# LANGUAGE OF VIOLENCE IN TRANSLATION: EXPLORING IDENTITY IN LILIANA COROBCA'S *KINDERLAND*



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Received: May 26, 2025 | Reviewed: June 2, 2025 | Accepted: June 5, 2025
UDC 81 | https://doi.org/10.62413/cqm.2025.11

**Abstract**

*Helmuth Popitz (1992) defines violence as an act of power that results in the intended bodily harm of others, no matter whether the purpose of this act is contained in itself, or used as a threat, it is intended to establish a permanent submission. Liliana Corobca's* "Kinderland" *depicts the hardships of children left behind in rural Moldova, exposing subtle forms of violence: emotional, structural, and neglect. This study examines the linguistic devices used to represent these forms of violence in the novel and analyses the translation procedures based on Peter Newmark's typology, employed to render them from a contrastive Romanian–English perspective.*

**Keywords**: *Translation Studies, literary translation, language of violence, contrastive analysis, translation procedures*

## Introduction

Liliana Corobca's *Kinderland* presents a powerful exploration of violence through emotional, structural, and neglect-based forms that reflect the harsh realities faced by children left behind in rural Moldova. As a realist novel, *Kinderland* captures the socio-economic and emotional conditions of post-Soviet Moldovan villages, portraying both individual and systemic forms of violence. These include emotional and psychological suffering, family neglect, and the social consequences of mass labour migration. Our study aims to examine the linguistic devices employed to construct these forms of violence in the source text and to analyse the translation strategies adopted to render such culturally embedded expressions of violence into English, from a contrastive perspective.

Despite the growing academic interest in violence, there remains a striking lack of consensus regarding its definition and conceptual boundaries. Scholars across disciplines like philosophy, history, sociology, political science, and critical theory frequently note this paradox: while violence is increasingly scrutinised, its theoretical grounding remains fragmented. Even with the foundational contributions of thinkers such as Hannah Arendt, Zygmunt Bauman, Elias Canetti, Norbert Elias, Michel Foucault, René Girard, and Helmuth Popitz, the concept of violence remains undertheorised relative to its centrality in structuring social relations and shaping collective memory (Evers, 2021, p. 21).

H. Popitz (1992, p. 48) offers a notable definition by linking violence to his broader theory of power, conceptualising it as an act intended to cause bodily harm, whether as a direct application of force or as a coercive mechanism to establish submission. While such definitions focus primarily on physical manifestations, literature frequently extends the notion of violence to psychological, emotional, and symbolic domains.

In literary studies, the representation of violence has been approached from multiple perspectives, depending on the narrative's structure and the author's intent. Violence may be depicted through explicit physical acts or implicit portrayals of trauma and suffering. Across historical periods, its use has ranged from allegorical or philosophical exploration to sensational or entertainment-driven purposes. Regardless of genre or era, literary violence continues to be a subject of ethical concern, particularly with regard to its impact on younger audiences (Moustakis, 1982).

The translation of literature dealing with violence, whether physical, structural, or symbolic, poses significant challenges that go beyond linguistic transfer. In *Kinderland*, violence is neither spectacular nor sensational; it is rather insidious and embedded in the social fabric. The novel constructs identity through the intersection of personal trauma and collective experience, illustrating how children's subjectivities are shaped by broader sociocultural forces. As John R. Hall, Mary Jo Neitz, and Marshall Battani (2003) note, identity is not a fixed or inherent attribute, but a dynamic and socially constructed process, mediated through cultural narratives and institutional structures. In this context, *Kinderland* serves as a particularly rich corpus for contrastive analysis due to its nuanced representation of post-Soviet childhood, abandonment, and institutional failure. The novel's voice—at once intimate and socially revealing—demands a translation approach sensitive to both the narrator's subjectivity and the socio-political backdrop. Examining how these layers are transferred into English allows for a deeper understanding of the translator's role in mediating violence, identity, and cultural specificity across linguistic boundaries. Lawrence Venuti (1995) argues that the translator must resist the impulse to domesticate texts too heavily, advo-

cating instead for the visibility of the translator and the preservation of cultural difference. This is particularly important when translating works that depict marginalised experiences or culturally embedded forms of trauma, such as those found in *Kinderland*. Translating emotionally charged texts requires balancing fidelity to the source with the expectations and interpretative frameworks of the target audience.

Through the lens of the protagonist Cristina, the novel brings into focus three interconnected forms of violence: *emotional*, *structural*, and *neglect* as a latent form of harm. Cristina's premature assumption of adult responsibilities, emotional isolation, and lack of parental support are manifestations of emotional violence. Simultaneously, the novel critiques systemic issues such as poverty, institutional failure, and the repercussions of mass migration—elements that constitute structural violence. Neglect, depicted through the absence of adult care and supervision, emerges as a pervasive and often invisible form of violence that endangers children's psychological and physical well-being. These nuanced representations call for careful linguistic and cultural mediation in translation, especially when transferring such localised forms of trauma into another language and cultural context.

Against this theoretical and literary background, the present study pursues two core objectives that address both the linguistic representation of violence and the challenges of translating it across cultural boundaries:

1. To identify the linguistic units through which *emotional violence, structural violence* and *neglect* are represented in the source text and in the target-text.
2. To perform qualitative analysis of the respective units from a linguistic, semantic and translation perspective.

The research adopts a contrastive textual analysis methodology, grounded in translation studies and informed by theories of violence and cultural transfer. In the domain of violence studies, this research draws on Johan Galtung's theory of violence (1969), which distinguishes between direct, structural, and cultural violence—categories that align closely with the types of violence represented in *Kinderland*. Structural violence, in particular, is defined as "violence that is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances" (Galtung, 1969, p. 171) and aptly describes the invisible systemic harm experienced by children in post-Soviet Moldova.

From the perspective of cultural transfer, the study draws on Michael Cronin's contributions to understanding translation as a form of intercultural negotiation. M. Cronin highlights the idea of translation being a process that is not just about linguistic transfer but about the negotiation of meaning between cultures and identities, involving the mediation of difference, a continuous dialogue between the source and the target cultures

(Cronin, 2006, p. 7). This underscores translation as a dynamic intercultural act, crucial for analysing how culturally embedded concepts, such as parental absence and community neglect, are transferred linguistically and pragmatically in translation.

By bridging literary analysis with applied translation research, this study contributes to ongoing studies regarding the translatability of culturally embedded notions of violence related language. Moreover, it addresses a broader gap in the studies concerning the translation of post-Soviet Eastern European literature, particularly those dealing with marginalised social realities.

**Methodology and data analysis**

We have adopted a qualitative analytical approach to explore the linguistic and translation representation of violence in Liliana Corobca's *Kinderland* and its English translation by Monica Cure – a Romanian-American writer and translator. The focus of this study lies on identifying how different forms of violence – emotional, structural and neglect – are encoded in language and how these are rendered in translation from Romanian into English. The research is guided by a contrastive textual analysis of selected excerpts from the original Romanian novel and its English version.

The selection criteria for examples include:

1. the presence of explicit or implicit markers of violence (lexical, syntactic, pragmatic);
2. the relevance to the broader thematic framework of identity formation and violence.

The analysis comprises the identification and categorisation of linguistic devices used to convey violence in the source text, which include lexical items, syntactic structures, and rhetorical strategies and the examination of translation procedures employed to render these linguistic units in English. In order to determine whether the translator preserved, adapted, softened, or intensified the linguistic markers of violence we have applied Peter Newmark's classification of translation procedures (Newmark, pp. 81-91).

Based on the outlined methodology, the following section presents the results of the contrastive analysis, focusing on how various forms of violence are linguistically encoded and translated.

A comparative look at the representation of emotional and structural violence in *Kinderland* reveals notable shifts in Cristina's narrative voice, tone, and linguistic register.

*Emotional violence* is often conveyed through personal, intimate, and affectively charged language (e.g. „Prostul ăla mic […]"), marked by sarcasm (e.g. „Nu plângeți, acum avem de lucru"), diminutives, colloquial expressions (e.g. „Unii chiar plâng și mi-e atât de ciudă pe ei, că-mi vine să le trag câte un picior în fund ca să aibă un motiv mai important pentru plâns"), and

childlike reasoning. Cristina's internalisation of pain and fear is filtered through emotionally saturated language, reflecting both vulnerability and resilience (e.g. „Oamenii care au frică întâi de animale, apoi de alți oameni, ajung să se teamă până și de umbra lor"). Selective examples of linguistic units that pertain to the category of emotional violence have been examined below from a translation perspective: Ro: „Mai bine nu spun nimănui că mama cu tata nu-s acasă, că pe urmă vin tot felul de copii obraznici la noi, ne fură jucăriile si ne mănâncă mâncarea de pe masă şi mai primeşti si un zdupac după ceafă, dacă nu eşti de accord; En: It's better that I don't tell anyone that my mom and dad aren't home, because all kinds of bad kids will come over, they'll steal your toys and eat the food off your table and even punch you in the back of the neck, if you put up a fight".

The sentence „Mai bine nu spun nimănui […] că pe urmă […]" conveys the speaker's internalised fear and its anticipated consequences, reflecting a protective decision driven by emotional reasoning. Further on, emotional violence is expressed through verbs and expressions like „fură jucăriile", „mănâncă mâncarea", and the colloquial „primești un zdupac", which evoke fear and vulnerability. The English translation employs literal and descriptive translation procedures, rendering „zdupac" *as* "punch" which is a loss of regional flavor. The translator's choice ensures clarity but reduces the cultural and emotional specificity of the source text: Ro: *Vezi, măi prostule, ce face un tată? lar tu boceşti zi şi noapte. Tată îți trebuie, să umbli cu capul spart, cu sânge în nas, flămând şi cârpit şi să te ascunzi pe la vecini?* En: *Do you see, dummy, what a dad does? And you're wailing night and day. You want a dad so you can walk around with your head busted up, a bloody nose, hungry and in rags and hide out at neighbours' houses?*

The scene highlights how Cristina internalises the parental absence and turns it into a defence mechanism. The Romanian excerpt conveys emotional violence through direct address „măi prostule", accusatory rhetorical questions, and vivid imagery expressed via descriptive units such as: „capul spart", „sânge în nas", „flămând şi cârpit", reflecting trauma and sarcasm. The English translation is done literally and by means of functional equivalence, maintaining the intensity and directness of the original, yet effectively preserving the emotive charge and aggressive tone of the source text. Ro: *Venise la noi şi un băiat cu tată, de la care avea ce auzi, trăgea acela câte o înjurătură şi imediat o repetau si ceilalți. lar despre vreo fată, chiar dacă aceea era la grădiniță, spuneau „curva ceea de Lenuța". Nu le plăcea, chipurile nicio fată* […]. En: *A boy who had a father also came to our place, and you could really hear things from him – his dad would throw out a curse word, and the boy would repeat it right away, and so would the others. And when they talked about a girl, even if she was just in kindergarten, they'd say, 'That whore Lenuța.' Supposedly, they didn't like any girl* […].

This excerpt conveys emotional violence through expressions like „trăgea câte o înjurătură" and gendered slur „curva ceea de Lenuța", revealing how children absorb and reproduce abusive language from adults. Linguistically, it features colloquial constructions and pejorative lexical items. English uses literal translation: "throw out a curse word", "that whore Lenuța", *thus* conserving the tone of offensiveness. The translator ensures fluency while maintaining the emotional effect and cultural critique embedded in the original: Ro: *Când vine Dan, strică totul. Râde de Marcel, îl ciupeşte, îi zice marcica-purcica, maricuța-văcuța, fetița mămicuței*. En: *When Dan comes, he ruins everything. He laughs at Marcel, pinches him, calls him Marcie-Daisy, Marcy-Fartsy, mommy's little girl* […].

This fragment illustrates emotional and verbal violence through diminutives and mocking nicknames like „marcica-purcica", „maricuța-văcuța" and „fetița mămicuței", which feminise and humiliate Marcel. Linguistically, these are derogatory rhyming compounds and diminutives. The English translation uses a cultural equivalent, capturing the teasing tone and gendered insult, with a cultural shift. The translator preserves the emotional impact while adapting wordplay and rhythm to suit the target language.

*Structural violence* is expressed through broader observations of systemic dysfunction, where Cristina's voice becomes more detached, generalising, and socially aware. The tone shifts toward quiet resignation (e.g. „Sunt atât de puțini copii pe drumul lor, că nici n-ai cui pune omizi în cap […]") or social commentary (e.g. „Ce scandal a fost la început... Se mai duce lumea după bani, în fiecare familie cineva lucrează în străinătate, mai curvăresc bărbații, [...] dar nu se reped la făcut copii […]"), reflecting an emerging consciousness that transcends her immediate experiences. The novel highlights systemic issues, such as poverty and migration, leading to the abandonment of children (e.g. „Că-n țara noastră cea săracă şi necăjită se aduce tot râsul, toate chimicalele, stricăciunile, […]"). The following excerpts reflect elements that belong to the category of structural violence in the novel: Ro: *Casa noastră a devenit azil de copii bătuți de părinți*. En: *Our house has become a shelter for kids whose parents beat them*.

The sentence above illustrates structural violence that stems from familial and social dysfunctions reflected in a private home, symbolically turning into a shelter for abused children. The English translation prioritises naturalness and clarity over literal fidelity. The shift from the noun „azil" (which connotes an institutional refuge) to "shelter" slightly softens the formality, making it more accessible and less institutional. Linguistically, the passive nuance in Romanian „bătuți de părinți" is rendered more explicit in English with "whose parents beat them", maintaining clarity but altering emphasis: Ro: *Exemple de tați răi găsesti câte vrei, că-s cam toți bețivi si toți îşi bat copiii. Ba chiar şi tatăl nostru ne bate când stă mai mult pe acasă. Pe mine m-a tras de ureche*

*de față cu fetele, iar pe Dan l-a fugărit cu o scândură, strigând la el, deși nu făcuse nimic rău*. En: *You can find as many bad dads as you want, since pretty much all of them are drunks and they all beat their kids. Even our dad hits us when he's home more. He pulled my ear in front of the girls, and he chased Dan with a board, yelling at him, even though he hadn't done anything wrong*.

The fragment reveals structural violence through linguistic units like „toți bețivi și toți își bat copiii" and „tatăl nostru ne bate", which depict normalised, systemic domestic abuse within families. The repetitive use of „toți" stresses the widespread nature of this violence. The English version mirrors the idea of collective abuse with "all of them […] and they all beat their kids" and "Even our dad hits us", using conversational language to maintain immediacy. The translation is done literally.

In contrast to the broader social patterns reflected in structural violence, *neglect* in *Kinderland* emerges through personal, everyday experiences of abandonment and unmet emotional needs. It functions as a distinct but overlapping form of violence (e.g. „Mai bine fără atâtea haine naturale, de firmă, dar cu mamă."; „Mai bine de noi, copiii rămași singuri acasă, nu ne leagă nimeni, nu ne înhamă nimeni, că n-are cine."). It is reflected through absence, supervision, lack of care, affection and protection (e.g. „Vor și ei să-i alinte cineva, să-i bage în seamă. [...] Vreau și eu o mamă alături, să-mi facă de mâncare, să-mi spele rochiile. Și să le calce."; „Stai, mama, cu copii străini zi și noapte, îi plimbi, te joci cu ei, îi hrănești, le spui povești la culcare. Iar cu noi nu stă nimeni […]"). Cristina's voice is often resigned, quiet, observant, less confrontational than in emotional violence, and less analytical than in structural violence (e.g. „Și cine să aibă grijă de frați?"). The idea of neglect appears in scenes of routine, like meals, illness, housework, decision-making, where children should not be the responsible ones. Pertinent examples of neglect are illustrated in the examples below: Ro: *Şi tat'tu-i la „bani lungi"? Fetița încuviință. Şi v-a lăsat pradã căpuşelor*. En: *And your pa's gone off to make long money. The girl nodded. And he left you at the mercy of the ticks*.

The excerpt portrays a father's abandonment through the use of the regional noun „tat'tu" *in Romanian, which reinforces the theme of neglect by evoking regional identity*, register, and tone. This figure, absent or reduced to a functional presence, is rendered in English *as* "pa", a term that typically conveys cultural warmth in English folklore, but functions ironically here as it refers to an absent or neglectful father. The girl's silent nod confirms a resigned acceptance of being left behind. Linguistically, the Romanian uses regional and metaphorical language „bani lungi" and „pradă căpușelor" to suggest economic migration and social vulnerability. The English translation applies functional equivalence, rendering the first linguistic unit as "to make long money" to preserve the figurative meaning, though this calque feels slightly foreign. The phrase "at the mercy of the ticks" captures the sense of

exploitation and danger, using literal translation to retain the metaphor's sharpness and symbolic weight, effectively conveying the emotional and social consequences of parental neglect: Ro: *Până una alta nu ne lăsăm noi bătuți de nimeni. Dar suntem ai nimănui, nimeni nu-i ca mama sau tata. Dacă era tata acasă, nu ne fura omul acela nisipul*. En: *For now, we're not letting anyone beat us. But we belong to no one – no one is like mom or dad. If dad had been home, that man wouldn't have stolen our sand*.

The example above illustrates the children's expressed vulnerability and emotional abandonment. The Romanian phrases „suntem ai nimănui" and „dacă era tata acasă" suggest both a lack of protection and the emotional void left by absent parents. The regionalism „nu ne lăsăm noi bătuți de nimeni" reflects a defiant, colloquial register typical of oral, rural discourse. The English translation renders the meaning fluently and clearly. The linguistic unit "we belong to no one" closely reflects the emotional weight of „suntem ai nimănui", while "that man wouldn't have stolen our sand" softens the metaphor slightly, losing some of the implied helplessness. The translator prioritises natural phrasing over preserving dialectal and cultural nuances, which slightly dilutes the socio-emotional force of neglect expressed in the original.

The findings presented above offer valuable insights into the linguistic construction and translation of violence in *Kinderland*, which merit further reflection in relation to identity representation and translation choices. After excerpting and analysing 105 linguistic units from Kinderland that pertain to *emotional violence, structural violence*, and *neglect*, we found that structural violence, manifested through parents working abroad and children being left behind, accounts for 40% of the examples. Emotional violence, reflected in interpersonal dynamics and Cristina's inner monologue, represents 35%, while neglect, which is visible in daily routines, the absence of adult supervision, and unmet basic needs, makes up the remaining 25%. Following Peter Newmark's typology of translation procedures, we observed that literal translation and functional equivalence predominate, serving to address translation challenges, mediate linguistic and cultural differences, and ensure the accurate transfer of meaning into the target language. This pattern suggests that the translator's rendition is both faithful to the source and accessible to the target audience.

**Conclusions**

This study set out to identify the linguistic devices used to represent emotional, structural, and neglect-based violence in the Romanian source text of *Kinderland*, and to analyse the translation strategies employed to render these culturally embedded expressions into English from a contrastive perspective. After excerpting and analysing 105 linguistic units that pertain to these three categories of violence, we found the following:

1. Structural violence is the most frequently represented category (42 units). It is linguistically marked by generalising constructions, passive voice structures, and declarative sentences with collective reference. The translation often uses literal or communicative procedures, ensuring clarity while softening the tone.
2. Emotional violence accounts for 37 units. It is expressed through direct address, rhetorical questions, diminutives, and pejorative language. The English translation relies on functional equivalence and cultural equivalence to preserve the emotional tone, sometimes substituting Romanian rhyming compounds with culturally adapted insults.
3. Neglect is present in 26 units. It is conveyed through understated narration, regionalisms, and emotionally neutral observations. The translation tends toward through-translation and literal translation, preserving semantic content but occasionally losing regional and emotional nuance.
4. Across all categories, literal translation and functional equivalence are the most frequently applied procedures. Literal translation is predominant in structurally descriptive segments, while functional equivalence is favoured in emotionally charged or idiomatic expressions.
5. In terms of identity representation, Cristina's voice shifts in tone depending on the type of violence: emotionally reactive in emotional violence, detached and observational in structural violence, and resigned in neglect. These tonal differences are partially preserved in translation but are more neutralised in cases of culturally specific expressions.

These results are particularly relevant for analysing identity construction in translated narratives, especially in cases where the narrator's voice is shaped by trauma, marginalisation, or experiences of disempowerment. This study may be extended to literary works addressing themes such as migration, gender-based violence, or post-conflict memory, as well as to investigations of whether similar translation procedures apply across different language pairs.

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