

Aspects of Linguistic and Cultural Equivalence in Literary Translation

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Abstract

In this article, we explore the concepts of translational and cultural equivalence as pivotal elements in the field of literary translation. Specifically, we examine how the notion of equivalence—recognized as a fundamental principle in translation theory—is realized, challenged, and redefined in the process of translating literary works across languages and cultures. Our focus is on how translations can preserve the meaning, tone, spirit, and cultural nuances of the original text while balancing fidelity to the source material with an awareness of the attitudes and norms of the target audience. Equivalence should be understood not as a static endpoint, but as an active, interpretive process that unfolds in response to the translator's own subjectivity and cultural context. This paper engages with theories of functional and dynamic equivalence, post-structuralism critiques, and cultural approaches to translation, critically interrogating conventional notions of accuracy and fidelity. We also address specific challenges in the translation process, such as the translation of untranslatable terms, culture-bound references, historical context, and the translator's role as an interpreter. By connecting theory to practice, this study draws on examples from various literary translations, particularly from English to Albanian, to illustrate how equivalence is achieved in actual translation scenarios. Ultimately, we advocate for a redefined, dynamic, and case-specific understanding of equivalence that recognizes the translator not only as a linguistic intermediary, but also as a cultural mediator and a creative agent.

Keywords: Literary Translations, Cultural Nuances, Translation Theory, Cultural Mediator, Translator's Subjectivity, Interpretive Process, Post-Structuralism Critiques, Culture-Bound References

Introduction

Translation extends beyond simple linguistic replacement; it embodies a process of interpretation and creativity that exists at the crossroads of language, literature, and culture. The intricacies involved in literary translation amplify this complexity, are responsible for not only conveying semantic content but also preserving tone, style, and cultural nuances inherent in the original text. Within this sophisticated framework, equivalence has emerged as a pivotal yet frequently debated concept within translation studies.

Equivalence broadly describes the relationship characterized by similarity or correspondence between a source text (ST) and its target text (TT). However, it is neither an absolute nor unchanging construct. Over recent decades, scholars have proposed various models to understand equivalence—ranging from formal and dynamic equivalence introduced by [1] to textual-linguistic equivalence proposed by [2]. and more contemporary theories emphasizing functional and cultural aspects put forth by These theoretical advancements underscore an increasing awareness

that translation is shaped by sociolinguistic variables along with historical contexts; thus rendering meaning both fluid and subject to negotiation [3,4].

In literary translations specifically, challenges escalate: translators frequently face difficult choices between remaining true to their source material while ensuring resonance within the target audience's culture. Ensuring translational fidelity while maintaining cultural resonance demands a high level of interpretive sensitivity and analytical precision. Cultural references may lack direct equivalents; idiomatic expressions or metaphors might not correspond across languages which obliges translators to partake in what [5]. terms "norm-governed behavior"—making decisions influenced both by established linguistic norms as well as cultural expectations.

The journey toward equivalence is often obstructed by challenges unique to literary texts, including: untranslatability, tonal fidelity, historical distance, cultural distinctiveness, which demand that translators act not merely as transmitters but as cre-

ative mediators, striking a compromise between remaining faithful to the source and making the text accessible and meaningful to new readers. Such a perspective recognizes the translator as:

1. A linguistic operator who manages textual fidelity.
2. A cultural mediator who bridges diverse worldviews.
3. A stylistic co-producer who shapes literary form and aesthetic experience.
4. An intercultural commentator who negotiates meaning across languages and societies.

This paper aims to explore concepts of translational integrity alongside cultural equivalence from both theoretical viewpoints, as well as critical analysis perspectives. It investigates how notions of equivalence do not serve merely as ultimate objectives—or "perfect matches"—but rather function dynamically within context-specific negotiations influenced significantly by translator agency along with individual aesthetic preferences. Through connecting key theoretical constructs with practical illustrations drawn from English–Albanian literary translations, this study aims to deepen the understanding of how equivalence is constructed and negotiated in the context of real-world literary translation.

Theoretical Framework

The notion of equivalence has historically been a critical aspect of translation theory, particularly in the context of literary translation discussions. Its interpretation has undergone significant transformation over time; it has shifted from being perceived as an objective standard for precise correspondence to being recognized as a relative and negotiated outcome—often unstable throughout the process of translation. It is now clear that cross-linguistic equivalence, along with other forms of translational equivalence, is not an inherent quality, rather, it emerges from an ongoing assessment of the interaction between source and target texts, a dynamic process which enables a better understanding of the complexity involved in achieving true equivalence in translations.

Formal and Dynamic Equivalence (Eugene Nida)

Eugene Nida, one of the most influential figures in translation studies, fundamentally reshaped the discourse on translation equivalence with his groundbreaking work in the 1960s. In his seminal book *Toward a Science of Translating* (1964), Nida introduced two key approaches to achieving equivalence in translation: formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence.

Formal equivalence is particularly appropriate for texts where precision is critical, such as legal, religious, or historical documents. In literary translation, formal equivalence can sometimes produce unnatural results and it may result in a target text that feels "foreign" or 'awkward' to the reader if the source language's structures are very different from those of the target language. The translator's goal is to produce a target text that mirrors the linguistic structure, vocabulary, and grammatical patterns of the original as closely as possible. This approach seeks to preserve the literal meaning, word order, and syntax,

maintaining a strong connection to the source language's form.

Dynamic equivalence, also called functional equivalence, prioritizes naturalness and readability in the target language, so the text "feels" right to its new audience, aiming for the same effect as the original text. In literary translation, the translator must adapt the message and style to fit the cultural expectations, norms, and linguistic conventions of the target audience rather than merely reproduce word-for-word translation [1].

Critiques and Limitations

Neither formal nor dynamic equivalence alone can fully address the complexities of translation. Formal equivalence can produce translations that are technically accurate but stilted or obscure to the target reader. Dynamic equivalence, on the other hand, risks over-adaptation or loss of source text specificity, potentially leading to translations that read more like interpretations or adaptations than faithful translations. In practice, translators often use a spectrum of strategies between formal and dynamic equivalence, making case-by-case decisions about when to remain literal and when to adapt creatively.

Textual-Linguistic Equivalence (J.C. Catford)

J.C. Catford's contribution to translation studies, particularly through his 1965 work *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*, brings a structuralist and linguistic perspective to the concept of equivalence, defining equivalence in terms of linguistic levels and emphasizing the inevitability of shifts or changes between source and target texts. He distinguishes between two main types of shifts in translation:

Level shifts: changes from one linguistic level to another, for example, translation shifts from one level of language to another, for instance, a grammatical element in the source language is translated as a lexical element in the target language.

Example: An English modal verb (grammatical) might be translated into Albanian using an adverb or a lexical phrase. (You can swim here= *ketu mund te besh* not-you can do the swimming here).

Category shifts: changes within the same level, such as changes in word class (e.g., noun to verb), structure, or sequence.

Structure shifts: Changes in syntactic structure, e.g., active voice in English becoming passive voice in Albanian.eg They built the house last year/ *Shtepia u ndertua vjet.*- The house was built last year.

Class shifts: Changes in word class, e.g., a noun in English becoming a verb in Albanian.

Example: The decision was difficult = We decided with difficulty

Unit shifts: Differences in the rank or unit size of linguistic items, e.g., a phrase in ST translated as a single word in TT.

Example: The English idiomatic phrase “kick the bucket” (meaning “to die”) is translated as a single Albanian verb expressing the same concept.

Intra-system shifts: Changes within the same linguistic system, e.g., a change in tense or number.

Example: The English past tense might be translated into a perfective form in Albanian, reflecting differences within verb aspect systems. (He wrote a letter-he has written a letter) Catford’s framework works well for technical or legal texts, where it is very important to preserve the exact meaning and function of terms. In these texts, shifts are controlled and precise. In literary works, it is not enough to simply replace words or structures; the translator must adapt the tone, style, cultural nuances, and figurative meaning the author intended.

Functional and Skopos -Oriented Theories (Katharina Reiss & Christiane Nord)

The German functionalist theories that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s presented a substantial challenge to the conventional understanding of equivalence as simple sameness. These theories underscored functionality and purpose as critical criteria, notably illustrated through Skopos theory. Scholars such as [6,7].

Argued that translation must serve a distinct role within the context of the target language, assessing equivalence based on the communicative objectives of the translated text rather than strictly adhering to fidelity with its source. This shift represented a move away from traditional focus on exact alignment between source and target texts, favoring instead an emphasis on function or objective—known in this context as Skopos—to inform translational decisions. This perspective promotes creative adaptations that allow translators to capture not just literal meaning but also thematic essence through imaginative adjustments.

Historical and Theoretical Background

Katharina Reiss and Christiane Nord are two of the key theorists who developed and popularized functionalist approaches: initially proposed a typology of texts based on their communicative functions—informative, expressive, and operative—and suggested that different text types require different translational strategies [8]. developed this further with Skopos theory, which argues that translation is a goal-oriented activity. The purpose (skopos) of the translation dictates the translator’s choices, focusing on the needs and expectations of the target audience.[9].

Core Ideas of Functionalism and Skopos Theory

Translation as Purpose-Driven Activity

Unlike earlier models which emphasize linguistic equivalence as the primary goal, functionalist theories assert that translations are made for a purpose within the target culture. The intended function of the target text—whether to inform, persuade, entertain, or educate—shapes how the translation is produced.

Equivalence as Functional Correspondence

Equivalence is reframed not as identity but as functional correspondence—the target text should fulfill the same function

for its audience as the source text does for its original audience. This may require adaptations, omissions, or additions that depart from source text fidelity but serve the communicative purpose better.

Freedom and Creativity of the Translator

This model recognizes the translator as active agents who make strategic decisions based on the translation’s purpose, allowing creative modifications to better fit the target audience’s culture and expectations.

Functionalist theories are especially useful in literary translation, where capturing cultural nuances, tone, and artistic effect is vital. For example, when translating *Vanity Fair* into Albanian, references to English social customs may be adapted or explained to ensure the text remains meaningful for Albanian readers.

However, some critics warn that emphasizing function over fidelity can risk misrepresenting the source text and may introduce subjectivity or inconsistency, especially if the translation’s purpose is unclear. Despite this, supporters argue that recognizing purpose and context leads to more transparent and effective translations.

Cultural and Descriptive Approaches (Susan Bassnett, Gideon Toury)

In the late 20th century, translation theory expanded significantly through what we now call the cultural and descriptive approaches. These perspectives moved beyond purely linguistic or functional views, emphasizing that translation is always a culturally and ideologically shaped act.

Susan Bassnett: Translation as Cultural Negotiation

In her seminal work, *Translation Studies* (first published in 1980, with later editions in the 1990s), Susan Bassnett argues that translation is not just a transfer of words between languages, but a process of cultural negotiation. It depends on how the translator interprets and adapts cultural elements for the target audience.

Gideon Toury, a leading figure in Descriptive Translation Studies, proposed that instead of telling translators what they should do, we should study what they actually do. His approach focuses on norms that is, the social and institutional expectations that guide translation behavior. Toury identifies three types of norms: Preliminary norms decisions about what texts or genres to translate. Operational norms decisions made during the translation process, especially regarding language and culture. Textual norms the stylistic features of the final product.

Foreignization vs. Domestication (Lawrence Venuti)

revolutionized the field of translation studies by bringing attention to the ethical and cultural implications of translational choices. Central to Venuti’s thesis are the concepts of domestication making translation natural and familiar to the target culture

and foreignization (preserving elements of the source culture), [10,11].

Venuti's Critique of Translator Invisibility

A key part of Venuti's critique is aimed at the "invisibility" of translators. In much Western translation practice, translators are expected to make their work seamless and transparent, as if the text was originally written in the target language. This invisibility supports domestication but, according to Venuti, silences the translator's voice and erases the cultural and ideological differences involved in translation. He advocates for translator visibility through prefaces, footnotes, or stylistic choices so that readers recognize the intercultural dialogue taking place.

In literary translation, these issues are especially important. Venuti's framework helps us understand that translation is not just about conveying meaning accurately but also about negotiating cultural difference and artistic style. The choice between domestication and foreignization influences how cultural identities are represented, preserved, or transformed in the target text. Finally, while foreignization can sometimes make texts feel "strange" or difficult, and domestication can increase readability, Venuti encourages translators to thoughtfully balance these strategies, embracing the ethical and political responsibilities involved in translation [12].

Untranslatability and Culture-Specific Terms

One major issue is the presence of words, idioms, social customs, or historical references deeply embedded in the source culture, but lacking direct equivalents in Albanian. Translators often have to choose between domestication adapting terms to something more familiar for the Albanian reader or foreignization retaining the original terms and explaining them.

For example, in William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, the term "season" refers to the London social season, a concept tied to aristocratic social events, which has no exact counterpart in Albanian culture. A domesticated translation might generalize it as "kulmi i jetës mondane" (the peak of social life), while a foreignized version might keep "Sezoni" and add a footnote explaining the tradition. Similarly, military titles such as "Life Guards" have no direct Albanian equivalent, so translators might use "Garda Mbretërore" (Royal Guard) and provide contextual explanation. Idiomatic expressions also pose challenges.

The English idiom "as cool as a cucumber" is culturally specific; a literal translation sounds odd. Instead, translators interpret the meaning calmness under pressure using phrases like "i qetë dhe i ftohtë si akull" (calm and cold as ice). Wordplay and puns are particularly difficult to render while preserving style and tone. For instance, the phrase "Revenge may be wicked, but it's natural" contains a moral paradox. A straightforward translation loses the rhythm, so translators may adapt it to capture the ironic and philosophical nuance [13].

Social and hierarchical references, like "Lady Bareacres" or "Miss Pinkerton's Academy for Young Ladies," reflect English

class systems or institutions unfamiliar in Albania. These often require domestication, foreignization, or additional explanations so the target audience can grasp their significance.

Tone, Mood, and Narrative Voice

In literary texts, tone (author's attitude), mood (atmosphere created), and narrative voice (distinctive style or personality of the narrator) are crucial stylistic elements that contribute significantly to the overall impact and meaning of a work. Translating these subtle features presents one of the most formidable challenges in literary translation, as they require a delicate balance between faithful representation and creative adaptation.

Importance of Tone and Mood

-Tone refers to the author's or narrator's attitude toward the subject matter or audience. It can be formal, ironic, humorous, sarcastic, melancholic, or any other affective stance.

Consider Wilde's famous paradoxical epigram:

Original: "I can resist everything except temptation."

Literal Albanian translation: "Duhet të rezistoj gjithçkaje, përveç tundimit." (I have to resist everything except temptation.)

While accurate in meaning, this translation:

Diminishes the paradox: The English version's witty contradiction ("resist everything except temptation") is an elegant play on words that highlights human weakness humorously.

Loses rhetorical elegance: The balance and brevity in the original contribute to its stylistic charm.

Misses tone calibration: Without idiomatic or stylistic adjustments, the humor may fall flat.

To better capture the tone, a translator might opt for a more idiomatic Albanian expression or restructure the sentence to preserve the paradoxical humor, for example:

"Mund të rezistoj gjithçkaje, përveç tundimit – dhe ai më tund vazhdimisht." (I can resist everything except temptation — and it constantly tempts me.)

This introduces a playful element, keeping the paradox alive and more natural in Albanian..

-Mood, on the other hand describes the emotional atmosphere or feeling evoked in the reader by the text, such as suspense, joy, gloom, or nostalgia.

For instance, the gothic atmosphere in Edgar Allan Poe's works is built through intricate sentence structures and vivid vocabulary. A translator who opts for simplified or modern Albanian phrases may inadvertently dilute the haunting mood [14].

Narrative Voice: Maintaining Authorial and Narratorial Identity
The narrative voice, whether first-person, third-person omniscient, unreliable, or experimental, is a key marker of style and perspective. In *Vanity Fair*, the formal and often ironic narrator addresses readers directly with a broad social overview, which

needs to be preserved to keep the satirical tone.

For example, the phrase “It is possible that Becky was one of those young ladies who are endowed with a genius for getting on in the world” carries subtle irony. A too-literal translation loses this nuance. A better version might be: “Perhaps Becky was one of those young ladies naturally gifted at rising in life—at any cost.”

Tone, Mood, and Narrative Voice – Examples from Vanity Fair

Example 1: Irony and Satire

English: “It is possible that Becky was one of those young ladies who are endowed with a genius for getting on in the world.”

Tone: Subtle irony, questioning Becky’s moral integrity while admiring her ambition.

Too literal Albanian: “Është e mundur që Becky të ishte një nga ato zonjusha me talent për të ecur përpara në jetë.” (It is possible that Becky was one of those young ladies with a talent for getting ahead in life)

Better version (preserving irony): “Ndoshta Becky ishte nga ato zonjusha që kanë dhunti të lindur për t’u ngritur në jetë – me çfarëdo çmimi qoftë.” (Perhaps Becky belonged to that order of young ladies endowed with an innate talent for climbing the social ladder — be it at any cost.)

Example 2: Authorial Intrusion

English: “Which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or having it, is satisfied?”

Challenge: Maintaining rhetorical rhythm and philosophical tone.

Albanian translation: “Kush prej nesh është i lumtur në këtë botë? Kush e arrin dëshirën e vet? Dhe nëse e arrin, a ndjehet i kënaqur?” (Who is happy in this world? Who attains what he desires? And having attained it, is he satisfied?)

Further Examples of Irony and Satirical Tone Satire of Morality and Society

Original: “This is a Vanity Fair, a world where everyone is striving for something—pleasure, fame, money, or power.”

Tone: Philosophical irony; Thackeray’s omniscient narrator moralizes while portraying characters’ pettiness.

Albanian suggestion: Kjo është Panairi i Kotësisë – një botë ku secili vrapon pas kënaqësisë, famës, parasë apo pushtetit.” (This is Vanity Fair — a world wherein all men and women pursue, with restless zeal, the fleeting shadows of pleasure, fame, wealth, or power.)

Commentary: While this phrase translates well literally, it’s the tone and context that carry the irony. The translator must ensure the moral voice and detachment of the narrator remain intact

throughout [15].

Understatement as Irony

Original: “Becky had no objection to going to church. She went to church as a matter of business.”

Irony: This undercuts religious sincerity with materialistic motives.

Albanian version: “Becky nuk kishte asgjë kundër të shkonte në kishë. Ajo shkonte në kishë si pjesë e biznesit të saj.” (Becky had no objection to attending church; indeed, she went there as a necessary branch of her trade.)

Commentary: The phrasing must mirror Thackeray’s dry, sardonic tone, avoiding emotional or moral exaggeration that could ruin the subtle effect.

Mock Heroism

Original: “Rawdon was brave—as brave as a lion—when there was no danger.”

Tone: Biting irony, undermining heroic image.

Albanian version: “Rawdon ishte trim – trim si luan – kur nuk kishte rrezik.” (Rawdon was a lion in courage — provided there was no danger to test it)

Optional variation to emphasize irony:

“Rawdon tregonte trimeri... por vetëm kur ishte i sigurt që s’kishte asnjë rrezik.” (Rawdon showed his 3.3. Historical Distance and Temporal Equivalence Translating literary works from different historical periods presents the challenge of balancing modern readability with preserving historical authenticity, a concept known as temporal equivalence. Translators must decide whether to modernize the language or preserve the historical flavor by negotiating the temporal gap between the original work and the contemporary audience. As languages and cultures evolve, texts from earlier periods develop layers of historical resonance that may be unfamiliar or inaccessible to modern readers. This phenomenon creates a tension between preserving the historical authenticity of the source text and ensuring the readability and relevance of the translation for the target audience—a tension at the heart of what we may call temporal equivalence.

The Problem of Diachronic Displacement

Texts written centuries ago often employ vocabulary, idioms, grammatical structures, and references that are no longer current, even in their source language. Translators working with such texts must determine how much of this archaism to retain. Do they render the text in modern target language for clarity, or attempt to mirror the historical distance and stylistic formality of the original? Take, for example, Charles Dickens, whose novels combine Victorian English, complex syntax, and cultural allusions that paint a vivid portrait of 19th-century Britain. An Albanian translation of *Bleak House* or *Oliver Twist* risks anachronism if the translator uses overly modern expressions that clash with the historical setting and characters’ worldview [16].

Example: Translating a Dickensian phrase like “He was a man of

low breeding but high ambition” into Albanian as “Ishte një njeri pa edukatë, por me shumë ambicie” (He was a man without manners, but full of ambition. may be clear), but the choice of “pa edukatë” (without manners) and “ambicie” (without ambition), (modern and direct) could lose the subtle class markers and social tone of the original. A more era-appropriate rendering like “Një zotëri me sjellje të rënda, por dëshira të larta për ngritje” (A gentleman of uncouth manners, yet aspiring to the highest of ambitions.) might better preserve the tone and historical nuance.

Modernization vs. Archaization

This dilemma is often framed as a spectrum between modernization (updating the language and tone) and archaization (preserving older forms of expression). Each strategy has trade-offs: Modernization ensures accessibility and engagement for present-day readers but can distort the historical texture or misrepresent the author’s voice.

Archaization maintains historical authenticity but risks alienating readers through obscurity or stiffness, especially if the target language no longer supports such archaic forms naturally [17].

In Albanian, which has undergone rapid standardization and modernization—especially post-1990—the gap between literary Albanian and its earlier forms can be dramatic. Translating Shakespeare or Shelley into 21st-century Albanian, for instance, means confronting the lack of an established poetic or archaic register equivalent to Early Modern English.

Temporal Equivalence in Practice

Let’s consider Thackeray’s narrative intrusions. In *Vanity Fair*, the narrator’s 19th-century diction and moral commentary are central to the reading experience. A literal translation may obscure these nuances, while a modernized version might shift the tone entirely.

The phrase: “The world is a looking-glass, and gives back to every man the reflection of his own face.” may be flattened if rendered in simplified contemporary Albanian as “Bota të pasqyron ashtu si je.” (The world shows you nothing more nor less than yourself) While communicative, this version lacks the rhetorical elegance and philosophical resonance of the original. A more temporally aligned version as “Bota është si një pasqyrë, që çdo njeri i kthen pas hijen e fytyrës së vet.” (The world is but a looking-glass, faithfully casting back to each of us the very shadow of our own countenance — whether we be pleased to see it or not.) preserves rhythm, metaphor, and tone while maintaining a 19th-century flavor.

Historical Distance and Temporal Equivalence – Examples from *Vanity Fair*

Example 1: Archaic Language and Social Conventions

English: “A modest dinner party, where a boiled leg of mutton formed the principal dish.”

Explanation: This reflects the 19th-century British middle-class domestic scene.

Translation approach: Should preserve the simplicity and class-specific detail.

Albanian suggestion: “Një darkë modeste familjare, ku këmba e zier e deles ishte pjata kryesore.” (A modest family supper, at which the boiled leg of mutton formed the principal dish.)

(Preserves historical flavor without modernizing the setting.)

Example 2: Outdated Expressions

English: “He has cut me in the park, and no longer nods when we pass.”

“To cut” here means to deliberately ignore someone.

Literal translation: “Më ka prerë në park dhe nuk më përshëndet më.” (He cut me in the park, and no longer acknowledges me)

Better version: “Më ka shpërfillur në park dhe nuk më jep më as një tundje koke.”

(He slighted me in the park, and will no longer grant me so much as a nod)

(Clarifies old idiom with modern clarity while retaining social context.)

The Translator’s Voice and Agency

Traditionally, the role of the translator was perceived as that of a neutral conduit, a mere channel through which the original text’s meaning passes transparently into another language. However, modern translation theory challenges this notion by emphasizing the translator’s active agency—the conscious and creative role the translator plays in shaping the final text, mediating cultural nuances, and ultimately influencing how the target audience interprets the source material. Translators often exercise creative liberties to prioritize effect over form, introducing new metaphors, modifying syntax, and adjusting register. This dynamic is particularly pronounced in poetry or experimental prose, where a literal translation can result in an unreadable or stilted output. In numerous English-Albanian translations, the translator’s presence is evident through footnotes, interjections, or subtle shifts in tone to align with local cultural norms. This approach, while at odds with the notion of “invisible translation” [11], reflects the practical realities of cultural mediation.

Translator as an Active Creator

Translators are not passive recipients of meaning but co-creators who interpret, reframe, and sometimes reshape the text. They frequently exercise creative liberties to maintain the original’s aesthetic and communicative impact, which may involve: Introducing new metaphors or culturally resonant imagery. Modifying syntax to preserve rhythm or flow. Adjusting the level of formality or register to suit the target audience [18].

Recognizing the translator’s agency encourages ethical transparency, where translators openly acknowledge their interpretive contributions rather than disguising them. It also underscores the need for translators to possess deep cultural competence and literary sensitivity to balance fidelity with creative adaptation. This approach fosters dialogue between source and target cultures, enriching both by allowing translations to resonate au-

thetically within new cultural contexts. The translator's voice and agency are central to the art and practice of literary translation. Far from mere conduits, translators function as intercultural mediators, creative collaborators, and critical interpreters who shape how texts are received and understood. Their active participation, through choices in style, tone, and cultural adaptation, transforms translation into a dynamic and nuanced process—one that is as much about re-creation and negotiation as it is about linguistic fidelity [19].

Translator's Voice and Agency – Examples from *Vanity Fair*

Example 1: Translator explaining culture

Original phrase: “The auctioneer's hammer fell.”

Literal meaning: An item has been sold at auction.

Albanian version with translator's note: “Çekiçi i ankandit ra.” (The auctioneer's hammer fell.)

(Footnote: “Ky është një moment vendimtar në ankand, që tregon mbylljen e shitjes.”)=This is the decisive moment of the auction, marking the close of the sale.

Example 2: Voice through register and syntax

English: “She flung herself on the sofa, laughing hysterically.”

Direct translation might be overly literal or flat.

Albanian (stylized): “U hodh mbi divan dhe shpërtheu në një të qeshur histerike.”

(She threw herself upon the sofa and burst into a hysterical fit of laughter.)

(Slightly elevated diction maintains drama and pace.)

Example 3: Translator's stylistic interpretation

When Becky is described as “not a person to be trifled with”, a translator may choose:

Direct version: “Nuk ishte person për t'u marrë lehtë.”(She was no woman to be trifled with)

Stylized rendering (with more nuance): “Nuk ishte nga ato që mund të nënvlerësohej pa pasoja.” (She was not a woman to be lightly set aside, nor to be underestimated without peril [20].

Conclusion

In conclusion, translational and cultural equivalence in literary translation is a complex, negotiated process that defies simplistic formulae. The creative mediation by translators enables the source text's essence, emotion, and meaning to be reinterpreted and revitalized, allowing it to speak powerfully to new audiences while honoring its original spirit. This dynamic process enriches both source and target cultures, fostering intercultural dialogue and expanding literary horizons.

Equivalence involves far more than word-for-word correspon-

dence; it encompasses the translator's ongoing interpretation, negotiation, and creative transformation of the source text. The translator's choices are influenced not only by the textual content but also by an awareness of the target audience's cultural expectations, literary traditions, and socio-historical context. As such, equivalence is inherently malleable and contingent, varying with the aims and constraints of each translation project [21].

This article has delved into the intricate and multifaceted aspects of translational and cultural equivalence within the specialized field of literary translation. By critically analyzing both theoretical frameworks and practical illustrations—particularly in relation to English-Albanian translations—we have established that equivalence transcends a simplistic, purely linguistic interpretation. Rather, it should be viewed as a dynamic, context-sensitive process rooted in interpretation that is influenced by the complex interactions among language, culture, literary forms, and aesthetic values.

Theoretical frameworks such as Nida's dynamic equivalence, which prioritizes the effect on the target reader, and Venuti's foreignization, which highlights the importance of cultural difference, provide useful conceptual tools. Yet, practical translation endeavors reveal that no single approach guarantees a perfect equivalence. Instead, successful translation requires a flexible, case-specific strategy that balances fidelity with adaptation.

In contexts involving literature, achieving equivalence often requires reinterpreting rather than merely reproducing original works. The various challenges posed by untranslatability issues such as tonal fidelity discrepancies or historical distances highlight an urgent need for solutions extending beyond mere word-for-word correspondence. These complexities offer translators valuable opportunities for creative mediation—allowing them to reconstruct meaning in ways that resonate profoundly with new audiences while remaining true to the core essence of the original text [22].

Contrary to previous scholarly perspectives on this topic, this study advocates for an understanding of equivalence that emphasizes interpretive depth alongside cultural sensitivity and practical applicability. Under this framework, translators emerge not just as technical linguists but also serve vital roles as cultural mediators, collaborative creators stylistically engaged with their work while facilitating intercultural dialogue.

Appendix: Case Study – Translational and Cultural Equivalence in *Vanity Fair*

This appendix provides a detailed case study on the complexities of achieving translational and cultural equivalence in William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, focusing on real or potential translation challenges in the English-Albanian context. The analysis illustrates key categories discussed in the article—untranslatability,

Untranslatability and Culture-Specific Expressions

Original Passage	Challenge	Translation Suggestion (Albanian)	Commentary
“He was as cool as a cucumber.”	Idiom has no equivalent in Albanian	“Ishte i qetë si akull.” (He was ice-cold)	Cultural substitution needed to preserve meaning and imagery.
“Public school”	UK-specific institutional reference	“Shkollë e mesme private” (A private academy for young ladies)	Domestication avoids confusion; footnote may explain nuance.
“Season” (as in social season)	Cultural/historical specificity	“Sezoni i shoqërisë së lartë” or “koha e ballove” (The season of balls)	Foreignization with explanatory note helps preserve cultural layer.

Tone, Mood, and Narrative Voice

Original Passage	Tone	Albanian Translation	Commentary
“She flung herself on the sofa, laughing hysterically.”	Dramatic	“U hodh mbi divan, duke qeshur hysterikisht.” (She threw herself upon the sofa and burst into a hysterical fit of laughter.)	Maintain vividness and emotional tone.
“I can resist everything except temptation.” (Wilde, used analogously)	Irony, wit	“Mund t’u rezistoj gjithçkaje, përveç tundimit.” (I can resist everything except temptation — and it constantly tempts me.)	Literal translation preserves paradox if tone is maintained.
“Becky was one of those young ladies... with a genius for getting on in the world.”	Subtle irony	“Becky ishte nga ato zonjusha që e dinin mirë si të përparonin në jetë.” (Perhaps Becky belonged to that order of young ladies endowed with an innate talent for climbing the social ladder — be it at any cost)	Preserve ironic praise and narrative voice.

Cultural References and Social Class

Original	Issue	Albanian Version	Strategy
“Lady Bareacres gave her a stare that would freeze water.”	British nobility & sarcasm	“Zonja Bareacres e shikoi me një vështrim që do ngrinte edhe ujën.” (Mrs. Bareacres looked at him with a gaze that could curdle water)	Literal with cultural hint; explanation of title may be needed.
“Miss Pinkerton’s Academy for Young Ladies”	English education system	“Akademia e Zonjushës Pinkerton për zonjusha të reja” (Miss Pinkerton’s Academy for Young Ladies)	Literal with archaic styling; signals class-based schooling.

Irony and Satire

Original	Tone	Albanian Suggestion	Challenge
“Revenge may be wicked, but it’s natural.”	Moral irony	“Hakmarrja është mëkat, por është plotësisht e natyrshme.” (Revenge is a sin, yet perfectly natural.)	Recasting tone for moral ambivalence.
“Rawdon was brave—as brave as a lion—when there was no danger.”	Mock-heroism	“Rawdon ishte trim si luan – kur nuk kishte asnjë rrezik.” (Rawdon was a lion in courage — provided there was no danger to test it)	Irony must be explicit yet subtle.
“She went to church as a matter of business.”	Satirical	“Shkonte në kishë si pjesë e strategjisë së saj.” (She attended church as part of her strategy.)	Highlights hypocrisy, avoids overstatement.

Historical Distance and Temporal Equivalence

Example	Period-specific Issue	Albanian Translation	Commentary
“A modest dinner where a boiled leg of mutton was the principal dish.”	19th-century domesticity	“Një darkë modeste me këmbë deleje të zier si pjatë kryesore.” (A modest family supper, at which the boiled leg of mutton formed the principal dish.)	Preserve historical texture with clear imagery.
“He has cut me in the park.” (meaning: ignored me)	Archaic social idiom	“Më shpërfilli në park, nuk më përshëndeti fare.” (He slighted me in the park, and will no longer grant me so much as a nod)	Clarifies outdated usage with natural modern rendering.

Translator’s Voice and Agency

Strategy	Example	Note
Paratextual explanation	“Life Guards” as military unit	Translator can use footnote to explain British army structure.
Stylistic mediation	Becky’s manipulative language	Translator may adjust register to signal manipulation while staying faithful.
Creative adaptation	Use of metaphors not present in Albanian	New metaphors may be crafted to preserve emotional/aesthetic effect.

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