (God curse him/her) is a strong expression of frustration or disbelief, but in English, a more common idiomatic equivalent would be "What the hell." In this case, we chose to replace the literal "God curse him/her" with the more commonly used English expression "What the hell," which maintains the same tone of surprise, frustration, or confusion without invoking religious imagery. As a result, the translation becomes: "What the hell is happening to me? I thought, and I left." This version captures the casual, conversational feel of the original text while making it more accessible and natural for an English-speaking audience. It successfully conveys the character's emotional reaction, reflecting a moment of bewilderment or exasperation, followed by their decision to leave.

One of the most interesting colloquialisms we encounter in the source text is "ამაზე ალბათ მთელი დილა გამიჭირდებოდა თავისმტვრევა, სინამდვილეში კი უბრალო ამბავი იქნებოდა: ეტყოდა გურამი ან ბიკენტი და მეტი არაფერი" [amaze albat mteli dila gamichirdeboda tavismtvreva, sinamdvileshi ki ubralod ambavi iqnebod: etkoda Gurami an Bikenti da meti araperi], which, when translated word-for-word, means: "Probably, I would have spent the whole morning trying to figure it out, but in reality, it was just a trivial matter: Gurami or Bikenti would have said it, and that would have been it."

The key part of this phrase is "გურამი ან ბიკენტი" [Gurami an Bikenti], which refers to ordinary or average people. This construction suggests that the task or matter at hand is so simple that any average person (rather than a specific, distinguished individual) could handle it. In English, this concept is often expressed with idiomatic phrases like "Tom, Dick, and Harry," which are used to refer to common people or generic individuals, emphasizing that the identity of the person involved is not particularly important.

While translating this colloquial idiom, there were several possible equivalents, including British terms like "Joe Bloggs" or "Joe Public." However, we ultimately chose "Tom, Dick, and Harry," as it fits well with the structure of the original Georgian phrase. The use of these specific names—Gurami and Bikenti—means that using "Tom, Dick, and Harry," which also includes proper names, is the most fitting equivalent in this context.

Otia Ioseliani's expressive style is crafted through the use of various stylistic devices, such as comparison, simile, hyperbole, and oxymoron, among others. These techniques allow the author to create vivid and emotionally charged descriptions that captivate the reader's attention. The way Ioseliani portrays characters in his works is particularly striking, drawing readers in with his ability to evoke strong emotions and create memorable images. The following examples demonstrate the author's skill in using figurative language to vividly express and describe people.

For instance, in the sentence "gmbos woods of sentence of sentence of the character larger of the character but also adds humor and a sense of exaggeration to the description. In translation, the wordfor-word approach preserves both the humorous tone and the heightened emotional impact of the original text, effectively conveying Ioseliani's stylistic intent. The sentence could thus be translated as: "The postman is so squint-eyed that it feels as though he's gazing at both the East and the East and the West at once." This translation captures the exaggerated and comical image of

the postman, while also preserving the original's playful and vivid style.

This example highlights Ioseliani's mastery of figurative language, demonstrating his ability to evoke humor and emotion through his descriptive choices. The use of these stylistic devices not only enhances the imagery but also invites the reader to engage with the characters on a deeper, more emotional level.

The author continues the humorous description of the postman in the following way: "ზამთარ-ზაფხულს ლურჯი ცხვირი აქვს" [zamtar-zapkhuls lurji tskhviri aqvs]. This sentence further enhances the comical portrayal of the character, offering a striking image of the postman. The phrase suggests that the postman's nose is permanently blue, regardless of the season. This exaggeration adds a layer of absurdity to the description, reinforcing the humorous tone that Otia Ioseliani often uses to depict his characters in a vivid and unconventional light. In translation, a word-for-word approach also works, with a slight syntactical adjustment to maintain the natural flow in English: "His nose is blue, come winter or summer." This translation successfully conveys the same idea while preserving the playful tone of the original text. The shift from the original Georgian phrasing to the English version retains the intended humor, using the contrasting seasons of winter and summer to emphasize the postman's unchanging, peculiar appearance.

By repeating this humorous and exaggerated imagery, Ioseliani highlights the absurdity of the character's appearance in a way that both entertains and evokes a strong visual image in the reader's mind. The use of figurative language in this context not only adds to the humor but also showcases Ioseliani's ability to create striking, memorable characters through unique and imaginative descriptions.

We encounter the description of another character in the source text: "აქეთ ტოლებში ყოჩივოთ დავდივარ, ყველა პატივს მცემს" [aqet tolebshi kochivvit davdivar, kvela pativs mcems]. When translated word-for-word, this means: "I walk here among my equals like a bellwether, and everyone respects me." However, translating the sentence literally in this way could lead to a misunderstanding for readers. Therefore, based on our decision, the following version provides a more accurate English equivalent for the original Georgian sentence: "I walk with the pride of a ram among my peers, and everyone respects me." While "to walk with the pride" is not a common idiom in English, the imagery of a ram is powerful. Rams are often associated with strength, confidence, and pride, and the phrase conveys a sense of self-assurance. In many cultures, a ram—particularly a male ram—is seen as a symbol of dominance and pride, especially because of its behavior, such as head-butting to assert authority. This figurative use of the ram helps emphasize the character's proud and confident demeanor, making the translation both meaningful and culturally resonant.

A similar case appears in the following sentence: "მე კიდე ცა ქუდად არ მიმაჩნია და დედამიწა ქალამნად" [me kide tsa qudad ar mimachnia da dedamitsa qalamnad], which is a vivid example of hyperbole. The literal, word-for-word translation would be: "As for me, I don't consider the sky as a hat and the earth as a crown." However, with slight syntactical adjustments, we have found a more fitting English equivalent: "I don't see the sky as my crown, nor the earth as my throne."

This rephrased version conveys the same exaggerated imagery while making it more natural in English. The phrase reflects a sense of humility and groundedness, as the speaker is rejecting grandiose or self-important notions. The translation also works idiomatically to imply that the person doesn't consider themselves above others or entitled to greatness, which makes it an appropriate equivalent for the Georgian original. The use of "crown" and

"throne" metaphorically underscores the speaker's modesty, suggesting that they do not see themselves as royalty or above the common experience.

We encounter a very interesting example of parallelism as a stylistic device in the following pattern: "ჯაროს როგორმე მოკლავ, მოკლავ და არც ისე უაზროდ მოკლავ" [dros rogorme moklav, moklav da arts tu ise uazrod moklav]. The literal translation of this sentence is: "You'll kill time somehow, you'll kill it, but not so pointlessly." While this translation is somewhat understandable, it could be phrased more naturally in English. The expression "killing time" is a common idiom, but the second part, "not so pointlessly," sounds awkward in this context.

For a more literary and fluid rendering, I have chosen the following English equivalent: "I will find a way to bend time, to squander it, yet not without purpose." While this translation effectively conveys the essence of the original phrase, it does sacrifice the parallelism present in the Georgian text. The repetition of the phrase "longensa" [moklav] (to kill/squander) in the original creates a rhythmic pattern that enhances the stylistic effect, which is a key part of the Georgian sentence.

However, maintaining the repetition in the English version would have been somewhat redundant and would not add significant literary value. Instead, I opted for a more expressive translation that retains the core meaning while enhancing the figurative language. The phrase "to bend time, to squander it, yet not without purpose" adds a layer of sophistication and conveys a more nuanced idea of time being used intentionally, even if it's spent in a seemingly unproductive way. In summary, while the parallelism is lost in the translation, the choice to prioritize literary coloring and expressiveness over direct repetition ultimately serves the text better in English, maintaining the essence and impact of the original while making it sound natural and engaging for the reader.

The most interesting key points of this novella are the title and its very last sentence. We have already analyzed the title and its figurative relationship to the overall content, and now we will focus on the last sentence, which reads: "შენ ხარ ჩემი თეკლა, შე უღმერთო" [shen khar chemi Tekla, she ughmerto]. The literal translation is: "You are my Tekla, you godless one." In Georgian, the word "უღმერთო" [ughmerto] typically carries a negative connotation, often used to express strong disapproval. However, in the context of this text, the word does not carry the same level of negativity. Instead, there is a hidden passion or intensity within it, which could pose a challenge for us. If the direct translation had been kept, it would likely have escalated the negative tone, as the phrase "You godless one" could express strong emotions, such as disappointment or frustration, and could carry a sense of scorn. In light of this, I opted for a different approach to preserve the underlying emotion without intensifying the negativity. The sentence was therefore translated as: "You are my Tekla, you heartless rascal."

This translation clearly shifts the tone of the original phrase, making it less harsh and potentially more playful or affectionate, depending on the context. The word "rascal" softens the intensity of the original phrase compared to "you godless one," which would have sounded severe and scornful. While the original Georgian expression could be interpreted as conveying frustration or disappointment, the use of "heartless rascal" transforms the emotional weight, making it more lighthearted or teasing rather than condemnatory. By choosing "rascal," I found a way to balance the emotional depth of the original while adapting it to a more contextually appropriate tone in English.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the translation of "Playing with Fire" from Georgian to English highlights the intricate interplay between language, culture, and identity. The process of literary translation is far from a mechanical transfer of words; it is an art that requires careful attention to the emotional, cultural, and stylistic nuances embedded within the original text. The challenges faced during this translation, from untranslatable expressions to cultural references, underscore the necessity of the translator's deep understanding of both the source and target languages, as well as their cultural contexts. By analyzing the specific translation strategies employed in this study, it becomes clear how the translator's decisions shape the reception of the text in a new linguistic and cultural environment. This study not only contributes to the broader field of translation studies but also emphasizes the pivotal role of the translator in bridging cultural divides and making foreign literature accessible to global audiences. Through this process, we gain a richer understanding of the complexities involved in translating literary works, and the indispensable role of translation in fostering cross-cultural communication and literary exchange.

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ლიტერატურული თარგმანის ლინგვისტური და კულტურული სიღრმეების კვლევა აბსტრაქტი

ღარიბაშვილი მანანა

თარგმნა რთული ფენომენია, რომელიც განსაკუთრებულ უნარებს მოითხოვს, რათა ზუსტად გადმოსცეს სათქმელი სათარგმნ ენაზე.

განასხვავებენ ლიტერატურული და ტექნიკურ/სამეცნიერო ტიპის თარგმანებს, რომლებიც მნიშვნელოვნად განსხვავდებიან ერთმანეთისგან მიზნის, სტილის, ენის გამოყენებისა და მიდგომის თვალსაზრისით. ტექნიკური/სამეცნიერო თარგმანის მთავარი მიზანი არის სპეციფიკური და ზუსტი ინფორმაციის გადმოცემა მედიცინის, ტექნოლოგიების, ინჟინერიისა და სხვა სპეციალიზებული თემების შესახებ. შესაბამისად, ტექნიკური/სამეცნიერო თარგმნის პროცესში ყურადღება უფრო ფუნქციონალობაზეა გამახვილებული, ვიდრე სტილსა თუ შემოქმედებითობაზე. ხოლო ლიტერატურული თარგმანისას მთავარი მიზანი არის ორიგინალური ტექსტის მხატვრული, კულტურული და ემოციური ნიუანსების მიტანა მკითხველამდე.

შესაგამისად, ლიტერატურული თარგმნა არის როგორც ხელოვნეგა, ისე მეცნიერეგა, რომელიც მოითხოვს არა მხოლოდ ენოგრივ უნარეგს, არამედ კულტურული ნიუანსეგისა და ლიტერატურული ტრადიციეგის ღრმა გააზრეგას. ლიტერატურული ტექსტეგის თარგმნა განსაკუთრეგით რთულია, რადგან ეს მოიაზრეგს არა მხოლოდ სიტყვეგის პირდაპირ გადმოცემას, არამედ ემოციურ სიღრმეეგში, კულტურულ კონტექსტსა და სტილისტურ ელემენტეგში ჩაწვდომას, რომლეგიც მთლიანოგაში ქმნიან ორიგინალურ ნამუშევარს თარგმანის სახით.

მოცემულ სტატიაში განხილულია ოტია იოსელიანის ნოველის "ცეცხლთან თამაში" თარგმნის პროცესი, განსაკუთრებული ყურადღება ეთმობა იმ სტრატეგიებსა და ტექნიკებს, რომლებიც გამოყენებულ იქნა ამ ქართული ლიტერატურული ნამუშევრის ინგლისურ ენაზე გადატანისას. თარგმნის ვარიაციათა ანალიზის საშუალებით, სტატიაში განხილულია, თუ როგორ გავლენას ახდენს კონკრეტული თარგმანი ნათარგმნ ტექსტზე მისი ლინგვისტური და კულტურული კონტექსტების გათვალისწინებით. თარგმნის პროცესში წარმოშობილი კონკრეტული გამოწვევებისა და მთარგმნელის მიერ მიღებული გადაწყვეტილებების აღნიშნული კვლევის მიზანია გააზიაროს სირთულეები, რომლებიც დაკავშირებულია ენობრივი ერთეულების ფრაზების, სიტყვების და სრული წინადადებების — თარგმნასთან, კულტურულ და ეთნიკურ ნიუანსების გათვალისწინებით. გარდა ამისა, ეს სტატია ხაზს უსვამს თარგმნის კვლევების უფრო ფართო მნიშვნელობას, რომელიც საშუალებას აძლევს სიღრმისეულად გავიგოთ ენის, კულტურისა ლიტერატურის დინამიური ურთიერთობა, განსაკუთრებული ყურადღებით იმაზე, თუ როგორ ფორმირებენ თარგმნის გადაწყვეტილებები საბოლოო პროდუქტს.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: ოტია იოსელიანი, ცეცხლთან თამაში, ლიტერატურული თარგმანი, კულტურული ნიუანსი, ლინგვისტიკა, თარგმნის პროცესი