



Translating Trauma Narratives And Aesthetic Challenges In Rendering Testimonial Across Linguistic Boundaries

Abstract

There is something deeply unsettling about the idea that a survivor's most painful words, wrung out of lived suffering, might arrive in another language stripped of the very weight that made them true. Translation has always carried this risk, but nowhere does it feel more urgent, or more ethically loaded, than in the rendering of trauma narratives. When a person speaks from the site of their wound, their language does not simply communicate but performs, fractures, hesitates, and sometimes breaks altogether. These are not stylistic accidents — they are the testimony itself. This paper sets out to examine the aesthetic and linguistic challenges that arise when trauma testimonials are translated across languages, with particular attention to how the formal and emotional textures of survivor speech resist conventional translation strategies. The central question around this inquiry is “to what extent do existing translation frameworks adequately account for the aesthetic dimensions of trauma testimony, and where do they fall short? The problem, as this paper argued, is not merely technical but philosophical and ethical. When translators prioritize fluency over fidelity, or cultural equivalence over experiential authenticity, something of the witness is lost and with it, a portion of the historical and human record. With insights from translation studies, trauma theory, and linguistics, this paper appraised the intersection of these fields to propose a more distinctive understanding of what it means to translate not just words, but wounds.

Keywords: Trauma narratives, testimonial translation, linguistic boundaries, aesthetic fidelity, translation ethics.

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Introduction

Every time a person speaks, they bring with them the full weight of their history, culture, and their emotional reality. This is true of ordinary speech, but it becomes especially significant when the speaker is a survivor through violence, displacement, loss, or any form of extreme suffering. In such cases, language does not simply report experience but is shaped by it and sometimes broken by it. The words a trauma survivor chooses, the pauses

they take, the things they cannot bring themselves to say are part of the testimony.

It is against this backdrop that the translation of trauma narratives presents one of the most demanding challenges in contemporary language studies. Translation, at its most basic, is the act of carrying meaning from one language to another. But meaning is not a fixed object but construed in culture, history and the specific emotional register of a community's way of

speaking. When a translator works with a trauma narrative, they are not simply converting words but attempting to carry an experience across a region that is not only linguistic but also cultural, psychological, and ethical.

Across the world, testimonial literature with accounts of genocide, war, forced migration, sexual violence, and colonial brutality has become one of the primary ways in which communities process collective suffering and demand historical accountability. These texts are translated, published, taught, and debated in languages far removed from the ones in which they were first spoken or written. Baldo (2022) observes accordingly that, "the translation of trauma involves not only linguistic transfer but also the negotiation of cultural memory and the ethics of representation" (p. 47). This observation points to something that translation theory has been slow to fully reckon with which is that, testimonial texts carry an ethical charge that ordinary texts do not, and that the translator's choices have consequences beyond the page.

Statement of the Problem

The primary problem this paper addresses is the inadequacy of conventional translation frameworks when applied to trauma narratives. Most established approaches to translation prioritize readability, cultural accessibility, and communicative equivalence. These are reasonable goals in many contexts, but they become problematic when the text being translated derives its meaning

precisely from its resistance to smooth communication. Trauma speech is often fragmented, repetitive, and elliptical. To render it fluent is, in many cases, to falsify it. This in line with Valdeón (2020) argument that, translation decisions are never innocent, and "the ideological and aesthetic dimensions of a source text can be systematically suppressed in the process of rendering it accessible to a target audience" (p. 112). This suppression, when it occurs in testimonial contexts, is not a minor editorial choice but an act with real consequences for how suffering is remembered and how survivors are heard.

Aim and Scope of the Study

This paper aims to examine the aesthetic and linguistic challenges that arise in the translation of trauma testimonials across linguistic boundaries. It draws on insights from translation studies, trauma theory, and linguistics to argue that a more ethically and aesthetically sensitive approach to testimonial translation is both necessary and possible. The study is limited to theoretical and textual analysis and does not conduct primary fieldwork. Its scope covers relevant scholarly literature, reflecting current debates in the field.

Conceptual Review

Translation

To understand why translating trauma narratives is so difficult, one must first understand what translation actually does and what it cannot do. At the surface level, translation appears to

be a straightforward act with a text existing in one language, and a translator rendering it in another. But this surface appearance is misleading as translation is not a mechanical substitution of words. It is an interpretive act, one that involves choices about meaning, tone, cultural context, and the relationship between the source text and the world it comes from. Every translation is, in some sense, a reading and like all readings, it is shaped by the assumptions, values, and limitations of the person doing the reading.

This interpretive dimension of translation has been recognized and debated for centuries, but it gained particular theoretical depth in the twentieth century, when scholars began to examine not just how translation works but what it does to texts and to the communities that receive them. The field of translation studies emerged as a discipline in its own right, moving away from the older prescriptive question of how one ought to translate and toward the more descriptive and critical question of what actually happens when texts cross linguistic and cultural boundaries.

One of the most enduring issues in translation theory is the debate between formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence prioritizes fidelity to the structure and wording of the source text, while dynamic equivalence prioritizes the effect of the translation on the target audience, seeking to produce in the reader a response equivalent to what the original produced in its own readers. This distinction, developed most

influentially by Eugene Nida in the mid-twentieth century, has continued to shape how translators and scholars think about their work.

The reality, as many contemporary scholars have argued, is far more complicated as meaning is not portable in the way that the equivalence model implies. It is embedded in the specific grammar, idiom, and cultural logic of a language, and some of it simply does not survive the crossing. Eco (2003) captured this when he described translation as the "art of failure", an acknowledgment that something is always left behind, no matter how skilled the translator is. What matters, then, is not whether loss occurs but what kind of loss is acceptable, and who gets to decide.

The languages into which texts are translated, the texts that are selected for translation, and the strategies translators use are all shaped by cultural and political hierarchies. Venuti (2008) argued that translation in the Anglo-American tradition has historically favoured what he called "domestication" which is the practice of making foreign texts read as though they were originally written in English, smoothing over cultural difference in the process. Against this, he proposed "foreignisation" as an ethical alternative, a strategy that preserves the strangeness of the source text and resists the cultural dominance of the target language.

More recently, scholars have pushed translation theory further by insisting that translation must be understood not only as a linguistic act but as a cultural and ethical one. Tymoczko (2014) argues that translation

is always a form of political engagement, that translators make choices that either reinforce or challenge existing structures of power and representation. This is especially true in the context of testimonial literature, where the stakes of representation are high and the consequences of misrepresentation are real. A survivor's account that is translated in ways that flatten its emotional complexity or erase its cultural specificity is not simply a bad translation. It is a form of epistemic injustice which is a failure to take seriously the knowledge and experience that the survivor is trying to communicate.

What emerges from this overview is a picture of translation as something far more than a technical skill. It is a practice that carries ethical weight, particularly when the texts being translated bear witness to human suffering. The translator is not a neutral conduit. They are an agent whose decisions shape how a text is received, how a speaker is heard, and how an experience is remembered. Maitland (2017) makes this point clearly, noting that the translator occupies "a position of considerable power over the text and, by extension, over the voices the text carries" (p. 23). This power is not inherently problematic, but it becomes so when it is exercised without awareness of the ethical responsibilities it entails.

For the purposes of this paper, translation is understood not simply as the transfer of linguistic content from one language to another, but as a complex interpretive and ethical practice that involves negotiating

meaning, cultural difference, and the demands of fidelity to a source text and the human experience it encodes. This understanding sets the foundation for examining, in subsequent sections, why trauma narratives in particular pose such acute challenges for translators – challenges that go beyond vocabulary and grammar into the very nature of how suffering is expressed and remembered.

Linguistics

Human beings are the only creatures that use language the way they do, not just to signal danger or attract mates, but to construct entire worlds of meaning, to remember the past, to imagine the future, and to tell each other who they are. This capacity for language is so fundamental to human life that it is easy to take it for granted. Linguistics is the discipline that refuses to take it for granted because it is the systematic, scientific study of language touching on how it is structured, how it is acquired, how it changes over time, how it varies across communities, and how it functions as a medium of human thought and social interaction.

What makes linguistics particularly relevant to this paper is not just its general concern with language but its attention to the relationship between language and meaning, language and context, and language and power. These are precisely the concerns that arise when one attempts to translate a trauma narrative. To understand why certain things cannot be translated without loss, one must first understand how meaning is made

in language and linguistics provides the tools for that understanding.

Linguistics is not a single unified field but a broad discipline with several interconnected branches, each of which illuminates a different dimension of language. Phonology deals with sound systems; morphology with word structure; syntax with sentence structure; semantics with meaning; and pragmatics with how context shapes the interpretation of utterances. Beyond these core areas, sociolinguistics examines how language varies across social groups and contexts, while psycholinguistics explores the cognitive processes involved in language use and acquisition. Each of these branches contributes

something to the understanding of how language works, and together they offer a comprehensive picture of language as a human phenomenon.

For the concerns of this paper, the most directly relevant branches are semantics, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics. Semantics is important because it deals with meaning and the question of how meaning is constructed, stored, and communicated is central to any discussion of translation. But semantics alone is not sufficient, because meaning is never purely a matter of words and their definitions. It is always shaped by context, by the relationship between speaker and listener, by what is left unsaid as much as by what is said. This is where pragmatics becomes essential. Yus (2011) explains That, pragmatics is concerned with "the study of meaning in context, including the ways in which speakers communicate more than their words

literally say" (p. 3). This insight is crucial for understanding trauma narratives, where what is not said, the silences, the gaps, the refusals to name often carries as much meaning as the words themselves.

Sociolinguistics remind us that language is not a neutral system floating above social life. It is founded in social structures, shaped by relations of power, and marked by the identities of its speakers. Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015) describe sociolinguistics as the study of "the relationship between language and society, between the uses of language and the social structures in which the users of language live" (p. 1). This matters enormously in the context of testimonial translation, because the language in which a survivor speaks is not just a medium of communication. It is a marker of identity, community, and historical experience. When that language is translated, the social and cultural world it carries does not automatically travel with it.

One of the most important contributions linguistics makes to translation theory is the concept of untranslatability which is the recognition that some meanings are so deeply contained in the structure or cultural logic of a particular language that they resist transfer into another. This is not simply a matter of vocabulary gaps, though those exist too. It is a deeper problem rooted in the fact that different languages carve up reality differently, encode different assumptions about time, agency, and causality, and carry different emotional and cultural associations even for words that appear to be direct equivalents.

Sapir (1929), in one of the foundational statements of what would later become the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, argued that "the worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached" (p. 209). While the strong version of this claim that language entirely determines thought has been largely rejected by contemporary linguists, the weaker version, that language shapes and influences how speakers perceive and organize experience, remains widely accepted and has significant implications for translation. If speakers of different languages do not simply see the same world through different windows but actually inhabit somewhat different conceptual worlds, then translation is not just a technical challenge but a philosophical one.

Halliday's (1994) systemic functional linguistics is also worth noting here, as it offers a particularly useful framework for analyzing how language functions simultaneously as a means of representing experience, enacting social relationships, and organizing discourse. These three functions of what Halliday calls the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions are all at work in trauma testimony, and attending to them helps explain why such texts are so difficult to translate without distortion. A translation that preserves the ideational content of a testimony but loses its interpersonal texture i.e the way the speaker positions themselves in relation to their listener, the emotional register they adopt has not fully translated the text. It has translated only part of it.

Trauma

In everyday speech, people use trauma loosely to describe anything from a difficult childhood memory to a minor embarrassment. But in clinical, psychological, and literary contexts, trauma refers to something far more specific and far more serious. It describes the aftermath of an experience so overwhelming that the mind cannot process it in the ordinary way. It is an experience that exceeds the individual's capacity to integrate it into their existing understanding of the world. The result is not simply pain or sadness, which are normal human responses to loss and difficulty. The result is a rupture, a break in the continuity of the self, in the ability to make sense of one's own experience, and in the capacity to narrate that experience coherently.

Understanding trauma in this deeper sense is essential to this paper, because the argument being made here is not simply that trauma narratives are emotionally difficult to translate. It is that trauma fundamentally alters the structure of language and memory in ways that have direct consequences for how testimonial texts are produced and how they must be read. A translator who approaches a trauma narrative without this understanding is likely to misread the very features that make the text what it is.

The modern clinical understanding of trauma is largely rooted in the work of psychiatrists and psychologists who studied survivors of war, sexual violence, and other extreme experiences. Herman's (1992) landmark study, *Trauma and Recovery*, established a framework that has shaped the field

for decades. Herman argued that trauma produces a characteristic set of responses such as intrusion, constriction, and hyperarousal that reflect the mind's attempt to cope with an experience it cannot fully absorb. What is particularly significant for this paper is Herman's observation that trauma disrupts the normal process of memory formation, producing memories that are not stored as coherent narratives but as fragmented sensory impressions, images, sounds, physical sensations that return unbidden and resist integration into a linear account of the past.

This neurological dimension of trauma has been further developed by more recent research. Van der Kolk (2014) demonstrated through extensive clinical work that traumatic memory is stored differently from ordinary memory, in ways that bypass the brain's normal narrative processing systems. As he puts it, "trauma is not stored as a narrative with a beginning, middle, and end" but rather as "isolated fragments of sensation and emotion" (p. 43). This finding has profound implications for testimonial literature. When a survivor's account is fragmented, non-linear, or punctuated by silences, this is not a failure of storytelling. It is a faithful reflection of how the traumatic experience lives in the body and mind. To translate such an account into a smooth, coherent narrative is to impose a false order on an experience that resists order by its very nature.

Beyond its neurological dimensions, trauma poses a specifically linguistic problem. Language is the primary medium through which human beings organize and communicate

experience. But trauma is precisely the kind of experience that resists organization. It is, in a sense, what happens when experience exceeds the capacity of language to contain it. This is why survivors so often report feeling that their experience is unspeakable not because they lack the vocabulary but because the very structure of language, with its grammar of cause and effect, its linear sequencing of events, its assumption of a coherent speaking subject, seems inadequate to what they have been through.

Caruth (1996), described this paradox with particular clarity. For Caruth, trauma is characterized by a fundamental belatedness i.e the traumatic event is not fully experienced at the moment it occurs but returns later, in fragments, in ways the survivor cannot fully control or understand. This means that testimony is never a straightforward account of what happened. It is always a partial, mediated, and often painful attempt to give form to something that resists form. Caruth (1996) writes that, "the history of trauma, in its inherent belatedness, can only be grasped in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence" (p. 8). This is a difficult idea, but its implications are clear that trauma testimony is not a transparent window onto the past. It is a complex, layered text whose meaning is inseparable from its form.

There is also an ethical dimension to the study of trauma that cannot be ignored. Engaging with trauma narratives, whether as a researcher, a translator, or a reader involves a relationship of responsibility

toward the person who is suffering the narrative encodes. Kaplan (2005) introduced the concept of "empathic unsettlement" to describe the kind of engaged, ethically aware response that trauma narratives demand from their audiences, a response that neither appropriates the survivor's suffering nor retreats into comfortable distance. This concept is useful here because it applies equally to translators. A translator who approaches a trauma narrative with genuine ethical awareness will resist the temptation to make the text easier, more palatable, or more culturally familiar than it actually is. They will understand that the discomfort the text produces is part of its meaning, and that their responsibility is to preserve that discomfort, not to resolve it.

Trauma Narratives and Aesthetic Challenges

If trauma fundamentally disrupts the way experience is stored and narrated, then trauma narratives are the literary and testimonial forms that emerge from that disruption. They are not simply stories about painful events. They are texts whose very form bears the imprint of the experiences they describe. This distinction matters, because it means that the aesthetic features of a trauma narrative, the way it is written or spoken, the choices the narrator makes about structure, voice, and language are not decorative. They are part of what the text is saying, and in many cases, they are the most honest thing about it.

This is a point that literary scholars and trauma theorists have been

making over the past two decades, and it has significant consequences for translation. If the meaning of a trauma narrative is inseparable from its form, then a translation that alters the form has not simply changed the style of the text but changed its meaning. Understanding why this is so requires a closer look at what trauma narratives actually look like and what aesthetic strategies they employ.

Trauma narratives tend to share certain formal characteristics that set them apart from other kinds of storytelling. They are often non-linear, moving back and forth in time rather than following a straightforward chronological sequence. They are frequently interrupted by silences or gaps which are moments where the narrator cannot or will not continue, where language fails or refuses. They often repeat themselves, returning again and again to particular images or phrases as though trying to work through something that resists resolution. And they frequently adopt an uncertain, hesitant voice that qualifies its own claims, that acknowledges the limits of memory and the difficulty of putting certain things into words.

These features are not accidental, and they are not signs of poor storytelling. Whitehead (2004) writes that, trauma fiction and testimony develop "formal and thematic strategies" that reflect "the impact of trauma on memory and identity" (p. 3). The non-linearity mirrors the way traumatic memory actually works not as a coherent story but as a series of intrusive fragments. The silences mark

the places where experience exceeds language. The repetitions enact the compulsive return that is one of trauma's defining features. And the hesitant voice reflects the survivor's awareness that their account is always partial, always inadequate to the fullness of what they experienced.

Felman and Laub (1992), made a related point when they argued that testimony is not simply a report of events but a performative act, something that does something in the world rather than merely describing it. For them, the act of bearing witness is itself a form of survival, a way of insisting on the reality of an experience that the world might prefer to forget or deny. This performative dimension of testimony means that how a survivor speaks is as important as what they say. The form of the testimony is part of its truth claim.

Gibbs (2014) has extended this argument by examining how trauma narratives use what he calls "affective contagion" which is the capacity of certain textual features to transmit emotional states from writer to reader, to make the reader feel something of what the narrator felt. This is achieved not through explicit description of emotion but through formal choices, the rhythm of sentences, the density or sparseness of language, the strategic use of repetition and silence. These are aesthetic choices, and they work on the reader in ways that are often below the level of conscious awareness. A translator who does not attend to these features will produce a text that may convey the same information as the original but fails to produce the same

effect, and in testimonial literature, effect is inseparable from meaning.

Testimonials in Linguistic Boundaries

Every testimony begins in a particular place, spoken or written in a specific language, shaped by the rhythms and idioms of a specific community, and addressed at least initially to a specific audience that shares enough of the speaker's world to understand what is being said and why it matters. This situatedness is not a limitation of testimony. It is part of what makes it testimony rather than abstract statement. The survivor speaks from somewhere, and that somewhere is encoded in the language they use. The problem arises when that testimony must travel, when it must cross into another language, another cultural context, another set of assumptions about what suffering looks like and how it ought to be expressed. At that point, the linguistic boundary becomes something more than a technical obstacle. It becomes a site of negotiation, of potential loss, and of ethical responsibility.

The concept of a linguistic boundary is worth pausing on, because it is easy to think of it simply as the line between two languages say, between French and English, or between Igbo and Spanish. But linguistic boundaries are never only about language in the narrow sense. They are also about the cultural worlds that languages carry with them, the histories contained in particular words and phrases, the social relationships encoded in grammatical structures, and the emotional associations that accumulate around

certain ways of speaking over generations. When a testimony crosses a linguistic boundary, all of these dimensions are at stake, not just the vocabulary.

The concept of untranslatability has a long history in translation theory, but it has taken on new urgency in the context of testimonial literature. Some words simply do not have equivalents in other languages not because the concepts they name are unknown in other cultures but because the specific emotional, historical, and cultural weight they carry cannot be reproduced by any single word or phrase in the target language. The German word *Heimweh*, the Portuguese *saudade*, the Yoruba *àánú* are words that moves toward emotional realities that other languages can approximate but not fully capture. In ordinary literary translation, this kind of untranslatability is a challenge that skilled translators navigate through a combination of approximation, footnoting, and creative adaptation. In testimonial translation, however, the stakes are higher, because the words that resist translation are often precisely the ones that carry the most weight, the ones closest to the heart of what the survivor is trying to say.

Apter (2013) has argued that untranslatability is not simply a problem to be solved but a productive concept that draws attention to the limits of cross-cultural understanding and the irreducible particularity of different linguistic worlds. She describes the "untranslatable" not as something that cannot be translated at all but as something that "loses critically

in translation", a formulation that is more honest about the nature of the loss than the simple claim that certain things are impossible to render in another language (p. 3). This is a useful positioning for thinking about trauma testimony, because it shifts the question from whether translation is possible to what is lost in the process and whether that loss is acceptable.

The losses that occur when testimonial language crosses linguistic boundaries are not always obvious, and they are not always the result of carelessness or incompetence on the part of the translator. Some of them are structural built into the differences between languages in ways that no amount of skill can fully overcome. Derrida (1998) touched on this when he reflected on the experience of writing in a language that is not entirely one's own, observing that "one never speaks only one language" and yet "one never speaks several languages" which is a paradox that captures something of the condition of the translator, who must inhabit two linguistic worlds simultaneously without fully belonging to either (p. 7). For the translator of trauma testimony, this condition is particularly charged, because the language they are working with is not just a medium of communication but a record of suffering.

Evaluation

Has the field of translation studies developed frameworks adequate to the complexity of testimonial literature, and where do the most significant failures lie? The dominant frameworks in translation

practice have historically been built around the concept of equivalence. Whether this equivalence is understood in formal terms, as fidelity to the structure and wording of the original, or in dynamic terms, as fidelity to the effect the original produces on its readers, the underlying assumption is the same, that meaning can be carried across linguistic boundaries without fundamental loss, provided the translator is skilled enough.

This assumption, as the earlier sections of this paper have argued, is already questionable in ordinary literary translation. In the context of trauma testimony, it becomes untenable as the problem is not simply that some words lack equivalents in the target language, though that is true. The deeper problem is that the meaning of a trauma narrative is not separable from its form in the way that equivalence models implicitly assume. When a survivor's account is fragmented, that fragmentation is not a container holding some separable content that can be poured into a smoother vessel. The fragmentation is the content, the testimony's most honest statement about the nature of the experience it describes. An equivalence-based approach that prioritizes communicative clarity over formal fidelity will, almost inevitably, produce a translation that is more readable than the original but less true.

Bassnett (2014) has been among the most persistent critics of equivalence as a governing concept in translation theory, arguing that it creates a false impression of translatability that obscures the real complexity of what

translators do. She contends that translation is better understood as a form of rewriting, a creative act that produces a new text in dialogue with the original rather than a copy of it (p. 5). This is a more honest account of what translation actually involves, and it has the advantage of making visible the choices and responsibilities that equivalence models tend to conceal. But it also raises a difficult question such as, if translation is rewriting, what constraints govern the rewriter? In testimonial contexts, this question is not merely theoretical but has direct consequences for how survivors are represented and how their experiences are received.

The tendency to produce fluent, culturally accessible translations of trauma narratives has resulted, in a number of documented cases, in texts that read smoothly in the target language but have lost the very features that made the original testimony powerful and distinctive. The result is a text that is easier to read but harder to believe, because it no longer bears the formal marks of the experience it claims to represent. Polezzi (2012) has examined this dynamic in the context of migrant and refugee testimonies translated for European audiences, finding that the pressure to produce readable, marketable translations consistently works against the formal integrity of the source texts. She argues that publishers and editors frequently intervene in the translation process to make testimonies more palatable to target audiences, and that these interventions are rarely acknowledged or made transparent to readers (p. 348).

This lack of transparency is itself an ethical problem, because it means that readers receive a mediated version of the testimony without knowing that it has been mediated, without knowing what has been changed and why.

If testimonial literature serves, as Felman and Laub (1992) argued, a function of historical witnessing, of keeping alive the memory of experiences that powerful interests might prefer to forget then translations that soften or domesticate that testimony are not simply aesthetically inferior. They are historically irresponsible contributing to a process of forgetting disguised as accessibility. What would a more adequate framework for testimonial translation look like? Several scholars have begun to sketch the outlines of one, though no fully developed model yet exists. The common thread running through these proposals is the insistence that translators of trauma testimony must bring to their work a combination of linguistic competence, literary sensitivity, cultural awareness, and ethical commitment that goes well beyond what conventional translation training typically provides.

Tymoczko (2014) has argued that translators need to understand themselves as cultural and political agents, not merely language workers, and that this self-understanding should shape every decision they make about how to render a source text. Applied to testimonial translation, this means that the translator must ask not only what a word means but what it does, what work it performs in the testimony, what emotional and political charge it carries,

and what is at stake in rendering it one way rather than another.

Cronin (2022) has more recently proposed what he calls a "minor translation practice" an approach that deliberately resists the pull toward dominant languages and dominant cultural frameworks, and that seeks instead to preserve the particularity and strangeness of source texts even at the cost of some accessibility. This is a provocative proposal, and it will not suit every context. But in the specific context of trauma testimony, where the strangeness of the text is often its most important feature, it offers a genuinely useful corrective to the domesticating tendencies of mainstream translation practice.

What is clear from this evaluation is that the field has not yet developed a fully adequate response to the challenges of testimonial translation. The frameworks that exist are partial, and the practices they inform are inconsistent. There is a real and pressing need for more sustained engagement between translation studies, trauma theory, and literary criticism, an engagement that takes seriously the aesthetic, ethical, and political dimensions of the task and develops practical guidance for translators working in this demanding area.

Conclusion

This paper set out to examine a problem that sits at the intersection of language, suffering, and responsibility. The central question it posed is whether existing translation frameworks adequately account for the aesthetic dimensions of trauma testimony, and

where they fall short has been answered, through the course of the preceding sections, with a qualified but firm no. Existing frameworks are not without value. They have produced translations that have carried important testimonies across linguistic boundaries and made them available to audiences who would otherwise have had no access to them. But they have also, in too many cases, produced translations that are smoother, more readable, and more culturally familiar than the originals and in being so, have lost something that cannot easily be recovered.

What has been lost, this paper has argued, is not merely stylistic. It is substantive because the fragmentation, the silence, the repetition, the hesitancy that characterize trauma testimony are not incidental features of the text. They are the text's most honest response to the experience it encodes. They are the formal traces of what trauma does to language and memory, and they carry meaning that no amount of paraphrase or approximation can fully reproduce. When a translation irons out these features in the name of fluency or accessibility, it does not simply change the style of the testimony but changes its truth claim. It presents to the target audience a version of the survivor's experience that is tidier, more coherent, and more manageable than the original and in doing so, it subtly misrepresents both the experience and the person who lived it.

Recommendations

The first and most fundamental recommendation is that translators working with testimonial literature

should develop what might be called a dual literacy. A literacy not only in the source and target languages but also in the psychological and cultural dimensions of trauma. This means engaging seriously with trauma theory, understanding how traumatic memory shapes narrative form, and resisting the instinct to correct or regularize features of the source text that appear irregular but are in fact meaningful.

Publishers occupy a position of considerable influence in the testimonial translation process, and that influence is not always exercised responsibly. The commercial pressures that shape publishing decisions which is the need to produce texts that will sell in competitive markets, the preference for smooth and accessible prose, the tendency to package foreign testimonies in ways that make them palatable to dominant cultural tastes frequently work against the formal integrity of the source texts. Publishers who commission translations of trauma narratives should be encouraged to adopt editorial policies that explicitly protect the formal features of testimonial texts, and to make transparent to readers the translation choices that have been made and why.

For researchers, the most pressing recommendation is for more sustained interdisciplinary work at the intersection of translation studies, trauma theory, and postcolonial criticism. The field has produced important individual contributions, but it has not yet developed a coherent, comprehensive framework for testimonial translation that integrates the insights of all three disciplines. Such

a framework would need to address the aesthetic, ethical, and political dimensions of the task simultaneously, and it would need to be grounded in close analysis of actual translation practice rather than purely theoretical speculation. Comparative studies of testimonial texts and their translations across multiple language pairs would be particularly valuable, as would collaborative research involving translators, survivors, and scholars from the communities whose testimonies are being translated.

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