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Translation Challenges in Jamel Brinkley's Short Story "Witness"

Introduction

Translation plays a crucial role in bridging different cultures and fostering understanding between nations. It enables the exchanging of ideas, knowledge, and innovations, providing access to education, literature, and global communication. Without translation and already translated material, many opportunities for collaboration, learning, and progress would be lost. Furthermore, translation is of paramount importance in preserving and disseminating cultural heritage, ensuring that important literary works remain accessible to future generations across linguistic boundaries. According to Toury (1995), „translation is a kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions, i.e. at least two sets of norm-systems on each level“ (Toury, 1995, p. 56). There are different types of translation, such as oral, written, machine, audio, and more. Each of them has its characteristics and is suited for different purposes and contexts. Written translation unites a wide range of texts, including literary, technical, legal, medical and financial texts. Translation, particularly in the realm of fictional works, presents a unique set of challenges due to the complex interplay of language, culture, and narrative structure. Fictional texts are not merely linguistic constructs; they embody cultural nuances/traits, emotional depth, and stylistic devices that are often deeply rooted in the source language. The translation of such texts requires not only linguistic proficiency but also a profound understanding of the cultural context and the emotional resonance that the original text conveys.

According to Gentzler (2001) over the last twenty years, two key changes in theoretical developments in translation theory have emerged: first is the shift from source-oriented theories to target-text-oriented theories and the second one includes cultural factors as well as linguistic elements in the translation training models (Gentzler, 2001, p.70 cited in Kuhiwczak&Littau, 2007, p.15).

In *A Companion to Translation Studies*, Kuhiwczak and Littau (2007) argue that translation serves as an ideal „laboratory situation“ for studying cultural interaction. By comparing the original text with its translation, one can not only observe the techniques employed by translators at certain moments, but also reveal and identify the different roles the target texts play in their literary systems. Additionally, the comparison reveals how the two cultural systems represented in the texts are interconnected to each other (Kuhiwczak & Littau, 2007, p.19).

Like every separate field of science, translation theories and practices have continuously developed over time. As new theories emerge and strategies are refined, translation practices are constantly being adapted to meet the demand of a globalized world. “A further example of the cultural turn in translation studies has been the expansion of research into norms governing translation strategies and techniques. Gideon Toury (1978; 1995), Andrew Chesterman (1993), and Theo Hermans (1999b), in particular, have sought to explore translational norms in terms of not only textual conventions but also cultural expectations. Toury is explicit about the cultural importance of norms in translation: Translation activities should be regarded as having cultural significance. Consequently, ‘translatorship’ amounts first and foremost to being able to play a social role, i.e. to fulfil a function allotted by a community – to the activity, its practitioners, and/or, and Theo Hermans (1999b), in particular, have

sought to explore translational norms in terms of not only textual conventions but also products – in a way which is deemed appropriate in its terms of reference. The acquisition of a set of norms for determining the suitability of that kind of behaviour and for manoeuvring between all the factors which may constrain it, is therefore a prerequisite for becoming a translator within a cultural environment“ (Toury, 1978, p 83 cited in Kuhlweck & Littau, 2007, p.18);

This article explores the challenges involved in translating the short stories *Witness* and *Infinite Happiness* by American writer Jamel Brinkley. The study explores the strategies and methods employed to maintain the original ideas while adapting the text to the Georgian cultural context. Notably, these literary works are not translated into Georgian; therefore, the translations of analyzed passages presented in this study are original and were done by the author of the study.

Methodology and Translation strategies

The study primarily employs a qualitative research method to examine and analyze the figurative language in Brinkley's short stories, as well as the methods of translating them in Georgian. The method allows exploration of translation techniques used in the literary texts. Through the process of close reading, the stories were carefully examined to gain a detailed understanding and interpretation of the original texts. Particular attention was given to the complexity inherent in the translation process. During the overall process of translation, various strategies/procedures were identified, which were primarily used to address the challenges encountered in rendering specific passages.

Generally, there are offered various translation procedures in translation studies. Though, in the given research, Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) and Newmark's (1988) translation procedures were mainly used. Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) single out the two methods of translation - direct, or literal translation, and oblique translation. These two methods include seven procedures, such as *borrowing*, *calque*, *literal translation (word for word)*, *transposition*, *modulation*, *equivalence*, *adaptation* (Saridaki, 2021, p.135-137). Direct or literal translation, which includes borrowing, calque, and literary translation, is focused on finding word-for-word equivalence and preserves the form of the original text. As for the oblique translation, including transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation, it is focused on conveying the meaning more naturally in the target language and culture. From these seven procedures, the translator (the author) used four of them - literary translation (word for word), transposition, modulation, adaptation. Besides the mentioned procedures, two forms - *reduction* and *expansion* of Newmark's (Newmark, 1988) translation strategies were actively used in translating the passages. Though, other techniques, such as, were also employed. According to Newmark (1988), *reduction* is the procedure when the translator is more likely to reduce the number of elements that make up the SL by not eliminating important information in the translation. *Expansion* refers to the case where the translator exceeds the number of SL words in the translation, Newmark (1988, pp81-93).

Literal, or *word for word* translation, refers to the direct transfer of a source language (SL) text into a target language (TL) that is both grammatically and idiomatically appropriate, with the translators' task primarily focused on ensuring adherence to the linguistic servitudes of the TL (Saridaki, 2021, p.135).

Another technique called *transposition* involves „replacing one word class with another without changing the meaning of the message“. In addition to being a specific translation procedure, transposition can also be applied within a single language. Translators must decide to apply transposition when the resulting translation better suits the utterance or preserves a particular stylistic nuance.

Modulation involves altering the form of the message by changing its perspective. This modification is justified when a literal or transposed translation, although grammatically correct, is considered unsuitable, unidiomatic or awkward in the TL.

With the method of *adaptation*, the extreme limit of translation is reached: „it is used in those cases where the type of situation being referred to by the SL message is unknown in the TL culture. In such cases translators have to create a new situation that can be considered as being equivalent.

Adaptation can, therefore, be described as a special kind of equivalence, a situational equivalence” (Saridaki, 2021, p.136).

Discussion

From the moment one begins reading Brinkley’s works, his distinctive colloquial writing style is immediately noticeable as his use of various expressive stylistic devices (simile, metaphor, onomatopoeia, and other) stands out. This creative blend of language makes a unique tone and voice to the writing. It is particularly interesting to explore how the emotiveness and expressiveness of Brinkley’s language are preserved in Georgian translations, as these elements are often shaped by cultural and linguistic nuances. In this context, the challenge lies in maintaining the writer’s original language and adapting it to fit the Georgian cultural and linguistic framework, because, without it, the product won’t be valuable. Based on the research, we have tried to identify the translation strategies employed to convey his ideas while maintaining the characteristics, intentions, and goals of the author. This study examines the specific methods used to retain the emotional depth and stylistic richness of Brinkley’s prose, which are essential to the overall meaning and effect of the stories.

One of the most powerful stylistic devices that captures readers’ attention throughout the stories is the metaphor. It should be mentioned that the meaning and emotiveness of metaphors are preserved while translating them into Georgian. In the following example, the translation, like the original text, maintains the main concepts and conveys the emotional burden of the character. This emotional background is further emphasized through an interesting metaphor - *regurgitated* (*ამომანთხევდა, amomantkhevdá*): *She collected as much information as she could, as furiously as she could, about the lives and trials, real and imagined, of black people everywhere. Willy-nilly, she regurgitated facts and ideas at me (“Witness”).* In Georgian, it has been translated as: *გაშმაგებით ცდილობდა ყველგან, სადაც კი ხელი მიუწვდებოდა, რაც შეიძლება მეტი ინფორმაცია მოეძიებინა ფერადკანიანთა ცხოვრებისეულ სირთულეებზე, იქნებოდა ეს რეალური თუ მოგონილი, და შემდეგ, დაუდევრად ამომანთხევდა ხოლმე ყველა ფაქტსა და მოსაზრებას [gashmagebit tsdilobda kvelgan, sadats ki kheli miutsvdeboda rats sheidzleba meti inpormatsia moedziebina peradkanianta tskhovrebiseul sirtuleebze, ikneboda es realuri tu mogonili, da shemdeg, daudevrad amomantkhevdá kholme kvela paqtsa da mosazrebas].* Here the metaphor itself has been rendered through a literal translation. However, the parallel construction in the original text *She collected as much information as she could, as furiously as she could* has not been directly preserved in Georgian. A word-for-word/literal translation in this case would be unnatural and fail to preserve the characteristic structure of the Georgian language. By using the constructions, the author emphasizes the character’s strong desire to gather as much information as possible. To maintain the same emotional intensity in Georgian, translation strategies of adaptation and transposition have been applied- *გაშმაგებით ცდილობდა ყველგან, სადაც კი ხელი მიუწვდებოდა რაც შეიძლება მეტი ინფორმაცია მოეძიებინა.*

Strategies of adaptation and transposition are also employed in translating another expressive metaphor - every emotion and reserve of energy seemed to have been boiled out of her (“Witness”). In Georgian, the metaphor has been translated in a way that preserves both the idea and metaphor itself, as Georgian also has a metaphor with a similar meaning- *მასში დაგროვილმა თითოეულმა ემოციამ, სიმშვიდემ და თავშეკავებულობამ ერთბაშად ამოხეთქა [masshi dagrovilma titoeulma emotsiam, simshvidem da tavshekavebulobam ertbashad amokhetka].* The metaphorical imagery of the source text is effectively transposed into the translation, maintaining an emotional intensity and main features. The translation successfully conveys the emotional and physiological exhaustion experienced by Bernice.

While translating the following metaphorical sentence into Georgian, various translation strategies were also used, such as transposition, modulation, and reduction. *When she wasn’t biting her lips, her nervous smiling mouth reminded me of cut strawberry’s inner flesh (“Infinite Happiness”)* is

translated into Georgian as -*როდესაც ნერვიულად იღიმოდა, მისი ტუჩები მარწყვის ნაზ რბილობს მაგონებდა* [rodesats nerviulad ighimoda, misi tuchebi martskvis naz rbilobs magonebda]. The phrase *her nervous smiling mouth* in the original sentence was modified as *როდესაც ნერვიულად იღიმოდა* (literal transl.: *when she smiled nervously*). The Georgian version makes an emphasis on *her lips* instead of *her mouth*: *მისი ტუჩები გაჭრილი მარწყვის ნაზ რბილობს მაგონებდა* (literal transl.: *Her lips reminded me of cut strawberry's soft flesh*). Also, the phrase *when she wasn't biting her lips* was omitted. Those changes were made to make the translation more natural where the major idea of her nervous actions is still preserved through the phrase *when she smiled nervously*.

To achieve an accurate and effective translation, the strategies of transposition, adaptation, and modulation are employed in translating the following sentence of imagery, including a simile— *I felt trapped, as though the words out of her mouth were expanding and filling up the space in her tiny apartment* (“*Witness*”). The sentence has been rendered in Georgian as -*გალიაში გამომწყვდეულივით ვგრძნობდი მის ბინაში თავს, მის მიერ წარმოთქმული თითოეული სიტყვა თითქოს უფრო და უფრო მრავლდებოდა, იზრდებოდა და სულს მხუთავდა* [galiashi gamomtskvdeulivit vgrdznobdi mis binashi tavs, mis mier tsarmotkmuli titoeuli sitkva titqos upro da upro mravldeboda, izrdeboda da suls mikhutavda]. Here, the phrase *I felt trapped* is translated as *გალიაში გამომწყვდეულივით ვგრძნობდი თავს* (literal transl. *I felt like a caged bird*), making the situation more vivid, expressive and emotionally charged in Georgian. This transformation enhances the imagery and strengthens the metaphorical impact of the utterance.

To ensure the accurate translation of the simile in Georgian, the strategies of transposition and reduction are used: *An unflattering beard grew like patches of moss along his pallid cheeks and jaw* (“*Witness*”). It is translated as - *ფერმკრთალ ლოყებზე, უხეში წვერი ხავსივით ჩამოზრდოდა* [permkrtal lokebze ukheshi tsveri khavsivit chamozrdoda]. In the translation, the word order is changed through transposition to adapt the natural structure of the Georgian language. Specifically, the word *jaw* is omitted in the phrase *along his pallid cheeks and jaw*, because, in Georgian, *cheeks* usually implies the area of the face where beard is grown, so the word *jaw* is not necessary. Consequently, the reduction and transposition strategies help the translator to maintain clarity in the Georgian translation where the meaning and impact of the simile is thoroughly preserved.

A free translation technique was used in the sentence - *For a long time, I'd been the camera verifying their love* (“*Infinite Happiness*”) to convey the idea and meaning more naturally in Georgian: *დიდი ხნის განმავლობაში, მათი სიყვარულის მოწმე ვიყავი* [didi khnis ganmavlobashi, mati sikvarulis motsme vikavi]. If we translated the phrase word-for-word, it would not be relevant in Georgian as such a phrase is not typical in the language. By employing a free translation, the sentence takes on the following meaning in English – *For a long time, I have been the witness of their love*.

For the translation of the sentence - *Except for Bernice's whistling breaths, everything was quiet., He just hummed in response, upstairs neighbor stomped and his TV roared* (“*Witness*”), where an interesting example of onomatopoeia is given, various translation strategies, such as transposition, adaptation, expansion, reduction and modulation, have been employed to achieve an accurate and expressive translation. *სიჩუმეს მხოლოდ ბერნისის ფშვინვა არღვევდა., თითქოს, ამით სიჩუმეს გამოეპასუხებოდაო., ზედა სართულიდან კი, როგორც ყოველთვის, მძიმე ნაბიჯების შემაწუხებელი ბრაგუნი და ტელევიზორის გაუთავებელი ღრიალი ისმოდა* [sichumes mkholod Bernisis pshvinva arghvevda., titkos, amit sichumes gamoepasukhebdao., zeda sartuldan ki, rogorts koveltvis, mdzime nabidgebis shematsukhebeli braguni da televizoris gautavebeli ghriali ismoda]. The word – *neighbour* is omitted, as it is implied in Georgian and it is not necessary to be stated,. By using the expansion, the phrase *როგორც ყოველთვის* (*as usual*) is added to emphasize that the action happens regularly, making the sentence more natural. As for the transposition, adaptation

and modulation, they were used to adjust the word order and structure to maintain the tone, meaning and the stylistic effect of the original text.

Transposition and expansion are used to maintain the expressiveness and emotiveness of Georgian translation, expressed by the stylistic devices, such as onomatopoeia and personification. The sentence *The heat hissed steadily into the room* (“Witness”) is expressively rendered in Georgian as – *ოთახში სიცხე გველსავით შესისინდა* [*otakhshi sitskhe gvelsavit shesisinda*]. In the translation, expansion is applied through the addition of the word *snake*, which is implied in the original. This addition strengthens the onomatopoeic effect, as the hissing sound is commonly associated with snakes.

By employing the strategies of free translation, transposition and expansion, the example including personification is translated even more expressively in Georgian. *The chill from outside clung to her body* (“Witness”). It is rendered as *გარედან შემოსული სიცხე მის სხეულს ჩაჰბდაუჭებოდა* [*garedan shemosuli sitsive mis skheuls chahbghautcheboda*]. Through free translation and expansion, another phrase is added to make it more emotive, so the translation is - *გარედან შემოსული სუსხი მის სხეულს ჩაჰბდაუჭებოდა და მთლიანად მოეცვა მისი სხეული* [*garedan shemosuli sitsive mis skheuls chahbghautcheboda da mtlianad moetsva misi skheuli*]. This addition not only enhances the emotional impact of the sentence but also provides a more logical and precise flow in the text.

As Brinkley employs colloquial writing style, he sometimes uses vulgar and coarse language in his stories. Generally, translating such words and expressions requires careful consideration of both cultural and linguistic differences between languages. Several translation techniques are mainly used in rendering these words, such as using euphemisms, finding a culturally acceptable equivalent, or omitting the taboo language. Though, choosing an adequate technique depends on the target audience and the text itself. It should be mentioned that such words are used not only as strong intensifiers, but also to express derogatory meanings, conveying contempt, disrespect, or disdain.

Brinkley mostly employs vulgar words as strong intensifiers, as well as to convey disdain and derogatory meanings. To translate the words in Georgian, substitution was primarily used to replace the offensive terms with milder equivalents. Though the translation still maintains the original expressions while adhering to cultural norms of politeness. For instance, the word *damn* is used as an intensifier and does not carry a negative meaning in the following sentence: *Back in the day, he explained, grinning, me and my boys would eat at this place after partying all damn night.* უწინ, განაგრძო ღიმილით, გიჟური წვეულებების მერე, მე და ჩემი მეგობრები, აქ მოვდიოდით ხოლმე საჭმელად [*utsin, ganagrzdno ghimilit, me da chemi megobrebi, gijuri tsveulebebis mere, aq movdiodit kholme sachmelad*]. The word *damn* is translated as a *wild party* in Georgian.

In the following example, the coarse word *damn* is used to intensify the speaker’s negative emotion towards the picture. It serves as a way to emphasize the strength of the dislike, but it also has a slightly vulgar tone, that is farther intensified by vulgar expressions, for making the insult more severe and derogatory: *I always hated that damn picture, he said. Bernice is so ugly in it, just a sad-ass, ugly-ass kid.* The sentence is translated as - *ყოველთვის მძულდა ეს წყველი სურათი, თქვა მან. ფუ! ბერნისი რა საცოდავად და საშინელია აქ* [*puh! Bernisi ra satsodavi da sashinelia aq*]. Euphemistic substitution is used to translate the vulgar expressions *sad-ass* and *ugly-ass*. Both of them carry derogatory meanings: *sad-ass* is used to indicate that the person is extremely pitiful or pathetic, while *ugly-ass* intensifies the insult, making the person's appearance seem even more repulsive. Therefore, in Georgian translation, for intensification of the meaning an interjection - ფუ! (Puh!) is used and for euphemistic substitutions for the vulgar words, the adjectives - *საცოდავი* and *საშინელი* (literally- abhorrent, lousy) are used, which perfectly renders the original idea of the passage.

Sentence from the short-story, includes an expletive *fucking* as a strong intensifier - *Man, he said, staring up at the wall again, I really fucking hate that photo.* In Georgian translation - *ძმაო, თქვა მან*

და თან კედელზე სურათს შეჰყურებდა, ჭირვიტ მეზიზღება ეს სურათი [dzmao, tkva man da tan kedelze surats shehkurebda, tchirivit mezizgeba es surati], expletive - *fucking hate* has been substituted with the phrase - ჭირვიტ მეზიზღება (literally – *hate like a plague*), which is frequently used by Georgians, when they want to express strong dislike. So, the sentence conveys the same intensity of strong disdain though uses a more culturally appropriate expression.

The sentence including the strong expletive - *Tell that motherfucker I can't stand him anymore* is translated into Georgian in the following way: უთხარი იმ ნაგავს, რომ აქ მისი დანახვა აღარ მინდა [utkhari im nagavs, rom aq misi danakhva aghar minda]. Literally - *Tell the trash that I don't want to see him here anymore*. The expletive *motherfucker* is used to express a strong and deep disdain or hatred towards the person. Using the word is natural for colloquial speech in both languages. It is highly vulgar and offensive, therefore, word for word translation is avoided, and replaced by a culturally specific word (*ნაგავი/trash*).

Conclusion

The translation of fictional works has always been a significant challenge for translators, requiring not only the expertise in translation techniques but also a deep understanding of the cultural traits inherent in both the source and target languages. Studying the translation challenges in Jamel Brinkley's short stories revealed the insightful findings. Brinkley's extensive use of figurative language, including metaphors, vivid imagery, vulgar or coarse language, presented a distinct challenge for the translator. The Study identified a range of translation strategies employed in the process, including literal translation, transposition, adaptation, modulation, reduction, and expansion. These strategies played a crucial role in ensuring that the translation accurately reflected the source text, while adapting to the cultural and linguistic specifics of the Georgian language. Translations of the selected passages successfully maintain the core ideas, emotional depth, intensity, and the stylistic richness of Brinkley's prose, all of which are essential to the overall meaning and effect of the stories.

Key words: translation, challenges in translation, strategies of translation, Brinkley, stylistic devices

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თარგმანთან დაკავშირებული გამოწვევები ჯამელ ბრინკლის

მოთხრობის "მოწმე" მიხედვით

რეზიუმე

ნაშრომში განხილულია თარგმანის ის ძირითადი გამოწვევები, რომლებიც ფიქსირდება ჯამელ ბრინკლის მოთხრობებში ცალკეული პასაჟების თარგმანისას. მწერლის წერის სტილი საკმაოდ საინტერესო და გამორჩეულია, დატვირთულია ემოციურად, რაც იძლევა დიდ შესაძლებლობებს, მოხდეს თარგმნის პროცესში მათზე დაკვირვება და ძირითადი გამოწვევების წარმოჩენა. კონკრეტული პასაჟების ანალიზით, ნაშრომი მიმოიხილავს, თუ როგორ გამოიყენება სხვადასხვა მთარგმნელობითი სტრატეგია ორიგინალური ტონისა და სტილის ხელუხლებლად შესანარჩუნებლად.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: თარგმანი, მოთხრობა, ირონია, მეტაფორა, მხატვრული შედარება.