



SYNTACTIC AND STYLISTIC FEATURES OF THE USAGE OF INDICATIVE VERB TENSES IN LITERARY TRANSLATION

Zaripova Feruza Shavkatovna

Lecturer at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy

Abstract

This article examines the syntactic and stylistic features of the use of indicative verb tenses in literary translation. Particular attention is paid to the role of tense forms in preserving the semantic content, artistic imagery, temporal relations, and stylistic nuances of the original text. The study analyzes the challenges translators face when rendering tense systems across languages with different grammatical structures and literary traditions. The research demonstrates that the appropriate selection of indicative tense forms is essential for maintaining narrative coherence, authorial style, and the communicative effect of literary works in translation.

Keywords: Literary translation, indicative mood, verb tenses, syntax, stylistics, translation studies, narrative structure, temporal relations, equivalence, linguistic transformation.

Introduction

Literary translation is a complex linguistic and cultural process that requires not only the transfer of lexical meaning but also the preservation of stylistic, syntactic, and pragmatic characteristics of the source text. Among the numerous grammatical categories involved in translation, verb tense occupies a particularly significant position because it serves as one of the primary means of expressing temporal relations, narrative perspective, and artistic expression.

In literary discourse, indicative verb tenses perform multiple functions. Beyond indicating chronological sequence, they contribute to the creation of atmosphere, characterization, emotional intensity, and narrative rhythm. Authors often manipulate tense forms to achieve specific stylistic effects, such as immediacy, retrospection, suspense, or psychological depth. Consequently, translators must

 WORLD BULLETIN PUBLISHING <small>Online Publishing Hub</small>	<h1 style="text-align: center;">World Bulletin of Education and Learning (WBEL)</h1>
ISSN (E): 3072-175X	Volume 2, Issue 5, May 2026
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https://worldbulletin.org/index.php/1	

carefully consider both grammatical and stylistic factors when selecting equivalent tense forms in the target language.

The issue becomes especially important when translating between languages with different tense systems. English, for example, possesses a highly developed system of aspectual and temporal distinctions, while many other languages express temporal relations through alternative grammatical or contextual means. As a result, literal reproduction of tense forms may not always ensure stylistic equivalence or communicative adequacy.

Translation theorists such as Eugene Nida, Peter Newmark, Roman Jakobson, and Mona Baker have emphasized that grammatical categories should be interpreted within their textual and communicative contexts rather than translated mechanically. In literary translation, the translator's task is not merely to reproduce grammatical forms but to preserve the artistic function they perform within the narrative structure.

The relevance of this study is determined by the growing interest in the interaction between grammar and literary style in translation studies. Understanding the syntactic and stylistic behavior of indicative verb tenses contributes to the development of more effective translation strategies and enhances the quality of literary translation. The purpose of this research is to investigate the syntactic and stylistic functions of indicative verb tenses in literary texts and to analyze their representation in translation.

Main part

Scientific Analysis and Discussion

The category of tense is one of the most important grammatical phenomena in literary translation because it directly influences the representation of time, narrative perspective, and stylistic effect. In literary texts, indicative verb tenses perform not only grammatical functions but also aesthetic, expressive, and pragmatic functions. Consequently, translators must carefully analyze tense usage in the source text to preserve both meaning and artistic value in the target language.

According to Roman Jakobson, literary translation involves the transfer of both linguistic meaning and stylistic function. Therefore, grammatical categories

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such as tense should not be translated mechanically. Instead, translators should focus on the communicative role that a particular tense form plays within the narrative structure.

Narrative Function of Indicative Tenses

One of the primary functions of indicative tenses in literary discourse is the organization of narrative time. Authors frequently manipulate tense forms to guide readers through different temporal dimensions.

For example, in English literary prose the Simple Past is commonly used as the principal narrative tense:

“She opened the window and looked at the empty street.”

The sequence of actions creates a chronological narrative progression. When translating this sentence into many languages, including Uzbek or Russian, the translator often preserves the past-time reference while adapting the syntax to the norms of the target language.

However, literary authors sometimes shift from past to present tense for stylistic purposes:

“She opened the window. Suddenly she sees a shadow moving outside.”

This phenomenon is known as the historical present.

According to Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short, the historical present creates immediacy and dramatic tension, making readers feel as though events are unfolding before their eyes. Translators must therefore determine whether the same stylistic effect can be achieved in the target language or whether another narrative device is required.

Tense Shifts and Stylistic Effects

The relationship between syntax and stylistics becomes particularly evident when authors intentionally change tense forms.

Mona Baker argues that tense shifts often function as discourse markers rather than purely grammatical structures. They may indicate:

- emotional intensity;
- psychological involvement;
- temporal transition;
- narrative focus.

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<p>ISSN (E): 3072-175X</p>	<p>Volume 2, Issue 5, May 2026</p>
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Consider the following example:

“For years he lived in silence. Then one day he realizes the truth.”

The shift from Past Simple to Present Simple emphasizes a turning point in the character’s life.

In translation, preserving such shifts is essential because they contribute to the author's stylistic intention. Failure to reproduce them may weaken the emotional impact of the text.

The Role of Present Tense in Literary Translation

Present tense frequently serves stylistic purposes beyond describing present actions.

Peter Newmark notes that the literary present often functions as a tool of vivid narration. It creates a sense of immediacy and psychological proximity.

Example:

“He walks through the forest, hears strange voices, and feels an unknown fear.”

Although the events may belong to the past, the present tense makes them more dynamic.

When translating such passages, translators face a choice:

1. Preserve the present tense;
2. Adapt it to the dominant narrative tense of the target language.

The decision depends on stylistic norms and reader expectations.

Past Tense as a Marker of Literary Narration

Past tense remains the most common narrative tense in world literature.

According to M.A.K. Halliday, past tense serves not only to indicate completed actions but also to establish narrative distance between the narrator and events.

For instance:

“The old man sat by the fire and remembered his youth.”

The use of Past Simple creates a reflective atmosphere.

In translation, the preservation of such temporal distancing contributes to maintaining the original tone and emotional coloring of the text.

Charles Dickens, Leo Tolstoy, and Ernest Hemingway extensively employed past tense narration to create realistic depictions of events and characters.

Perfect Tenses and Their Translation

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One of the most challenging aspects of literary translation involves English perfect forms.

Example:

“She had never seen such beauty before.”

The Past Perfect indicates an action completed before another past event.

According to Eugene Nida, perfect forms often contain implicit temporal relations that may not have direct grammatical equivalents in other languages.

Consequently, translators frequently employ lexical means to convey these meanings.

For example:

“She had already left.”

may be translated using adverbs such as:

- already,
- previously,
- before,
- by that time,

depending on the target language structure.

The translator’s objective is to preserve the sequence of events rather than merely reproduce grammatical form.

Future Tense and Character Perspective

Future tense frequently contributes to character development and thematic construction.

Example:

“I will return one day.”

This sentence may express:

- prediction,
- determination,
- promise,
- hope.

The stylistic interpretation depends on context.

Lawrence Venuti emphasizes that translators should identify the pragmatic intention behind future forms before selecting an equivalent structure.

For example:

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“You will regret this.”

may function as:

- a prediction,
- a threat,
- an emotional reaction.

Each interpretation requires a different stylistic approach in translation.

Psychological Narrative and Tense Usage

Modernist literature often employs complex tense systems to represent human consciousness.

Virginia Woolf and James Joyce frequently combined present, past, and perfect forms within a single paragraph.

Example:

“She sits quietly. She remembers the summer. She has forgotten so much.”

The alternation of tense forms reflects the flow of thought and memory.

According to Dorrit Cohn, such temporal structures serve as linguistic representations of consciousness.

Translators must therefore preserve not only the temporal reference but also the psychological function of tense variation.

Stylistic Equivalence in Literary Translation

Eugene Nida introduced the concept of dynamic equivalence, arguing that successful translation should reproduce the same effect on target readers as the original text produces on source readers.

This principle is particularly relevant to tense translation.

Consider the example:

“He is coming!”

Grammatically, this is Present Continuous. Stylistically, however, it may express urgency or excitement.

The translator's task is not simply to reproduce the grammatical form but to recreate the emotional effect.

Similarly:

“I was wondering if you could help me.”

Although grammatically past, this structure functions as a polite request.

Direct literal translation may fail to preserve its communicative purpose.

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Comparative Perspective

Research conducted by Catford, Baker, and Newmark demonstrates that languages differ significantly in their treatment of tense systems.

English possesses:

- Present Simple;
- Present Continuous;
- Present Perfect;
- Past Perfect;
- Future Perfect;

and other analytical forms.

Many languages rely more heavily on contextual indicators, lexical markers, and discourse structure.

Therefore, literary translators frequently apply:

- transposition;
- modulation;
- grammatical transformation;
- contextual adaptation.

These strategies allow them to maintain stylistic equivalence while respecting target-language norms.

The analysis demonstrates that indicative verb tenses function as both grammatical and stylistic devices in literary texts. They shape narrative perspective, organize temporal relations, reveal character psychology, and contribute to artistic expression. Consequently, successful literary translation requires not only grammatical competence but also a deep understanding of stylistic and narrative functions. The translator must interpret tense forms as elements of the author's artistic strategy and recreate their communicative impact within the cultural and linguistic framework of the target language.

Conclusion

The analysis of indicative verb tenses in literary translation demonstrates that tense forms play a crucial role in preserving both the grammatical structure and artistic value of literary texts. They function not only as markers of temporal

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reference but also as important stylistic devices that contribute to narrative perspective, emotional expression, and textual cohesion.

The study confirms that successful literary translation requires a flexible approach to tense equivalence. Translators must consider the communicative function, narrative context, and stylistic purpose of tense forms rather than relying solely on formal grammatical correspondence. In many cases, maintaining the artistic effect of the original text may require grammatical transformation or adaptation in the target language.

Furthermore, the syntactic organization of literary discourse is closely connected with the use of indicative tenses. Changes in tense selection can influence narrative dynamics, character representation, and reader perception. Therefore, tense forms should be regarded as integral elements of literary style rather than purely grammatical structures.

In conclusion, the effective translation of indicative verb tenses is essential for achieving semantic accuracy, stylistic adequacy, and artistic equivalence. Future research may focus on comparative analyses of tense usage across different language pairs, genres, and literary traditions, contributing to a deeper understanding of the relationship between grammar, style, and translation.

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