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RECONSTRUCTING THE PAST: IDIOLECT, MEMORY RECONSTRUCTION AND UNRELIABLE NARRATION IN AGATHA CHRISTIE'S FIVE LITTLE PIGS

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Abstract Agatha Christie's Five Little Pigs (1942) represents one of the earliest examples of retrospective ("cold case") detective fiction, in which the investigation depends not on physical evidence but on the interpretation of competing witness narratives. This article examines how Christie reconstructs the past through five individual idiolects, each reflecting distinctive patterns of memory, evaluation, and cognitive interpretation. The study integrates Gérard Genette's theory of internal focalization, Bakhtin's concept of polyphony, and insights from cognitive stylistics and translation studies to investigate the relationship between linguistic individuality and narrative unreliability. Employing qualitative stylistic and discourse analysis, the research demonstrates that each witness reconstructs the same historical event through a unique lexical, evaluative, and ideological framework, transforming language itself into the principal source of detective evidence. The findings further show that translating Five Little Pigs requires more than lexical equivalence; translators must reproduce narrator-specific idiolects, evaluative perspectives, and cognitive patterns in order to preserve the novel's investigative logic. The study contributes to detective fiction scholarship by proposing an integrated framework that connects idiolect, memory reconstruction, unreliable narration, and translation within a single analytical model.

Keywords: Agatha Christie; Five Little Pigs; idiolect; memory reconstruction; unreliable narration; internal focalization; cognitive stylistics; detective fiction; translation studies.

INTRODUCTION The Golden Age of detective fiction is traditionally associated with the "whodunit" formula, in which the solution of a crime depends primarily on the systematic interpretation of physical evidence such as fingerprints, footprints, weapons, and other material clues. Within this classical paradigm, the detective reconstructs objective reality through observable facts, while witnesses generally function as supplementary sources of information. However, Agatha Christie gradually transformed this convention by shifting the centre of criminal investigation from external evidence to human consciousness, memory, and language. This development reaches one of its most sophisticated forms in Five Little Pigs (1942), where the murder under investigation took place fourteen years earlier, leaving virtually no recoverable physical evidence. As a result, Hercule Poirot must reconstruct the past exclusively through retrospective witness narratives, each reflecting a different linguistic and cognitive perspective.

Unlike conventional detective fiction, Five Little Pigs demonstrates that historical truth is not preserved in objective facts but reconstructed through language. Each witness remembers the same event differently, not because the facts themselves have changed, but because memory is filtered through individual experience, emotional involvement, ideological beliefs, and distinctive patterns of linguistic expression. Consequently, the novel transforms witness testimony into the principal source of detective evidence, while linguistic analysis becomes an essential investigative tool. This narrative strategy anticipates many concerns of contemporary cognitive stylistics and discourse analysis, where language is understood not merely as a vehicle of communication but as a reflection of conceptual organization and human cognition.

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Previous scholarship has examined Five Little Pigs from the perspectives of detective fiction, narratology, and unreliable narration. Knight (2004) emphasizes Christie's contribution to the evolution of detective fiction beyond the traditional clue-centred model, while Pyrhönen (1999) explores retrospective investigation as a distinctive narrative strategy. Narratological studies grounded in Genette's theory of focalization explain how restricted perspectives shape readers' access to fictional reality, whereas Booth (1983) and Riggan (1981) demonstrate that narrative unreliability often results from psychological bias rather than deliberate deception. Cognitive linguistic research initiated by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) further suggests that linguistic choices reveal underlying conceptual structures through which individuals organize experience.

Despite these important contributions, relatively little attention has been devoted to the interaction between idiolect, memory reconstruction, and translation in Five Little Pigs. Existing studies generally investigate unreliable narration or detective plot construction separately, whereas the linguistic individuality of each witness and its implications for translation remain insufficiently explored. More specifically, the relationship between narrator-specific idiolects, cognitive reconstruction of memory, and the preservation of these stylistic distinctions in Uzbek translation has not yet received systematic scholarly attention.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine how Christie constructs distinct witness narratives through individual idiolects and how these linguistic differences influence memory reconstruction, narrative reliability, and translation. The analysis integrates narratology, cognitive stylistics, and translation studies to demonstrate that the solution of the novel emerges not from forensic evidence but from the comparative interpretation of competing linguistic perspectives.

To achieve this objective, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How does Christie construct individual idiolects across the witness narratives?
2. In what ways do these idiolects shape memory reconstruction and narrative unreliability?
3. What challenges arise in preserving narrator-specific stylistic identities in Uzbek translation?

The novelty of this study lies in proposing an Idiolect-Based Memory Reconstruction Framework, which explains how individual linguistic styles reconstruct the past, shape narrative reliability, and determine translation strategies in retrospective detective fiction.

LITERATURE REVIEW Scholarship on Five Little Pigs has traditionally approached the novel from the perspectives of detective fiction, narratology, and memory studies. Knight (2004) regards Christie as one of the principal innovators of the Golden Age detective tradition, emphasizing her gradual transition from clue-centred investigations toward psychologically motivated crime narratives. Similarly, Pyrhönen (1999) argues that retrospective detective fiction shifts the reader's attention from the discovery of physical evidence to the interpretation of narrative testimony and competing versions of past events.

Narratological studies have further demonstrated that the novel's polyphonic composition relies heavily on restricted focalization and subjective reconstruction. Genette's theory of internal focalization provides an effective framework for explaining how each witness presents only a partial and ideologically mediated version of reality. Complementing this perspective, Booth (1983) and Riggan (1981) observe that narrative unreliability frequently emerges not through intentional deception but through psychological bias, selective memory, and individual systems of evaluation. From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that conceptual organization is reflected in everyday language through recurring patterns of metaphorical thinking. Rather than functioning as isolated stylistic ornaments, lexical choices reveal underlying cognitive structures that shape human perception and recollection. This approach is particularly valuable for

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examining how Christie differentiates the witness narratives through distinct patterns of evaluation, description, and interpretation.

Despite these important contributions, relatively little attention has been devoted to the interaction between idiolect, memory reconstruction, and translation in Five Little Pigs. Existing studies primarily focus on detective plot construction or unreliable narration, while the linguistic individuality of each testimony and its implications for translation remain underexplored. The present study addresses this gap by integrating narratology, cognitive stylistics, and translation studies to demonstrate how Christie transforms individual idiolects into the principal mechanism for reconstructing historical truth.

The Nursery Rhyme as an Intertextual Mnemonic Framework Unlike conventional detective fiction, where clues are primarily material objects, Five Little Pigs organizes its investigation around a familiar cultural text—the traditional nursery rhyme "This little pig went to market...". Christie does not employ the rhyme merely as a decorative literary allusion. Instead, it functions as an intertextual mnemonic framework that structures Poirot's investigation and assists readers in navigating competing retrospective narratives.

From the perspective of Genette's theory of transtextuality, the nursery rhyme represents an external cultural text deliberately incorporated into the novel to organize its internal narrative architecture. Each witness is implicitly associated with one of the symbolic "little pigs," allowing Poirot to treat the testimonies not as isolated recollections but as interconnected components of a single interpretative structure. The rhyme therefore performs an organizational rather than a decorative function, guiding both the sequence of the investigation and the reader's cognitive processing of multiple narrative voices.

Its importance also becomes evident from the perspective of memory studies. Nursery rhymes belong to culturally shared mnemonic traditions, enabling complex information to be remembered through rhythm, repetition, and familiar verbal patterns. Christie adapts this collective mnemonic mechanism to detective fiction by transforming a seemingly innocent children's verse into a framework for reconstructing fragmented memories. As the investigation progresses, the rhyme gradually shifts from a playful cultural reference to a cognitive map through which disparate testimonies acquire coherence.

This intertextual strategy also reinforces the novel's polyphonic structure. Each witness reconstructs the same historical event from a different psychological position, yet the nursery rhyme symbolically unites these divergent perspectives within a single investigative design. Rather than determining the truth, the rhyme provides the structural order through which conflicting memories can be compared, evaluated, and ultimately reinterpreted by Poirot.

From a translatological perspective, the nursery rhyme presents one of the novel's most culture-specific challenges. Its significance lies not only in its lexical meaning but also in its cultural familiarity for English readers. A literal Uzbek rendering such as "Bu kichkina cho'chqacha bozorga bordi..." reproduces the semantic content but fails to activate the same associative network because the rhyme does not occupy a comparable place within Uzbek childhood folklore. Consequently, preserving functional equivalence may require a combined strategy: retaining the original rhyme while providing concise explanatory commentary that enables target readers to recognize its organizational role in the investigation without replacing Christie's original cultural reference.

Internal Focalization and Conceptual Metaphors in the Narratives *Philip Blake: Possession, Control and the Language of Judgement* Philip Blake's testimony is characterized by an evaluative, categorical, and emotionally biased idiolect. Although he presents himself as a prosperous, shrewd, and rational man of affairs, his lexical choices reveal a deeply rooted hostility toward Caroline

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Crale. Through Genette's concept of internal fixed focalization, the reader is confined to Philip's highly subjective reconstruction of events, where recollection consistently transforms into harsh moral condemnation.

Philip openly uses a derogatory and absolute lexical field when characterizing Caroline, explicitly stating: "Caroline was a rotter. She was a rotter through and through". He argues that her apparent vulnerability was merely a deceptive facade, stating she had "that kind of sweetness of manner that deceives people utterly". and possessed a "frail, helpless look about her that appealed to people's chivalry"(Christie, 2011, p. 63). Furthermore, he frames her actions within the context of malicious calculation and an untamed, violent nature, bringing up a childhood incident where she tried to kill her baby sister with a crowbar out of pure jealousy.

His evaluation of the Crales' marriage relies on a conceptual metaphor of domestic life as an inescapable torment or conflict. He describes Amyas Crale's married life as "one long hell" dominated by Caroline's "nagging and all the ceaseless rows and quarrels"(Christie, 2011, p. 66). He asserts that these confrontations stimulated her, remarking that she would "go off looking as sleek and well-fed as a cat"(Christie, 2011, p. 66). This vivid animalistic imagery exposes the severe cognitive bias embedded within his discourse.

Translation Commentary. Preserving Philip Blake's idiolect in Uzbek requires maintaining the intensely derogatory and descriptive weight of his evaluative vocabulary. For instance, rendering "a rotter through and through" (Christie, 2011, p. 63) necessitates a robust phrase like "ichidan aynigan, vijdonsiz odam" rather than a weak translation. Similarly, translating the phrase "sleek and well-fed as a cat" demands an equivalent that captures the specific combination of complacency and malice, such as "huddi to'q, surkaladigan mushukdek", ensuring Uzbek readers perceive the exact ideological hostility encoded by Christie in the source text.

Meredith Blake: Scientific Distance and the Language of Detachment

Meredith Blake's narrative serves as a stark stylistic contrast to his brother Philip's explicit judgements. Representing the classic English country gentleman with outdoor tastes, Meredith's idiolect privileges intellectual classification, botanical taxonomy, and a cautious, hesitating narrative pace over active emotional involvement.

Through Genette's internal focalization, the reader experiences past events through a consciousness that regularly retreats into scientific descriptions of chemical and botanical properties. Meredith details his personal laboratory and his passion for old English herbalists, recalling how he gave his guests a "special disquisition on the spotted hemlock"(Christie, 2011, p.79) and read to them from the Phaedo (Christie, 2011, p.84) describing Socrates' death. His language relies heavily on academic classification—referring to the properties of "valerian and the way it attracts cats"or explaining "deadly nightshade... belladonna and atropine" (Christie, 2011, p.80). This academic detachment functions as a narrative defense mechanism. While Meredith does not intentionally alter facts, he limits his causal interpretation of human emotions by filtering them through objective categories. When confronted with the raw marital friction between Amyas and his women, Meredith recalls that Amyas bluntly told him, "Caroline must lump it" and "Elsa must lump it too!" (Christie, 2011, p.77) because he wouldn't let a couple of "jealous quarrelling women" ruin the best picture he had ever painted. Meredith views Amyas as a "rank egoist" and an "incurable optimist," yet his own language when recalling Caroline remains deeply sentimental and protective, describing her as a "gentle creature" whose eyes revealed a deeply "anguished grief" (Christie, 2011, p79).

Translation Commentary. Meredith's idiolect must retain its formal, academic, and slightly hesitant country-gentleman register in Uzbek. Botanical and chemical terms should feature precise Uzbek equivalents, such as "dog'li boligolov" for spotted hemlock. The colloquial indifference

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in Amyas's phrase "Caroline must lump it" (Christie, 2011, p77) should be translated to contrast sharply with Meredith's refined speech, using phrases like “Kerak bo‘lsa, ko‘nikadi” or “Chidaydi”, thereby preserving the linguistic friction between Amyas's blunt artistic egoism and Meredith’s detached decorum.

Lady Dittisham (Elsa Greer): Emotional Absolutism and the Reconstruction of Desire

Elsa Greer's testimony is characterized by a discourse of unwavering emotional certainty, absolute possession, and a profound subsequent emptiness. Free from Philip's judgmental moralizing or Meredith's scientific digressions, Elsa evaluates the past through the prism of a single-track mind that views her past passion as the only absolute reality.

Viewed through Genette's internal focalization, Elsa's narrative explicitly rejects traditional social boundaries or moral guilt. She frames her initial encounter with Amyas not as a standard romance, but as an absolute necessity: "I met him at a party and I fell for him—I knew I'd got to have him—". Her idiolect relies on stark, non-negotiable declarations, viewing Caroline Crale with deep, lingering vindictiveness as "the lowest kind of woman there is" who deliberately killed Amyas out of petty possessiveness. During her interview with Poirot, her lack of moral hesitation is reinforced by her alignment with the Spanish proverb: "Take what you want and pay for it, says God". (Christie, 2011, p107)

Crucially, the primary marker of unreliability and tragedy in Elsa's narrative voice is the profound cognitive dissonance between her past vitality and her current emotional death. Poirot observes that her grey eyes look like "dead lakes" (Christie, 2011, p103) and her current existence feels entirely hollow. She directly admits to the linguistic reconstruction of her emptiness, stating: "It killed me, do you understand? It killed me. Ever since there's been nothing... Emptiness! Like a stuffed fish in a glass case!". (Christie, 2011, p106) The survival of her past passion is crystallized textually when she shares Amyas's final, chaotic letter, filled with intense, living language: "Elsa—I'm yours for ever—yours till death"(Christie, 2011, p110).

Translation Commentary. Recreating Elsa's idiolect in Uzbek requires capturing both her unyielding emotional absolutism and her cold, current exhaustion. Her devastating simile, "Like a stuffed fish in a glass case!", must be translated with full stylistic force as “Shisha idish ichidagi ichiga somon tiqilgan o‘lik baliqdek!” to convey her psychological state. Her fierce declaration of hatred ("I hate her—I hate her—I hate her...") (Christie, 2011, p177) must retain its raw, unedited rhythmic repetition to maintain the linguistic focus on her absolute emotional conviction.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the central mystery of Five Little Pigs is resolved not through forensic evidence but through linguistic interpretation. Rather than functioning as neutral records of past events, the witness narratives reconstruct memory through individual idiolects shaped by personal experience, ideological positions, and cognitive selectivity. Christie therefore transforms language from a medium of narration into the primary instrument of detection.

The analysis further confirms that narrative unreliability in the novel emerges not only from intentional concealment but also from differences in lexical choice, evaluative discourse, focalization, and patterns of memory reconstruction. Each testimony offers a coherent yet incomplete version of reality, requiring both Poirot and the reader to compare competing linguistic perspectives before historical truth can be reconstructed.

From the perspective of translation studies, the findings indicate that preserving the investigative structure of the novel depends on reproducing narrator-specific stylistic identities rather than merely transferring lexical meaning. Idiolect, evaluative language, and discourse organization

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function as essential narrative clues; consequently, their successful recreation in the target language is fundamental to maintaining semantic equivalence and interpretative coherence.

The present study contributes to detective fiction research by integrating narratology, cognitive stylistics, and translation studies into a unified analytical framework centred on idiolect-based memory reconstruction. This approach may also provide a productive methodological model for future comparative research on retrospective narration and literary translation in detective fiction.

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