

# The Efficacy and Creativity of Literal Translation: A Case of Nepali EFL Student Translators

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## Abstract

*Translation scholarship abounds in strong views against literal translation, questioning its viability and creativity. The present paper problematizes the relegation of literal translation and makes a case for its viability in the translation of literary texts. To this end, the paper analyzes 600 culture-bound and collocational expressions extracted from a corpus of thirty Nepali short stories in English translation carried out by Nepali EFL student translators. The findings demonstrate the accuracy of literally translated expressions and further illustrate the creative potential of literal translation. Finally, the study points out the necessity of incorporating literal translation as a viable strategy in translation pedagogy.*

**Keywords:** Collocations, Culture-bound Expressions, Literal Translation, Free Translation.

## 1. Introduction

Whether and to what extent the translated text (TT) should reflect or correspond to the source text (ST) is a matter of ongoing debate in translation scholarship. In general, translators are advised to liberate the TT from the source language (SL) and culture so as to breathe new life into it. Translation scholars and practitioners who maintain that the TT should bear little or no linguistic and cultural traces of the ST that contradict the target language (TL) system and culture privilege the free, or target-centred translation over the literal, or source-centred translation (Chironova 2014).

The opposition between literal and free translation is as old as translation practice itself, dating back to the Roman system

(Bassnett 2014), and it has not lost its significance in translation theory and practice even today. Deeply entrenched in the translation discourse, the distinction has manifested itself in different guises. For example, the German philosopher and translation theorist Schleiermacher's (1813/2012) classical distinction between alienating and naturalizing methods (Munday 2016) inherently reflects the distinction between literal and free translation. Likewise, Nida's (1964) notions of formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence and Newmark's (1981, 1998) semantic translation and communicative translation are built on this age-old distinction in one way or the other. Formal equivalence or semantic translation is the outcome of literal translation. Conversely, dynamic equivalence or communicative translation is achieved through the enactment of free translation.

Literal translation is generally perceived pejoratively – seen as the strategy of less utility and criticized for producing “inadequate, low-quality translation” (Chironova 2014: 28). Owing to its potential to distort meaning and violate norms of the TL (Lomaka 2017), the efficacy of literal translation is often questioned and its use is less recommended.

The present paper problematizes the tendency to relegate literal translation to marginal status and argues with empirical evidence that it can be equally effective and creative in the translation of culture-bound and collocational expressions found in literary texts.

This paper is part of my larger study concerning the translation of Nepali literary texts into English by English as Foreign Language (EFL) student translators. The paper reports and discusses only Nepali culture-bound and collocational expressions translated literally into English. Following Newmark's (1998) categorization, culture-bound expressions include, among others, geographical and ecological terms

loaded with cultural connotations, terms of address, metaphors, and similes. Collocations, on the other hand, are the two or more lexical items that co-occur (Munday 2009) to express a single meaning. Collocations are mostly language-bound and are defined by the syntagmatic relationship between the co-occurring lexical items. Culture-bound and collocational expressions are perceived as one of the most problematic areas in translation (Newmark 1991; Baker 2011) and therefore translators are usually advised not to render them literally. On the contrary, this paper demonstrates the potential of literal translation in the rendition of culture-bound and collocational expressions.

In my attempt to demonstrate the efficacy and creativity of literal translation, I first briefly review the literature on literal translation, focusing on arguments for and against its viability in the rendition of literary texts. Then I outline the methodology adopted to conduct the study before presenting and discussing the findings under two broad thematic headings. Finally, the conclusion includes a summary of key findings and their implications for translation pedagogy.

## **2. The (In)viability of Literal Translation as a Strategy**

Literal translation is taken as the obverse of free translation primarily for two reasons. First, literally or closely translated expressions, unlike those rendered freely, are considered the mere reproductions of SL expressions (Bayer-Hohenwarter 2011). Second, literal translation also termed close translation is SL-oriented, allowing the lowest degree of freedom for the translator (Hervey & Higgins 2002). The literally reproduced text is often considered inadequate because of its failure to escape the stylistic-linguistic influence of the ST (Kallebach 2016). Many scholars argue that literal translation transfers ST elements that are communicatively irrelevant in the TL, and such transferred elements violate TL semantic and syntactic

systems (Lomaka 2017). Wolf (1986: 460) contends “a literal translation can never be true to its original. Every language has its own locutions, its accepted rhetorical figures, its assimilated expressions which cannot be translated into another language simply by using the corresponding words”. For Low (2003), literally translated texts characterize the works of novice translators who depend on poor dictionaries and hold the untenable view that literal translation produces maximum accuracy. It is perhaps for this reason that few literary translators consider “literal translation to be a suitable vehicle for their work” (Shuttleworth & Cowie 2014: 96)

Views in support of literal translation are also equally strong and justifiable. Literal translation should not be mistaken for the word-for-for rendition of the ST into the TL, which often produces an incoherent jumble of words. Instead, literal translation should be interpreted as the closest possible emulation of “the form, order, and linguistic idiosyncrasies” (Kallebach 2016 para. 3) of the ST, respecting at least minimally linguistic and cultural norms of the TL. The literally rendered text is supposed to exhibit a maximum adherence to its source, causing minimum distortion in the TL. This observation echoes Vinay and Darbelnet’s (1958/2000: 86) classical conceptualization of literal translation as “the direct transfer of an SL text into a grammatically and idiomatically appropriate TL text in which the translator’s task is limited to observing the adherence to the linguistic servitudes of the TL”. As a product, a literal translation is a TT expression that is structurally and semantically modelled upon the source expression while respecting TL grammatical constraints (Englund Dimitrova 2005). As a result, a literal translation is “formally closer to its source than some other translation of the same source chunk” (Chesterman 2017: 240). Thus, the closest possible transfer of source content by respecting and ensuring

the TL grammar system appears to be the defining feature of literal translation

Contrary to the pejorative perception of literal translation prevalent in translation scholarship, Schleiermacher (1813/2012) treats it with high regard. For him, there are only two paths open for the translator: “Either the translator leaves the writer in peace as much as possible and moves the reader toward him, or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer toward him” (49). The first is the path of alienation. The translator following this path renders the text as closely as possible, i.e., literally, allowing cultural and linguistic differences between SL and TL to emerge in the translation. On the other hand, the translator following the second path naturalizes the content, form, and language of the ST to make it readily consumable for target readers. The naturalizing method which corresponds to free translation gives readers the impression that they are reading the work in the original language itself. Schleiermacher (1813/2012) recommends the first method, i.e., literal translation for literary translators, as it allows the sense, sound, and texture of the ST to enrich the target language.

Nabokov (1955, 1964), a true champion of the literalist approach, distinguishes between paraphrastic (free) and literal translation. Paraphrastic translation is the free re-creation of the ST, with omissions and additions, whereas literal translation transfers the exact contextual meaning of the ST “as closely as the associative and syntactical capacities” of the TL allow (1964/2006: 385). Nabokov remarks that free translation prioritizes the spirit of the ST, often misrepresenting the exact intention of the author. For him, “the clumsiest literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase” (1955/2012:113) and it is the only way to be true to the original.

Following Schleiermacher's (1813/2012) classical distinction, Venuti (2008) distinguishes between domesticating and foreignizing methods of translation, and fervently advocates the use of the foreignizing method in the translation of literary texts. Espousing the spirit of literal translation, foreignizing translation is geared towards registering "the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text" (Venuti 2008:15). By this method, the translator endeavours to take readers as close as possible to the author's language and style. Hatim (2013) notes that a foreignizing translator retains something of *foreignness* of the ST and deliberately breaks the TL convention. On the other hand, the domesticating method which corresponds to free translation subordinates the ST to the prevailing norms of the TL and the common expectations of the target readership (Lomaka 2017).

On a psychological level, the distinction between literal and free translation coincides with the distinction between reproductive and productive activity. In Vygotsky's (1990: 84) conceptualization, reproductive activity is "closely connected with memory, its essence consisting in a person's reproducing or retrieving traces of previous impressions", whereas productive or creative activity is concerned with "the creation of new forms" (85). Linguists like Bolinger (1975) also stress the memory-driven and reproductive nature of language use. Bolinger maintains that language production is backed by "a large capacious and redundantly structured memory system" (Skehan 1994:181). During communication, language users first access and retrieve the words/chunks and structures already available at their disposal. Novelty in linguistic forms is not possible nor desirable each time. An endeavour to construct linguistic forms anew each time hinders fluency (Skehan 1994). This is understandable since language users endeavour to produce novel linguistic forms only in case the ready-made linguistic resources at their disposal fail to solve

the communicative problem. The same might also apply to translation as bilingual communicative activity. Since the reproduction of SL expressions is likely to be less time-consuming than the creation of target expressions that differ in form from their source counterparts, we can presume that translators tend to render SL expressions literally before recreating them freely in the TL. Considering this probability, Chesterman proposes a literal translation hypothesis which postulates that translators usually start from a literal version of the text and then work towards a freer version (2017).

Literal translation is likely to operate effectively at both the lexical and syntactic levels when the source and target languages are structurally similar and share a similar cultural environment. Nepali and Hindi exemplify such cognate languages. The use of literal translation is limited to the lexical level or local instances comprising lexical chunks when languages are syntactically different and culturally distant. Nepali and English serve as examples of such languages. With this theoretical consideration in mind, the present paper examines the viability of literal translation in the rendition of Nepali texts into English.

### **3. Methodology**

This study adopted the framework of product-oriented research (Saldanha & O'Brien 2013) to analyze the English textual product elicited from Nepali EFL student translators. According to Shuttleworth and Cowie (2014: 92), product-oriented research analyzes and describes translated texts to examine “the strategies employed by translators in given language pairs”. For this study, Nepali English-major M.Ed. students were designated as EFL student translators, and were coded ST1, ST2,...and ST30 to ensure their anonymity. As a tool, I employed the production task (Nunan 2010) to elicit data from thirty purposively selected student translators from

Mahendra Ratna Campus, Kathmandu, one of the constituent campuses of Tribhuvan University, Nepal. Furthermore, I purposively selected ten Nepali short stories, each within the limit of 800 to 1000 words, and assigned one story to three student translators. The stories were coded as S1, S2,...and S10. I requested each of the participants to render the story in their own time and return the English translation within a month from the date of receiving the Nepali story. From a total corpus of 30 stories in English translation, I selected only culture-bound and collocational expressions for analysis. I analyzed altogether 600 culture-bound and collocational expressions, each type comprising 300 items. In the rendition of these expressions, student translators employed different strategies such as free translation, literal translation, substitution, and borrowing. This paper, however, concerns only those English expressions rendered literally from Nepali.

I followed a descriptive-explanatory approach (Saldanha & O'Brien 2013) to analyze English texts elicited from student translators. Within this framework, the elicited texts were analyzed from two perspectives: the efficacy of literal translation and the creativity exhibited in literally rendered English expressions. Broadly guided by Waddington's (2001) method of assessing translated texts, I approached efficacy from the perspectives of the accuracy of transfer of source content on the one hand and linguistic accuracy of English expressions on the other. To assess the accuracy of transfer of source content, I, based on Waddington's (2001) assessment framework, employed a three-level scale: complete transfer (CT), almost complete transfer (ACT), and serious inaccuracy (SI). The linguistic accuracy of English expressions was assessed in terms of the presence of the global error (GE), and the local error (LE), or absence of such errors, i.e., error-free (EF) (Adhikari 2020). A global error is the one that renders the whole expression or sentence incomprehensible, whereas a

local error, despite breaching the grammar rule, does not cause a problem of comprehension (Richards & Schmidt 2010). The accuracy of content transfer and the linguistic accuracy of translated expressions were analyzed mainly quantitatively by using tabulation, frequency counts, and percentages. Quantitative analysis was followed by a close analysis of representative cases to illustrate key findings. The creative facet of literal translation, on the other hand, was analyzed qualitatively by means of language-based analysis (Doryei 2007).

#### 4. Results and Discussion

##### 4.1 Accuracy of Content Transfer and Quality of Language

Before proceeding to the analysis of literally rendered culture-bound and collocational expressions, I present in brief student translators' use of different strategies in the rendition of these expressions:

Strategies TL / expressions	Literal translation	Free translation	Substitution	Borrowing	Deletion	Total
Culture-bound expressions	100 (33.33 %)	78 (26 %)	79 (26.33 %)	30 (10 %)	13 (4.33 %)	300
Collocations	90 (30%)	104 (34.66 %)	96 (32 %)		10 (3.33 %)	300

Table 1: Distribution of TL expressions among translation strategies.

Table 1 shows the distribution of culture-bound expressions and collocations translated into English among five different translation strategies, namely literal translation, free translation, substitution, borrowing, and deletion (in a descending frequency order).

To refer to Table 1, one-third (31.65%) of the expressions (including both types) were the outcome of literal translation, whereas an almost equal proportion (30.33 %) of the

expressions were rendered freely. Likewise, less than one-third (29.17 %) of the expressions underwent the strategy of substitution. A very small number (10%) of culture-bound expressions were borrowed from the SL (i.e. Nepali), while there were no cases of collocations being carried over to the English text. Finally, only a negligible percentage (3.83 %) of source expressions were deleted from TTs. Overall, these figures show student translators' more inclination to literal translation than other strategies in the rendition of Nepali culture-bound and collocational expressions into English.

Since the aim of this paper is to examine the viability of literal translation, the following section concentrates exclusively on those target expressions that resulted from literal translation.

Table 2 presents literally rendered expressions in terms of two scales: the accuracy of transfer of source content and their conformity to English grammar:

Accuracy TL / Expressions	Accuracy of transfer of ST content				Accuracy of expression in TL			
	CT	ACT	SI	Total	GE	LE	EF	Total
Culture-bound expressions	35 (35%)	33 (33%)	32 (32%)	100	32 (32%)	27 (27%)	41 (41%)	100
Collocations	36 (40%)	31 34.44%	33 (36.66 %)	90	33 (36.66%)	23 (25.55%)	34 (37.77%)	90

Table 2: Accuracy of content transfer and language quality of literally translated expressions.

Table 2 shows that three-fourths (71.22%) of the literally reproduced expressions (including both types) were characterized by the complete and almost complete transfer of source content, whereas only one-third (32.5%) of such expressions were seriously inaccurate, causing the same number of global errors. Concerning language accuracy, more than one-fourth (27%) of the literally rendered culture-bound expressions were tainted with local errors, and the number of error-free expressions amounted to eight percent more than

one-third (41%) of the expressions. Approximately the same percentage of (37.77%) the literally translated collocations were free from errors, and the collocations impaired by local errors amounted to one-fourth (25.55%) of the expressions. In other words, the number of global errors was significantly low compared to local errors and error-free expressions in both types of literally translated expressions.

Low serious inaccuracies and global errors correspond respectively to the high accuracy of source content transfer and high accuracy of language, further exhibiting high fidelity to STs on the one hand and conformity to the TL system on the other. In a majority of cases, the expressions thus reproduced were linguistically correct and contextually acceptable. Consider the following representative instances of literally rendered culture-bound expressions with the complete transfer of source content:

(1) us-lai a-sahāyatā-ko khāḍal-tira munṭyau-dai cha.<sup>1</sup> (S2)

3SG.OBL-DAT NEG-help-POSS pit-ALL drag-PROG be.3SG

ST1: He is being dragged to the pit of helplessness.

ST2: It is dragging him to the pit of helplessness.

(2) ekānta-ko madāni-le sampurna bigat-lāi math-na thāl  
pachi. (S2)

loneliness-POSS churner-INS all past-ACC churn-PURP  
begin.PST after

ST6: After the churner of loneliness started to churn his whole past

(3) yo macho jhaĩ phutki-yo. (S6)

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<sup>1</sup> The transliteration used in this study is based on ISO 15919  
([https://scriptsource.org/cms/scripts/page.php?item\\_id=entry\\_detail&uid=g8w4snzcy5](https://scriptsource.org/cms/scripts/page.php?item_id=entry_detail&uid=g8w4snzcy5))

it fish like slip away-PST

ST16: It slipped as a fish.

ST17: It was slippery like a fish.

ST18: It would slip away like a fish.

(4) mero peṭ-mā musā ḍauḍi-rahe-cha. (S5)

1SG.POSS stomach-LOC rat run-PROG-be.PRS

ST14: The rat is running in my stomach.

ST18: A rat is running in my stomach.

These selected instances demonstrate the closest possible rendition of Nepali expressions into English without upsetting the TL system and frustrating intelligibility. Lexically, each of the English expressions is the result of the word-for-word rendition of its source counterpart, conveying the denotative meanings of the words being used. Syntactically, the rendered expressions break their ties with the SL syntax and align themselves with and conform to the TL syntax. Denotative and grammatical meanings are important but not sufficient for the overall comprehension of the translated cultural expression in general and its connotation in particular. To work out the connotations suggested by such expressions, the reader has to situate them in the context of the situation that includes extralinguistic factors such as the overall narrative event, the relationship between characters, and the immediate contexts of expressions and their communicative functions. It is in the given context of the situation that the reader is expected to work out connotations suggested by these English expressions. Take, for example, the metaphoric expression ‘the pit of helplessness’ in (1) which is the literal reproduction of the metaphor *asahāyatā-ko khāḍal* (helplessness-POSS pit). This expression which evidences the complete transfer of source content is linguistically acceptable and contextually

interpretable. Likewise, the reproduction of a complex metaphoric expression *ekānta-ko madāni-le sampurna bigat-lāi mathna thāle pachi* in (2) as ‘the churner of loneliness started to churn his whole past’ serves an interesting case of an acceptable literal translation. This expression constitutes two metaphors *ekānta-ko madāni* (loneliness-POSS churner) and *sampurna bigat-lāi math-nu* (all past-ACC churn-INF), both of which were translated literally, yet the resultant expressions are semantically meaningful, grammatically acceptable, and contextually interpretable. Likewise, example (3) exhibits the closest possible correspondence between the source simile *mācho jhāi* (fish like/as) and its English versions. Leaving aside a minor syntactic variation, all the three English versions faithfully reproduce the tenor (i.e. it), vehicle (i.e. fish), and sense (i.e. the quality of being slippery) of the source simile. Cases such as (1), (3), and (4) are also indicative of the fact that any source expression can have two or more acceptable literal translations.

Now let us consider some representative cases of TL expressions that almost completely transferred the source content:

5) *jiban saḍ-eko māsu jastai durgandit bhayo.* (S4)

life rot-PTCP flesh like reek become.PST

ST8: Life smelled like rotten flesh.

(6) *bidhuwā kāg-ko hul-mā hāsini thiin.* (S1)

Widow crow-POSS flock-LOC she-swan be.PST.3SG.F

ST2: The widow was like a duck among the crows.

(7) *krur kāl-le us-lāi lag-yo.* (S2)

cruel death-A 3SG.M.OBL-DAT take away-PST

ST5: Ruthless death took him away.

The TL expressions categorized as almost complete or partial translations were characterized by neutralization of the source meaning as in (5), the use of one of the denotatively equivalent words with the minimum transfer of connotations suggested by the source word as in (6) or the use of the lexically equivalent but contextually less fitting word as in (7). Owing to the presence of one of these features, such TL expressions were less congruent, denotatively and connotatively, with their sources than the TL expressions characterized by the complete transfer of source content. Consequently, some of them required rewording to strengthen their semantic ties with their sources or to ensure correctness and appropriacy in the TL. Let us take a case of neutralization of the source meaning in (5). The verb ‘smell’ conveys only the peripheral meaning of *durgandit bhayo*, blunting both denotative and connotative edges of the source expression. In other words, ‘smell’ is more generic and less evocative than *durgandhit hunu* whose close translation would be ‘to reek’. The translator’s use of ‘duck’ for *hāsini* in (6) demonstrates how the use of a denotatively equivalent word with weak connotations results in a partial translation. Independent of the context, *hāsini* translates both as (*female*) *duck* and (*female*) *swan*. However, ‘duck’ in this context fails to convey the cultural image of a widow dressed in white- the image that the author intends to convey by comparing her with *hāsini*, the swan. In the given context, ‘swan’ is preferable to ‘duck’ because of its color (whiteness) that distinctly stands out from the color of ‘crow’ (blackness), making the former an odd one out in its appearance from the rest. Likewise, ST5’s translation ‘Ruthless death took him away’ in (7) closely reproduces the image of death taking someone away. Despite this, the translator’s use of ‘ruthless’ for *krur* does not adequately convey the antagonistic image that the speaker in the narrative associates with *kāl* (death). The qualifier *krur* in Nepali corresponds more closely to

‘cruel’ (causing pain or suffering) than ‘ruthless’ (having or showing no pity or compassion) both denotatively and connotatively.

As in the case of culture-bound expressions, a large percentage of literally rendered collocations showed fidelity to source expressions and were either acceptable (error-free) or partially acceptable (local errors) in English. The following are some of the representative cases:

(8) un-ko ākhā-mā āsu ā-yo. (S10)

3SG.F.OBL.POSS eye-LOC tear come-PST

ST28: Tears came to her eyes.

(9) peṭ kasari bhar-ne? (S1)

stomach how fill-PURP?

ST2: How to fill the stomach?

(10) us-le hāmi-lāi pārṭi di-yo. (S7)

3SG.M.OBL-A 1PL-DAT party give-PST

ST4: He had given us a party

ST5: He gave us a party.

(11) tyas-pachi sānjh par-yo. (S9)

that-after evening fall-PST

ST24: Then the evening fell.

In these chunks, source collocations *peṭ bharne*, *āsu āyo*, *pārṭi diyo* and *sānjh paryo* were rendered respectively as ‘to fill the stomach’; ‘tears came’; ‘gave a party’, and ‘evening fell’. These and most of the other literally rendered collocations adhere “closely to the ST mode of expression” (Hatim & Munday 2004: 344), while at the same time conforming to the

conventions of English grammar and ensuring idiomaticity expected by English readers.

The complete or almost complete transfer of source content in conformity with the TL system counters the widespread view that questions the efficacy of literal translation. Contrary to a common criticism of literal translation, this strategy, as the findings show, has the potential to ensure what Doyle (1991) calls two-way fidelity (1991). In Doyle's (1991) view, two-way fidelity is an ideal condition in which translators demonstrate their fidelity to the content and form of the ST, while equally conforming to the TL system. This conformity also suggests that the close translation of source expressions, as commonly believed, does not necessarily lead to unidiomatic, unintelligible target expressions.

Student translators' urge to translate SL expressions closely agrees in part with Chesterman's literal translation hypothesis as well as abides by Nida and Taber's (1969) three-stage model of literary translation. Chesterman hypothesizes that translators tend to begin with the literal translation of chunks and then move towards a freer version. Likewise, Nida and Taber's model recognizes literal translation as the first and vital stage leading to the stage of minimal transfer and from there to free translation. Literal translation is hence largely recognized as a transitional stage leading ultimately to free translation with the assumption that its principal role is to produce cribs for free translation. In other words, literal translation is not a self-standing strategy- only a means, not an end itself. However, this view of literal translation as a subsidiary strategy serving free translation is only partially valid. The findings indicate that literal translation can also produce an acceptable text without going through the stage of free translation. On this basis, one could argue that when literally rendered expressions are coherent with the TL system



example, *she turned black and blue with fear*, the close rendition of *uni ḍar-le kālo-nilo vain* in (12). Nepali associates the color image *black and blue* with *fear*, whereas in English this color image is associated with physical assault. Consequently, the expression *to turn black and blue with fear* is likely to create confusion among English readers.

Likewise, *us-le jibro ṭokyo* in (13) is another expression that does not lend itself to literal rendition. Both Nepali and English have the idiomatic expression *bite your tongue*, but with culturally different meanings. In Nepali, this expression means *to die*, equivalent to the English idiom *to kick the bucket*. On the other hand, the meaning of *bite your tongue* in English is *to restrain oneself from saying something*. The literal translation of *us-le jibro ṭokyo* as *he bit his tongue* thus conveys the meaning quite different from the one intended by the author. This typifies a case of mistranslation. Second, literal translation is not an effective strategy when the reproduced expression breaches the TL system. One such example is *the boy did suicide* in (14) which is the direct transfer of *keṭā-le ātmahatyā garyo*. The translator's attempt to reproduce this Nepali collocation in English has resulted in a wrong English collocation.

These representative cases of inaccuracy suggest that literal translation cannot be a default solution when literally reproduced SL images are likely to contradict TL cultural images, convey culturally different meanings or breach the TL system. With such expressions, literal translation serves only as a means, not as an end. In such a situation, literally rendered expressions should be deliteralized to ensure their acceptability in the TL. In other words, translators need to deliteralize literally rendered expressions to loosen their semantic and syntactic ties with the SL and correspondingly to strengthen their conformity to the TL system and cultural expectations.

## 4.2 Literal Translation as a Creative Process

When viewed from the perspectives of the aesthetics of the outsider (Becker 1994) and foreignizing translation (Venuti 2008), some of the literally rendered expressions in the corpus produced by student translators exhibited certain features of creativity. This finding, to some extent, counters a sweeping conclusion that literal translation engenders awkward expressions that mar the aesthetics of reading.

One of the major findings is that literal translation has the potential to introduce cultural elements of the outsider, i.e., going from the source language community to the target readership. The literal translations of the following simile can be a case in point:

(15) hiũ jhaĩ ciso (S5)  
snow like cold

ST13: frigid like snow

ST14: cold like snow

ST15: as cold as snow

All three translators almost identically reproduced this simile in English. In the story, the boy is talking about the girl's hands that have gone extremely cold. Normally, the simile in this situation as expected by English readers would be *as cold as ice* or *as cold as stone* rather than *as cold as snow*. The similes *frigid /cold like snow* and *as cold as snow* are carried over to the English text, which appear uncommon or foreign to English readers. Such a target text "breaks target conventions by retaining something of the foreignness of the original" (Shuttleworth & Cowie 2014: 107) and exposes to readers what Becker (1994) calls the aesthetics of the outsider. Likewise, two of the translators (ST14 & ST18) came up with the direct translation of *mero peṭ-mā musā ḍauḍi-rahecha* as

*A/The rat is running in my stomach.* The idiom *peṭ-mā musā ḍauḍanu* is a common expression in Nepali to mean *someone is very hungry*. The expected English translation of this expression would be *I'm hungry as a wolf*. However, the translators chose to carry over the Nepali cultural image (i.e. running a rat in the stomach) to the English text through the literalization of the expression. This literally rendered expression is paradigmatic of foreignizing translation that registers the linguistic and cultural differences (Venuti 2008) of the ST, appealing to TL readers to be open to and appreciate the differences. Such literally reproduced expressions preserve the local colour of source expressions (Shuttleworth & Cowie 2014) and offer an opportunity for TL readers to experience it from the outsider's perspective.

That literal translation can lead TL readers to the source cultural and aesthetic space is also substantiated by the literary critic and translation theorist Gayatri Spivak's (1992/2012) translation practice. Spivak rendered the title of Mahasweta Devi's story *Standāyini* literally as *Breast-giver* rather than substituting it with the common English term *Wet-nurse*. Spivak informs us that the story is available in two versions and the author has expressed approval for the literal version *Breast-giver*. The non-literal translation *The Wet-nurse*, Spivak argues, "neutralizes the author's irony in constructing an uncanny word; enough like 'wet-nurse' to make that sense, and enough unlike to shock" (1992/2012: 315). In her observation and experience, a close translation like this allows "the author's stylistic experiments" to emerge in the TT and prevents the "loss of rhetorical silences of the original" (325). Following this argument, literalization has the capacity to foreground cultural differences, heighten the author's rhetorical strategies and create a space for readers to have an aesthetically-shocking experience.

The literally reproduced expressions that abide by English grammar can be interpreted from three perspectives of creativity. The first is the perspective of departure. Sternberg (2007) conceptualizes creativity as a departure from the common tendency or common expectations. Bayer-Hohenwarter (2011) also recognizes a departure as a defining feature of creative use of language. Viewed from this perspective, several literally rendered English expressions in the corpus of student translations were marked for their departure from the conventional usage and the common expectations of English readers. The expressions such as *cold like snow* (ST14), *life is like curry without salt and spices* (ST29), and *A rat is running in my stomach* (ST18) depart markedly from the conventional English usage. In other words, these and other culturally different expressions defy the prevalent expectations of English readers. Such expectation-defying translations are characteristically “ethnodeviant” (Venuti 2008: 15) in that they require English readers to approach and appreciate from the perspective of the outsider, i.e., Nepali. Moreover, the culturally different expressions carried over from the ST foreground foreignness in the text and are likely to create an estranging or defamiliarizing effect on readers.

The second perspective of creativity has to do with the conversion of stock or dead cultural expressions into original or innovative ones. Dead expressions are those which have got worn out and have lost their original freshness and vitality in the course of use (De Waard 1974). Consequently, language users are hardly conscious of the images originally associated with such expressions (Newmark 1998). Their meanings have fossilized and can be understood even without reference to the context. Let us consider the literal rendering of *hiũ jhaĩ ciso* in (15) as *as cold as snow*. In Nepali, *hiũ jhaĩ ciso* is a dead idiomatic expression, since Nepali readers can understand its

meaning independent of the context. Since the meaning of this expression is already culturally fixed, Nepali readers become hardly conscious of the image originally associated with it. The literal rendition *as cold as snow*, on the other hand, reads slightly odd or even new in English. Another case could be the expression *like curry without salt and spices* (ST29). Its source expression *nun masalā na-bha-eko tarkāri jasto* (salt spices NEG-have-PTCP curry like) has virtually a fixed and frozen meaning in Nepali. One of its functionally equivalent English expressions would be *as dull as dishwater*, whose meaning can be understood almost instantly without additional contextual information. The literal reproduction *like curry without salt and spices*, on the other hand, may require English readers to pause, and contemplate its meaning with reference to the context. The same is true for the idiomatic expression *a rat running in one's stomach* (ST14 & ST18), and the collocation *to kill hunger* (ST27), meaning *to assuage hunger*. Like any innovative use of language, these literally reproduced expressions look “original,” “bizarre,” or “odd” (Newmark 1998:111-112) to English readers. In terms of their images, these reproduced expressions are characterized by novelty and freshness and are perceived to be more evocative than their source counterparts.

This discussion suggests that the translator can choose either to replace dead SL expressions with functionally equivalent TL expressions or to reproduce SL expressions challenging the conventions of the TL and expectations of TL readers. The strategy of replacement reproduces the familiar TL cultural image to camouflage the SL cultural image. On the contrary, literal translation reproduces the fixed SL image in the TL, introducing the culturally different image to TL readers. Here the argument is that literal translation has a capacity to transform frozen or dead SL expressions into alive or fresh ones in the TL as in creative writing.

The third perspective is informed by Holman and Boase-Beier's (1999:13) view that regards "constraints as a source of creativity in translation". In their observation, the number and nature of constraints are directly proportional to creativity, that is, the more the constraints the more creative the translator has to be. Viewed from this perspective of the relationship between constraints and creativity, literal translation can be counted as an enactment of a creative process. As literal translation involves the optimum transfer of both denotative and connotative meanings of source expressions in line with syntactic capacities of the TL (Nabokov 1964/2006), the burden of constraints is bound to be greater in literal translation than in free translation. While translating literally, the translator has to work within the dual constraints, i.e., maintaining the closest possible intertextual coherence with the ST (Munday 2016) and ensuring its interpretability for TL readers. This requires the translator to balance the centripetal pull and centrifugal pull imposed respectively by the ST and the TL. This double fidelity to the ST and the TL system renders the act of literal translation rather challenging, complicated, and risky.

## **5. Conclusion**

The analysis of the data obtained from Nepali EFL student translators has shown the translators' inclination towards literal translation in the rendition of culture-bound and collocational expressions. A substantial number of expressions literally rendered into English were characterized by high accuracy of transfer of source content as well as acceptability in English. This means that literally reproduced expressions exhibited fidelity to STs on the one hand and conformity to the TL system on the other. In many cases, the expressions thus reproduced were linguistically correct and contextually interpretable, which leads to the conclusion that literal

translation, if handled judiciously, can be a reliable, effective, and viable strategy in the translation of literary texts.

Another significant finding to emerge from this study is that literal translation as a form of close rendition of source lexical items can be equally creative. Literally rendered expressions embody certain aesthetic tenets of creative writing, for example, defamiliarizing effect on readers and innovative use of language. Reproduced expressions are marked for the departure from conventional expectations of target readers, requiring them to approach and appreciate such expressions from the outsider's perspective, which, in turn, evokes an estranging or defamiliarizing effect on them, as in the case of literary writing. Literal translation also has the potential to transform fixed or dead cultural expressions into innovative ones in the TL. As the findings show, fixed Nepali expressions translated literally turn out to be new and unfamiliar to English readers, and invite them to interpret foreign cultural expressions with reference to the source context and culture. Literally rendered expressions, like the creative use of language, resist semantic transparency and challenge automaticity in reading. Finally, literal translation, like any form of creative writing, is subject to linguistic and cultural constraints that shape and engender creativity.

Since this study concerns literal translation as one of several viable strategies with reference to local instances (i.e. culture-bound and collocational expressions), it does not make a case for the viability of literal translation as an overall approach or method of translating literary texts. Moreover, the conclusions about the efficacy and creativity of literal translation are drawn only from the analysis of TTs produced by student translators. A further study similar to this one is needed to analyze TTs produced by experienced or professional translators so as to further examine the viability of literal translation.

The findings nevertheless suggest that literal translation can be recognized as a viable strategy in translation practice so long as literally rendered expressions abide by the TL system. Accordingly, student translators can be trained in how to best exploit literal translation during the translation process. Given the almost equal possibility of literally translated expressions being unacceptable in the TL, student translators should also be informed about the limitations of this strategy.

### **Abbreviations used in morpheme-by-morpheme rendition**

1	first person
3	third person
A	agentive
ACC	accusative
DAT	dative
F	feminine
INF	infinitive
INS	instrumental
LOC	locative
M	masculine
NEG	negative
OBL	oblique
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
PRCP	participle
PROG	progressive
PRS	present
PST	past
PURP	purposive
SG	singular

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