

TRANSLATING THE SHORT STORY AS A LITERARY GENRE: CHALLENGES, STRATEGIES AND IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract:

This paper explores the translation of short stories as a distinct literary genre, examining how the characteristics of the short story—its brevity, concentrated narrative, stylistic density, cultural embeddedness—pose particular challenges for translators, and how translation strategies can respond to them. It begins by situating translation within the field of literary studies and genre studies, then turns to the short story in particular, highlighting what makes it distinct from other forms (novel, poetry, drama) and thus what special demands it places on the translator. Then, the paper surveys major challenges (linguistic, stylistic, cultural, paratextual, and reader-reception) in short story translation, drawing on recent empirical research. Next it reviews translation strategies and methods relevant to short stories—such as domestication vs foreignisation, adaptation, communicative vs semantic translation, modulation, transposition—and how they function in this genre. It also examines issues of fidelity, creativity and translator visibility in short story translation. Finally, the paper reflects on the implications for practitioners (translators, editors, publishers) and for scholarship, including how short-story translation contributes to cross-cultural literary exchange, the internationalisation of literatures, and the shaping of literary canons. The conclusion summarises key insights and suggests directions for future research. Keywords: short story, literary translation, genre, translation strategy, cultural transfer, translator's visibility.

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Introduction:

Translation is an activity at once linguistic, cultural and literary: it involves not only rendering words from a source language into a target language but also transferring meanings, literary effects, cultural resonances and reader-responses from one literary system into another. As has been argued in current translation studies, literary translation is among the most complex of translation types, because it must preserve (or re-create) not only propositional content but also aesthetic form, tone, style, voice and cultural context. ([Frontiers][1]) Within literary translation the short story emerges as a discrete genre whose particular features call for specific attention. Whereas novels afford breadth, sub-plots, digressions and extended development, and poetry emphasises condensed form,

rhythm and metaphor, the short story stands between them: closely controlled, compact, intense and tightly unified. The translator of a short story must negotiate that concentration of effect, the economy of language, the subtle interplay of narrative voice and time-space in a small textual space. At the same time the short story often embodies cultural, idiomatic, symbolic, linguistic and paratextual features (names, idioms, local colour, humour, dialect) that may resist easy transfer into another language or culture. Recent studies of short story translation have begun to map the kinds of errors, strategies and translation reception issues that arise. For example, one study of Indonesian short stories translated into English found a wide range of linguistic and cultural issues leading to translation errors. ([DOAJ][2]) Another study of different Arabic

translations of *Cat in the Rain* by Ernest Hemingway analysed how translators employed domestication, foreignisation, adaptation and transcreation strategies. ([jls.tu.edu.iq][3]) Given this burgeoning field of research, it is timely to consider how short-story translation functions as a literary genre within translation studies and what implications it has for the global circulation of literature. This paper therefore sets out to examine (1) what makes short stories distinctive as a genre in translation, (2) what major challenges translators face when working with short stories, (3) what strategies and methods are available and how they are applied in this genre, and (4) what implications this has for both practice and scholarship.

To appreciate the translator's challenge, it is first necessary to reflect on the short story as a genre. The short story is characterised by brevity, economy of language, and a single major event or moment of change, rather than multiple sub-plots. It often relies on subtle shifts in tone, implication, symbolism, and an abrupt or poignant ending. Because of its compactness, every word, phrase, sentence counts; there is little room for explanatory digression. Hence the translator cannot rely on lengthy paraphrase or expansion without altering the effect. At the same time, the short story is often culturally bound: references to place, custom, idiom, dialect, regional speech, humour, local allusions are frequent. This confluence of formal-narrative intensity and cultural specificity gives rise to particular challenges in translation. Furthermore, from a reception point of view, the short story has been used as a vehicle for introducing world literatures to new readerships, since collections of short stories often travel across linguistic borders more readily than full novels; they are cited in anthologies, translated for educational programmes, taught in courses, and introduced to global readers. Thus, translation of short stories becomes part of the process of literary internationalisation and cross-cultural dialogue. As one

paper notes: "Short stories, distinguished by their brevity and concentrated narrative structure, present distinct artistic elements that necessitate careful handling during the translation process." ([jls.tu.edu.iq][3]) In sum: the short story's formal features (brevity, intensity, singular event, economy of language) combined with cultural-embeddedness make it a demanding but rich domain for translation.

Translating a short story involves multiple layers of difficulty, which can be grouped broadly into linguistic, stylistic, cultural/contextual, paratextual, and reader-reception challenges.

The economy of the short story means that the translator must preserve, as far as possible, the concision and precision of the original text. Mistakes in word choice, syntax, lexical register, or omission/addition can disturb the balance of tone or distort the narrative moment. Evidence from empirical studies supports this: one study of Indonesian short stories found translation errors arising from "grammatical issues, lexical choices, rhetorical problems, pragmatic problems and cultural issues." ([DOAJ][2]) Similarly, a study of translating into Arabic identified lexical, syntactic, semantic and stylistic levels as key analytical loci. ([peerianjournal.com][4]) In literary translation, choices about sentence length, rhythm, punctuation, paragraph breaks, narrative voice—all of which are acutely felt in short stories—are crucial. The translator must decide whether to preserve unusual syntax, dialectal features, or word-play, or to adapt them for target-language readability.

Because the short story often captures a slice of life, local custom, idiom, dialect, cultural reference or socio-historical moment, translation must negotiate how to render these in the target language. For example, idioms or metaphors rooted in the source culture may have no equivalent in the target culture; names, toponyms, or lexical items may carry

connotations or resonances unfamiliar to target-language readers. In such cases omissions, footnotes, adaptation, or compensation may be required—but each choice carries effects on reader reception and literary integrity. The aforementioned study of “Cat in the Rain” and its Arabic translations shows how translators used domestication and foreignisation strategies to handle cultural/contextual gaps. ([jls.tu.edu.iq][3]) Also, translators must consider pragmatic issues (reader expectation, genre norms in target culture) and cultural transfer: how much of the “foreignness” to preserve versus how much to adapt for intelligibility.

Short stories often appear in collections, anthologies or magazines, sometimes with notes, titles, sub-titles, authorial introductions or cover blurbs; these paratextual elements may need translation or adaptation, and they influence reception. Moreover, the translator must bear in mind the focussed dramatic or narrative moment of the short story: there is little room for explanatory gloss, so decisions made at the textual level are strongly felt in the final effect.

The target reader’s reception is key: will the translated short story evoke a similar sense of surprise, irony, poignancy or compression as the original? Studies show that translation readers perceive differences in engagement depending on translation type (human, machine, post-edited). For example, a recent study found that human translations had higher reader engagement and enjoyment than machine or post-edited translations. ([arXiv][5]) Translators must therefore not only render meaning but generate a similar narrative effect in the target language. In short-story translation, the margin for error is small: a mis-rendered metaphor or tone shift can shift the story’s impact.

As popularised by Lawrence Venuti, the translation-strategy debate splits between domestication (making the text read fluently in the target culture) and

foreignisation (preserving source-culture foreignness). In short-story translation, this choice is critical: a domesticated rendering may lose cultural flavour and “bite”; a foreignised reading may feel stilted or alien to target readers. One study of Arabic translations of a Hemingway story showed how translators negotiated this balance via different techniques. ([jls.tu.edu.iq][3]) The translator must decide, for example, whether to explain or preserve a local custom, idiomatic expression, or dialect feature.

According to Peter Newmark’s taxonomy, communicative translation aims for effect, for target-language reader comprehension; semantic translation aims for fidelity to source text meaning and style. A short-story translator must often move between these modes: e.g., preserve the original’s tone and voice (semantic) but ensure target readers experience a coherent story (communicative). A recent article analysing translation methods of Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart” found that translators employed communicative translation methods to maintain horror-nuances, while also using modulation and transposition procedures to align with the target culture. ([smarteducenter.org][6]) These more fine-grained procedures (from Newmark and others) are frequently necessary in short-story translation: modulation (shifting perspective or category), transposition (changing grammar/syntax), adaptation (cultural substitution) may help render idiomatic, figurative or culturally-bound expressions. For example, a culturally-specific metaphor may require adaptation or modulation to preserve its effect in the target language and culture.

Given the short story’s formal tightness, translators must pay special attention to maintaining narrative tension, thematic economy and voice. This means carefully assessing sentence length, paragraphing, rhythm, repetition, sound-effects, and the “moment” of change inherent in the story. Some translators adopt a “micro-translation” approach—focusing on every

sentence, phrase and word choice rather than broader paragraphs. Empirical studies of short-story translation errors support the importance of lexical and rhetorical accuracy. ([Ejournal IAIN Palopo][7])

In literary translation, particularly of short stories where artistic effect is integral, the translator becomes a co-creator. They must choose when to stick close to the text (fidelity) and when to depart in order to recreate the effect in the target language (creativity). Studies of machine vs human translation show that human translation permits higher creativity and better narrative engagement. ([arXiv][8]) This is especially salient in short stories where subtle tone shifts matter.

They should be aware that short-story translation demands heightened sensitivity to form, style and effect. Pre-translation work (such as analyzing the narrative moment, identifying culture-bound items, dialect, registers, and the story's rhythm) is crucial. Editors should recognize that translation is not merely word-level substitution but a nuanced literary act; they should allow for translator's notes, footnotes or prefatory material when necessary. Publishers may wish to present short-story collections with contextual material (translator's preface, explanatory notes) to aid reader reception.

Short-story translation plays a pivotal role in exposing readers to literatures beyond their language-bound borders. Because short stories are compact and often thematically powerful, they can serve as "entrance points" into other literary traditions. However, translation strategy matters: a domesticated version may flatten cultural specificity, while a foreignised version may limit reader engagement. The translator's decision thus affects how a source-culture literature is perceived and valued abroad. The study of Indonesian short-story translation shows how cultural issues, lexical mis-interpretations and reader expectations may impact the translated text. ([DOAJ][2])

The short story genre offers a fertile site for research

because it brings into focus issues of translation economy, narrative moment, reader reception, voice, effect, and culture. Future research could deepen our understanding of how readers of translations of short stories respond compared to original texts, how translation strategies differ by language pair or culture, and how paratextual and publication practices shape translation outcomes. For instance, research on machine translation of literary texts indicates that MT currently lacks the capacity for creative translation demanded by literary genres. ([arXiv][8]) Moreover, systematic literature reviews show growing interest in translator's style in fiction translation. ([ResearchGate][9])

Conclusion:

The translation of short stories as a literary genre presents both rich opportunities and significant challenges. The short story's formal qualities—brevity, intensity, unified narrative moment—combined with cultural and linguistic specificity, call for a translation approach that is attentive, creative and contextually aware. Translators must negotiate the balance between fidelity and readability, between preserving source-culture flavour and ensuring target-language engagement. The strategy adopted—domestication vs foreignisation, communicative vs semantic translation, modulation or adaptation—has direct implications for how the text is received and how the source literature is represented in the target culture. For translation studies, the short-story genre offers an especially fertile site for research into translator's creativity, reader reception, narrative form, and transnational literary circulation.

In practice, translators, editors and publishers should approach short-story translation with awareness of these dynamics, investing pre-translation textual analysis, cultural research, and thoughtful strategy decisions. For scholarly work, more empirical studies of short-story translation—including comparative

analyses across languages, reception studies, translator-practice reflections—are needed to deepen our understanding of how literary translation works in this genre.

The short story as a genre in translation is far from a simplified or “mini-novel” task; rather, it demands sensitivity to the micro-structure of narrative, to culture, to language, to reader reception—and ultimately serves as an important vehicle for cross-cultural literary exchange. By attending to the particular demands of short-story translation, translators contribute not only to the “cross-border” movement of texts but also to the shaping of literary canons, readers’ worlds and intercultural understanding.

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