

BORROWING STRATEGY IN SCIENCE FICTION TRANSLATION

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Abstract

Borrowing is a crucial strategy in the translation of science fiction literature, allowing translators to preserve the originality and innovative linguistic features of source texts. By directly importing terms, neologisms, or culturally specific expressions from the source language, translators maintain lexical fidelity and stylistic authenticity. This article examines the theoretical foundations and practical applications of borrowing in science fiction translation. Through case studies of notable works, the study illustrates both the advantages and potential challenges of borrowing, including reader comprehension and consistency. The findings highlight that strategic borrowing enhances narrative integrity and supports the international dissemination of science fiction.

Keywords: Science Fiction, Borrowing, Translation Strategy, Neologisms, Lexical Fidelity, Cultural Mediation

Introduction

Science fiction (SF) literature often features inventive terminology, futuristic concepts, and culturally embedded elements. Translating such texts presents unique challenges: should the translator adapt terms for the target language or retain them in their original form?

Borrowing, as a translation strategy, directly incorporates words or expressions from the source language into the target text. This approach allows translators to preserve the speculative and stylistically innovative qualities of science fiction, while also exposing readers to the linguistic creativity of the original author.

This article explores the role of borrowing in SF translation, its benefits, challenges, and practical implementation strategies.

Theoretical Background of Borrowing

Borrowing is a well-established strategy in translation studies, particularly in handling neologisms, technical terminology, and culture-specific items. According to Newmark (1988), borrowing is appropriate when:

- The term is widely recognized in the source language community.
- No equivalent exists in the target language.
- The term carries cultural or stylistic significance essential to the narrative.

In science fiction, borrowing is particularly valuable due to the genre's frequent creation of new words and futuristic concepts.

Advantages of Borrowing in SF Translation

1. Preservation of Neologisms

Neologisms in science fiction, such as “cyberspace” or “terraforming,” often lack equivalents in the target language. Borrowing retains the originality and conceptual specificity of these terms.

2. Maintaining Authorial Style

Authors often craft a distinctive language to shape speculative worlds. Borrowed terms preserve stylistic consistency, enabling readers to experience the text as intended.

3. Cultural and Conceptual Mediation

Borrowing allows translators to retain culturally or conceptually significant elements, which can then be clarified with glossaries or footnotes, preserving both meaning and immersion.

Challenges of Borrowing

1. **Reader Comprehension:** Excessive borrowing may confuse readers unfamiliar with the source language.
2. **Phonetic and Orthographic Adaptation:** Borrowed words may need adjustment for pronunciation or writing systems.
3. **Consistency:** Maintaining uniform use of borrowed terms across a series or text is critical to prevent disorientation.

Practical Strategies for Effective Borrowing

1. **Selective Borrowing:** Only borrow terms essential for meaning or style.
2. **Supplementary Notes:** Use footnotes or glossaries to explain unfamiliar terms.
3. **Phonetic Adaptation:** Slightly adjust borrowed terms to align with the target language’s phonetics.
4. **Consistency Checks:** Maintain uniform usage throughout the text or series.

Case Studies

1. William Gibson’s “Neuromancer”

Key terms like “cyberspace” and “console cowboy” were borrowed in translations to maintain the cyberpunk aesthetic. Glossaries were used to ensure reader comprehension.

2. Liu Cixin’s “The Three-Body Problem”

Terms such as “sophon” and scientific concepts were borrowed and accompanied by brief explanations to balance accessibility and fidelity.

Impact on Reader Engagement

When applied strategically, borrowing enhances the authenticity of the text, preserves the author’s innovative language, and increases global accessibility of science fiction literature. Improper use, however, risks alienating readers or disrupting narrative flow.

Conclusion

Borrowing is a vital strategy in science fiction translation, particularly for preserving neologisms, technical terminology, and stylistically unique elements. Translators must balance fidelity and readability by using selective borrowing, glossaries, phonetic adaptation, and consistent terminology. Properly implemented, borrowing enhances narrative integrity, preserves authorial voice, and facilitates international readership.

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