

Translation of Poetry: Towards a practical model for translation analysis

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Abstract: This article delves into the intricate process of poetry translation, using examples from German and Albanian poems to shed light on the challenges posed by linguistic and cultural divergences. Various translation models are analyzed, with an emphasis on categorizing translation approaches and their applicability to poetic discourse. The study emphasizes that translating poetry requires a nuanced approach, highlighting the translator's critical role in preserving the essence and rhythm of the original text while adapting it to the cultural and linguistic nuances of the target language. Special attention is given to the contributions of Joachim Rom and Robert Schwarz in transferring poetic meaning into the German language, demonstrating how translators navigate the delicate balance between fidelity to the original and adaptation to the audience's expectations.

Keywords: Poetry translation, translation challenges, rhyme, tone, metaphor.

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1. Introduction

Poetry, as a unique literary form, presents distinct challenges for translators. Unlike prose, which primarily relies on clarity and coherence, poetry is deeply rooted in rhythm, sound, imagery, and emotional depth—elements that are often difficult to replicate in another language without losing their essence.

This paper explores the complexities of translating poetry, beginning with an overview of the concept and process of translation. It then examines specific approaches employed by two translators in rendering Albanian poetry into German, with a focus on the works of Ismail Kadare, one of Albania's most renowned and celebrated authors. Translating Kadare's poetry presents a significant challenge due to its rich interplay of linguistic precision, cultural nuances, and artistic subtlety.

Poetry, as defined, is "a form of writing that encapsulates a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience through language, employing meaning, sound, and rhythm." It is an art form that manipulates words to create sensory illusions, much like a painter uses colors to evoke imagery. Poetry embodies rhythm, often metrical; emotion, both sensuous and profound; a creative use of figurative language; and a certain deviation from conventional word order. Above all, it requires imagination and the ability to perceive qualities in an object or situation that might elude a non-poet. This study highlights these intricate features of poetry and examines the translator's role in preserving the delicate

balance between the original's artistic essence and the linguistic and cultural expectations of the target audience.¹

1.1. Definition and Process of Translation

The translation of poetry has long been regarded as a uniquely complex task due to the intricate interplay of meaning, sound, and form inherent in the original text. Unlike other types of literary translation, poetry translation demands a focus on aesthetic and expressive values, as well as adherence to constructive theories that guide the process. However, as Hariyanto (2003) observes, poetry translation often encounters significant challenges, whether arising from theoretical inadequacies or a lack of practical strategies. These difficulties may stem from the absence of equivalent literary structures, the richness of literary language, or even a failure to fully grasp the content of the original poem.

To overcome these challenges, literary translators must employ figurative language to replicate the feelings, illusions, and expressive experiences of the source text. According to Abu Hatab (2017), translating literary texts entails transferring a series of values between the source language and the target language. This process goes beyond mere linguistic equivalence, requiring the translator to capture the emotional and artistic essence of the original work. Some theorists even argue that a poetry translator must be a poet themselves, as the transference of emotions demands a level of artistic capability that transcends ordinary translation skills.

¹<https://davidpublisher.com/Public/uploads/Contribute/60d54a3738c3b.pdf>

The question of whether poetry is translatable at all has sparked considerable debate among theorists. Newmark (1981) highlights the tension between the translatability and untranslatability of poetry, emphasizing the unique challenges posed by expressive texts. Since the original author of a poem seeks to convey an artistically shaped creative message, the translator must strive to recreate this artistic intent in the target language (Hatim & Munday, 2004). In doing so, the translator faces additional obstacles, such as preserving the aesthetic and rhetorical value of the work, respecting the authorial intention, and navigating potential bicultural conflicts (Kharmandar & Karimnia, 2013).

Ultimately, poetry translation requires a delicate balance of linguistic fidelity, artistic creativity, and cultural sensitivity. By addressing these challenges, translators can bridge the gap between languages and cultures, ensuring that the essence of the original poem resonates with the target audience.²

1.2. Types of Translation

Translation can be categorized in various ways depending on the degree of faithfulness to the original text. Different scholars have proposed frameworks to classify translation types, each addressing unique aspects of the translation process.

Catford (1965) identifies three primary distinctions in translation:

- **Full vs. Partial Translation:** In full translation, the entire source text is translated, whereas in partial translation, only specific segments are rendered into the target language.
- **Rank-Bound vs. Unbound Translation:** Rank-bound translation adheres strictly to linguistic units, such as sentences or words, while unbound translation operates more freely across structural levels.
- **Total vs. Restricted Translation:** Total translation involves the conversion of all linguistic and cultural elements, while restricted translation focuses on particular linguistic features.

Nida (1964) differentiates between **formal** and **dynamic equivalence**:

- **Formal Translation** strives to maintain the structure, style, and formal characteristics of the original text.
- **Dynamic Translation**, on the other hand, prioritizes eliciting the same emotional and cognitive response in the target audience as that intended for the original audience.

Newmark (1988) builds on this distinction by introducing the concepts of **semantic** and **communicative translation**:

- **Semantic Translation** focuses on achieving the closest possible equivalence of meaning, maintaining the original text's integrity while adhering to linguistic constraints.
- **Communicative Translation** emphasizes reproducing the same effect on the target audience as the original text had on its readers, often allowing for cultural and stylistic adaptation.

Munday (2002) further relates Newmark's semantic and communicative approaches to Nida's formal and dynamic

equivalence, noting their respective emphases on form and effect. This correlation highlights how translation frameworks align in addressing the delicate balance between fidelity to the original text and the need for cultural and emotional resonance in the target language.

By exploring these types of translation, this section underscores the critical decisions translators must make to navigate the complex interplay of meaning, form, and audience expectations.

2. Difficulty in translating linguistic features

One of the most significant challenges in translating poetry arises from the inherent differences between the source and target languages. As Barnstone (1993) notes, substantial barriers exist due to variations in grammar, sound, and meaning. Since no word equivalents can fully correspond across different linguistic systems, the complete and faithful translation of a poem is an exceedingly rare achievement.

Albanian poems translated into german: Interpretation

This section analyzes two Albanian poems alongside their German translations, focusing on the linguistic, cultural, and stylistic peculiarities that influence the translation process. Special attention is given to the challenges posed by linguistic nuances and cultural context, as well as the stylistic adaptations required to convey the emotional and artistic essence of the original works in German. This analysis aims to uncover the complexities and strategies involved in rendering Albanian poetry accessible and resonant to a German-speaking audience.

Poem 1: "Shkëlqimi i Diellit" by Ismail Kadare ("The Shine of the Sun")

Original in Albanian:	Translation in German:
Shkëlqimi i diellit mbi dhe Sytë e mi, të rënduar nga drita, Po shohin tokën si një thesar. Të fshehur nën terrin e natës.	Glanz der Sonne über der Erde Und meine Augen schwer vom Licht, Sehen die Erde wie einen Schatz Versteckt unter der Dunkelheit der Nacht.

Analysis of translation

1. Sound and Phonetics

Albanian poetry often places great emphasis on the musicality of words, as seen in the line "Shkëlqimi i diellit mbi dhe" ("The shine of the sun above the earth"). This line is particularly melodic in its original form, with rhythmic vowel patterns and the gentle repetition of "i". Translating this lyricism into German requires meticulous word choice to preserve the auditory quality of the original.

The German phrase "Der Glanz der Sonne über der Erde" effectively mirrors the softness of "Shkëlqimi" with the word "Glanz," which conveys brightness and warmth. While the German translation captures much of the melodic flow, the subtle euphony of the Albanian original is challenging to replicate fully, reflecting the intrinsic limitations of language transfer in poetry.

2. Metaphors and Imagery

Kadare's original poem employs rich metaphors, such as the earth being likened to a "treasure" hidden beneath the "darkness of the night." This central metaphor is preserved in the German

² Theory and practice in poetry translation;
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372491324_Theory_and_Practice_in_Poetry_Translation

translation, where *"Versteckt unter der Dunkelheit der Nacht"* retains the mysterious and evocative quality of the original imagery.

However, there is a nuanced difference between the terms *"terr"* (night) in Albanian and *"Dunkelheit"* (darkness) in German. While *"terr"* conveys a sense of intimacy and encompassing obscurity, *"Dunkelheit"* feels slightly less personal. This subtle shift underscores the cultural and linguistic intricacies involved in metaphorical translation.

3. Symbolism and Tone

In the Albanian poem, the sun and light symbolize revelation, clarity, and truth, while night serves as a metaphor for concealment and mystery. The line *"Sytë e mi, të rënduar nga drita"* ("My eyes, burdened by light") encapsulates the duality of enlightenment as both illuminating and overwhelming.

In the German translation, *"beschwert vom Licht"* carries the intended symbolism of heaviness and enlightenment. However, *"beschwert"* does not fully capture the poetic depth of the Albanian word *"rënduar,"* which suggests a more profound emotional and physical weight. Despite this, the translator skillfully conveys the core meaning, though some poetic nuances may feel slightly diluted.

4. Cultural and Emotional Resonance

The themes of light, darkness, and treasure resonate deeply in Kadare's poetry, reflecting universal human struggles and the search for truth within an Albanian cultural context. These themes are effectively transposed into German, yet their emotional resonance may shift subtly due to differences in cultural perception.

For example, the Albanian imagery of treasure and concealment often aligns with a deep cultural appreciation for nature and the human condition, which may evoke different connotations in German. The translator demonstrates an adept understanding of this cultural dynamic, ensuring that the German version remains faithful to the spirit of the original while adapting to the expectations of a German-speaking audience.

The translation of *"Shkëlqimi i Diellit"* into German demonstrates a commendable effort to balance linguistic fidelity with cultural and emotional resonance. While some nuances, particularly in sound and metaphor, present challenges, the translation successfully conveys the poem's essence. This analysis highlights the delicate interplay between form, meaning, and cultural context in the art of poetry translation.

Poem: Malli "Sehnsucht"

The translation of poetry, as exemplified in the German rendition of Ismail Kadare's poem *"Mall"* (translated as *"Sehnsucht"* by Joachim Röhm), illustrates the intricate interplay of language, culture, and artistic intent. Kadare's poem is a reflective elegy of longing and nostalgia, imbued with the delicate imagery of raindrops on glass, the somber mood of an autumn morning, and philosophical undertones inspired by Heraclitus' notions of shared and individual worlds.

The challenge in translating *"Mall"* lies not merely in achieving linguistic equivalence but in capturing the melancholic rhythm, tone, and emotional intensity that characterize Kadare's poetic

style. The translator must navigate between fidelity to the original and adaptation to the target audience's cultural sensibilities

The Original Poem and Its Translation

Original in Albanian: <i>MALL</i> <i>Ca pika shiu ranë mbi qelq.</i> <i>Për ty unë befas ndjeva mall.</i> <i>Jetojmë të dy në një qytet,</i> <i>Dhe rrallë shihemi, sa rrallë.</i>	Translated into German by Joachim Röhm: <i>Sehnsucht</i> <i>Regentropfen pochten auf das Glas.</i> <i>Als jähe Sehnsucht mich nach dir ergriff.</i> <i>Wir leben beide in derselben Stadt,</i> <i>Doch unsre Wege kreuzen sich nicht oft.</i>
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Analysis of Translation

1. Tone and Emotion

The melancholic tone of the original is a defining feature of the poem. In Albanian, the phrase *"Ca pika shiu ranë mbi qelq"* (Some raindrops fell on glass) evokes a quiet, reflective mood, setting the stage for the sentiment of longing (*mall*). Röhm's translation, *"Regentropfen pochten auf das Glas"* (Raindrops tapped on the glass), preserves the auditory and visual imagery, while the choice of the verb *pochten* adds a subtle sense of urgency and emotional depth.

The expression of longing in the line *"Për ty unë befas ndjeva mall"* (For you, I suddenly felt longing) becomes *"Als jähe Sehnsucht mich nach dir ergriff"* (When sudden longing seized me for you). The German translation captures the sudden intensity of the emotion with *jähe Sehnsucht* (sudden longing), preserving the immediacy and depth of the original. However, *mall*, a word deeply embedded in Albanian cultural and emotional expression, carries connotations that extend beyond its direct translation as "longing," making the German version slightly less culturally nuanced.

2. Rhythm and Structure

The rhythmic simplicity of the Albanian lines is central to the poem's emotional resonance. The steady, almost conversational meter reflects the quiet inevitability of the speaker's feelings. Röhm adapts this rhythm effectively, maintaining a balance between the original structure and the natural flow of the German language. For instance, the repetition of *rrallë* (rarely) in the Albanian line *"Dhe rrallë shihemi, sa rrallë"* (And we rarely see each other, so rarely) finds a counterpart in *"Doch unsre Wege kreuzen sich nicht oft"* (Yet our paths seldom cross). While the repetition is less explicit, the meaning and rhythm are preserved.

3. Imagery and Metaphor

Kadare's poem uses vivid imagery, such as *raindrops on glass* and *living in the same city but rarely meeting*, to evoke a sense of physical proximity juxtaposed with emotional distance. The German translation conveys these images effectively, ensuring that the visual and emotional clarity of the original is retained. However, subtle shifts in nuance occur. For example, *"rrallë shihemi"* (rarely we meet) carries a tone of wistful inevitability, while *"unsre Wege kreuzen sich nicht oft"* (our paths seldom cross) introduces a more spatial metaphor that slightly alters the emotional resonance.

4. Cultural and Philosophical Undertones

The poem reflects Kadare’s philosophical exploration of the coexistence of shared and individual worlds, a theme resonating with Heraclitus’ ideas. The line *"Jetojmë të dy në një qytet"* (We both live in the same city) is simple yet profound, emphasizing the paradox of proximity and separation. The German version, *"Wir leben beide in derselben Stadt,"* retains this duality while adapting to the German linguistic framework.

The translator succeeds in preserving the universal themes of longing and human connection, ensuring that the poem resonates with German readers. However, certain cultural nuances, such as the deep emotional resonance of *mall* in Albanian, are inevitably diminished in translation.

The translation of *"Mall"* into *"Sehnsucht"* demonstrates the delicate art of poetry translation. Joachim Röhm navigates the challenges of linguistic, cultural, and emotional fidelity with notable skill, capturing the tone, imagery, and philosophical depth of Kadare’s original. While certain cultural nuances intrinsic to the Albanian language are unavoidably softened, the translation succeeds in conveying the universal themes of longing and nostalgia. This case study underscores the intricate balance required in poetry translation, where linguistic precision meets artistic intuition to bridge cultures and evoke shared human experiences.

Poem: "Kristal"

The poem *"Kristal"* by Ismail Kadare, alongside its German translation by Joachim Röhm, delves into the themes of memory, loss, and the inescapable transience of life. The melancholic tone and vivid imagery in the original are skillfully rendered into German, preserving much of the poem's emotional depth while navigating the inherent challenges of poetic translation.

Original Poem and German Translation

Original in Albanian:	German Translation:
<i>Kristal</i> <i>Ka kohë që s'shihemi dhe ndjej</i> <i>Si të harroj un'dalngadal</i> <i>Si vdes, tek unë kujtimi yt</i> <i>Si vdesin flokët dhe gjithçka.</i> <i>Tani kërkoj unë posht'e lart</i> <i>Një vend ku ty të të lëshoj.</i> <i>Një strofë a notë a një brilant</i> <i>Ku puth, ku lë, ku të shkoj.</i> <i>Nëse të pranofte asnjë varr,</i> <i>Mermer asnjë morg-kristal,</i> <i>Mos duhet vall' prap' të të mbart</i> <i>Gjysmë të vdekur, gjysmë të gjallë?</i> <i>Në s'gjetsha hon ku të hedh</i> <i>Të gjej një fushë a një lulanjë</i> <i>Ku butësisht porsi polen</i> <i>Gjithkund, gjithkund të të shpërndaj.</i>	<i>Kristall</i> <i>Ich spür, dass wir so lang uns nicht gesehen,</i> <i>Wie peu à peu ich dich vergesse,</i> <i>Wie die Erinnerung in mir erlischt,</i> <i>Wie alles, selbst die Haare sterben.</i> <i>Nun such ich allerorts mit Mühe</i> <i>Nach einem letzten Aufenthalt für dich,</i> <i>Nach einer Strophe, einer Note, einem Edelstein,</i> <i>Dich dort hineinzugeben. Dann ein Kuß und fort.</i> <i>Doch wenn kein Grab dich akzeptiert,</i> <i>Kein Marmor, kein kristallnes Leichenhaus,</i> <i>Muß ich dann zwischen Tod und Leben,</i> <i>Dich in mir tragen fernerhin?</i>

Analysis of Translation

1. Tone and Emotional Resonance

The melancholic tone of Kadare’s original poem, imbued with the inevitability of separation and the fragility of memory, is effectively mirrored in the German translation. The line *"Si vdes tek unë kujtimi yt"* (How your memory dies within me) is rendered as *"Wie die Erinnerung in mir erlischt"* (How the memory in me extinguishes). While *"erlischt"* captures the fading quality of memory, it carries a slightly colder, more clinical connotation compared to the Albanian *"vdes,"* which evokes a more personal, human sense of loss.

The German translation retains the reflective melancholy of the original while subtly emphasizing the finality of the loss. This slight shift in tone exemplifies the challenges of conveying nuanced emotions across languages.

2. Imagery and Metaphor

Kadare employs powerful imagery, such as searching for a resting place for the beloved (*"Një strofë a notë a një brilant"* / *A stanza, a note, or a gem*), which reflects the poet's struggle to immortalize a fading memory. In the German translation, *"Nach einer Strophe, einer Note, einem Edelstein"* closely parallels the original, maintaining the metaphor of art and preciousness as a vessel for memory.

The phrase *"Në s'gjetsha hon ku të hedh"* (If I cannot find an abyss to cast you) becomes *"Doch wenn kein Grab dich akzeptiert"* (Yet if no grave accepts you). While the German translation shifts the imagery from an abyss to a grave, it preserves the poem’s existential tension between life and death, albeit with a slight grounding in a more conventional cultural symbol (grave versus abyss).

3. Rhythm and Structure

Kadare's poem is rhythmically conversational, with an understated cadence that underscores its introspective nature. The German version successfully replicates this rhythm, though it naturally adjusts to the linguistic characteristics of German. For example, the original line *"Gjysmë të vdekur, gjysmë të gjallë"* (Half dead, half alive) becomes *"Muß ich dann zwischen Tod und Leben"* (Must I then between death and life), which introduces a slight restructuring while maintaining the dichotomy central to the poem’s theme.

4. Symbolism and Philosophical Undertones

Kadare’s *"Kristal"* explores themes of memory, mortality, and the search for meaning in impermanence. The metaphor of a “crystal morgue” (*"morg-kristal"*) evokes a paradoxical image of beauty and finality, reflecting the poet’s struggle to preserve memory in a fragile, crystalline form. This concept is effectively rendered as *"kristallnes Leichenhaus"* in German, preserving the original's symbolic weight.

The Albanian *"Të gjej një fushë a një lulanjë"* (To find a field or a flower garden) is translated as *"Eine Wiese oder einen Blumengarten finden,"* successfully retaining the softness and dispersal imagery of the original. The symbolism of scattering like pollen (*"porsi polen"*) is preserved in German, encapsulating the poet’s acceptance of letting go while ensuring the essence of the beloved lingers everywhere.

5. Cultural Context and Adaptation

The translation adapts Albanian cultural references, such as the intimate tone and poetic cadence, into a German framework that resonates with its readers. While some cultural nuances are inevitably altered—such as the connotation of "vdes" (die) versus "erlischt" (extinguishes)—the translator successfully bridges the emotional and symbolic core of the poem across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

The German translation of "*Kristal*" by Joachim Röhm showcases a sensitive and skillful approach to preserving the melancholic tone, vivid imagery, and philosophical depth of Ismail Kadare's original. While certain linguistic and cultural nuances are subtly transformed, the translation achieves a remarkable balance between fidelity to the source text and resonance with the target audience. This case study underscores the translator's critical role as both an interpreter of meaning and a recreator of emotion, navigating the delicate interplay between linguistic structures and universal human experiences.

Conclusion

The translation of poetry represents one of the most intricate challenges in the field of literary translation, requiring a nuanced understanding of both linguistic structures and cultural contexts. Through the case studies analyzed, it becomes evident that poetry translation is far more than a linguistic exercise; it is an art form in itself, requiring the translator to act as both a faithful interpreter and a creative artist.

Kadare's works, with their rich imagery, melancholic tones, and philosophical depth, illustrate the complexity of transferring meaning, emotion, and aesthetic resonance from one language to another. Translators like Joachim Röhm demonstrate the delicate balance between preserving the original poetic intent and adapting

it to the cultural and linguistic norms of the target audience. While some subtleties may inevitably be altered in the process, the core essence of the poem can be retained through thoughtful adaptation and artistic sensitivity.

Ultimately, the translation of poetry is a bridge between cultures, fostering cross-cultural understanding and enriching the global literary landscape. It underscores the transformative power of language, allowing readers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds to engage with the universal themes of humanity, memory, and emotion that poetry so uniquely conveys.

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