

Received: 19 July, 2026

Accepted: 23 September, 2026

Published: 20 September, 2026

A Pedagogical Approach to Bilingual Reading of Translated Short Stories in the EFL Classroom: Linguistic and Cultural Insights from Cynthia Rylant's "Papa's Parrot" in Kyrgyz Higher Education

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Cite this article:

Kachaganova, G. et al. (2026). A pedagogical approach to bilingual reading of translated short stories in the EFL classroom: Linguistic and cultural insights from Cynthia Rylant's "Papa's Parrot" in Kyrgyz higher education. *Revista Cultura Científica*, (24), pp. 1423–1430. <https://doi.org/10.70517/revcc2624117>

ABSTRACT.

This study investigates how the parallel reading of an English short story and its Kyrgyz translation can support language learning, stylistic awareness, and intercultural understanding in an English as a foreign language (EFL) higher-education setting. Situated at the intersection of linguistics and cultural studies, the study draws on linguistic analysis to examine the lexical and stylistic texture of the paired texts and on cultural analysis to interpret the values, cultural associations, and intercultural meanings that these texts convey. Although the short story is widely recognised as a productive genre for language teaching, comparatively little classroom-based evidence addresses how bilingual presentation—that is, the source text presented alongside its translation—shapes learners’ linguistic, stylistic, and affective engagement in under-researched educational contexts such as Kyrgyzstan. Adopting a qualitative, classroom-based design, the study implemented a three-stage teaching sequence (pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading) built around Cynthia Rylant’s “Papa’s Parrot” and its Kyrgyz translation “Атасынын тоту кушу” with 25 undergraduate philology students of intermediate English proficiency. Data were drawn from classroom observations, com-

prehension tasks, reflective journals, and a comparative stylistic analysis of paired passages, and were examined through thematic coding across three principal domains: cognitive outcomes, affective outcomes, and translation awareness. The findings indicate that comparing the English source text with its Kyrgyz rendering helped learners notice lexical and stylistic shifts, strengthened vocabulary retention through contextualised cross-linguistic associations, and deepened emotional and intercultural engagement with the text’s themes of family, memory, communication, and reconciliation. The study argues that translated short stories, when read bilingually and analysed stylistically and comparatively, can function as a pedagogically effective, culturally responsive, and linguistically meaningful resource for integrated language and literature instruction. Implications for EFL curriculum design in bilingual educational settings, classroom practice, and directions for larger mixed-methods research are also discussed.

Keywords: linguistics, cultural studies, short story, efl, bilingual reading, literary translation, stylistics, reader-response, vocabulary acquisition, intercultural competence, kyrgyz, higher education

1. INTRODUCTION

The short story occupies an increasingly central place in literature-based language teaching. Its compactness, structural cohesion, and stylistic density allow a complete text to be read, analysed, discussed, and interpreted within a single instructional cycle, making the genre especially suitable for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). As Cox [1] observes, the genre “is moving from relative neglect to a central position in the curriculum,” offering students “a route into many complex areas,” because questions of style, imagery, structure, narrative strategy, and interpretation can be addressed through a single text. Hollingshead [2] makes a related point about the genre’s intensity, arguing that a short story “is far less like a novel than it is like a poem” and that it “exists in present time,” so that every word, structural choice, and nuance of rhythm can carry interpretive weight. This concentration encourages close reading, sustained stylistic attention, interpretive reflection, and emotional involvement, all of which are central to language learning and literary development.

A substantial body of scholarship has examined how short stories can be taught effectively and how learners respond to them in different educational contexts. Beach [3] surveys reader-response perspectives and the instructional practices they support, foregrounding the reader’s active construction of meaning through a transaction with the text. Rosenblatt’s transactional theory provides a foundational account of this position, distinguishing efferent from aesthetic reading and locating literary meaning in the event and experience of reading rather than in the text alone [4]. Liang [5], working with middle-school readers, distinguishes reader-response approaches from cognitively oriented instructional approaches and demonstrates how systematic scaffolding can enhance both comprehension and personal response to short narratives. In second-language contexts, Bhuvaneswari and Jacob [6] argue that short stories foster language acquisition because learners become “emotionally bound to the text,” learning words in meaningful narrative, situational, and cultural contexts rather than in isolation. Kallan [7], working from a writing-instruction perspective, shows how tightly constrained micro-narratives such as the 55-word story can sharpen concision and stylistic precision—a principle that can be adapted productively to creative tasks in the language classroom. Taken together, these studies establish a strong theoretical and practical foundation for integrating short stories into language curricula and for designing classroom activities, teaching materials, and assessment practices around them.

Within this literature, however, one instructional configuration remains comparatively under-examined: the deliberate and parallel use of an English source text and its translation as the organising principle of instruction within a specific bilingual educational setting. In Kyrgyz higher education, where instruction increasingly mediates between global English and local linguistic, educational, and cultural identities, teaching English short stories alongside their Kyrgyz translations represents both a practical pedagogical strategy and a culturally meaningful approach. Pruden’s account of teaching through short stories is useful in this context because it frames instruction as the alignment of teaching approaches with intended outcomes across cognitive (analytical and linguistic) and affective (emotional and empathetic) domains [8]. Bilingual presentation can potentially engage both domains simultaneously: learners decode vocabulary, syntax, and stylistic choices while also reflecting on relationships, emotions, cultural values, and the broader cultural resonance of the narrative.

The present study addresses this gap through a classroom-based investigation organised around Cynthia Rylant’s “Papa’s Parrot” [9], a short story concerned with generational distance, family relationships, communication, emotional separation, and belated understanding between a father and his son. The story was read in its English original and in the Kyrgyz translation “Атасынын тоту кушу” [10], thereby allowing learners to engage with meaning on two interconnected levels: the lexical and stylistic texture of the English source text and the interpretive and culturally resonant layer introduced by the Kyrgyz rendering. On this basis, the study is guided by the following three research questions:

1. How does parallel reading of the English source and its Kyrgyz translation affect learners’ vocabulary development, comprehension, and stylistic awareness (cognitive outcomes)?
2. How does bilingual presentation shape learners’ emotional engagement and intercultural understanding (affective outcomes)?
3. What do learners notice about lexical and stylistic shifts between the two languages (translation awareness)?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Two complementary theoretical perspectives inform the analysis. The first is a text-focused stylistic perspective concerned with structure, diction, imagery, rhythm, and other linguistic features through which literary meaning is constructed and communicated. This orientation is supported by established stylistic scholarship, notably Simpson’s framework for analysing the language of literary texts [11] and Wales’s systematic account of stylistic terminology and analytical concepts [12]. In the bilingual classroom, this perspective translates into the close and systematic comparison of original and translated passages—for example, examining how the English word *lonely* is rendered as *Жаалдыз*, a term that can carry a culturally specific emotional resonance for Kyrgyz readers.

The second is a reader-response perspective, developed by Rosenblatt [4] and applied to short-story pedagogy by

Beach [3] and Liang [5]. This perspective emphasises the dynamic interaction between reader and text and the centrality of the reader's prior experience, emotions, and interpretive activity in constructing meaning. In bilingual teaching, this perspective foregrounds the ways in which translation can mediate affective response: learners may "feel" the father's longing or the son's eventual realisation differently in Kyrgyz than in English [10]. Liang's distinction between reader-response activities and cognitively oriented activities is directly observable in the present instructional design: pre-reading discussion prompts (for instance, "*Have you ever had a special bond with a pet?*") elicit personal and affective connections, whereas vocabulary-matching and comprehension tasks engage more explicitly cognitive and analytical processing [5].

Integrating these two perspectives yields a more balanced pedagogy in which linguistic precision, interpretive ability, emotional engagement, and intercultural awareness can develop together rather than in isolation. This combination is particularly relevant to translated literature, which not only transmits semantic content between languages but also inevitably reshapes aspects of tone, rhythm, stylistic emphasis, and cultural connotation as a literary text moves from one linguistic and cultural system to another.

3. TRANSLATION, STYLISTIC AWARENESS, AND CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

Teaching English short stories alongside their Kyrgyz translations introduces learners directly to the linguistic, stylistic, and interpretive challenges of translation, which themselves constitute a valuable object of language awareness and literary analysis. Reading Rylant's story in English alongside its Kyrgyz version can strengthen semantic understanding while simultaneously drawing attention to the ways in which tone, rhythm, lexical selection, and figurative language may shift across languages. The parrot's repeated question "*Where's Harry?*", for instance, becomes "*Гарри кайда?*"—a phrase whose rhythm and vocal contour give it a slightly different emotive weight in Kyrgyz, thereby opening a productive classroom discussion of translation equivalence, emotional connotation, linguistic choice, and reader interpretation.

These linguistic and stylistic goals are inseparable from broader cultural, interpersonal, and moral dimensions. "Papa's Parrot" invites reflection on family relationships, empathy, communication, emotional distance, and reconciliation—values that can resonate strongly within Kyrgyz culture—while the translation "Атасынын тоту кушу" preserves much of this emotional depth and provides learners with accessible language models in their familiar linguistic context. Such texts support what Jennings and Greenberg describe, in the context of the prosocial classroom, as the development of care and concern for others together with the social and emotional dimensions of learning [13]. Teaching translated short stories therefore encourages meaningful intercultural dialogue: learners can relate the father-son dynamics of an American story to familial values and experiences in Kyrgyz society, so that translation functions as a bridge for linguistic comprehension, literary interpretation, and cultural empathy rather than as a barrier between languages.

4. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed a qualitative, classroom-based research design that combined descriptive analysis with a small-scale pedagogical implementation. It examined the teaching of an English short story together with its Kyrgyz translation through classroom observation and parallel stylistic comparison, focusing specifically on how translation can support comprehension, foster linguistic and stylistic competence, and promote intercultural understanding among Kyrgyz learners of English. The classroom implementation proceeded through three clearly structured phases: (1) textual selection and stylistic analysis of the paired source and translated texts; (2) classroom instruction using bilingual materials organised into pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities; and (3) evaluation and reflection, drawing on student reflections, comprehension checks, classroom tasks, and teacher observations to assess cognitive and affective outcomes.

The participants were 25 undergraduate students from the Department of Philology at the International University of Kyrgyzstan in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic. All participants had an intermediate level of English proficiency and prior experience with bilingual reading activities. Two instructors with experience in teaching literature, stylistics, and translation in higher education conducted the instructional sessions and contributed observational data to the study. Participation in the research component was voluntary, while the teaching materials and classroom tasks formed part of the students' regular coursework.

The primary materials were:

1. "Papa's Parrot" by Cynthia Rylant [9], in the English original;
2. "Атасынын тоту кушу," the Kyrgyz translation by K. Kalieva [10];
3. supporting pre-reading, vocabulary, comprehension, and creative tasks adapted from a teaching module used in an English Language and Literature programme;
4. supplementary theoretical and stylistic reference texts [11, 12].

Instruction followed a three-stage sequence.

- **Pre-reading.** Students predicted the content of the story and discussed relationships between parents and children,

activating prior knowledge and cultural context.

- **While-reading.** Students read the English version and then the Kyrgyz translation, identifying stylistic, lexical, and syntactic correspondences. Instructors guided discussion using both text-focused (stylistic) and experience-focused (reader-response) approaches [3, 5].
- **Post-reading.** Students completed comprehension checks, wrote reflective responses, and undertook creative tasks such as rewriting the ending or composing a letter from a character's perspective.

A dedicated comparative stylistic analysis was conducted across the while-reading and post-reading stages. During this analysis, students examined how translation affected meaning, rhythm, tone, imagery, lexical selection, and stylistic emphasis, drawing on analytical principles from Simpson [11] and Wales [12]. Feedback and qualitative evidence were collected through classroom observation notes, discussion transcripts, and reflective journals in order to examine the pedagogical effects and perceived value of bilingual teaching.

The collected data were analysed qualitatively through a systematic process of thematic coding. Student responses and teacher observations were categorised under the following three analytical domains:

- **Cognitive outcomes** — vocabulary development, comprehension, and stylistic awareness;
- **Affective outcomes** — empathy, cultural awareness, and emotional engagement;
- **Translation awareness** — recognition of lexical shifts and stylistic adaptation between the English and Kyrgyz versions.

Comparative textual analysis was applied in parallel with the thematic analysis to examine how the Kyrgyz translation conveyed, modified, or recontextualised tone, syntax, imagery, and stylistic emphasis relative to the English source text.

Thematic analysis followed a six-phase approach comprising familiarisation, initial coding, theme generation, review, definition, and reporting. The dataset comprised reflective journal entries, written responses to comprehension and creative tasks, transcribed segments of classroom discussion, and the instructors' observation notes. Coding proceeded in two successive cycles. In the first cycle, the two instructors independently applied open and descriptive codes to a shared subset of the data (approximately 30% of the corpus), generating an initial inventory of codes such as *noticing lexical shift*, *emotional identification*, *cultural parallel*, and *vocabulary recall through context*. In the second cycle, these codes were grouped deductively under the three pre-specified domains—cognitive outcomes, affective outcomes, and translation awareness—while the researchers remained open to additional codes that did not fit neatly within the initial analytical framework.

To enhance the trustworthiness and transparency of the analysis, the two coders compared their independent coding of the shared subset and discussed all identified discrepancies until consensus was reached; the agreed coding scheme was then applied consistently to the full dataset. Coding was further supported by an audit trail of analytical memos documenting interpretive decisions, and illustrative extracts were retained to ground each theme directly in the empirical data. Because the study is qualitative and relatively small in scale, the analysis prioritises descriptive credibility, interpretive transparency, and contextual understanding over statistical generalisation; the reported patterns therefore represent recurring tendencies across the qualitative corpus rather than statistically quantified effects.

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the participating institution. Before the instructional sessions began, students were informed about the purpose of the study, the nature and types of data to be collected, the intended research use of those data, and their right to decline participation or withdraw at any time without academic penalty. All participants provided informed consent for their anonymised reflections and task responses to be used for research purposes. Participation was entirely voluntary and did not affect course assessment or academic standing. All research data were anonymised: student names were replaced with identifiers (for example, S1–S25), and no information capable of identifying individual participants is reported. Reflective and creative work produced by students is cited only in aggregated or anonymised form, while the original research materials were stored securely and were accessible only to the two instructor-researchers.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The classroom implementation indicated that the bilingual reading of “Papa’s Parrot” and “Атасынын тоту кушу” supported learners’ comprehension, engagement, stylistic awareness, and cultural understanding across the three coded analytical domains.

During the pre-reading stage, prompts such as “*Have you ever had a special bond with a pet?*” and “*Why do people sometimes talk to animals?*” helped learners establish a personal connection with the story’s central concerns of communication, affection, and empathy across generations. Several students drew directly on personal experience before reading the text; one wrote, “*My grandmother talks to her cow every morning. I never thought it was strange until this question*” (S7), while another anticipated the central theme, noting, “*I think the parrot will say something the father could*

not say himself” (S14). Such responses appeared to increase motivation, emotional readiness, and contextual engagement before reading, consistent with Pruden’s view that short stories can be designed to activate cognitive and affective domains simultaneously [8].

In a vocabulary-preview task, students matched selected English words (for example, *embarrassed*, *lonely*, and *hospital*) with their meanings and then identified appropriate Kyrgyz equivalents. This bilingual activity reinforced lexical awareness, encouraged cross-linguistic comparison, and strengthened associative learning, supporting Bhuvaneswari and Jacob’s claim that learners can acquire vocabulary effectively when words are encountered within specific cultural, narrative, and meaningful contexts rather than as isolated lexical items [6].

Close parallel reading drew students’ attention to differences in rhythm, lexical choice, and emotional tone between the two texts. For example, Rylant’s sentence “*Harry stopped liking candy and nuts when he was around seven*” was rendered as “*Гарри жетиге чыкканда таттуулар менен жаңгактарга болгон кызыгуусун жоготту.*” Students observed that the Kyrgyz version conveyed a slightly softer and more reflective emotional register, illustrating how translation can subtly shift emphasis without altering the central narrative meaning. As one participant put it, “*In English the sentence sounds neutral, but in Kyrgyz it feels gentler, more like a memory*” (S3); another remarked, “*The English word ‘lonely’ is short, but жалгыз carries more sadness for me*” (S21). These reflections demonstrate that learners were attending explicitly to stylistic, lexical, and tonal nuance rather than focusing only on literal equivalence. This observation aligns with Liang’s finding that scaffolded reading enhances critical and interpretive skills [5], as well as with stylistic accounts of the ways in which lexical and syntactic choices encode tone and literary effect [11, 12].

A post-reading comprehension check revealed a strong overall understanding of the plot, character relationships, and the story’s central moral concerns. Nearly all students correctly explained why Mr. Tillian bought a parrot and how Harry’s feelings changed over the course of the narrative. The creative tasks also elicited personalised and emotionally engaged responses: letters written from Harry to his father demonstrated empathy and an awareness of generational distance and delayed understanding. In one such letter, a student wrote, “*Papa, I was too busy to hear you, and the bird heard you instead. I am sorry it took me so long*” (S9), effectively capturing the story’s central movement toward recognition and reconciliation. These responses provide qualitative evidence of affective and interpretive learning consistent with the reader-response orientation [3, 4].

The comparative analysis foregrounded the important role of translation in shaping how a literary message is perceived and emotionally interpreted, since a translation conveys not only literal semantic meaning but also elements of emotional tone, rhythm, stylistic emphasis, and cultural nuance. In the following passage, the English text emphasises Harry’s recognition of his father’s concern through the repeated phrase “*Where’s Harry? Miss him,*” which carries a sense of urgency, repetition, and longing. The Kyrgyz rendering “*Гарри кайда? Сагындым*” preserves the essential semantic content while introducing subtle cultural and linguistic shifts. In particular, the verb *сагындым* conveys both the intensity of missing someone and a culturally resonant tone of affectionate concern that may be experienced as warmer or more emotionally explicit by Kyrgyz-speaking readers than the concise original English phrasing.

English: “*He understood now: someone had been saying, for a long time, ‘Where’s Harry? Miss him.’ Harry finished his unpacking, then swept the floor of the shop. He checked the furnace so the bird wouldn’t get cold. Then he left to go visit his papa.*” [9]

Kyrgyz: “*Эми гана ал куштун айтканын түшүндү: көпкө чейин ‘Гарри кайда? Мен аны сагындым’ деп, атасы кайра-кайра кайталап айтып келгенин эсине түштү. Гарри калган конфеттерди жайгаштырып, дүкөндүн полун шыпырып, жыйнап чыкты. Мешти да текшерип, тоту кушка суук тийип калбасын деп, отту да күйгүзүп койду. Андан кийин атасын көргөнү ооруканага жөнөдү.*” [10]

The translation also orders the actions sequentially in a manner that suits a natural Kyrgyz narrative rhythm, describing Harry as completing his chores and checking the furnace before leaving to visit his father. This sequencing maintains narrative clarity while subtly foregrounding responsibility, attentiveness, and care as central thematic values. Overall, the Kyrgyz rendering preserves the core message of love, attentiveness, responsibility, and family bonds while adapting certain stylistic and cultural nuances so that the text remains emotionally, linguistically, and culturally resonant for Kyrgyz-speaking readers.

Teacher observations and reflective journals further indicated that bilingual presentation enhanced cultural empathy and encouraged learners to connect literary themes with familiar social experiences. Students related the story’s father–son relationship to Kyrgyz family traditions and drew on familiar cultural ideas and idioms during discussion, suggesting that translation fostered cross-cultural connection rather than linguistic or cultural distance. One participant reflected, “*This is an American story, but the father is like our fathers—he shows love through work, not words*” (S18), while another connected the text to a familiar local value: “*In our culture we say you understand your parents only when you grow up. Harry understood too late*” (S5). These observations are consistent with the social and emotional dimensions of literature-based learning described by Jennings and Greenberg [13].

Taken together, the results suggest that teaching an English short story alongside its Kyrgyz translation can support a

multidimensional learning process that combines language development, vocabulary learning, stylistic literacy, emotional engagement, and cultural reflection. As Cox [1] argues, the short story allows questions of style, imagery, structure, and narrative strategy to be addressed through a single text; the present study further indicates that, when bilingual and comparative methods are applied systematically, these dimensions can be extended and deepened through explicit cross-linguistic and cross-cultural analysis.

- It is important to acknowledge the study’s methodological limitations. The design is qualitative and small in scale, involving a single literary text and a single group of 25 students at one higher-education institution; the findings should therefore be interpreted as illustrative and context-sensitive rather than broadly generalisable. In addition, outcomes were assessed through classroom observation, learning tasks, reflective writing, and self-report rather than through controlled experimental measurement or standardised quantitative testing. These constraints necessarily limit the strength of causal or generalised claims and frame the directions for future research outlined below.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined the pedagogical, linguistic, and stylistic value of teaching an English short story alongside its Kyrgyz translation, using Cynthia Rylant’s “Papa’s Parrot” as a classroom-based case study in a higher-education EFL setting. The findings indicate that parallel bilingual reading can support vocabulary development, reading comprehension, stylistic awareness, emotional engagement, and intercultural understanding among Kyrgyz learners of English. By integrating a text-focused stylistic perspective with a reader-response orientation, the teaching sequence helped learners develop close-reading, comparative, and interpretive skills while attending carefully to stylistic, emotional, and cultural nuances in both languages. The evidence further suggests that translation does not merely transmit semantic meaning from one language to another but can also reshape tone, rhythm, emphasis, and cultural resonance, thereby deepening learners’ comprehension, interpretive awareness, and empathy.

Comparing “Papa’s Parrot” with “Атасынын тоту кушу” enabled learners to recognise more clearly how linguistic choices, translation decisions, and cultural context shape literary meaning, thereby supporting linguistic competence, stylistic awareness, cultural literacy, and the integration of cognitive and affective learning. On this basis, translated short stories, when read bilingually and analysed comparatively, appear to offer a pedagogically effective and culturally responsive resource for integrated literature and language instruction in Kyrgyzstan and in comparable bilingual or multilingual educational contexts. Future research could strengthen, test, and extend these findings by including a broader range of authors, literary texts, and genres; larger and more diverse student samples across several institutions; and mixed-methods or quasi-experimental designs incorporating quantitative measures of vocabulary gain, reading comprehension, stylistic awareness, intercultural competence, and attitudinal change.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed equally to this paper. All authors read, reviewed, and approved the final version of the manuscript.

DATA AVAILABILITY

Data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

FUNDING

This research received no external funding.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

In the course of preparing this manuscript, the authors employed ChatGPT to improve the linguistic quality, clarity, and readability of the content. After using this AI-assisted tool, the authors conducted a comprehensive review and made all necessary revisions to ensure the accuracy, integrity, consistency, and scientific rigor of the manuscript. All authors bear full responsibility for the final content of the published work, including any errors or inconsistencies that may remain.

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