

The effect of foreignization and domestication in translating modern Arabic literature into English: Baghdad Clock as a case study

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Abstract

This research aims to examine the impact of the strategies of foreignization and adaptation in the translation of modern Arabic literature into English, by analyzing the novel "The Baghdad Clock" by Iraqi novelist Shahad Al-Rawi, translated into English by Luke Leafgren. The study explores how the translator deals with the cultural and linguistic specificities of the original text, whether by preserving the local character of Iraqi culture (foreignization) or adapting the text to suit the English reader (domestication).

The research focuses on linguistic and cultural elements such as colloquial terms, religious expressions, social customs, places and character names, and analyzes the extent to which these strategies influence the transmission of cultural meaning and the preservation of the original text's identity. It also discusses the impact of these strategies on the foreign reader's experience and reception of the work.

Keywords: Foreignization, Domestication, Translation, Baghdad Clock.

أثر التغريب والتدجين في ترجمة الأدب العربي الحديث إلى الإنجليزية: ساعة بغداد كدراسة
حالة

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الملخص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة أثر استراتيجيات التغريب والتدجين في ترجمة الأدب العربي الحديث إلى الإنجليزية، من خلال تحليل رواية "ساعة بغداد" للروائية العراقية شهد الراوي، التي ترجمها لوك ليفغرين إلى الإنجليزية. يستكشف البحث كيفية تعامل المترجم مع الخصوصيات الثقافية واللغوية للنص الأصلي، سواءً بالحفاظ على الطابع المحلي للثقافة العراقية (التغريب) أو تكييف النص ليناسب القارئ الإنجليزي (التكيف). يركز البحث على العناصر اللغوية والثقافية، كالمصطلحات العامية، والتعبيرات الدينية، والعادات الاجتماعية، وأسماء الأماكن والشخصيات، ويحلل مدى تأثير هذه الاستراتيجيات في نقل المعنى الثقافي والحفاظ على هوية النص الأصلي. كما يناقش تأثير هذه الاستراتيجيات على تجربة القارئ الأجنبي وتلقيه للعمل

الكلمات المفتاحية: التغريب، التدجين، الترجمة، ساعة بغداد.

Introduction

Translation as mediation is a form of inter-linguistic as well as inter-cultural communication. Translation serves as an intermediate between people of different languages, transformed it is a carriage between languages and cultures. Undoubtedly the cultural factor has a part to play in translation, and it can never be denied on many levels. Two cultures, with equal commonality and national peculiarity, and at least two languages are involved in translation. This specificity is a necessity being pointed in researches of intercultural communication and translation essence (Baker. 2000).

Translation is not just between two languages, but a bridge from one culture to another. Translation, simply, is the re-coding of the thought of one social group that speaks a certain language into that of another social group in the appropriate language that contains processes of social and cultural de-coding, re-coding and en-coding. With the growing intercontact of cultures, there is going to be more and more multicultural consideration. The translators are confronted with a kind of alien culture which needs to be accommodated in a more neutral way than has been suggested so far (Byram. 1989).

An Overview of Domestication and Foreignization

The methods of foreignization and domestication provide cultural and linguistic direction. L. Venuti, an American translation theorist (Schaffner 1995:4) suggests that, first, the foreign text is ethnocentrically reduced to socio-culturally acceptable values in the target language that bring the author home; second, those (cultural) values are ethnodeviantly pressured to conform to the norms of the target language, thereby allowing the reader to experience the linguistic/cultural differences of the foreign text and spread them internationally (Venuti 1995: 20). Domestication, in general, refers to a translation technique where a text's foreignness is hidden from target language readers by using a clear and fluid style. By keeping particular characteristics of the original, a translation is said to be foreignized if it deviates from the expectations of the target audience (Shuttleworth & Cowie 1997:59). There have been ongoing discussions on domestication and foreignization for a long time. Language itself, however, did not receive much attention until the 1950s and 1960s, when more organized, linguistically-focused methods to translation studies began to emerge (Jeremy, 2001:9). However, these discussions started to be viewed through a different lens in the 1970s with the rise of the cultural shift, one that takes historical, social, and cultural circumstances into account. With the rise of the cultural turn in the 1970s, the discussion of translation tactics has been re-examined from a different angle, emphasizing historical, social, and cultural aspects. The long-running argument between literal and free translation is being continued by the perception that the conflict between domestication and foreignization—two opposing methods to translation—is more of a cultural and political issue than a linguistic one (Wang Dongfeng, 2002:24). Although there may be a correlation, free (liberal) and literal translation are not synonymous with domestication and foreignization. One may assess if a

translation tends towards domestication or foreignization by looking at how foreign the original material is in terms of language or culture. Both literal and free translation address the way language is presented and are seen as techniques for changing linguistic structure. Domestication and foreignization, on the other hand, deal with the interaction between cultures; domestication entails modifying the source culture to conform to the target culture, while foreignization aims to preserve the authenticity of the source culture. Only in cases when linguistic structure and cultural meaning clearly differ are these two approaches pertinent.

Research Question

–What effects do foreignization and domestication tactics have on translating Arabic literature, particularly in the case of *The Baghdad Clock*?

–How Foreignization and Domestication Techniques Affect Arabic Literature Translation in *"The Baghdad Clock"*?

Particularly with the so-called "cultural turn" that started in the 1970s, foreignization and domestication rank among the most crucial ideas in contemporary translation theory. According to Venuti (1995), translation is now seen as a social and cultural activity in addition to a linguistic one. The novel *"The Baghdad Clock"* by Iraqi author Shahad Al-Rawi is an example of current Arabic literature that has been translated in a way that effectively communicates the original text's cultural framework to a foreign audience.

The use of foreignization allows the translator to retain aspects of the original culture, such as the names of popular foods like "klichia," "Ramadan," and "abaya," without substituting them with Western cultural equivalents. This allows the foreign reader to experience the quirks of Iraqi society (Venuti, 1998). However, adaptation modifies these components to fit the culture of the recipient in an effort to make the text easier to grasp. According to Newmark (1988), this may result in the

"obliteration" of certain deeply ingrained cultural symbols and meanings, but it makes reading and reception easier. The translator Luke Leafgren used two strategies in the translated version of *The Baghdad Clock*: he simplified certain images or phrases to make them easier for the English reader to understand, while leaving some original terms untranslated and backed up by context or interpretation (Al Rawi, 2018). It follows that literary translation is a cultural position that represents the translator's perspective on the function of culture in interlanguage communication rather than just a linguistic transfer.

Aims of the research:

1. Study the theoretical foundations of the strategies of westernization and acclimatization in the context of literary translation.
2. Analysis of how to employ these two strategies in the English translation of the *Baghdad Hour* novel for the narrator.
3. Explore the effect of westernization and adaptation on the transfer of cultural elements from Arabic to English.
4. Evaluating the effect of the translator's choices on the reader's perception of the Iraqi identity and the historical, social and political context of the novel.
5. Measuring the effectiveness of these strategies in preserving literary and stylistic characteristics of the original text.
6. Contributing to the broader discussion about the translation of Arabic literature into the English language, with a focus on the representation of culture and the facilitation of understanding of the foreign reader.

Theoretical Background: Venuti – Domestication and Foreignization

Lawrence Venuti is one of the most prominent translation theorists of the late twentieth century. In his books, especially *The Translator's Invisibility* (1995), he developed the concepts of domestication and foreignization as two opposing strategies used by translators when

translating texts from one language to another, particularly when translating from "peripheral" languages into English.

1. Domestication

A strategy that seeks to make the translated text sound familiar and natural to the reader in the target language. It modifies the content to suit the linguistic and cultural norms of the recipient. Venuti argues that this approach obscures the original author's voice and achieves cultural hegemony.

2. Foreignization

Preserves elements of the original language and culture of the text, even if they are foreign to the reader. It demonstrates "cultural difference" and highlights the translator's presence. Venuti views it as a political resistance to Anglo–American global hegemony through translation.

Venuti asserts that the choice between Foreignization and Domestication is not neutral, but rather reflects an ideological stance regarding how different cultures are represented in translated texts.

First: Areas in which Domestication is most evident:

1. **Idioms and Proverbs** Often translated into their target language equivalents or simplified to fit the English context (Munday.2016)

For example, "الي فات مات" might be translated as "let bygones be bygones."

2. **Religious or universal symbolic references** Are replaced with expressions familiar to non–Muslim or non–Arab readers (Venuti. 1995).

For example, "سحور" is replaced with "pre–dawn meal" or "المحلة" with "neighborhood."

3. **Daily life cultural references Social life in Iraq**, such as descriptions of food, family, and neighborhood, are transformed to be universally understood (Baker. 2016)

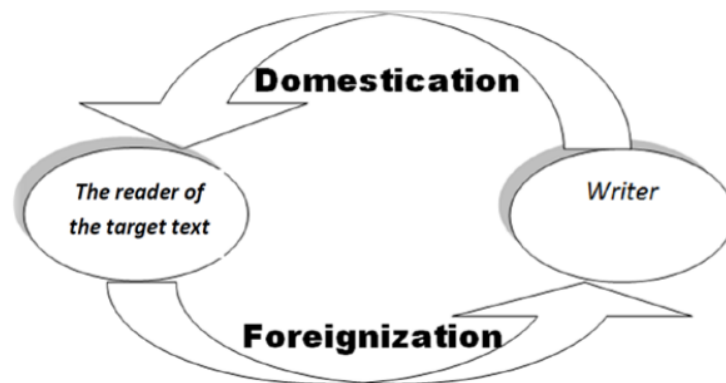
Second: Areas in which foreignization is more widespread

1. **Religious and cultural terms** that are not equivalent (Venuti.١٩٩٨) Words such as "أذان," "كحل," "رمضان," "جلابية," and "محرم" are often left as they are or transliterated. This is very common in literary translation to preserve cultural identity.

2. **Proper names and traditional references** such as names of neighborhoods, religious sites, historical figures, and decorative or cooking utensils (Paloposki.2011).

Example: Keeping the name "شارع الرشيد" as it is rather than translating or explaining it.

3. **Linguistic Structures Specific to Arabic Dialect or Language:** Sometimes a translator retains the Arabic phrasing or rhythm in order to preserve the flavor of the original text, even if it confuses the reader slightly (ibid).



Macro and Micro Levels

Macro-factors project translators to historical and social screens. These include cultural asymmetry, historical background, linguistic reality, political interference, ideology, aesthetic stereotypes, and the needs of the intended audience.

a. The imbalance that arises between various cultures is known as cultural asymmetry. Uneven communication across cultures with higher and lower status results from this imbalance. According to Even-Zohar's polysystem theory (Gentzler, 1993, p. 119), the distinction between

translated and original texts becomes hazy and the idea of translation becomes more malleable when translated literature takes centre stage.

a. Historical Background: According to Toury (1998), translation is a dynamic process that is influenced by social, cultural, and historical factors. Literary works frequently capture the unique traits of the time period in which they were produced. People are inexorably impacted by the particular circumstances and constraints of history since human existence is deeply embedded in it. Interactions between nations and cultures have always been dynamic and ever-evolving, and translation is no exception.

c. Language reality: Although Nida sought to create a polite and neutral setting for interacting with different languages and cultures in order to improve international communication and understanding, his viewpoint is evident in the claim that "each language has its own genius" (Nida & Taber, 1969, p. 3). He admits that although all languages have some universal traits, they also differ from one another. Wordplay, lyrical rhythm, acrostics, and intentional alliteration are examples of linguistic elements that are frequently language-specific and challenging to fully translate. Nida highlights that "unless the form is an essential part of the message," "anything that can be said in one language can be said in another" (ibid., p. 4).

d. The term "political interference" describes how a society's political climate might affect its translation tactics. Generally speaking, a translator's political preferences—both positive and negative—are more evident in their work the more politically sensitive or informed they are. Seeing this political prejudice in different political circumstances makes it particularly apparent. Examples of this phenomenon abound. For example, colonial governments frequently employed translation as a means of enforcing their authority by incorporating images of the colonised that supported the prejudices of the colonisers.

e. Our language, our values, and the social systems in which we exist are all connected by ideology. Fundamentally, ideology is a system of thinking that is grounded on actual circumstances. Ideological opinions might emerge from people's reactions to certain socioeconomic circumstances. More generally, these reactions are identified as ideology when they are incorporated into social conflicts and fulfil particular societal functions. Ideology has an impact on translation as a social practice. It actively contributes to the production and shaping of ideological forces in addition to being shaped by them.

f. Aesthetic stereotype: A society's criteria of beauty are intimately related to its mentality. Cultures can have quite different ideas on what beauty is. For instance, the Chinese have a tendency to think in visual imagery due to their ideographic writing system. On the other hand, Western societies, which were influenced by phonographic languages, tend to be more rational. Naturally, different cultural standards of beauty result from these disparate cognitive approaches.

g. The target text readers' needs: Both the translator and the readers are involved in the translation process. Without the involvement of the readers, it isn't really complete. Theorists contend that the intended audience—those who will read the translated text—is crucial since translation is greatly influenced by their expectations, cultural background, and communication demands. This was highlighted by Nida (1995, p. 139), who said that the target audience frequently plays a significant role in identifying the right language level to employ and informing translation tactics.

The goal of the translation as well as the translator's perspective on the original material and its cultural background are examples of micro-factors in translation.

The goal of translation

Skopos theory states that the norms and requirements of the target

culture dictate the function and standing of a translation within that culture. Translations, as stated by Toury (2001, p. 29), are essentially "facts of target cultures." According to Vermeer (quoted in Nord, 2001, p. 12), translation is the process of crafting a text for a particular audience, situation, and goal inside the target culture. This implies that a translator's tactics ought to be in line with the translation's intended purpose. Therefore, as long as it helps accomplish the intended impact on the target audience, translators are free to select any approach that successfully tackles the difficulties they encounter. For example, Lin Shu's translations of Western novels sometimes deviated from the source texts during the late Qing and Ming eras. His work is still important, nevertheless, because he explicitly acknowledged in numerous prefaces that his translations were motivated by certain goals rather than exacting adherence to the original.

b. The translator's perspective on his culture
During the translation process, the translator becomes both the communicator of the message in the target text and the recipient of the message in the source text. The translator is a reader first and foremost, and their approach to translation is often influenced by how they understand the original text. Understanding the original is the first step in the process, yet opinions on the worth of a work can range greatly since different people perceive literature in various ways. Divergent interpretations of the original text frequently result in diverse translation approaches, as noted by Lefevere (1992a, p. 91). Fu Donghua and Li Yeguang's two translations of *Gone with the Wind*, for instance, show how various perspectives on the source material lead to varied translation strategies.

Shahad Al-Rawi

The Iraqi novelist was born to Iraqi parents on February 1, 1986, in Baghdad. Her hometown is Rawah, which is in the western Iraqi

province of Anbar. After completing her secondary schooling in Baghdad, she departed Iraq for Syria in 2003. After that, she finished her education at Damascus University, where she earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from the Faculty of Administration and Economics. Then she obtained her master's in the same university in Human Resources Management. Then she had her PhD in Administrative Anthropology in 2019 in UAE. She currently lives in Dubai.

Textual Analysis – Selected Examples

Example 1 – Greetings:

"عليكم السلام" → "Peace be upon you" (Foreignization – preserves cultural identity)

Example 2 – Food Vocabulary:

"الصمون الخبز" → "samoon bread" (Balanced approach – local flavor with explanation)

Example 3 – Religious Invocation:

"أبي يحمي أن الله دعونا" → "We prayed to God" (Domestication – generalizes Islamic phrase)

Example 4 – Political Reference:

"حسين صدام" → "Saddam Hussein" (Foreignization – accurate cultural reference)

Example ٤

Original Text (Arabic): دجلة نهر على يطل الذي الشارع في الكرادة، حي في نجمع كنا

Translation (English): We used to meet in the Karrada district, on the street that overlooks the Tigris River.

Analysis:

Translation

Strategy:

Foreignization

The translator retained the local place name "Karrada" instead of adapting it, which preserves the cultural identity and gives the reader a genuine feel of the Iraqi setting.

Example ٥

Original Text (Arabic): الحسد يبعد الباب على القديم الحذاء تعليق إن جدتي قالت.

Translation (English): My grandmother said that hanging an old shoe on the door wards off the evil eye.

Analysis:

Translation Strategy: Mixed (Foreignization and Domestication)

The expression "evil eye" is a domesticated equivalent, while the use of "old shoe" keeps the foreign cultural element.

Example ٦

Original Text (Arabic): الحرب بعد علينا الدنيا انقلبت.

Translation (English): The world turned upside down for us after the war.

Analysis:

Translation Strategy: Domestication

The Arabic idiom was translated into a common English idiomatic expression to ensure clarity and relatability.

Example ٧

Original Text (Arabic): جمعة يوم كل الدولة تطهو أمي كانت.

Translation (English): My mother used to cook dolma every Friday.

Analysis:

Translation Strategy: Foreignization

Retaining the term "dolma" introduces a specific Iraqi dish to the reader, preserving cultural authenticity.

Example ٨

Original Text (Arabic): جدتي كليجة ونأكل جديدة ملابس لنلبس العيد ننتظر كنا.

Translation (English): We waited for Eid to wear new clothes and eat my grandmother's kleicha.

Analysis:

Translation Strategy: Foreignization

Words like "Eid" and "kleicha" are retained in their original form to convey cultural specificity.

Example . °

Original Text (Arabic): الشريرة الأرواح لطرد مساء كل البيت تبخر أمي كانت.

Translation (English): My mother used incense every evening to expel evil spirits from the house.

Analysis:

Translation Strategy: Partial Domestication + Foreignization
"Incense" is familiar to English readers, while the idea of evil spirits reflects a local belief system.

Example . °

Original Text (Arabic): ماكو؟ شكو

Translation (English): What's up?

Analysis:

Translation Strategy: Domestication
The translator used a familiar expression rather than a literal one, which makes the dialogue accessible but loses the local flair.

Example . °

Original Text (Arabic): الأرض تحت الملجأ إلى وهرعنا القصف بدأ.

Translation (English): The bombing started and we rushed to the underground shelter.

Analysis:

Translation Strategy: Domestication
Standard war-related terms are used to ensure universal understanding.

Example . °

Original Text (Arabic): لحمايتنا السيارة مرآة على زرقاء مسبحة أبي علّق.

Translation (English): My father hung a blue rosary on the car's mirror to protect us.

Analysis:

Translation Strategy: Domestication

"Rosary" was used in place of "masbaha", which may misrepresent cultural specifics but aids reader comprehension.

Discussion

The translator of *The Baghdad Clock*, Luke Leafgren, demonstrates a flexible approach combining both foreignization and domestication. However, there is a clear preference for foreignization, especially in culturally loaded elements such as religious phrases, local idioms, and geographical references.

Foreignization enriches the target reader's exposure to the Iraqi context but may pose comprehension challenges. Domestication, on the other hand, improves readability but risks diluting cultural specificity. Venuti's theory supports the ethical value of foreignization in resisting cultural erasure. The translator's balanced use of both strategies is largely effective, though further cultural annotations or glossaries could enhance the reader's experience.

Conclusion

This research concludes that foreignization and domestication strategies significantly affect how Arabic literature is received in English translation. *The Baghdad Clock* offers a compelling case where foreignization helps preserve cultural identity, while domestication ensures accessibility. A strategic balance between both approaches can foster intercultural understanding and literary authenticity.

Findings and Recommendations

- Foreignization was more dominant and effective in preserving cultural context.
- Domestication was selectively used for clarity and smoothness.
- Translators should consider adding footnotes or prefaces to support foreignized content.

– Future research could explore other Arabic novels using similar analytical frameworks.

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