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A Tentative Study on the Translation Techniques of *A Collection of Classic Ghost Stories* Under Halliday's Context Theory

WANG Tao^[a]; CHAI Su^{[b],*}

^[a]M. A. Candidate, School of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Lanzhou University, Lanzhou, Gansu Province, China.

^[b]Associate Professor, School of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Lanzhou University, Lanzhou, Gansu Province, China.

* Corresponding author.

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Abstract

In real life, contexts precede texts. According to Halliday's theory, contexts can be divided into three branches, each one corresponding to a higher degree of complexity. In papers discussing translation and context in literary texts, much attention is paid to macroanalysis, however, techniques relating to the translation of specific words and sentences are seldom discussed. The author of this paper applies the Context Theory in the translation of the book *A Collection of Classic Ghost Stories* and poses seven different techniques to its translation.

Key words: *A Collection of Classic Ghost Stories*; Context of linguistics; Context of situation; Context of culture; technique

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INTRODUCTION

The notion of context is critical to a variety of disciplines concerned with language use, including translation studies.

Malinowski (1923) argued that the interpretation of a linguistic unit cannot be realized unless one takes account of the interrelationship between linguistic units and the context of the situation.

Firth (1950) made discussions on "context of situation", suggesting that "it is best used as a suitable schematic construct to apply to language events, and that it is a group of related categories at a different level from grammatical categories but rather of the same abstract nature", therefore, he posed his own categories of the situation.

However, fundamentally speaking, the Context Theory advanced by Halliday (1989) shows clear advantages with its emphasis on language function. Chinese scholar Hu Zhuanglin (1994) wrote many articles to introduce the theory and made comparisons between Halliday's classification on contexts and that of Martin's.

In Halliday's context model there exist two structural problems: "first, there is no clear description of how situational context influence cultural context; second, the restriction relationship between situational context and semantic system needs further explanation." (Hu, 2017) However, this model shows a clear hierarchy and can be used to classify the phenomena in translation. For example, culture-loaded words can be analyzed under cultural context.

Martin's model of context is too complex to operate at a specific level with progressive strata of phonology, grammar, semantics, register, language category and ideology included. In addition, Martin uses "register" to represent Halliday's register and situational context. Register, as a long-established term in systemic functional linguistics, has a specific meaning accepted by the academia, that is, the functional variant of language. In addition, Martin's context model does not explain how ideology works on language categories. Last but not the least, "the relationship between language category and schematic structure of the text." (Hu, 2017) To sum

up, Halliday's context model is more closely related to language and text, and is operable. Hence Halliday's theory is adopted.

The material of this paper mainly comes from the book *A Collection of Classic Ghost Stories* compiled by Emily Dorothy Scarborough, an American writer. In the book there appears all sorts of words and sentences that can only be understood in exclusive context. The translating of the text starts from translating words and phrases, which are what this paper mainly discusses.

THE CONTEXT THEORY

The context theory is made to describe how contexts affect the choose of word meaning and style of the speech act. The core value of the context theory is to put the text into a situation similar to that developing it and thus get a better understanding of the information. Halliday (1989) thought that contexts include context of linguistics, context of situation and context of culture. The original context theory only provides a general framework for the classification of contexts, which can only be adopted to macroanalysis. The author of this paper uses several small techniques combined with distinct characteristics of both English and Chinese to illustrate how could context guide the translation of literary text.

CONTEXT OF LINGUISTICS

Contexts of Linguistics refers to the language environment within a single text or between texts. (Halliday, 1989). Nida (2017) suggested that "...Failure to consider the contexts of a text is largely responsible for the most serious mistakes in comprehending and reproducing the meaning of a discourse." In translation literary texts, the choose of word meaning is highly related to the context. In this chapter, the author poses three techniques to its translation.

SPECIFICATION

Specification refers to the technique of narrowing the denotation of a word in some certain context. The meaning given by the English dictionary without taking context into account can not be borrowed directly. Since word meaning changes according to contexts.

Example A

SL: "No; there's nothing like a personal interview. We've had enough of town. We'll go back to-morrow, and you must work your cold for all it's worth. Don't forget that it's got on to the chest, and will require weeks of feeding up and nursing." (*The Shadows on the Wall*, P.60)

TL: "没必要。这不是私人会谈。我们在城里玩够了，明天就动身回去，你必须不惜一切代价将你的感冒治好。你可别忘了，要是发展到肺部，得花费数周疗养。"

In Collins Online English Dictionary, "chest" is explained like this: the top part of the front of your body where your ribs, lungs, and heart are. In Chinese, people call this part "胸部". However, in this part of the story, the word means "肺部" in Chinese. Because the subject matter is about the possibility of the common cold which might develop into pneumonia.

Example B

SL: Caroline, who was writing letters, rose again, took the only remaining lamp in the room, and followed her sister. Rebecca had risen, but she stood trembling, not venturing to follow. (*The Shadows on the Wall*, P.11)

TL:正在桌前写感谢信的卡罗琳再次起身，托着仅有的一盏烛台朝妹妹走去。丽贝卡早就站起来了，但是她的腿不住地打颤，一步都迈不开。

Writing letters is easy to understand, but the reader might be curious: for what purposes she is writing and to whom? In the earlier part of the story, Caroline writes several letters to inform the relatives and friends to come to the funeral. After the funeral, appreciation must be expressed. So, she is writing letter of thanks. The same word has totally different meanings in accordance with various settings.

Example C

SL: "I know you said that he had terrible pains in his stomach, and had spasms, but what do you think made him have them?" "Henry called it gastric trouble. You know Edward has always had dyspepsia." Mrs. Brigham hesitated a moment. "Was there any talk of an examination?" said she. Then Caroline turned on her fiercely. "No," said she in a terrible voice. "No." The three sisters' souls seemed to meet on one common ground of terrified understanding through their eyes. (*The Shadows on the Wall*, P.6)

TL: "你说过他曾有严重的胃痛，还有痉挛，但他是怎么患上这些病的呢?" "亨利认为是消化问题。你知道的，爱德华一向消化不良。"布里格姆太太在一旁若有所思。"有没有人说过要尸检?" 话声刚落，卡罗琳猛地转过头来，用令人生畏的语气说："没有，没听说过。" 三姐妹从彼此的眼神中明白，她们都想到了一件令人不寒而栗的事情。

Definitions of "examination" given by Collins Online English Dictionary embody two meanings: first, a formal test that one takes to show one's knowledge or ability in a particular subject, or to obtain a qualification; second, simple tests in order to check how healthy a person is. Clearly, neither of the definitions fits the situation, because judging from the setting, the one they are talking about is dead. Consequently, the only becoming meaning is "autopsy".

Example D

SL: Near the holy water stoups peasant women, in scarlet petticoats and laced bodices, sat upon the ground as immovable as domestic animals ... (*The Mass of Shadows*, P. 69)

TL: 在圣水盆附近, 一些农村妇女身穿朱红色衬裙和有花边的紧身马甲, 坐在地上一动不动, 活像一群家畜。

Holy water is water blessed by a priest and used (as in the Asperges) as a sacramental in Roman Catholic churches. The image is commonplace for westerners, while Chinese readers find it far away from their life. The problem is in which the holy water is contained. Normally, the holy water is placed in a bowl, in Chinese the container is “盆”. Left the transformation of the word unspecified, the meaning and the environment will be different.

Example E

SL: Whilst they thus conversed under their breath, a very old canon was taking the collection and proffering to the worshipers a great copper dish, wherein they let fall, each in his turn, ancient coins which have long since ceased to pass current: écus of six livres, florins, ducats and ducatoons, jacobuses and rose-nobles, and the pieces fell silently into the dish. When at length it was placed before the Chevalier, he dropped into it a louis which made no more sound than had the other pieces of gold and silver. (*The Mass of Shadows*, P.70)

TL: 当他们低声交谈的时候, 一位年纪很大的教士端着一个硕大的黄铜盘子开始募捐, 每到一个人跟前, 他们就会丢下几枚早已停止流通的古币, 六利弗的银币、弗洛林银币、达克特金币和杜卡图恩银币、雅各布斯金币还有玫瑰金币, 这些硬币静静地落在盘子里。

The underlined part, as indicated by the word “coins”, represent various money in different periods. Seldom are there Chinese readers knowing of their colors, shapes and material. Therefore, the translator must tell the reader what they are made of. However, it is unnecessary to mark out specific periods, since if explained like that, the reader may be puzzled—they do not know the times.

CONVERSION OF VOICE

One of the evident disparities of grammars between English and Chinese lies in the Voice. The passive voice is more widely used in English while in Chinese the application is much less, only in special occasion or for special purpose will it appear. Usually, passive voice in Chinese is regarded as a rhetorical device implying some certain of negative feeling. In context of linguistics, what is delivered in the source language must be revealed in the target language. It is a process bridging the differences, with an aim to reproduce the same feeling.

Example F

SL: Henry Glynn, evidently reasoning that the source of the strange shadow must be between the table on which

the lamp stood and the wall, was making systematic passes and thrusts with an old sword which had belonged to his father all over and through the intervening space. Not an inch was left unpierced. He seemed to have divided the space into mathematical sections. He brandished the sword with a sort of cold fury and calculation; the blade gave out flashes of light, the shadow remained unmoved. (*The Shadows on the Wall*, P.9)

TL: 显然, 亨利·格林认为墙上的影子是由放着台灯的牌桌和墙之间的什么东西造成的, 他握着原本属于父亲的那把剑, 扎扎实实地把那块地方横着竖着刺了一遍, 不留一丝空隙。他似乎把巴掌大的那块地方分成了若干精确的小块, 每一刺都带着冷冷的愤怒和对这一动作的精确把控。凄冷的光一次又一次地剑面上飞出, 然而, 墙上的影子仍旧纹丝未动。

Left unchanged the passive structures, the translated text reads like this: “没有一寸不被刺穿”, which is quite a mouthful. Idiomatic expression in Chinese goes like the following one: “横着竖着刺了一边, 不留一丝空隙”. From the sentence it can be concluded that whether the conversion of voice should be made is determined by in which way the target reader will receive the rendered text. The modified one reads more smoothly and fits the occasion.

Example G

SL: Nobody entered the study that day, nor the next. The third day Henry was expected home, but he did not arrive and the last train from the city had come. (*The Shadows on the Wall*, P.10)

TL: 那天没有人进去书房, 第二天也是如此。她们想, 都第三天了, 亨利也应该回来了。但是, 直到最后一趟发自城里的火车靠站, 也不见他的身影。

In Corpus of Contemporary American English, there are 2917 items relating to “was expected”, which indicates the collocation is live and widely used. Turning into Chinese without conversion, the translation is unacceptable: “亨利在第三天被期待回家”. To be readable in Chinese, conversion must be made: “亨利也应该回来了”。

MUTUAL TRANSFORMATION OF AFFIRMATIVE AND NEGATIVE EXPRESSIONS

This technique refers to a figure of speech in which an affirmative is expressed by negating its opposite (Fujuan Zhang, 2007). Diction and conversion of voice, if deemed to be rudimentary techniques to reproduce the semantic meaning, then mutual transformation is a secondary approach to imitate the communicative meaning under a certain context.

Example H

SL: Two years before his death Adrian Borlsover developed, unknown to himself, the not uncommon power

of automatic writing. Eustace made the discovery by accident. (*The Beast with Five Fingers*, P.52)

TL: 艾德里安·博尔索弗在他去世的两年前不知不觉获得了与常人一般的书写能力。尤斯塔斯无意之中观察到了这一举动。

Firstly, “unknown to himself” and “not uncommon” are not deliberately utilized to create a special style. Deverbalization is then applicable. “Unknown to himself”, though formally negative in English, is positive in meaning in Chinese. So does the phrase “not uncommon”. If construed with form reserved, in context built by Chinese it will be odd and intricate.

Example I

SL: He shook his head. “In a way it is,” he answered; “the surface here is as fine as anything you could wish, but there’s a big flaw at the back, though I don’t expect you’d ever notice it. I could never make really a good job of a piece of marble like that. It would be all right in the summer like this; it wouldn’t mind the blasted heat. But wait till the winter comes. There’s nothing quite like frost to find out the weak points in stone.” (*August Heat*, P.40)

TL: 他摇了摇头，说：“差不多吧。正面无可挑剔，但在背面却有一个不小的瑕疵，我倒是希望你压根没注意到呢。用这样的大理石要凿出一件完美的作品，是异想天开。它在这样的夏天安然无恙：酷热也耐它不得。但是，到了冬天，寒霜最能让一块石头的弱点暴露无遗。”

Chinese prefers to use an agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant while communicating. Even it is really a big flaw at the back of the flag, people would not speak without reservation. “never” is too strong a word to be directly turned into Chinese as “永不可能”, seldom do we say it directly. “wouldn’t mind” can be replaced by the phrase “safe and sound”, which means “安然无恙” in Chinese. By transformation the context of the target text is parallel to that in the source text.

CONTEXT OF SITUATION

According to Halliday’s (1989) description, “context of situation is the immediate environment in which a text is actually functioning”. Because there are no identical contexts, different techniques should be employed. Context of situation consists of three aspects: field, tenor and mode. The field of discourse refers to what is happening, to the nature of the social action that is taking place; the tenor of discourse refers to who is taking part, to the nature of the participants, their status and roles; the mode of discourse refers to what part the language is playing, what it is that the participants are expecting the language to do for them in that situation (Halliday, 1989). Baker (2000) said that the meaning system is largely determined by the three aspects of situational context: ideational meaning by field, interpersonal meaning

by tenor and textual meaning by mode.” Therefore, in translating, after the identification of the register, corresponding situational context must be reestablished.

AMPLIFICATION

Amplification means in translation, some words are added in accordance with the needs of semantics, rhetoric or syntax to faithfully and smoothly express the content of the original text. It is different from the “annotation”, for the latter was more culture-oriented.

Example J

SL: It was built some fifteen or twenty years since by Mr. A - -, the well-known New York merchant, who five years ago threw the commercial world into convulsions by a stupendous bank fraud. (*What Was It?*, P. 71)

TL: 差不多在十五年前，最早不过二十年前，纽约市著名的商人A先生出资建造了这栋别墅。五年前，与他相关的一起特大银行诈骗案使整个商界陷入一片混乱。

Of course, Mr. A, being a well-known and wealthy merchant, was impossible to build the building on his own. If translated without amplification, the sentence would be “纽约市著名的商人A先生建造了这栋别墅”, which sounds unnatural and illogical. The second part, descriptions provided in the story is insufficient to judge whether the fraud is planned by Mr. A or he was set up by someone. So, added neutral words showed in the target language is necessary.

Example K

SL: One of the boarders, who had purchased Mrs. Crowe’s *Night Side of Nature* for his own private delectation, was regarded as a public enemy by the entire household for not having bought twenty copies. (*What Was It?*, P. 72)

TL: 有一个房客为了解闷，买了克罗太太的《本性的暗面》一书，却因为没有给其他十九个每人买一本而成为众矢之的。

The reason why he was attacked was because he only got a book for himself, but in the mansion he got nineteen other partners. The translation, if not amplified, would be: 却因为没有买二十本书而被视为公敌。The reader will be slightly puzzled here: why twenty books? Because there are twenty guys in the house, the others want the book, too.

OMISSION

Omission means that some words in the original text need not be translated in the target text, because the meaning is embedded or included in the language, or it serves as a kind of cultural default. In other words, omission is the deletion of unnecessary words, or words that are considered redundant or contrary to the language habits of the target language users. In E-C translation, grammatical

and syntactical divergences make it necessary to take advantage of substitution to fulfill the gap so as to rebuild the context. Pronouns and conjunctions are two kinds of words that are most omitted.

Example L

SL: How, indeed, could it be otherwise, since it told us so much of its secret life? At night we heard it singing to the moon as we lay in our tent, uttering that odd sibilant note peculiar to itself and said to be caused by the rapid tearing of the pebbles along its bed, so great is its hurrying speed. We knew, too, the voice of its gurgling whirlpools, suddenly bubbling up on a surface previously quite calm; the roar of its shallows and swift rapids; its constant steady thundering below all mere surface sounds; and that ceaseless tearing of its icy waters at the banks. How it stood up and shouted when the rains fell flat upon its face! And how its laughter roared out when the wind blew upstream and tried to stop its growing speed! (*The Willows*, P. 9)

TL: 真的, 多瑙河还能是其他什么样子吗? 因为我们已经知道它太多私密的事情。深夜, 躺在帐篷里的我们听到它对月吟唱, 哼出奇特、独有的嘶嘶歌声, 人们说这是急流刷过河岸的鹅卵石发出的声响, 可见多瑙河的河水是多么湍急。我们也知道多瑙河打起旋涡时会发出潺潺的声响, 水平恬静的河面会突然冒出咕嘟咕嘟冒起泡沫; 浅滩的河水在喧闹, 河中的急流在轰鸣; 水面上的声音与水中不停息的隆隆声相比不足为道; 冰冷的河水不知疲倦地冲刷着河岸。雨水直下拍打脸颊的时候, 它那般屹立高呼! 在狂风逆吹, 竭力想要阻止它愈来愈快的脚步时, 它又如此豪迈作笑!

In this paragraph the pronoun “it” appears many times. It is used so in English to represent anaphoric relation. Yet in Chinese the relationship between words and sentences depends more on parataxis. Hence, in translation most of them are omitted. By doing so readers can get a providential context.

Example M

SL: She lived at the corner of the Rue aux Nonnes, in the turret which is still to be seen there, and which formed part of an old half-ruined mansion looking on to the garden of the Ursuline nuns. (*The Mass of Shadows*, P.68)

TL: 方丹住在修女街拐角一处宅邸的角楼里, 宅邸年久失修, 半边塌散, 与乌尔苏拉会 (Ursuline) 修女住处的花园相望, 到现在都看得见。

It is clear that the turret is a part of the mansion. Rendered in the target text, the target text will be illogical. Therefore, the underlined part is left untranslated in the target text.

CONTEXT OF CULTURE

Halliday (1989) said that “the context of situation is only the immediate environment. There is also a broader

background against which the text has to be interpreted: its context of culture”. Newmark (1991) also said that “what are relevant to translation are not only situational context but also cultural context. Language is a substantial but partial reflection of a culture.” In translation, the culture encoded in the language is deprived of the field generating meaning, the translator is obliged to reestablish the context to make it reappear.

ANNOTATION

Some culture-loaded words are less known by target readers or even translators, thus making it difficult to get hold of without explanation or annotation. Interior and exterior annotations can help solve the problem.

Example N

SL: But Catherine Fontaine knew well every single stone she stepped on, and, as she could have found her way to the church with her eyes shut, she reached without difficulty the corner of the Rue aux Nonnes and the Rue de la Paroisse, where the timbered house stands with the tree of Jesse carved on one of its massive beams. (*The Mass of Shadows*, P. 69)

TL: 但是凯瑟琳熟悉自己踩过的每一块石头, 她闭着眼都能走到教堂。她十分娴熟地拐过修女街, 又来到教区街的拐弯处, 一座巨大的木屋矗立于此, 其中一根粗壮的立柱上刻着耶西之树的图案。

The Tree of Jesse is a depiction in art of the ancestors of Christ, shown in a tree which rises from Jesse of Bethlehem, the father of king David. It originates in a passage in the biblical Book of Isaiah which describes metaphorically the descent of the Messiah, and is accepted by Christians as referring to Jesus. Information behind the words are intricate and obscure, for hardly are there Chinese readers who have read the Old Testament. To explain the term in the translation is not necessary, for the explanation will be too long. Nevertheless, neglecting the culture-loaded words is unethical, because without the interpretation the context of the target text will not be the same as that developed by the source language. External annotation is required here to create the same context.

External annotation goes like this:

“耶西之树”是耶稣的家谱, 起源于《以赛亚书》中的一段描述弥赛亚后裔的经文, 而这个后裔被基督徒认作是耶稣。这个主题经常能在基督教艺术中看到, 特别是在中世纪教堂的彩窗、大教堂门前的石雕, 墙壁和天花板上的绘画等。“耶西之树”也出现在较小的艺术品上, 如刺绣和象牙。

Example O

SL: He had an exceedingly clever knack in cutting silhouettes for young ladies and paper pigs and cows for little children, and made more than one complicated wind instrument of his own devising. (*The Beast with Five Fingers*, P.50)

TL: 他在为年轻女士定做(人像)剪影、为小孩剪纸猪奶牛这方面轻车熟路, 此外还制作了不止一种他自己设计的复杂管乐器。

Looking up in the English Etymology Dictionary, the word silhouettes reads like this: 1798, from French silhouette, in reference to Étienne de Silhouette (1709-1767), French minister of finance in 1759. Usually said to be so called because it was an inexpensive way of making a likeness of someone, a derisive reference to Silhouette's petty economies to finance the Seven Years' War, which were unpopular among the nobility. The above description reminds the translator of the paper-cut silhouette in China, because the two artistic forms share close tips of making. Despite of the similarities, there are distinct discrepancies. Paper-cut silhouette originated from the 6th century when women used to paste golden and silver foil cuttings onto their hair at the temples, and men used them in sacred rituals. The material used is donkey skin or cowhide. Paper cuttings can be found in festivals when people celebrate the harvests or good days. Both do not possess the derogatory connotation of the French word. Thus, the word can not be rendered into papercuts or paper-cut silhouette that belongs to China uniquely. The exterior annotation goes like this:

Silhouette portraits were so called simply because they came into fashion in the year (1759) in which M. de Silhouette was minister. His petty economies to finance the Seven Years' War agitated the nobility. As a result, they used his name to refer to the technique, which was really a scathing satire on him. The material used to make the silhouette is paper mostly, different from what Chinese use in paper cuttings or paper-cut silhouette.

DOMESTICATION

Domestication is termed by Venuti in his book *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* published in 1995. According to Venuti, domestication refers to "an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, bring the author back home," (Venuti, 1995, 4). The method designates the type of translation in which a transparent, fluent style is adopted to minimize the strangeness.

Example P

SL: "Good Lord!" said Eustace; "what in the world was the old boy driving at? And what in the name of all that's holy is that?" (*The Beast with Five Fingers*, P.56)

TL: 尤斯塔斯惊恐万分: "老天爷! 那鬼东西到底想要干什么? 谁能告诉我那是什么东西啊?"

In 1900, in a book named *A Brief History of Enlightenment* (《文明小史》) the very word "lord" came into horizons of Chinese intellectuals. It is 119 years since the term first appeared in China. Today, it is no longer a term that puzzles readers. Even so, it is better to transform it with idiomatic Chinese image. "the

old boy" is the nickname of Satan. "in the name of all that's holy" is equal to "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost", which, the author can say for certain that most readers are not able to tell the differences. This is an excellent example regarding when to domesticate – when there is a vacuum between pairs of seemingly corresponding expressions. "谁能告诉我" is an amplification derived from the context of situation.

Example Q

SL: "I have something to see to," replied Caroline, and the others at once knew by her tone that she had some solemn and sad duty to perform in the chamber of death. (*The Shadows on the Wall*, P.4)

TL: "我还有一些事情需要处理,"从她的语气中姐妹俩一下就明白了: 她要去安息室去完成一些神圣而又悲伤的事。

Chamber of death is a room in which a person is dying or lies dead; specifically, a place of execution within a prison. In Chinese, such a room is called "安息室". Usually, people from all walks of life speak with solemnness and respect as if the one on the deathbed leaves no regrets. In the text, the sudden death of the brother makes it difficult for sisters to recover from the sadness, not to speak of the sense of relief. Nevertheless, in Chinese there is no appropriate counterpart fitting both the contextual meaning and emotive meaning. A better choice is "安息室", which coincides the thinking pattern as well as culture psychology of the Chinese readers.

CONCLUSION

As pointed earlier in the paper, Halliday's context model is more closely related to language and text, and is operable when compared with Martin's. The conclusion consists of three points. All the techniques adopted share one common purpose, that is, to create the contexts in the target language the same as that developed by the source language.

a. Context of linguistics deals with language environment in a text or between texts. Generally speaking, language itself in use will generate many problems in understanding, because of polysemy and disparities between grammars. But such challenges might be tackled through Diction and Conversion of Voice as well as Mutual Transformation of Affirmative and Negative Expressions.

b. Context of situation is the most discussed term in system-functional linguistics. It systematically explains how context could confine the meaning of the language. In translation, Field, Tenor and Mode must be made clear before undertaking the work. Specification and Substitution have something to do with genre and rhetoric of the text, especially in literary texts. That is why these two techniques are employed.

c. Context of culture, may exert influence on both linguistic and situational contexts, for anything

involved in the language is in culture. Techniques such as Annotation and Domestication not only takes care language and grammar, but also two different cultures.

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