An Inquiry into the Challenges of Literary Translation to Improve Literary Translation Competence with Reference to an Anecdote by Heinrich von Kleist

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Abstract

Acquisition and improvement of literary translation competence is an important undertaking in teaching literary translation with the aim to enable the student to translate into the target language the content, expressive power, language style, and an equal function of the literary text. This essay pursues the aim of helping to create and improve the literary translation competence in the student by inquiring into and analyzing the challenges and proposing solutions to translation. The approach of this inquiry seeks to explain the significance of the language style and translation function in the target language using Nord's Function-Focused Theory by making reference to a translation of an anecdote by Heinrich von Kleist.

Keywords: literary translation competence, challenges, obstacles, style, equivalence, function

1. Introduction

Getting to know literary translation, analyzing literary texts, and, finally, presenting an equivalent translation are the aims of the curriculum for the **German Translator** study program and issues in **teaching practical translation** in order to develop the skill for literary translation in the student.

The *Function-Oriented Theory* has opened up a new window into the educational issues of practical translation and seeks to offer solutions to literary and non-literary translations. The theory considers translation function-focused aimed at the target language. The basis of the theory dates back to the *Skopos Theory* in 1978 (Nord, 1993, p. 8). The major issue of investigation in this essay is how to achieve an equivalent translation of the source literary text in the target language both in function and style.

Understanding the function of translation and stylistic components of the source language plays an important role in preventing errors in translation, and by emphasizing and applying the Nord's function-focused theory to practice and to translation criticism one can achieve an equivalent translation.

2. Literature Review

Apart from the purely linguistic analyses addressing the translation product with a standard normalistic approach, reference can be made to the views of Wolfram Wilss in the 1970s, who despite his purely linguistic views in translation, holds a view beyond, on the function, process and context of the text. Then, other theorists such as Reiss and Hönig largely addressed the text-specific features of a wide variety of texts and analysis in translation, and with the emergence of the language performance theory, a new chapter with an approach to the language function in translation. Beginning with the 1970s, more attention was paid to the target text in descriptive translation studies, and the function of the target text in the target language and culture received special attention such that in the eighties and nineties of the twentieth century, an interdisciplinary approach based on Hornby's views came into vogue. Then, followed the Skopos Theory in 1984-1991 which did not consider loyalty to the source text; rather, the functional equivalence of the target text as the standard measure for translation evaluation. Continuing along the same lines, Christian Nord, too, presented his function-oriented theory with an approach to the function and style of the target text in translation, adding to his theory two new concepts: "equivalence in function" and "loyalty in literary translation". In this study, we tried to further illustrate the significance of transferring the style and function in literary translation.

3. Theoretical Foundations of Literary Translation from Translation-Teaching Perspective

When there is the talk of literary translation, the real challenge of translation arises; for when translating literary texts, translation must be done in a way to create "a balance expressive of the feelings or one in an artistic-esthetic context" such that "formal-esthetic traits, linguistic games, and individual style are represented in the target text" (Haddadi, 1996, pp. 19-20).

According to Nord's Translation Teaching Model below used primarily for literary translation, the literary translation essentially begins at a time when the translation mission is interpreted by the translator or student so that the aim or purpose of translation is explained in its light (Nord, 2008, p. 26).
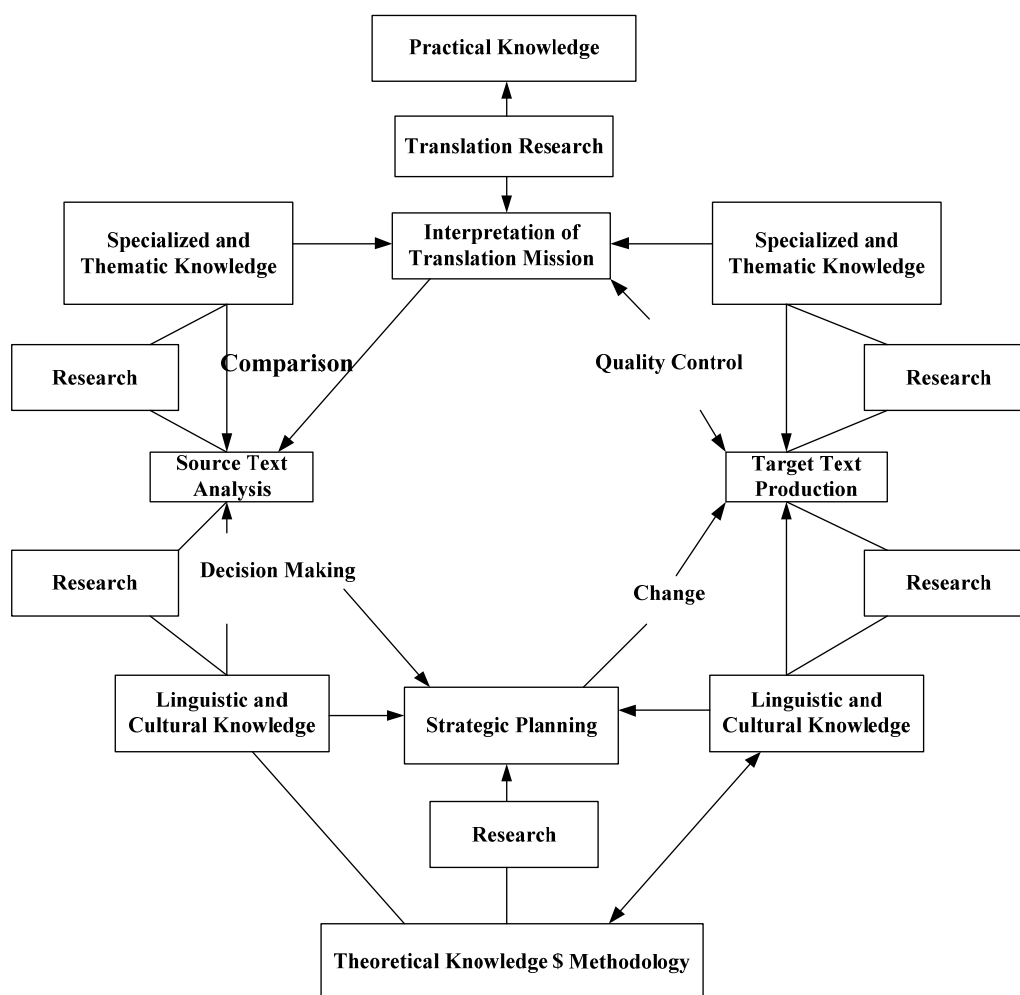

Figure 1. Nord's model (1996)

In the above model (Figure 1), the first step in the translation is closely related to the mission statement process and the aim of translation. In the second step of the translation process (counterclockwise), there is the talk of source text analysis. That is, the applicability of the translation mission is put to test and the potential challenges of translation are brought to light. The column to the left of the model reveals that acquisition or enjoyment of a specialized thematic knowledge as well as a cultural and linguistic knowledge to analyze the source text are indispensable. Furthermore, for analysis of the source literary text, the student's knowledge of the literary text writer, and the major features of text types or literary genres are of significance. On the techniques of text interpretation in teaching translation, Gardt believes that there is necessarily no reason for text interpretation to have a method similar to that of teaching literature and literary text analysis. Any method opening up a way to proper understanding of the text is permissible (Gardt, 1987, p. 243).

In the third step for the above model, the challenges of literary translation which will be addressed subsequently are revealed following the analysis of the source literary text. However, resolution of the challenges of literary translation depends on the analysis and interpretation of the translation mission, and determine the nature and form of translation and ultimately a solution in the best way, or put otherwise, finding the nearest equivalence, in the target language (Nord, 2008, p. 27). Therefore, as the bottom column of the model shows, first, a procedure must be adopted to translate the whole text where the major challenges of translation have been clarified in advance. Knowledge of the translation theory will also help the student to adopt the proper way to translate the text. In the fourth step, the student will be able to produce the the target text where the linguistic, cultural and specialized thematic knowledge of the target language gain importance. In the final step, too, it is essential that the text thus produced be compared against the expectations referred to in the translation mission to allow a qualitative revision of the translation.

4. Inter-Cultural and Literary Translation Competences

Foreign language (L2) and mother tongue (L1) competences as well as cultural competence are three aspects of translation competence of every translator student and yet an essential prerequisite to any translation, literary, in particular. As the writer of any text is influenced by the history and living style of their people in their particular historical, cultural, and social context, the translation teacher, too, must seek to provide such cultural information on the writer (Dousti Zadeh, 2006, p. 62).

Literary translation can be learned as a skill. Kohlmayer (1996, p. 192) believes that the competence critical for the literary translator is the ability to acquire a general understanding of the text and create the general plan for translation. He rewords himself as "The literary translator needs to not only be in such position to be able to translate but also to write a prelude or postlude to their translation text providing an explanation for his translation; that is, to describe the style of the original text and their translation technique; or, alternatively, substantiate the general plan of their translation as a reaction to the original text" (ibid.). Furthermore, reference is made to seven subtypes of literary competences: text review, text comprehension, text production, text translatology, verbal eloquence, text-type recognition, meta-ideological, and intercultural (ibid., pp. 193-200). The meta-ideological and intercultural competence relate to the translator's knowledge of the distinct ideological differences and gaps and clash-filled spots of the two cultures.

5. Nord's Challenges and Obstacles to Literary Translation

According to Nord, the challenges of translation may be due to the ungeneralizable idiosyncrasies of a particular text in the source language, the social functions of language and the challenges of pragmatics. They may be due to the behavioral patterns of the source and target cultures, or, put differently, due to the culture-specific challenges, or the results of the structural differences between the source and target texts, or even due to cross-linguistic challenges of the two languages (Nord, 2011, p. 117).

However, unlike the challenges of translation, the obstacles to translation can be removed easily by acquiring a translation competence. Translation obstacles fall into four categories:

1) Text-related obstacles including, among others, overcomplexity of content, insufficient explanation of content, complex theme, ambiguous and inconsistent structure, use of ambiguous terminology both semantically and syntactically as well as textual drawbacks in terms of typos, standard errors, and faulty punctuation which can be corrected by the translation instructor using a precise analysis of the source text;

2) Translator-related obstacles including, among other things, competence level of translation trainees which depending on their linguistic, thematic, and translation competences can be removed gradually by acquiring skills in the target area;

3) Obstacles relating to the types of translation exercises arising from the difficulty of the text translation in terms of the frequency and complexity coocurring in the text influencing the balance of all the linguistic layers, which can be removed by increasing the translation competence and stating the mission for translation; and

4) Obstacles of the technical problems of translation due to the availability of appropriate aids such as lexicons, extra data containing textual information, supplementary texts, textual citations, specialized sources, technical tools, procedures for exercise schedules, and applications for composing the target texts, all of which can be removed by providing the technical and informational tools, sufficient time for translation, and reasonable explanatory notes on how to compose the target text (Ibid., pp. 121-124). Of all the challenges referred to in the translation are those arising from a particular text in the source language, especially those that occur in the literary province when the text writer challenges the translator by using a particular literary style such as using lexical or linguistic games, or by his linguistic and creative use outside the usual linguistic and syntactic

standards. According to Nord, in the true sense of the word, error occurs when "the translation mission fails to realize".

6. A Review of Kleist's Stylistic Components in Translation

The following text has been selected in compliance with the text screening standards (Kautz, 2002, pp. 147-155) for Master's degree translation students with the mission of translation in mind.

A. Translation Mission: The aim of the translation of the following anecdote is that the Persian-speaking addressee is to acquaint with a sample of Heinrich von Kleist's prose and language style using a translation of a sample of his short works. The works of this German writer has a dialectical relation with the Age of Enlightenment and Romanticism, representing linguistically, semantically, and formally the charactristics of Romanticism. In translation, in line with the translation mission, attention must be drawn to the content, expressive power, language components, and Kleist's peculiar prose style in the target language prose.

B. Overview of the Writer's Language Style: Kleist's language is usually composed of long sentences, uncommon and free position of words, different and, at times, unusual syntax, nominal phrases, adjectival complements and descriptive subordinate clauses embedded into main clauses and texts. His prose proceeds with a particular sentential rhythm where the textual world emerging from it is specific to the source language and culture. Fries is of the opinion that on the Kleist's language style, free position of the words, and syntactic innovations in the Kleist's prose, appears the romantic freedom of the writer, and that this language genius has an approach in conflict with the conventional syntacto-grammatical restrictions. The usual place of the words is rational, understandable, and unartistic. In a battle with the rationality existing in syntax and grammar, Kleist has an approach in conflict with the position of words in the sentence structure and his prose (Fries, 1904, p. 440).

Übersetzungsübung

Ausgangstext

Mutwille des Himmels

Eine Anekdote

Der in Frankfurt an der Oder, wo er ein Infanterieregiment besaß, verstorbene General Dieringshofen, ein Mann von strengem und rechtschaffenem Charakter, aber dabei von manchen Eigentümlichkeiten und Wunderlichkeiten, äußerte, als er, in spätem Alter, an einer langwierigen Krankheit, auf den Tod darniederlag, seinen Widerwillen, unter die Hände der Leichenwäscherinnen zu fallen. Er befahl bestimmt, dass niemand, ohne Ausnahme, seinen Leib berühren solle; dass er ganz und gar in dem Zustand, in welchem er sterben würde, mit Nachtmütze, Hosen und Schlafrock, wie er sie trage, in den Sarg gelegt und begraben sein wolle; und bat den damaligen Feldprediger seines Regiments, Herrn P..., welcher der Freund seines Hauses war, die Sorge für die Vollstreckung dieses seines letzten Willens zu übernehmen. Der Feldprediger P... versprach es ihm: er verpflichtete sich, um jedem Zufall vorzubeugen, bis zu seiner Bestattung, von dem Augenblick an, da er verschieden sein würde, nicht von seiner Seite zu weichen.

Darauf nach Verlauf mehrerer Wochen, kommt, bei der ersten Frühe des Tages, der Kammerdiener in das Haus des Feldpredigers, der noch schläft, und meldet ihm, dass der General um die Stunde der Mitternacht schon, sanft und ruhig, wie es vorauszusehen war, gestorben sei. Der Feldprediger P... zieht sich, seinem Versprechen getreu, sogleich an, und begibt sich in die Wohnung des Generals. Was aber findet er? —Die Leiche des Generals schon eingeseift auf einem Schemel sitzen: der Kammerdiener, der von dem Befehl nichts gewusst, hatte einen Barbier herbeigerufen, um ihm vorläufig zum Behuf einer schicklichen Ausstellung, den Bart abzunehmen. Was sollte der Feldprediger unter so wunderlichen Umständen machen? Er schalt den Kammerdiener aus, dass er ihn nicht früher herbei gerufen hatte; schickte den Barbier, der den Herrn bei der Nase gefasst hielt, hinweg, und ließ ihn, weil doch nichts anders übrig blieb, eingeseift und mit halbem Bart, wie er ihn vorfand, in den Sarg legen und begraben.

6.1 A Synopsis of the Source Text

Here is an overview of the work: A general wills that, after his death, according to his exact orders to the army chaplain, be buried as he was at the time of death, in sleepwear and a nightcap. However, on his death the next morning when his servant reports the overnight death to the chaplain, he goes to the general's where to his utter astonishment he finds the general's corpse washed with water and soap, and laid on a long stool. Unaware of the general's will, the servant has had the general's beard shaven by calling in a barber. Astonished at the sight on entering the house, the chaplain, too, blames the servant and throws out the barber holding the general's nose to

shave him. Then, he has the general buried, beard half-shaven. The end depicts the gist of the story, ridiculing the luxurious military lifestyle.

6.2 Language Form

A. Style: Using words in their uncommon positions and peculiar descriptions inserted here and there into the text are characteristic of Kleist's specific prose and style.

B. Sentence Structure: There are long chain and often non-coordinate sentences.

6.3 Textual Features and Wording

1) Non-coordinate Sentences: The subordinate clauses and paragraphs semantically serving to describe the events in detail are separated from the previous sentences non-coordinately using commas or periods.

2) Additional Descriptions Used in the Narrative: The adverbs of time, place, manner, as well as descriptive complements used in the body of the main clauses, or separated with commas or conjunctions serve different functions including, among others, detailed descriptions, emphasis, highlighting and, at times, raising the level of excitement in the reader.

Lexical Selection in General: Most of the words used in the text are also long-established in modern German. However, at times, old German words like *Barbier* replace the equivalents *Haarschneider* or *Frisör*.

Text Categorization: The textual status and analysis indicate that we are dealing with the form-focused textual features (Ibid., Reiss, 1971, p. 37). The author has used used language-specific tools undermining the long-established wording.

Translation Method and Strategy (From Text Analysis): Once the text has been categorized, the translation method is determined. First, the content of the story must be conveyed unaltered in translation. Then, the form and style of the language must be maintained to the extent possible. Therefore,

A. It is essential that a style similar to that of the source text be maintained in the target text;

B. The syntactic components must be restored to the extent possible. Thanks to the capabilities, flexibility, and power of the Persian language, the descriptive complements and subordinate clauses (i.e., clauses) inserted in the story can be reconstructed and inserted in the translation; and

C. In selecting words for translation, a general standard similar to that which is available for the text style must be observed.

Language-Style Translation Challenges of the Source Text: A major problem with stylistic errors in translation is to create in the target text reader the general impression that the source text a completely vulgar by using vulgar words in the translation, or conversely, create in the reader to mislead the target text reader about the source text style by using words more eloquent than those used in the translation of the source text. For instance, the German verb *verscheiden* or *darniederliegen* used in the German text carry the eloquent literary meanings "*Rouy dar neqaabe khaak keshidan*" and "*dar bestare bimari ranj bordan*" in Persian can be proposed respectively.

6.4 Sentence Structure

A. Subordinate clauses and descriptive complements inserted in the sentence structure: Using subordinate clauses and additional descriptions inserted in the body of the story, Kleist means to not only break the long-established language syntax but also to prepare the reader's mind, seeking to read the decriptions and insertions, to retell something and add to their excitement. For this purpose, the author has repeatedly used opening and closing quotation marks to insert additional descriptions and information to describe the event. In translation, the same strategy can be used. For example, in the first long sentence of the text, emphasis must be placed on the structural style and the position of the phrase "*General Diringshofen*" as the subject of the sentence following the elementary descriptions, and to realize Kleist's purpose in translation by providing the opening descriptions to prepare the reader's mind. For instance, the following is a proposed translation of the first long sentence in the text:

Der in Frankfurt an der Oder, wo er ein Infanterieregiment besaß, verstorbene General Dieringshofen, ein Mann von strengem und rechtschaffenem Charakter, aber dabei von manchen Eigentümlichkeiten und Wunderlichkeiten, äußerte, als er, in spätem Alter, an einer langwierigen Krankheit, auf den Tod darniederlag, seinen Widerwillen, unter die Hände der Leichenwäscherinnen zu fallen.

Proposed translation of the first long sentence in the text: In Franfurt, on the river Oder, where the infantry was stationed, there was a man, extremely strict and fair and yet with rare and bizaare qualities called General Diringshofen who, when at an old age and suffering from a serious disease, expressed his aversion to falling in the hands of the burial service men after his death.

Proposed Persian translation of the first long sentence in the text:

در شهر فرانکفورت بر ساحل رود اُدر، همانجا که مقر پیاده نظام مردی به غایت سختگیر و دادگر و همزمان با ویژگیهایی نادر و عجیب بود و نامش ژنرال دیرینگسهوفن، آنگاه که در کهولت سن بود و از بیماری سختی رنج می‌برد، بیزاریش را از افتادن زیر دست مرده شوران به زبان آورد.

B. Writing and Punctuation Marks: As in the original text, observance and using writing and punctuation marks in the body of translation, especially commas, to insert detailed descriptions and subordinate clauses, are of special importance.

7. Survey

Provided with an explanation of the model introduced by Nord in the theoretical part, and then a statement of the translation mission for short literary texts presented by Heinrich von Kleist in the classroom followed by an explanation of the syntactico-stylistic features and the challenges of translation, the students were asked to express their reactions to the translation of the text and respond to the questionnaire with the following statements:

A. Literary text translation helps create an interest in me and bring success in learning translation.

B. Literary text translation with its peculiar syntactico-stylistic features reinforces my motivation and competence for translation of the text.

C. With the mission of translation stated and the features and challenges of translation explained, I was more successful.

The students expressed their reactions choosing from among the following options:

1) Fully agree

2) Agree

3) Partle agree

4) Hardly agree

5) Disagree

6) Am neutral

The following graphs provide an assessment of the questions surveyed.
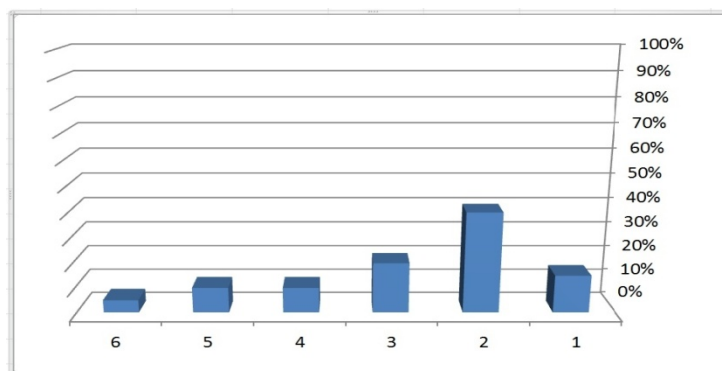

Figure 2. Evaluation of Question A

Figure 2 Analysis: Over 70% of the students found translation of literary texts effective in creating interest and bringing success in learning translation. 55% of the students agreed, 20% partly agreed, 15% hardly agreed or were neutral and only 10% disagreed.
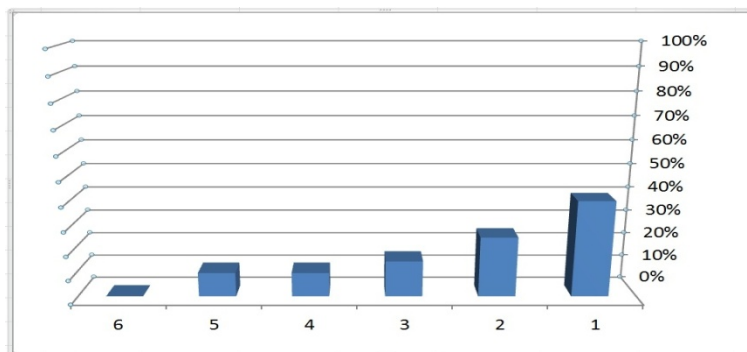
Figure 3. Evaluation of Question B

Figure 3 Analysis: Figure 3 reveals that over half of the students, i.e., 65% found literary translation with specific syntactic or stylistic features effective in creating motivation and translation competence, 15% partly agreed, 10% hardly agreed, and only 10% disagreed.
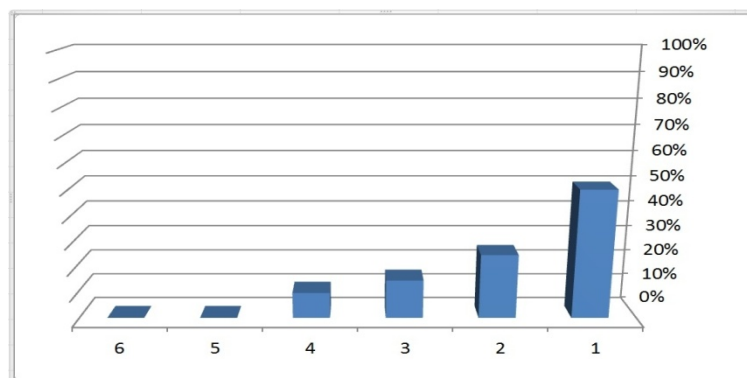

Figure 4. Evaluation of Question C

Figure 4 Analysis: Figure 4 reveals that most of the students, namely 90% believed that awareness of the translation mission and explanation of the syntactico-stylistic features positively contributed to their success in literary translation. 50% of them fully agreed, 25% agreed, 15% partly agreed, and only 10% hardly agreed. However, no one disagreed.

8. Concluding Remarks, Results, Educational Suggestions on Teaching Literary Translation

Owing to their lexical, cultural, and stylistic richness as well as variation in structure, grammar, syntax, and semantics, literary texts play an immensely important role in teaching translation. Analysis of literary texts, text categorization, analysis of special syntactic and stylistic structures, statement of the translation mission prior to the actual translation, and decision on the translation method arising from the text analysis help improve comprehension of the text, provide an equivalent translation, and improve the ability of literary translation in the student. Focus on the aim, function, literary translation style in the target language, focus on the translation mission play a substantial role in providing an equivalent translation. For this reason, it is essential for translation drill classrooms to state the translation mission. Investigation into the problems specific to literary texts following a text analysis would help benefit from the proper translation strategy. Where errors occur, a distinction must be made between grammatico-lexical syntactic errors and functional-stylistic errors.

Using texts with a considerable syntactic, stylistic, and functional potential for investigating the problems of literary translation would result in an applied use of the knowledge of the foreign language and native language in translation, improvement of creativity in overcoming the challenges, and finally, acquisition and reinforcement of the translation competence in the student. According to the Nord's function-focused method for literary translations, the conclusion resulting from this study is that a translation with an equivalent function and

style in the target language would be achieved by a proper understanding of the function and style of the source language. In fact, it should be noted that an understanding of the language style specific to the author as well as his syntactic, linguistic, and expressive tools is far more important than a mere understanding of the lexical meaning of the sentences in the translation. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the results from this study are confined to a short sample of Kleist's prose, and that a decision on the translation of other samples of his prose would deserve more detailed discussions.

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