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**Equivalence and equivalent effect in the English edition of
Forest of the Gods by Balys Sruoga, compared to the original
Lithuanian text**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	3
BACKGROUND INFORMATION.....	3
THEORY.....	4
EQUIVALENCE AND EQUIVALENT EFFECT.....	5
METHODOLOGY.....	7
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.....	8
CONCLUSION.....	14

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a comparative study of translation and localization from Lithuanian into English. It aims to specifically explore equivalence, as well as equivalent effect, in the English edition of Balys Sruoga's memoir *Forest of the Gods*, by analyzing and comparing it to the original Lithuanian edition. It will also focus on emotive/connotative meaning of the translations, as well as cultural contexts when considering the equivalence within the English work.

Equivalence and equivalent effect will be further defined in the theory section, but a brief elaboration on the purpose of this topic is as follows: to what extent can the English edition provide a direct translation of the original, what forms or phrases absolutely must be substituted with different ones, and whether the translator is able to convey the full context and mood of the author's original writing.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Balys Sruoga (1896 - 1947) is one of the most important and well-known authors of all time in Lithuania, his work being taught in every classic literature class in the country, and one will seldom meet any native Lithuanian who is not familiar with him. *Forest of The Gods* is his most famous work, enough as to be translated into different languages, which is not a very common occurrence for Lithuanian literature.

Balys Sruoga was also a poet, a critic of literature and theater, as well as a translator and publicist. His early works consisted of poetry, though he later leaned into dramaturgy as he found his passion in the modernization of drama and theater. His prose imitated the poetics of traditional folk songs, it was improvisatory, melodic, and often thematized "forces of nature" (Barčienė, 2024). Sruoga's language was so impactful and unique, in fact, that Lithuanians often refer to "sruogisms" in reference to language that was heavily put to use and popularized by him (Davoliute, 1998). His later works within dramaturgy were majorly concerned with revitalizing historic characters and settings, and he is credited to have "revitalized Lithuanian historic theater traditions" (Barčienė, 2024).

In 1943, Sruoga was arrested by Nazi soldiers and taken to the Stutthof concentration camp. It was after his return from the camp that he wrote *Forest of The Gods* about what he had lived

through in the two years he was there. The memoir is steeped in ironic tones and the author's signature themes of "laughter", which, in this literary work, results in grotesque dark humor and absurdism. Though it was written and finished in 1945, it wasn't released until 1957, 10 years after his death (Barčienė, 2024). It was banned by the Soviet government, allegedly due to "mockery of the victims, inadequate condemnation of fascism and lack of moral distinguishment between the perpetrators and victims of genocide" (Davoliute, 1998). Today, it is agreed upon that this was a complete misinterpretation of Sruoga's language and the point of the book; it was banned arguably due to the overly strict censorship laws typical of authoritarian regimes.

As for the English edition of *Forest of the Gods*, Ausrine Byla is the translator of the book, as well as Sruoga's granddaughter (Foti, pg. 341). She was born and raised in the United States, but has spent at least 15 years living in Lithuania. Byla studied English literature at Arizona State University, and currently teaches at Vilnius College of Design. Due to her Lithuanian parents and grandmother's efforts to maintain their language and culture in the family, Byla is able to speak Lithuanian very clearly and fluently, as shown by the interviews she has taken part of (LRT, 2015). Despite this, there is not a lot of public information about the translator regarding formal or academic skills in the Lithuanian language specifically. Therefore, it is worthy to note a question regarding her capabilities as a translator, especially for a book from an author whose language is well-known to be unique and complex due to the avid use of colloquialisms, idioms, etc. The same scrutiny can also be applied to myself when evaluating the choices made by the translator, as a native whose perspective and reflection of the translation of the book is not founded on years of research and expertise within translation studies.

THEORY

The theoretical background in this thesis draws upon the theories and teachings from Jeremy Munday's 3rd edition of *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications* (2012). The author of the book is a translation studies professor, and works in the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom. He has, in addition to this book, also authored several guides on different kinds of subjects within the discipline of translation for Routledge since 2008.

Considering Munday's prolific status as a translator and professor, his theory book on translation studies is highly suited to support the theory section of this thesis.

In this academic guide, Munday compiles translation theories and contributions from many other translators and authors across several decades. The study of translation is shown to have developed and re-developed several times, as the terminology gradually became more targeted and specific.

Chapter 3 is especially relevant for this paper; it covers the subject of "equivalence and equivalent effect". The most impactful work regarding equivalence was pioneered by structuralist Roman Jakobson, Eugene Nida (who himself drew upon Noam Chomsky's generative-transformational grammar model), and Peter Newmark.

EQUIVALENCE AND EQUIVALENT EFFECT

Before the 1950s and 1960s, discussions regarding translation mainly concerned "literal" and "free" translation. Both terms are relatively simple and broad, "literal" describing word-for-word translation, and "free" indicating an approach that strays from those constraints - a seemingly controversial strategy at the time. After this point, however, theoreticians started to develop more systematic approaches and categorizations of translation. The more prominent debates explored the issues of "meaning" and "equivalence" started by Roman Jakobson in a paper in 1959. Equivalence to Jakobson was essentially solving the cross-linguistic differences found in languages in relation to each other, specifically obligatory grammatical and lexical forms. These differences belonged to one of three levels: the level of gender, the level of aspect, and the level of semantic fields (e.g. terms of kinship).

The section on Jakobson's work is brief compared to the texts about Eugene Nida's contributions to translation studies - the American was hailed as "one of the most important figures" in this particular discipline. His approach entailed that "a word *acquires* meaning through its context and can produce varying responses according to culture" (Munday, pg. 64). Similarly to Jakobson's cross-linguistic differences, the nature of meaning can belong to three categories:

1. Linguistic meaning, which shows how many different meanings the same word can have in various phrases/sentences, due to different linguistic structures.

2. Referential meaning, which simply denotes the codified “dictionary” meaning.
3. Emotive/connotative meaning, which is the associations that a word can produce.

Emotive/connotative meaning is especially relevant for the research done in this paper, as a literary text like *Forest of the Gods* specifically aims to connect with the reader and be of emotional value, and to cause them to reflect upon and experience the emotions conveyed in the text.

Nida also developed the “two types of equivalence” in translation, formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence solely focuses on the text and the message within it, which is often used in academic environments by students to study language and culture, though it is not a particularly suitable strategy for the type of text discussed in this paper. Dynamic equivalence, on the other hand, is based on “the principle of equivalent effect”. The goal is to achieve the same effect for the subject reading the translated message, that the subjects who read the message in its original language did.

In order to achieve this dynamic equivalence in the translated text, Nida believes that “naturalness of expression” is a crucial part of it. Naturalness can be acquired by accounting for the reader’s linguistic needs and cultural expectations; adjustments of grammar, lexicon and cultural references; minimal interference from the original language.

Finally, Nida postulates that four basic requirements are needed to achieve the equivalent effect. The translation needs to:

1. make sense
2. convey the spirit and manner of the original
3. have a natural and easy form of expression
4. produce a similar response (Munday, pg. 67)

Peter Newmark’s approach to translation is also brief, touching upon the suggestion to replace Nida’s equivalence terms with “communicative translation” and “semantic translation” respectively. Communicative translation greatly resembles Nida’s dynamic equivalence, as it aims to “produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original”. Furthermore, similarly to formal equivalence, semantic translation focuses on

reproducing the equivalent semantic and syntactic aspects of the languages, as well as the exact contextual meaning of the original text (Munday, pg. 70).

The difference between Nida and Newmark's definitions lies in, at least according to Newmark, the fact that one cannot replicate the same exact effect "if the text is out of [the translation's] space and time". As an example, one may never reproduce the equivalent effect of the Greek poet Homer's *Odyssey* as it was experienced by the listeners in ancient Greece.

Nonetheless, Nida's theories are presented in a detailed and concise manner, and are easy to apply to one's own research and discussion. Disregarding Newmark's argument of space and time, this was never specifically mentioned by Nida, and the theoreticians' approaches are immensely similar to one another.

METHODOLOGY

The methods used to produce findings for this thesis will be of the qualitative kind, and will mostly consist of independent, close reading of the Lithuanian and English versions of the book simultaneously. That is, they will be read side-by-side, and the languages will be compared to one another at the same time in order to detect notable differences.

The samples for the thesis will be taken from the first five chapters of the book. The examples from these chapters will be presented in the Findings section and categorized into specific themes whenever possible. Some translations include several points of interest within themselves that belong to different categories, but do account for a specific mood when considered together. The themes will be of the following: differences in mood due to under- or over-exaggeration; differences in mood due to substitution of otherwise directly untranslatable phrases or grammatical forms; alternative grammatical forms that can subtly change the semantic meaning of the text.

The findings will be formatted as follows:

English (translation): "Citation." (page number)

Lithuanian (original): "Citation." (page number)

Direct translation of the original: "Citation." (page number)

Any paragraphs succeeding the findings will be describing them using terminology from translation and other linguistic studies, as well as elaborating on any necessary cultural or literary contexts. As was mentioned before, emotive and connotative meaning is especially focused on throughout the research on the book and included with the findings, as it is an emotionally charged work, written to provoke active reflection of the historical events and lived experiences detailed in the text. The Discussion section will attempt to answer the thesis statements presented in the introduction, through the use of the information detailed in the Findings section.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The first category of translations that will be presented is differences in the writing's mood due to mis-matched intensity of phrases in the different editions, such as under- or over-exaggeration.

English: "The draft board offices **feel haunted**." (pg. 16)

Lithuanian: "Jaunimo suėmimo įstaigose tarytum **giltinės vaikštinėta**." (pg. 12)

Direct translation: "In the youth detention establishment, it was as if the **Grim Reaper had walked through**."

While the English translation uses the more general description of the office "feeling haunted", the original Lithuanian text specifically describes the feeling of "the Grim Reaper having walked through" the space. An argument is to be made here that, while the haunting of a place can indicate an ominous and dark atmosphere clearly, using the personification of Death for the comparison greatly amplifies the coldness and emptiness of the draft board offices. It simply being haunted does not portray the exact intensity of the feeling in the way that the Grim Reaper does.

English: "Our glowing prospects are suddenly **shattered** when, creeping out from the devil knows where, a sort of spindly and skewed S.S. guy begins to wave his fist in our faces and mutter from under his flattened nose." (pg. 27)

Lithuanian: “Mūsų svajonių gražiausias perspektyvas staiga **nutraukė** galas žino iš kur netikėtai išlindęs vienas SS vyrukas, ištišęs toks, kreivas, su atlapa nosimi, po kuria kažką pamarmaliavęs, ėmė savo kumštį vedžioti palei mūsų nosis.” (pg. 21-22)

Direct translation: Our dreams’ beautiful prospects are suddenly **cut off/interrupted** by, end knows where from, this SS guy, kind of elongated, crooked, with a loose/open nose, under which after having muttered, he took to tracing his fist parallel to our noses.”

The translation of interest is “shattered” in the English version as opposed to being “cut off” or “interrupted”. While dreams and prospects can be said to “shatter”, the expression is not exactly the same in Lithuanian. Despite this, the English translation juxtaposes the notion of a specifically “beautiful” dream with “shattering” - being promptly destroyed into many unrepairable pieces. While the phrase also expresses a sense of suddenness in the original, it is more so in a way where a reader’s eyes skim across the word, and move on to the next phrase. In contrast, the feeling of something shattering reads as more impactful, and is capable of portraying that an unwanted, potentially dangerous intruder has crept up on the narrator.

The next category follows the theme of language- or culture-specific sayings. It encompasses phrases that would be quite difficult, if not impossible, to translate word-for-word and still attain the same kind of cultural understanding in readers who only know English. It is then explored what a close equivalent would be; possible paraphrasing to include the direct translation, if only partially; or the possibility of non-Lithuanian speakers being able to grasp the full extent of the translation after all.

English: “But here, **thunder** only knows what happened!” (pg. 17)

Lithuanian: “[...] o čia - **perkūnas** žino, kas pasidarė!” (pg. 13)

In this passage, “thunder” is translated literally and refers to the god of thunder from Baltic mythology. Speakers tend to name him in Lithuanian in an exclamatory sentence. This colloquialism is deeply ingrained in Lithuanian language and culture, but the same cannot be said for English, necessarily. Unlike Death’s personification being a common phenomenon in most cultures and therefore possible to be understood by foreigners, the reason for naming thunder as a seemingly divine, personified force may be lost to the reader.

It should be noted, however, that this concept is not exclusive to Lithuanian language and culture, or even Baltic mythology. An article published by Emily Malone, a student from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, details how the Finnish swear word “perkele” was originally derived from the Baltic languages and was the name of their own god of thunder. It also states that many other Balto-Slavic languages have word equivalents for similar gods (Malone 2014). On the other hand, it can be difficult to confirm this information with the utmost certainty. There are sources that suggest that “perkūnas”, “perkele” and other such variants all stem from the same Proto-Indo-European roots, and not necessarily from their fellow branch languages (Adams & Mallory 2006).

With this context in mind, the translation of this phrase can, in fact, be relatable to a wider demographic of readers, particularly those from all sorts of different parts of Europe. One might even argue that the concept is near-universal, as virtually all cultures hold or have held nature in a superior, deistic regard in different degrees.

English: “Our glowing prospects are suddenly shattered when, creeping out **from the devil knows where**, a sort of spindly and skewed S.S. guy begins to wave his fist in our faces and mutter from under his flattened nose.” (pg. 27)

Lithuanian: “Mūsų svajonių gražiausias perspektyvas staiga nutraukė **galas žino iš kur** netikėtai išlindęs vienas SS vyrukas, ištišęs toks, kreivas, su atlapa nosimi, po kuria kažką pamarmaliavęs, ėmė savo kumštį vedžioti palei mūsų nosis.” (pg. 21-22)

Direct translation: Our dreams’ beautiful prospects are suddenly cut off/interrupted by, **end knows where from**, this SS guy, kind of elongated, crooked, with a loose/open nose, under which after having muttered, he took to tracing his fist parallel to our noses.”

The phrase of interest reads “from the devil knows where”, which replaces the original noun “end”. The direct translation sounds especially foreign and senseless, and the English expression chosen to substitute this is one of the most suitable ones that exist in broad jargon. While it may still render the sentence rigid or awkward, the Lithuanian phrase is more or less a close equivalent to when one would say “cannot make heads or tails of something”. In other words, the narrator does not know where the military officer appeared from, just as he has no inkling as to where the “end” (tail) would be, or *which* “end” (tail *or* head) it would be. The conclusion is that the “end” which is as undetectable and unexplainable as the military officer who appeared in front of them is, its identical nature would allow it to be the one to know.

The third category deals with differences in grammatical and lexical forms. This can be due to one language not having all of the same grammatical forms as another, or a more “natural”, coherent translation being discarded in favor of a direct translation, though the strength of this argument can also be debated.

English: “Most of my cellmates look like everyday criminals, though one individual **says** the rosary all night.” (pg. 19)

Lithuanian: “Lyg ir kriminalinė publika, tiktai vienas iš jų visą naktį rožančių **kalbėjo** be paliovos.” (pg. 15)

Direct translation: “It does seem like a criminal public/audience, just one of them **spoke** the rosary all night without pause.”

There is a noticeable discrepancy of the verb tenses used in the translation compared to the original. In this example, this is not worthy of noting in particular, but should be briefly explained for clarity in regards to future examples. In Lithuanian, the verb of interest “to speak/talk” is in past tense, but this is changed to present tense in the English edition.

The choice of verb, on the other hand, is the reason for including this example in the thesis. The particular verb can be used in this combination of grammatical and lexical contexts when speaking Lithuanian. However, when it is simply directly ported over, one can argue that it creates a rigid translation and does not flow as well in English. Referring to “saying the rosary” as opposed to “praying” or “reciting” it can be deemed as unusual. Rosaries are prayers that people specifically learn to repeat word-for-word, while “saying” something usually refers to that which is not practiced to be vocalized. One will often think of spontaneous, natural speech that is not practiced when reading about a character “saying” a line.

English: “Now even I **am laughing**.” (pg. 22)

Lithuanian: “Dabar **nusijuokiau** ir aš.” (pg. 18)

Direct translation: “Now I **laughed/let out a laugh** as well.”

This is where verb tense is particularly relevant. In Lithuanian, the present progressive verb form does not exist. Context has to be taken into account when translating it into English for

this reason. Not only does the translation change the original tense of the verb from past to present, it also specifically makes the form progressive. The argument here is that these decisions have changed the perception and length of the physical time that this verb takes.

Looking at the structure of the verb will help to understand why this is the case. In Lithuanian, the verb “to laugh” is “juoktis”. The suffix “-iausi” is added to make this verb first-person past tense, “juokiausi”. However, with the addition of the prefix “nu-”, the “-si” part of the suffix must be moved between the new prefix and the verb root. The verb is now “nusijuokiau”, and the function of the prefix is specifically to mark the non-intensity of the action (Kietytė 2023). This indicates that the narrator’s laugh was short, it could be appropriately described as a “chuckle”. Changing the verb to be present progressive greatly transforms this context, the action seems to take up more physical time than it was intended to by the author of the book.

English: “Our glowing prospects are suddenly shattered when, creeping out from the devil knows where, a sort of spindly and skewed S.S. guy begins to wave his fist in our faces and mutter from under his **flattened nose.**” (pg. 27)

Lithuanian: “Mūsų svajonių gražiasias perspektyvas staiga nutraukė galas žino iš kur netikėtai išlindęs vienas SS vyrukas, ištįsęs toks, kreivas, su **atlapa nosimi**, po kuria kažką pamarmaliavęs, ėmė savo kumštį vedžioti palei mūsų nosis.” (pg. 21-22)

Direct translation: Our dreams’ beautiful prospects are suddenly cut off/interrupted by, **end knows where from**, this SS guy, kind of elongated, crooked, with a loose/open nose, under which after having muttered, he took to tracing his fist parallel to our noses.”

Presented is a contradiction in the translation regarding the characteristics of the S.S. soldier’s nose. The Lithuanian adjective “atlapas” refers to something that is not fixated or connected onto something well, or describes something “open”, such as a door. The description in the context of a nose may allude to wide nostrils, protruding nose tip, long nose bridge, etc. All of these go directly against the translated “flattened nose”. As it is a very unusual adjective to use to describe a nose, it may be hard to find a functional equivalent for it, in which case the translator may have decided that changing the semantic meaning would be more appropriate.

The following is an example of a specific grammatical form, as well as an ironic downplaying of an action adding up to a very specific response that the author is looking for in a reader. The mis-match of one of these can betray that goal, and it will be demonstrated how.

English: “The Gestapo pursue those who can’t squeeze in with **foul words**, then **bludgeon** them with clubs to slim them down.” (pg. 26)

Lithuanian: “Netelpančius, **šuniškais žodeliais** palydėdami, gestapininkai ėmė buožėmis **pamaigyti**, kad jie plonesni pasidarytų.” (pg. 21)

Direct translation: The ones who can’t fit, while escorting (by the Gestapo) with dog-like little words, the Gestapo-men took to **kneading**, so that they’d become slimmer.”

There are a couple things to note here: the translations of “foul words” and “bludgeon”. The phrase “šuniškais žodeliais” includes both an adjective that has no direct equivalent in English, as well as the diminutive of the noun “words”. The closest direct translation of “šuniškais” would be “dog-like” or “in dog fashion”, which, to a non-native speaker, may have been puzzling to read had it been conveyed as such. “Foul” gives a fairly accurate association of what the Lithuanian equivalent does; there are certain words that take on the “dog” compound to mean something negative. Another example of this in the language is “šunsnukis”, literally “dog-snout” (“snout” being an informal, borderline vulgar form for “face” when used to refer to a person’s face), which would correspond to the English vulgarities “asshole” or “bastard”. Dogs in Lithuanian culture are not otherwise frowned upon, they have been companions and house guards not unlike in most other countries. Circling back to the word “foul”, they may have been described as such purely physically due to the tradition of keeping dogs exclusively outside year-round. As for “words”, it expresses a linguistic feature that Sruoga uses very frequently in his writing, namely diminutives. They function in much the same way as they do in, for example, Spanish, which adds “-ito” or “-ita” to nouns to make them smaller, depending on the word’s gender. For the Lithuanian plural noun “žodžiai”, “-eliai” is the appropriate diminutive form. It is assumed that the author wished to ironically diminish the brutality of the situation by calling the vulgarities spoken by the Nazi soldiers “small”. In some contexts, arguably including this one, the diminutive can even present it as being “cute”.

While the Grim Reaper example was that of a type of under-exaggeration in English, the escalation from what would be “kneading” in Lithuanian to “bludgeoning” in English is a

distinct occurrence of over-exaggeration in this book. “Pamaigyti” is a verb that can apply to several objects, its referential meaning being “to change (one’s) natural form”. The connotative meaning of this word would be regarded by most as a much less severe form than “bludgeoning”, as it is usually assumed that the action is being done with one’s hands on a much smaller and malleable object, such as paper, dough, a hat, etc.

The use of this verb in its original Lithuanian form, along with the former “foul (little) words” is akin to the author waving a dismissive hand to this incident, treating it as a pleasant daily occurrence. Due to this presentation, translating the act with the club as “bludgeoning” contradicts the mood the author had originally created.

CONCLUSION

Finally, this section will attempt to summarize the answers to the questions posed in the introduction.

To what extent can the English edition provide a direct translation of the original? In many cases, it is very much possible to translate entire segments word-for-word and keep the linguistic and contextual integrity of the text. Sometimes phrases are directly translated to a fault, such as the example with the rosary. Curiously, in other cases, the translator ends up contorting the original mood of the writing, such as when “Grim Reaper” was substituted with the room being “haunted”, despite the concept being almost fully universal. It is difficult to justify the missed opportunity for perfect equivalence in the translated work.

What forms or phrases absolutely must be substituted with different ones? Examples of the “end → devil” change, as well as the questionable state of “thunder” as an understandable cultural phenomenon can be argued to be contenders. At the same time, alternative translations sacrificing the sentence structure may allow the “end” to be a usable substitute for “tails” in “heads or tails”; “thunder” as the mythological god is not only exclusive to Lithuanian or even Baltic mythology, so it can have a broader audience than anticipated. In addition, as “thunder” is associated with disorder and chaos, readers unfamiliar with the god may as well interpret it as a metaphor for those concepts.

Is the translator able to convey the full context and mood of the author's original writing? As touched upon in the first question, Byla can greatly change the mood for the worse, but it can also be transformed for an even better, impactful phrasing. For example, the colorful and impactful image of the scene in the English version - beautiful prospects being "shattered" instead of simply "interrupted". It arguably leaves a longer-lasting impression on the reader than the original.

Differences in verb tense are apparent, at least in the one instance illustrated as the "was laughing" versus "let out a laugh" example. This is a common issue in such branches of language that are able to employ a wide range of suffixes and prefixes onto simple words - it can be difficult to convey that exact verb and the style in which it is executed.