

THE ISSUES OF RECREATING FORM AND TONE IN POETIC TRANSLATION

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Abstract: Poetry translation is regarded as one of the most intricate types of literary translation. It demands that the translator convey not just the meaning of the text, but also the original poem's form and tone. This endeavor comes with numerous challenges, such as maintaining the meter, rhyme, imagery, and the poet's unique voice, all while making the poem relatable to a new audience. This research paper investigates these obstacles and presents techniques for capturing both form and tone in poetry translation, drawing on examples from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The study emphasizes how these techniques can either amplify or undermine the poem's impact in the target language.

Keywords: poetry translation, form, tone, meter, rhyme, linguistic equivalence, cultural adaptation, poetic voice, cultural and artistic integrity.

Poetry is often seen as the pinnacle of literary art, skillfully combining sound, meaning, and rhythm to create a profound impact on readers. Translating poetry goes beyond merely swapping words between languages; it demands that the translator evoke the same emotional and aesthetic experience as the original poem. Two major difficulties in this task are preserving the form and tone of the initial piece.

Form includes the poem's structural components—such as rhyme scheme, meter, stanza organization, and line breaks—which play a crucial role in how a poem is experienced. Tone reflects the poet's feelings, mood, or emotional perspective regarding the subject matter. Both elements are vital for maintaining the poem's integrity and must be taken into account during translation. A translator's skill in balancing these aspects ultimately decides whether the translated work captures the spirit of the original.

The significance of replicating form and tone in poetry translation

Accurately reproducing form and tone in poetry translation is essential for several reasons, as these components are vital for maintaining the original work's integrity and impact:

- Form reflects structure and meaning. The structure of a poem, including its rhyme scheme, meter, and line breaks, often plays a crucial role in conveying its meaning and emotional depth. For instance, a strict structure may signify order or limitation, whereas free verse could suggest liberation or disorder. Preserving the form in translation is important for retaining these nuances (Bassnett, 1998).

- Tone maintains the poem's emotional and aesthetic experience. Tone expresses the poet's perspective on the subject and influences how readers emotionally connect with the poem. Whether the tone is melancholic, joyful, ironic, or contemplative, accurately translating it ensures that the audience can feel a similar emotional resonance (Jones, 2004).

- Cultural and artistic integrity. Poetry is often strongly tied to its cultural context. The form and tone of a poem embody not just its words but also the artistic traditions and values of that culture. A faithful recreation honors these aspects, enabling the target audience to appreciate the poem's cultural depth and artistic intricacies.

- Strengthens reader engagement. When form and tone are lost, the translated poem may come across as flat or disconnected from the original. Conversely, a successful translation preserves the poem's "music," rhythm, and emotion, allowing readers to experience the full artistic and emotional impact the poet intended (Bassnett Susan, 2002).

Key challenges in recreating form and tone

Navigating the task of reproducing form and tone in poetry translation presents various challenges. The following provides an overview of these key challenges, along with relevant examples and analyses.

1. Preserving structure: poems often contain specific structural elements like rhyme schemes, meter, and line length. Translating these while retaining the original meaning can be challenging. For example, Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" follows an AABA rhyme scheme and iambic tetrameter. Direct translation into another language may lose the poem's rhyme and rhythm, making it sound awkward or flat. If the equivalent words in the target language do not fit the same meter, the translator faces the dilemma of either sacrificing the exact meaning for form or vice versa. The key challenge is to recreate a similar structure while keeping both the emotional weight and original cadence (Frost, 2001).

2. Conveying tone and emotion: a poem's tone is often conveyed through specific word choices, punctuation, and rhythm, all of which must be carefully handled by a translator to evoke the same emotions in the target language. In Pablo Neruda's "Sonnet XVII," the tone transitions from passionate to desperate. Translating lines such as "I don't love you as if you were of this world" requires deep understanding of how to capture similar feelings in the target language. A translator might use synonyms that convey the same emotional intensity, but this could alter the tone slightly. Sometimes, idiomatic expressions help convey the emotion, but they risk changing the original meaning (Neruda, 2004).

3. Cultural context: poems often incorporate cultural references that do not easily translate into another language, which can impact the imagery and resonance. For instance, in T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," references to British cultural elements, like "the Thames," may not hold the same significance for readers from other cultures. A translator may choose to add footnotes or adjust the imagery to reflect something more culturally relevant for the target audience, but this risks diluting the original meaning and making the translation feel disconnected (Holmes, 1988).

4. Ambiguity and wordplay: many poets use ambiguity and wordplay to add layers of meaning, which can be difficult for translators to replicate. In Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky," the nonsensical words and playful sounds are essential to the poem's whimsical tone. Translating such a work requires inventing new words or



finding equivalents that maintain the playfulness. A literal translation may fail to capture the essence of the original, while a more creative approach could resonate with the target audience. The challenge is balancing fidelity to the original with crafting a poem that works in the target language.

5. Sound and rhythm: poetry often relies on its musical qualities, such as alliteration and assonance, to create impact. Reproducing these sound elements in translation can be tricky. For example, in William Wordsworth's line “I wandered lonely as a cloud,” the rhythm and assonance create a lyrical quality that may not be directly translatable. A translator might modify the line to preserve the emotional effect while introducing new sounds that suit the target language’s phonetics. This demands a fine ear for both the source and target languages, as well as an appreciation for the poem's auditory qualities.

6. Loss of nuance: some words carry cultural or connotative nuances that do not have direct translations, leading to a loss of subtlety. For instance, the Japanese term “mono no aware,” which conveys a deep awareness of the fleeting beauty of things, is hard to translate directly into English. A translator might use the phrase “the pathos of things” to capture a similar idea, but this may not fully convey the depth of the original concept. The challenge is to convey the term’s essence without oversimplifying it (Basho, 1997).

7. Audience expectations: different cultures have distinct poetic traditions and expectations, which can influence how a translated poem is perceived. A poem rich in imagery and symbolism might be appreciated in one culture but seen as too abstract in another. Translators must be mindful of the preferences of the target audience and may need to adjust their approach accordingly. This could involve making the language more accessible or modifying certain elements to align with the audience's poetic preferences, while still attempting to stay faithful to the original work (Bassnett, 2002).

Recreating both form and tone in poetry translation is a challenging task that requires a careful blend of accuracy, creativity, and cultural awareness. Translating poetry is more than just a word-for-word conversion—it is an artistic process that seeks to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps while respecting the essence of the original poem.

Balancing form and tone in poetry translation

Translators often face a difficult choice: Should they prioritize the poem’s structure, staying true to its rhyme and meter even if it means losing some of the tone? Or should they focus on preserving tone, allowing for more flexibility in form? The art of poetry translation lies in achieving a balance between remaining faithful to the form and capturing the emotional depth. Successfully balancing form and tone requires careful attention to both the original poem’s structure and the emotional and aesthetic impact it conveys. Key considerations include:

1. Understanding form:

Rhyme and meter: many poems depend on rhyme schemes or specific meters. Translating these while keeping the original meaning intact can be difficult. Some translators choose to prioritize the form, which may lead to changes in meaning or

word choice. Others allow for more flexibility in the form to better preserve the poem's meaning. The layout, stanza lengths, and line breaks often play a crucial role in a poem's impact. Preserving the visual structure when translating can help retain the original flow and pacing of the poem.

2. Capturing tone:

Emotional register: tone reflects the mood or feeling evoked by the poem. The challenge lies in translating not just the words, but the emotional resonance they carry. For example, the irony, humor, or seriousness in one language may require adjustments in another to convey the intended tone effectively.

Cultural nuance: tone can also be culturally specific. Idioms, metaphors, and symbols may have different connotations in different languages. Translators often need to find equivalent expressions that convey a similar tone in the target culture.

3. The balancing act:

Literal and literary translation: remaining faithful to the exact meaning of the original text (literal translation) might reduce the emotional impact of the poem, while a more flexible (literary) approach risks deviating from its message. Finding the right balance depends on the poem and the translator's goals. The translator must carefully navigate between preserving the original poet's style and allowing space for their own creative interpretation, ensuring that the translation doesn't become too subjective. If strict adherence to meter or rhyme is not feasible, the translator might aim for an approximation that conveys a similar feeling. Some translations opt for free verse while focusing on capturing the essential tone and imagery, prioritizing thematic faithfulness over strict form. The key to successful poetry translation is maintaining a balance between form, tone, and meaning, while adapting to the nuances of the target language (Levere, 1992).

Effective Ways for Recreating Form

1. **Meter adaptation:** translators may adjust the meter to fit the rhythm of the target language. For example, when translating Persian ghazals into English, a translator might replicate the line length or rhyme patterns but modify the meter to suit the natural stress patterns of English.

2. **Compensatory techniques:** when replicating rhyme is difficult, translators may compensate by using internal rhyme or alliteration to preserve the poem's musical quality. For example, in translating classical Japanese haiku, the exact syllable count may not directly transfer into English. Instead, translators may focus on maintaining the brevity and evocative nature of the original haiku by using concise and impactful language.

3. **Lexical choices:** recreating tone often involves selecting words with similar connotations. This challenge is common for translators of Spanish poet Federico García Lorca, whose surreal imagery and distinctly Andalusian tone require careful word choices to capture the same sense of mysticism and regional identity.

In conclusion, translating poetry is one of the most challenging forms of literary translation, requiring a delicate balance between maintaining the original form and conveying the tone. The intricacies of rhyme, meter, cultural references, and emotional impact all contribute to the complexity. While it may not be possible to

perfectly replicate every aspect of the original poem, a successful translation strives to maintain both structural integrity and emotional depth. Translators use a variety of creative techniques, such as compensatory methods, careful lexical choices, and cultural adaptation, to ensure the translated poem resonates with a new audience while staying faithful to the original. Ultimately, poetry translation is an interpretive process that involves making difficult decisions, but when done well, it allows the poem’s beauty and meaning to transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries.

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