

TRANSLATION OF PRAGMATIC MARKERS IN LITERARY TEXTS

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Abstract. Pragmatic markers (PMs) — also known as discourse markers — play a subtle yet significant role in shaping meaning, coherence, speaker attitude, and interactional tone in spoken and written discourse. Their presence in literary texts, especially in dialogue and character development, is crucial to maintaining the stylistic, cultural, and communicative authenticity of the source. However, translating pragmatic markers poses considerable challenges due to their context-dependent meanings, multifunctionality, and culture-specific use. This article explores the nature of pragmatic markers, their narrative functions in literature, and the difficulties of preserving them in translation. It also examines strategies translators can employ to render these elements effectively and provides illustrative examples across language pairs.

Keywords: Pragmatic markers, discourse markers, literary translation, equivalence, context, culture, translation strategies.

INTRODUCTION

In literary translation, attention is often focused on rendering plot, imagery, and character voice, but a crucial layer that underpins all these elements — pragmatic markers — is frequently overlooked or undertranslated. Pragmatic markers (such as well, you know, I mean, anyway, actually, sort of, right, etc.) serve various discourse functions: they organize conversation, signal turn-taking, mitigate statements, and index the speaker’s attitude or interpersonal stance. In literary narratives, especially in character dialogue, these markers contribute to voice authenticity, register, and realism. Their omission or mistranslation can flatten character portrayal, distort tone, or disrupt the narrative flow.

This article investigates the translational implications of pragmatic markers in literary texts. It examines their functional complexity, sociolinguistic variation, and cultural embeddedness, and provides a methodological overview of how professional translators can preserve their meaning and narrative value.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Pragmatic markers are words or phrases that do not change the propositional content of an utterance but modify how it is interpreted. In literary texts, they frequently

appear in dialogue and free indirect speech, serving as tools for expressing hesitation, emphasis, contrast, transition, or interpersonal alignment.

For example, in the line [1]:

“Well, I didn’t exactly expect you to say that,” she murmured.

The word *well* functions as a hedging device, marking a shift in expectation and softening the tone. Removing it might render the character’s speech more abrupt or emotionally flat. In literary style, such subtle nuances are vital for creating believable, psychologically rich characters.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One aspect that further complicates the translation of pragmatic markers in literary texts is genre sensitivity. Pragmatic markers do not operate uniformly across genres; their frequency, function, and stylistic acceptability vary considerably in prose fiction, drama, poetry, and children’s literature. In contemporary novels and plays, especially those written in a conversational or stream-of-consciousness style, pragmatic markers serve to simulate natural speech, reveal psychological states, and embed social nuance. In contrast, classical prose or high literary styles may use these markers more sparingly, often for intentional disruption or emphasis. A translator’s sensitivity to the genre-specific function of pragmatic markers is therefore essential in maintaining both the tone and the stylistic register of the original work [2].

For example, in dramatic texts, such as Harold Pinter’s plays, pragmatic markers like *well*, *you know*, *right*, or even strategic silences represented by ellipses and dashes function as critical carriers of subtext, tension, and interpersonal conflict. Translating such elements literally — or omitting them for the sake of fluency — may erase the dramatic texture that defines the genre’s communicative ethos. The translator must thus approach such markers not as optional accessories but as dramatic tools requiring performative equivalence in the target language [3].

Another underexplored dimension in the translation of pragmatic markers is stylistic variation across character types and narrative layers. In multi-character novels, for instance, pragmatic markers often serve to differentiate sociolects, generational speech, and interpersonal roles. A teenager might frequently use hedging and filler expressions (like, *you know*, *I guess*) that reflect social insecurity or informality, while an older, more authoritative character might favor more assertive or directive markers (so, look, listen). These distinctions contribute to voice authenticity and social realism.

Translators must carefully replicate this stylistic variation in the target language without homogenizing voices or diluting social nuance. This is especially challenging in languages with more rigid formal registers or limited equivalents for casual discourse markers. In such cases, translational creativity becomes indispensable. This involves adapting tone through syntax, punctuation, rhythmic choices, or culturally familiar expressions that serve a similar pragmatic purpose. For instance, in the absence

of an equivalent for English well, a translator might choose an interjection (eh, hmm) or a shift in sentence ordering to simulate hesitation or preface [4].

CONCLUSION

Pragmatic markers, though often overlooked in translation, are essential to the integrity of literary texts. They shape character voice, establish interpersonal tone, and reflect culture-specific modes of communication. Their translation requires a nuanced, context-sensitive approach grounded in both linguistic insight and literary sensibility. As literary translation continues to evolve beyond word-for-word rendering toward a more holistic representation of meaning, pragmatic markers deserve central attention in both research and practice. The translator, in this sense, must become not just a mediator of words, but an interpreter of intentions, moods, and social dynamics encoded in every utterance.

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