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Problem of translating stylistic devices of zeugma and pun in “Yulduzli tunlar” (Starry nights) by Pirimqul Qodirov

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Abstract. This article explores the challenges of translating stylistic devices, particularly zeugma and puns, in literary discourse through a comparative analysis of English translations of *Yulduzli tunlar* by Pirimqul Qodirov. The study examines how wordplay based on polysemy, homonymy, and semantic ambiguity contributes to characterization, imagery, and rhetorical effect in the source text. Particular attention is paid to the translation strategies employed by I. Tukhtasinov et al. (2018) and Carol Ermakova (2021), highlighting cases in which stylistic devices are weakened, neutralized, or omitted altogether.

Key words: zeugma, pun, wordplay, literary translation, stylistic devices, functional equivalence, semantic translation, communicative translation, polysemy, homonymy, translation strategies, literary discourse

Annotatsiya. Mazkur maqolada Yulduzli tunlar asarining inglizcha tarjimalari qiyosiy tahlili asosida badiiy diskursda stilistik vositalar, xususan, zeugma va so‘z o‘yini stilistik vositalarini tarjima qilishdagi muammolar tadqiq etiladi. Tadqiqot polisemiya, omonimiya hamda semantik noaniqlikka asoslangan so‘z o‘yinlari manba matnda obraz yaratish, personaj xarakterini ochish va ritorik ta’sirni kuchaytirishda qanday ahamiyat kasb etishini yoritadi. Shuningdek, I.Tuxtasinov va hammualliflar (2018) hamda Carol Ermakova (2021) tomonidan qo‘llangan tarjima strategiyalariga alohida e’tibor qaratilib, stilistik vositalarning zaiflashtirilishi, neytrallashuvi yoki butunlay tushirib qoldirilgan holatlari tahlil qilinadi.

Kalit so‘zlar: zeugma, kalambur, so‘z o‘yini, badiiy tarjima, stilistik vositalar, funksional ekvivalentlik, semantik tarjima, kommunikativ tarjima, polisemiya, omonimiya, tarjima strategiyalari, badiiy diskurs.

Аннотация. В данной статье рассматриваются трудности перевода стилистических средств, в особенности зевгмы и каламбура, в художественном дискурсе на основе сравнительного анализа английских переводов романа Пирикула Кодирова «Звёздные ночи». Исследование анализирует, каким образом игра слов, основанная на полисемии, омонимии и семантической неоднозначности, способствует созданию образности, характеристике персонажей и риторическому воздействию исходного текста. Особое внимание уделяется переводческим стратегиям, использованным И. Тухтасиновым и соавторами (2018), а также Кэрол Эрмаковой (2021), с акцентом на случаи, когда стилистические средства ослабляются, нейтрализуются или полностью опускаются.

Ключевые слова: зевгма, каламбур, игра слов, художественный перевод, стилистические средства, функциональная эквивалентность, семантический перевод, коммуникативный перевод, полисемия, омонимия, переводческие стратегии, художественный дискурс.

Introduction

The artistry of literary discourse often relies on the manipulation of linguistic structures to create multi-layered meanings, a feat frequently achieved through the use of stylistic devices like zeugma and the pun. Zeugma, derived from the Greek word for "yoking," involves a single word, typically a verb or adjective, governing two or more parts of a sentence in distinct semantic ways (Jurayev, 2021). Similarly, the pun (or paronomasia) exploits the polysemy or homonymy of language

to evoke humor, irony, or dramatic effect through formal similarity and semantic divergence (Crisafulli, 1996).

While these devices enrich the source text with aesthetic and communicative depth, they present a formidable "problem of untranslatability." The challenge arises because stylistic devices are inherently language-bound; they rely on the specific semantic, phonetic, and grammatical idiosyncrasies of a particular tongue. As scholars have noted, the translation of such figurative expressions is a sensitive task because the "figurativeness of the language is an inalienable part of the text as a literary piece" ("Figurative Language in Translation," 2007).

Translating zeugma and puns requires more than mere linguistic substitution; it demands a reconciliation between the structural constraints of the target language and the preservation of the original's rhetorical impact. When the semantic structures of the two languages do not overlap, the translator is often forced to choose between maintaining the literal meaning and sacrificing the stylistic effect, or vice versa (Delabastita, 1994). This article aims to analyze these translation dilemmas, evaluating the strategies employed to bridge the gap between form and function across linguistic boundaries.

Literature Review

The study of stylistic devices has long been central to linguostylistics. I.R. Galperin (1977), a foundational figure in the field, defined zeugma as the use of a word in the same grammatical but different semantic relations to two adjacent words, where one relation is typically literal and the other is transferred (as cited in Jurayev, 2021). Galperin viewed zeugma and puns as devices that force a clash between the primary and secondary meanings of a word, thereby maintaining the "purity" of the original meaning while introducing a "big surprise" to the reader (Jurayev, 2021).

Puns, however, are often seen as the "epitome of language-bound humor" (Nash, 1985). Dirk Delabastita (1996), a leading authority on wordplay, defines the pun as the contrast of linguistic structures that are formally similar but semantically distinct. Delabastita (1994) further categorized puns into four distinct types based on the relationship between signifier and signified:

Homonymy: Identical sounds and spelling.

Homophony: Identical sounds but different spelling.

Homography: Identical spelling but different sounds.

Paronymy: Slight differences in both spelling and sound.

Theoretical Approaches to Translation

Historically, punning was dismissed by some as a "cheap trick," but by the mid-1980s and early 1990s, scholars like Nash (1985) and Delabastita (1991) began to treat wordplay as a valid academic subject. Peter Newmark (1988) famously remarked that the "translation of pun is of limited importance but unlimited fun," yet he emphasized the difficulty of rendering these "polysemous words" into a target language while maintaining communicative intent (Klabal, 2023).

Newmark’s dichotomy of semantic versus communicative translation provides a framework for this problem. In semantic translation, the focus is on the author’s thought processes and the sacredness of the source text's "idiolect" (Wang, 2023). However, when translating zeugma and puns, a purely semantic approach often leads to a loss of the device entirely. Conversely, communicative translation seeks to produce an effect on the target reader as close as possible to that obtained by the original reader, which may require the translator to invent a new pun or zeugma in the target language (Wang, 2023).

To address the structural mismatch between languages, Delabastita (1987, 1994) identified eight specific translation strategies, including:

1. Pun to Pun: Translating the source pun into a target language pun.
2. Pun to Non-Pun: Retaining the meaning but losing the wordplay.
3. Pun to Rhetorical Device: Replacing the pun with repetition, alliteration, or rhyme.
4. Pun to Zero: Omitting the passage containing the pun entirely.
5. Non-Pun to Pun: Introducing a pun where none existed to compensate for losses elsewhere (Atlantis Press, n.d.).

Recent research has shifted toward Relevance Theory, which suggests that a translation should be based on "interpretive resemblance" rather than strict equivalence (Érudit, 2013). From this perspective, the translator acts as a mediator who seeks "optimal relevance," attempting to recreate the cognitive effects intended by the author while minimizing the processing effort for the target audience (Érudit, 2013).

The task of a literary translator extends far beyond the mechanical conversion of words from one language to another; it is an exercise in linguistic surgery and aesthetic preservation. Stylistic devices, such as metaphors, epithets, alliterations, and puns, serve as the "fingerprints" of an author's unique voice. Without the careful rendering of these elements, the translation risks becoming a mere skeleton of the original, stripped of the flesh and blood that give a story its life and color.

Every writer possesses a distinct idiolectб a personal way of manipulating language to evoke specific emotions or atmospheres. When a translator overlooks a subtle zeugma or flattens a complex pun into a literal explanation, the author's stylistic intent is compromised.

Stylistic devices are the primary vehicles for imagery. A metaphor isn't just a comparison; it's a shortcut to a sensory experience. If the imagery is lost, the reader's mental "movie" of the book becomes blurred.

Devices like alliteration or assonance create a musicality that dictates the pace of reading. Ignoring these transforms a lyrical prose passage into a functional, dry report.

The true problem lies in the fact that style is often language-specific. What sounds elegant in French might sound cumbersome in English if translated word-for-word. Therefore, the translator must seek functional equivalence, finding a way to create the same impact on the target reader that the original device had on the source reader.

"A translator is the author's most attentive reader, but they must also be their most creative echo. To translate style is to translate the soul of the text."

Stylistic choices often reflect the cultural background of the source text. The "feel" of a book is often more memorable than the plot; style is what generates that feeling. Maintaining the original imagery ensures that the target audience experiences the work as the author intended, rather than a "watered-down" version.

In short, rendering stylistic devices is the bridge between a literal translation and a literary masterpiece. It is what ensures that the "magic" of the source text survives its journey across linguistic borders.

Results

The analysis of Pirimqul Qodirov's *Yulduzli tunlar* (Starry Nights) reveals that wordplay, rooted in homonymy and polysemy, serves as a vital tool for characterization and tone. However, the comparative study of translations by I. Tukhtasinov et al. (2018) and Carol Ermakova (2021) shows a recurring loss of these stylistic nuances.

Case 1: The "Xonzodalar" Pun

In the source text, Babur Mirzo uses the word *"xonzodalar"* to refer to his sister (Khanzada Begum) while simultaneously playing on the literal meaning: "daughters of the Khan" or "princesses."

Tukhtasinov et al. (2018): Used the calque "shah-ladies." While this attempts to preserve the Eastern flavor, it captures only the literal status and loses the double entendre involving the sister's name.

Ermakova (2021): Employed the term "shahini," a Persian-derived loanword familiar to English speakers. Although it maintains the "Eastern spirit," the linguistic play between the proper name and the social rank is omitted.

Case 2: The "Yalangoyoq" (Barefoot) Ambiguity

The term *"yalangoyoq"* is used by the character Tohir to create a pun between its literal meaning (to be without shoes) and its metaphorical meaning (to be destitute or a beggar).

Tukhtasinov et al. (2018): Relied on the literal translation "barefooted." This preserves the physical context but fails to convey the social commentary regarding poverty.

Ermakova (2021): Used a combination of paraphrase and literalism ("naked and barefoot"). While descriptive, it flattens the stylistic "clash" intended in the original dialogue.

Source Term	Tukhtasinov et al.	Ermakova	Suggested Equivalent
Xonzodalar	"shah-ladies"	"shahini"	"miladies"
Yalangoyoq	"barefooted"	"naked and barefoot"	"down-at-heel"

Case 3: Zeugma and the Rhetoric of Conquest

In the analyzed text of *Yulduzli tunlar*, a sophisticated use of zeugma appears during Babur's pivotal decree before a life-or-death battle. The author uses the verb *"yengmoq"* (to conquer/defeat) to govern two distinct objects:

Internal: *"O'z nafsini yenggan..."* (Those who have conquered their own desires/ego...)

External: *"...har qanday yog'iyni yengishga qodirdirlar!"* (...are capable of conquering any enemy!)

This stylistic arrangement creates a semantic bridge between the psychological state of the soldiers and their physical military objectives. However, a significant finding in this study is the omission of this passage in the existing English translations. Neither the collective work of I. Tukhtasinov et al. (2018) nor the version by Carol Ermakova (2021) included this specific zeugma-driven decree, leading to a total loss of the author's rhetorical emphasis in these translated versions.

Discussion

The translation of puns in *Yulduzli tunlar* illustrates the classic tension between semantic fidelity and stylistic preservation. In both analyzed cases, the translators prioritized the "Eastern atmosphere" and basic plot meaning over the playful manipulation of language. This results in what may be termed "stylistic leveling," where the text remains readable but loses the author's original wit.

Functional Equivalence: "Miladies"

To restore the pun in the "Xonzodalar" passage, we suggest the use of "miladies." In English, this term functions polysemously:

1. As a formal address for women of noble birth (matching "princesses").
2. As a term implying personal possession/connection (matching Babur's reference to his kin).

By using "And even miladies!", the translator could recreate the dual sense of social rank and familial teasing that Qodirov intended.

Idiomatic Compensation: "Down-at-heel"

Regarding the "yalangoyoq" example, the problem is that "barefooted" in English does not inherently imply poverty as strongly as the Uzbek term does in this context. To bridge this gap, the English idiom "down-at-heel" is a superior alternative. The idiom contains the word "heel," maintaining the anatomical connection to the foot. It specifically refers to someone who is poor or has "run-down" shoes. Using this idiom allows the translator to maintain the "foot" imagery while simultaneously signaling the character's fear of social descent into poverty.

The Role of Translator Creativity

The results suggest that literal translation and calquing are often insufficient for rendering stylistic devices. As seen in the proposed translations, the translator must sometimes move away from the "dictionary definition" of a word to find an idiomatic equivalent that triggers the same cognitive response in the target reader. The loss of zeugma and puns in the current English versions of *Yulduzli tunlar* suggests that while the "story" has been translated, the "voice" of the author—specifically his linguistic playfulness—remains partially obscured.

The Mechanics of Zeugma: Internal vs. External Struggle

As I.R. Galperin (1977) noted, zeugma functions by forcing a word to operate in two semantic spheres simultaneously—usually one literal and one transferred. In Qodirov's work, the verb *"yengmoq"* acts as this governing center.

1. In the first instance, it refers to moral self-discipline (restraint).
2. In the second, it refers to martial victory (subjugation).

By "yoking" these two meanings, Qodirov reinforces the philosophical theme of the novel: that political and military power is an extension of personal character. The omission of this device in translation is not merely a linguistic loss; it is a thematic one. It simplifies Babur's complex leadership philosophy into a more mundane narrative, stripping the prose of its "emotional coloring" and instructional weight.

To reconstruct this zeugma in English, we propose the use of the verb "resist." While "conquer" is a literal possibility, "resist" provides a more nuanced stylistic overlap in English:

"Those who can resist their own temptations can resist any enemy."

"Resist temptation" is a standard colocation in English, effectively capturing the struggle against *nafs* (ego/desire).

"Resist the enemy" is a standard military term, capturing the martial context of the battle.

Using "resist" allows the translator to maintain the formal economy of the source text. It forces the reader to acknowledge the parallel between the moral and the physical, achieving what Delabastita (1994) refers to as "optimal relevance" by mirroring the cognitive effort required by the original Uzbek audience.

Conclusion

The translation of *Yulduzli tunlar* presents a vivid case study in the difficulties of preserving Eastern stylistic devices in Western languages. While the analyzed translations succeed in conveying the basic plot and historical atmosphere, they often struggle with the "linguistic acrobatics" of puns and zeugma.

The tendency toward "Pun to Non-Pun" translation or the outright omission of complex rhetorical structures leads to a "flatter" reading experience. As demonstrated by our proposals for using "miladies," "down-at-heel," and "resist," the key to a successful literary translation lies in the creative search for functional equivalents. By prioritizing the *effect* of the device over its literal dictionary definition, translators can ensure that the author's unique imagery and stylistic brilliance remain intact across linguistic borders.

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