Empathic Translation Theory: A 4-Dimensional Model for Emotionally Resonant Translation

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ABSTRACT

This research delves into the emotional and moral aspects of trauma narratives translation, especially those from conflict areas. Focusing on a real interview with the sister of a martyr, a civilian who was killed by an airstrike on the 8th of May. It presents and implements the Empathic Translation Theory, a four-dimensional framework consisting of Tone, Context, Emotion, and Perplexity. This research compares an empathic translation of the interview against a literal one through a qualitative, interpretive narrative method. The analysis shows that an empathic translation more successfully retains emotional fidelity, psychological depth, and socio-political complexity. It focuses on the emotional witness role of the translator in ethically presenting silence, fragmentation, and affective resonance. The research reinforces the inadequacy of conventional translation practices for trauma literature and calls for empathic, ethically informed practices. This study adds to trauma-informed translation theory and provides important insights for scholars and practitioners working with stories of loss, conflict, and displacement. The empathic translation appears not only as a research tool but as a mode of ethical engagement with vulnerable testimony.

Key Words: *Empathic Translation, Trauma Narratives, Ethical Translation*

INTRODUCTION

"*But the war goes on; and we will have to bind up for years to come the many, sometimes ineffaceable, wounds that the colonial onslaught has inflicted on our people*'' Fanon (1963, p. 200)

Translation is more than a linguistic operation; it is an act of cultural negotiation and emotional transmission. Translation, broadly defined, involves converting a text from a source language to a target language while preserving meaning, context, and intent (Saha, 2020). In reality, translation is more than semantics. Translation also acts to communicate human experiences in varied and complex ways across languages and cultures (Nazrullaeva, 2021).In an increasingly interconnected world, its role extends beyond diplomacy and commerce to emotionally charged domains such as trauma narratives, refugee testimonies, and spiritual texts.

These sensitive genres demand that translators navigate not only linguistic codes but also psychological realities and cultural subtleties (Hamasaeed & Hama, 2025). Despite the evolution of translation studies from Nida's (1964) dynamic equivalence to Vermeer's Skopos Theory (Abdelkarim, Alhaj, & Hakami, 2025) a significant gap remains underexplored: the preservation of emotional and psychological fidelity in translation. Traditional approaches often emphasize literal or functional accuracy, which can inadvertently strip emotionally dense texts of their affective depth (Ali, 2023). In trauma-specific contexts, such as war testimony or psychoanalytic discourse, much of the meaning takes form across silence, fragmented language, and metaphor that requires more than original or derivative translation (Rozmarin, 2017).

Recent studies on trauma narratives—particularly from Japanese, African, and Ukrainian contexts—demonstrate that without trauma-informed frameworks, translations often result in omissions, distortions, or emotional detachment (Gu, 2023, 2024; Gu & Yang, 2024; Mbonyingingo, Moiseyenko, & Mazin, 2023). These findings emphasize the need for translation strategies to have equivalency, not just in what is said but in how it is felt. So, the current paper introduces Empathic Translation Theory - a trauma-informed, ethics-based approach to translation intended to maintain emotional equivalence in translation. This four-dimensional model - "tone, context, emotion, and perplexity" - is grounded in psycholinguistics, trauma studies, and ethical translation practice and proposes a different conceptualization of the translator as an empathic witness growing from an emotional reality of the lived experience. The aim is to translate emotional determinants, even where the content is completely ideological. By doing so, this theory enables translators to carry both words and wounds across linguistic borders, preserving the emotional and cultural integrity of trauma narratives.

Objectives

1. Examine how emotional fidelity can be preserved in the translation of trauma narratives by applying **Empathic Translation Theory**.

2. Analyze the role of the four dimensions—**tone**, **context**, **emotion**, and **perplexity**—in enhancing the psychological and emotional depth of translated trauma texts, in contrast to traditional literal translation approaches.

Research Questions

1. How can emotional fidelity be preserved in the translation of trauma narratives through the application of **Empathic Translation Theory**?

2. In what ways do the dimensions of **tone**, **context**, **emotion**, and **perplexity** enhance the psychological and emotional depth of translated texts when compared to literal translation methods?

LITERATURE REVIEW

"Bringing together the words <u>language, trauma, and translation</u> invites one to think about the demise of humankind's greatest attribute" (Pillen, 2016).

The word *translation* comes from the same root as words like *transmission*, *transference*, and *traverse*. These all suggest movement—carrying something from one place or state to another. This shows that translation is more than just changing one language into another. It involves shifting meaning, emotions, and, sometimes, deeply personal experiences (Pestre & Benslama, 2011).

Translation studies have been considered in many ways over time. The early concepts were restricted to equivalence—finding an exact counterpart in meaning—and function which examined how a translation works in its new context. In recent discussions of translation studies, there are more emerging scholarship that consider translation as cultural and political as well as story-based. Translation is now seen as an action that carries intentionality and beliefs or personal worldviews from one language and culture to another.

More so, many of the theories still do not recognize the emotional and psychological weight of the texts we work with, especially texts that have been affected by trauma. In an intricate cultural or political situation, translation is more than just the words. Translation carries the movement of pain, memory, and emotion. Pestre and Benslama (2011) note that within the context of trauma, translation is transmission. In this mode of action, something of the person—the subject—comes to the fore. This movement allows the trauma to be encountered, given form, and potentially made sense of through language.

Eugene Nida's concept of dynamic equivalence was a significant shift in thinking from word-for-word methods of translation. Instead of focusing only on literal accuracy, Nida suggested that translators aim for *thought-for-thought* translation. In this model, the goal is to create the same effect on the target audience that the original text had on its original readers. Attention to the reader's response is especially critical when translating words or ideas that have a strong tie to a particular culture. A straightforward literal translation in these cases will likely not carry the same emotional or literal meaning. This shows that a good translation is not just about being correct with words but about delivering the same message and emotional impact—even when translating across different times and cultures (Gao, 2023; Kim, 2015; Xiang, 2011).

Nida's distinction between formal and dynamic equivalence is important to understanding how translation practices have progressed. Formal equivalence is meant to preserve the structure and content of the original text as closely as possible, which can result in awkward or unnatural translations even when they maintain the meaning. Phrases commonly used in one culture can hold weight or significance in another, so following this strict formal equivalence process may not translate appropriately for the text's target audience. On the other hand, dynamic equivalence allows the translator to change the content so that it makes sense for a reader in a different language and cultural context (Othman, 2015). Some scholars also argue that too much flexibility leads to meaning being reduced as well. This leads to an ethical issue of how literal or faithful a translation has to be and how much it may adapt to new audiences. Although dynamic equivalence allows the translator to respond to and capture the emotional tone of the original, it still does not get to the importance of empathy or trauma-aware translation of sensitive texts.

Hans Vermeer's Skopos Theory (1978) introduced a functionalist approach that shifted the focus of translation from the original text to the purpose (Skopos) of the translation, thereby changing the understanding of translation. Vermeer contends that translation is a purpose-driven activity in which the translator makes decisions based on the anticipated needs of the target audience and uses the context of the translated text (Bao, 2024). The theory consists of three rules: The Skopos Rule, which states that all decisions about the translation must be based on the purpose of the Skopos; the Coherence Rule, which states that the translated text must be coherent in the target culture; and the Fidelity Rule, which states that translations should (but do not have to) relate to the original text, but this is regarded secondary to the purpose of the translation.

This functionalist model is instrumental when translating non-literary or functional texts (e.g., business, legal, functional, or technical texts) since translations in these genres prioritize meaning and function over style or emotional tone. However, still others stressed that taking a purpose- oriented approach could lead to the dismissal of the original text's psychological or emotional depth.

Skopos's theory is less suited for translating trauma narratives or emotionally rich literature, where understanding the inner world of the author or characters is essential. While it brought a significant shift by moving away from strict equivalence and toward functional goals in the target culture, it still does not fully address the need for empathy or emotional awareness in translation (Nedainova, 2021; Vermeer, 1989).

Building on the Skopos model, Reiss created a text typology that categorizes texts into four (4) functional genres: informative, expressive, operable, and imaginative (Romala & Setiajid, 2019). The idea here is that by classifying a text into one of the genres, the translator can determine a way to translate the text based on its primary function. For example, an expressive text such as poetry must consider style and emotional meaning. In contrast, informative texts often generate an emphasis on accuracy and factual clarity.

Reiss later joined Hans Vermeer to create a more thorough and complex framework that expanded the Skopos model. One of the developments was the idea of loyalty introduced by Christianne Nord. This notion of translator loyalty encourages translators to respect the intent of the original author while at the same time and responsibly consider the target audience needs (Nord, 2006). In a way, it balances the process of self-independence with a sense of responsible attitude towards the text the translator is departing from.

Despite its strengths, this functionalist model still tends to overlook the emotional and psychological layers of a text—especially in trauma-related or personal narratives. Focusing mainly on function risks missing the deeper cultural and emotional meanings that make such texts powerful. Scholars have also explored other models, such as Vinay and Darbelnet's comparative stylistics, Catford's translation shifts, House's functional-pragmatic model, and Toury's descriptive translation studies. Each of these offers valuable tools for analyzing translation—focusing on structure, shifts, or function—but they too often neglect emotional fidelity and the affective role of the translator (Safi, 2021; Safi & Nasser, 2022; Hani & Zainab, 2024).

Catford identifies two main types of translation shifts. The first is *level shifts*, which occur when a change happens between grammar and vocabulary. The second type is category shifts, which encompasses a range of subtypes, specifically structure shifts (where the grammatical structure changes), class shifts (where the word shifts class, such as from a noun into a verb), unit shifts (where the rank shifts, such as from phrase into clause), and intra-system shifts (where it takes falls or variations from plural to singular) (Rasyidie, 2024; Xie, 2023; Guo & Liu, 2025; Xiao & Hu, 2023).

While Catford's model serves for analyzing structural changes, in the sense of licensed equivalency, emotional or psychological equivalence is missing from consideration, which we would limit its application when describing texts that are emotional or psychological in nature.

Another framework that is prominent, and often applied, is House's functional-pragmatic model, which informs translation quality assessment.

This model examines how well the translated text maintains the original text's communicative purpose and context. It does so by comparing both the source and target texts in terms of *register*— which includes *field* (subject matter), *tenor* (relationships between participants), and *mode* (channel of communication)—as well as *genre* (text type). By pointing out mismatches in these aspects, the model can assist in understanding whether the translation could have altered the meaning or effect in significant ways (Kargarzadeh & Paziresh, 2017; Abalkheel & Abdulhamid, 2023; Thuy, 2013).

in theory, considering overt and covert translations is worthwhile. Overt translations usually maintain aspects of the foreign text, allowing recipients to appreciate it is a translation from another cultural context. Whereas, an overt translation will usually provide a form of naturalness for the target culture. Covert translations often resort to some form of cultural filter to account for the cultural differences and will produce more familiar and readable texts for the new audience (Kargarzadeh & Paziresh, 2017; Abalkheel & Abdulhamid, 2023).

A second perspective might be Toury's model, Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS). DTS focuses on not how translations ought to be, but how they are, in real situations. This methodological approach, developed by Gideon Toury, finds translations to be cultural products determined by the actions, norms, values, and expectations of the audience (Toury, 1995; Toury, 2012). Rather than striving for exact word-for-word fidelity, DTS shows that translators often make choices based on what works best in the new cultural context. This is an endorsement of a consciousness that literal translation can sometimes fall short, and that emotional and cultural equivalence may be as meaningful as fidelity for successful translation (Alhussein, 2020; Alsuhaim, 2024).

Feminist Translation Theory provides new insight into the discussion about fidelity in connection to emotion. While other concepts of fidelity demand a loyalty to the original text and the original author, feminist translators take a different perspective, seeing translation as a collaborative writing process where the voice and empathy, therefore emotional involvement of the translator matters. This makes sense, particularly when considering the range of emotions when discussing women's lived narratives and experiences, whereas emotions and cultures can be quite thick/rich (Jiaji, 2015; Cao, 2023). Feminist translators also remind us that emotions are not neutral and not universal; they are shaped by our gendered roles, cultural context, and systems of power. This means that translation is also responsible in the careful, sensitive measurement of both, the emotional labor of the original, as well as the lived cultural reality of the eventual target audience members (Cao, 2023; Reyes, 2019). And it is this reckoning that makes apparent the value of the translator's role as an active participant in interpreting and representing emotions bounded by identity, operation and voice.

One of the key developments in translation studies is Mona Baker's Narrative Theory of Translation, introduced in 2006. The premise of this theory argues that, while translators act as neutral messengers, they are also active participants, re-narrating the original textual message by placing ideological, cultural, or emotional positions (Frere et al., 2021). Baker explained, "translation is an act of reconstruction of stories which, in turn, shape different narratives (personal, public, concepts, and meta-narratives)" (Baker, 2017).

Baker's theory highlights the different narrative features of temporality (the ordering of the events, i.e., chronologically, non-chronologically), relationality (the relatedness of the characters or ideas), and selective appropriation (the framing of the narrative: what is made relevant and what is made less relevant). These reference points work together to provide a both understanding of and recognition of the difference of how narratives make sense and are experienced in various cultures and contexts. Also, Baker's theory is useful for examining texts that represent emotional, cultural, or political content, want to understand what ordering or how messages of cultural or political significance are translated. For instance, Translation as an Ideological Practice in Abulhawa's (2023) Mornings in Jenin, uses Baker's theory to show how translation either maintains dominant ideological narratives, or inconclusively challenges them.

Baker's framework provides emphasis on ethical responsibilities of the translator for recognizing their role in the constructed linguistic situation which shapes how trauma and emotionality is transmitted. Translators do not simply act as a linguistic conduit; instead, they shape how the people and experiences impacted by conflict are elevated or diminished depending on what frameworks are applied (Yang, 2022; Gu, 2024). Although Baker's framework allows for a consideration of the emotional and ideological aspects of translation, it does not adequately acknowledge the level of emotional engagement translation entails when working with texts about trauma, displacement, or psychological suffering. This presents a shortcoming even in discourse-oriented theories recognizing and potentially enabling the translator's affective and empathetic role in translating highly personal or traumatic texts.

The translator working with postcolonial literature often has ethical and emotional challenges when translating expressions of collective trauma or grief. An exemplar is Bharati Mukherjee's The Management

of Grief, where the translator is required to convey culturally embedded and emotion-laden experience to a new audience without stripping those experiences of culture and meaning (Alonso-Breto, 2021).

In postcolonial translation, safeguarding emotional fidelity entails more than utilizing the right words. It calls for translators to mobilize strategies that counter a high level of simplification, erasure, reduction or accommodation that is necessary to safeguard plurilingualism and cultural complexity. Rather, it asks the translator to retain the source culture's affective and linguistic landscape as much as they can (Hernández, 2021; Wedhowerti, 2023).

Trauma-informed translation is emerging practice that draws upon the principles of trauma- informed care—safety, trust, empowerment, and collaboration—to translate a document, particularly those that represent, or are written by, those who have experienced trauma. The framework recognizes the role trauma plays in language, storytelling, and experience. It also draws attention to how translators need to be conscious of the potential harm they can do through re-traumatization or misrepresentation while translating an experience of trauma into another language (Levenson, 2017, 2020). Instead of framing the author or client's words as language content, trauma-informed translation encourages translators to see these words as potential indicators of how someone is coping with pain or adversity. It emphasizes that translators should approach this work with empathy and respect, and be mindful of the power dynamics that are entailed in voicing another person's experience (Levenson, 2017; 2020).

All of the prominent theories on translation covered have provided good insights on the field. For instance, Nida's Dynamic Equivalence theory considers the reader's response in terms of the goal of translating. In terms of the goals of translating, the Skopos theory considers the purpose of the translation. Functional theories of translation introduced new text types and communicative functions among other things. Narrative theories used by Baker and others, explored ideology and storytelling aspect of performing translating. Yet still these theories do not account, as extensively in the literature, for the emotional, psychological, trauma and related aspects of translating texts in this way.

As such, this section intends to introduce Empathic Translation Theory (ETT) as a model that includes or supports a cognitive/emotional fidelity, psychological sensitivity and cultural awareness when translating sensitive, personal texts.

While existing models such as Nida's Formal and Dynamic Equivalence, Skopos Theory, and several cultural or ethical models can provide an effective means to ensure accuracy, purpose, and contextual understanding across cultures, they all have limitations and do not apply well to emotionally charged or trauma-based narratives. Existing models have dimensions focused on transferring meaning and maintaining function, yet they will miss the emotional depth and the psychological burden of the kinds of texts discussed above - testimonies of refugees, accounts of war, survivor autobiographies, and post-conflict poetry, for instance.

Empathic Translation Theory (ETT) - a systematic four-dimensional framework based on emotional equivalency, ethical responsibility, and trauma-informed practices - is suggested to fill this vital gap in existing translation models. It suggests that fidelity in translation, particularly for traumatic texts, should not be interpreted as solely lexical (the words themselves) or functional (the desired outcome). Fidelity should also consider the emotional and psychological experiences of the initially experienced narratives.

Empathic Translation Theory

The Empathic Translation Theory proposes that translation is not only a linguistic form of communication but also a moral and emotional responsibility. Therefore, the translator is not only a linguistic chain, but also an emotional witness. The translator has about the same role: transferring the trauma, sorrow,

hesitance, and silence of the original text into the target text while conveying the same emotional weight without distortion, oversimplification, or loss.

The Four Dimensions of Empathic Translation Theory:
Tone

The tone of a trauma narrative is often fragmented, subdued, heavy, or erratic—reflecting the speaker's emotional world. It goes beyond the binary of formal vs. informal. For instance, a survivor may use calm language to describe horrifying events—an emotional numbness that must not be lost in translation. The translator's job is to feel and keep that tone and ensure that the reader is experiencing that same emotional texture.

Context

Context is the reader's linguistic or cultural background and the personal, historical, and socio- political realities in which the text was created. In empathic translation, the translator must consider both the source and target contexts: What happened to the speaker? What does this phrase mean in the aftermath of war, displacement, or loss? What words in the target language can mirror that *same emotional and cultural resonance*?

Emotion

Emotion is at the heart of this theory. A translation is incomplete if the reader understands the content but *feels nothing*. The translator must ask: *Is the emotional impact of the original being recreated in the target language?* For example, does the reader feel the grief, hesitation, or silence of a mother describing the death of her child in war? Translators must choose language not only for its meaning but also for its emotional force.

Perplexity

Trauma narratives are rarely straightforward or neat. They can often contain signals of emotional or psychological disturbance, such as pauses, contradictions, silences, repeats, or fragmented syntax. In a regular translation, the "irregularities" would be considered bumps in the road, things to navigate and modify for clarity. An empathic translation sees these as important markers of trauma. Perplexity in this theory represents the translator's sensitivity to those moments of uncertainty, mental instability, or linguistic breakdown and the effort to preserve them faithfully.

Empathic Translation Theory argues that translation is more than simply transferring words. In fact, translation—especially in light of trauma—is regarded as a fundamentally human endeavor, one that requires ethical responsibility, emotional intelligence, and psychological understanding. By focusing on tone, context, affect, and bewilderment, the translator provides not only a linguistic link but also an important empathetic conduit through which the authentic experience of pain, loss, and survival may be communicated thoughtfully and appropriately. This model is notably prominent for texts that issue from conflict zones,
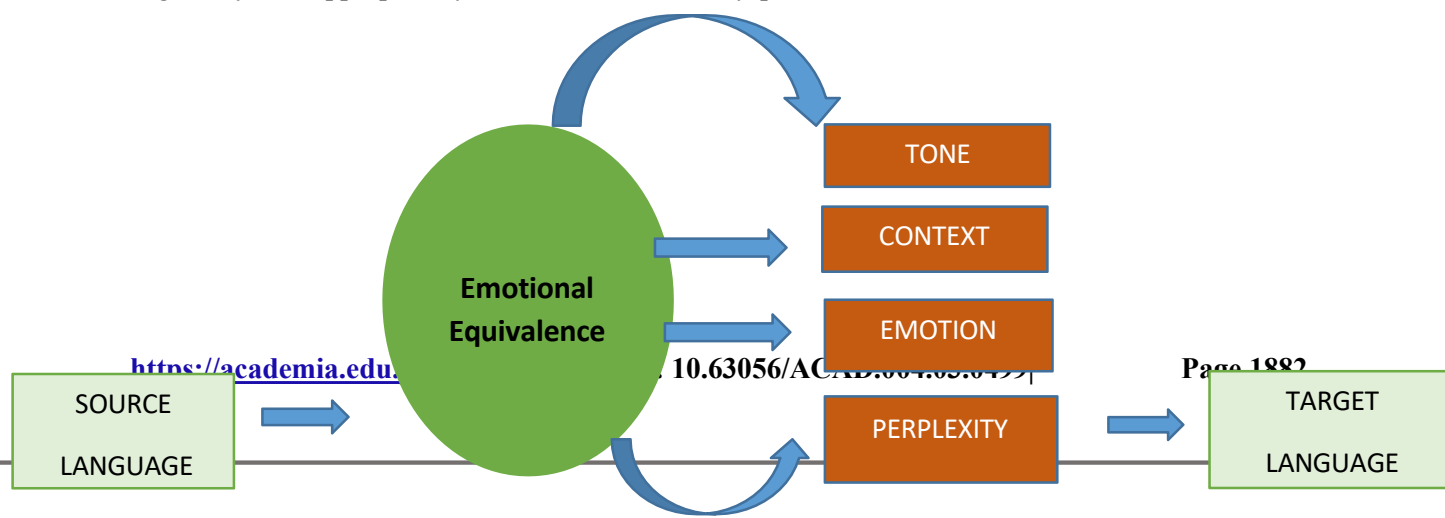
camps of displacement, or post-colonial struggles, where words are not only information—but wounds, memories, and demands for justice.

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive narrative case study design guided by a trauma- informed and discourse-sensitive approach. The data is taken from a publicly available interview conducted initially in Urdu with the sister of a martyr who lost his life in an airstrike on 8th May 2025. Although the researcher did not conduct the interview, it was ethically accessed via a Facebook post, providing valuable insight into a real-life trauma narrative.

The goal of this design is not to generalize but to understand the emotional and psychological layers embedded in a single, powerful testimony. Using the lens of Empathic Translation Theory, this study looks at emotional truth in translation, and how it can be maintained or lost. The interpretive perspective here emphasizes the speaker's words/listening tone, pauses, silences, and cultural expressions of grief. The translation is conceptualized as a language and moral undertaking, particularly significant when dealing with stories impacted by trauma.

Data Collection

The main data consists of a trauma narrative from a public interview available on Facebook. The original interview was in Urdu with a female sibling of a martyr who died in an airstrike. Shared online by a third party, the interview contains emotionally rich reflections on loss, memory, grief, and resilience.

Although the researcher was not directly involved in the interview, careful consideration was given to preserve the speaker's voice, dignity, and emotional depth. The narrative was selected because of its genuine nature and expressive nature, which importantly provides a strong case to apply Empathic Translation Theory (ETT). Availability to the public allowed us to ethically use the narrative, while also allowing analysis around affective aspects of trauma in translation.

Original Language of Interview:
Urdu Source: Public Facebook post

Participant Profile: Female, grieving sibling of a martyr

Type of Data: Secondary narrative with significant emotional content

This single narrative comprises the case of the study, allowing for an innovative exploration of how trauma is conveyed and transformed in translation.

Translation Procedure

For the English translation of the Urdu narrative, there were two separate approaches to allow for an evaluation of how trauma is presented and conveyed across languages. The two translation versions can offer a meaningful comparison from a grammatical and vocabulary perspective; but also from a more empathic view through Empathic Translation Theory (ETT).

Literal Translation (Control Version)
This translation employs a literal, or word-for-word, narrative and grammar in Urdu. It keeps close to the Urdu original and offers a word-for-word translation. The intent was not to convert any tone, pauses, or emotional subtext to English during this phase for direct comparison to the video title and author. It reflects a typical example of how trauma is often flattened and converted in the realm of institutional or formal translation processes.

Empathic Translation (Experimental Version)

This translation also follows the four dimensions of ETT, with the purpose encapsulated in the nuances of communicating the speaker's emotional and psychological truth between languages. In this consideration, the original Urdu document and the pain, voice, silences, and affective meanings of these words and concepts were the main constructs wanted from the speaker.

The four dimensions summarized were:
Tone: The emotional qualities that are utilized by the speaker's voice, e.g., sadness, insensibility, and confusion.

Context: Acknowledges the speaker's social, cultural, and political background.

Emotion: Preserves emotional expressions, metaphors, and raw language, including silence. **Perplexity:** Accepts disorganized grammar, repetition, or hesitation as signs of trauma, not errors. By translating the same narrative in two ways, the study demonstrates how translation style can either preserve or reduce emotional impact—making the case for trauma-informed translation practices.

Analytical Framework
This study uses a comparative and interpretive analysis to assess how trauma is expressed and preserved in both translation versions. The evaluation is not concerned with technical correctness; but rather with the influence that a translator's decision-making may have had on the emotional, psychological and moral aspects of the discourse they are describing. The evaluation is based on the principles of Empathic Translation Theory (ETT).

The evaluation is structured around three overarching parameters:

Emotional Fidelity
Evaluate whether the translation encapsulated the emotional force and intensity of the original, such as fragmented phrases, metaphors, and silences that convey utter sorrow or shock.

Psychological Fidelity
Estimate how well the translation articulated the exhaustion established by representing the speaker's psychological state (e.g. trauma, displacement, or mourning). Reference to pauses and repletion are seen as intentional markers of suffering.

Ethical Position of Translator

This section examines the ethical position of the translator and the ethical responsibilities they take on when representing trauma narratives. This includes decisions about what to represent, diminish or privilege during the process; but always represent with respect to the speaker's lived experience, and empathic distance to the emotional state of the speaker.

It is important to note that this qualitative approach does not utilize numerical coding but uses close reading, emotional interpretation, and context. Translation is understood to be a uniquely human and moral act, and every act of translation a navigating of pain and memory across languages. Through this lens, *Empathic Translation Theory* offers a more respectful, trauma- aware way of engaging with sensitive narratives.

DATA ANALYSIS

Literal Translation

No.	Original Urdu Sentence	Literal English Translation
1	مجھے بہت فخر ہے	I am very proud
2	ہم نے اسے فوج میں نہیں جانے دیا	We did not let him join the army
3	ہم نے کہا ہم تمہیں آرمی میں نہیں بھیج سکتے	We said we cannot send you to the army
4	اتنا بڑا جگر نہیں ہے	We don't have such a big heart
5	لیکن وہ جب شادی کے بعد یہ جنگیں شروع ہوئیں	But when these wars started after his marriage
6	وہ کہتا کاش کہ سویلین کسی کو بھی بلانے	He used to say, "I wish they would call even civilians"
7	تو میں بھی جا کر شہید ہو کر آتا	Then I would also go and become a martyr
8	تو میں اس کا جذبہ دیکھ کر کبھی نہیں پہنچا سکی	So seeing his passion, I could never understand it fully
9	کہ وہ شہید، شہیدوں میں ہی جائے گا	That he would end up among the martyrs
10	اور جب وہ شہید ہوا پتہ ہی نہیں لگا کیسے شہید ہوا	And when he was martyred, we didn't even know how it happened
11	اس کی گردن پہ ایسا وار ہوا	Such a strike hit his neck
12	جیسے وہ ذبح ہو گیا تھا	As if he was slaughtered
13	سر الگ ہو گیا تھا بالکل ہی	His head was completely separated
14	شیلنگ ہو رہی تھی شروع سے فجر سے	Shelling was happening since morning prayer
15	گھر کے قریب گولے لگنے کی آوازیں آنے لگیں	We started hearing the sound of shells landing near the house
16	باگھ کے باہر گئے دیکھا کہاں گولے لگ رہے ہیں	We went outside the garden to see where the shells were falling
17	جیسے ایک گولا لگا درخت گرا نیچے	One shell hit and a tree fell down
18	اتنے میں دوسرا گولا جیسے گھر پر لگا	Just then another shell hit the house
19	تو ایک دم سموگ سا ہو گیا	Suddenly it became all smoky
20	سارے گھر میں سب چھت ٹوٹ گیا	The whole roof of the house broke down
21	میں گئی بھائی کے کمرے میں دیکھا وہ بلکل زخمی ہوا تھا	I went to my brother's room and saw he was badly injured
22	اس سے بہت خون نکل رہا تھا	A lot of blood was coming out of him

23	میں نے اس کی آنکھیں بند کیں کیونکہ میں دیکھ چکی تھی	I closed his eyes because I had seen already
24	کہ وہ اب نہیں بچ سکتا	That he could not survive now
25	میں نے اس کی آنکھیں بند کیں اور جا کر چھوٹی بہن کو نکالنے کے لیے آگئی	I closed his eyes and went to get my younger sister out
26	ہمارے دلوں میں کوئی خوف نہیں ہے	There is no fear in our hearts

Empathic Translation (Tone, Context, Emotion, Perplexity Applied)

No.	Urdu Sentence	Empathic Translation (4 Dimensions)
1	مجھے بہت فخر ہے	I carry immense pride in my heart. *(Tone: Pride; Emotion: Deep attachment)*
2	ہم نے اسے فوج میں نہیں جانے دیا	We never let him join the army—we just couldn't. *(Context: Protective family; Tone: Hesitation)*
3	ہم نے کہا ہم تمہیں آرمی میں نہیں بھیج سکتے	We told him, "We can't send you to the army." *(Tone: Protective; Emotion: Powerlessness)*
4	اتنا بڑا جگر نہیں ہے	Our hearts weren't that strong. *(Tone: Emotional exposure; Emotion: Vulnerability)*
5	لیکن وہ جب شادی کے بعد یہ جنگیں شروع ہوئیں	But after he got married… the wars started. *(Perplexity: Memory fragment; Context: Civilian war reality)*
6	وہ کہتا کاش کہ سویلین کسی کو بھی بلانے	He'd say, "If only they called civilians too…" *(Tone: Desire; Context: Civilian helplessness)*
7	تو میں بھی جا کر شہید ہو کر آتا	"I would've gone… and embraced martyrdom." *(Emotion: Resolve; Tone: Devotion)*
8	تو میں اس کا جذبہ دیکھ کر کبھی نہیں پہنچا سکی	I could never fully grasp his passion. *(Emotion: Pain mixed with awe)*
9	کہ وہ شہید، شہیدوں میں ہی جائے گا	That he would go… among the martyrs. *(Tone: Reverence; Perplexity: Emotional detachment)*
10	اور جب وہ شہید ہوا پتہ ہی نہیں لگا کیسے شہید ہوا	And when he was martyred… we didn't even know how. *(Perplexity: Disorientation; Emotion: Shock)*
11	اس کی گردن پہ ایسا وار ہوا	He was struck at the neck… *(Tone: Horror; Context: War violence)*
12	جیسے وہ ذبح ہو گیا تھا	…as though he was slaughtered. *(Emotion: Deep grief; Tone: Raw)*
13	سر الگ ہو گیا تھا بالکل ہی	His head… it was severed completely. *(Emotion: Intensity; Context: Graphic trauma)*
14	شیلنگ ہو رہی تھی شروع سے فجر سے	The shelling began… from Fajr. *(Context: Civilian war time; Perplexity: Fuzzy memory)*
15	گھر کے قریب گولے لگنے کی آوازیں آنے لگیں	We heard the blasts—closer and closer. *(Tone: Fear intensifying; Emotion: Alarm)*
16	بھاگ کے باہر گئے دیکھا کہاں گولے لگ رہے ہیں	We went out near the garden, trying to see where it hit. *(Context: Civilian confusion; Tone: Urgency)*

17	جیسے ایک گولا لگا درخت گرا نیچے	A shell hit—the tree fell down. *(Perplexity: Rapid fragmented recall)*
18	اتنے میں دوسرا گولا جیسے گھر پر لگا	Then another… seemed to hit the house. *(Tone: Escalating fear; Emotion: Chaos)*
19	تو ایک دم سموگ سا ہو گیا	Suddenly, everything was covered in smoke. *(Emotion: Disorientation; Tone: Shock)*
20	سارے گھر میں سب چھت ٹوٹ گیا	The entire roof had fallen in. *(Emotion: Devastation; Context: War-torn domestic space)*
21	میں گئی بھائی کے کمرے میں دیکھا وہ بلکل زخمی ہوا تھا	I ran into my brother's room—he was terribly wounded. *(Tone: Panic; Emotion: Horror)*
22	اس سے بہت خون نکل رہا تھا	He was bleeding—heavily. *(Emotion: Despair; Tone: Immediate trauma)*
23	میں نے اس کی آنکھیں بند کیں کیونکہ میں دیکھ چکی تھی	I closed his eyes… I already knew. *(Tone: Resignation; Emotion: Finality)*
24	کہ وہ اب نہیں بچ سکتا	That… he wouldn't survive. *(Emotion: Realization; Perplexity: Paused grief)*
25	میں نے اس کی آنکھیں بند کیں اور جا کر چھوٹی بہن کو نکالنے کے لیے آگئی	I shut his eyes… and went to get my little sister out. *(Tone: Strength in crisis; Emotion: Duty)*
26	ہمارے دلوں میں کوئی خوف نہیں ہے	Our hearts carry no fear. *(Tone: Defiance; Emotion: Strength through sacrifice)*

Comparative Table: Literal vs. Empathic Translation

No.	Urdu Sentence	Literal Translation	Empathic Translation (Tone, Context, Emotion, Perplexity)	How Empathic Translation Improves Meaning
1	مجھے بہت فخر ہے	I am very proud.	I carry immense pride in my heart.	Adds emotional weight, personalizes pride tied to loss.
2	ہم نے اسے فوج میں نہیں جانے دیا	We did not let him join the army.	We never let him join the army—we just couldn't.	Expresses emotional limitation and family concern.
3	ہم نے کہا ہم تمہیں آرمی میں نہیں بھیج سکتے	We said we can't send you to the army.	We told him, "We can't send you to the army."	Recreates emotional dialogue and struggle.
4	اتنا بڑا جگر نہیں ہے	We didn't have that big a heart.	Our hearts weren't that strong.	Clarifies metaphor; shows emotional vulnerability.
5	لیکن وہ جب شادی کے بعد یہ جنگیں شروع ہوئیں	But when war started after marriage.	But after he got married… the wars started.	Reflects fragmented recall and sequencing of trauma.
6	وہ کہتا کاش کہ سویلین کسی کو بھی بلاتے	He used to say civilians should be called.	He'd say, "If only they called civilians too…"	Recaptures desire and longing tone.

7	تو میں بھی جا کر شہید ہو کر آتا	Then I would go and be martyred too.	"I would've gone… and embraced martyrdom."	Adds emotional gravity; preserves patriotic tone.
8	تو میں اس کا جذبہ دیکھ کر کبھی نہیں پہنچا سکی	I could never understand his passion.	I could never fully grasp his passion.	Preserves awe and emotional pain.
9	کہ وہ شہید، شہیدوں میں ہی جائے گا	That he will go among the martyrs.	That he would go… among the martyrs.	Adds emotional pause; emphasizes reverence.
10	اور جب وہ شہید ہوا پتہ ہی نہیں لگا کیسے شہید ہوا	When he was martyred we didn't know how.	And when he was martyred… we didn't even know how.	Captures shock, disbelief.
11	اس کی گردن پہ ایسا وار ہوا	He was struck on his neck.	He was struck at the neck…	Emotional horror conveyed.
12	جیسے وہ ذبح ہو گیا تھا	Like he was slaughtered.	…as though he was slaughtered.	Keeps trauma intensity, softens literal brutality slightly.
13	سر الگ ہو گیا تھا بالکل ہی	His head was completely separated.	His head… it was severed completely.	Maintains pain and trauma with natural tone.
14	شیلنگ ہو رہی تھی شروع سے فجر سے	Shelling started from morning.	The shelling began… from Fajr.	Includes cultural time reference (Fajr), adds tension.
15	گھر کے قریب گولے لگنے کی آوازیں آنے لگیں	Shells started landing near the house.	We heard the blasts— closer and closer.	Builds suspense and anxiety.
16	بھاگ کے باہر گئے دیکھا کہاں گولے لگ رہے ہیں	Went outside to see where shells landed.	We went out near the garden, trying to see where it hit.	Adds detail, keeps confusion and urgency.
17	جیسے ایک گولا لگا درخت گرا نیچے	One shell hit, a tree fell.	A shell hit—the tree fell down.	Adds visual drama.
18	اتنے میں دوسرا گولا جیسے گھر پر لگا	Then another hit the house.	Then another… seemed to hit the house.	Preserves disorientation.
19	تو ایک دم سموگ سا ہو گیا	Suddenly it got smoky.	Suddenly, everything was covered in smoke.	Clarifies chaotic scene.
20	سارے گھر میں سب چھت ٹوٹ گیا	The whole roof broke.	The entire roof had fallen in.	Smooth natural phrasing; conveys devastation.
21	میں گئی بھائی کے کمرے میں دیکھا وہ بلکل زخمی ہوا تھا	I went to brother's room, he was injured.	I ran into my brother's room—he was terribly wounded.	Enhances urgency and emotional panic.

22	اس سے بہت خون نکل رہا تھا	A lot of blood was coming out.	He was bleeding— heavily.	More natural and emotional.
23	میں نے اس کی آنکھیں بند کیں کیونکہ میں دیکھ چکی تھی	I closed his eyes because I saw it.	I closed his eyes… I already knew.	Preserves emotion; ellipsis conveys silent grief.
24	کہ وہ اب نہیں بچ سکتا	That he cannot survive.	That… he wouldn't survive.	Adds emotional pause.
25	میں نے اس کی آنکھیں بند کیں اور جا کر چھوٹی بہن کو نکالنے کے لیے آگئی	I closed his eyes and went to get my sister.	I shut his eyes… and went to get my little sister out.	Captures strength in pain.
26	ہمارے دلوں میں کوئی خوف نہیں ہے	We have no fear in our hearts.	Our hearts carry no fear.	Preserves defiance, inner strength tone.

FINDINGS

The comparison analysis of literal translations and empathic translations demonstrated considerable distinctions in emotional fidelity and psychological depth. The literal translation was appreciably lexically correct, but time after time, the literal failures did not really account for the strong emotional undercurrents, silences, and cultural context. Whereas the Empathic Translation, encouraged through the four dimensions, *tone, context, emotion, and perplexity*, provided ways to comprehend how the speaker's grief, trauma, and resilience differed from the original. For example, silences and fractured expressions found in the original Urdu were not considered defects but rather psychological ruptures. Even the tone of sadness and strength when the sister recalls her brother's martyrdom is more pronounced when applying empathic strategies. The research described in this paper illustrates that empathy matters in translating trauma-informed discourse.

CONCLUSION

By examining Empathic Translation Theory on a non-fiction war narrative, we see that translation does not account for the emotional nuances and psychological complexities of trauma discourse and the unique ways narratives can tell of people's lived war and trauma experiences. The four dimensions of the Empathic Translation Theory provided a thoughtful, human-centred way to engage in translation that maintained the rawness, the silences, and the affective truths from the original source text. So, terms like translation can become more than a simple language exchange; they can be an ethical act of witnessing. These findings have particular implications for translators, researchers and humanitarian practitioners who handle trauma discourse related to conflict and offer a valuable insight into how to translate in an emotionally charged, conscious way that honours not only the witness' trauma but also their dignity.

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