

The Function of Military Registers in Constructing Narrative Realism in the Indonesian Translation of *Ghost Fleet*

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the discursive roles performed by military registers in shaping narrative realism within the Indonesian translation of *Ghost Fleet*, a techno-military novel by P. W. Singer and August Cole. Building upon a preceding inquiry that employed the same corpus of 242 register items, this research reorients its analytical lens from translation quality evaluation toward the examination of how specialized language functions within the target-text narrative. A qualitative methodology anchored in Halliday's register theory provides the analytical scaffolding, with data subjected to descriptive and interpretative scrutiny across three functional dimensions: referential, interpersonal, and textual. Analytical stages encompass register categorization, scene-embedded function identification, and interpretive mapping of each register's contribution to the narrative's authority, tension, and world-credibility. Results demonstrate that military registers in the translation extend well beyond terminological preservation; they operate as meaning-laden semiotic instruments that actively reinforce fictional authenticity and sustain reader immersion. Translation decisions reveal a deliberate effort to reconcile technical fidelity with accessibility for lay readers, all while sustaining the dramatic register of the text. The study ultimately affirms that rendering specialized registers in literary translation is a generative act of narrative meaning-making, not a mechanical substitution of terminology.

Keywords: military register; narrative realism; literary translation; functional discourse analysis; semiotic devices

INTRODUCTION

Among the most demanding tasks in translation studies is the rendering of texts saturated with domain-specific registers. Military register, in particular, presents a layered challenge: it not only encodes specialized technical knowledge but also carries a complex web of narrative, cultural, and semiotic functions that extend far beyond purely denotative content. Rather than serving merely as labels for equipment or procedures, military registers actively shape the texture of the narrative world, generate tension, and govern the communicative relationship between text and reader.

These dynamics are nowhere more apparent than in *Ghost Fleet* by P. W. Singer and August Cole (2015), a speculative fiction grounded in the authors' extensive defense research. The novel imagines a large-scale armed confrontation among the United States, China, and Russia played out across a near-future Pacific theater. Its narrative fabric is woven from highly specific weapons designations, operational protocols, communication codes, and rank terminologies all drawn from real or plausible military systems. When rendered into Indonesian, this dense technical register demands from the translator not only subject-matter familiarity but also a nuanced understanding of how such language operates narratively for an audience unfamiliar with military conventions.

The present inquiry is a sequel to an earlier study that assembled a corpus of 242 military register instances drawn from both the English source text and its Indonesian target text. While the prior work assessed the quality of those translation choices, this study repurposes the same dataset to investigate a different question: in what ways do military registers, as translated into Indonesian, serve as constructive elements of narrative realism in *Ghost Fleet*? This shift in analytical orientation from evaluative to functional opens a productive avenue for understanding translation as a site of narrative construction rather than mere linguistic conversion.

The scholarly contribution of this inquiry is twofold. For translation studies, it advances the argument that specialized register in literary contexts is not a neutral technical substrate to be transferred intact, but rather a dynamic signifying system whose narrative functions must be actively reconstituted in the target text. For discourse analysis, it illustrates how register choices operate semiotically to build and sustain a fictional world, shaping reader perception and engagement across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Halliday's Register Theory

The theoretical foundation of this study draws on the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework developed by Halliday (1978; 1994), which conceptualizes register as a configuration of linguistic choices that varies in response to situational context. According to this account, the situational context is constituted by three interlocking parameters: field, which captures the nature of the social practice or subject matter under discussion; tenor, which describes the relational dynamics between those engaged in the communicative event; and mode, which concerns the channel through which language operates and the rhetorical role it assumes. Each of these parameters exerts a determining influence on the lexico-grammatical resources deployed in a given text.

Military discourse instantiates these three parameters in highly specific ways. The field is governed by the technicality of armed operations, covering domains such as weapons systems, combat tactics, and command procedures. The tenor is hierarchical by nature, reflecting institutionalized chains of authority from commanding officers to subordinate personnel. The mode is predominantly transactional, realized through tightly formatted genres such as radio transmissions, operational briefings, and intelligence dispatches. The convergence of these situational features produces a highly distinctive linguistic profile, marked by alphanumeric nomenclature, technical abbreviations, formulaic command language, and institutionalized discourse patterns.

The translation implications of register theory have been thoroughly examined by Hatim and Mason (1990), who argue that translators bear responsibility not only for conveying the propositional content of a source text but also for reproducing its register profile including the social relationships, institutional contexts, and genre conventions embedded therein. A translation that distorts register equivalence risks undermining the very pragmatic and aesthetic effects the source text was designed to achieve.

Military Register as Specialized Discourse

Military register is distinguished from other specialized discourses by its combination of extreme technical precision and rigid formulaic structure. Drawing on their analysis of institutionalized spoken discourse, Thornbury and Slade (2006) identify several features that characterize highly codified professional registers: a heavy reliance on in-group abbreviations and acronyms (for instance, IFF, REMUS, SLAMRAAM, and ATHENA in a military context); lexis that is narrowly calibrated to specific technical referents within

weapons systems and combat platforms; recurrent formulaic exchanges whose form is prescribed by institutional convention (such as acknowledgment markers and status confirmations); and discourse structures that encode and reproduce organizational hierarchy.

When military register migrates from its operational context into literary fiction, however, its functional orientation undergoes a significant reorientation. In its original setting, such language is primarily performative and task-oriented, facilitating the coordination of personnel and equipment in real-time operations. Transplanted into a narrative frame, it assumes what Freedman and Medway (1994) have theorized as a “genre uptake” function: the discourse conventions of one social domain are appropriated by another to achieve particular rhetorical and aesthetic purposes. In techno-military fiction, military register thus becomes a key instrument of verisimilitude, lending the fictional world the texture and feel of operational authenticity.

Narrative Realism in Technical Fiction

The concept of narrative realism in technical fiction refers to the capacity of a text to project a compelling and internally consistent representation of a specialized world, persuading readers to treat that world as plausible even when it is partly or wholly imaginary. In the case of *Ghost Fleet*, Singer and Cole (2015) actively cultivate this effect by grounding every piece of military technology and hardware referenced in their novel in documented or credibly projected real-world systems, effectively blurring the line between speculative invention and current military capability.

Ryan’s (2001) theoretical account of narrative possibility offers a complementary perspective. Ryan argues that the immersive quality of fiction depends in large part on the “textual world” the narrative succeeds in constructing a coherent domain of objects, events, and agents that readers can imaginatively inhabit. The more densely and precisely a narrative populates this world with specific, verifiable, or technically grounded detail, the stronger its hold on the reader’s willing suspension of disbelief. In techno-military fiction, military register serves precisely this world-building function, anchoring the fictional environment to the reader’s existing frameworks of real-world knowledge.

METHOD

This study is situated within a qualitative research paradigm and employs a functional discourse analysis design. The choice of this

methodology reflects the interpretive nature of the research aims: rather than tabulating distributional patterns in the corpus, the study seeks to account for the discursive work performed by individual register items in their specific narrative contexts, guided by the analytical categories supplied by Halliday's register framework.

Primary data were drawn from two textual sources: the original English-language edition of *Ghost Fleet* (Singer & Cole, 2015) and its published Indonesian translation (Penerbit Mizan). Corpus construction proceeded through systematic close reading of both versions, with military register instances identified and logged in a parallel data table recording source-text form, target-text rendering, and relevant page references from the translation.

The resulting corpus encompasses 242 military register items across five taxonomic categories: (1) ranks and institutional titles such as Lieutenant Commander, Admiral, Major, and Colonel; (2) weapons systems and platforms including the MiG-35K, F-35A Lightning II, AIM-120 SLAMRAAMs, and Mark Fifty-Four torpedo; (3) standardized communication protocols and authentication codes such as "Copy," "Standing by," and "Aye Captain;" (4) unit and task force designations such as Task Force, USS Triggerfish, and Satuan Tugas Longboard; and (5) tactical and operational procedures such as Force Protection, Material Condition Zebra, Battle Stations, and Damage Control.

This corpus was originally compiled in a prior study focused on translation quality assessment. Its re-deployment here exemplifies what has become an established practice in corpus-based translation research: applying multiple, theoretically distinct analytical lenses to a shared dataset in order to generate complementary insights that would not be available from a single analytical approach alone.

Analytical Procedures

Analysis unfolded across three sequential stages. In the initial stage, register categorization, each of the 242 items was assigned to a linguistic category lexical, phraseological, or formulaic and mapped onto the sub-domain of military activity it indexes (weaponry, command structure, tactical communication, operational procedure, and so on). The second stage, discursive function identification, required close examination of each register item within the specific narrative scene in which it occurs, tracing its contribution to one or more of three functional dimensions: the referential function (the construction of a concrete and credible fictional world), the interpersonal function (the expression of relational dynamics

between characters and between text and reader), and the textual function (the generation of narrative coherence and thematic continuity). The third stage, interpretive synthesis, brought these scene-level findings into dialogue with the overarching research question, drawing conclusions about how the collective deployment of military register across the translation contributes to narrative realism as a sustained textual effect.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Referential Function of Military Registers

Referential function, as it operates in the *Ghost Fleet* translation, concerns the capacity of military register to establish a materially specific and recognizable fictional world. Corpus analysis indicates that this function is most densely realized in the sub-category of weapons systems and military platform nomenclature, which constitutes the largest single cluster in the 242-item dataset.

Weapons designation terminology affords the most instructive illustrations. When the source text refers to “T-38 trainers to F-22 stealth fighter jets,” the Indonesian rendering, “*Jet latih T-38 hingga jet tempur siluman F-22*,” preserves the alphanumeric designators intact, treating them as non-translatable markers of technical authenticity rather than as culturally variable labels. A similarly revealing case involves “Major Alexei Denisov’s MiG-35 fighter bomber,” which the translator renders as “*Pesawat pengebom taktis MiG-35K yang diterbangkan Captain Third Rank Alexei Denisov*.” This solution retains the aircraft designation while making explicit a rank relationship that was implicit in the source phrasing, thereby reinforcing the hierarchical texture of the military world. Such choices are consistent with what Hatim and Mason (1990, p. 9) characterize as the translator’s obligation to carry across not merely the ideational content of an utterance but the full spectrum of register values it encodes.

In the domain of acronym handling, two distinct translation strategies are in evidence. In some instances—as with “*REMUS, unit pemantau lingkungan jarak jauh*”—the translator elects to retain the source-language acronym while supplying an Indonesian-language gloss, thereby preserving the technical marker while scaffolding comprehension for readers unfamiliar with military terminology. In other instances—notably in the case of “*ATHENA*”—the acronym is allowed to stand without elaboration, relying on contextual accretion across multiple appearances to build the reader’s working

understanding of the referent. Both strategies reflect a principled judgment about the balance between technical authenticity and reader accessibility as determinants of referential credibility.

The Interpersonal Function of Military Registers

The interpersonal dimension of military register concerns its capacity to articulate and sustain social relationships - most saliently, the hierarchical command structures that organize military institutions - and to position the reader in relation to the operational world being narrated. In a discourse domain as fundamentally authority-structured as the military, this function is realized with particular clarity in command formulae and formal address conventions.

The translation of the exclamation “Atten-huht on deck! Dress-right-dress!” provides a richly instructive example. The target-language rendering “Atten-huht on deck! *Lencang kanan, g’rak!*” reflects a differentiated strategy: the phonetically rendered American command “Atten-huht” is carried across untranslated, functioning not as a propositional instruction but as a culturally anchored semiotic marker of American military institutional identity. The second command, by contrast, is transposed into its Indonesian military equivalent, “*Lencang kanan, g’rak!*”, which carries the same degree of performative force within Indonesian military discourse. This selective calibration of foreignization and domestication - concepts elaborated in Venuti’s (1995) influential account of translation ethics - reflects a nuanced sensitivity to the register’s dual semiotic function: both as institutional code and as cultural artifact.

Additional examples illuminate how small translation decisions carry significant interpersonal weight. The condensation of “Status report!” to “*Laporan!*” eliminates a word yet amplifies urgency: the truncated Indonesian form reads as more sharply imperative than its source equivalent, intensifying rather than diminishing the command’s performative impact. Conversely, “Battle stations, then” is rendered as “*Posisi tempur, kalau begitu,*” with the discourse particle “*kalau begitu*” preserving the interactional implicature of the English “then” - its function as a responsive inference from prior situational information. Both solutions demonstrate that interpersonal nuance in military register is not reducible to lexical correspondence but depends on a reading of the pragmatic role each register item plays within its conversational context.

A further dimension of the interpersonal function operates at the level of text-reader positioning. The retention of authentication

codes such as “Authenticate Zulu, One, Bravo, Two, Three, X-Ray...” without translation locates the reader within the classified operational context of the scene, inviting a form of insider participation that is constitutive of the novel’s immersive effect. By preserving such codes across the translation, the translator sustains this reader-positioning function, enabling Indonesian audiences to experience the same sense of access to a restricted operational world.

The Textual Function of Military Registers

The textual function of military register is concerned with its contribution to the structural and thematic coherence of the narrative as a whole. In literary terms, register consistency across a text is one of the primary mechanisms by which a fictional world is made to cohere as a sustained and internally consistent representational space.

The most transparent illustration of this function is the recurring deployment of the AI designation “ATHENA” at multiple points in the narrative, ranging from early mission-commencement contexts (“ATHENA is online, it’s green for go”) to active combat sequences (“ATHENA shows Port Royal counterfiring”). Through its consistent presence across scenes and chapters, this single register item acquires the discursive properties of what might be called a “character register”: a textual entity that accrues relational and thematic significance across the narrative arc. The translator’s decision to preserve the designation unchanged across all instances ensures that this accumulative coherence function is carried intact into the target text.

The textual function is also operative in the handling of standardized operational procedures. The translation of “Material Condition Zebra” as “*kondisi siaga* Material Condition Zebra” is noteworthy in this respect: the Indonesian gloss “*kondisi siaga*” (alert condition) prepends explanatory context to the untranslated source term, enabling readers with no prior military knowledge to track the procedural logic of the narrative without disrupting the flow of events. This approach exemplifies a compensatory textual strategy that maintains the register’s cohesive function-its role as a procedural landmark within the narrative-while simultaneously lowering the comprehension threshold for non-specialist readers.

Beyond individual items, the cumulative presence of military register throughout the translation-encompassing terms such as “Task Force / *Satuan Tugas*,” “destroyer / *fregat*,” and “rail gun” - performs a

genre-marking function. This persistent terminological texture continuously signals to readers the generic conventions within which the text operates, calibrating their interpretive expectations and framing their engagement with each new scene in terms appropriate to techno-military fiction.

Military Registers as Semiotic Devices of Narrative Realism

Integrating the findings across the three functional dimensions, this study proposed that military registers in the translated text operate as semiotic devices whose collective action produces narrative realism through three interrelated mechanisms.

The first mechanism, technical authentication, operates through the scrupulous retention of weapons designations, alphanumeric codes, and procedural terminology whose specificity signals authorial and translatorial competence in the military domain. The cumulative effect of this specificity is what might be described as an epistemic trust effect: readers are disposed to accept the fictional world as credible because its technical surface bears the hallmarks of genuine knowledge. The translator's sustained fidelity to these codes—even at the cost of occasional opacity for non-specialist readers—reflects a deliberate investment in technical authentication as a structural support of narrative realism.

The second mechanism, authority construction, operates through the registers of military rank, hierarchy, and command, which constitute the institutional grammar of the fictional world. When command-issuing language is deployed—whether in the form of orders from senior officers, status reports from system operators, or battle-readiness confirmations from crew members—it instantiates a social structure that lends weight, consequence, and credibility to the events being narrated. The translation's reproduction of this hierarchical register ensures that the authority relations of the source text are not merely described but enacted in the target language as well.

The third mechanism, experiential immersivity, is produced by the register's capacity to replicate, for the reader, the phenomenological texture of participation in a military operational scenario. The formulaic patterns of radio communication, the compressed urgency of tactical commands, and the procedural specificity of operational protocols all converge to position the reader as a notional participant in the unfolding events rather than a detached observer. This mechanism is most directly implicated in the affective and aesthetic dimensions of reading, generating the sense of

presence that distinguishes immersive from merely informative fictional worlds.

Sample Data Analysis

Table 1 presented a representative selection of ten items from the 242-item corpus, organized to illustrate the distribution of discursive functions across register categories:

Table 1:

Sample Analysis of Military Registers in the Indonesian Translation of Ghost Fleet

No.	Source Text (English)	Target Text (Indonesian)	Discursive Function	Page
1	Lieutenant Commander Lo Wei	<i>Letnan Komandan Lo Wei</i>	Referential – military rank	14
2	Force Protection alert! FP condition delta!	<i>Peringatan Force Protection! FP Condition Delta!</i>	Interpersonal – authority & tension	75
3	Material Condition Zebra	<i>Kondisi siaga Material Condition Zebra</i>	Textual – operational procedure	75
4	MiG-35 fighter bomber	<i>Pesawat pengebom taktis MiG-35K</i>	Referential – weapons system	76
5	AIM-120 SLAMRAAMs	<i>AIM-120 SLAMRAAMs (Surface-Launched Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missiles)</i>	Referential – weapons system	129
6	ATHENA is online, it's green for go.	<i>ATHENA sudah tersambung, lampu hijau untuk memulai.</i>	Interpersonal – readiness confirmation	269
7	Battle stations, then	<i>Posisi tempur, kalau begitu</i>	Interpersonal – tactical command	410
8	Task Force Commander	<i>Komandan Satuan Tugas</i>	Referential – command role	462
9	Damage control teams	<i>Tim-tim pengendali kerusakan</i>	Textual – emergency procedure	344
10	USS Triggerfish, Task Force Longboard	<i>USS Triggerfish, Satuan Tugas Longboard</i>	Referential – unit identification	331

The functional profile emerging from Table 1 reflects patterns consistent with the broader corpus. Referential register items (Nos. 1, 4, 5, 8, 10) cluster around the naming of ranks, weapons systems, and organizational units, collectively establishing the material and institutional specificity of the fictional world. Interpersonal items (Nos. 2, 6, 7) are instantiated in communication codes, readiness reports, and tactical commands, enacting authority relations and aligning readers with the operational perspective of the characters. Textual items (Nos. 3, 9) are realized through standardized procedures and emergency protocols, functioning as structural anchors that orient readers within the operational logic of the narrative. The three functional types are thus not merely descriptive categories but dimensions of a coordinated semiotic system that sustains narrative realism across the full range of the translated text.

CONCLUSION

This study has argued that military registers in the Indonesian translation of *Ghost Fleet* are not passive carriers of technical content but active contributors to the narrative's meaning-making architecture. Through the systematic analysis of 242 register items within a functional discourse analysis framework informed by Halliday's register theory, three principal discursive functions have been identified: a referential function, through which register constructs the material and institutional texture of the fictional world; an interpersonal function, through which it enacts authority relations and governs reader positioning; and a textual function, through which it sustains narrative coherence and genre consistency across the translated text.

These three functions do not operate in isolation but converge to produce what the study terms narrative realism—the quality of a text that induces readers to engage with a fictional world as though its representations were grounded in genuine knowledge and experience. The analysis demonstrates that this quality is not simply inherited from the source text but is actively reconstituted in the target text through a series of principled translation decisions that negotiate between technical precision and communicative accessibility.

At a theoretical level, these findings contribute to a reconceptualization of specialized-register translation in literary contexts. Rather than approaching such translation as a problem of terminological equivalence, the study invites a shift toward

understanding it as a form of narrative world-building, in which the translator functions as an active co-architect of the fictional environment (cf. Hermans, 1999). The translator of this text has navigated the tension between foreignization and domestication with demonstrable strategic awareness, producing target-text solutions that preserve the semiotic load of the source-language register while rendering it accessible to a readership that does not share the source culture's military literacy.

Two directions for future inquiry emerge from this analysis. First, a comparative study examining translations of the same novel into typologically and culturally distinct languages-such as Arabic, Japanese, or French-would yield productive insights into how different translatorial traditions and military-cultural contexts shape the negotiation of register in techno-military fiction. Second, empirical reader-response research investigating how Indonesian readers with varying degrees of military familiarity perceive and engage with the translated register would provide a valuable counterpoint to the text-immanent analysis conducted here, grounding the study's claims about immersivity and authority in documented reading experience.

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