

LITERARY TRANSLATION AND DEVIATION FROM NATURALNESS

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Abstract

This paper explores translation issues in the Romanian version of the novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* (2022) by Zoulfa Katouh, translated as *Atunci când înfloresc lămâii* and published by Bookzone in 2023. Literary translation functions not only as a linguistic and cultural exchange but also as a market-oriented product shaped by a collaborative effort involving not just the translator, but also editors, reviewers, and other publishing professionals who refine the text to ensure it resonates with the target audience and meets commercial expectations. Within this context, naturalness in translation means that the target text reads smoothly, follows the typical grammar, vocabulary, and idiomatic expressions of the language, and does not appear constrained by the structure of the source text. Using the American Translators Association's 2017 error categorisation framework, the study identifies specific types of errors that hinder readability in the Romanian version. For a broader perspective, it also looks at the French translation released by Éditions Nathan (SEJER) in 2023, examining whether similar issues occur or whether the French version demonstrates a higher level of natural flow. The findings contribute to ongoing discussions about how we evaluate translation quality and underscore the challenges involved in preserving fluency when conveying meaning between languages.

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Keywords: Literary translation; Translation errors; Readability; Naturalness; Translation quality assessment.

1 Introduction

Zoulfa Katouh's debut novel, *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*, has been translated into 23 languages, a key indicator of its world literature status. The novel depicts Syrian voices and experiences in a war-torn country. The Syrian Canadian author's multicultural upbringing and Syrian heritage contributed to creating a work of fiction that foregrounds experiences of loss, displacement, and vulnerability, resonating with readers amidst the backdrop of a geopolitical context torn by conflict and instability. It is precisely for this reason that a high-quality translation plays a crucial

role in mediating the emotional impact of the narrative, ensuring that it is rendered clearly and powerfully for new readerships.

In the field of translation, a common distinction is made between literary and non-literary texts, with literary translation often regarded as more than just a technical task and rather as a form of art. This perception derives from the nature of literature itself, which relies heavily on the expressive and aesthetic power of language. As a result, literary translation is sometimes considered to hold a higher cultural status than its non-literary counterpart. Central to literary translation is the goal of readability and emotional resonance; the translator must not only convey meaning but also recreate the artistic impact of the original. At the same time, literary translation plays a key role in circulating and reinforcing dominant linguistic and stylistic norms within the target language, often functioning as a reference point for idiomatic and stylistically coherent language use.

According to Lawrence Venuti, translators and publishers should adopt a more self-aware and ethically informed approach to their work. Translation should be understood as a serious responsibility that involves conveying not just language but the cultural and ethical essence of the original work (Venuti, 1995/2008). As maintained by the scholar, too often, translation is treated as a personal, almost artistic endeavour, where the translator expresses their own style or affinity with the source author, rather than focusing on faithfully and ethically representing the foreign culture. This point of view foregrounds the ethical stakes of literary translation which should seek to remain accountable to both the source text and to the expectations of the target readership.

From this perspective, literary translation can be seen as a form of rewriting shaped by institutional constraints. As André Lefevere (1992) observes, translations are influenced not only by individual translators but also by systems of patronage, editorial intervention, and ideological expectations within the receiving culture. This framework allows translation choices to be examined not solely as individual linguistic decisions, but as products of broader literary and publishing systems.

2 Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Achieving naturalness in translation

Naturalness or readability in translation is not a superficial stylistic feature, but a central criterion in discussions of how translated texts come to be read as originals. As Newmark (1988, p. 41) emphasises, a translation should stand on its own as a coherent piece of writing, independent of its source, and must read naturally, conforming to the linguistic norms of the target language. This reverberates in Venuti's (1995/2008, p. 14) critique of the "illusion of transparency", where fluency and readability, often achieved by contemporary language usage and clear syntax, shape the reader's perception of the translation as effortless or, in other words, invisible. In other words, although a translation can never be the original,

professional translators strive to produce texts that do not feel like second-hand versions but rather as if they were conceived directly in the target language. This brings into focus the challenge of rendering voice and tone, as the goal is to evoke a similar effect on readers and foster a sense of connection with the narrator or characters in the story. However, the main problem is that while this practice can help forward localisation and accessibility, it also raises ethical questions about the translator's agency in shaping meaning.

From a descriptive perspective, however, naturalness is not an absolute linguistic property but the result of compliance with target-culture norms. As Gideon Toury (1995) argues, translations are governed by historically and culturally situated norms that determine what is considered acceptable or appropriate within a given literary system. What reads as "natural" is therefore not universal but norm-dependent, shaped by prevailing conventions in the target language and its publishing context. The present study adopts this view in treating naturalness as an indicator of target-culture acceptability rather than as a prescriptive ideal of quality.

Naturalness, then, is not merely about surface fluency but involves deeper alignment with textual, cultural, and communicative conventions, particularly during the revision stage. As Chesterman (1997, p. 24) notes, translation is increasingly understood as a target-oriented rhetorical act, one shaped primarily by audience expectations and communicative purpose, rather than as a word-for-word reproduction of the source. This perspective aligns with the functionalist approach proposed by Kupsch-Losereit and Nord (1997), where a translation is deemed faulty if it fails to fulfil its intended function for the target audience, whether due to linguistic awkwardness, cultural misalignment, or violations of genre conventions.

Furthermore, as Garbovsky (2004) observes, translation errors often derive from the translator's insufficient knowledge of the source language, the subject matter, or the author's intent and stylistic nuance. This underscores the fact that naturalness cannot be achieved without a deep understanding of both the source and target contexts.

2.2 Defining the concept of *error* in translation

In the context of translation studies, the concept of *error* has sparked considerable debate, particularly regarding its definition and distinction from *mistake*. Lennon (1991, p. 182) defines an error as a linguistic form that would likely not be used by a native speaker in similar conditions, highlighting its deviation from standard usage. Goff-Kfouri (2004) clarifies that a mistake is typically a performance slip, random and non-systematic, whereas an error reflects a deeper gap in knowledge and tends to be recurring.

Translation errors are often seen as failures to achieve equivalence between the source and target texts (Neubert & Shreve, 1995; Koller, 1979). They may also indicate deficiencies in translation competence (Pym, 1992, p. 281) or involve significant distortions of meaning through omissions, additions, or substitutions (Hatim & Mason, 1997, p. 203). From a functionalist standpoint, as Seguinot (1990,

p. 172) and Nord (2009, p. 190) suggest, translation errors are not just linguistic issues, as they also involve violations of text function, coherence, cultural norms, or failure to meet the expectations laid out in the translation brief.

In literary translation, these perspectives are particularly relevant. Given the creative and expressive nature of literature, errors should not be considered as merely technical faults but potential threats to tone, nuance, and narrative integrity, all of which could ultimately affect the reader's understanding of the text in a negative way.

2.3 Models of error analysis

Many scholars in the field have proposed classification systems for translation errors to create reliable frameworks for evaluating the quality of translated texts. Liao (2010), for instance, developed a model that groups errors into three main categories: *rendition*, *language*, and *miscellaneous*. According to his research, *Rendition errors* occur when the translator fails to convey the intended meaning of the source text accurately; *language errors* involve awkward or incorrect expressions in the target language, and *miscellaneous errors* include omissions or unrelated inconsistencies.

Hurtado, as referenced by Waddington (2001), designed an error-based model for assessing translation quality, organising errors into three levels. The first level, *translation mistakes*, includes misinterpretations, incorrect meanings, nonsense, additions, omissions, unresolved cultural references, loss of meaning, and stylistic mismatches (such as register or dialect). The second category, *major errors*, involves issues that negatively affect the fluency and correctness of the target language, such as grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and overall textual style. Finally, *minor errors* are those that interfere with conveying the main or secondary functions of the source text but do not severely disrupt meaning or readability.

In a different approach, House (1997) outlined three perspectives for evaluating translation quality. The *pre-linguistic approach* is largely subjective and lacks clear evaluation criteria. The *psycholinguistic approach* assesses translation quality based on the reader's reception and emotional response. Lastly, the *source-text-based approach* aims to establish objective linguistic standards for comparing source and target texts.

Another taxonomy of translation errors emerges from a learner-focused study based on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students translating from Romanian into English (Popescu, 2013). Grounded in the learner-centred theory, which promotes the idea that students can self-correct and develop awareness of natural L2 structures, this approach categorises errors into three main types: *linguistic errors* (morphological, syntactic, and collocational inaccuracies), *comprehension errors* (misinterpretations of lexis or syntax in the source text), and *translation errors* (distorted meanings, omissions, additions, and inaccurate lexical renderings).

For the current study, I applied the American Translators Association (ATA) framework (2017 version), used for grading the ATA certification exam for

professional translators. The table below shows this classification based on the three sections and the 26 distinct error categories:

Table 1. ATA error framework (2017)

Section	Category	Description
1. Target language mechanics	1.1 Grammar (G)	Errors in subject-verb agreement, verb inflections, noun/pronoun declension.
	1.2 Syntax (SYN)	Unnatural word order, improper modification, run-on sentences.
	1.3 Word Form / Part of Speech (WF/PS)	Incorrect word form or part of speech, e.g., wrong verb tense or noun case.
	1.4 Spelling / Character (SP/CH)	Misspelled words or incorrect characters.
	1.5 Capitalisation (C)	Incorrect use of uppercase or lowercase letters.
	1.6 Diacritical Marks / Accents (D)	Missing or incorrect accent marks affecting readability.
	1.7 Punctuation (P)	Incorrect punctuation use, such as misplaced commas or missing quotation marks.
	1.8 Illegibility (ILL)	Text is difficult or impossible to read due to formatting or handwriting.
	1.9 Other Mechanical Errors (OTH-ME)	Other errors that affect target language mechanics.
	2.1 Addition (A)	Adding extra words or phrases not found in the source text.
2. Meaning transfer	2.2 Omission (O)	Leaving out words, phrases, or key ideas from the source text.
	2.3 Terminology (T)	Using an incorrect or inappropriate term in the target language.
	2.4 Faux Ami (FA)	Using false cognates that look similar but have different meanings.
	2.5 Verb Form (VF)	Incorrect verb tense, aspect, or mood leading to altered meaning.
	2.6 Ambiguity (AMB)	Translation is unclear and allows multiple interpretations.
	2.7 Cohesion (COH)	Failure to maintain logical flow using linking words, pronouns, or transitions.
	2.8 Faithfulness (F)	Deviation from the original meaning or intent of the source text.
	2.9 Literalness (L)	Word-for-word translation that results in unnatural or incorrect meaning.
	2.10 Misunderstanding (MU)	Misinterpreting the source text leading to translation errors.
	2.11 Indecision (IND)	Providing multiple translation options instead of a clear choice.
	2.12 Unfinished (UNF)	Incomplete translation or missing large sections of text.

	2.13 Other meaning transfer errors (OTH-MT)	Other meaning transfer errors not fitting other categories.
3.Writing quality	3.1 Usage (U)	Unnatural phrasing, incorrect idioms, or awkward word choices.
	3.2 Text Type (TT)	Language does not match the intended audience or context.
	3.3 Register (R)	Translation is too formal or too informal for the context.
	3.4 Style (ST)	Failure to maintain the original tone, poetic style, or expressiveness.

I consider this taxonomy particularly well-aligned with the objectives of my research, as it does more than simply classify errors, it also invites a deeper inquiry into the underlying causes behind them. Its structure is comprehensive and linguistically expansive, covering a wide array of issues from grammar and syntax to cohesion, register, and even stylistic appropriateness. This breadth allows for a subtle exploration of translation quality, especially in literary contexts where small deviations can significantly impact meaning and reader engagement. By using the ATA model, I aim to go beyond surface-level assessments and uncover patterns that reflect the translator's linguistic choices, interpretive gaps, or contextual misreadings.

3 Research Problem and Questions

When it comes to analysing errors in translation, the majority of existing studies tend to focus on student errors, the performance of emerging internet-based machine translation applications, or the challenges involved in translating from minor languages into major ones through intermediary languages; for example, translating from Kazakh into Russian, and subsequently into English (Dildabekova, Amalbekova & Turginbayeva, 2022). While these areas offer valuable considerations, they often overlook a significant dimension: the translation of books as literary products with the power to shape and influence the language and discourse of the receiving culture. This gap highlights the need for more attention to be directed toward the role of literary translation in cultural and linguistic exchange.

To address this overlooked dimension of literary translation and its cultural implications, the present study sets out to explore the following research questions:

1. What types of translation errors can be identified in the Romanian version of *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*?
2. How do these errors impact the naturalness and readability of the target text?
3. Are similar deviations from naturalness present in the French translation, or does it demonstrate greater linguistic fluency?

4. What do these findings reveal about the translator's contribution to the linguistic and cultural landscape of the target language?

In line with Toury's model (1995), the present study does not seek to establish universal standards of literary translation quality, but to identify patterns of deviation from dominant target-language norms as manifested in a specific translated work.

4 Aim and Methodology

The aim of this research is to identify and categorise translation errors that affect the naturalness of the Romanian translation of *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* by Zoulfa Katouh, using the American Translators Association (ATA) error framework. By comparing the Romanian version with the French translation, the study seeks to evaluate the extent to which naturalness is preserved across languages and to contribute to the broader discourse on translation quality in literary texts. Accordingly, the identification of "errors" in this study is understood descriptively, as departures from established Romanian literary norms, rather than as absolute failures of translation correctness.

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques to analyse the Romanian translation of *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*. The first step involved collecting data, where I identified 62 fragments in the Romanian text that appeared less aligned with dominant Romanian norms of linguistic naturalness, based on criteria such as fluency, idiomatic usage, and grammatical appropriateness in the target language. These excerpts were then compared with the English source text and the French target text to highlight deviations and assess whether similar issues occurred across translations. The selected corpus may be consulted in Annex 1 of the present article.

Subsequently, the ATA error framework (2017 version) was applied to classify the types of translation errors found in the Romanian version. As part of the quantitative analysis, the errors were grouped into categories and subcategories, and their frequency was calculated and expressed as percentages. This allowed for the identification of the most common error types. Finally, a qualitative interpretation was provided, discussing the underlying causes of these errors through the lens of target language mechanics, meaning transfer, and writing quality, thereby offering insight into how these elements influence the translator's impact on the receiving language and culture.

5 Quantitative Findings

The quantitative findings of this study offer a snapshot of the types of translation errors that, in the analysed excerpts, most significantly affect perceived naturalness of the Romanian version of *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*. By categorising the 62 identified unnatural fragments using the ATA (2017) framework, all three sections

emerged: *Target Language Mechanics*, *Meaning Transfer*, and *Writing Quality*, resulting in 66 translation errors, each contributing in distinct ways to the disruption of fluency and reader experience.

Table 2. Number and Percentage of Errors by Section and Category

Section	Category	Number of errors	Percentage by section
Target language mechanics	Grammar (G)	6	
	Syntax (SYN)	7	
	Punctuation (P)	11	
	Word Form / Part of Speech (WF/PS)	1	39.39%
Meaning transfer	Other Mechanical Errors (OTH-ME)	1	
	Omission (O)	1	
	Terminology (T)	4	
	Faux Ami (FA)	1	
	Ambiguity (AMB)	4	
	Cohesion (COH)	1	
	Faithfulness (F)	1	
	Literalness (L)	3	24.24%
	Misunderstanding (MU)	1	
	Unfinished (UNF)	1	
Writing quality	Usage (U)	23	36.36%
	Style (ST)	1	
TOTAL	16 categories out of the total number of 26	66	100%

5.1 Target language mechanics

This section, which encompasses aspects of grammar and structure, revealed the highest number of errors. Grammar (G) errors (6 examples) and Syntax (SYN) errors (7 examples) were relatively common, suggesting recurrent difficulties in maintaining standard Romanian sentence patterns and morphosyntactic accuracy within the analysed segments. Interestingly, Punctuation (P) errors emerged as the most frequent within this group (11 examples), often altering the rhythm or even the meaning of sentences. Less frequent but still noteworthy were errors in Word Form / Part of Speech (WF/PS) and Other Mechanical Errors (OTH-ME), each with one occurrence, pointing to occasional lapses in morphological awareness or proofreading.

5.2 Meaning transfer

This group reflects the translator's ability to faithfully convey the original message. While Literalness (L) (3 examples) and Terminology (T) (4 examples) point to overly direct or imprecise renditions, Ambiguity (AMB) (4 examples) signals a breakdown in clarity, possibly due to insufficient contextualisation. Errors such as Faux Ami

(FA) and Omission (O), though less frequent, expose pitfalls in lexical sensitivity and completeness. The presence of errors like Cohesion (COH), Faithfulness (F), Misunderstanding (MU), and Unfinished (UNF), each appearing once, underscores sporadic but impactful lapses in ensuring coherent and accurate transmission of meaning from source to target text.

5.3 Writing quality

This section recorded the second highest number of errors (23 examples), indicating that idiomatic fluency was less consistently realised in the Romanian translation across the analysed excerpts. Notably, 22 of these were related to Usage (U), revealing that the difficulty lay less in flamboyant stylistic choices and more in everyday language habits, such as awkward phrasing, unnatural collocations, or structures that come across as awkward or forced to a native reader. A single Style (ST) error was also identified, suggesting that while overt stylistic mismatches were rare, subtler inconsistencies in tone or register may have contributed to the overall perception of unnaturalness.

6 Qualitative Analysis and Discussion

6.1 Examples of errors in target language mechanics

(6.1.1 EN) “By now it’s probably encoded in my DNA” (Katouh, 2022, p. 10).	(6.1.1 RO) “E scris în ADN-ul meu de-acum” (Katouh, 2023, p. 7). (SYN) & (P)	(6.1.1 FR) “Il doit déjà être encodé dans mon ADN” (Katouh, 2023, p. 5).
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(SYN) – syntax, unnatural word order & (P) – incorrect punctuation use, missing a comma: This first example showcases a rigid structure and a misplacement of a temporal adverbial. The Romanian rendition back-translates as “It is written in my DNA of now”, as if the DNA itself has changed recently, not that the information has become ingrained over time. Furthermore, the adverbial expression should be fronted and followed by a comma: “De-acum încolo, va rămâne înregistrat în ADN-ul meu. / “Probabil că este deja înscris / stocat în ADN-ul meu”. In comparison, the French version avoids such punctuation-related disruption and appropriately places the adverb “déjà” (“already”), mirroring the emphasis of the original.

(6.1.2 EN) “All of that was remedied as the first body was laid out before me to be stitched up” (p. 11).	(6.1.2 RO) “Totul s-a rezolvat când mi-au pus în față <u>primul</u> <u>corp</u> <u>de</u> <u>suturat</u> ” (p. 8). (WF/PS)	(6.1.2 FR) “On m'a confié mon premier corps à recoudre et j'ai appris sur le tas” (p. 6).
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(WF/PS) – Word Form / Part of Speech: The protagonist of the novel works in a hospital that frequently treats victims of bombings during the Syrian revolution. Though still very young and a pharmacy student, Salama Kasaab operates on autopilot in the face of danger and the fast-paced urgency of saving innocent lives. The narrative is therefore sprinkled with medical terminology, reflecting both her environment and state of mind. In this second example, the Romanian translation uses a verbal noun construction that sounds stiff and literal. The supine form “de suturat” (“for stitching” / “to be stitched”) expresses the purpose of the action in an impersonal way and is more commonly used in technical writing, manuals or bureaucratic documents, like “instrumente de folosit” (“tools for use”) or “pacienți de operat” (“patients to operate on”). In this context, a relative clause introduced by “pe care” (“that”) would better emphasise the action from the subject’s point of view: “primul corp pe care să îl suturez” / “primul corp cu plăgi pe care să le suturez”. In contrast, the French translation is more natural, as the infinitive construction is often used in French to express purpose: “à recoudre” (“to stitch up”). Also, the sentence implies a sense of initiation by adding the expression “j’ai appris sur le tas” (“I learned on the job”).

(6.1.2 EN) “Yusuf can take care of things until I’m back” (p. 93).	(6.1.2 RO) “Are Yosuf grijă <u>de totul</u> până mă întorc” (p. 97). (G)	(6.1.3 FR) “Yusuf surveillera la maison jusqu’à mon retour” (p. 94).
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(G) – Grammatical error: The expression „are grijă de totul” is grammatically incorrect, as the definite form of the pronoun is not used in the standard adverbial phrase “de tot”, expressing totality or completeness of an action or state. “Yusuf surveillera la maison jusqu’à mon retour” (“Yusuf will watch over the house until I return”) avoids the ambiguity altogether by specifying the object of surveillance (“la maison”).

(6.1.3 EN) “She painted the kitchen white to contrast with shelves made from walnut wood” (p. 12).	(6.1.3 RO) “A zugrăvit bucătăria în alb să facă contrast” (OTH-ME) cu rafturile din lemn de nuc” (p. 10).	(6.1.3 FR) “Elle a repeint la cuisine en blanc pour faire ressortir les étagères en noyer (p. 9).
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(OTH-ME) – Other mechanical errors: One example of a mechanical issue in the Romanian translation is the phonetic clumsiness created by the phrase “să facă contrast”. The repeated harsh consonants result in phonetic clumsiness and an unpleasant rhythm that disrupts the fluency of the sentence. In French, however, translator preserves naturalness by choosing the idiomatic expression “faire ressortir” (“to highlight” or “bring out”). In Romanian as well, alternatives like “pentru a contrasta cu” or “pentru a scoate în evidență” offer smoother phrasing that maintains the intended contrast without sacrificing readability.

6.2 Examples of Errors in Meaning Transfer

(6.2.1 EN) “When the aisles prove to be truly empty, I trudge to the counter to pay for the lemons and bread with Baba’s savings” (Katouh, 2022, p.10).

(6.2.1 RO) “După ce rafturile s-au demonstrat a fi cu adevărat goale, (L) m-am târât spre teajheă să plătesc lămâile și lipile cu economiile tatei” (Katouh, 2023, p. 7). (F)

(6.2.1 FR) “Constatant que les rayons sont vraiment vides, je me dirige vers la caisse pour régler mes achats grâce aux économies de Baba” (Katouh, 2023, p. 5).

(L) – literalness, word-for-word issue: The phrase “s-au demonstrat a fi” is a case of literal translation that sounds awkward and overly formal in Romanian, especially as in this context the structure mirrors the English construction “proved to be”. However, in Romanian, it introduces an unnecessarily bureaucratic tone. More idiomatic alternatives like “odată ce am constatat că rafturile erau cu adevărat goale” or “văzând că rafturile erau cu adevărat goale” better reflect the natural rhythm and expressive patterns of Romanian. The French phrase demonstrates a high degree of naturalness using a participial construction (“constatant”) that is contextually appropriate.

(F) – faithfulness, deviation from the original intent: The Romanian translation turns “Baba” into “tata”, which, in my opinion, misrepresents the source text’s intention of highlighting the exotic flavour of the honorific term used by some South Asians to show respect to an older man. It is true, however, that in contemporary translation practice, fluency is often achieved by domesticating the text and avoiding words with distinctive features (Venuti, 1995/2008, p. 6). Nevertheless, trying too hard to make a translated text easy to read and homogeneous can harm or erase the unique stylistic features of the original.

(6.2.2 EN) “It’s not that easy, Khawf, I hiss” (p. 20)

(6.2.2 RO) “Nu e aşa simplu, Khawf, scuip” (p. 19). (AMB)

(6.2.2 RO) “Ce n’est pas si facile, je siffle” (p. 15).

(AMB) – ambiguity, unclear meaning: In this example, the source text term “hiss” implies a disapproving tone of voice used to express disdain. A perfect equivalent is used in the French translation. However, the verb “scuip” in Romanian feels harsh, as it conveys the physical act of spitting. To convey disapproval or even potential aggression in the tone of voice, a translation like “şuier printre dinti” would be more appropriate.

(6.2.3 EN) ““You’re leaving now?” I ask Hamza, my voice breaking” (p. 25).

(6.2.3 RO) “Pleci acum? Îl întreb pe Hamza cu glas spart” (p. 25). (FA)

(6.2.3 FR) “Puis j’interroge Hamza d’une voix tremblante :

– Vous partez maintenant?” (p. 22).

(FA) – Faux Ami: The Romanian adjective “spart”, a literal translation of “breaking”, when used figuratively about voice, means “hoarse”, “ragged”, “lacking resonance” (DEX, 2016, p. 1143). So, the phrase “cu glas spart” literally describes a torn or shattered voice. The French captures the emotional fragility intended in the original text, explicitly describing a trembling voice. A better alternative would be “cu glas tremurat” / “și vocea mi se frângе”.

(6.2.4 EN) “I don’t have time to analyze his tone or features” (p. 92). (6.2.4 RO) “n-am timp să-i analizez tonul sau mina de pe chip” (p. 97). (6.2.4 FR) “Je n’ai pas le temps d’analyser le ton de sa voix ou son expression” (p. 93). (T)

(T) – Terminology: In this example, the Romanian phrase “mina de pe chip” (lit. “the mug of the face”) is tautological, since “mină” (“mug”) already implies “chip” (“face”). The French translation strikes a better balance between precision and naturalness: “son expression” is a common way to refer to facial features. Similarly, in Romanian the translator could have used “expresia feței”.

6.3 Examples of errors in writing quality

(6.3.1 EN) “But today, a whisper echoes in my brain” (p. 37) (6.3.1 RO) “Însă astăzi, mi se strecoară o soaptă în cap” (p. 37). (U) (6.3.1 FR) “Mais, cette fois, une petite voix s’élève dans mon cerveau” (p. 35).

(U) – unnatural phrasing: In this example, “în cap” is grammatically correct, but it is stylistically abrupt and colloquial, especially following such a poetic or subtle idea “mi se strecoară”. In Romanian, more natural or idiomatic collocations when referring to internal echoes might be “în minte” / “în gând”.

(6.3.2 EN) “It was a quiet day, a good day where hopes and dreams would be traded. Where sweet childhood memories would be revisited” (p. 46). (6.3.2 RO) “Era o zi calmă, numai bună să visezi și să speri. Să povestesc istorii din copilărie” (p. 46). (P) (6.3.2 FR) “C’était une journée paisible, le genre de journée heureuse durant laquelle on évoque ses rêves, ses espoirs, ses souvenirs d’enfance” (p. 44). (U)

The noun “istorii”, although technically correct, is not the most natural word in this context. The noun implies historical events or embellished narratives, in contrast with the English “sweet childhood memories”, a phrase that evokes intimate, nostalgic recollections. In French, the translation has a higher degree of adaptability. The verb “évoquer” is the perfect choice for “revisit”, as it conveys a gentle mental recollection, not necessarily verbal or performative. In turn, the equivalent “souvenirs d’enfance” faithfully renders “childhood memories” without sounding forced. A more natural alternative for the Romanian translation could be “să

povestești întâmplări din copilărie” / “să îți aduci aminte de copilărie”, etc. Like the book’s official translator, I also avoided using the phrase “amintiri din copilărie”, because it would create an unintended intertextual reference to Ion Creangă’s well-known work of the same name.

(6.3.3 EN) “And then you pass and get certificates of honor while <u>we sit here contemplating your murder</u> ” (p. 147).	(6.3.3 RO) “Apoi ieî examenul și diplomă de onoare în timp ce noi stăm aici <u>imaginându-ne cum să te ucidem</u> ” 154 (P) (ST)	(6.3.3 FR) “Et après, tu cartonnes, et nous on reste là <u>avec nos envies de meurtre</u>
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(ST) – Style, failure to maintain the original expressiveness: In this paragraph, beyond the punctuation errors (P), which fail to properly separate temporal adverbs and obscure the flow of actions, there is also a stylistic error. I interpret it as a failure to capture the same ironic and playful tone present in the source text. The English phrase “we sit here contemplating your murder” is deliberately darkly humorous. It uses exaggerated language to express jealousy and frustration, unlike the Romanian version which sounds more literal, and potentially disturbing, rather than sarcastic.

Differences between the Romanian and French translations may thus reflect not only individual stylistic competence, but also distinct normative and institutional constraints operating within the two literary systems, as described by Lefevere’s model of rewriting.

“(E)nvies de meurtre” conveys a playful expression of frustration, without sounding sinister. To better match the original tone, the Romanian translation could be softened: “nutrind dorințe ascunse de a te strâng de gât” / “gândindu-ne la tot felul de scenarii cum să scăpăm de tine” / “în timp ce noi stăm aici cu gânduri criminale”.

7 Conclusions

This research set out to investigate the impact of translation choices on the naturalness and readability of the Romanian version of *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*, while also assessing how these choices compare with those in the French translation. To better understand the findings of this research, I will revisit the initial questions and provide answers based on the quantitative and qualitative analysis presented above.

1. What types of translation errors can be identified in the Romanian version?

By applying the ATA (2017) error framework to 62 selected excerpts, the study identified 66 translation errors, spread across three major categories: Target Language Mechanics, Meaning Transfer, and Writing Quality. The most frequent errors were encountered in Target Language Mechanics (39.39%), which refers to the basic linguistic rules and conventions of the Romanian language. Also, in terms

of categories, the most frequent errors I encountered were related to usage (U), often stemming from awkward phrasing or unidiomatic expressions.

2. How do these errors impact the naturalness and readability of the Romanian translation?

These errors suggest a less consistent alignment with target language stylistic norms and may compromise the fluency of the Romanian version in several ways. Grammatically, some phrases feel clumsy and may interrupt reader immersion. Lexically, the translation sometimes opts for literal equivalents that are formally correct but stylistically jarring.

3. Does the French translation demonstrate greater linguistic fluency or exhibit similar deviations?

The French version of the novel generally demonstrates a higher degree of alignment with dominant norms of contemporary French literary prose. In many cases, it manages to accurately capture tone without sacrificing readability, preserves emotional undertones and cultural references, and, most importantly, uses idiomatic and grammatically fluid expressions. While not free of translational intervention, the French translation shows stronger adaptation skills, often smoothing out source-language awkwardness and avoiding overly literal structures.

4. What do these findings reveal about the translator's contribution to the linguistic and cultural landscape of the target language?

The Romanian translation, while generally faithful to the source content, frequently prioritises surface-level equivalence in ways that appear less aligned with dominant Romanian norms of idiomatic literary expression. This approach limits the translator's creative agency and reduces the visibility of translation as a cultural act. Furthermore, the translation misses opportunities to enrich the Romanian text with fluid, emotionally nuanced language that resonates with target readers. By contrast, the French translator demonstrates a greater sensitivity to reader expectations, reinforcing the translator's role as a cultural mediator.

In the end, returning to Venuti's idea of the translator's invisibility, it becomes apparent that this concept should not be extended to the point, where the text itself becomes invisible, stripped of any cultural flavour or sense of place. After all, in global literature we are dealing with different countries and cultures, and this uniqueness needs to be preserved in the target texts.

The translator should absolutely be "invisible" when it comes to following the internal rules of the language we are translating into. The target language must be grammatically correct, expressive enough to fit the cultural context it belongs to and not shaped by the translator's personal background. It is precisely this personal context that can often be mistaken or poorly understood by the general public. This refers to the individual nuances in how each of us perceives reality through language. Every person is shaped by certain beliefs, often influenced by their environment and the people around them, and at times by how they understand or remember specific concepts or linguistic formulations. Speakers' minds, particularly in multilingual contexts, can sometimes deceive us into believing that a certain expression exists in a language, when in fact it is reconstructed by memory alone.

This is precisely why the revision process in translation is so important. A reviser, whose understanding is not influenced by the source text, can often identify inconsistencies that the translator may miss. Literary translations, therefore, play an important role in preserving the distinctiveness of the target language. They must be rich, clear, and free of ambiguities that prevent the reader from truly engaging with the text. Regardless of marketing pressures, financial concerns, or promotional strategies, literary translators bear a responsibility to their language and to readers who choose literature as a mode of engagement distinct from other narrative media, such as film or audio formats, precisely because of the cultural, linguistic, and imaginative enrichment it provides.

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ANNEX 1

CORPUS OF SELECTED PASSAGES FOR TRANSLATION ERROR CLASSIFICATION

English ST (Katouh, 2022)	Romanian TT (Katouh, 2023)	French TT (Katouh, 2023)
When the aisles prove to be truly empty, I trudge to the counter to pay for the lemons and bread with Baba's savings. (p.10)	(RO 1) După ce rafturile <u>s-au demonstrat a fi</u> cu adevărat goale, (L) m-am târât spre tejghea să plătesc lămâile și lipiile cu economiile <u>tatei (F)</u> . (p. 7)	(FR 1) Constatant que les rayons sont vraiment vides, je me dirige vers la caisse pour régler mes achats grâce aux économies de Baba. (p. 5)
From whatever he was able to withdraw before that fateful day. (p. 10)	<u>Erau tot ce reușise să retragă</u> (L) înainte de acea zi fatidică. (p. 7)	Tout ce qu'il a réussi à mettre de côté avant le jour fatal. (p. 5)
By now it's probably encoded in my DNA. (p. 11)	E scris <u>în ADN-ul meu de-acum</u> . (SYN) & (P) (p. 8)	Il doit déjà être encodé dans mon ADN. (p. 6)
All of that was remedied as the first body was laid out before me to be stitched up (p. 11)	Totul s-a rezolvat când mi-au pus în față primul corp de suturat. (WF/PS) (p. 8)	On m'a confié mon premier corps à recoudre et j'ai appris sur le tas. (p. 6)
I finally catch sight of my home and my chest expands. (p. 13)	În sfârșit, se vede casa mea. Mi se ia o greutate de pe piept. (P) & (COH) (p. 10)	Enfin, j'aperçois ma destination et mon cœur se gonfle. (p. 8)
She painted the kitchen white to contrast with shelves made from walnut wood. (p. 13)	A zugrăvit bucătăria în alb să facă contrast cu rafturile din lemn de nuc. (OTH-ME) (p. 10)	Elle a repeint la cuisine en blanc pour faire ressortir les étagères en noyer. (p. 8)
“Is the baby kicking?” (p. 14)	Lovește copilul? (AMB) (p. 11)	– Le bébé te donne des coups ? (p. 9)
I want my family. I just want my family back. (p. 16)	Vreau familia mea. Vreau înapoi familia mea. (SYN) (p. 13)	Je veux ma famille. C'est tout ce que je veux ; qu'on me rende ma famille. (p. 11)
I saved her older brother from sepsis (p. 17)	Eu îl salvam pe fratele ei mai mare de la septicemie. (L) (p. 14)	pendant que je sauvais son frère d'un choc septique (p. 12)
“It's not that easy, Khawf,” I hiss (p. 20)	Nu e aşa simplu, Khawf, scuip (AMB) (p. 19)	Ce n'est pas si facile, je siffle. (p. 15)
They're both wearing coats with the Syrian Revolution flag hanging over one shoulder. (p. 23)	Amândoi poartă peste paltoane steagul revoluției siriene atârnând pe un umăr. (SYN) (p. 23)	Ils portent tous les deux le drapeau de la révolution syrienne sur l'épaule. (p. 19)
“You're leaving now?” I ask Hamza, my voice breaking. (p. 25)	Plec acum? Îl întreb pe Hamza <u>cu glas spart</u> . (FA) (p. 25)	Puis j'interroge Hamza d'une voix tremblante : – Vous partez maintenant ? (p. 22)

I have replayed this conversation in my mind on a loop until the words scramble together. (p. 29)	Mi-am repetat în minte conversația asta de atât de multe ori până când cuvintele au început să se amesteece unul cu celălalt. (P) (p. 30)	Je me suis repassé cette conversation en boucle, jusqu'à ce que les mots se mélangent dans mon esprit. (p. 28)
Anger and sadness intertwine through my heart, latching to my deteriorating bones. (p. 30)	Furia și tristețea mi se împletește în inimă, agățându-mi-se de oasele în deteriorare. (L) (p. 31)	La colère et la tristesse me déchirent le cœur, me rongent jusqu'à l'os. (p. 29)
"Go away," I whimper (p. 31)	Pleacă, mă smiorcăi (MU) (p. 31)	– Va-t'en, je gémis. (p. 30)
It's bustling as usual, the groans and cries of the wounded echoing over the walls. (p. 32)	E aglomerat, ca de obicei, pereții <u>fac ecou</u> <u>gemetelor și strigătelor răniților</u> . (U) (p. 32)	Les couloirs résonnent de grognements et de cris de douleur. (p. 31)
Bombs mean anything could come through these doors. (p. 35)	Bombe înseamnă că pe ușile astea poate intra orice. (p. 35) (SYN)	Avec les bombes, il faut s'attendre au pire. (p. 33)
The sight of bone jutting from skin makes the acid in my stomach rise to my throat, burning. (p. 36)	La vedea osului care ieșe prin piele <u>sunt cum mi se ridică bila în gât</u> . (p. 36) (U)	La vue de l'os qui dépasse de la chair fait remonter de la bile dans ma gorge. (p. 35)
But today, a whisper echoes in my brain. (p. 37)	Însă astăzi, <u>mi se strecoară o soaptă-n cap</u> . (p. 37) (U)	Mais, cette fois, une petite voix s'élève dans mon cerveau (p. 35)
to sail away on a boat to another continent that many of us have only read about in books. (p. 38)	Pentru a pleca pe o barcă spre un alt continent despre care mulți dintre noi au auzit doar din cărți. (p. 39) (G)	pour embarquer à bord d'un bateau, en direction d'un continent que nous ne connaissons que par les livres. (p. 36)
Nevertheless, I stand on unsteady legs as Dr. Ziad throws a white sheet over the bodies. (p. 43)	Și cu toate acestea, când doctorul Ziad acoperă copurile cu un cearșaf alb, mă ridic și picioarele îmi sunt ferme. (p. 44) (U)	Je me force néanmoins à me lever pendant que le Dr Ziad recouvre les deux corps d'un drap blanc. (p. 41)
It was a quiet day, a good day where hopes and dreams would be traded. Where sweet childhood memories would be revisited. (p. 46)	Era o zi calmă, numai bună să visezi și să speri. Să povestești istorii din copilărie. (p. 47) (P) & (U)	C'était une journée paisible, le genre de journée heureuse durant laquelle on évoque ses rêves, ses espoirs, ses souvenirs d'enfance. (p. 44)
With her being an only child and me an only daughter, we'd forged that relationship on our own. (p. 47)	Ea era singură la părinți, iar eu, singura fată din familie. Ne-am apropiat una de cealaltă singure. p. 47 (AMB)	Comme elle était enfant unique et moi la seule fille de ma famille, on était chacune devenue la sœur de l'autre. (p. 45)
my stomach rattles about like an empty drum (p. 48)	Îmi chiorăie stomacul ca o tobă (p. 48) (U)	Mon estomac gronde. (p. 45)

I ball my hands into fists (p. 51)	Îmi fac mâinile pumn (p. 52) (U)	Je serre les poings (p. 49)
Don't you believe I'm some sort of a defense mechanism? (p. 54)	Nu ești tu convinsă că sunt eu fel de mecanism de apărare? (p. 55) (SYN) (UNF)	Rappelle-toi, je ne suis qu'un mécanisme de défense de ton cerveau. (p. 52)
Extreme thirst can only mean one thing. (p. 56)	Senzația de foarte sete înseamnă un singur lucru. (p. 58) (U)	Une soif intense ne peut signifier qu'une chose. (p. 55)
Do all six-year-olds know what death is? Or is it only children of war? (p. 57)	Să știe copiii de șase ani ce este moarte? sau doar copiii războiului? (p. 59) (SYN)	Est-ce que tous les enfants de six ans comprennent ce qu'est la mort ? Ou seulement ceux qui ont connu la guerre ? (p. 56)
"My sister," he begins in a forced calm tone. A vein pounds in his throat. (p. 60)	Sora mea, începe fortându-se să pronunțe cuvintele calm. Pe gât i se vede o venă pulsând. (p. 62) (P)	C'est ma sœur, reprend-il, une veine palpitant sur sa gorge à cause de ses efforts pour rester calme. (p. 59)
I wasn't supposed to cut into children's stomachs in their homes. (p. 64)	Nu să tai copii în viu la ei acasă (p. 67) (U)	Pas ouvrir le ventre des enfants au milieu de leur salon. (p. 64)
It would sound like an empty threat coming from anyone else (p. 75)	Din gura altcuiva ar suna a amenințare goală (p. 75) (U)	Venant de n'importe qui d'autre, ces mots sonneraient comme une menace en l'air (p. 73)
I try not to imagine Layla's eyes widening at this juicy piece of information. (p. 74)	Încerc să nu mă gândesc la ce reacție va avea Layla când va afla această informație suculentă. (p. 76) (U)	J'imagine Layla ouvrant de grands yeux lorsqu'elle l'apprendra (p. 74)
I can see his real face behind the fragments he's had to glue back together over and over again. (p. 75)	Pot vedea adevărata sa față dincolo de bucățile de sine sparte pe care a trebuit să le lipească la loc de mai multe ori la rând. (p. 78) (P) & (U)	je me rends compte qu'il est aussi perdu et brisé que moi. (p. 75)
he replies slowly (p. 75)	Întreabă pe un toc scăzut. (p. 78) (SP)	- [omission] p. 75
This is a specialty shared by all Syrians. (p. 76)	E ceva ce fac toți oamenii din Siria (p. 79) (U)	C'est un talent que partagent tous les Syriens. (p. 76)
He straightens (p. 77)	Se îndreaptă din spinare (p. 80) (U)	Il se redresse (p. 77)
We held our heads high and planted lemon trees in acts of defiance, praying that when they came for us, it'd be a bullet to the head. (p. 81)	Am ținut capul sus și, în semn de sfidare, am plantat arbori de lămâi, rugându-ne ca <u>atunci să ajungă la noi numai sub forma unui glont în cap</u> . (p. 85) (C)	Mais nous avions tenu bon. La tête haute, nous avions planté des citronniers en signe de défiance, priant pour que, le jour venu, on nous fasse la grâce d'une balle dans le crâne. (p. 83)

The Arab proverb has never been truer: The worst of outcomes is what is most hilarious. (p. 83)	Are dreptate vorba aceea arăbească: facem haz de necaz. (p. 87) (F)	Le proverbe arabe n'a jamais été aussi vrai : « Le pire des scénarios est souvent le plus drôle. » (p. 85)
Yusuf hasn't even spoken (p. 84)	Yosuf nu mai scote o vorbă (p. 89) (SP)	Yusuf ne parle plus (p. 86)
I don't have time to analyze his tone or features. (p. 92)	n-am timp să-i analizez tonul sau <u>mina de pe chip</u> . (p. 97) (T)	Je n'ai pas le temps d'analyser le ton de sa voix ou son expression. (p. 94)
Yusuf can take care of things until I'm back. (p. 93)	Are Yosuf grijă de totul până mă întorc (p. 97) (G)	Yusuf surveillera la maison jusqu'à mon retour. (p. 94)
If you're staying, then don't throw your life away. They both need to be allowed to be children. (p. 97)	Dacă stai aici, atunci nu arunca la gunoi viața lor. ... Trebuie să aibă voie să fie doar doi copii. (p. 101) (G) & (AMB)	Si tu veux vraiment rester, tu ne dois prendre aucun risque. ... On doit leur permettre de redevenir des enfants. (p. 98)
If life were normal, it would have been part of my daily duties to update Dr. Ziad. (p. 111)	Dacă viața noastră ar fi fost una normală, parte dintre îndatoririle mele zilnice ar fi fost să-l informez pe doctorul Ziad. (p. 116) (G)	Si on menait une vie normale, ce serait moi qui tiendrais le Dr Ziad informé (p. 113)
I start working, thanking God this is my thousandth neck suture so I'm able to make it quick and without wasting a huge amount of blood. (p. 121)	Mulțumindu-i lui Dumnezeu că am de făcut mii de ori asta cât să termin imediat, fără prea multă pierdere de sânge (p. 127) (SYN)	Remerciant Dieu de m'avoir déjà fait recoudre des centaines de coups. Ainsi, je peux agir rapidement et limiter la perte de sang. (p. 123)
He glances back at me and I can see him fighting with himself not to ask the million questions teetering on his tongue. (p. 128)	Mă privește la rândul său și văd cum se luptă cu sine ca să nu-mi pună <u>milionul de întrebări care-i stau pe vârful limbii</u> . (p. 135) (U)	Je me rends compte qu'il se retient de me poser le million de questions qui se bousculent sur ses lèvres. (p. 130)
I was floating! In water! Without any effort! (p. 140)	Pluteam ! în apă! fără să mișc din deget ! (p. 146) (U)	Je flottais ! Sur l'eau ! Sans faire le moindre effort ! (p. 142)
What am I going to do with him. (p. 141)	Ce-o să mă fac eu el?! (p. 146) (SP)	Qu'est-ce que je vais faire de lui ? (p. 143)
it's better than staying here (p. 142)	E mai bine, decât să rămâi aici. (p. 148) (P)	C'est toujours mieux que ce qui t'attend ici, conclut-il. (p. 144)
The female guests are scattered all over (p. 142)	Femeile invitate la nuntă sunt împrăștiate pe peste tot (p. 149) (G)	Les femmes discutent par petits groupes (p. 144)
Her long auburn hair is in soft curls cascading down her back, with the white roses and baby's breath I	Părul lung și arămuș îi cade pe spate într-o cascadă de bucle, are prinse în cozi trandafiri mici albi și <u>floarea</u>	Ses longs cheveux auburn retombent en boucles souples dans son dos, ornés des roses blanches et du

picked out for her woven between the tresses. (p. 142)	<u>mireasei</u> . (p. 149) (P), (SP) & (O)	gypsophile que j'ai cueilli pour elle. (p. 145)
At least in Germany, you'll be miles away from the reminders. (p. 145)	În Germania, măcar, vei fi la kilometri distanță de aducerea aminte. (p. 152) (P) & (U)	Mais en Allemagne, tu seras à des milliers de kilomètre de tout ça. (p. 147)
And then you pass and get certificates of honor while we sit here contemplating your murder. (p. 147)	Apoi ieși examenul și diplomă de onoare în timp ce noi stăm aici imaginându-ne cum să te ucidem (p. 154) (P) & (ST)	Et après, tu cartonnes, et nous on reste là avec nos envies de meurtre. (p. 149)
I bandage and soothe. (p. 153)	Bandajează și alin. (p. 161) (T)	Je pose des bandages, je réconforte. (p. 155)
I look around and all I see is red and gray, figures slumped over one another and the miasma of despair clinging to the air. (p. 154)	Mă uit în jurul meu și tot ce văd e roșu sau gri, figură prăbușite unele peste altele și miasma disperării agățată în aer. (p. 162) (U)	Autour de moi, je ne distingue qu'un halo gris et rouge, des silhouettes courbées les unes sur les autres et une odeur de désespoir. (p. 162)
No. Starved. (p. 156)	Nu. Afecțat de foame. (p. 165) (U)	Pas juste mince. Affamé. (p. 159)
stare at them and imagine that might life (p. 157)	Le fixez cu privirea imaginându-mi viața care ar fi putut fi (p. 164) (U)	Je les contemple en me perdant dans de nouveaux « et si » (p. 158)
Bright orange petals. (p. 163)	Petale portocalii strălucitor (p. 172) (G)	Pétales orange vif. (p. 165)
The world would be his oyster (p. 164)	Lumea ar fi fost scoica lui (p. 174) (U)	Le monde s'offrirait à lui (p. 166)
It looks... haunting. (p. 165)	Arată...devastant (p. 175) (T)	C'est... magnifique. (p. 167)
I blink (p. 171)	Clipesc incredulă. (p. 181) (T)	- [omission] (p. 172)
I stop talking because the way he's staring at me is making butterflies flap their wings in my stomach. (p. 171)	Mă opresc din vorbit pentru că felul în care mă privește mă face să simt că-mi fâlfâie fluturi în stomac. (p. 182) (P) & (U)	Je m'arrête là, car son regard provoque en moi un envol de papillons. (p. 173)
I sort through the problems (p. 179)	Scotocesc mental printre probleme (p. 190) (U)	Je passe mes problèmes en revue (p. 181)