

The Translation Techniques of Figurative Expressions in Novel Texts: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

The translation of figurative expression in novels represent a distinct challenge to translator because it requires preserving the aesthetic and artistic features as well as the intended meaning. This necessitates the translators to balance the formal with the functional aspects to convey the author's message precisely and equivalently. The study aims at investigating the translation techniques of translating figurative expressions in novels. The current study uses the Systematic Literature Review methodology, focusing on selected journal articles published between 2018 and 2025. The data of present systematic review are collected from twelve journal articles, which are mainly concerned with the translation of figurative expressions in novels. The results show that some translation techniques (literal translation, adaptation, generalization, word-for-word translation, and reduction) are used more frequently than others. Moreover, translators employ a wider range of translation techniques to convey the aesthetic, artistic, functional, and cultural implications of each figurative expression from the source text to the target one.

Keywords: Systematic Review, Figurative Expressions, Translation Techniques, Novel Texts

INTRODUCTION

The translation of figurative expressions in literary texts is a significant area of research in the field of translation because of the fact that it involves a simultaneous interaction of the linguistic, artistic, and cultural elements (Ji, 2011, p. 154). It is “a deviation from what speakers of a language apprehend as the ordinary, or standard significance or sequence of words, in order to achieve some special meaning or effect” (Abrams, 1988, p. 63). At the same time, this type of interaction is realized if one takes into account that the process of translation which involves seeking not only the equivalence of meaning in the target language but also equivalence in form, style, norms, and culture references in the target language (Heizmann, 1997, p. 146). Moreover, Moindjie, Ummu-Salmah & Gan (2025) point out that literary texts are not only characterized by literariness, style, mode of expression, and culture, but they are also characterized by expressive function, evocative power, aesthetic value, non-univocity, timelessness, and universal values. Therefore, translators come cross certain challenges when rendering novel texts, particularly the figurative expressions (Tan, 2024, p. 144) which are characterized by their conveyance of imagery and emotional effect, establishing the rhythmic flow of events, and developing and foreshadowing events. Translators must maintain the essence of the source text while taking its linguistic intricacies such as its assertiveness, rhetoricity, style, etc. into account (Gumar & Al-Zubaidi, 2025). The current systematic

review investigates the different translation techniques which are used in the translation of figurative expressions in novel texts, focusing on the studies which are published since 20 until 2025.

Additionally, it has been identified that different translation techniques are used in the translation of figurative expressions in novel texts. This can be attributed to the difficulty and complication of novel translation because the latter necessitates not only the translation of linguistic meaning from one language into another but also the socio-cultural one (Hartono, 2018, p. 47). The translators' need for a wide range of translation techniques is the result of such complications and difficulties so as to compensate the gaps of rendering the meaning from the source text into the target one. In addition, the utilization of the translation strategies enables the translators "to effectively convey the original text's aesthetic and emotional resonance" (Mauladiana & Juniardi, 2024, p. 76).

Moreover, in translating figurative expressions in literary texts, it is important to consider the socio-cultural context of such figurative expressions because it plays a crucial role in their interpretation and translation. In addition to the cultural challenges in translating the figurative expressions in novel texts, sometimes translators come across the problem of not finding a direct equivalent to such expressions in the target language (Ahmed, 2024, p. 339). Therefore, when translating, translators need to pay attention to the cultural insinuations of the text being rendered, and not only to the linguistic accuracy or fidelity. Katan and Taibi (2021) argue that translation is a "practice requires language professionals with the necessary cultural sensitivity and communication skills to intervene and negotiate the cultural gaps" (p. 17). Such investigations reveal the importance of understanding the cultural implications in rendering figurative expressions literary texts, particularly novels.

In addition to the cultural aspects, the translation of figurative expressions in novel texts is also subject to the style and aesthetic consideration. In literary translation, there should be focus on the stylistic and aesthetic aspects because "literature is linguistically rich, culturally informative, and aesthetically engaging" (Sun, 2023, p. 145). As a literary work, novel should be translated in a way that keeps its stylistic and aesthetic aspects which can recognize it as a novel. The translation of the figurative expression in novel should be consistent with the stylistic features of the translated text. This can be interpreted in terms of the fact that "every writer has a unique way of expressing ideas. No two writers bear the same style" (Hamawand, 2023, p. 18).

In brief, translating the figurative expressions in novel texts is a complicated because of their distinctive characteristics, including their artistic features, linguistic style, and emotional depth (Nida & Taber, 2003, pp. 4-5). Consequently, the translation of figurative expressions in novel requires certain strategies of translation that enable translators to maintain the figurative meaning as well as the linguistic uniqueness and cultural implication while transferring the figurative expression from the source text into the target one (Epstein, 2014, p. 66). The current systematic review investigates the translation strategies of figurative expressions in novel texts in some published studies. The study aims at investigating and categorizing the translation techniques utilized by translators when dealing with figurative expressions.

THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current study uses the systematic literature review which indicates a well-structured and methodological-based approach of "reviewing existing literature on a specific topic, aiming to minimize bias and provide a comprehensive synthesis of findings" (Mauladiana & Juniardi, 2024, p. 77). It is a review that can be used to "locate appraise and synthesize the best available evidence relating to a specific research question in order to provide informative and evidence-based answers" (Dickson, Cherry & Boland, 2017, p. 2). Methodologically, carrying out a systematic review involves several stages, including reviewing the research question and objective, the inclusion and exclusion criteria, search strategy and screening, quality assessment and appraisal, and interpreting results and drawing conclusions (Tripney & Gough, 2025, p. 29)

The first stage of the methodology involves the systematic search for the related research. This stage is achieved by searching the journals that are specialized in the publication of translation studies as well as other academic journals to find the relevant studies that can be utilized in the current systematic literature review. The search is implemented using some of the keywords such as "figurative expressions translation in novel texts", "the translation of the figurative devices in novel", "the techniques of translating figurative expressions in novel", and "the strategies of translating the figurative devices in novel texts". The use of such keywords will guarantee the collection of the relevant studies. This systematic review focuses on the studies that are published in peer-reviewed and reputable journal articles.

As for the object of the current systematic literature review, it focuses on the research that investigates the translation techniques in novel texts. There are twelve journal articles that match the criteria set in the current study. They are published between 2018 and 2025. The study employs some of the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Concerning the inclusion criteria, the study employs the following criteria:

1. The selected articles must be published in book chapters, peer-reviewed journals, or conference proceedings.

2. The included studies must be concerned with the investigation of the translation techniques of figurative language or figurative devices in novel texts.
3. The studies must be written in English.

On the other hand, the exclusion criteria involve:

1. The studies that are concerned with non-literary texts, particularly novels.
2. The non-academic publications.
3. Studies that have duplicated publications or those with no full-text access.

The selection of the eligible relevant studies that meet the inclusion criteria comprises the following stages:

1. The initial screening which involves the screening of “the titles and abstracts of all the records returned by the search” (Huang & Chalmers, 2023, p. 4). Any search records that violate the aforementioned inclusion criteria are excluded.
2. The full-text screening and reviewing which indicates that the full text of each of the selected studies is reviewed to guarantee that they meet the selection principles.
3. The quality assessment where the trustworthiness of each study is evaluated in terms of its methodology clarity, relativity to research questions, and the strength of conclusions.

The quality of the collected data is evaluated using the following questions:

1. QA1/ Does the study investigate the translation techniques of translating figurative expressions in novel texts?
2. QA1/ Was the selected study published between 200 and 200?
3. QA1/ Does the study describe the data collection methodology and analysis for translating the figurative expressions in novel texts?

The quality of the selected studies is evaluated using the words “Yes”, for the studies that align with the quality assessment principle, and “No”, for those which do not.

The final stage is the analysis of the selected data where the selected studies are analyzed to grasp the translation techniques used in the translation of figurative expressions in novel texts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the current study, twelve journal articles are selected because they match the aforementioned inclusion and exclusion criteria. The journal articles that match the inclusion criteria are published between 2018 and 2025, taking into account that the selected articles are concerned with the translation techniques of figurative expressions in novel texts. The selected studies are categorized in table 1. The categorization comprises the name of the journal, the year of the study publication, and the author(s), and the title of each study. It also comprises the quality assessment procedure and result.

Table 1 The selected studies according to the journal name, the publication year, and the author(s), the study title, quality assessment procedure, and result.

No.	Name of the Journal	Year of Publication	Author(s)	The Title of the Study	Quality Assessment			Result
					QA1	QA2	QA3	
1.	<i>JENTERA: Jurnal Kajian Sastra</i>	2022	Riris Mutiara Paulina Simamora & Andre Priyono	Translation Method Analysis on Figurative Language in Novel Crazy Rich Asians Translated into Kaya Tujuh Turunan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Accepted
2.	<i>MOZAIK HUMANIORA</i>	2020	Nurul Huda Gustema	The Translation of Figurative Languages in Novel Lelaki Harimau by Eka Kurniawan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Accepted
3.	<i>Forum for Linguistic Studies</i>	2025	Faiz Algobaei & Elham Alzain	Metaphors in Translation: A Study of Figurative Language in Badriah Albeshr's HEND and the Soldiers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Accepted

4.	<i>International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation</i>	2021	Dellia Erdita	Translation Strategies of Similes in "Game of Thrones" Novel	Yes	Yes	Yes	Accepted
5.	<i>Kata Kita</i>	2020	Deby Angelia	Translation Strategies of Figurative Language in the Novel <i>The Fault in Our Stars</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Accepted
6.	<i>Undergraduate Conference on Language, Literature, and Culture (UNCLLE)</i>	2024	Alisa Amanda Cahya and Nina Setyaningsih	Techniques and Accuracy of Simile and Metaphor in <i>The Midnight Library</i> Novel by Matt Haig	Yes	Yes	Yes	Accepted
7.	<i>Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Humaniora</i>	2025	Warminingsih & Syamrurrijal	Analysis of Figurative Language and Translation Strategies in <i>Picture Me Gone</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Accepted
8.	<i>EScience Humanity Journal</i>	2024	Nuril Adila & Evert, H. Hilman	Translation Techniques in the Figurative Language In "It Ends with Us" An Analysis	Yes	Yes	Yes	Accepted
9.	<i>IdeBahasa</i>	2022	Miftah Kevin Iswara & Evert Haryanto Hilman	Translation of Figure of Speech in the Novel "To All the Boys I've Loved Before"	Yes	Yes	Yes	Accepted
10.	<i>Arab World English Journal For Translation and Literary Studies</i>	2018	Rachadaporn Mata & Supong Tangkiengsirisin	The Strategies in Translating English Metaphors into Thai: A Case Study of the American Novel <i>Percy Jackson</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Accepted
11.	<i>Journal of Language and Literature</i>	2023	Aulia Rachma Pratiwi, Nurenzia Yannuar & Arif Subiyanto	A Comparative Analysis of the Impact of Translation Techniques on the Translation of Similes and Metaphors in <i>The Old Man and The Sea</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Accepted
12.	<i>Alustath Journal for Human and Social Sciences</i>	2021	Farah A. Abo Al-Timen	A Translation Assessment of Metaphors in Elif Shafak's <i>Black Milk</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Accepted

The main aim of the current systematic review is the investigation of the translation techniques utilized in translating the figurative expressions in novel texts. Therefore, it is important to identify the translation techniques in the reviewed studies. The translation techniques in the selected studies are used to address the linguistic, contextual, and cultural challenges of rendering the source text into the target one. Therefore, it is important to review the translation techniques that are used in each of the selected studies to recognize which one of the translation techniques is the most frequently used in the translation of the figurative expressions in literary novel texts. Table 2 introduces a review to the translation techniques that are used in each of the selected studies.

Table 2 The translation Techniques in each of the Selected Studies.

No.	The Title of the Study	The Translation Techniques
1.	Translation Method Analysis on Figurative Language in Novel Crazy Rich Asians Translated into Kaya Tujuh Turunan	Literal translation, Word-For-Word Translation, communicative translation, semantic translation, faithful translation, idiomatic translation.
2.	The Translation of Figurative Languages in Novel Lelaki Harimau by Eka Kurniawan	Literal translation, Adaptation, Particularization, Generalization, Established Equivalent, Reduction.
3.	Metaphors in Translation: A Study of Figurative Language in Badriah Albeshr's HEND and the Soldiers	Adaptation, Preservation, Alteration, Omission
4.	Translation Strategies of Similes in "Game of Thrones" Novel	e change, Distribution Change (expansion, compression).
5.	Translation Strategies of Figurative Language in the Novel The Fault in Our Stars	Translating the word non-figuratively, Retaining the word in the original, but adding its sense, Substituting a figurative expression.
6.	Translation Techniques and Accuracy of Simile and Metaphor in The Midnight Library Novel by Matt Haig	Established equivalent, Amplification, Borrowing, Linguistic Amplification, Linguistic Compression, Reduction, Literal Translation, Discursive Creation, Generalization, Variation.
7.	Analysis of Figurative Language and Translation Strategies in Picture Me Gone	Literal Translation, Modulation, Reduction, Descriptive Equivalent, Paraphrase, Transposition.
8.	Translation Techniques in the Translation of Figurative Language In "It Ends with Us"	Trope Change, Emphasis Change
9.	An Analysis Translation of Figure of Speech in the Novel "To All the Boys I've Loved Before"	Literal Translation, Word-For-Word Translation, Semantic Translation, Idiomatic Translation, Adaptation
10.	The Strategies in Translating English Metaphors into Thai: A Case Study of the American Novel Percy Jackson	Reproducing, Replacing, Deleting, maintaining the source image, Adding some meaning.
11.	A Comparative Analysis of the Impact of Translation Techniques on the Translation of Similes and Metaphors in The Old Man and The Sea	Literal translation, Transposition, Modulation, Amplification, Established Equivalent, Generalization, Particularization, Reduction, Adaptation, Borrowing, Discursive Creation.
12.	A Translation Assessment of Metaphors in Elif Shafak's Black Milk	Literal Translation, Sense Strategy, Mix Strategy, Deletion Strategy, Addition of Lexical Ties, Simile Strategy, Simile plus Sense, Adaptation.

Depending on the review of the translation strategies found in the twelve selected journal articles, thirty-three translation techniques are identified. These translation strategies are used in the translation of figurative expressions in novel texts. The review of the translation techniques in the selected studies reveals that there is a variation in the frequency of using these strategies in the translation of figurative expressions in novel texts. However, some strategies are used more frequently than others. Table 3 identifies the frequency and the percentage of each strategy in the reviewed studies.

Table 3 The Frequency and Percentage of the Translation Techniques in the Reviewed Studies.

No.	The Translation Techniques	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Literal Translation	7	10.80%
2.	Word-For-Word Translation	4	6.20%
3.	Communicative Translation	1	1.53%
4.	Semantic Translation	2	3.07%
5.	Faithful Translation	1	1.53%
6.	Idiomatic Translation	2	3.07%
7.	Adaptation	5	7.75%
8.	Particularization	2	3.07%
9.	Generalization	3	4.63%
10.	Established Equivalent	3	4.63%
11.	Reduction	4	6.20%
12.	Preservation	1	1.53%
13.	Alteration	1	1.53%
14.	Omission	1	1.53%
15.	Trope Change	2	3.07%
16.	Distribution Change	1	1.53%
17.	Substituting	2	3.07%
18.	Adding Sense	2	3.07%

19.	Retaining the word in the original	2	3.07%
20.	Amplification	2	3.07%
21.	Linguistic Amplification	1	1.53%
22.	Borrowing	2	3.07%
23.	Linguistic Compression	1	1.53%
24.	Discursive Creation	2	3.07%
25.	Variation	1	1.53%
26.	Modulation	2	3.07%
27.	Descriptive Equivalent	1	1.53%
28.	Paraphrase	1	1.53%
29.	Transposition	2	3.07%
30.	Emphasis Change	1	1.53%
31.	Mix Strategy	1	1.53%
32.	Simile Strategy	1	1.53%
33.	Simile plus Sense	1	1.53%
	The Total	65	100.00%

The results of reviewing the translation techniques in the twelve selected journal articles demonstrate that the strategy of literal translation is the most frequently employed strategy in the translation of the figurative expressions in literary novel texts. This can be attributed to its effectiveness in the preservation of the authorial voice and style. It also maintains the aesthetic and artistic features of figurative expressions in the translation of novel texts. However, it sometimes fails to capture the cultural implications of the figurative expressions because of the cultural differences from one community into another. Moreover, this technique is frequently used to avoid the over-interpretation where the use of the other strategies can leave the door open to a wide range of interpretations of each figurative expression. The other reason is taking into account the readers' expectations where the translated text is often expected to reflect the source text artistry rather than paraphrase.

Additionally, the next frequently used techniques in the translation of figurative expressions novel texts are adaptation and reduction. As for adaptation, it is frequently used to maintain the cultural untranslatability when the figurative expression is culturally specific, enabling the target reader to get an equivalent effect even with changing the image. Moreover, adaptation can preserve readability, emotional, and stylistic impact. Concerning the frequent use of reduction technique of translation, it is attributed to its functionality in avoiding complexity where it keeps translation clear and concise without confusing the target readers. Moreover, it is an effective technique of ensuring the pragmatic relevance of the figurative image, and ensuring the smooth narrative flow.

The techniques of established equivalent and generalization are recorded three times for each in the selected studies, which represents 4.63%. The use of these techniques in the translation of figurative expressions can be justified by the reason that establishing equivalent figurative expression can enhance the cultural accessibility and comprehension without the need for any explanations. However, if no figurative equivalent is available, the technique of generalization can be used to convey the intended meaning and enhancing the intelligibility (Shojaei, 2012, p. 1222). Moreover, the technique of generalization is needed when the source language has more lexical density than the target language to cover the lexical gaps or the semantic mismatch (Klaudy, 2009, p. 85).

The less frequent use of the other translation techniques can be interpreted in the fact that each one is intended to serve an identifiable purpose in the process of translation. Their employment in the translation of figurative expressions in novel texts indicates the multifaced feature of the translation process where a wide variety of translation techniques can be used to convey the intended meaning based on the target audience and the text type. In translating the figurative expressions in novel, different translation strategies are required to capture the nuances of the source text. With such variety of translation techniques, translators of novels are able to convey the source text meaning more creatively to the target text. The techniques "highlight the flexibility and creativity required" in novel translation, and "how translators navigate the challenges of preserving both the poetic essence and the cultural nuances of the original text, especially in cases where a direct translation is not feasible" (Mauladiana & Juniardi, 2024, p. 82).

To recapitulate, the findings of the reviewed studies indicate that the techniques of literal translation and adaptation are the most common translation strategies employed by translators in the translation of figurative expressions in literary novels. The other frequently used techniques are generalization, established equivalent, and reduction. The findings also show that translating figurative expressions in novel is a process that necessitates the equilibrium between maintaining meaning, preserving aesthetic aspects, and considering the linguistic and cultural standards of the target readers. The use of the variety of the translation techniques indicates the unique challenges that translators come cross in translating the figurative language presented in novel.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the translation techniques in the twelve selected journal articles shows that translators usually use a wide range of translation strategies to render the figurative expressions in novels from the source text to the target one. It is also found that some of the strategies such as literal translation, adaptation, generalization, word-for-word translation, and reduction are used more frequently in the translation of figurative language than other strategies. The use of these translation techniques in the selected reviewed studies reveals that they enable translators to balance the fidelity to the source text, transferring the aesthetic and artistic features of the figurative expressions to the target text, and conveying the intended meaning with each expression. This leaves no space to the target readers to interpret the figurative expressions with different layers of meaning, or to be understood ambiguously.

Furthermore, the current study puts forward some implications and recommendations. As for implications, the study implies that the translation of the figurative expressions is not only linguistically dependent but rather pragmatically and culturally dependent. Thus, it implies the essentiality of the interdisciplinary models in the translation of figurative expressions. It also implies that some of the translation strategies such as literal translation, adaptation, generalization, word-for-word translation, and reduction are useful in translating the figurative expressions. Therefore, translators in general, and students of translation in particular, can benefit from the findings of the current study because it encompasses the results of the most current studies in the field of figurative expression translation. Consequently, they can adopt the frequent translation strategies found by the current paper when translating the figurative expressions in literary texts so that their translation can be more linguistically accurate and culturally preserving.

Concerning recommendations, the present study recommends the development of figurative translation frameworks of an interdisciplinary nature, taking into account the cultural, pragmatic, stylistic, and cognitive aspects in rendering the figurative expressions from one language into another. It is also recommended to expand the computational and corpus-based studies in the field of figurative expressions so as to enable researchers to conduct a quantitative study to the strategies of translation that are more frequently used in that field.

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