

## What Makes Literary Translation Distinct?

Literary translation is fundamentally different from technical, legal, or commercial translation. While a technical manual for a machine must be precise and unambiguous, a novel or a poem thrives on ambiguity, connotation, and aesthetic effect. The literary translator's primary goal is to recreate the experience of the original work.

### A. Aesthetic and Emotional Purpose vs. Informational Purpose

The core function of a literary text is to evoke an emotional and intellectual response. The translator must act as a writer in the target language to achieve this.

#### Example from Kurdish Poetry:

Consider a powerful Kurdish poem about loss. The poet might use the word فرمیسک. A purely informational translation would render this as tear. However, a literary translator must consider the entire sonic and emotional landscape of the poem. Is the sorrow sharp and sudden, or is it a long, lingering ache? The translator might choose between words like teardrop, lament, grief, or sorrow, not based on a one-to-one lexical match, but on which English word best recreates the intended feeling and sound within the new poetic structure.

### B. Creativity and Flexibility

Legal or medical documents demand absolute fidelity to the source text's terminology. Literary translation requires creativity to solve problems that have no direct literal equivalent.

#### Example of Metaphor:

An English novelist might use a complex metaphor rooted in a specific Western cultural context, such as a reference to a particular historical event or a line from Shakespeare. A literal translation of this metaphor into Kurdish might be confusing or meaningless. The translator's task is not to translate the words of the metaphor, but its function. They may need to create a new metaphor, one rooted in Kurdish culture, for instance referencing a figure from a حەبیران or a local legend, that evokes a similar feeling of betrayal or irony in the Kurdish reader. This is a creative act, not a mechanical one.

### C. Focus on Form and Style (Sound, Rhythm, and Voice)

The literary translator is a stylist. You must pay close attention to how something is said, not just what is said. This is especially crucial when translating from a language with a strong oral and poetic tradition like Kurdish.

#### Example of Sound in Prose:

Imagine a line in a Kurdish folk tale that uses heavy alliteration and a specific cadence to create a memorable, almost musical effect, such as کابرایهکی کلاو کۆنی کورتیله. The repeated k sound is a key stylistic feature. A direct English translation like a short man with an old hat captures the meaning but feels flat and lifeless, stripped of its original artistry. The stylistic translator must try to compensate for this loss. They might not be able to replicate the exact alliteration, but they could introduce a different sonic device in English, such as

assonance or a strong rhythmic pattern, to preserve the playful and folkloric tone of the original narrative.

#### **D. The Translator as Cultural Mediator**

Literary works are embedded in culture. The translator must decide how to handle cultural references, concepts, and values that may be unfamiliar to the target audience.

#### **Example of a Cultural Concept:**

A Kurdish novel might center around the festival of **نەورۆز**. For a Kurdish reader, this word alone evokes a vast network of meaning related to the New Year, the spring equinox, national identity, resistance, and renewal. When translating for an English audience, the translator faces a choice. Should they simply use the word Newroz and let the context provide clues? Should they add a brief, unobtrusive explanation within the text itself? Or should they use a footnote? Each choice impacts the reader's experience and the flow of the text.

### **1.3 Assessing Fit for Purpose: The Skopos Framework**

A translation is not simply good or bad on its own. Its quality depends on what it is meant to do. This is the main idea of Skopos theory, which comes from the Greek word for purpose. The first thing a translator needs to know is the purpose of their translation.

#### **Key Questions to Define the Purpose:**

1. Who is the target audience? Is this a translation of a Bachtyar Ali novel for a university course on world literature, or for a general reader looking for a compelling story?
2. What is the intended effect? Is the goal to make the reader laugh, cry, question their assumptions, or learn about Kurdish history?
3. What is the context of publication or use? A translation of a play intended for stage performance has different requirements than one intended for quiet reading.

#### **Criteria for Assessment Based on Purpose:**

**Accuracy and Fidelity:** In a literary context, this means being faithful to the spirit of the original.

**Literary Quality in the Target Language:** The translation must stand on its own as a compelling piece of writing in English or Kurdish.

**Equivalence of Effect:** Does the translation produce a similar response in the target reader as the original did in its source reader?

**Handling of Cultural Nuances:** The assessment must consider how effectively the translator has managed culturally specific items without erasing the text's unique Kurdish identity.

Let's apply these concepts to concrete examples.

## Translating a Term of Endearment

Concept: Consider the common Sorani Kurdish term of affection, گیان, which literally translates to soul or life. However, its usage is much broader. It can mean dear, darling, my love, or simply be used as a polite and warm suffix to a name.

Analysis: A translator who renders گیان as my soul every time it appears will produce a text that sounds overly dramatic and unnatural in English.

### Fit-for-Purpose Discussion:

What is the function of the word in this specific context? Is it a lover whispering to their partner? Is it a mother speaking to her child?

### Translation Options:

In a romantic context, it could become darling or my love.

When a parent uses it, it might be translated as sweetheart.

In a polite, everyday context, it might be best to omit it and ensure the English dialogue sounds appropriately warm and respectful.

The best choice is never fixed; it is always dictated by the specific context.

### EXAMPLE:

**Source Text:** من داریکی رووتم، لهناو بهفری غه‌ریبی

1. Provide a literal, word-for-word translation into English.

A literal rendering would be something close to: I am a naked/bare tree, in the snow of exile/strangeness.

2. Discuss the meaning and connotations of the key words. What does رووت imply here? Is it just bare, or does it suggest vulnerability, poverty, or shame? What is the full emotional range of غه‌ریبی? Does it mean loneliness, exile, homesickness, or a more general feeling of being an outsider?
3. Brainstorm at least two fit-for-purpose translations into English. For each one, define the target audience and the intended effect.

Translation A: The Lyrical Version. Aim for a translation that prioritizes the emotional and poetic impact for a general reader of poetry. The goal is a line that sounds beautiful and resonant in English.

Translation B: The Faithful Version. Aim for a translation for a scholarly anthology of Kurdish literature. Here, the purpose might be to stay closer to the original's core concepts, perhaps even sacrificing some lyrical smoothness to convey the specific and crucial terms of غه‌ریبی and رووت.

## Option 1: The Lyrical Translation

Purpose: To be published in a collection of world poetry for a general English-speaking audience. The goal is to create a line that is beautiful, emotionally resonant, and functions as a powerful piece of English poetry in its own right.

Translation:

A tree stripped bare, I stand in the alien snow.

Why it is excellent for this purpose:

A tree stripped bare...: This changes the syntax slightly from I am a bare tree for a more poetic and active feel. The word stripped is a better choice than bare or naked because it implies that an external force caused this vulnerability, which aligns with the theme of exile.

...I stand...: This verb is added to give the image a sense of isolated endurance, which is often a theme in Pashew's work.

...in the alien snow.: This is a creative solution for غەریبی. Instead of using a complex abstract noun like estrangement or exile, it modifies snow with alien. This fuses the physical image (snow) with the emotional state (feeling like an alien/stranger), creating a single, powerful metaphor that is immediately understandable and evocative for an English reader.

## Option 2: The Faithful Scholarly Translation

Purpose: For a university textbook or a scholarly analysis of Kurdish literature. The primary goal is fidelity to the original's specific concepts, allowing a student or researcher to understand the poet's exact word choices.

Translation:

I am a bare tree, in the snow of *xerîbî* [exile and estrangement].

Why it is excellent for this purpose:

I am a bare tree...: This is a more direct rendering, staying close to the original syntax.

...in the snow of *xerîbî*: This translation makes the brave and academically honest choice to not fully translate the key term. By keeping غەریبی in the original and providing a concise gloss in brackets, the translator signals that no single English word is sufficient.

Clarity and Honesty: This approach is excellent because it educates the reader about a unique cultural concept. It doesn't hide the translation difficulty; it highlights it, which is precisely the goal in a scholarly context.

### Option 3: The Dynamic Equivalence Translation

- Purpose: To be used as a voiceover in a documentary about the Kurdish experience or quoted in a news article. The goal is to convey the core emotional meaning quickly, clearly, and powerfully to an audience that has little context.
- Translation:

I am exposed and alone, like a bare tree in the winter of my exile.

Why it is excellent for this purpose:

I am exposed and alone...: This is an interpretation, not a direct translation. It takes the meaning of *پرووت* (vulnerability) and *غەریبی* (loneliness) and states them directly and emotionally.

...like a bare tree...: It keeps the central simile because it's universally understandable.

...in the winter of my exile.: It replaces snow with winter to make the metaphor of a harsh, desolate season even more explicit. Adding my exile clearly defines the context for an audience unfamiliar with the subtleties of *غەریبی*. This translation prioritizes immediate emotional impact and clarity over poetic nuance or literal fidelity.