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Translating Paratexts: A Multimodal Analysis of Vietnamese Editions of Irish Chick Lit

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the multimodal adaptation of paratextual elements, specifically titles, authorial branding, and book covers, in the Vietnamese translations of five Irish Chick Lit novels. Drawing on Genette's theory of paratexts, Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar, and Viezzi's model of culturally adaptive titling, the analysis highlights how intersemiotic translation practices reframe genre identity, gender ideology, and reader positioning across cultural contexts. Using a qualitative, multimodal discourse analytic framework, the paper compares the Irish and Vietnamese editions of works by Marian Keyes, Cathy Kelly, and Cecelia Ahern. Findings reveal systematic shifts in the paratextual hierarchy, visual aesthetics, and semantic framing, reflecting both localization strategies and ideological filtering processes. Vietnamese editions emphasize emotional relatability and consumer-oriented femininity through vibrant color palettes, softened imagery, and downplayed author branding. Title translations exhibit a spectrum from literal rendering to metaphorical reframing, often modulating tone and cultural resonance to align with local genre expectations. This research contributes to translation studies by demonstrating how paratexts operate as strategic sites of meaning-making, market adaptation, and cultural negotiation in the global circulation of popular fiction. The study also highlights the importance of integrating visual and discursive dimensions into applied linguistic models of translation and reception.

Keywords: Paratextual Translation; Multimodal Discourse Analysis; Chick Lit; Genre Localization; Cross-Cultural Reception; Title Adaptation

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1. Introduction

Translation is a critical site of linguistic and cultural negotiation, not only enabling access to foreign texts but also mediating the way these texts are perceived, categorized, and consumed in new sociocultural contexts. In addition to translating textual content, translators and publishers must consider paratextual elements, such as titles, authorial branding, and book covers, which function as semiotic gateways that frame the reading experience and shape audience expectations. According to Genette, paratexts are "thresholds" that condition the reception of a text[1], while Venuti, Kress and van Leeuwen emphasize that paratexts are also sites of ideological and cultural inscription[2, 3]. Yet despite growing interest in multimodal and extra-textual dimensions of translation, there remains limited scholarly attention to how paratextual strategies, especially in the visual domain, function discursively in the transnational flow of popular fiction, particularly in underrepresented linguistic contexts such as Vietnam.

This study explores the Vietnamese translations of five Irish "*Chick Lit*" novels by authors including Cecelia Ahern, Marian Keyes, and Cathy Kelly, focusing on how paratextual features–especially titles, authorial branding, and book covers–are adapted to align with the expectations of local readers. While Irish "*Chick Lit"* has gained global popularity for its themes of female agency, emotional resilience, and contemporary femininity, its translation into Vietnamese is not merely linguistic but semiotic and ideological, involving choices that frame gender, genre, and cultural identity. Drawing on Genette's paratextual theory and a multimodal discourse analysis approach, this paper examines how title translations, cover imagery, and visual hierarchies (e.g., author prominence vs. title salience) are localized to resonate with Vietnamese sociocultural norms and readership values. Through a linguistically grounded analysis, this study argues that titles and book covers in translated fiction are not peripheral but central to the negotiation of meaning across cultures. The findings contribute to ongoing debates in translation studies and discourse linguistics regarding the interplay between language, ideology, and market positioning in global literary circulation. In doing so, the study highlights how paratextual strategies can function as tools of both cultural domestication and genre reconfiguration, shaping not only how foreign texts are received but also how they are reimagined within new literary systems.

2. Irish Chick Lit: Genre, Discourse, and Translation in a Cross-Cultural Context

Contemporary Irish female popular fiction—often grouped under the umbrella of "*Chick Lit*"—has gained global traction for its blend of humor, realism, and emotional depth. While Helen Fielding's Bridget Jones's Diary is often cited as a foundational work in this genre, Irish authors such as Marian Keyes, Cecelia Ahern, Cathy Kelly, and Sheila O'Flanagan have emerged as leading voices, producing narratives that have resonated with international readers across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Their commercial success is well-documented: Maeve Binchy's books have sold 4.6 million copies, generating nearly €36 million, while Ahern's P.S. I Love You has been translated into more than 40 languages and adapted into a popular film. These authors frequently rank among the best-selling fiction writers in the UK[4].

From a translation studies perspective, the global success of Irish Chick Lit offers a valuable case for analyzing how genre-specific discourse—particularly that of female experience, identity negotiation, and emotional resilience—is linguistically and paratextually adapted for target cultures. While the original texts are embedded in culturally specific contexts shaped by Ireland's post-Celtic Tiger transformations, social referendums, and evolving gender roles[5], translations often recode or neutralize such cultural references to ensure accessibility. Such dynamic raises important questions about the domestication or foreignization of genre norms[2], especially when the source culture's ideological positioning intersects with the target audience's sociocultural expectations. Irish Chick Lit often balances culturally marked content (e.g., Irish names, local settings) with globally familiar discursive patterns, such as first-person confessional narratives, informal lexis, and humorous inner monologue[6]. These linguistic features contribute to the genre's international appeal. Yet, they pose challenges in translation—particularly in contexts like Vietnam, where the genre is relatively new, and readers may not share the same cultural schemas. McGonigle notes that many Irish Chick Lit novels strategically emphasize cosmopolitan lifestyles over national

identity, allowing translators to frame them as aspirational yet culturally adaptable narratives that could plausibly unfold in any modern, urban setting[7]. The discursive construction of femininity in Irish Chick Lit is another element that requires sensitive negotiation in translation. While stereotypical Chick Lit motifs—such as career struggles, romantic entanglements, and consumer culture—do appear, Irish authors often imbue them with pragmatic realism and psychological nuance. Ryan observes that career depictions in these novels transcend cliché by portraying ambition and workplace dynamics as multidimensional and contextually fraught[8]. Moreover, Irish Chick Lit frequently engages with socially grounded themes—such as domestic abuse, single motherhood, and class inequality—addressed with both linguistic subtlety and emotional authenticity[9]. These thematic layers not only distinguish Irish contributions to the genre but also introduce a complexity that must be navigated in translation, particularly in the rendering of tone, register and culturally situated references. As Baykan argues, Irish Chick Lit resists the formulaic structure often associated with the genre by foregrounding individualized narratives and rejecting reductive portrayals of female experience[10]. Translating such texts thus demands attention not only to lexical and syntactic choices but also to the ideological positioning of voice and agency, especially when moving between socio-discursive systems with different gender norms and narrative conventions. In brief, Irish Chick Lit represents a rich intersection of genre, culture, and ideology—making it an ideal corpus for investigating how translation, particularly through paratextual and linguistic strategies, mediates meaning across global literary markets. As the Vietnamese readership increasingly engages with these narratives, the role of translation becomes central in reshaping genre recognition and reader reception within a new cultural and linguistic landscape.

3. Irish Chick Lit and Vietnamese Readers: Cultural Resonance and Discursive Mediation through Translation

Vietnamese society, long shaped by Confucian patriarchal values, has traditionally defined women's roles through the "*three obediences*" and "*four virtues*"—prescriptive norms that emphasize filial piety, marital subservience, and gendered propriety. These ideologies, historically embedded in both social discourse and cultural expectation, continue to exert influence even as Vietnamese women increasingly assert agency and independence in the post-Doi Moi era[11, 12]. Against this backdrop of transformation, the emergence of translated Irish Chick Lit has offered Vietnamese readers a unique cultural encounter—one that is simultaneously familiar and aspirational.

From a translation and discourse perspective, the success of Irish Chick Lit in Vietnam reveals how translated genre fiction functions as a site of ideological negotiation. The genre's recurring narrative arc—centered around romantic resolution, personal transformation, and professional ambition—reflects and reframes the tensions Vietnamese women face as they navigate between tradition and modernity. While Western feminist critiques have often problematized Chick Lit's emphasis on romantic fulfillment and consumerism[13], these very themes resonate with Vietnamese readers, not as regressive but as reflections of culturally sanctioned milestones such as marriage and social stability. Crucially, the Vietnamese translation of Irish Chick Lit not only replicates these tropes but also recontextualizes them through paratextual and linguistic adaptation, aligning genre expectations with local readership norms. The linguistic register of Chick Lit—marked by an informal tone, humor, and first-person narration—must be translated sensitively to preserve relatability while avoiding cultural dissonance. For example, Vietnamese translations often tone down overt individualism or sexual expression, substituting them with softened equivalents or euphemisms that maintain social acceptability. Similarly, paratextual elements such as titles and blurbs frame the novels as empowering and fashionable, often branding them as "essential reading for modern women," thus discursively positioning the books as both lifestyle guides and self-reflective texts. This discursive framing is particularly significant given that many themes addressed in Irish Chick Lit—such as single motherhood, domestic violence, and workplace discrimination—are still underrepresented or delicately treated in Vietnamese mainstream fiction. The translation thus performs a dual function: it introduces readers to new narrative forms while maintaining a culturally acceptable presentation of sensitive content. As Nguyen notes, this hybrid appeal enables Vietnamese readers to project their own experiences onto the protago-

nists' dilemmas, identifying both with their struggles and with their symbolic victories [14].

The reception of Irish Chick Lit in Vietnam can also be understood through the lens of reader-response theory and cultural semiotics. Online reader communities and book forums often highlight how educated women in their twenties and thirties view these texts as aspirational, particularly in terms of professional autonomy and emotional self-determination. These responses reflect how translation influences not only linguistic meaning but also socio-symbolic meaning, transforming Irish Chick Lit into a vehicle of aspiration and identity construction. Moreover, the market-oriented paratextual strategies used by Vietnamese publishers reinforce this effect. Cover designs, author bios, and promotional language construct a symbolic connection to modernity and cosmopolitanism. Framing these narratives as both globally relevant and locally resonant allows the genre to function as a cultural bridge, allowing readers to explore evolving notions of womanhood through translated discourse. In short, the popularity of Irish Chick Lit in Vietnam is not solely a product of narrative entertainment but the result of carefully mediated translation practices that align linguistic style, paratextual framing, and cultural ideology. The genre's success highlights the significance of examining how translation reconfigures not only texts but also reader expectations, gender discourse, and cultural identity formation in the target context.

4. Paratextuality and Translation: Mediating Meaning across Cultures

In contemporary translation studies, paratextual elements such as titles and book covers have gained increasing scholarly attention as critical sites of meaning-making. Once considered peripheral, these elements are now widely recognized as semiotic interfaces that shape how a text is framed, accessed, and interpreted. As Genette argues, paratexts serve as "*discursive thresholds*", mediating the relationship between the text and its audience by organizing expectations and enabling genre recognition [1]. In cross-cultural translation, the role of paratexts becomes especially pronounced: the intersemiotic translation of such elements demands shifts not only in linguistic expression but also in visual representation, cultural symbolism, and ideological alignment [15]. These shifts are rarely neutral; instead, they mediate embedded value systems and reader positioning within the target culture. Approaching title and cover translation through the lens of multimodal discourse analysis reveals the layered interaction between linguistic, visual, and cultural semiotics [3]. Elements such as color, layout, typography, and imagery are not merely decorative but function semiotically to construct genre identity, emotional tone, and audience appeal. Particularly in genre fiction, such as Chick Lit or romance, titles and covers operate as culturally coded signifiers that shape not only what kind of story is being told but also who the imagined reader is—in terms of gender, lifestyle, and aspiration. A pertinent example is the Vietnamese translation of Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary*, rendered as *Nhật ký tiểu thư Jones* (lit. "Diary of Miss Jones"). While the original title positions the text as a confessional narrative grounded in irony and everyday insecurity, the Vietnamese term *tiểu thư* introduces a layer of social refinement and aspirational femininity. This lexical elevation transforms the protagonist from a self-deprecating, relatable character into a more polished and socially privileged figure. From a translation-theoretical perspective, this represents a form of ideological domestication, aligning the narrative with prevailing norms of femininity in Vietnamese popular culture [1]. This transformation is reinforced by the visual grammar of the book cover, which typically features soft pastel tones, cursive fonts, and images of slender, well-dressed women—semiotic resources that contribute to a more romanticized, elegant rebranding of the character. Similar processes are evident in the Vietnamese edition of Sophie Kinsella's *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, translated as *Lời thú nhận của một tín đồ shopping*. The English title, built on the humorous and pathological suffix "-aholic," conveys themes of excess and personal struggle. In contrast, the Vietnamese term *tín đồ* (meaning "devotee" or "follower") reframes the protagonist's consumerism as fashionable enthusiasm rather than addiction. This euphemizing shift neutralizes the ironic critique in the original, recasting consumption as a culturally sanctioned expression of modern urban identity. The cover design complements this reinterpretation through images of luxury shopping bags, fashionable women, and vibrant, high-contrast visuals—conveying empowerment, sophistication, and agency. Such paratextual choices exemplify how translation involves not only ver-

bal fidelity but also aesthetic and ideological realignment. These examples highlight a broader trend in the gendered marketing of translated fiction, particularly in contexts like Vietnam, where publishing houses actively tailor titles and covers to reflect localized ideals of femininity, emotional expression, and consumer aspiration. Common visual motifs include soft color palettes, scripted fonts, and emotionally evocative blurbs. These choices are not arbitrary; they are informed by market segmentation strategies and culturally specific reader expectations. For instance, blurbs such as "A must-read for modern women" or references to international success operate as epitextual endorsements, guiding reception and enhancing the text's legitimacy through global recognition while also reinforcing local cultural values.

Paratexts also serve as ideological transmitters, as demonstrated in Zao, Zhang, and Feng's analysis of *China's Panda Books project*, where cover design is employed to communicate not only the genre but also state-approved cultural narratives[16]. In commercially driven contexts, similar mechanisms are at work: publishers manipulate paratexts to construct narratives of upward mobility, emotional resilience, and lifestyle aspiration, particularly for women, embedding translated fiction within broader socioeconomic and ideological frameworks. Viezzi's model of culturally adaptive titling offers a useful typology for understanding these shifts[17]. Title translation often involves metaphorical reframing, modulation of tone and register, or insertion of evaluative lexis to align with the discursive norms of the target culture. These adaptations are rarely literal; they are crafted to enhance marketability, emotional accessibility, and genre clarity. When combined with feminist translation theory, it becomes clear that these paratextual shifts not only facilitate communication across linguistic boundaries but also reproduce, challenge, or strategically reshape dominant gender ideologies[18, 19]. In summary, the translation of titles and book covers should be understood as a multimodal act of cultural negotiation involving the recalibration of language, aesthetics, and values. Far from being secondary, these elements constitute a core part of the translation process—shaping genre legibility, reader identification, and the transnational circulation of texts. As the above examples illustrate, paratextual adaptation is instrumental in translating not just words but worldviews, identities, and social imaginaries.

5. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, multimodal discourse analytic approach to investigate the translation of paratextual elements, specifically titles and book covers, in the Vietnamese editions of Irish Chick Lit. The methodology is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Genette's theory of paratextuality[1], Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar[3], and Viezzi's typology of culturally adaptive titling[17]. Feminist translation theory further informs the critical interpretation of how translated paratexts encode gendered ideologies and reader subjectivities[18, 19].

5.1. Selection of Material for Analysis

The corpus was constructed through purposive sampling based on three primary criteria. First, all selected works were authored by Irish writers, ensuring the presence of culturally embedded perspectives specific to Irish contemporary womanhood. Second, literary prominence and market visibility were considered; the selected authors (Marian Keyes, Cathy Kelly, and Cecelia Ahern) are internationally recognized for shaping the Chick Lit genre and have achieved sustained commercial success across English-speaking and global markets. Third, only works with Vietnamese translations were included, as the study investigates the adaptation of paratextual elements for Vietnamese audiences. A total of five novels were selected namely, *Watermelon* and *Sushi for Beginners* by Marian Keyes[20, 21], *Never Too Late* by Cathy Kelly[22], *P.S. I Love You* and *Where Rainbows End* by Cecelia Ahern[23, 24]. These texts, published between 1995 and 2004 and translated into Vietnamese between 2003 and 2010, offer a diachronic perspective on the evolving strategies of paratextual adaptation. The corpus reflects both genre-defining features and shifts in translation practice during a key period in Vietnam's cultural globalization. This period coincides with Vietnam's post-WTO accession reforms, increasing engagement with global consumer culture, and a marked expansion of the domestic publishing industry. During these years, translated literature, particularly women's fiction, gained visibility as publishers sought to cater to a growing urban, middle-class readership with rising literacy, disposable income, and exposure to global media. These socio-economic shifts created fertile ground for the localization of Chick Lit and its paratextual repackaging to

suit Vietnamese tastes and aspirations. The inclusion of translations from multiple publishing houses, both state-owned and independent, enables a comparative analysis of differing institutional logic in the treatment of paratexts.

5.2. Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

For each novel in the corpus, the Vietnamese translation was examined in parallel with its English-language original to investigate two principal paratextual dimensions. The first dimension focused on the translation of titles, which were analyzed for lexical choices, semantic shifts, tone modulation, genre cues, and ideological framing. These titles were further categorized according to Viezzi's typology, which includes literal translations, metaphorical adaptations, additions of evaluative components, and semantic substitutions [17]. The second dimension involved designing the book covers, which were examined using the visual grammar framework proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen [3]. This analysis considered modality features such as color saturation and brightness, salience based on visual hierarchy, framing techniques related to social distance and angle, and the overall composition in terms of information value and balance.

The analytical process was conducted in three stages. First, the researcher undertook descriptive coding of the linguistic and visual features observed in both the source and target paratexts. Second, a comparative analysis was conducted to identify recurring patterns of semantic and semiotic transformation across the corpus. Finally, the third stage involved interpretive synthesis informed by feminist translation theory [18, 19], to evaluate how translated paratextual strategies negotiated cultural values, gendered discourse, and aspirational identities in the Vietnamese context.

To enhance interpretive reliability, the study employed a focused form of triangulation, specifically analysing the book's front cover. This approach involved examining how the translated title interacted with other paratextual elements printed on the cover, such as the prominence of the author's name, the inclusion of review excerpts, and promotional labels, including "international bestseller" claims. These features were analyzed in relation to their visual placement and semantic alignment with genre expectations and marketing conventions. No external publisher catalogues, media discourse, or bookstore metadata were consulted; all contextual insights were derived exclusively from the physical presentation of the front cover itself. This confined yet systematic triangulation approach enabled a close examination of how meaning is constructed through the interplay of text and image within the material book object.

Together, the defined corpus and multimodal methodology provide a coherent framework for investigating how paratextual translation mediates the cross-cultural transmission of genre fiction. The findings contribute to broader discussions in translation studies, multimodal discourse analysis, and feminist literary research.

6. Findings and Discussion

Among the corpus examined, Cathy Kelly's *Never Too Late* (1999) represents the earliest instance of Irish Chick Lit translated into Vietnamese, with its publication by the Women's Publishing House in 2003—preceding the more prominent wave of Chick Lit translations in Vietnam after 2009 [22, 25] (see **Figure 1**). A comparative analysis of the original Irish and Vietnamese editions reveals clear patterns of paratextual and semiotic reconfiguration, reflecting both market-driven considerations and culturally embedded reader positioning strategies.

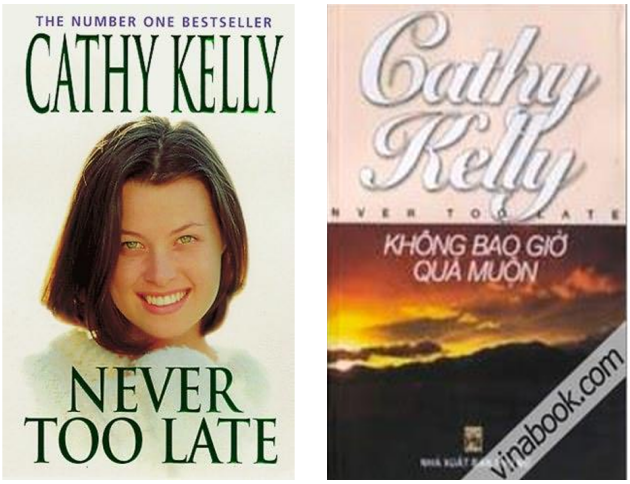

Figure 1. Book covers of Cathy Kelly's *Never Too Late* In Ireland and Vietnam.

In the source edition, Cathy Kelly's authorial status is foregrounded as a primary branding device. The phrase "*Number One Bestseller*" is prominently placed on the front cover, and the author's name is printed in a font size equal to or exceeding that of the title, a layout that assigns salience to the author as a paratextual signifier of quality and commer-

cial value[1]. The use of white and dark green in the color palette, along with an illustration of a fair-skinned model with red-tinted hair and blue eyes, aligns visually with Irish national identity tropes and implicitly codes the novel's narrative as centering on Irish women's experiences. According to Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar, the compositional choices construct a high-modality, contextually grounded representation that evokes both ethnic familiarity and genre affiliation with romantic women's fiction[3]. In contrast, the Vietnamese cover reconfigures these elements through both semiotic simplification and cultural domestication. The background shifts to a soft pink hue, a common visual marker of femininity and emotional warmth in Vietnamese publishing. Notably, the author's name is rendered in a larger and more stylized font than the novel's title, reinforcing the author's prominence as a transnational brand while repositioning the text within a localized aesthetic of aspirational femininity. The translated title, *Không bao giờ là quá muộn,* serves as a semantic equivalent of the original, indicating lexical fidelity. However, the simultaneous presence of the English title, which appears with a misspelling as "*Nevre Too Late*," introduces a form of bilingual intertextuality that gestures toward cosmopolitan appeal while also suggesting possible editorial oversight. This unintended orthographic error subtly diminishes the epitextual authority of the translated edition and may influence reader perceptions of the publisher's quality control. The accompanying cover image, which depicts either a sunrise or a sunset over a stylized horizon, operates as a metaphorical representation of personal renewal and emotional transformation.

Within a multimodal interpretive frame, the use of warm tones and horizon lines establishes a visual narrative of hope, aligning with the novel's thematic message that it is "never too late" for change. This image-text coupling constructs a reader address oriented toward middle-class women navigating personal reinvention, mirroring Vietnam's post-reform aspirational discourse. The presence of the Women's Publishing House logo and formal publication data at the bottom of the cover adheres to Article 26 of Vietnam's Law on Publishing but also contributes to the paratextual legitimation of the text within the national literary market. Taken together, the paratextual adaptation of *Never Too Late* reveals a strategic reorientation from the original's ironic yet grounded representation of Irish womanhood to a visually romanticized and emotionally uplifting portrayal tailored to Vietnamese cultural sensibilities. This shift exemplifies both ideological domestication[1] and paratextual repositioning, as the novel is reframed to resonate with local reader expectations surrounding femininity, self-empowerment, and emotional rebirth. As such, the Vietnamese edition not only translates the verbal content but also reconceptualizes the visual and symbolic landscape through which the narrative is received.

Among the titles analyzed, Marian Keyes's *Watermelon* offers a compelling case of paratextual transformation in translation. In the original Irish edition, the cover prominently constructs authorial visibility as a primary marketing device[20] (see **Figure 2**). Marian Keyes is introduced as a "*No. 1 bestselling author*", with her name appearing in a larger, bold typeface than the title. This visual hierarchy foregrounds the author as a commodified brand[1]. This layout reflects a paratextual strategy common in Anglophone publishing, where commercial authorship is leveraged as a guarantee of narrative quality and genre affiliation. The cover's dominant color scheme, consisting of light red and soft pastel tones, semiotically codes the book as a feminine text, targeting female readers through emotional warmth and gendered genre cues[3]. Central to the Irish cover is an illustration of a stork carrying a watermelon, a visual juxtaposition that combines an established symbol of fertility with an unexpected object. In European visual culture, the stork traditionally connotes fertility, good fortune, and maternal themes, drawing on longstanding associations with the Roman goddess Juno[26]. The substitution of a watermelon for the expected baby introduces an ironic undertone and adds narrative intrigue. This semiotic choice serves as a metaphor for the protagonist, Claire's disrupted experience of motherhood. Abandoned by her husband shortly after giving birth, Claire embarks on a process of emotional renewal. The watermelon, which is tough and green on the outside but red and tender within, becomes a symbolic representation of the protagonist's emotional journey and inner resilience—a metaphor deeply embedded in the novel's narrative structure. In contrast, the Vietnamese edition presents a distinctly different paratextual configuration that emphasizes literal over metaphorical representation[27]. The cover features a painted image of a man with a question mark superimposed on his face standing beside a woman. This imagery signals

the story as a romantic narrative centered on the search for an ideal partner. The central visual motif, a modern urban house, evokes associations with middle-class aspiration and contemporary Vietnamese femininity, where romantic relationships and lifestyle ideals are closely intertwined. From a multimodal perspective, the design employs high-saturation colors, frontal visual angles, and intimate framing. These features encourage identification with the female protagonist and guide the reader toward an interpretation centered on romantic fulfillment rather than emotional irony. Whereas the Irish cover invites layered interpretation through metaphor, the Vietnamese design favors direct emotional legibility and immediate genre recognition.

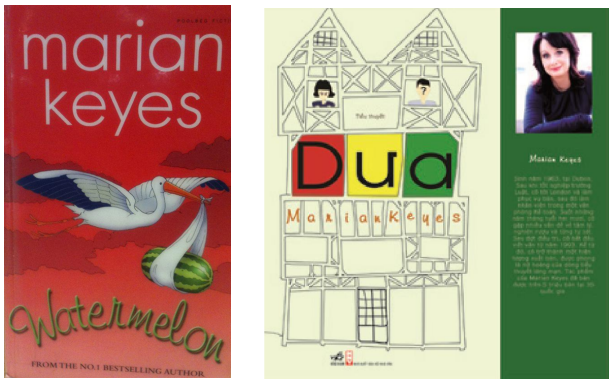

Figure 2. Book covers of Marian Keyes's *Watermelon* in Ireland and Vietnam.

This contrast is also evident in the paratextual hierarchy. In the Irish edition, Marian Keyes's name appears more prominently than the book title, reinforcing her status as a well-established literary brand. In the Vietnamese version, however, the author's name appears in a smaller type than the translated title, *Dua*, which indicates a shift from author-centered marketing to title-driven appeal. This inversion reflects distinct publishing strategies. While readers in Western markets may associate Keyes with the broader Chick Lit genre and respond to her brand as an author, Vietnamese readers are more likely to be drawn in by compelling titles and engaging visual design, particularly when the author is less well-known. Despite this shift, Keyes's literary status is still communicated through the inside front flap, which features a translated biography and selected promotional blurbs referring to her as the "*Queen of Chick Lit*" This epitextual framing reinforces her international reputation and restores her brand value within the localized market. The title translation from *Watermelon* to *Dua* (literally "melon") further illustrates a pattern of semantic flattening that occurs in cross-cultural paratextual adaptation. In its original context, *Watermelon* functions as a metaphor that evokes femininity, emotional contradiction, and hidden strength. The Vietnamese term *Dua,* by contrast, is generic and lacks comparable cultural resonance or symbolic complexity. According to Viezzi's model of title adaptation, this case demonstrates a strategy of lexical generalization that prioritizes ease of recognition and cultural accessibility over the preservation of metaphorical nuance [17]. As a result, the interpretive depth of the title is reduced, and its symbolic impact is potentially diluted for Vietnamese readers. In sum, the Vietnamese paratext of *Watermelon* illustrates a clear case of ideological domestication. The translated edition redirects the narrative's framing away from metaphor and irony, instead presenting a more aspirational story of personal renewal [1]. Through changes in visual presentation, the relative emphasis on authorial identity, and the semantic framing of the title, the translation reconfigures genre positioning and reader alignment in ways that resonate with Vietnamese cultural and market norms. This example underscores the broader argument that paratextual translation shapes not only how stories are read but also how they are culturally situated and emotionally experienced across linguistic and national boundaries.

Marian Keyes's *Sushi for Beginners* (2000) offers a distinct case of intercultural paratextual negotiation, particularly through its title and visual design [21] (see **Figure 3**). In the English-language edition, the title Sushi for Beginners strategically combines two distinct cultural registers. The phrase "for beginners" draws on a well-established template in self-help and instructional publishing. At the same time, the inclusion of "sushi" introduces an exotic element, referencing a food that was relatively unfamiliar to Irish readers at the time of the novel's publication. This title structure evokes intertextual associations with guidebooks such as *Yoga for Beginners* or *Computing for Beginners*, thereby signaling a narrative of personal growth and emotional self-development, even as the novel maintains a satirical tone. The word "*sushi*" functions as a semiotic marker of cosmopolitanism and novelty, appealing to readers situated in modern urban contexts. According to Viezzi's adaptive titling framework, the original title exemplifies a culturally hybrid construction that merges genre-specific conventions

with global referentiality, effectively positioning the novel within a lifestyle-oriented subcategory of Chick Lit [17]. In the Vietnamese translation, the title *Sushi dành cho người mới bắt đầu* offers a literal rendering that preserves both the lexical composition and the thematic ambiguity of the original [28]. The exotic quality of "*sushi*" continues to function as a transnational symbol that appeals to aspirational sensibilities. However, the phrase "*for beginners*" does not carry the same genre-specific resonance in Vietnamese, where the self-help genre has historically played a more marginal role in literary culture. The rhetorical layering typical of English-language instructional titles is, therefore, less immediately accessible to local readers. As a result, the translated title may be perceived as having a degree of semantic opacity, which limits its effectiveness in conveying genre and tone. Despite this, the preservation of the English-influenced title structure suggests a foreignizing strategy that foregrounds the text's global origin and enhances its aspirational appeal within the Vietnamese market [1].

Figure 3. Book covers of Marian Keyes's *Sushi for Beginners* in Ireland and Vietnam.

The paratextual adaptation continues in the design of the book cover. The Irish edition promotes Marian Keyes as a "*national bestseller*" and includes endorsements from popular women's magazines. These paratextual elements serve as genre-signaling devices positioning the novel within both the literary and lifestyle media spheres. Visually, the cover features cartoon-style illustrations, a vibrant red color scheme, and an image of a fashionable woman in high-heeled boots and a short dress. This composition constructs a clear reader address, targeting young, urban, style-conscious women. Drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar, the design activates markers of salience, modality, and gendered framing that align the book with a globalized image of post-feminist femininity [3]. In the Vietnamese edition, the cover retains a similarly vibrant tone but revises its visual grammar to appeal to a broader demographic. The design features three female figures, each distinguished by clothing that signifies different social roles. One wears a professional outfit, consisting of a black skirt and high heels, another wears an apron that suggests domestic responsibility, and the third is dressed in jeans, typically associated with students. These visual codes are culturally resonant within Vietnamese fashion and lifestyle norms, and their inclusion reflects an intersemiotic adaptation aimed at expanding identification across a spectrum of female subject positions. This strategy aligns with the evolving gender dynamics in Vietnam, where women are increasingly moving between traditional and modern identities in both private and professional spheres.

The spatial and typographic arrangement of the cover also encodes marketing priorities. While Keyes's name is printed more prominently than it is on the Vietnamese edition of Watermelon, it still appears in a smaller font than the title, suggesting that in this context, the title exerts greater paratextual influence than the author's brand. This observation reinforces the broader argument that foreign author names carry limited cultural capital in the Vietnamese market, where textual content and visual appeal play a more decisive role in attracting readers. The publisher's marketing strategy thus prioritizes genre signaling and thematic clarity over author recognition. Additional paratextual features are strategically retained to enhance the book's appeal further. A translated version of a review from the Sunday Express—"*should come with a health warning. It's too addictive… a real page-turner*"—is prominently displayed on the Vietnamese cover. This use of international blurbs serves a dual function. First, it provides an external validation frame that enhances the perceived quality of the text [1]. Second, it transfers the entertainment value of the book across cultural contexts, emphasizing its readability and emotional engagement over its literary prestige. In both editions, these blurbs operate as paratextual endorsements that shape genre perception and guide reader expectations. Overall, the paratextual trajectory of *Sushi for Beginners* illustrates how fidelity to the original title does not preclude semantic adjustment and cultural repositioning. The Vietnamese edition reconfigures the global identity of the novel into a locally intelligible

representation of modern womanhood and personal transformation. Through visual adaptation, genre recalibration, and targeted reader alignment, the translation demonstrates how paratextual strategies mediate the cross-cultural circulation of fiction and reframe gendered subjectivities in ways that reflect the aspirations and social realities of Vietnamese readers.

Cecelia Ahern's *P.S. I Love You* provides a revealing case of paratextual and structural transformation in translation, particularly in light of its dual circulation as both a literary and cinematic product. The original English title functions as a paratextual cue, invoking the epistolary tradition through its use of *"P.S."* (Post Scriptum)—a formulation that not only indexes letter-writing but also signals intimacy and emotional continuity[23] (see **Figure 4**). This titular framing is reinforced visually in the Irish edition through soft color palettes (pink, baby blue, and white) and illustrations of ribboned envelopes and floral motifs, which collectively construct a feminized genre identity and foreground the novel's themes of love, grief, and personal renewal. According to Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar, these design elements evoke high modality, emotional closeness, and affective softness, aligning the novel with the conventions of romantic popular fiction. In contrast, the Vietnamese edition replaces the book cover with a film tie-in poster, prominently featuring actors Hilary Swank and Gerard Butler in a photographic embrace[29]. This shift from illustrative to photographic modality marks a significant change in semiotic resources: the cover no longer mediates an imaginative engagement with the epistolary genre but instead externalizes the narrative through celebrity imagery. The title is translated as *Sức mạnh tình yêu* (lit. "The Power of Love"), which departs from the literal formulation and instead conveys a more generalized emotional message. While this adaptation may enhance accessibility, it also attenuates the textual specificity of the original title, erasing its reference to letter-writing and thereby delinking the paratext from the narrative structure. This strategic rebranding reflects a case of paratextual domestication, where the novel's visual identity is subordinated to its cinematic counterpart[1]. A red line across the Vietnamese cover retains the original English title, *P.S. I Love You,* but its placement is secondary, functioning more as a symbolic echo of the film's international identity than as a translation device. Above it, a Vietnamese epitext reads *Một câu chuyện tình yêu nổi tiếng thế giới* (lit. "A worldwide famous love story"), which serves as a global endorsement frame, enhancing the product's perceived prestige and marketability through intertextual association with Hollywood. These adjustments signal a shift in paratextual hierarchy, wherein narrative authority and promotional emphasis move from the original author to the actors and the film industry. Rather than constituting a transmedia expansion, this configuration represents a form of intermedial transposition, in line with Irina Rajewsky's definition, in which the narrative is transferred from one medium (literature) to another (film) without significant narrative divergence or fragmentation.

Figure 4. Book covers of Cecelia Ahern's *P.S. I Love You* in Ireland and Vietnam.

This shift also influences the presentation of authorial identity. In the Irish edition, Ahern's name is centrally positioned in pink lettering, asserting her paratextual presence as a bestselling author. In contrast, the Vietnamese edition minimizes her visibility by placing her name below the image, accompanied by the publisher's logo. This visual positioning suggests that cinematic recognition has taken precedence over literary authorship. Although reduced on the front cover, Ahern's status is reaffirmed through epitextual content in the form of a prefatory introduction, which provides a summary of the novel's themes, a brief author biography, and references to her international success. This supplemental material functions as a discursive frame that guides the reader's interpretation and compensates for the visual diminution of the author's role. The Vietnamese edition also diverges structurally from the source text. While the original includes fifty-one chapters and an epilogue, the Vietnamese translation contains only twenty-two chapters, and the epilogue is omitted. This reduction constitutes a

form of narrative condensation, which may reflect editorial decisions based on market preferences, reader engagement, or production constraints. The inclusion of a translated preface that contextualizes the narrative and reinforces the author's celebrity status serves as a compensatory mechanism, restoring narrative coherence and reestablishing cultural legitimacy[1].

Despite these paratextual and structural modifications, the physical dimensions of the Vietnamese edition closely resemble those of the original. This suggests an effort to maintain material equivalence while altering symbolic content. The interplay of these elements exemplifies the complexity of paratextual translation, in which texts do not merely travel across languages but also shift across modalities and media environments. The Vietnamese adaptation of *P.S. I Love You* demonstrates how intermedial influence shapes the paratextual configuration of translated literature. Through alterations in title translation, visual presentation, authorial emphasis, and narrative structure, the translated edition becomes a hybrid cultural artifact that mediates between its literary origins and its cinematic reinterpretation. These transformations highlight the ideological and commercial dynamics that paratexts facilitate in constructing transnational reception, genre positioning, and reader identification.

Cecelia Ahern's *Where Rainbows End*, translated into Vietnamese in 2010, offers a compelling example of paratextual continuity and cultural recalibration across linguistic and publishing contexts[24, 30]. The Irish edition draws upon the visual grammar established in Ahern's debut novel, *P.S. I Love You*, featuring a consistent aesthetic scheme that includes pastel color tones, minimalist illustrations, and stylistic choices associated with femininity (see **Figure 5**). These visual elements reinforce the novel's affiliation with romantic fiction while simultaneously contributing to Ahern's evolving brand identity as a popular fiction author. The front cover prominently displays the tagline "*sometimes fate just can't stop meddling…*" which serves as a narrative hook that activates reader expectations regarding themes of destiny, emotional entanglement, and serendipity[1]. The accompanying epigraph, "*best-selling author of P.S. I Love You*", situates the book within a broader marketing strategy in which the author's persona serves as a unifying reference across titles, building cumulative commercial and emotional resonance. In the Vietnamese edition, the title is rendered as *Nơi cầu vồng kết thúc*, which offers a literal translation of the original. While the surface structure is preserved, the idiomatic and mythopoetic associations embedded in the English title do not carry over to the Vietnamese context. In English, the phrase "*where rainbows end*" evokes the folkloric motif of a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow, symbolizing unattainable dreams or ironic hope. Vietnamese readers, unfamiliar with this cultural imagery, are less likely to interpret the phrase metaphorically. This scenario reflects a case of semantic untranslatability, where literal equivalence leads to the loss of metaphorical meaning. According to Viezzi's model, such instances illustrate a missed opportunity for adaptive titling through pragmatic or symbolic substitution that might have enhanced cultural resonance for the target audience[17]. The Vietnamese edition retains a light, accessible visual tone that aligns with the semiotic palette of the Irish cover. The central image consists of seven colored pencils arranged in rainbow order. Although this motif does not carry the mythological symbolism of the original, it conveys a sense of brightness, diversity, and youthful optimism. These design choices correspond with domestic publishing conventions for literature marketed to women and reflect a multimodal strategy that substitutes cultural metaphor with visually accessible symbolism[3]. Authorial branding is also reconfigured in the Vietnamese edition. Whereas Ahern's name is prominently featured in the Irish and UK editions, it appears in a smaller and less stylized font than the title in the Vietnamese version. This reversal of typographic hierarchy suggests that Ahern's international celebrity status holds less persuasive power in the Vietnamese market, where readers may be unfamiliar with her broader literary persona. Nevertheless, this reduction in visual emphasis is partially counterbalanced by additional epitextual elements. A translated review by Grace Macleod stating that the novel "*strongly affirms the number one bestselling position in Europe of Cecelia Ahern*" appears above the author's name. This endorsement, along with the label "*international bestselling author*" restores a degree of authorial prestige by leveraging transnational validation. The Vietnamese cover also includes the logo and name of the domestic publishing house, by Article 26 of Vietnam's 2001 Law on Publishing. This feature not only fulfills legal requirements but also serves as a marker of institutional credibility, assuring readers of the book's editorial legitimacy. In this way, the Vietnamese edition constructs

a hybrid identity that frames the novel as both aspirational foreign fiction and a locally curated literary product. This case demonstrates how paratextual adaptation negotiates the balance between symbolic fidelity and market intelligibility. When linguistic equivalence is insufficient to convey metaphorical nuance, visual and typographic strategies become essential in maintaining genre legibility and reader appeal. Through shifts in title interpretation, author visibility, symbolic imagery, and paratextual framing, the Vietnamese edition of Where Rainbows End illustrates how translated texts are culturally repositioned to accommodate divergent reader expectations and publishing norms. Across the five case studies examined in this research□namely, *Never Too Late, Watermelon, Sushi for Beginners, P.S. I Love You, and Where Rainbows End*—paratextual adaptation emerges as a significant locus of cultural negotiation. From an applied linguistic perspective, each example demonstrates that translation encompasses more than lexical equivalence. It also involves navigating visual codes, genre markers, and sociocultural expectations. Drawing on Jakobson's concept of intersemiotic translation, this study treats paratexts such as titles, covers, and authorial brands as multimodal communicative acts that recontextualize texts for new cultural audiences. The findings reveal a persistent tension between foreignizing and domesticating strategies, particularly evident in decisions regarding the preservation of metaphor, author branding, and visual modality. For instance, *Watermelon* becomes *Dưa*, a case of lexical generalization that reduces metaphorical depth. Similarly, while the title *Where Rainbows End* is formally preserved, its idiomatic meaning is diminished due to the absence of relevant cultural referents in Vietnamese. These examples illustrate how accessibility often takes precedence over symbolic complexity in the translation of popular fiction. Titles such as *Sushi for Beginners* and *P.S. I Love You* further highlight how genre conventions and intertextual familiarity influence the reception of the target language. The former maintains its self-help structure despite the lack of genre alignment in Vietnam. At the same time the latter shifts from an epistolary format to a more generalized romantic title, *Sức mạnh tình yêu*, that reflects local conventions. The visual designs across all five Vietnamese covers share a multimodal grammar aimed at constructing a gendered, aspirational reader identity. Rather than emphasizing irony or critique, the covers privilege emotional warmth, lifestyle aspiration, and feminine aesthetics. This is achieved through high-saturation color schemes, cursive typography, and illustrations that depict professional or romantic scenarios. As Kress and van Leeuwen suggest, these visual features establish salience and reader alignment[3], positioning the reader as a modern, urban Vietnamese woman navigating love, work, and personal transformation. The representation of authorial identity also transforms. While Irish and UK editions often emphasize the author's brand, Vietnamese editions place more emphasis on the title and thematic content. In some cases, such as *P.S. I Love You*, structural alterations to the translated edition, including the reduction of chapters and the removal of the epilogue, further illustrate how translation entails editorial decisions tailored to market dynamics, reading habits, and cultural preferences. From a gender-critical perspective, the paratextual shifts observed in these translations tend to depoliticize the feminist undertones of the original texts. Irony and social critique are frequently softened or erased, replaced by narratives of normative femininity, romantic resilience, and emotional self-regulation. This discursive shift mirrors dominant gender ideologies in contemporary Vietnamese media, where notions of empowerment are often framed within the contexts of personal aesthetics and relational success rather than structural critique. In conclusion, the analysis confirms that paratextual translation in the Vietnamese editions of Irish Chick Lit functions as a central mechanism through which meaning is reconstituted for new readerships. Titles, covers, and accompanying promotional elements serve not only as marketing tools but also as cultural mediators. These paratexts play a critical role in shaping how translated texts are interpreted, positioned, and emotionally experienced. By foregrounding visual and symbolic choices alongside linguistic adaptation, this study contributes to a growing body of research that views translation as an intersemiotic and culturally embedded practice. The findings suggest that translated Chick Lit in Vietnam represents not merely a linguistic transfer but a re-articulation of genre, gender, and market identity that bridges global textual flows with local reader imaginaries[31, 32].

7. Conclusions

This study has demonstrated that paratextual elements, including titles, covers, typographic cues, and promotional

language, play a central role in the cross-cultural mediation of contemporary female popular fiction. Through the application of frameworks from applied linguistics and multimodal discourse analysis, the research has shown that these elements do more than reflect genre conventions; they actively shape reader expectations, gendered subjectivities, and the cultural positioning of texts within the target context.

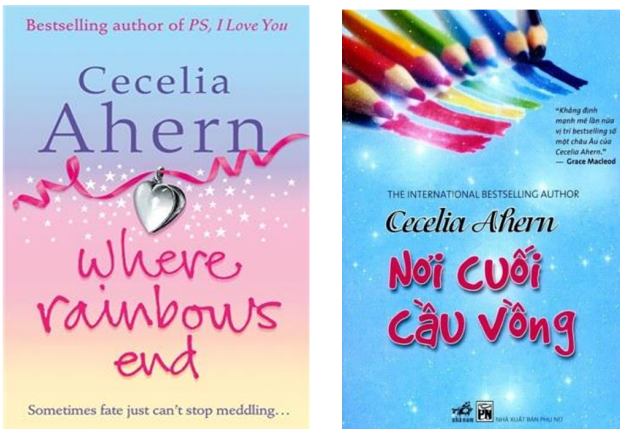

Figure 5. Book covers of Cecelia Ahern's *Where Rainbows End* in Ireland and Vietnam.

The comparative analysis of five Irish Chick Lit novels and their Vietnamese translations reveals a consistent pattern of semiotic negotiation across paratextual dimensions. In the Irish source editions, cover designs often rely on minimalist illustrations and strong author branding to signal relatability and reinforce market prestige. In contrast, the Vietnamese translations adopt a more vibrant and ideologically coded visual grammar. These designs feature bright color palettes, stylized typography, and feminine imagery that reflect domestic publishing norms and resonate with the psychological profiles of local readers. The visual adaptations reframe protagonists not simply as everyday women managing emotional and professional challenges but as aspirational figures situated within a rapidly evolving urban consumer culture. Furthermore, the prominence of titles over author names in the Vietnamese editions suggests a cultural shift in how literary authority and authorship are conceptualized. This tendency indicates that the recognition of authorial identity may hold less persuasive power in the Vietnamese market compared to the symbolic and emotional appeal of the title itself. The paratextual treatment of titles across the corpus also reveals a range of translation strategies. These include literal renderings, metaphorical reinterpretations, and culturally responsive modifications. Each case illustrates the ideological and pragmatic efforts of translators and publishers to align global narratives with the emotional and cultural sensibilities of local audiences. Whether maintaining idiomatic ambiguity or reshaping meaning to suit familiar thematic registers, translated titles and covers function as interpretive gateways. These paratextual thresholds enable texts to acquire new layers of cultural meaning and social relevance. This finding affirms the significance of treating paratextual translation as a crucial component in the translatability and international circulation of genre fiction. On a broader level, the study contributes to the field of translation studies by highlighting the interrelationship between linguistic translation, visual semiotics, and market-oriented discourse. It demonstrates that successful translation in global publishing involves more than textual fidelity; it requires cultural responsiveness, genre fluency, and sensitivity to audience expectations. The implications for cross-cultural publishing practice are equally important. Paratextual adaptation emerges not merely as a supplementary task but as a deliberate strategy for localizing global content, cultivating gendered readerships, and sustaining genre recognition in new cultural environments.

In conclusion, this research underscores that paratextual elements are not marginal additions to translated texts but rather constitute a vital layer of meaning-making. They shape how texts are received, understood, and integrated into new literary systems. As such, they deserve greater attention in both applied linguistic inquiry and practical publishing contexts. Future research may expand on this foundation by examining reader reception, editorial decision-making, or cross-genre comparisons, thereby deepening our understanding of translation as a process that unfolds not only through words but also through images, formats, and communicative design.

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