

TRANSLATING WHAT IS NOT SAID IN LITERARY DISCOURSE

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Abstract: This article explores the manifestation of implicit pragmatic meaning in literary discourse and the ways such meaning is interpreted and re-created in translation. In literary texts, meaning is often conveyed indirectly through silence, irony, evaluative restraint, presupposition, and cultural inference rather than explicit statement. The translation of such meanings depends on the translator's interpretive judgment, cultural competence, and pragmatic awareness. The study approaches translation not as a purely linguistic procedure but as a hermeneutic act. Drawing on canonical English literary works and selected examples from English-Uzbek translation practice, the article examines how what is not said can be rendered meaningfully for a new reading community.

Keywords: literary translation, implicit meaning, pragmatics, discourse, interpretation

Literary texts rarely speak in a fully transparent voice. Much of their expressive power resides in implication rather than declaration, in silence rather than statement. Readers are invited to infer attitudes, emotions, and values from what is hinted at, withheld, or understated. [Grice, 1975: 14] This indirect mode of meaning-making is not accidental; it is integral to literary aesthetics and to the ways in which texts engage their readers. Consequently, when literature is translated, the task confronting the translator is not simply to transfer meaning from one language to another, but to recreate a network of implicit cues that enable interpretation to take place.

From a humanities perspective, this implicit dimension of meaning aligns closely with hermeneutic approaches to literature, which emphasize interpretation as an active and historically situated process. Meaning does not reside solely in linguistic form but emerges through the interaction of text, context, and reader. [Levinson, 1983: 21] In this sense, literary discourse invites readers to participate in meaning-making by recognizing presuppositions, decoding indirect evaluations, and responding to narrative silences. Pragmatics provides a useful conceptual framework for understanding these processes, as it foregrounds inference, contextual dependence, and communicative intent.

When literary texts are translated, the interpretive process becomes more complex. Translation introduces a new linguistic and cultural environment in which the original pragmatic cues may no longer function as intended. What was implicit and readily inferable for the source audience may become opaque for the target readership. Conversely, meanings that relied on silence or understatement may be perceived as incomplete or ambiguous. The translator is therefore confronted with the task of reconstructing interpretive conditions rather than reproducing linguistic form. [Hatim, Mason, 1997: 25] This task is fundamentally hermeneutic: it requires interpretation, evaluation, and creative mediation.

Silence occupies a particularly significant place in literary discourse. It functions not as absence, but as a meaningful strategy through which authors guide interpretation. Narrative restraint, omissions, and unsaid evaluations often convey emotional intensity more effectively than explicit description. In literary prose, silence can signal dignity, resistance, irony, or emotional depth. The interpretive force of silence depends on shared cultural expectations and on the reader's sensitivity to contextual cues. [Levinson, 1983: 36]

The prose of Ernest Hemingway exemplifies the aesthetic use of silence and understatement. His minimalist style avoids overt emotional commentary, allowing meaning to emerge through sparse description and narrative omission. In *The Old Man and the Sea*, the protagonist's endurance and moral resilience are conveyed indirectly. The narrative presents physical actions and factual observations while withholding explicit emotional judgment. As a result, readers infer values such as dignity and perseverance precisely because they are not articulated. Silence becomes a vehicle of meaning rather than a lack of expression. [Grice, 1975: 48]

Silence in literary discourse should not be understood merely as the absence of verbal expression. Rather, it functions as a meaningful communicative strategy through which ethical, emotional, and ideological positions are conveyed. In many literary traditions, what remains unsaid often carries greater interpretive weight than explicit articulation. Silence may signal dignity, resistance, emotional restraint, or moral judgment, inviting the reader to participate actively in the construction of meaning.

From a humanities perspective, silence operates as an ethical gesture. By withholding direct commentary, authors allow characters and situations to speak for themselves, thereby respecting the complexity of human experience. This narrative restraint encourages readers to engage in interpretive labor, drawing conclusions based on context, action, and implication rather than authorial instruction. Such an approach aligns with broader hermeneutic views of literature, where meaning is not imposed but emerges through dialogue between text and reader.

Hemingway's prose offers a paradigmatic example of ethical silence. His narratives frequently avoid overt emotional evaluation, relying instead on concrete actions and sparse description. In *The Old Man and the Sea*, the protagonist's suffering is presented without melodrama. Pain, endurance, and perseverance are not explained or interpreted for the reader; they are shown through repetitive physical struggle and quiet determination. The absence of explicit emotional language does not diminish the intensity of the experience. On the contrary, it amplifies it, as readers are compelled to infer moral strength and existential meaning from narrative restraint.

When such silence is translated, its ethical function becomes vulnerable. Translators may feel pressure to clarify emotional states or moral implications, particularly when working for audiences accustomed to more explicit narrative guidance. Introducing evaluative adjectives or explanatory phrases may appear to improve clarity, but it also alters the ethical stance of the original text. [Baker, 2018: 78] What was once an invitation to interpret becomes a directive, and the reader's role shifts from active participant to passive recipient.

Silence also functions as a form of resistance within literary discourse. By refusing to articulate certain meanings directly, authors may challenge dominant ideologies or question established norms. In this sense, silence is not neutral but politically and ethically charged. Translating such silence requires sensitivity not only to linguistic form but also to the cultural and historical conditions that give silence its meaning. Failure to recognize this dimension risks transforming resistance into compliance or ambiguity into neutrality.

In translation, preserving silence does not necessarily mean reproducing the same textual gaps. Rather, it involves recreating comparable interpretive conditions in the target language. This may require different linguistic means, but the ethical effect - inviting inference rather than dictating interpretation - must be maintained. Silence, therefore, becomes a shared responsibility between author, translator, and reader, each contributing to the production of meaning.

In translation, preserving such silence poses a significant challenge. Different literary traditions vary in their tolerance for understatement. In some contexts, excessive restraint may be perceived as stylistic flatness or emotional insufficiency. Translators may therefore feel compelled to introduce evaluative elements that guide interpretation more explicitly. While such choices may enhance accessibility, they also risk altering the original balance between explicitness and implication. The translation thus reflects an interpretive stance toward the role of silence in literary meaning.

A comparable reliance on implicit pragmatic meaning can be observed in the novels of Jane Austen, where social relations are negotiated through politeness, indirectness, and presupposition. Austen's characters rarely express judgment

directly. Instead, evaluation is embedded within seemingly neutral remarks that presuppose shared knowledge of social hierarchy, gender roles, and norms of decorum. [Levinson, 1983: 36] The pragmatic force of these utterances depends on the reader's ability to recognize what is implied rather than stated. Irony in Austen's prose often emerges from the tension between polite form and evaluative intent.

For translators, rendering this kind of implicit social meaning requires careful interpretive judgment. The cultural presuppositions underlying Austen's discourse are historically specific and may not be readily accessible to contemporary or cross-cultural readers. Translators must decide whether to preserve indirectness and trust the target reader's inferential competence, or to introduce subtle clarifications that reconstruct social relations more explicitly. Both approaches involve interpretive intervention, highlighting the translator's active role in mediating literary meaning. [Newmark, 1988: 18]

Indirectness is a central pragmatic mechanism through which power relations, social hierarchy, and interpersonal distance are negotiated in literary discourse. Rather than expressing authority or judgment overtly, characters often rely on politeness strategies, understatement, and implication to assert influence or convey evaluation. These pragmatic choices are deeply embedded in cultural norms and social expectations, making them particularly sensitive to translation.

Jane Austen's novels provide a rich illustration of how indirectness functions as a marker of social power. Her characters operate within a rigid social hierarchy where explicit confrontation is discouraged, especially for women. Evaluation is therefore encoded indirectly through polite phrasing, controlled tone, and carefully chosen lexical items. What appears courteous on the surface often carries implicit judgment, irony, or resistance beneath.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, social authority is exercised through implication rather than command. Characters signal approval or disapproval without naming it directly, relying on shared social conventions to convey meaning. Readers familiar with these conventions are able to interpret subtle shifts in tone or phrasing as indicators of power and evaluation. Indirectness thus becomes a socially sanctioned means of exercising control while maintaining decorum.

For translators, rendering such pragmatic indirectness presents a significant challenge. The social conventions that govern politeness and power in the source text may not align with those of the target culture. Expressions that are perceived as restrained and polite in English may appear evasive or unclear in another language, while attempts to clarify meaning may inadvertently introduce bluntness or alter power dynamics.

In some translation contexts, indirectness is reduced through explicitation. Evaluative meanings that were originally implied may be stated more clearly in order

to ensure comprehension. While this strategy may improve accessibility, it also risks flattening the social texture of the text. [Baker, 2018: 49] Power relations that were subtly negotiated through language become overt, and the nuanced balance between politeness and authority is disrupted.

Indirectness also plays a crucial role in shaping gendered discourse. In Austen's work, female characters frequently rely on pragmatic restraint as a means of navigating social limitations. Their indirect speech acts function as tools of negotiation and self-preservation. Translating such discourse requires awareness of how gendered communication patterns operate within both source and target cultures. Failure to account for this dimension may result in translations that either exaggerate passivity or impose assertiveness where none was intended.

From a humanities standpoint, the translation of indirectness is inseparable from questions of power and representation. Translators must decide whether to preserve pragmatic subtlety at the risk of ambiguity or to intervene in order to guide interpretation. These decisions reflect assumptions about readers, authority, and the purpose of literary translation itself. Indirectness, therefore, is not merely a stylistic feature but a site where cultural values and power relations intersect.

Implicit pragmatic meaning also plays a crucial role in politically charged literary discourse. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* relies on pragmatic contradiction and irony to convey ideological critique. Statements that appear simple on the surface derive their force from violations of logical and moral expectations. The reader's recognition of these violations is essential to the satirical effect. Here, meaning is generated not through complex language, but through the gap between literal expression and inferred intention.

In translation, maintaining such pragmatic effects requires preserving the conditions for inference. Excessive explicitation may neutralize irony by resolving contradiction too directly, while insufficient guidance may obscure ideological meaning. Translators must therefore strike a balance that allows the target reader to experience the same interpretive tension as the source reader. This balance illustrates how translation functions as an interpretive alignment rather than a mechanical transfer of content. [Hatim, Mason, 1997: 69]

Beyond canonical literary works, implicit pragmatic meaning frequently manifests in micro-level interpersonal constructions that appear in literary dialogue. Understatement, mitigated evaluation, and indirect disagreement are common pragmatic devices in English. The sentence "He didn't exactly approve" communicates restrained disapproval without overt negation. The pragmatic meaning resides in the divergence between literal content and inferred evaluation.

In English-Uzbek translation practice, rendering such understatement requires sensitivity to pragmatic norms in both languages. A literal translation such as *U aniq*

ma'qullamadi introduces categorical negation and risks misrepresenting the speaker's evaluative stance. Translators therefore often prefer constructions like *U buni unchalik ma'qullagani yo'q*, which preserve indirectness and allow the reader to infer mild disapproval. This example illustrates how pragmatic meaning can be recreated through syntactic modulation and lexical softening rather than direct equivalence. [Salomov, 2001: 152]

Beyond isolated instances of understatement, English-Uzbek literary translation reveals a broader pattern of pragmatic adjustment shaped by cultural norms of evaluation, restraint, and interpersonal distance. In English literary discourse, indirectness often functions as a strategy of mitigation, allowing speakers to express criticism, doubt, or disagreement without direct confrontation. Such pragmatic behavior reflects cultural expectations regarding politeness and emotional control, particularly in dialogue-driven narrative prose. [Levinson, 1983: 116]

In Uzbek discourse, pragmatic restraint is likewise valued, but it is realized through different linguistic and cultural mechanisms. Concepts such as *hurmat* (respect), *odob* (propriety), and *andisha* (consideration for others) play a central role in shaping indirect expression. As a result, translators must navigate not only grammatical differences but also culturally embedded expectations about how evaluation should be voiced - or withheld. What appears as neutral understatement in English may require culturally resonant mitigation strategies in Uzbek to achieve a comparable pragmatic effect.

Consider English literary utterances that employ partial negation or modal distancing, such as "I'm not sure that was the best idea" or "It may not have been entirely appropriate." These constructions soften evaluation while maintaining interpersonal distance. A literal Uzbek rendering risks producing either excessive vagueness or unintended directness. Translators therefore tend to restructure such utterances using particles, adverbial modifiers, or negation patterns that preserve evaluative restraint, allowing the target reader to infer criticism without encountering overt judgment.

This pragmatic recalibration is particularly significant in literary dialogue, where interpersonal nuance contributes to characterization. A character's social position, emotional state, or moral attitude may be conveyed less through explicit description than through patterns of indirect speech. Preserving these patterns in translation is essential for maintaining narrative coherence and character dynamics. When pragmatic mitigation is lost, characters may appear more aggressive, passive, or emotionally transparent than intended in the source text.

Indirect disagreement provides another illustrative case. English literary dialogue often encodes disagreement through hesitation, reformulation, or partial concession. Uzbek translations typically reproduce this effect through syntactic

postponement or through expressions that signal reluctance rather than opposition. Such choices demonstrate that pragmatic equivalence is achieved not by replicating linguistic form but by aligning interpersonal meaning within the target culture's pragmatic framework.

These observations suggest that English-Uzbek literary translation relies on a constellation of pragmatic adjustments rather than on isolated techniques. Translators must remain attentive to how evaluation, disagreement, and emotional distance are encoded in both languages, and how these encodings interact with broader cultural values. In this sense, pragmatic translation operates at the intersection of language, culture, and literary convention.

Uzbek translation scholarship has repeatedly emphasized the importance of cultural and pragmatic awareness in rendering literary meaning. Scholars such as G'. Salomov and N. Q. Qodirova note that successful literary translation depends not only on linguistic accuracy but also on the translator's ability to interpret cultural presuppositions and pragmatic intent. Their observations align with broader humanities perspectives that view translation as an interpretive act embedded in cultural context. [Qodirova, 2015: 94]

Across these examples, a consistent pattern emerges: implicit pragmatic meaning resists direct transfer. Translators respond to this resistance by employing strategies that seek to recreate interpretive conditions within the target culture. These strategies may involve preserving silence, redistributing implicit cues, or activating culturally resonant associations. Rather than eliminating implicitness, effective translation relocates it in forms that remain meaningful for the target reader.

Recognizing translation as an interpretive and culturally situated activity foregrounds the translator's agency. Translators operate as mediators between reading communities, making decisions that shape how literary texts are understood across cultures. Evaluating translations therefore requires attention not only to formal correspondence but also to the interpretive effects produced in the target context. Such an evaluative perspective aligns with humanities scholarship that treats translation as a form of reading and rewriting rather than as a neutral transfer of meaning.

An additional dimension that merits attention is reader reception in translation. Readers approach translated literature with culturally shaped expectations regarding clarity, emotional explicitness, and narrative guidance. When implicit pragmatic meaning is preserved through silence or understatement, readers must actively participate in interpretation. In some contexts, this participation is welcomed and culturally reinforced; in others, it may lead to interpretive uncertainty. The translator's task, therefore, involves anticipating the interpretive habits of the target readership and adjusting pragmatic cues accordingly. This does not imply simplifying

the text, but rather calibrating the degree of implicitness so that literary meaning remains accessible without being overdetermined.

From this perspective, translation becomes a dynamic negotiation between textual integrity and readerly competence. Decisions to maintain silence, introduce minimal explicitation, or relocate pragmatic cues elsewhere in the text reflect an awareness of how readers construct meaning. Such decisions are rarely mechanical; they are informed by cultural knowledge, literary tradition, and the translator's interpretive judgment. Recognizing reader reception as a factor in pragmatic translation further reinforces the view of translation as a hermeneutic practice embedded in cultural dialogue.

In conclusion, translating what is not said in literary discourse reveals the central role of pragmatic inference and cultural interpretation in the construction of literary meaning. Implicit pragmatic meaning is not an auxiliary feature but a defining characteristic of literary texts. Approaching translation as a hermeneutic act allows scholars and practitioners to account for the creative and interpretive labor involved in rendering literature across languages. [Gadamer, 2004: 48] Such an approach underscores the importance of cultural competence, sensitivity to silence, and respect for indirectness in literary translation, and it offers a productive framework for further research in the humanities.

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