Language of Translated Version of 'Abstract Thought: An Onion'

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Abstract

Translation as writing across languages and cultures is characterized by its own linguistic features. Translation researchers have discerned certain linguistic features of translated texts that render the translated language distinct from non-translated one. In this context, the present paper examines the language of Abstract Thought: An Onion, *the English translation of Shankar Lamichhane's Nepali essay 'Yābstyrakṭ Chintan: Pyāj' rendered by Govinda Raj Bhattarai. The data were collected and analyzed through qualitative document analysis and the findings are discussed under three thematic headings like lexical borrowing, lexical explicitation and syntactic parallelism. The findings show obligatory and strategic lexical borrowings, explicitation, and syntactic parallelism as the key linguistic features of this Nepali essay in English translation, signaling the translator's fidelity to the source text and his concern for the intelligibility of the translated text. Finally, the study points out the implication of these findings for translation teaching and training.*

Introduction

Translation dwells on two different linguistic and cultural systems. As a bilingually-mediated communicative process, the aim of translation is to communicate the source language message to the target language audience (Levy, 2011; Reiss, 1971/2012). Translation as a process of communication across languages and cultures constitutes a double helix of reading and writing. Reading the source text and its (re)writing in the target language are intertwined in a subtle way. Reading feeds writing and it is the process of writing that actualizes the process of reading. Although both reading and writing are equally important, the writing dimension of translation poses more challenges and demands more effort from a translator. The quality of a translated text is assumed to be subject to the art, craft and skill

that a translator demonstrates in the (re)writing of the source text in the target language. More than a mechanical reproduction of a text in another language, translation involves the translator's conscious and creative manipulation of linguistic resources in the production of the target text (Levy, 2011; Wilss, 1990; Grossman 2010; Singh, 2010). However, there is a lack of consensus among translation scholars and practitioners as to the features of the language of translated texts (Hatim 2013).

This lack of consensus can be attributed to the nature of the translated text itself. Scholars have pointed out the double and paradoxical status of a translated text (e.g. Devy, 1990; EI-Haddad, 1999; Koster, 2002; Venuti, 2008). In Devy's (1990) view, translation as a product has a double existence. Those who do not know the source language, Devy argues, tend to take the translated text as if originally written in the given language, whereas those who know the source language look at it as a text derived from another language. Likewise, Koster (2002) posits that a translated text is at once a representation of another text and a text in its own right. When we regard it as a text derived from a text rooted in different historical and cultural contexts, we tend to welcome and acknowledge the presence of source language features in the translated text. On the other hand, when we take the translated text as an originally written text or want it to be akin to the latter, we might not acknowledge the presence of the linguistic features of the source text. In the former case, the translated text straddles both source and target cultures and its language bears traces of the source language. In the latter case, the translated text distantiates itself both linguistically and culturally from the source text. Whatever the case, a translated text is assumed to be characterized by its own linguistic features that render it distinct from a non-translated text (Baker, 1993; Venuti, 2008). Against this backdrop, the present paper analyzes the language of a Nepali literary text in English translation in terms of lexical and syntactic features

What follows is a literature review that provides a brief overview of some important theoretical and empirical studies in the area of the language of translated texts. Then we outline the methodology adopted to carry out the study. This is followed by a discussion of the findings and the paper closes with some concluding remarks.

Review of Literature

Given its cross-lingual and cross-cultural existence, a translated text is assumed to be qualitatively different in its language from a non-translated text. This position has been vigorously argued by translation scholars working in the descriptive paradigm (e.g. Even-Zohar, 1978; Baker, 1993; Vanderrauwera, 1985; Blum-Kulka, 1986; Kruger & Rooy, 2012; Hatim, 2013). Scholars have examined linguistic features observed typically in translated texts and such features are variously termed universal features of translation (Baker, 1993), laws of translation (Toury, 1995), translation universals (Mauranen & Kujamäki, 2004), mediation universals and features of translation (Olohan, 2004). These features include explicitation, simplification, disambiguation, normalization, untypical collocation, omission, or rewording of source text repetitions (Pulambo, 2009; Hatim, 2013). Drawing on the works of Blum-Kulka (1986), Toury (1991), and others, Hatim (2013) makes the following observations about the language of translated texts: (a) Translated texts tend to gravitate towards disambiguation and simplification; (b) Source texts repetitions are often either omitted or reworded; (c) The language of translated texts tends to be more explicit than the language of their source counterparts; and (d) Translated texts tend to embody more standardized language than their source counterparts. Additionally, Pulambo (2009) cites presence of untypical collocations as another traceable linguistic

feature of translated texts. Translations, Pulambo posits, usually "favor combinations that are infrequent or absent in non-translated texts" (p.143). Owing to these and other features, the language of translated texts is less likely to conform to the prevalent target language usage.

The influence of the source language on the language of the translated text is often cited as one of the major factors that makes translated language distinct from non-translated language (Olohan, 2004). Also commonly termed source language-interference, source language features, both lexical and syntactic, permeate the translated text rendering its language characteristically different from the language of a non-translated text. This line of argument has remained influential in the study of the language of translation. Researchers guided by this assumption compare translated texts with their source counterparts. The constraints operating in the (re)production of texts in the target language are presumed to be another contributing factor that differentiates the language of translated texts from that of non-translated texts (Baker,1999). Researchers espousing this assumption investigate the language of translation from the perspective of the target language system. For this, they compare the language of translated texts with that of non-translated texts in the same language. With the growing availability of comparable corpora, comparison between the language of translated and non-translated texts has been gaining momentum in recent years.

Taking account of these two potential factors viz. source language interference and text (re) production constraints, Chesterman (2004) distinguishes between S-universals and T-universals. S-universals stem from the source language and their investigation requires the researcher to compare translations with the source versions. T-universals, on the other hand, emanate from social, cultural and cognitive constraints of text production. Such linguistic features are analyzed by comparing translated texts with non-translated texts in the target language. The comparative analysis has the potential to reveal similarities and differences between the language of translated and non-translated texts.

The language of translation has been extensively studied (e.g. Williams, 2005; Mutesayire, 2004; Kenny, 2001; Klaudly, 2008; Kruger & Rooy, 2012; Liu & Afzaal, 2021) and the findings of the studies have shown that translated texts are noted for such features as explicitation, syntactic simplification, normalization, leveling out and lexical borrowing. Of these linguistic features, the present study limits itself to lexical borrowing, explicitation, syntactic simplification, complexification, and parallelism and reviews the studies related to these linguistic aspects of translation.

Not all source language words lend themselves to literal or free translation. The lexical items that defy translation are usually borrowed from the source text and transplanted to the target text. The borrowed lexical items are noted as a significant feature of the language of translated texts (Palumbo, 2009; Shuttleworth & Cowie, 2014). In several circumstances, translators carry over source language words or expressions to the target text either because there exist no words in the translating language to replace source language words or because translators wish to achieve a particular stylistic effect. The first type of borrowing can be counted as an obligatory or necessary one in that the translator is bound to transfer source language-specific words to fill a lexical gap in the target language The second type of borrowing, on the other hand, is optional in that the translator chooses to borrow words from the source text mainly for stylistic effect. In both cases, borrowings inscribe in the target text linguistic and cultural specificity of the source text.

Explicitation is defined as the phenomenon whereby a translated text conveys source

information in a more explicit way (Pulambo, 2009). The source information is made explicit in the target text by adding conjunctions, explanatory phrases, cohesive devices, or removing elliptical structures (Pulambo, 2009; Kruger & Rooy, 2012). Williams's (2005) study identifies explicitation as one of the recurrent features of translation into both English and French. The hypothesis that the translated text tends to be linguistically more explicit than the source text has been substantiated by Mutesayire's (2004) study. The findings reveal the presence of apposition markers significantly higher in the corpus of translated English than in the corpus of non-translated English which further suggests that translated language favors explicitation more than non-translated language.

Translated texts are postulated to be linguistically simplified compared to their source counterparts or non-translated texts. That is to say, translated language is argued to be less complex, both lexically and syntactically, than non-translated language. The simplification hypothesis has been supported by Liu and Afzaal (2021). Drawing on the comparative analysis of Chinese-English and native English corpus, Liu and Afzaal (2021) conclude that "translation as a whole is less complex compared to non-translation"(p.1). However, this finding is not supported by Williams' (2005) study, which, contrary to the common belief that the translated text tends to be linguistically simpler, found translated texts in both English and French being more complex than non-translated texts. In a similar vein, Frankenberg-Garcia (2019) concludes that simplification effected by sentence splitting is less frequent than sentence joining (opposite of simplification) in literary translation. The obverse of simplification i.e., complexification was also reported in Adhikari's (2021) study of the Nepali-English corpus produced by thirty student translators. The student-produced translations contained more cases of syntactic joining or merging (9 %) than syntactic simplification (3%). Simplification and complexification both involve shifts in sentence boundaries. Contrary to these two linguistic phenomena, some studies have pointed out translators' tendency of keeping source text sentences intact in the translated text (Bastola, 2017; Frankenberg-Garcia, 2019; Adhikari, 2021). Their findings have shown translators' tendency to preserve the structural boundaries of source sentences leading to syntactic parallelism between source and translated texts. These studies, however, have not comprehensively dealt with the language of Nepali literary texts in English translation. They are confined to either the analysis of experimental translations produced by Nepali-English learner translations (e.g. Adhikari, 2021) or limited only to syntactic parallelism (e.g. Bastola, 2017). Considering this gap, the present paper examines the language of a Nepali literary text in English translation from lexical and syntactic perspectives.

Methodology

This study used document analysis to collect and analyze the data from the essay *Abstract Thought: An Onion* (2003) and its Nepali source *'Yābstyrakṭ Chintan: Pyāj'* (1967) by Shankar Lamichhane, a famed Nepali essayist. Translated by Govinda Raj Bhattarai and included in the anthology *Selected Nepali Essays,* this essay (i.e. *Abstract Thought: An Onion*) is hailed as a masterpiece in Nepali nonfiction prose, thanks to its experiment in style and free flow of ideas. We selected this translated essay for the study mainly because of its lexical and syntactic features. Lexically, the essay contains expressions that are uniquely ingrained in Nepali culture. Syntactically, it is characterized by the free play of simple, compound and complex sentences. As a qualitative research method, document analysis involves the close examination of texts and the interpretation of data so as to "elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge" (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). In the words of O'Leary

(2017), document analysis (also termed textual analysis) engages the researcher in the collection, review, interrogation and analysis of the written text to examine and understand its reality.

The data were collected through an iterative process that consisted of multiple rounds of reading the translated text in the light of the source text and their thorough comparative examination. We numbered each sentence in both versions and examined them line-by-line. Then we highlighted and extracted those words/expressions and excerpts that exhibited the features of translated language, namely lexical borrowing, lexical explicitation, syntactic simplification, and syntactic parallelism discussed in the literature review section above. In order to ensure the reliability of the data, we each coded the text separately, compared the lists of codes and generated a final list. Finally, the agreed-upon codes were categorized into and discussed under three thematic headings.

Results and Discussion

This section discusses the three major findings that emerged from the analysis of the lexical and syntactic features of the translated essay in question such as (a) lexical borrowing, (b) lexical explicitation, and (c) syntactic parallelism.

Lexical Borrowing

The examination reveals the conspicuous presence of Nepali words in the translated essay, leading to a juxtaposition of Nepali lingual and cultural elements with the English lexicon. The Nepali words transplanted to the English translation can be broadly categorized into the following types:

1. Proper names of famed Nepali artists and writers (e.g. *Bangdel, Vyathit, Bhanubhakta*), Hindu mythological and historical figures (e.g. *Yasodha, Lord Krishna, Shankaracharya*), and Nepali magazines (*The Himani, The Gorakhapartra*)
2. The honorific suffix *-ji*, as in *Bandel-ji* and *Vyathit-ji*
3. Eastern religious concepts (e.g. *vishwaroop, viratroop, satya yuga, brahmāsmi, linga*)
4. Names of castes (e.g. '*Chyāme, Pode*)
5. Terms of address (*garibparbar, karunānidan, khwāmit*)
6. Hindu festival (*Ekādashi*)
7. Newari phatic communion (*jā ne ḍhun la bājyā*).

Based on these cases, we can discern two types of lexical borrowing at work in the English translation of the essay. They can be termed obligatory and optional lexical borrowing. To the first category belong those source words/expressions that must be transferred to the target text in order to fill the lexical gap in the target language. To put it another way, the translator has no choice but to carry over certain source words/expressions to the target text mainly for two reasons. First, the words pertaining to source cultural specificities lack equivalents in the target language (Osakwe, 2000). For example, the names of castes such as *Chyāme* and *Pode* in (4) and the name of the festival *Ekādashi* in (6) cannot be replaced by any English words. Transfer of proper names is the paradigmatic case of obligatory borrowing of source lexical items. Since proper names have unique references and are deeply ingrained in the culture and context of origin, they are supposed to be transferred to the target text and transliterated in the target language with or without some morpho-phonological modification. The target text retains such source lexical items which are not possible to translate literally nor can they be substituted by target language lexical items. Second, such lexical items are too important to delete from the translation. On this account, borrowing is regarded as the only alternative.

Optional lexical borrowing has to do with those source language words/expressions that are retained in the translation even if they can be re-expressed in some way through target language lexical resources. Put another way, certain source language elements are carried over to the translation even if there is a possibility of substituting them with functionally equivalent target language elements or of rendering them literally. The transference of the honorific suffix -*ji* in the following excerpt substantiates this argument:

8.   Last evening I met Bangdelji at New Road. He said, "Shankerji, I read that article of yours, the new one *Shankar Lamichhane in the eyes of Shankar Lamichhane* (Lamichhane, 2003, p.53).

The retention of the Nepali honorific suffix -*ji* in the English text demonstrates the translator's sensitivity to the linguistic nuance. This suffix could have simply been translated into English as the honorific Mr. or omitted. Keeping this choice aside, the translator has not only transferred the Nepali suffix but also opened up its meaning for the reader by means of a footnote (The use of footnotes to explain the meaning is discussed under Lexical Explicitation below). Likewise, Eastern religious concepts such as *vishwaroop, viraṭroop, satya yuga, aham brahmāsmi* and *linga* could have been avoided by providing their literal translations in English.

The retention of Nepali words has helped the translator foreground *Nepaliness* in the English text. It seems that optional borrowing is rhetorically motivated since it is the outcome of the translator's willful and deliberate move to foreignize the English text by juxtaposing source language elements with those of the target language.

The borrowed source language terms can be further categorized into two types: borrowing without additional information and borrowing with literal translation or explicitation. The first category includes general proper names that bear little or no historical/cultural significance or whose meanings can be worked out from the context. Examples include *Gurkhapatra*, *Lord Krishna*, and *Suikucha.* The translator, for instance, has simply italicized *Gorkhapatra* without supplying any additional information about it. Nevertheless, the context informs the reader that it is a newspaper as- I read different papers- from *Gorkhapatra* to *Times* (p, 54). Most of the borrowed words or expressions are accompanied by either literal translations or additional information. In some cases, the translation consists of the simultaneous use of Nepali expressions and their English translations as in the following:

9.   Lord Krishna had shown Yashoda his universal form (*vishwaroop*) by opening up his mouth. (p.54)

10.   *Jā nae ḍhun la bājyā* (Have you eaten rice?) (p.55)

11.   *Aham brahmāsmi* (I am Universal Brahma) (p.55)

The simultaneous use of Nepali expressions and their English translations seem to be redundant and even paradoxical. It looks redundant to use source expressions and their translations together to communicate the same information or to accomplish the same communicative function. Moreover, the juxtaposition of expressions from two different linguistic and cultural systems looks communicatively unwieldy. This linguistic juxtaposition also appears paradoxical. The use of Nepali expressions in the English translation implies their linguistic and cultural specificity and underscores their untranslatability. On the contrary, their translations evidence that such expressions are translatable. Despite this, the translator's use of both Nepali and English expressions together seems to be rhetorically motivated. By embedding Nepali expressions in the English text, the translator accentuates their linguistic and

cultural specificity, whereas the accompanying English translations open up referential and connotative meanings of expressions for English readers. Whatever the reason, the borrowed words/expressions result in textual hybridity that allows cultural and linguistic elements from two or more different linguistic systems to come together and interact with each other in a single textual space.

Lexical Explicitation

Translated texts are made more explicit by adding syntactic elements such as conjunctions and cohesive devices, paraphrasing or removing certain syntactic structures and incorporating explanatory phrases. By this, we can say that explicitation can take place both at lexical and syntactic levels. Of these two types, syntactic explication was virtually absent in the translated essay (i.e. Abstract Thought: Onion). To be more specific, Bhattarai's translation does not contain ostensive instances of syntactic addition or omission in the interest of explicitness. A possible explanation for this might be that the source Nepali text in itself syntactically explicit and fairly accessible which calls for no strategic manipulation for the sake of syntactic accessibility. The virtual absence of addition or omission of syntactic elements in the translated text can also be attributed to the approach adopted by the translator. The comparison of the English translation and its Nepali source demonstrates the approach of close translation at work. That is to say, the translator's attempt to remain syntactically close to the source text might have prevented him from adding or removing syntactic elements in the English translation.

The English translation is dominated by lexical explicitation. This form of explicitation actualized almost exclusively through footnotes is so dominant that the six-page essay is comprised of fifteen footnotes. A point to be noted is that explicitation in the form of footnotes was found to be used with borrowing. The translator has resorted to explicitation to render the meanings of different types of borrowed words (see Lexical Borrowing above) more explicit in the English text. Let us consider the following excerpts:

12.   In the hands of *Vyathitji* was the cover-design of *Himani*. (p. 53)

13.   It will be released on the auspicious occasion of the *Vijaya Dashami*. (p.53)

14.   I also give alms to *Chyame* and *Pode* (p.54)

15.   There is no more the time of the sages of the *Satya Yuga.* (p.56)

16.   Those attacks of *Shankaracharya*…(p.57)

In these excerpts, Nepali words *Vyathitji* and *Himani* (12), *Vijaya Dashami* (13), *Chyame* and *Pode* (14), *Satya Yuga* (15) and *Shankaracharya* (16) are accompanied by their explanations in footnotes. The translator has informed English readers of *Vyathit* by supplying additional information about him as *Kedar Man Vyathit, late poet, formerly Vice-Chancellor, Royal Nepal Academy*. The honorific suffix *-ji* has also been footnoted as *The suffix -ji appended to a name to show respect or honor*. Likewise, the reader is informed of *Himani* as *a literary magazine* and *Chyame* and *Pode* as *Castes of people that professionally sweep, clean*. The translator's use of footnotes to explain the meanings of source cultural and linguistic elements is also supported by Adhikari's (2021) study. Drawing on the analysis of Nepali literature in English translation, Adhikari (2021) concludes that the use of explanatory phrases for Nepali words is a common tendency of Nepali-English translators

The incorporation of additional information has made explicit the historical, cultural and linguistic aspects of the source language terms in question. The purpose of explicitation is to increase the readability of the translation by explaining meanings to the target text reader (Cowie

& Shuttleworth, 2014). By this, the translator invites readers to participate in the interpretive act. In many cases, explicitations of borrowed words or expressions seem inevitable for the reason that borrowing without additional information is lopsided because of its faithfulness to the source text at the cost of target text intelligibility. To restate it another way, the retention of source language words in the translation without explicitations leaves target readers in the dark. By combining borrowing with explicitation can help the translator to achieve two-way fidelity. Borrowing registers linguistic and cultural specificity in the translation, whereas explicitations allow target readers to enter the culture and context of the source text.

Syntactic Parallelism

In principle, three syntactic options are open for the translator, namely sentence-splitting, sentence-joining and structure-preserving (Frankenberg-Garcia, 2019; Kunilovskaya, 2018; Adhikari, 2021). Sentence-splitting and sentence-joining are motivated respectively by the processes of syntactic simplification and complexification and both the processes are operated across sentence boundaries resulting in syntactic shifts. On the other hand, structure-preserving does not bring about any shifts across sentence boundaries leading to syntactic parallelism. Of these three syntactic features, the translated text in this study exhibits only the cases of syntactic parallelism. The translated text is syntactically parallel to the source text in terms of number of sentences or clauses and their structures (simple, complex and compound), grammatical categories (e.g. tense and reported speech), and even punctuation in most cases. The English translation and its Nepali source both have virtually an equal number of sentences i.e., 163. Moreover, the translated text does not evidence the translator's manipulation of structures through syntactic operations of sentence splitting (i.e. simplification) and sentence joining or merging (i.e.: complexification). The following representative excerpts support this observation:

17.   Nepali: *bhannu-huntyo- "tapāi jasto kalam challne mānchhe, yauṭā kathā ek-dui din-mā lekhera dinus na!"* (p.19)

English: He used to say- "Someone like you, whose pen runs so well, please write a story for me in a day or two.   (53)

18.   Nepali: *ma hāsirahe. (hāsna jannu pani ṭhulo kalā ho!..)* (p.19)

English: I kept smiling. (To know how to smile is also a great art!) (p.53)

19.   Nepali: *tara, man-bāṭa na Vyathit gae, na Bangdel, na Himani, na yābstrakṭ!* (p.19)

English: But neither *Vyathit* nor *Bangel* did vanish from my mind; neither *Himani* nor abstract. (p.54)

These excerpts explicitly demonstrate the translator's inclination towards syntactic parallelism between source text and its translation. None of them exhibits a shift in grammatical categories and structures. The translator has kept intact in the English text reported speech and habitual past (17), past continuous and simple present (18) and simple past (19), and simple sentence (19) and complex sentence (17, 18 & 20). However, we can notice some shifts in the use of punctuation. In (17), the translator has replaced the exclamatory mark (!) with a full stop. This shift has weakened the emphatic force implied in the imperative sentence in Nepali. Example (19) also involves a case of punctuation shift. Soft punctuation (i.e. comma) has been changed to hard punctuation (i.e. semi-colon). Apart from such shifts, there is a close correspondence between English translation and its Nepali source in the use of punctuation marks.

Syntactic parallelism between Nepali text and its English translation contradicts one of the key hypotheses of translation universals that translated texts tend to be syntactically more simple than their source counterparts or original texts (Hatim, 2013). Contrary to Kunilovskaya's (2018) postulation that translators split complex and compound sentences in the interest of making semantic and pragmatic relations between ideas more explicit, the translator of the essay in this study has kept Nepali complex and compound sentences intact in the English translation. This finding accords with previous observations (e.g. Bastola, 2017; Frankenberg-Garcia, 2019). Upon the analysis of the fifty chunks from a Nepali novel translated into English, Bastola reports the translator's inclination to keep sentence boundaries intact in the translated text. Likewise, Frankenberg-Garcia's (2019) study concludes that more than 90% of sentence boundaries of source texts remained intact in translated literary texts.

Conclusion and Implications

This study set out to analyze the lexical and syntactic features of 'Abstract Thought: An Onion, the English translation of the Nepali essay by Shankar Lamichhane. Findings show borrowing, lexical explicitation and syntactic parallelism as the major linguistic features of this translated text. The English translation consists of, among others, proper names of persons, mythological figures, castes, mythological concepts, honorific suffix and phatic communion borrowed from the source language. The presence of some of the Nepali words such as proper names in the English translation is unavoidable, that is the translator has no choice but to carry them over from the source text. The retention of other Nepali words or expressions such as the honorific suffix, phatic communion, and religious concepts seems to be strategically motivated. Whatever the case, the presence of source linguistic elements in the target text hybridizes the language of translated texts, probably the most unavoidable feature of translation. Lexical explicitation is another feature that dominates the English translation in question. Syntactic explicitation such as addition and omission of syntactic elements does not feature in the English translation. The virtual absence of syntactic explicitation can be attributed either to the nature of the source text itself, that is, the source text is already syntactically explicit that did not need the addition or omission of syntactic elements, or to the translator's approach of close translation. Lexical explicitation enacted almost exclusively through footnotes has the function of making explicit the denotative and connotative meanings of borrowed words to increase their readability. Lexical explicitation demonstrates the translator's fidelity to the source text as well as his concern for the intelligibility of the target text. Syntactic parallelism was observed as the other characteristic feature of the translated essay. This linguistic feature, to a large extent, contradicts the simplification hypothesis that translators tend to simplify the syntax of the source text through sentence splitting. Supporting previous studies, this finding signals translators' proclivity for keeping source syntactic boundaries intact in the target text.

The findings of this study provide insights into the nature of the language of translation in general and the language of Nepali-English translation in particular. Literary translation teachers and trainers can make use of these findings to draw students' attention to obligatory and strategic retention of source language words in the translation, the contextual necessity of explaining such words through explicitation, and the possibility of maintaining syntactic parallelism between source text and target text.

The major limitation of the study is that it examined the language of only one Nepali essay in English translation. Therefore, further research with a larger sample of Nepali and English texts is required to make generalizations about linguistic features of Nepali literary texts in English translation.

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