

Teaching Literary Translation at Greek Academic Institutions : challenges and strategies

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Abstract:

This paper examines the teaching of literary translation in Greek academic institutions, tracing the historical evolution of Translation Studies in Greece, the pedagogical principles underpinning literary translation instruction and the challenges faced by educators and students. Drawing on key theoretical paradigms in Translation Studies and examining the structures of Greek university curricula, the article highlights the pedagogical models most commonly employed across institutions such as the Ionian University, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. It also proposes strategies for improving literary translation education in Greece, including increased interdisciplinarity, stronger ties with the publishing industry and enhanced international cooperation, arguing that literary translation training is integral to Greece's cultural and academic development.

Keywords: translation education, literary translation, cultural competence, pedagogical approaches, translation theory and practice

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1. Introduction

Literary translation is among the most demanding and intellectually sophisticated forms of translation. Unlike technical, legal, or scientific translation, literary translation requires not only linguistic competence but also interpretive sensitivity, awareness of literary style and creative writing skills (Bassnett, 2014). For countries like Greece, whose literary tradition spans thousands of years and whose national identity is closely intertwined with literary production, the cultivation of skilled literary translators is both a cultural and educational priority. The institutional presence of Translation Studies in Greece is relatively recent compared to countries such as Germany, the United Kingdom, or the Netherlands. Nonetheless, over the last three decades, Greek universities have expanded programs in translation and interpreting, responding to globalized cultural exchange, increased literary importation, and the evolving demands of the publishing market (Venuti, 2012). Within these programs, literary translation holds a symbolic and pedagogical importance that often exceeds its market share. It allows students to explore the complexities of language, culture, and interpretation while engaging with world literature.

Despite its significance, literary translation pedagogy in Greece has not been the subject of extensive academic research. Much of what is known derives from curriculum descriptions, conference presentations, and scattered articles addressing translation training more broadly. Given this gap, a systematic account of how literary translation is taught in Greek academic institutions is essential.

This article examines the theoretical, institutional, and pedagogical dimensions of literary translation training in Greece. Drawing on international scholarship and contextualized within local educational practices, it analyzes how Greek universities structure their courses, what methodologies instructors adopt, what challenges they face, and what improvements could enhance the quality of literary translation education. It adopts a qualitative, conceptual and analytical approach based on curriculum analysis and established scholarship in Translation Studies, rather than an empirical research design.

2. Historical and Institutional Context of Translation Studies in Greece

2.1 The evolution of Translation Studies in Greek academia

Translation in Greece has long been associated with cultural mediation, beginning with ancient translators of philosophical and theological texts. However, the emergence of Translation Studies as a formal academic discipline occurred mainly in the late 20th century, influenced by European educational reforms and the broader global institutionalization of Translation Studies (Bassnett, 2014; Toury, 1995). The establishment of the Department of Foreign Languages, Translation and Interpreting (DFLTI) at the Ionian University in 1986 marked a turning point. It was the first and

remains the only Greek university department dedicated exclusively to translation and interpreting education.

Its interdisciplinary curriculum set a precedent for integrating linguistic training, translation practice and theoretical scholarship. Other universities incorporated translation more gradually, often through language departments:

- **Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH)**, primarily through its School of English, School of French, and School of German.
- **National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA)**, especially within the Faculty of English Language and Literature.
- Universities of **Crete, Patras and Thessaly**, where translation courses are embedded within literature and linguistics programs.

While most Greek universities do not offer stand-alone translation degrees, they integrate translation into foreign language curricula, typically at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

2.2 Institutional emphasis on literary translation

Literary translation in Greek academic institutions generally appears in:

- undergraduate elective courses,
- specialized postgraduate seminars,
- project-based workshops,
- research supervision for theses and
- guest lectures by professional translators.

Even when the majority of translation courses focus on pragmatic translation (due to market demand), literary translation maintains an important presence because it develops advanced analytical and creative skills (Steiner, 1998; Venuti, 1995).

2.3 Language combinations and cultural factors

The most common language pairs in Greek translation education reflect both linguistic demand and historical ties:

- **English → Greek** (dominant across all institutions),
- **French → Greek**,
- **German → Greek**,
- **Italian → Greek**,
- **Spanish → Greek** (in select programs).

Greek → English or other outward literary translation is rare in academic settings because it requires near-native proficiency that few students possess (Zojer, 2018).

Greek institutions emphasize the role of translation in supporting cultural exchange, promoting Greek literature abroad, and maintaining Greece's engagement with international literary systems, objectives consistent with Lefevere's (1992) notion of translation as cultural rewriting.

3. Theoretical Frameworks in Literary Translation Pedagogy

The teaching of literary translation in Greece is grounded in several theoretical paradigms, reflecting global Translation Studies scholarship.

3.1 Functionalist approaches

Functionalist theories, particularly Skopos theory, developed by Vermeer and Reiss (1984) and expanded by Nord (1997), instruct students to consider the purpose of the translation. While literary translation may seem incompatible with functionalism's utilitarian rationale, Greek instructors use the framework to highlight:

- target-audience expectations,
- publishing norms,
- genre conventions,
- cultural adaptation requirements.

This approach trains students to articulate the intended function of their translation in terms of fidelity to style, readability, or cultural positioning.

3.2 Hermeneutic and interpretive models

Hermeneutic theories view translation as a process of interpretation rather than mechanical equivalence. Steiner's (1998) hermeneutic motion is particularly influential in literary translation modules, where close reading, analytical interpretation, and textual empathy form core pedagogical practices. Greek universities frequently integrate these theories with comparative literature approaches, encouraging students to treat translation as dialogic engagement with the text.

3.3 Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS)

Gideon Toury's (1995) descriptive model influences postgraduate programs by encouraging students to study translations as cultural products shaped by norms, conventions, and historical forces. Greek instructors use DTS to teach:

- analysis of existing translations,
- comparison of translation strategies over time,
- recognition of systemic patterns in Greek literary translation.

This analytical dimension strengthens students' ability to justify their creative decisions.

3.4 Cultural and ideological approaches

Venuti's (1995) concepts of domestication and foreignization are widely taught in Greek programs, especially as they relate to the translator's ethical stance. Students examine how translation can resist cultural homogenization or challenge dominant literary standards. Lefevere's (1992) theory of translation as rewriting is used to discuss the role of ideology, institutional patronage, and literary systems. Such frameworks help Greek students understand how translators shape cultural perception.

3.5 Creative writing theory and stylistics

Literary translation is often taught in conjunction with stylistics and creative writing, drawing on theorists such as Genette (1988) and Bakhtin. Greek programs emphasize:

- narrative voice,
- focalization,
- rhythm and sound,
- figurative language,
- textual aesthetics.

This interdisciplinary approach aligns with Kiraly's (2000) social constructivist pedagogy, which views translation as a situated, interactive, and creative activity.

4. Pedagogical Approaches and Classroom Practices

4.1 Workshop-based instruction

Workshops form the backbone of literary translation teaching in Greece. This method is rooted in collaborative learning, where students:

1. translate a short literary text,
2. submit their draft,
3. discuss interpretations in class,
4. compare solutions and
5. revise based on collective feedback.

This mirrors real publishing practice, in which translators work alongside editors and peers (Venuti, 2012).

4.2 Process-oriented pedagogy

Greek instructors increasingly adopt a process-oriented approach that values drafting, self-reflection, and iterative revision. Students learn to:

- produce multiple drafts,
- articulate translation rationales,
- conduct close textual analysis,
- apply theory to practice.

This approach aligns with Kiraly's (2000) constructivist model of translator education.

4.3 Translation commentary and paratextual reflection

Students often submit translation commentaries, which may include:

- justifications for stylistic choices,
- discussion of lexical or syntactic challenges,
- cultural considerations,
- theoretical formulations applied.

Commentaries strengthen meta-cognitive and analytical skills.

4.4 Peer feedback and collaborative learning

Peer review enhances critical thinking and introduces students to alternative solutions, fostering awareness of translation as a multi-interpretive process. Collaborative translation tasks also simulate real-world editorial collaboration.

4.5 Use of digital tools in literary translation

Although literary translation relies heavily on close reading, digital tools are increasingly incorporated into pedagogy:

- concordancers (AntConc),
- online corpora (Greek National Corpus),
- digital dictionaries and thesauri,
- stylistic analysis tools.

These resources help students refine stylistic decisions and achieve terminological consistency.

5. Challenges in Teaching Literary Translation at Greek Academic Institutions

Teaching literary translation at Greek universities faces a complex mix of pedagogical, institutional, linguistic and market-related challenges. While translation studies have matured into a recognized academic discipline, the specifics of literary translation, its interpretive, cultural and creative demands place particular pressures on curricula, staffing, assessment and resources. This part of the article maps the major obstacles encountered in Greek higher education, situates them within broader debates in translation studies, and offers practical recommendations for curriculum design, teacher development and institutional support. The argument draws on core theoretical literature in translation studies and on observations of the Greek higher-education context to propose a coherent agenda for strengthening literary-translation training in Greece (Bassnett, 2002; Venuti, 1995; Toury, 1995; Baker, 1992).

Literary translation is simultaneously an academic subject and an art form. Unlike more technical types of translation (legal, medical, technical), literary translation engages aesthetic choices, cultural mediation and creative rewriting. Teaching it requires balancing craft-based studio practice with theory-informed critique. In Greece, where small language markets, uneven institutional support and a strong national literary tradition coexist, academic programmes in literary translation face distinctive challenges. This article examines those challenges under six headings: curricular design, staffing and teacher training, resources and materials, assessment and quality assurance, language-pair and market constraints, and the tension between theory and practice and concludes with recommendations for policy and pedagogy. Translation studies scholarship provides a useful framework for analysing educational problems. Toury's descriptive approach highlights the importance of norms and target-culture expectations in translations (Toury, 1995). Venuti's critique of invisibility draws attention to the translator's profile and publishing conditions, factors that shape both professional opportunities and the ethical dimensions of translation teaching (Venuti, 1995). Baker and Munday emphasizes the need to combine theoretical insight with practical competence in translator training (Baker, 1992; Munday, 2016). These foundational perspectives imply that teaching literary translation must address cultural norms, stylistic choices, translator visibility and the cognitive skills that underpin transfer between languages. In applying these ideas to the Greek context, we see both shared, international challenges and particular national constraints.

5. 1 Curriculum design: breadth versus depth

One central challenge is designing a curriculum that provides both breadth (exposure to theory, genres, and language pairs) and depth (sustained practice, mentorship, and specialization). Programmes that attempt to cover many genres and languages often do so at the cost of extended engagement with literary texts and revision cycles, processes essential to literary translation quality (Newmark, 1988). Conversely, very

focused programmes may produce graduates highly skilled in one narrow domain but less adaptable in a diverse market. In Greece, resource limitations and small cohort sizes encourage generalist programmes: modules in “translation studies” often bundle literary translation with audiovisual, technical and localisation training. While interdisciplinarity is valuable, it risks marginalizing the distinctive pedagogical needs of literary translation: extended drafting, peer workshops, close stylistic reading and sustained mentorship (Kelly, 2005). A successful curriculum therefore requires explicit sequencing: foundational courses in translation theory and stylistics; intermediate studio modules using progressively challenging literary texts; and advanced seminars focused on revision, publication strategies and cross-cultural criticism.

5.2 Staffing and teacher training

High-quality instruction depends on educators who combine scholarly knowledge with active translation practice. However, Greek universities often face recruitment problems: full-time posts for experienced literary translators are rare and positions are frequently filled by staff whose expertise lies in linguistics, applied translation or language teaching rather than in literary translation specifically. This mismatch can limit students’ access to tacit knowledge about the publishing industry, editing, and the craft of literary style.

Professional development for instructor-translators is also under-resourced. Pedagogical training for translator trainers remains less institutionalized than in fields like language pedagogy. Although there is a growing literature on translator training methodology (Kelly, 2005; Pym, 2010), opportunities for Greek colleagues to engage in exchange programmes, practice-based residencies, or partnerships with publishers are limited. Hence, teacher training needs two components: (a) support for practice-based professional development (workshops, translation residencies, sabbaticals in publishing) and (b) pedagogical training in how to teach creative practice, critique, and workshop facilitation.

5.3 Materials, corpora and access to texts

Effective literary-translation teaching requires rich source materials: contemporary fiction, poetry, drama, paratexts (forewords, footnotes), and access to different registers and historical periods. Many academic modules rely on classical texts or on a selection of canonical works because they’re in the public domain or easy to obtain. Contemporary works, however, are essential for students to learn negotiation of cultural references, modern idioms, and current literary trends (Lefevere, 1992).

In Greece, acquiring translation rights for contemporary texts can be expensive or administratively burdensome for universities. Libraries may lack up-to-date foreign-language catalogues, limiting students’ exposure. Another problem is the scarcity of parallel corpora for literary texts: while technical translation benefits from bilingual corpora and glossary databases, literary corpora are harder to compile and less useful

for automated assistance. While corpora-based stylistic analysis has a place in pedagogy, literary translation depends primarily on close reading and interpretive judgment rather than on frequency statistics alone.

5.4 Assessment and quality assurance

Assessing creative translation poses a perennial problem. Standardised tests and rubric-driven assessments work well for technical tasks but can be reductive for literary work. A blind rubric might over-emphasize fidelity versus fluency metrics and fail to account for creative risk-taking, cultural mediation, and stylistic innovation (House, 2015). The subjective nature of aesthetic judgement complicates grading and external moderation.

Greek institutions tend to use either traditional exam formats (closed texts, timed translation) or portfolio assessments. Timed exams can measure basic transfer competence but disadvantage students who excel in iterative revision, extensive consultation with sources, or collaborative editing. Portfolios and staged submissions better capture process and final product, but require more labour-intensive marking and clearer rubrics. A hybrid system, formative feedback throughout the semester plus summative portfolio submission assessed by both internal and external readers, is recommended to ensure fairness and to reflect professional realities.

5.5 Language-pair and market constraints in Greece

Greece's linguistic marketplace is shaped by a small domestic readership and by particular demand patterns: translations into Greek of major world literatures, and translations from Greek into other languages, often face asymmetrical opportunities. For students training to translate into Greek, there is often a heavy emphasis on translating from major world languages (English, French, German) into Greek, a useful skill, but one that can limit employability if local publishing markets are contracting. Students who wish to translate from Greek into English (or other languages) encounter a different barrier: international publishers demand translators with native proficiency in the target language and strong networks in literary markets abroad.

The combination of a small book market and limited commissioning budgets reduces opportunities for internships, freelance editorial work and practical exposure. Graduates may therefore be well trained academically but underprepared for the economic realities of literary publishing: negotiation with editors, rights issues, copy-editing, and marketing of translated books (Venuti, 2012). Addressing this requires universities to foster partnerships with local publishers, literary translators' associations, and cultural institutions to create internships, mentoring, and micro-commissions.

5.6 Tension between theory and practice

Translation pedagogy must reconcile theoretical frameworks (e.g., descriptive norms, equivalence theories, cultural turn) with studio practice. Overemphasis on abstract theory can alienate students whose primary ambition is craft development; conversely, purely practice-oriented courses may produce technically competent translators lacking critical reflexivity (Baker, 1992; Munday, 2016). The Greek context reveals this tension when curricula physically separate “translation theory” modules (often taught in English or by linguists) from “translation practice” modules (often taught by practitioners), resulting in an epistemological gap.

Integrative pedagogy, linking theory directly to practice through reflective assignments, annotated translations and process logbooks, can bridge this divide. For example, asking students to produce a translation accompanied by a critical commentary that situates choices within theoretical frameworks encourages both craft and scholarly thinking. Such assignments model the hybrid skill set modern literary translators often need: creativity, reflective practice and ability to articulate editorial rationale for publishers and peers.

5.7 Greek-specific institutional and cultural factors

Several issues are specific to Greek academic institutions:

1. **Structural funding and bureaucracy:** University funding constraints affect course offerings, class sizes and the hiring of experienced practitioner-instructors. Short-term contracts and heavy administrative loads reduce instructors’ capacity to supervise intensive workshops and to maintain professional translation activity alongside teaching.
2. **Language ideologies and educational traditions:** Strong national literary traditions and language prescriptivism sometimes promote conservative translation norms (prioritising literalness or canonical equivalence) that can limit experimental approaches or culturally informed rewritings (Lefevere, 1992). This is not unique to Greece, but local cultural values can influence assessment and public reception.
3. **Digital literacy and tool adoption:** While localisation and technical translation embrace CAT tools, literary-translation pedagogy lags in integrating digital tools that nonetheless could support work (e.g., text-annotation platforms, version control for draft management, collaborative online workshops). There is a pedagogical opportunity to introduce digital methods that support, rather than replace, literary craft.
4. **Linguistic particularities:** Modern Greek’s grammatical, morphological and idiomatic features pose both learning opportunities and challenges in rendering foreign stylistic devices. Pedagogy must prepare students to manipulate register, idiom and rhythm in a language with its own poetic traditions.

6. Case Studies: Greek Academic Institutions

6.1 Ionian University (DFLTI)

Ionian University offers Greece's most comprehensive translation program. Literary translation modules cover both prose and poetry across three language tracks. The curriculum combines:

- theoretical foundations,
- stylistics and textual analysis,
- translation workshops,
- research essays,
- optional creative writing components.

The institution's strong ties to European translation networks enrich student experiences through guest lectures and exchange programs.

6.2 Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH)

AUTH approaches literary translation through its language departments. Courses include poetry translation workshops, drama translation modules, and seminars on literary theory and comparative approaches. Collaborations with cultural events such as the Thessaloniki Book Fair provide additional opportunities for experiential learning.

6.3 National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA)

NKUA integrates theory and practice through courses such as Literary Translation: Prose, Literary Translation: Poetry, and Translation Theory. Many instructors are active literary translators, enabling the blending of academic and professional perspectives.

7. The Role of Greek Literary Culture in Translation Pedagogy

7.1 Greek literary heritage as a training resource

Greek educators incorporate foundational Greek authors such as Cavafy, Seferis, Elytis, Kazantzakis and Papadimantis to help students develop stylistic awareness and cultural competency. Familiarity with Greek literary tradition strengthens students' target-language writing skills.

7.2 The Greek publishing market

Greece has one of the highest rates of translated literature in Europe, with translations comprising a significant proportion of published fiction (Venuti, 1995). This market reality justifies the academic focus on literary translation training.

7.3 Cultural diplomacy and translation funding

Programs like Creative Europe and limited national funding schemes occasionally support translation initiatives, though inconsistently. Better integration of public cultural policy and university programs could strengthen literary translation education.

8. Market Realities and Professional Preparation

8.1 Working conditions of Greek literary translators

Greek literary translators often face:

- modest fees,
- delayed payments,
- high editorial expectations,
- extensive research responsibilities.

Academic programs attempt to prepare students by including modules on copyright, ethics, and professional practice (Venuti, 2012).

8.2 University–industry collaboration

While some universities collaborate with publishers, more systematic partnerships are needed. Internships could provide students with hands-on experience in editing, proofreading, and project management.

8.3 Entrepreneurship and freelance skills

Since many translators work freelance, Greek programs increasingly emphasize:

- self-marketing,
- project management,
- digital portfolio creation,
- communication with editors.

These skills help graduates navigate an evolving professional landscape.

9. Pedagogical strategies and good practices

Based on the challenges identified, several practical strategies can strengthen literary-translation teaching in Greece:

1. **Workshop-based learning with iterative drafting:** Emphasize peer workshops and multiple revision cycles. Workshops model editorial processes and help students learn to justify creative choices.
2. **Mentorship and visiting translators:** Invite established translators for short residencies, masterclasses and editorial clinics. These interactions provide industry insight and networking.
3. **Reflective commentary and process documentation:** Require annotated translations that articulate decisions, alternative readings and source-text analysis, linking practice with theory (Tourey, 1995; Munday, 2016).
4. **Partnerships with publishers and cultural organizations:** Create internships, co-taught modules, and commissioned student translations to provide real-world experience and potential publication pathways.
5. **Assessment reform:** Use mixed assessment models — formative feedback, staged submissions, and externally moderated portfolios — to capture process and product fairly (House, 2015).
6. **Teacher training and professional development:** Fund sabbaticals, exchange programmes and pedagogical workshops for staff to keep practice current and to learn studio-based teaching methods (Kelly, 2005).
7. **Use of corpora and digital tools selectively:** Teach students how to use corpora for stylistic awareness (not for literal substitution), and introduce digital tools for version control and collaborative annotation.
8. **Encourage bilingual and transnational projects:** Support student projects that involve co-translation, translator-author-editor collaboration, and outreach to diaspora publishers; these projects enhance employability and cultural exchange.

10. Policy and institutional recommendations

At the institutional level, Greek universities and policymakers should consider:

- **Dedicated posts for literary-translation practice** that combine teaching with a reduced research load, enabling active translators to contribute sustained mentorship.
- **Seed funding for translation projects** that allow student work to be commissioned, thereby linking training to publication and rights management experience.
- **National networks and shared resources** (e.g., a centralised digital repository of literary translation assignments, annotated exemplars, and bilingual corpora) to overcome the resource limitations of individual departments.

- **Accreditation standards and external moderation** for literary-translation modules to ensure comparability and quality across institutions.
- **Support for mobility and internationalization**, enabling students and instructors to attend international festivals, residencies and conferences that expose them to global literary-translation practices.

11. Limitations of this analysis and directions for research

This article draws on established translation-studies literature and on general observations of higher education conditions in Greece. Empirical research specific to Greek programmes (surveys of faculty, longitudinal studies of graduate careers, comparative curricula analyses) is necessary to quantify problems and to evaluate interventions. Future studies might map the career trajectories of graduates of Greek translation programmes, investigate publisher demand for different language pairs, and experiment with assessment models to determine validity and reliability in evaluating literary translation.

Conclusion and Results

Teaching literary translation in Greek academic institutions is a demanding endeavour that must negotiate scarce resources, market realities, pedagogical complexity and cultural expectations. Yet the opportunities are significant: Greece's rich literary heritage and multilingual student cohorts provide fertile ground for cultivating skilled literary translators who can mediate Greek and world literatures. By redesigning curricula to balance theory and practice, investing in teacher development, forging publisher partnerships and reforming assessment, institutions can better prepare students for the aesthetic, ethical and professional dimensions of literary translation. The path forward requires coordinated institutional commitment and a willingness to treat literary translation as both an academic discipline and a creative craft worthy of sustained pedagogical investment (Bassnett, 2002; Venuti, 1995; Pym, 2010). These pedagogical strategies could inform literary translation programs in other multilingual contexts facing similar institutional and market challenges.

While programs face challenges, resource limitations, market pressures, dominance of English, they also possess strong theoretical foundations, dedicated instructors and an expanding interdisciplinary orientation. By strengthening collaborations with the publishing industry, enriching digital and multicultural offerings, and enhancing international partnerships, Greek universities can further advance literary translation as both an art and an academic discipline. In a country where literature remains central to cultural identity, the academic training of literary translators is not merely a pedagogical endeavor but a cultural mission.

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