

TACKLING IDENTITY IN THE STUDENTS' CHOICES OF THE TRANSLATION STRATEGIES

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Abstract: *The research in this paper aims at exploring the issue of identity preservation in specific translation situations within the linguistic courses at the level of undergraduate studies at English Department and Chinese and English Department, in the University of East Sarajevo. The main objective of the research is to examine the use of the two predominant identity-related translation strategies, domestication and foreignisation, along with the exploration of their application among the BA students in the translation-oriented courses during academic 2022/2023. The domestication represents a translation strategy that often implies the departure of the translated text from the source language culture so as to make a culture-specific item more natural, more understandable and more familiar to the target reader, while the foreignisation seeks for the perseverance of as much of the source language identity as possible, through the retention of the original forms and expressions whenever possible. The theoretical background of the research relies to some recent postulates¹ that observe the dichotomy between the two strategies as an ideological and identity-related one, strongly arguing that the foreignisation should be the prevalent strategy over domestication, for the purpose of source language cultural concepts perseverance. The research was conducted among the third year BA students engaged in the literary text translation through the textual method and contrastive analysis method application. The overall results are strongly indicative of the interrelatedness of the students' options for the predominant strategies used, their cross-cultural awareness as well as a necessity of raising the cross-cultural awareness not only among the student populations but in the academic environment and the society in general.*

Keywords: *Identity, Translation strategy, Domestication, Foreignisation, Cross-cultural awareness*

1. Introduction

This article is envisioned as yet another contribution to scanning the situation related to the most opted for strategies in academic translation, the students' cross-cultural awareness and their sensitivity for the specific translation items reflecting the perseverance of both their native and source language cultural identity. Among the many ways, identity, as the fundamental constituent element of personality, may be reflected in the particular translation strategies applied in literary text translation from a foreign to native language and vice versa.

¹ Lawrence Venuti, (ed.). *The Translation Studies Reader*, London & New York, Routledge, 2010.

2. Literature review

In this section, the reference will be given to the sources arguing the issue of identity and those most prominent ones (both traditional and newer, typological) related to the process of translation and the strategies that may be applied in it. The issue of identity will be referred to first. Namely, according to Romala, identity in general represents a part of character that distinguishes an individual from other people². The author further argues that national identity is an inevitable part of personal identity embodied in an individual and it is reflected in different traditions, culture and language. It is also reflected in literary works, based on which the identity of the author and the culture they come from may easily be discerned. The reflections of either foreignness in a translated source language text or the naturalization, adaptation of such a text to linguistic and cultural structure of the target language represents the main issue in translation, particularly when both the options are linguistically but not ideologically allowed for. Therefore, it remains an arduous challenge to explore and preserve the national identity in a translated literary work. The challenge is even more arduous if all the strategies with respect to restructuring of culture-specific items are allowed for, the translator's responsibility to either reflect the source language identity or their own language (target language) identity being even higher and tricky more often than not.

Translation is seen as a means of dialogue among the cultures in this article, representing as such a mode of cross-cultural communication³. Within this socio-pragmatic dimension, it represents a multidimensional process, with an inevitable reference to the third party or recipients, users of a translated item. It is a process which aims at achieving the highest degree of both structural and semantic equivalence between a source language and a target language⁴. According to Nida, the equivalence is achieved through cognitive *restructuring*, within the communicative model of translation, which implies the proper comprehension of the translation item in a source language and its linguistic transference in a target language, using those corresponding structures that most naturally render the semantic structure of the unit in a target language. This process may only be successfully performed by an individual that is highly competent in both source language and target language, and in its essence represents the last stage of translation, after the analysis of the source material, its cognitive transfer (with competent translators almost an instantaneous situation). In newer studies related to communicational linguistics, the translation is argued to represent a discourse oriented process, implying numerous situational factors that need to be considered so as to

² Almira Romala, *Representing the national identity through the foreignisation in the English translation of selected Indonesian Children's literature*, in „International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation”, 2021, p. 147.

³ The terms inter-cultural, cross-cultural and trans-cultural communication are differentiated among in this article. The first might refer to either verbal or non-verbal communication within the same culture, the second implies the communication across the cultures while the last one entails the influence of the cultures in a particular communicational context to one another and the inevitable changes they all undergo in the process.

⁴ For further information see Eugen Nida, *Science of translation*, in *Language*, Vol. 45, No. 3, 483-498, 1969 and Mahmoud Ordurari, *Translation procedures, strategies and methods*, in „Translation Journal”, Vol 11, No 3., 2007.

achieve as successful rendering of the message in a target language as possible. Furthermore, in cultural studies, language represents a part of cultural heritage, which in its totality incorporates territory, language, people and the overall folklore⁵. Within this wide picture language can be observed as to represent a means of cultural communication and mediation. Mediation is the term that refers not only to linguistic cross-cultural communication but the incorporation of extra-linguistic information in a particular translation item as well.

As aforementioned, a competent translation might be performed by a skilled translator proficient in both source language and target language. Therefore, in order for the result of the process to be successful, it is necessary for the translator to have both translational competence and linguistic competence. While linguistic competence represents the essential part of translational competence and refers to the proper transfer of specific linguistic structures from a source language to a target language and vice versa, translational competence implies not only linguistic competence but the awareness that the translation implicates a complex cognitive process of several stages and the incorporation of the restructured linguistic material minding extra-linguistic and the both source language and target language cultural concept perseverance⁶. With respect to this, every restructured culture-specific item reflects the translator's attitude towards both source language and target language identity perseverance, particularly in those contextual situations where it is possible to equally opt for both foreignisation and domestication in translation. Some studies show that a typical contextual situation where the students opted for foreignisation in the situation where both the strategies allowed is in the restructuring of proper nouns⁷. Even though the transcription is also an option and is even considered favourable in the process, it was highly avoided, the retention of the original form of the nouns having been considered the safest ground⁸. These findings are indicative of the necessity to encourage the students, as future qualified specialists in linguistics, to offer their own solutions for the proper nouns in transcription.

As stated in the introductory section, the aim of the research in this article is to observe the choices of the students in opting among the translation strategies so as to restructure some culture-specific items in literary text translation. With respect to this, the two key terms will be relevant – domestication and foreignisation. These are actually the two predominant strategies that might be used in the restructuring of culture-specific items. The domestication represents a translation strategy that often implies the departure of the translated text from the source language culture so as to make a culture-specific item more natural, more understandable and more familiar to the target reader, while the foreignisation seeks for the perseverance of as much of the source language identity as possible, through the retention of the original forms and expressions whenever possible. Venuti argues that the prevalent strategy in restructuring of culture-specific items should be foreignisation, so as the greatest part of authentic source language material (both

⁵ Malcolm Harvey, *A beginner's course in legal translation: the case of culture-bound terms*, 2003. Retrieved 21 April, 2020, from <http://www.tradulex.org/Actes2000/harvey.pdf>.

⁶ Chakib Bnini, *Didactics of Translation: Text in Context*, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2016.

⁷ Žana Gavrilović, *Alternating between domestication and foreignization in academic translation*, in *LINGUA. LANGUAGE AND CULTURE. NO 1/2021*, 146-152, 2021.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

linguistic and extra-linguistic) is preserved⁹. Furthermore, Hatim and Munday further on make a distinction between ‘the ideology of translating’ and ‘the translation of ideology’, arguing that while the first term refers to the basic orientation and strategies used in translation, the second represents a more challenging bite, as it refers to the reflection of the translator’s mediation or any adding and modification of the text, particularly with gender/race/religion or politically sensitive parts of the text in translation¹⁰. It is the translation of ideology, as a part of source language cultural heritage and contemporary reality that is potentially tricky and it needs to be dealt with a particular carefulness in the process of translation. This is the field in which the translator is to exhibit their utmost skill so as to make a decision what amount of either foreign or their own, domestic identity to put forth in restructured materials. This research tackles the issue of preserving linguistic and cultural identity in the context of application of either foreignisation or domestication strategies in literary text translation.

3. The scope of research and methodology

The research was conducted with the third-year students of the undergraduate studies in English Department and English and Chinese Department at the Faculty of Philosophy in the University of East Sarajevo, during the academic 2022/2023. The relevant materials were integrated in the courses *Contemporary English 5* and *Contemporary English 6*. The syllabus of this course is a complex one indeed – it comprises 8 hours per week, disseminated to the practice of four language skills and both directional translation. The sampling for the purpose of this research was conducted with 47 students, in their in-class activities related to the translation from English to Serbian, with specific reference to the restructuring of culture-specific items. Several methods were utilised within the integrated approach to translation, such as textual method (particularly emphasised by Seresova & Brevenikova¹¹), convenience sampling method and qualitative linguistic analysis.

The main aim of the research was to gain an insight in whether the students rather opt for foreignisation or domestication in translation and to tackle their overall awareness of the importance of perseverance of both source language and target language identity in the process. The ground hypothesis was that the strategy most opted for was foreignisation, even though the students apply both the strategies in restructuring of the culture-specific items presented in section 4 of this article.

4. Interpretation of the results

The examples are classified in three sets, according their conceptual similarity (in Set 1 and Set 2 in particular). The first set of examples might be considered both source language and target language specific, as it incorporates a reference to Christianity.

- a) *Christian hospitality*,

⁹ Lawrence Venuti, (ed.). *The Translation Studies Reader*, cited edition.

¹⁰ Basil Hatim & Jeremy Munday, *Translation: An Advanced Resource Book*, New York, Routledge, 2004.

¹¹ Katarina Seresova & Daniela Brevenikova, *The role of text analysis in translation*, *International Conference on Innovations in Science and Education*, Prague, 617-622, 2019.

- b) *in an un-Christian manner,*
- c) *the most Christian of dwellings.*

There is an interesting situation in all the examples here from the point of application of the translation strategies – whether the terms are foreignised or domesticated, they remain the same both structurally and conceptually (being both British and Slavic culture-specific), so there can no be any argument about the deviation or non-deviation of the original concept but rather a strategic neutralisation. Furthermore, another type of neutralisation is possible here – instead of using the term *Christian*, the paraphrases is also an option so as to refer to great hospitality/manners/dwellings. The strategy exclusively opted for among the students was the retention of the form from the source language:

Table 1. Presentation of the strategies used in the restructuring of culture-specific items in Set 1

<i>Culture specific item</i>	<i>Foreignisation</i>	<i>Domestication with elements of neutralisation</i>
a)	47	--
b)	47	--
c)	47	--

The students’ options of the strategies in translation of the aforementioned items could be referred to as of general reference, given that the term in all the examples has universal reference. The following set of examples (Set 2) might be intriguing in that it contains the lexeme *Chinese*, with its attributive function in all the examples:

- a) *...perhaps her hair looked a bit Chinese,*
- b) *Chinese medicine,*
- c) *The Chinese summer,*

The reference in example a) is to a haircut style and the colour of the hair typical for the East (not China exclusively), so this metonymic reference might be extended to the reference to the East. In example b), the reference is made to holistic medicine that incorporates not only the curing of the body but diving deeper, in those hidden and unveiled parts of a person in order to find the cause of the illness. Therefore, instead of the specific reference (Chinese medicine), another more general reference is allowed for in this context. In example c), the type of the summer as attributed refers to an extended summer time period of warm weather, which could be, in Slavic culture, referred to a warm and sunny period in the last half of September and the first half of October.¹² In terms of translation strategies, there were two options in examples a) and b), to either foreignise or extend the meaning to a more general reference, while in example c) the only proper option was to domesticate, so as to make the expression understandable for the readers of translation to Serbian as target language. The students’ options were as follows:

¹² The expression in Serbial is *Miholjsko ljeto*, named after St. Kyriakos the Anachorite, celebrated on October 12.

Table 2. Presentation of the strategies used in the restructuring of culture-specific items in Set 2

<i>Culture specific item</i>	<i>Foreignisation</i>	<i>Domestication with elements of neutralisation</i>
a)	41	6
b)	30	17
c)	12	35

Mostly opting for foreignisation was expected here except for in example c), as the literally rendered meaning of the related phrase is non-understandable in the target language. Obviously, an additional cognitive effort needed to be put in the proper understanding and strategically opting for in this example, in order to provide the appropriate expression in the restructuring.

The following set of examples (Set 3) allowed for different strategic solutions in restructuring. In all of them there is a culture specific reference and they are specific from the point of translation strategies application in that in some of them more than one strategy is allowed for.

- a) *unobtrusive western type of music,*
- b) *Prince of Whales check (p.154),*
- c) *a stolid Schwabian (p.158),*
- d) *the imperial city of V,*
- e) *We are not living in the age of Paracelsus,*
- f) *...coming over all elegiac about this Kiwi polish,*
- g) *That's a non-sequitur.*

If foreignisation is applied in example a), it would be clear what kind of music here is being referred to to most of the readers, particularly those who listen to western music. As for those who are not familiar with what kind of music it actually represents, the neutralisation would also be possible, in that several genres are enumerated, such as jazz, rock, pop, reggae. Opposite from that situation, the foreignisation would leave the expression in example b) ridiculous as and it would entirely miss the proper reference. The first step a translator should undertake here is to gain awareness that the whole phrase refers to a kind of fabric. The following step is to discover the etymology of the name of the fabric patch. It represents a kind of woollen fabric with a woven design of small and large checks and it was popularised by King Edward VIII. Therefore, the only meaningful translation should avoid the specific reference and restructure the item so as to refer to the same type of fabric familiar in Slavic culture in terms of a more general reference, using the word *kariran*, in domestication. The restructuring on example c) might be somewhat tricky, as there is a term *Švabo* in Serbian that refers to the Nazis in World War II. If foreignised, this expression might render derogatory, so the recommended strategy here is domestication with the elements of neutralisation.¹³

As any translation item needs to be interpreted contextually, the use of V in example d) to refer to the city that was most significant for the context might be

¹³ Schwabians are an ethnic group of Germany, their dialect spoken in Baden-Württemberg and the surrounding areas.

considered appropriate as well. However, the translator is always free to provide any additional information in a footnote, if they consider it necessary. The literal translation of the reference to *Paracelsus* in example e) might be somewhat vague if foreignised, except that the translator offers an explanation on the figure in a footnote. Otherwise, the whole item better be paraphrased so as to be neutralised. Furthermore, the proper interpretation of the reference in example f) might be inadequate if not considered within the phrase *this Kiwi polish*. In restructuring, it is even favourable to neutralise the proper noun reference, as it is frequent that the footwear polish is referred to in terms of neutral type reference. So the foreignisation here would not leave the meaning unfaithful, rather make it unnatural in Serbian. Finally, the Latin expression *non-sequitur* may be considered a stylistic marker as it represents a discourse indicator of highly educated people engaged in a conversation. From that point of view and given that the readers of the translation are of the similar educational background, the foreignisation is even favourable with this item. The students' options for the available strategies in restructuring of the aforementioned and discussed items are as follows in Table 3:

Table 3. Presentation of the strategies used in the restructuring of culture-specific items in Set 3

<i>Culture specific item</i>	<i>Foreignisation</i>	<i>Domestication with elements of neutralisation</i>
a)	47	--
b)	3	44
c)	1	46
d)	44	3
e)	32	15
f)	28	19
g)	22	25

As evident from the facts in Table 3, foreignisation was again the strategy most opted for and was still utilised, not only in the context where it was optional but also where it was necessary to restructure the item, so as to be interpretable in the target language (examples b, c, e). Wherever it was an optional strategy, the students' tendency to rely on foreignisation was almost exclusive. Such choices sometimes might lead to a vague idea about the proper translation equivalent in the target language.

5. Concluding remarks

This article attempted at providing an insight in the most commonly used translational strategies in the translation of culture-specific items among the third-year students of English and the students of Chinese and English in the University of East Sarajevo, during academic 2022/2023. It was carried out as a continuation of the scanning of the application of prevalent translation strategies with the third-year students in courses *Contemporary English 5* and *Contemporary English 6*. The ground hypothesis of the research was that the prevalent strategy used in the translation was foreignisation.

The same results were obtained in a similar research for academic 2021¹⁴, also in academic text translation.

Methodological investigation in the research in this article showed that foreignisation was not only used when it was an optional strategy (along with domestication) but even in the context where it was absolutely necessary to restructure the translation item so as to make it interpretable and understandable in the target language. The reason for such options might be in that the students considered the non-deviation of the faithfulness of the source language text as the safest ground in the process of translation. Another reason of such a choice might be the lack of awareness about the necessity to check the reference of every given culture-specific item from the target language, which is furtheron indicative of the necessity to put constant effort in raising cross-cultural awareness among the students. The restructuring of every translation item, particularly a culture-specific one, needs to be carried out after the proper interpretation and comprehension of the item in the source language and with respect to the third party (the readers), their cultural, social and educational background.

With respect to the aforementioned, domestication is another translation strategy that is inevitable in the restructuring. If the translator aims to preserve the intelligibility of the translation among the readers of the target language, this strategy comes into play in the context where the retention of the original form would leave the users of the translation with vague idea about what the particular reference is made to. In spite of the fact that all the contextual situations and the culture-specific items had been discussed in-depth in the classes of the relevant courses and the foreignisation expected to be the prevalent strategy used, it was still more used than expected. One of the possible reasons why domestication was not as much used is that it, along with neutralisation, requires an additional cognitive effort to be put in the analysis of the text so as to properly restructure each and every culture-specific item in the target language.

The concept of cross-cultural awareness is another issue that absolutely needs to be addressed in the context of translation in general, particularly in literary text translation and in dealing with culture-specific items. An effort to raise cross-cultural awareness among the students' needs to be constant from the teacher's part. This concept might be introduced in a versatile manner, e.g. through different genres, not only literary genre and in an authentic contact with people from other cultural backgrounds. For that reason, it is highly significant that the students of a foreign language are encouraged to travel and visit other countries as much as they can, either as tourists or on academic mobility programs that are usually offered in their universities.

Methodologically, translation courses need to be designed so as to incorporate both traditional and new, communicative approach methods, so that the highest amount of the semantic structure of a particular translation item is properly restructured in the target language. The students need to be aware of the necessity to further develop their cross-cultural awareness and to gain awareness about the inevitableness to consider the identity matters in restructuring culture-specific items. Every qualified translator or translator-to-be need to be aware of their accountability to preserve either the elements

¹⁴ Žana Gavrilović, *Alternating between domestication and foreignization in academic translation*, cited article.

of a foreign culture or the elements of their native culture, particularly when both the strategies are allowed. Otherwise, the foreignisation and domestication are more often than not convergent and their application implies the skillfulness and both linguistic and extra-linguistic translational competence from the part of the translator.

The research in this article was carried out with a minor sample so as to present the complexity of restructuring of the culture-specific items and the necessity to approach it from different aspects, both linguistic and extra-linguistic. A research with a bigger sample remains one of the primary research interests of the author of this article, as well as a comparative research of the results obtained so far in the field of culture-specific items restructuring.

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