

TRIPLE BURDENS ON LITERARY TRANSLATORS

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ABSTRACT: A good number of writers do create images, still or moving, with their own words, which I refer to as *verbal images*. Writers also use *stream of consciousness* as a genre, or style, which characterizes characters' wandering, disruptive flows of thought and awareness. The language that reflects stream of consciousness, therefore, is characterized by chunks, or fragments, often loosely connected, or even disconnected and ungrammatical. These present grand challenges to translators: how to transfer the meaning, the verbal content and the author's intent in the source text (ST) into the target language (or target text TT) while preserving the verbal images created by the original author? Furthermore, sensitive words and expressions, including curses, swear words, taboos, words referring to sex organs and sexual acts, do not sound the same across languages and cultures, depending on socio-cultural, political and regulatory, norms, despite their absolute lexical equivalence, which causes another challenge to literary translators. All of these challenges occur in *Little Scratch* by Rebecca Watson (2021), which will be analyzed in the paper. Hopefully, the paper can help improve literary translators' awareness of conventional as well as emerging difficulties in their job.

KEY WORDS: Verbal image; stream of consciousness; sensitive words; sex; literary translation.

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1. Introduction

Human beings have always used various means to communicate, the most important, convenient, powerful and productive of which is language - the verbal means, and linguistics has been extensively proliferated for centuries. However, other means of human communication, including non-verbal means, have not received the same level of attention. Among non-verbal means, images serve as a rich meaning-making resource, but only a few decades ago were they seriously examined by linguists, when interdisciplinary research was needed and widely accepted in linguistics, as seen in the publication of such works as *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, 2020).

Images, as are known, include still and moving pictures, photographs, video clips/films, graphic designs, to name just a few. So far, a number of writers even create images using the very words they write, i.e. telling their stories not only with words but also with pictures formed by those words. I will refer to them as *verbal images*, similar to *visual poetry*, or what Finch (1998) called *picture poems* (a visual perspective on the arrangement of words). These verbal images are definitely rich meaning-making resources for writers, and need to be investigated and interpreted, and they are all over the pages of the novel *Little Scratch* by Rebecca Watson (2021). Preserving these verbal images in the TT while adhering to various quality requirements for a translated work is the first major challenge to translators.

What is more, Watson wrote the novel, deliberately using *stream of consciousness* for the purpose of portraying the turbulence of the heroine's thoughts that are fragmented, diverted, invoked by various actual happenings crisscrossed with one another, reflecting her mental struggle between attempts to reveal what had happened to her and to continue hiding her pain and humiliation. For that purpose, the novel is full of short phrases, even single words, rather than full sentences coherently connected. This presents the second major challenge to translators.

The third challenge to translators of this novel as well as translators of similar literary or

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cinematic works is the prevalent use of curses, swear words or bad, 'dirty' language, to express the characters' agony, persistent yet unutterable pain and desperation. Lastly, since the novel concerns sexual harassment and rape at the office, sex-related words account for a considerable proportion, and how to translate them is subject to various considerations. All these three difficulties will be analyzed in this paper so that generalization of their characteristics can be made, which explains why they are difficult.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Verbal Images

Going back to ancient history, *visual poetry* is a style of poetry that incorporates graphic and visual design elements to convey its meaning, combining visual art and written expression to create new ways of presenting and interpreting poetry. Words, images, and symbols are deliberately arranged in a certain design to enhance the meaning of the poem, allowing the poem to be seen as well as read. Finch (1998) talks about *picture poems* as a visual perspective on the arrangement of words, i.e. arrange words in poems to visualize a particular object, a scene, a character in the poems or the theme of the poems. For instance, a poem involving trees or fish can look like the following:

girls
Are like apples
On trees. The best ones
Are at the top of the tree.
The boys don't want to reach
For the good ones because they
Are afraid of falling and getting hurt.
Instead, they just get the rotten apples
From the ground that aren't as good,
But easy. So the apples at the top think
Something is wrong with them, When in
Reality, they're amazing. They just
Have to wait for the right boy to
Come along, the ones
Brave enough to
climb all
the way
to the top
of the tree

(Lebeter, 2016)

The pitiful jumps out of water swimming slowly into thin air. Swishing its invisible spiny with its venomous bite.

(Finch, 1998, p.31)

This can also be referred to as *word picture* - a picture created by arranging words in a creative way, and in this paper, I will call them *verbal images*.

Visual poetry, concrete poetry, picture poems, word pictures or verbal images, as quickly reviewed above, date back thousands of years, but to date, studies on translation of verbal images

remain too few. The only one found is Zheng (2022) who studied the reproduction of visual pictures in poetry translation and concluded that “the translation of poetry in the sense of picture reproduction is to evoke similar aesthetic sensitivity and emotional response in target readers”. Zheng (2022) advised translators to try to keep the formal beauty, i.e., word layout or arrangement of a poem but not at the cost of changing its original spirit, and the static or motional properties should be kept consistent with the original picture while maintaining the static-motional balance. Some other studies may appear relevant as they contain similar-looking titles, e.g., “Poetic imagery transformations in translation” by Andreeva (2019) or “Comparison of images in poetry translation from the perspective of corpus” by Yu Xia (2023), but they discuss poetic imagery, i.e. a kind of mental representation that poems may try to invoke in the reader’s mind rather than images formed by the arrangement of words in poems. This gap motivates my present study.

2.2. *Stream of Consciousness*

The term *stream of consciousness* captures the complete mental process of the character in which sense perception mingles with consciousness and half-conscious thoughts, memories, feelings and random associations. In literature, the phrase refers to the flow of these thoughts, with reference to a particular character’s thinking process which is never coherent and often jumps from one thought to another. In *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel*, Humphrey (1954) believes that perhaps the earliest stream of consciousness writer was the minor French novelist and a short story writer Eduard Dujardin who attempted the technique in a rather crude manner in his short novel *The laurels have been cut*. In English, such literary works as Dorothy Richardson’s *Pilgrimage* (1915-1938), Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the light house* (1927), William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922)”, etc., also use stream of consciousness. Similar literary works written with stream of consciousness in English and Vietnamese languages include *The Babysitter* by Robert Coover (1969), Bảo Ninh’s *Nỗi buồn chiến tranh* (*The Sorrow of War*, 1987), Nguyễn Minh Châu’s *Phiên chợ Giát* (*Giát Market Fair*, 1988), Phạm Thị Hoài’s *Thiên sứ* (*Angel*, 1988), Nguyễn Bình Phương’s *Một ví dụ xoàng* (*A trivial example*, 2021), among others. Stream of consciousness must have been used by writers in other languages as well.

So far, stream of consciousness has been a controversial and much disputed subject within the field of translation. Studies on translation of stream of consciousness try to discover ways to get the exact meaning of the authors and convey their intended meaning, and several translation strategies have been suggested to handle problematic translation. These studies focus on single works, typically some of those mentioned above, e.g. *Ulysses*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *To the lighthouse*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Jacob’s Room*, *Penelope* by a few writers such as William Faulkner, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce. Horri (2009) examined Persian’s translation of Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* in the light of Baker’s universals of translation, focusing on the importance of the writer’s style along with the translator’s style, and found out that “normalization is the most frequent universal in Hosseini’s translation” of the work. Two years later, Wang & Li (2011) conducted a corpus-based study on Chinese translation of *Ulysses*, and concluded that “the fingerprints of the translator are left on the translated text both as a result of his/her linguistic idiosyncrasy and of the interference and constraints of the languages s/he is dealing with in translation.” In the same year, Kao & Wu (2011, cited in Talebinezhad & Alirezazadeh, 2012) paid attention to the structure of stream of consciousness style employed by Faulkner, and claimed that “translation without annotation may lead to textual inaccessibility for the target reader”. To improve textual accessibility, they proposed adaptation to reconstruct stream of consciousness through the use of explicitation and expansion.

Unlike those studies which investigated individual works, in her doctoral dissertation, Totò (2014) considered stream of consciousness a genre, and examined how the main traits of the genre, such as the apparent lack of narratorial control, privacy and spontaneity of the fictional discourse, are recreated in Italian. Totò observed that existing studies focus on the problematic areas, or on the

perceived failings or inaccuracies, or on unusual solutions, and such focus can be a source of bias: “the overall stylistic effect of the translation based on the sum of all choices made by the translator is reduced to those points which seize the researcher’s attention” and proposed an alternative approach to investigate all translation choices regarding a set of pre-specified parameters, rather than focusing on isolated cases, and report all findings. Totò’s Literature Review also cites several authors examining Italian and Chinese translations of some works by James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and William Faulkner. She concludes that “From a methodological point of view, it is worth noting that most of the above studies, whether or not the authors limit their investigation to a specific linguistic parameter(s), seem to report the findings, the translational solutions, that are considered interesting” and “Notably, these and other studies focus on the problematic areas, or on the perceived failings or inaccuracies, or on unusual solutions. Such focus can, in my opinion, be a source of bias: the overall stylistic effect of the translation based on the sum of all choices made by the translator is reduced to those points which seize the researcher’s attention” (Totò, 2014, p.23). She emphasizes her approach as follows,

An alternative approach, which I propose and follow in this thesis, is to investigate all translation choices regarding a set of pre-specified parameters, rather than focusing on isolated cases, and report all findings. This method seeks to give the researcher a better appreciation of how and to what extent the defining characteristics of stream of consciousness genre have been recreated in another language. It is based on the fundamental belief that every choice made by a translator has an impact on the text and hence is of interest. As a matter of fact, choices need to be made at every step of the translation process, which is inherently a process of negotiation. Translating implies recreating a source text in another language and culture; thus, it implies a difference; at the same time, the new text reproduces the source text, it is ‘the same’ text. (Totò, 2014, p.23)

I support Totò’s view, and even though I have not been able to examine stream-of-consciousness literary works as a genre, I have experienced the same consideration to make choices in every step while translating *Little Scratch*.

In Vietnam, there have been a few studies on stream of consciousness as a technique rather than a genre, e.g. Lê Hoàng Ngọc Thái et al (2023), Tạ Thị Bích Ngân (2016), but no studies on translation of stream of consciousness have been conducted. I will partially fill the gap and add to this existing body of relevant research with the present study, again using a particular recent novel to illustrate both familiar issues as well as new phenomena.

2.3. Sensitive Words and Expressions

Sensitive words and expressions in this paper include curses, swear words or vulgar, bad, ‘dirty’ language, taboos, words referring to sex organs and sexual acts. These possibly exist in every language and are often used for a variety of purposes: to express frustration, anger, pain to relieve oneself or insult others, or used merely as a blank-filler in informal, friendly conversations in certain contexts. Their degrees of dirtiness or offensiveness vary from situation to situation and from one person to another, and definitely from one culture to another. Alderete (n.d.) posts on VidaLingua that “it’s quite difficult to understand these words if you don’t have direct contact with the culture. It’s estimated that between 1% and 3% of the words that some people say per day are swear words. While some insults are mild and can be used in informal situations without causing much offense, others are extremely vulgar and can be deeply offensive. It’s important not only to understand the literal meaning of these swears, but also the context in which they are used and the intention behind their use.”

Migaku, another post on the Internet (2025), classifies swear words into several kinds, including mild, moderate and strong swear words, e.g. *damm*, *hell*; *shit*, *ass*; *f*ck*, *c*nt* respectively. Jay (1992) uses the word *cursing* to cover all sorts of dirty word usage, considers how cursing is used in particular contexts and identifies how the use of certain words affects both the speaker and the

listener within a setting or a speech situation, pragmatically focusing on how people actually curse in real world situations.

Translation studies focusing on such sensitive words and expressions vary significantly in terms of perspectives and approaches. Baker's (1992) and Newmark's (1988) translation procedures serve as a prominent analytical framework for scrutinizing the translation of taboo words. The researchers assert that the translation of "culture words" poses a challenge unless there is a cultural congruence between the SL, TL and their respective readerships. Taboo words, deeply rooted in sociocultural contexts, present a formidable task to translators. As regards translation strategies, Newmark (1988) highlights several procedures - functional equivalence, descriptive equivalence, cultural equivalence, paraphrase, literal translation, reduction, and through translation - as particularly pertinent for translating taboo words when compared to alternative strategies; recognizing that swearwords play a crucial role in character and setting depiction, contributing to the audience's understanding of specific discourse segments, their omission results in a "loss in communicative effect and social implicature" (Greenall, 2011, p.60), along with the suppression of linguistic diversity, specifically individuals deviating from standard speech (Díaz-Cintas, 2018).

In the country, very few translation studies on swear, taboo or vulgar words have been made. Nguyen Viet Khoa's (2024) study identifies 6 strategies, including Taboo for Taboo, Omission, Euphemism, Direct translation, Substitution, and Translation by more general words, used for [Vietnamese] subtitling (i.e. translation) taboos in the movie *The Shawshank Redemption*, and advocates prioritizing Taboo for Taboo strategy to maintain fidelity and allow the translator to preserve the original expressive impact while ensuring comprehension in the target language, despite cultural constraints, censorship and target language norms. Tran Thanh Du (2024) does not deal with translation of swear words, but compares swear words in English and Vietnamese on the basis of Fairclough's discourse analysis model. The study only concludes that swear words used in both languages have both similarities and differences with reference to types and functions, which offers some indirect help to translators. In Lê Hoài Ân (2017, 2021), swear words and vulgar terms for sex and sexual organs are only dealt with in passing as examples illustrating the point he was making. The scarcity of translation studies concerning swear, taboo or vulgar words and sex-related expressions is the third drive for me to conduct the research.

3. Methodology

3.1. The data source

Little Scratch by Rebecca Watson (2021), a 202-page-long novel, describes a day's work of an office clerk from the time she wakes up to the moment she falls asleep. Everything she does, everywhere she goes, every act she performs, is visualized through the sophisticated arrangement of words as still or moving images. Her every thought, naturally incoherent, fragmented, ignited by various happenings around her or with her, jumping back and forth from one to another, is recounted, revealing her inner struggle between whether or not to tell her boyfriend about the sexual harassment and rape that she suffers from at the office. She is in extreme pain, both physically and mentally. Those pains, together with her frustration, anger, hatred, and other emotions, are apparently expressed through swear words and curses. For those reasons, the novel is full of verbal images and swear words, and is written in the stream-of-consciousness style. Apart from swear words, since the novel revolves around the topic of sexual harassment and rape, the language that overtly describes or covertly implies sexual organs and sexual acts adds to the major challenges to translators.

3.2. Collection and analyses of the data

The novel is full of verbal images, presenting an abundance of data for the image analysis. Meanwhile, sensitive words and expressions are scanned and calculated, and a total of 165 occurrences are collected, i.e. almost no page is without swear, 'dirty' words or sex-related expressions. The word with the highest occurrences (112 times) is *f*ck* and its derivatives, then come *shit*, *damm*, *c*ck*, *c*nt*, *breasts* and a few others.

The images are classified as static and moving in terms of what postures, actions or movements they are intended to visualize, and analyzed in terms of length and structure so as to characterize the use of language for visualization and its challenge to translators. Meanwhile, the use of stream-of-consciousness as the author's writing style is elaborated with regards to lexical and structural choices, including phrase and textual composition. Lastly, swear words and sex-related expressions are characterized in terms of their functions.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Characteristics of Verbal Images in Little Scratch

As described earlier, almost every page of the novel sketches at least one verbal image, so in this section, I will present just a selection of 4 of them as illustrations, and analyze them before generalizing their characteristics.

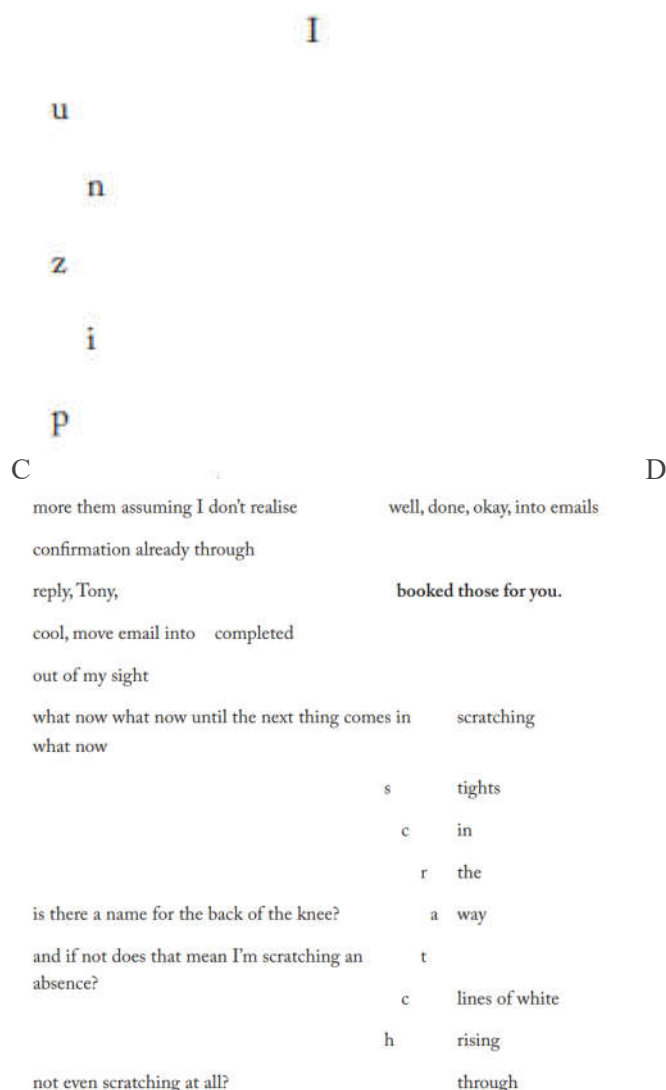
The first one on page 6 of the original A depicts the scene when the character is excreting after a shower and then gets dressed before going to work. The first visualization in the top right-hand corner is her excretion with just 3 words: *freeing*, *emptying* and *plop* which is repeated 4 times. *freeing emptying* are placed together on top, visualizing the bottom body part where the excreta starts out; 4 *plop* are placed below, visualizing the fall of different segments of the excreta and the sound they make when they hit water in the toilet bowl, slowly at first, then speedily and successively. In the second visualization, the word *drip* is repeated and arranged in such a way that visualizes the various droplets falling from different parts of her body down onto the bathroom floor. Meanwhile, the second verbal image B visualizes her stepping down the stairs. Apparently, the words are arranged on different lines, with the latter further right from the former, not vertically but diagonally, representing the steps of the stairs and each of her movement.

making it) that the hangover	freeing emptying	spitting, rinsing, rinsing
and the running late have rather	hearing, plop!	
a significant correlation, but as I	(then faster)	grabbing pile back to room
said, I'm not making that argument	hearing plop! plop! plop!	into washing bag on door
	a little quicker than expected	shoes! shoving feet in push, wiggle in, push, wiggle in
Wiping, wiping, up and towel round flushing (stodgy toilet ignoring)		jacket on, purse keys phone cool
unlocking		time 08:09
padding back over wood	drip	right
	drip drip	right
	drip	down
	drip drip	stairs (bag on back)
into room, time	07:56	into kitchen (gross, pans, ignore)
fifteen minutes, cool, cool, I got this	text from my him, no time to read	grabbing apricot from shelf
wardrobe open,	pants first	(third down, my shelf), back out
	bra, shoulder, shoulder, clip, on	slowing now, I've done it, I'm getting out of the house
dress, off hanger		taking bite getting out!
over head		wait I'm getting out!
tights, where tights, fuck no tights	must cover legs	no
floor there!	inside out will do will do	eurgh!
	up leg, up leg	it tastes like egg!

A

B

8



On the other hand, C visualizes the zipper of her bag which curves a little while she is opening it. Lastly, D represents her sitting posture, with herself 'belted' to the chair as she describes it in page 38 and her legs tightly trapped between the chair and the desk while scratching her popliteal fossa (the back of the knee). Each letter of the word *scratch* is placed in a separate line to form a static picture of her popliteal fossa, and also dynamically visualize the movement of her fingers to calm the itch.

The analysis above apparently reveals that in *Little Scratch*:

(1) All linguistic units, namely sentences, phrases, words and even syllables, are broken up so that they can be individually placed at designated positions to form a static image and/or a dynamic motion;

(2) In cases where sounds are represented, lexical items which are more phonetically, or 'audibly', suitable, are favored;

(3) The arrangement of words or letters in verbal images assumes various directions: vertical, horizontal, diagonal from left to right or right to left, top to bottom or bottom to top, depending on what they are intended to visualize and convey.

These require translators to hone their visual thinking skill in order to accurately interpret these verbal images and make careful choices of lexical items in the TT to fully render the meaning of the ST while preserving their phonetic forms as well as the audio-visual effects associated with those forms. In addition, they must ensure proper spacing and font sizes since these play crucial roles in the layout and spatial arrangement of the pages for the intended effects of verbal images to be fully achieved. I see these characteristics as emerging requirements to translators.

4.2. *Characteristics of the Stream-of-Consciousness Style in Little Scratch*

What characterizes literary works using stream of consciousness is typically their lack of coherence, logical order, and punctuation. They may be full of incomplete sentences, and most often composed of chunks, phrases, or fragments, even single words or letters. They violate grammatical norms; they are often disrupted; and sometimes they have no clear plots at all. Readers are challenged to interpret them properly, and translators face even more difficulties as they not only have to interpret them but also transfer their interpretation into the target language. This has been pointed out by Tee (2013, p.38) who begs for familiarity with the ‘terrain’ [the field or theme of the reading], i.e. close reading is required before one attempts to translate it. For translators, Tee continues, ‘that could mean additional challenges’ (Riquelme, 1983, p.165, cited in Tee, 2013, p.39), since the ST may lack ‘grammatical telltale signs of shifts in point of view’ and show dubious deviations from conventional syntax’. Talebinezhad (2012, pp.2176-2177) studied two Persian versions of William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* by Sholevar (2004) and Hosseini (2009) and found out that ‘ungrammatical syntactic structures and elliptical clauses’ are common in the ST. *Little Scratch* is no exception.

First, *Little Scratch* requires the reader to simultaneously apply various directions in reading: horizontally, vertically, diagonally, jumping from left to right, right to left, or scrolling centrally, linking one page with another, connecting the chunks or single words together so as to capture the characters’ actions, speech and thoughts. Examples can be seen in E and F.

E is full of chunks and single words; phrases are mingled and/or interwoven; grammaticality is difficult to judge since various function words are omitted; pronouns show apparent ungrammaticality, e.g., ‘her, *thanks!* her, goes through the other door’; ‘me walking’; ‘haven’t seen boss yet today’. In F, longer sentences in the middle column are more frequent – her thoughts are longer, clearer and more connected, but still interrupted, interwoven and ungrammatical. *pedalling* is repeated on either side, visualizing her legs’ motions with the bicycle’s pedals, and her thoughts in the head are in between.

Another problem is references of such pronouns as *he*, *him*, *her*; it is extremely difficult to identify who and what they refer to - the heroine’s boss, her boyfriend, her co-workers, a girl in the story, herself or the little female underpart of her body, for what is being recounted is never coherent. Single words or chunks again make it difficult to grasp the co-text so as to properly understand the novel. Close reading of the original several times, re-reading it and the translation after a substantial span of time clearly help improve both translators’ understanding and their translation. However, most often, this is not possible since the commissioned translation must be accomplished and the published work must reach the reader within the time constraints specified in relevant contracts. That is a pressure in translation, but re-translation can be an option to consider, as Totò (2014) concludes.

swing doors
 holding it open for the woman behind
 haven't seen her before
 like her trousers
 grey, flecked with blue wool?
 her, *thanks!*
 her, goes through the other door
 the other swing door
 that I wasn't holding open
 she has said thanks! me walking
 for me opening a door she did not use
 lobby
 waiting
 for
 a
 lift
 which haven't seen boss yet today
 does what if
 not seem to be he's in the lift
 coming ?

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E

pedalling where it happened every day no but pedalling
 pedalling I'll say YES, THAT NIGHT (he'll know) pedalling
 pedalling WHERE I WENT SILENT pedalling
 pedalling AFTER THE OFFICE DRINKS, THEN, pedalling
 pedalling YES THEN, he'll know, I know, he knows I pedalling
 pedalling have something to say, he's seen the scabs, he's pedalling
 pedalling gently asked, waited, said he's here, he'll pedalling
 pedalling know he's seen that my boss is dubious pedalling
 pedalling (a rapist slightly/very different but still) pedalling
 pedalling
 pedalling I shouldn't have got myself in that situation pedalling
 pedalling the thought materialises pedalling
 pedalling (I stamp it down) pedalling
 pedalling I am entitled (was) (it doesn't feel like me, pedalling
 pedalling the me pre-this at the office drinks, who was pedalling
 pedalling merry and managed to get her boss's pedalling
 pedalling attention, say I WRITE! I WRITE!, say, I pedalling
 pedalling AM MORE THAN HANDS pedalling
 pedalling TO SPIKE, OR FINGERS TO pedalling
 pedalling COUNT NOTEPADS) I don't pedalling

F

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4.3. Sensitive Words and Expressions in *Little Scratch*

First, the word *f*ck* and its derivatives occur 112 times in *Little Scratch* in various contexts, sometimes in her thought, sometimes in her actual speech. Most of the time, the heroine was in extreme mental pain and humiliation as well as hatred and agony towards the culprit, so strong swear words, direct sex-related terms and expressions are used.

The word and its derivatives appear in several distinct functional contexts throughout the novel not at random, but cluster around specific emotional and thematic moments, including:

- Shock, frustration, irritation, agitation or overstimulation, in which they are used as an expletive reacting to daily annoyances, e.g., “no! f*cking dream... f*ck!”; workplace or pub confusion: “what the f*ck does she...”, “what the f*ck was he wearing?”;
- Self-directed anger, self-conflict or internal struggle, or loss of self-control, e.g., “oh f*ck me scratching”; “f*cking pity... this dreaded f*cking desk”;
- Sexual desire and erotic intensity in a density of sexual scenes or thought in the novel, e.g., “let's f*ck let's f*ck let's f*ck”; “f*cking! f*cking! f*cking!”; “f*ck yes yes”;
- Trauma in sections confronting rape and bodily memory, e.g., “you never f*cked it no no no”; “f*ckless... as I want it”;

Appearing with lower frequency are *c*nt* (15 instances), *sh*t*, *christ*, *bitch* to express irritation, agitation, exasperation, hostility, etc., mark emotional escalation in confrontation with the boss (the culprit), or in memories of sexual violation and verbal retaliation. The following table summarizes their occurrences.

Table 1. Frequencies of Most Sensitive Words

Words	Relative Frequency
f*ck	extremely high
c*nt	low-moderate
sh*t	low-moderate
christ	low
bitch	very low

Also, there are a good number of critical puns in the novel, (i) *ass-istant* (p. 101); (ii) *spike* and *f*ck* (p.47 and many others); (iii) *my f*cking mouth* and *c*nt* (p.164). Both *spike* and *f*ck* acts

produce certain sounds, and the verb *spike* or *punch* starts with a combination of fricative and plosive consonants /sp/, or a plosive consonant /p/ while *f*ck* begins with an affricative so that the sounds can be verbally reconstructed. These add to the level of difficulty in translators' tasks. What is found by Hong Diao (2026) that "to reconstruct the sound effects in translation by employing such sound devices as conventional onomatopoeia, expressive vowel elongation, cacophony, and verb-loaded translation" may not suffice.

5. Conclusion

Reviewing the characteristics above, which are not only typical of *Little Scratch*, but also other literary works using the same style and techniques, i.e. verbal images, stream of consciousness, and sensitive words & expressions, one can clearly see why they are considered triple burdens to literary translators.

First, to reconstruct verbal images in the TT, translators must make extremely careful choice of words, phrases and sentences among different options, especially synonyms, so as to ensure to the highest extent possible at least the original: meanings; visual design; phonetic features; functional equivalence and brevity and conciseness.

The last criterion among the five above is to make sure the translated text is easy to be arranged and fits within the constraints of the page. Then comes the ways letters, words, phrases and sentences are arranged properly in the exact design of the ST, which requires translators' visual thinking, as discussed earlier. This involves care to the page dimensions, the font sizes and word as well as line spacing, which may not have been translators' responsibility so far. Often these tasks are performed by editors and publishers, who may not be aware of the visual effects intended by original authors in verbal images and re-constructed by translators, so the original design can be lost or altered due to inappropriate page layout, font sizes and spacing. Evidence of such losses or alterations are found in the Vietnamese version of *Little Scratch*, i.e. the first criterion 'faithfulness' of the translation is not satisfied, and this will be discussed in a subsequent paper within my research.

Secondly, to work out the logical connection among scattering chunks of words and phrases arranged in various directions to re-formulate proper sentences, and get out meanings from such seemingly disconnected pieces of utterances and thoughts is extremely difficult, and misunderstanding, and consequently mis-translation, is inevitable. Again, I will point these out in my upcoming paper.

Lastly, as sensitive words and expressions vary from one culture to another, context to context, how to render them in the TT appropriately, faithfully, functionally yet acceptably to different socio-cultural, even political and regulatory, norms of the target audience continues to triple the burden on literary translators. My next paper will also discuss these issues.

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Thêm ba gánh nặng cho người dịch văn học

Tóm tắt: Nhiều nhà văn tạo lập hình ảnh tĩnh hoặc động bằng chính ngôn từ của mình, và trong bài này tôi gọi chúng là *hình ảnh ngôn từ*. Nhà văn còn sử dụng thủ pháp *dòng ý thức* như một phong cách, hoặc thể loại, nhằm thể hiện dòng tư duy, ý thức lan man, đứt đoạn của nhân vật. Do vậy, ngôn ngữ thể hiện dòng ý thức thường đứt quãng, manh mún, rời rạc, thậm chí phi liên kết và phi ngữ pháp. Những đặc điểm đó gia tăng gánh nặng cho người dịch văn học: làm sao truyền tải được ý nghĩa, nội dung ngôn từ và dụng ý của tác giả trong văn bản nguồn (ST) sang ngôn ngữ đích (hoặc văn bản đích TT) mà vẫn phải bảo toàn hình ảnh ngôn từ mà tác giả gốc tạo nên? Ngoài ra, từ ngữ nhạy cảm như từ tục, chữ thề, từ cấm kỵ, từ ngữ chỉ cơ quan sinh dục và hoạt động tình dục, có những tác động, hiệu ứng khác nhau giữa các ngôn ngữ và văn hóa, tùy thuộc vào chuẩn mực văn hóa-xã hội, chính trị và pháp lý, mặc dù chúng đều là tương đương tuyệt đối về từ vựng. Đó cũng là một thách thức nữa đối với người dịch văn học. Tất cả những thách thức này đều xuất hiện trong cuốn tiểu thuyết *Little Scratch* của Rebecca Watson (2021). Những thách thức đó được phân tích trong bài viết nhằm nâng cao nhận thức của người dịch văn học về những thách thức truyền thống cũng như mới nảy sinh đối với công việc của mình.

Từ khóa: Hình ảnh ngôn từ; dòng ý thức; từ ngữ nhạy cảm; tình dục; dịch văn học.