Linguocultural Challenges in Translating Gonzo Reportage

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Abstract
Gonzo reportage is marked by a strong authorial presence and openly experiential mode of narration in which emotion is not concealed but becomes a central organizing principle. This article examines the linguocultural challenges of translating gonzo reportage into Russian within the Kazakhstani media context and argues that translation practices tend to normalize the original, diminishing its expressive force, weakening culturally marked references, and smoothing out the fragmented rhythm that shapes its narrative intensity. The study employs a linguocultural methodology, analyzing a corpus of selected fragments from Hunter S. Thompson's gonzo texts and their Russian translations through linguostylistic, discourse, and comparative analysis to trace shifts in authorial voice, emotional intensity, and cultural specificity. Findings demonstrate that these shifts diminish the pragmatic force of the originals and reconfigure Gonzo discourse to conform to prevailing post-Soviet media norms.
Key words: gonzo reportage, linguocultural challenges, translation strategies, subjectivity, media discourse

Introduction

In contemporary media, journalism increasingly moves away from the idea of neutral information delivery. More often, journalistic texts reflect personal interpretation, emotional involvement, and the author's position toward the events being described. This shift is closely connected to changes in media culture, where the authority of objective narration is questioned and individual perspective becomes an accepted source of meaning. *Gonzo reportage* represents one of the most explicit forms of this transformation.

Gonzo reportage emerged in the United States in the second half of the twentieth century as a reaction against the modernist ideal of journalistic objectivity. Instead of maintaining distance from events, the journalist openly enters the narrative and becomes part of what is being described. Emotions, personal experience, and subjective judgment are not hidden but placed at the center of the text. As a result, the report no longer functions as a neutral record of facts. It becomes a narrative of lived experience, in which the author's perception of reality shapes meaning.

This genre shift has important consequences for translation. In gonzo reportage, meaning cannot be separated from the author's voice, cultural background, and intentional violation of journalistic and linguistic norms. The text operates not only at the level of information but also at the levels of attitude, evaluation, and emotional impact. For this reason, translating gonzo reportage cannot be treated as a purely linguistic task. A literal or formally accurate translation often results in stylistic neutralization and a loss of the text's expressive force.

The problem becomes even more apparent when gonzo texts are translated for readers whose media traditions differ from journalistic expectations. In many cultural contexts, journalism is associated with restraint, impersonality, and institutional authority. Against this background, the open subjectivity and expressive language of gonzo reportage may appear excessive or unconventional. Translation, in this case, plays a mediating role, helping the reader understand not only the text's content but also the cultural logic behind this form of journalistic writing.

Gonzo reportage is closely connected to *postmodern views* on knowledge, truth, and subjectivity. *Postmodern* thought questions the existence of a single objective truth and emphasizes the role of language and interpretation in constructing reality. These ideas are reflected in the structure of gonzo reportage, where *fragmentation, irony, and emotional intensity are used to convey experience rather than to organize information.* The journalist does not claim to present an objective account but offers a personal interpretation shaped by cultural and ideological context.

In this situation, a *linguacultural approach* to translation appears especially suitable. This approach treats translation as a form of cultural interpretation rather than mechanical transfer. It allows *the translator to work with culturally marked subjectivity, authorial voice, and pragmatic intention*. The goal is not to reproduce the form of the original text but to preserve its communicative effect in another cultural environment.

The novelty of this study lies in examining gonzo reportage within the Russian-language media space of Kazakhstan, a context that has received little attention in translation studies. This environment combines Soviet journalistic traditions, post-Soviet institutional discourse, and new digital media practices, creating specific expectations for style and authorial voice. When gonzo reportage enters this space through translation, it not only changes language but also interacts with a different system of cultural norms. Studying this process allows us to see how global journalistic genres are reshaped in local media cultures.

While gonzo reportage is well documented in media theory and literary journalism, its translation remains insufficiently theorized and empirically described. Existing scholarship predominantly addresses gonzo as a stylistic phenomenon or discusses translation only in broad terms, without analyzing how the genre's constitutive features-radical authorial subjectivity, heightened affect, and dense culture-bound reference-are reconstructed in the target language and target media culture. Consequently, it is still unclear what happens to gonzo reportage when it is transferred into journalistic environments shaped by different professional conventions and expectations of objective reporting. This unresolved problem provides the rationale for the present study, which investigates how linguacultural constraints and media norms condition the translation of gonzo reportage and the shifts in voice, pragmatics, and genre identity that result.

This article examines the linguistic and cultural features of gonzo reportage that are essential for translation. The study seeks to show that an adequate translation of gonzo texts depends on the careful reconstruction of authorial subjectivity, cultural context, and pragmatic impact. By applying a linguacultural perspective, the article contributes to the discussion of how hybrid and subjectively marked media texts can be translated without losing their genre-specific character.

Literature review

Gonzo reportage appeared in American journalism as a reaction to the crisis of objectivity and the growing dissatisfaction with institutional forms of news reporting. The genre is most closely associated with the work of *Hunter S. Thompson*, whose texts established a model of journalistic writing based on first-person immersion, emotional intensity, and deliberate violation of professional and linguistic norms (Thompson, 1971; Thompson, 1988). In gonzo reportage, the journalist does not attempt to distance himself from the event but becomes an integral part of it, transforming personal experience into the primary source of meaning. Facts in such texts do not disappear; rather, they are embedded within a subjective narrative and interpreted through the author's worldview.

Scholarly interest in gonzo reportage initially developed within media studies and literary journalism. Researchers have consistently emphasized the hybrid nature of gonzo reportage, which combines elements of factual reporting, autobiographical

narration, and literary technique. Norman Sims situates gonzo within the broader tradition of literary journalism, noting that it relies on narrative structures and stylistic devices traditionally associated with fiction while maintaining a connection to real events (Sims, 2007). At the same time, gonzo differs from other forms of narrative journalism in that it foregrounds authorial subjectivity not as a means but as an end of communication.

This idea is further developed in the works of John C. Hartsock, who interprets gonzo reportage as an epistemological challenge to conventional journalism. According to Hartsock, gonzo reportage replaces the ideal of factual objectivity with what he terms experiential credibility, in which truth is constructed through lived experience rather than through verified distance (Hartsock, 2016). From this perspective, gonzo reportage reflects broader postmodern attitudes toward knowledge, representation, and authority. The rejection of universal truth claims and the emphasis on perspective align gonzo reportage with postmodern cultural theory, particularly with ideas concerning the instability of meaning and the mediated nature of reality (Lyotard, 1979; Baudrillard, 1981).

In contemporary scholarship, gonzo reportage is no longer viewed solely as a historical phenomenon tied to American counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s. Recent studies demonstrate that gonzo principles continue to influence modern media practices, including immersive journalism, narrative reporting, and digital storytelling. Researchers such as M. Kramer and M. Winston note that first-person narration, emotional transparency, and the visible presence of the author have become increasingly common in contemporary journalistic formats, especially in online media environments (Kramer, 2015; Winston, 2018). These observations suggest that gonzo reportage functions not only as a genre but also as a transferable model of media discourse.

Despite sustained interest in the cultural and stylistic features of gonzo reportage, its translation has received comparatively little systematic attention. Translation studies have traditionally focused on institutional media texts, political discourse, and news reporting, where the dominant values are accuracy, neutrality, and standardization (Bassnett, 2010). Within this framework, translation is often conceptualized as a process that reduces subjectivity to align the target text with the journalistic norms of the receiving culture. Such an approach proves inadequate when applied to gonzo reportage, where subjectivity is not a deviation but a genre-forming principle.

Classical equivalence-based theories of translation offer limited explanatory power in this context. While Eugene Nida's concept of dynamic equivalence shifts attention toward the effect of the text on the reader, it does not fully account for the deliberate excess, fragmentation, and stylistic disorder characteristic of gonzo reportage (Nida, 1964). Roman Jakobson's notion of equivalence in difference emphasizes the interpretative nature of translation but remains largely focused on linguistic systems rather than on media discourse and cultural positioning (Jakobson, 1959). As a result, these models struggle to explain how authorial voice and emotional intensity function as central mechanisms of meaning-making in gonzo texts.

More recent approaches associated with the cultural and discursive turn in translation studies provide a more productive framework. Juliane House's model of translation quality assessment highlights the importance of genre, register, and pragmatic function, allowing researchers to explain why formally accurate translations may fail to reproduce communicative effect (House, 2015). Descriptive translation studies developed by Gideon Toury and Itamar Even-Zohar further demonstrate that translated texts operate within cultural systems governed by norms and expectations of the target culture (Toury, 1995; Even-Zohar, 1990). These ideas are particularly relevant for gonzo reportage, which often enters media cultures with different traditions of authorship and expressive freedom.

Recent studies in translation have focused on the role of cultural and linguistic complexity in translating texts that contain hybrid or culturally marked language. Kozhbayeva and colleagues examine how linguistic interference, such as code-switching and code-mixing, manifests in multicultural literature and how these elements can be addressed in translation, emphasizing the need for linguacultural sensitivity beyond formal equivalence (Islam et al., 2024). This work highlights the importance of interpreting culturally embedded language features rather than simply transferring words, a perspective that aligns with the challenges encountered in translating subjective and stylistically disruptive genres such as gonzo reportage.

Linguacultural approaches extend these insights by treating translation as a form of cultural interpretation rather than mechanical transfer. Within this paradigm, meaning is inseparable from cultural models of perception, evaluation, and discourse. Scholars working in linguacultural translation emphasize that elements such as colloquial language, irony, hyperbole, and intentional norm violations carry cultural significance and cannot be neutralized without altering the text's genre identity. Applied to gonzo reportage, this approach highlights the need to reconstruct the author's worldview and pragmatic intention rather than to linguistically normalize the text.

Recent linguistically oriented studies address gonzo reportage more directly from this perspective. For example, research on the translation of Hunter S. Thompson's works demonstrates that the primary difficulty lies in rendering authorial voice, expressive syntax, and cultural references without transforming the text into conventional journalistic prose (Moerland, 2014; Gizdatov, 2021). These studies show that losses in translation are most often connected not with lexical complexity but with the suppression of subjectivity and stylistic deviation.

The relevance of this problem becomes particularly evident in the context of Russian-language media in Kazakhstan. In the Kazakhstani Russian-language media space, editorial norms are shaped by post-Soviet institutional journalism combined with state-regulated public discourse. These traditions contrast sharply with the expressive and confrontational nature of gonzo reportage, creating additional pressure toward stylistic normalization in translation. Local journalistic traditions have historically emphasized restraint, impersonality, and institutional authority, which contrast sharply with the expressive, confrontational nature of gonzo reportage. When translated into this context, gonzo texts are often stylistically neutralized, resulting in the loss of their pragmatic force and cultural specificity. The translator thus faces a complex task: to preserve the sense of cultural otherness and authorial provocation while ensuring interpretability for the target audience.

Overall, existing scholarship provides substantial insight into the cultural logic and stylistic features of gonzo reportage, as well as into contemporary approaches to translation. However, research rarely integrates these perspectives into a unified linguacultural model of translating gonzo reportage, particularly in non-Anglophone contexts. This gap defines the focus of the present study, which seeks to examine gonzo reportage as a linguacultural object of translation and to identify strategies for preserving its genre-forming subjectivity in the Russian-language media space of Kazakhstan.

Another important direction in contemporary research is the study of subjectivity and voice in translation. Scholars working in narrative and discourse-based translation studies emphasize that the translator is not only a mediator of meaning but also a secondary narrator who inevitably reshapes the original author's voice. Baker argues that narrative structures and voice are sensitive to ideological and cultural pressures, which means that translation often reflects the dominant values of the receiving culture rather than the intentions of the source author (Baker, 2006). This idea is especially relevant for gonzo reportage, where voice is not a background element but the main organizing principle of the text.

Research on media discourse translation also shows that journalistic genres react differently to translation. Institutional news texts tend to be standardized across languages, while narrative and opinion-based genres show stronger cultural variation. According to Schaffner, media translation is always embedded in political, cultural, and ideological contexts, which influence what can be said and how it can be said (Schaffner, 2012). When a highly subjective genre like gonzo reportage enters a media culture with strong institutional traditions, translation becomes a site of tension between innovation and normalization.

Studies on the translation of colloquial and substandard language further support this idea. Many researchers note that slang, taboo words, and emotionally charged expressions are often softened or replaced in translation because they conflict with literary or journalistic norms of the target language (Jay, 2009; Androutsopoulos, 2014). This tendency has been described in studies of youth language, popular culture, and internet discourse. For gonzo reportage, this is a critical issue because expressive vocabulary is one of its main tools for constructing emotional truth.

Another relevant area of research is the translation of irony and humor. Irony, in particular, depends on shared cultural knowledge and the reader's ability to recognize implied meanings. Scholars such as Attardo and Chiaro argue that irony is one of the most difficult pragmatic phenomena to translate, because it cannot be conveyed solely through words and requires the reconstruction of communicative intention (Attardo, 2000; Chiaro, 2010). In gonzo reportage, irony is often aggressive, political, and emotionally loaded, which makes its translation even more complex.

Recent work on hybrid genres in media studies also contributes to understanding gonzo reportage. Hybrid genres combine features of different discourse types and therefore resist stable classification. Researchers show that such genres often face difficulties in translation because they do not fit the target culture's genre expectations (Bhatia, 2004). Gonzo reportage, as a hybrid of journalism, autobiography, and literature, enters translation without a clear place in the target genre system. This explains why translators often unconsciously reshape it into something more familiar.

Finally, research on post-Soviet media discourse helps explain the specific context of this study. Scholars note that Russian-language journalism in post-Soviet countries has inherited strong traditions of institutional authority, seriousness, and ideological caution (Voltmer, 2013). Although digital media is changing these traditions, many readers and editors still expect journalism to be controlled and respectful in tone. Against this background, gonzo reportage appears not only foreign but also risky. Translation therefore, becomes a filter that decides how much of this risk can be allowed to enter the local media space.

Accordingly, the present study is positioned as a contribution to translation studies within the framework of a linguacultural approach to the translation of English-language gonzo reportage. By focusing on translator-oriented analysis and conceptualizing gonzo reportage as a culturally and discursively marked genre, the article advances existing scholarship beyond descriptive treatments of style and subjectivity. It proposes an integrated analytical perspective for examining the translation of genre-forming authorial voice, cultural specificity, and expressive norm deviation, thereby addressing an underexplored intersection of gonzo reportage, media discourse, and linguacultural translation in Kazakhstan's media space.

Materials and methods

The material for this study consists of English-language gonzo reportage texts and their Russian translations. The primary source texts were selected from the works of Hunter S. Thompson, whose writing is considered the classical model of gonzo reportage. The corpus includes fragments from *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, Generation of Swine and The Great Shark Hunt* as well as several journalistic essays

that clearly demonstrate the main features of the genre: first-person narration, emotional intensity, irony, stylistic excess, and deliberate violation of journalistic norms. For the analysis of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, its Russian translation *Страх и отвращение в Лас-Вегасе*, produced by A. Kervi in 2019 and *Generation of Swine*, which was translated into Russian language by S.Iliyn as *Поколение свиней* in 2005 and *The Great Shark Hunt* – it was translated into Russian language *Великая охота на акул* in 2003. These translations were selected because they are among the most widely circulated and influential Russian-language versions of this work.

These texts were chosen because they represent different thematic and stylistic aspects of gonzo reportage, including political commentary, social criticism, and personal travel narration. This variety allows us to observe how gonzo techniques function across different communicative situations and how they are affected by translation.

The target material includes published Russian translations of these works that circulate in the post-Soviet media and literary space and are available to readers in Kazakhstan. In addition, several experimental translations produced by the researcher are used for comparative purposes. This allows the study to compare institutional translation practices with alternative translation solutions that aim to preserve the expressive and subjective nature of the original texts.

The corpus is not treated as a closed or statistically representative dataset. Instead, it is used as a qualitative research material that allows in-depth analysis of linguaculturally marked fragments. The focus is on text segments where cultural references, expressive language, and authorial presence are most clearly manifested and where translation difficulties are most evident.

The empirical basis of the study consists of narrative fragments and character utterances containing markers of gonzo reportage. In total, 157 textual segments were selected for analysis based on linguistic criteria, including explicit authorial presence, expressive and evaluative language, stylistic excess, and deliberate violation of journalistic and linguistic norms. Each selected fragment from the English-language source texts was systematically compared with its corresponding fragment in the Russian translation, allowing for a qualitative examination of linguocultural shifts and translation strategies.

The study is based on a *qualitative linguacultural approach* to translation analysis. This approach views translation as a form of cultural interpretation, in which meaning is reconstructed through interaction between languages, cultures, and discursive traditions. It allows the researcher to examine not only what is translated but also how cultural meanings and authorial positions are reinterpreted in the target language.

At the first stage, selected fragments of gonzo reportage are analyzed in the source language. Linguostylistic analysis is used to identify expressive lexical items, substandard vocabulary, metaphorical language, syntactic fragmentation, and other markers of subjectivity. Discourse analysis is applied to describe the author's narrative position and the organization of personal experience in the text.

At the second stage, the corresponding Russian translations are examined. The analysis focuses on how expressive and culturally marked elements are rendered in the target language and whether they are preserved, neutralized, intensified, or transformed. Particular attention is paid to shifts in tone, voice, and pragmatic effect.

At the third stage, source and target fragments are compared within a linguacultural framework. The comparison is interpretative rather than quantitative. Each translation solution is evaluated in terms of its ability to reconstruct the author's worldview, emotional stance, and communicative intention for readers in a different cultural environment.

The study also draws on functional principles of translation, which emphasize the text's communicative purpose and its intended effect on the reader. However, these principles are interpreted through a linguacultural perspective, where cultural context and discourse traditions are treated as central components of meaning.

Finally, the analysis takes into account the Russian-language media context of Kazakhstan. Local journalistic norms, editorial practices, and reader expectations influence how translated texts are produced and perceived. For this reason, translation choices are interpreted not only as individual decisions but also as results of broader cultural and institutional constraints.

Using these methods together helps show how gonzo reportage changes in translation and why some of its features survive while others are smoothed out.

The analytical procedure follows a step-by-step linguacultural model. At the first stage, the source text is examined as a cultural and discursive whole. This involves identifying the author's dominant narrative position, the degree of subjectivity, and the text's general communicative orientation. Special attention is paid to the interaction between factual information and personal experience, as this is the core of gonzo reportage.

At the second stage, the internal structure of selected fragments is analyzed. Linguostylistic analysis is applied to identify expressive lexical units, evaluative adjectives, emotionally charged verbs, colloquial and substandard forms, metaphorical constructions, and non-canonical syntactic patterns. These elements are treated as markers of subjectivity and emotional intensity. Each marker is described not only in terms of form but also of its cultural and pragmatic functions.

At the third stage, discourse analysis is used to describe how the author constructs his position in relation to events, characters, and readers. The narrator's role is examined through the use of first-person forms, direct address, evaluative commentary, and ironic distance. This allows the study to show how the text organizes experience and guides the reader's interpretation.

At the fourth stage, the corresponding fragments in Russian translation are analyzed using the same categories. This symmetrical procedure allows comparison of source and target texts on equal methodological grounds. Attention is paid to shifts in lexical choice, syntactic structure, and stylistic tone. Each shift is interpreted in terms of its effect on authorial voice, emotional intensity, and cultural meaning.

The comparative stage of analysis is interpretative and qualitative. Instead of counting isolated linguistic features, the study focuses on functional changes. Each translation decision is evaluated according to whether it preserves, weakens, or transforms the communicative effect of the original fragment. This evaluation is guided by linguacultural criteria: preservation of worldview, reconstruction of emotional stance, and transmission of cultural specificity.

In order to avoid purely subjective interpretation, the analysis is supported by theoretical models discussed in the literature review. Concepts of narrative voice, experiential credibility, cultural norms, and translation strategies are used as analytical tools rather than abstract references. This ensures that each conclusion is grounded in both textual data and theoretical reasoning.

Finally, the method allows for interpretative flexibility. Gonzo reportage itself resists rigid categorization, and therefore, the analytical model is not mechanical. It is designed to adapt to the text's internal logic, allowing the researcher to follow the dynamics of meaning rather than impose external schemes. This approach aligns with the nature of gonzo reportage as an open and unstable form of media discourse, enabling the study of its translation without reducing it to fixed categories.

The selection of these works is motivated by their status as some of the most representative texts of classical gonzo reportage, in which the genre's defining features - radical authorial subjectivity, stylistic excess, and the fusion of factual reporting with personal experience - are realized in their most explicit and systematic form. As such, they provide particularly suitable material for examining the linguacultural challenges involved in translating gonzo reportage and for tracing how its genre-specific characteristics are negotiated in the Kazakhstan's media context.

Results and discussion

The linguacultural analysis shows that the most visible changes in translating gonzo reportage concern the way subjectivity, emotional force, cultural meaning, and narrative rhythm are handled. These elements do not change independently; they influence one another and, together, reshape the genre in translation.

In the original gonzo texts, the narrator speaks as a living participant of events. He does not simply describe reality but experiences it, reacts to it, and judges it emotionally. This is clearly seen in passages where the author uses strong metaphors to describe his own state:

Eng: *We had all the momentum; we were riding the crest of a high and beautiful wave* (Thompson, 1971).

Rus: *У нас был разгон – мы неслись на гребне высокой и прекрасной волны* (Томпсон, 2019)

In the English original, the metaphor of *riding the crest of a high and beautiful wave* constructs experience as an overwhelming force that carries the narrator forward without the possibility of control or detachment. The narrator is not observing events from a distance but is physically and psychologically immersed in them, moving with the momentum of chaos. The metaphor emphasizes surrender to excess and reinforces the gonzo principle of experiential narration, where meaning emerges from lived intensity rather than reflective analysis. In the Russian translation, although the metaphor is preserved, its experiential pressure is reduced through stylistic smoothing. The image becomes more aesthetic than destabilizing, shifting the focus from loss of control to descriptive motion. As a result, the narrator's position subtly changes from a participant swept up by events to a voice recounting them retrospectively. This shift weakens the immediacy of experience and supports Hartsock's claim that gonzo reportage derives its authority from being inside the event rather than from narrating it at a distance (Hartsock, 2016).

A similar shift appears in other fragments where the narrator expresses emotional overload:

Eng: *The noise in the car was so awful – between the wind and the radio and the tape machine – that the kid in the back seat couldn't hear a word we were saying* (Thompson, 1971).

Rus: *Шум в машине – из-за ветра, радио и магнитофона – был таким невыносимым, что сидевший сзади парень не мог расслышать ни слова* (Томпсон, 2019).

The English sentence constructs *noise* as an aggressive, overwhelming force through syntactic accumulation and causal excess. The piling up of sound sources the *wind, the radio, the tape machine* creates a claustrophobic auditory space in which perception and communication collapse. *Noise* here is not a neutral background detail but a form of sensory violence that invades consciousness and destabilizes interaction, thereby immersing the reader in the narrator's chaotic experience. This strategy is characteristic of gonzo narration, where emotional intensity is produced through excess rather than reflection. In the Russian translation, the semantic content of the sentence is largely preserved; however, the experiential pressure is reduced through syntactic reorganization and explanatory framing. The causal structure becomes more linear and descriptive, directing the reader's attention toward the outcome *не мог расслышать* rather than the ongoing process of sensory assault. As a result, the reader observes the effects of *noise* instead of being subjected to it. This shift illustrates a recurrent translational tendency: dynamic structures expressing perceptual overload in the original are rendered as stable descriptive statements in translation, which weakens the gonzo principle of emotional immersion and transforms lived chaos into narrated information.

The same tendency is observed in the treatment of expressive and non-standard language. Gonzo reportage frequently employs sharp, provocative formulations in order to shock the reader and express the narrator's explicit emotional attitude toward the social environment:

Eng: *The Circus-Circus is what the whole hep world would be doing on Saturday night if the Nazis had won the war* (Thompson, 1971).

Rus: *Казино "Циркус-Циркус" - это то, чем жил бы весь "продвинутый" мир субботним вечером, если бы нацисты выиграли войну* (Томпсон, 2019).

The expression if the *Nazis had won the war* functions as an aggressively ironic metaphor that openly attacks the moral and cultural atmosphere of the place. Rather than describing Las Vegas neutrally, the narrator frames it as a grotesque and ethically perverse spectacle, positioning himself as an uncompromising and judgmental observer. This type of hyperbolic comparison is characteristic of gonzo discourse, where social criticism is delivered through shock, exaggeration, and deliberate provocation. In the translation, while the semantic meaning of the comparison is preserved, its provocative force is significantly softened. The historical and ideological shock value of the *Nazi* reference is neutralized through a more restrained tone and explanatory structure, reducing the immediacy of the attack. The evaluative stance becomes less confrontational and more mediated. From a linguacultural perspective, this shift reflects a preference in the target culture for controlled expressiveness, where emotionally extreme or culturally sensitive imagery is often moderated to avoid excessive conflict, even at the cost of reduced expressive intensity.

As Kozhbayeva notes, culturally marked and emotionally strong language is often adapted to avoid conflict with target cultural norms, even when this reduces expressive power (Kozhbayeva et al., 2024). This softening also affects insults and emotional judgments:

Eng: *These goddamn people are all drunk and crazy*. (Thompson, 1971).

Rus: *Эти люди все пьяны и ведут себя неадекватно*. (Томпсон, 2019).

In the original sentence, the adjective *goddamn* functions as an emotional intensifier and a direct verbal attack, while *crazy* expresses open contempt rather than neutral description. Together, these elements position the narrator as an aggressive commentator who actively judges and insults the surrounding social environment. The utterance is confrontational and evaluative, reinforcing the gonzo principle of subjective involvement and emotional excess.

In the Russian translation, the explicit insult is removed and replaced with a more neutral behavioral characterization. The emotional aggression of the original is reduced, and the narrator's voice shifts from active condemnation to detached observation. As a result, the speaker no longer attacks the subjects verbally but merely reports their condition. This transformation alters the narrator's image, moving it from an emotionally engaged, judgmental participant to a more restrained, quasi-neutral reporter. Gonzo texts are deeply rooted in American political and cultural life, and these references often carry strong evaluative meaning:

Eng: *The whole scene had the familiar Nixon stink about it* (Thompson, 1971).

Rus: *Во всей этой сцене чувствовался знакомый политический душок* (Томпсон, 2019

For an American reader, the proper name *Nixon* immediately activates a complex network of cultural associations, including political scandal, abuse of power, corruption, and moral hypocrisy. The metaphor *Nixon stink* functions not only as a political allusion but also as a strong negative evaluation, framing the situation as ethically contaminated. The reference thus operates as a condensed form of political irony, allowing the narrator to express judgment without explicit explanation. In the Russian translation, the proper name is omitted and replaced by a generalized

description. As a result, the political dimension of the utterance disappears, and the reader receives only an abstract image of unpleasantness rather than a pointed ideological critique. According to House (2015), such cultural simplification is a common translational strategy aimed at protecting the target reader from culturally specific references; however, it also weakens pragmatic force and reduces the interpretive depth of the text. Consequently, the narrator's role shifts from politically engaged critic to a more neutral observer, diminishing the gonzo effect of sharp cultural confrontation.

Another example shows the same process:

Eng: *It felt like a bad Vegas movie mixed with a political nightmare* (Thompson, 1971).

Rus: *Это напоминало странный сон и тяжелые события* (Томпсон, 2019)

There *Vegas is* presented as a symbol of excess, and illusion disappears. The cultural space becomes abstract. The reader no longer sees the American cultural landscape behind the text.

Eng: *The Edge… There is no honest way to explain it because the only people who really know where it is are the ones who have gone over* (Thompson, 1979).

Rus: *Грань… Честно объяснить её невозможно, потому что по-настоящему знают, где она проходит, только те, кто её перешёл* (Томпсон, 2003)

In the original, the metaphor of *the Edge* functions as a condensed symbol of experiential extremity. It represents a boundary between controlled perception and irreversible immersion, between observation and total involvement. The phrase no honest way to explain it rejects rational explanation and emphasizes that true knowledge comes only through lived experience. This construction directly reflects the gonzo epistemology identified by Hartsock: truth is accessible only to those who have crossed into experience, not to detached observers.

In the Russian translation, although the metaphor is preserved lexically, its destabilizing force is reduced. The expression becomes more abstract and reflective, shifting from embodied danger to philosophical generalization. The visceral implications of risk gone over lose some of their existential threat and are reinterpreted as a conceptual boundary rather than a loved one. As a result, the reader is invited to understand the idea intellectually rather than to feel its danger. This shift illustrates a recurring translational tendency: gonzo metaphors grounded in bodily risk and experiential excess are reframed as reflective concepts, weakening the principle of experiential credibility.

Changes in language and culture also affect narrative rhythm. Gonzo writing often uses short, broken sentences to show emotional tension:

Eng: *Buy the ticket. Take the ride* (Thompson, 1971).

Rus: *Купи билет и отправляйся в путь* (Томпсон, 2019)

In the English original, the message is split into two minimal imperative sentences, each functioning as an isolated rhythmic unit. The abruptness and symmetry of the structure create a sense of urgency and inevitability, reflecting the gonzo ethos of irreversible immersion in experience. Meaning is generated not through explanation but through rhythm and command, forcing the reader into direct involvement rather than reflective distance. In the Russian translation, the two imperatives are merged into a single syntactic unit, resulting in a smoother, more conventional narrative rhythm. The fragmentation that generates pressure in the original is lost, and the utterance is reinterpreted as a generalized motivational statement rather than an existential command. As a result, emotional tension is reduced, and the performative force of the phrase is weakened. This transformation illustrates a broader translational tendency: the gonzo rhythm, based on brevity and syntactic isolation, is often normalized in translation, diminishing immediacy and weakening emotional immersion. Another example shows the same tendency:

Eng: *Too weird to live. Too rare to die* (Thompson, 1979).

Rus: *Слишком странный, чтобы жить, и слишком редкий, чтобы умереть* (Томпсон, 2003).

The English original relies on extreme syntactic minimalism and parallel fragmentation. Each clause is a verb-less sentence functioning as an isolated rhythmic unit, creating a sharp, aphoristic impact. The repetition of the comparative structure *too… to…* combined with sentence separation, produces a staccato rhythm that foregrounds existential tension and psychological extremity. Meaning is generated not through explanation but through rhythmic pressure, forcing the reader to confront the statement as an uncompromising judgment rather than a reflective observation. This technique is characteristic of gonzo narration, where intensity is achieved through compression and immediacy.

In the Russian translation, the two fragments are merged into a single syntactically complete sentence connected by coordination. Although the semantic content is preserved, the original's rhythmic fragmentation disappears. The aphoristic unit is replaced by balanced logical symmetry, which stabilizes the utterance and reduces its emotional force. As a result, the statement reads as a polished philosophical reflection rather than an abrupt existential verdict. This example illustrates a broader translational tendency - the normalization of fragmented gonzo syntax leads to a loss of rhythmic intensity and weakens the principle of emotional immersion, transforming raw experience into coherent discourse. In the Kazakhstani Russian-language context, most translations favor adaptation, which slowly moves the text away from the true spirit of gonzo reportage.

Another example of cultural reference can be seen in the way American political and social symbols are treated in translation.

Eng: *The American Dream was a concept heavy on my mind as we drove into Las Vegas* (Thompson, 1971).

Rus: *Идея американской мечты не выходила у меня из головы, когда мы въезжали в Лас-Вегас* (Томпсон, 2019).

In the original, the phrase *the American Dream* functions as a culturally saturated symbol rather than a neutral abstraction. For an American reader, it evokes a complex ideological construct associated with prosperity, success, freedom, and social mobility, as well as its historical disillusionment. Positioned at the moment of entering *Las Vegas*, the symbol acquires ironic weight: the city embodies both the promise and the corruption of *the American Dream*, turning it into a spectacle of excess, illusion, and moral decay. Thus, the reference operates as a critical lens through which the entire narrative space is interpreted. In the translation, although the phrase *американская мечта* is preserved lexically, its cultural and ideological density is significantly reduced. The expression is received as a generalized concept of success rather than as a contested national myth with a long history of critique in American culture. As a result, the ironic tension between the ideal and its grotesque realization in Las Vegas becomes less pronounced. The reader encounters an abstract idea rather than a culturally charged symbol embedded in American media and social discourse. This example demonstrates a broader translational tendency: iconic cultural formulas of American popular ideology are often decontextualized in translation, thereby weakening their evaluative and critical functions within gonzo narration.

Emotional language also undergoes visible change in translation. For example,

Eng: *There was no way to explain the terror I felt* (Thompson, 1971).

Rus: *Невозможно было объяснить то раздражение, которое я испытывал* (Томпсон, 2019).

In the English original, the phrase *no way to explain* emphasizes the overwhelming and uncontrollable nature of emotion. Terror is presented not as a rational or communicable state but as an experience that exceeds language itself. The narrator does not analyze his feelings but registers them as raw and immediate, reinforcing the

gonzo principle of experiential narration, where emotion precedes reflection. The focus is not on justification but on intensity, positioning the narrator as a subject overwhelmed by affect rather than as a commentator explaining it. In the Russian translation, the emotional charge is noticeably reduced. The noun terror is replaced by *раздражение*, shifting the emotional scale from extreme affect to mild discontent. In addition, the construction becomes more descriptive and controlled, framing emotion as something that can be named and categorized rather than as an unmanageable internal force. As a result, the narrator's emotional state is normalized, and the sense of psychological excess is weakened. The authorial voice moves away from lived emotional crisis toward restrained self-observation, which reduces the experiential credibility central to gonzo reportage.

In gonzo reportage, rhythm and slang are also sensitive to translation as presented in the example below:

Eng: *The poor bastard didn't know what was coming* (Thompson, 1971).

Rus: *Бедняга не знал, что его ждёт* (Томпсон, 2019).

In the original, the slang noun *"bastard" convey*s rough familiarity and ironic cruelty. It signals the narrator's emotional superiority and anticipatory sarcasm, reinforcing a tone of reckless confidence. The phrase is conversational and morally ambiguous, typical of gonzo narration where judgment and empathy coexist in unstable tension. During the translation, the slang insult is replaced with the neutral and sympathetic *бедняга*, which removes aggression and irony. The narrator's voice shifts from mocking insider to compassionate observer. Consequently, emotional sharpness is reduced, and the gonzo stance of provocative involvement is softened into conventional storytelling. One more example:

Eng: *We were somewhere around Barstow on the edge of the desert when the drugs began to take hold…* (Thompson, 1971)

Rus: *Мы были где-то под Барстоу, на краю пустыни, когда наркотики начали действовать…* (Томпсон, 2019).

In the English original, the sentence immediately places the reader inside an unfolding experience rather than at a point of narrative reflection. The vague spatial marker, somewhere around Barstow, creates disorientation, while the verb phrase 'began to take hold' introduces a powerful metaphor of physical seizure and loss of agency. Drugs are not merely present; they act upon the narrator, gradually overtaking consciousness. This construction frames experience as invasive and irreversible, establishing from the very first sentence the gonzo principle of experiential narration, in which events happen to the narrator rather than being calmly observed by him. In the target text, the general structure of the sentence is preserved, but its experiential force is reduced. The verb phrase *начали действовать* neutralizes the metaphor of physical grip implied in take hold, replacing it with a clinically descriptive expression. As a result, the sense of threat and loss of control is weakened. Drug influence is presented as a predictable process rather than as an external force overwhelming the subject. The reader receives information about intoxication but is less strongly immersed in its onset.

Eng: *When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro* (Thompson, 1979)

Rus: *Когда всё становится странным, странные берутся за дело всерьёз* (Томпсон, 2003).

This aphoristic sentence relies on rhythmic compression, repetition, and slang to express a worldview rather than to describe a specific event. The repetition of *'weird' and the colloquial verb 'turn pro' creates* a sharp, ironic rhythm that frames chaos as a natural environment for outsiders and nonconformists. The sentence functions as a gonzo manifesto. Instability is not a problem, but a condition in which alternative forms of expertise emerge. In the Russian translation, the original's rhythmic unit is softened. A more neutral formulation replaces the colloquial force of turn pro, and the playful irony of repetition is weakened. While the general meaning is preserved, the

sentence loses its performative punch and reads more like a reflective observation than a provocative slogan. This transformation demonstrates how gonzo aphorisms, which depend on rhythm, slang, and ideological stance, are often normalized in translation. The result is a reduction of confrontational energy and a shift from cultural provocation to general commentary.
So, let us demonstrate all gonzo reportage features in Table 1:

Gonzo-reporting main features	**Original version**	**In translation**	**Result**
Author's presence	The narrator is always visible, emotional, judging events	The voice becomes calmer and more distant	The author feels less like a participant
Emotional language	Strong words, slang, exaggeration, irony	Softer and more neutral vocabulary	The text loses emotional strength
Cultural details	Clear links to American politics and culture	Many references are simplified or removed	Cultural meaning becomes weaker
Sentence rhythm	Short, broken, sharp sentences	Long and smooth sentences	Tension and energy decrease
Reader's effect	Shock, irony, emotional involvement	Clear but calm reading	Experience turns into information
Genre feeling	Risky, unstable, personal	Correct and controlled	Gonzo loses its special character

Table 1: Gonzo reportage translation analysis

In the above table, the Gonzo reportage translation analysis clearly shows the main changes that appear when Gonzo reportage is translated into Russian in the Kazakhstani context. The table shows how voice, emotion, culture, and rhythm are gradually weakened. As a result, the genre itself changes. The table also presents the main linguocultural features of gonzo reportage and their transformation in translation.

Discussion

The results of the present study confirm that gonzo reportage cannot be understood or translated within the limits of traditional journalistic or purely linguistic models. Gonzo, like many hybrid and subjective forms of writing, operates as an open system in which meaning grows through the contact of language, culture, the author's personality, and the reader. In this sense, gonzo reportage belongs to those forms of writing where meaning is not fixed but is constantly shaped in the process of reading and interpretation.

Unlike classical journalistic models, which treat the text as a neutral container of facts, gonzo constructs reality through personal experience. This explains why translation problems appear not only at the level of words, but also at the level of worldview. The translator has to work not only with information, but also with emotions, irony, cultural memory, and personal stance. From this point of view, gonzo reportage supports House's idea that communicative effect and cultural function matter more than formal accuracy in discussions of translation quality.

The findings also support the ideas of descriptive translation studies. As Toury argues, translators usually follow the dominant norms of the target culture (Toury, 1995). In the Kazakhstani Russian-language context, these norms are shaped by traditions of

restrained journalism, institutional discourse, and stylistic moderation. Because of this, expressive and emotionally unstable elements of gonzo are often softened. This is not accidental. It shows a deeper cultural habit: the receiving culture tries to protect itself from ways of speaking that disturb its usual public style.

At the same time, the analysis shows that such adaptation changes the genre itself. When emotional excess, broken rhythm, and sharp evaluation disappear, gonzo stops being gonzo. It becomes a narrative report with some personal elements, but without the genre's main energy. This confirms Hartsock's idea that gonzo is based on experiential credibility: once experience is replaced by description, the genre loses its core.

The observed changes also align well with linguistic and cultural studies of translation. Kozhbayeva and her colleagues show that culturally marked texts are often normalized because translators are guided by what the target audience expects (Kozhbayeva et al., 2024). However, the present analysis shows that in the case of gonzo, such normalization leads to serious pragmatic loss. The reader receives the message, but not the emotional event that the author created.

The same tendency has been observed in other types of media translation. Mukhamejanova shows that discursive markers, which express speaker attitude and organize interaction, often change their function in translation, especially in audiovisual and media texts (Mukhamejanova, 2022). When such markers are weakened or reorganized, the communicative intention of the original speaker becomes less visible. This supports the present findings: in gonzo translation, shifts in emotional tone, rhythm, and authorial presence are not accidental but follow a general pattern of adapting discourse to the norms of the target culture.

The dynamics observed in the translation of gonzo reportage can also be explained through ideas developed in linguosynergetic studies. Muryasov, Samigullina, and Bakiev show that metaphor and expressive language function as unstable and self-developing elements that change meaning through interaction with the whole text and the reader (Muryasov et al., 2018). When such elements are simplified or normalized, the system of meaning becomes more stable but also poorer in emotional and semantic energy. This directly corresponds to what is observed in gonzo translation: once metaphors, broken syntax, and emotional excess are smoothed out, the text loses its dynamic force and becomes stylistically predictable.

These results suggest that translating gonzo needs a different professional attitude. The translator must accept risk, just as the author does. Sometimes it is necessary to break target-language norms, keep emotional roughness, and allow stylistic instability. Only then can the translation remain as open and alive as the original, rather than becoming a calm, domesticated version of it.

Gonzo reportage therefore supports a more general idea: texts built on subjectivity and experience cannot be translated through neutral procedures. They demand interpretative courage and cultural sensitivity. Translation in this case is not a simple reproduction but the re-creation of a worldview in another linguistic and cultural space. In the Kazakhstani context, this task is especially complex, because it requires dialogue between different traditions of speaking, feeling, and judging reality.

The discussion thus supports the main thesis of the study: a linguacultural approach is not optional but necessary for translating gonzo reportage. Only such an approach allows the translator to see the text as a living cultural phenomenon and to preserve not only what is said, but how, why, and from what inner position it is said.

From this perspective, the translator functions as an active participant in intercultural communication, whose task extends beyond the transfer of propositional content to the reconstruction of culturally conditioned patterns of perception, evaluation, and meaning-making. This understanding aligns with the cognitive turn in translation studies, which conceptualizes translation as a cognitively situated, interpretive process shaped by the translator's mental representations and cultural knowledge. In the

translation of gonzo reportage, this implies mediating divergent experiential and conceptual frameworks, where preserving the subjective logic of the source text becomes a central translational objective.

Conclusion

This study examined English gonzo reportage, mainly the works of Hunter S. Thompson, and their Russian translations used in the Kazakhstani context. The analysis was based on a linguacultural approach, which involved studying linguistic and cultural elements both separately and as part of the whole text. The analysis showed that gonzo reportage contains a large number of culturally and stylistically marked elements, including expressive vocabulary, emotional metaphors, cultural references, and broken narrative rhythm.

The research revealed a clear tendency toward normalization in translation. Authorial voice, emotional intensity, and stylistic freedom are often weakened in Russian translations. Many expressive verbs are replaced with neutral forms, cultural references are generalized, and fragmented sentences are restructured into smooth, logical structures. These changes show that the translator often adapts the text to the norms of restrained journalistic and literary discourse.

The analysis also demonstrated that cultural references play a key role in gonzo reportage. Names, political figures, social symbols, and everyday realities create ideological and emotional meaning. In translation, many of these elements lose their cultural sharpness, which leads to a decrease in pragmatic effect. As a result, the translated text becomes clearer but less provocative and less emotionally engaging.

The study has shown that the main function of gonzo reportage is not only to inform but to involve the reader emotionally. Its style is built on subjectivity, risk, and norm-breaking. When these features are reduced, the genre itself changes. Gonzo turns into a narrative report with personal elements, but without its original energy.

This research contributes to translation studies by showing that gonzo reportage cannot be translated successfully using only equivalence-based models. A linguacultural approach is necessary because it allows the translator to work with worldview, emotion, and cultural meaning. The results of this study can be useful to researchers, translators, and students working with hybrid and culturally marked media texts.

From a broader theoretical perspective, the findings of this study confirm the postmodern nature of gonzo reportage as a mode of journalistic writing in which meaning is constructed through subjectivity, fragmentation, and experiential narration rather than through claims of objective representation. In translation, this model foregrounds the mediating role of the translator, who operates between different journalistic cultures and reader expectations, negotiating the transfer of a global genre into a local media environment. The observed normalization strategies therefore reflect not individual translational shortcomings but systemic pressures of the target culture, which reshape reader reception and redefine the communicative potential of gonzo reportage in the Kazakhstani Russian-language media space.

The results of this study suggest that translating gonzo reportage requires more than lexical or structural equivalence. They show that genre identity depends on maintaining the author's subjective voice, the emotional force of the text, and the culturally specific ways meaning is structured in discourse. For translation studies, this implies the need to incorporate linguocultural analysis when examining hybrid media genres, particularly in contexts where institutional norms strongly influence stylistic decisions. For translation practice, the findings indicate that preserving expressive instability and rhythmic fragmentation is essential if experiential narration is not to be reduced to neutralized information.

AI Tools Declaration

The authors declare that AI-assisted tools were used only for auxiliary purposes: Grammarly for language proofreading and Elicit, Semantic Scholar, and Scite for identifying potentially relevant academic sources. All references and source content were independently verified by the authors, who assume full responsibility for the selection and interpretation of the literature. The research design, analysis, interpretation, and conclusions were developed independently; no AI tools were used to generate substantive parts of the manuscript or research results. All materials, including works by Thompson (English and Russian) and non–open-access articles, were obtained legally (including via purchase where required).

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