

Cultural Identity in Translation: Foreignization as a Strategy of Revelation and Domestication as a Strategy of Adaptation

الهوية الثقافية في الترجمة: التغريب كاستراتيجية للكشف والتدجين كاستراتيجية للتكييف

TABBI Mohamed ¹, University of Algiers 2, Institute of Translation
mohamed.tabbi@univ-alger2.dz

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Abstract:

This article examines how translation negotiates cultural identity in the light of analysing the legitimate use of foreignization and domestication strategies in Mohamed Annani's rendering of Edward Said's work. The process stands on a focused comparative analysis from English into Arabic; this concise study finds out that Annani balances to preserve source text specificity and adapt it to Arabic readers. The process argues to a large extent that, effective translation posture involves context-sensitive choices which mediate both cultural difference and familiarity. These strategies allow translation to function as cultural dialogue, offering insight and accessibility rather than rigid fidelity or total adaptation.

Keywords: cultural Identity; translation strategies; foreignization; domestication; adaptation.

الملخص:

تبحث هذه الورقة في كيفية تفاوض الترجمة للهوية الثقافية في ضوء تحليل الاستخدام المشروع لاستراتيجيات التغريب والتوطين في ترجمة محمد عناني لكتابات إدوارد سعيد. تعتمد هذه العملية على تحليل مقارن مُركّز من الإنجليزية إلى العربية؛ وتكشف هذه الدراسة الموجزة أن عناني يوازن بين الحفاظ على خصوصية النص الأصلي وتكييفه للقراء العرب. تُبين العملية إلى حد كبير، بأن منطلق الترجمة الفعال والمنطوي على خيارات مُراعية للسياق، يُتيح التوسط بين الاختلاف الثقافي والألفة. تُمكن هذه الاستراتيجيات للترجمة من العمل كمحاور ثقافي، مُوفِّرةً بذلك رؤيةً ثابتةً وسهولةً في الوصول، بدلاً من الالتزام الصارم أو التكيف الكلي.

كلمات مفتاحية: الهوية الثقافية، استراتيجيات الترجمة، التغريب، التوطين، التكيف.

¹ Corresponding author: TABBI Mohamed

Introduction

Translation in our contemporary era has transcended its purely linguistic role, which had long confined it to being merely a bridge linking peoples and cultures. It has now become a decisive tool in reshaping meaning and reconfiguring cultural identity, that is, employing language to convey the distinctive immaterial attributes of a community — what is expressed by culture in its broader anthropological concept, namely, a way of life of a society or a group, rather than in its humanistic concept, which refers to education, literature, arts, and music.

There exists a natural relationship between the language through which a community communicates and that community's identity (Ben Touta, 2025). As Kramsch (2011) observes that, « their accent, their vocabulary, their discourse patterns, speakers identify themselves and are identified as members of this or that speech and discourse community. From this membership, they draw personal strength and pride, as well as a sense of social importance and historical continuity from using the same language as the group they belong to. » (p. 65) Language itself then is culture, for, as the writer and linguist Al-Ghawth (2021) noted, it constitutes a record of a people's sciences, beliefs, experiences, and memories (p. 35). From this standpoint, translating such epistemic and civilizational weight has proven to be an exceedingly complex and sensitive undertaking, fraught with social and scholarly stakes in the age of globalization. Translation thus assumes the responsibility of transmitting the cultural identities of peoples and societies.

The importance of studying the relationship between translation and cultural identity lies in the fact that translation may dismantle the fabric of identity discourse by introducing elements of identity between the source text and the target text for ideological purposes. According to Hussein (2007), this could result in a “dialogic confusion... that plunges discourse into the vortex of difference, the madness of fragmentation and disappearance, where meanings proliferate and multiply, turning the text into a site of conflagration, fuelled by the clash, strife, and intermingling of ideological discourses, where past, present, and future intersect” (p. 412).

From within this interconnected relationship between translation and cultural identity arises an urgent question regarding the challenge faced by translation in transmitting and shaping diverse cultural entities and identities above all, in their plurality. Is translation merely a disclosure of the Other, or is it an adaptation of what is local? In other words, should the translator be committed to presenting the reader with the spirit of the Other by highlighting cultural strangeness in order to preserve originality? Or should the translator instead domesticate those cultural structures so that they appear familiar and suitable to the local taste, thereby drawing the Other closer?

This research paper will therefore attempt to address this issue by defining the temporal, spatial, and thematic scope of the study, and will employ a descriptive-analytical method, resorting to comparative analysis.

1- The definition of cultural identity

It is challenging for a novice researcher to arrive at a well precise and comprehensive definition of the concept of cultural identity. This expression in Arabic consists of two components or terms: identity and culture. Linguistically, identity is derived from *huwa* (he), meaning “the conformity of a thing to itself, or the essence of a thing encompassing its essential attributes” (Al-Tuwaijri, 1997, p. 16). According to Al-

Ghawth (2021), it also refers to “that which cannot be shared of immaterial attributes” (p. 31), and thus each entity is distinguished by its own.

The second component, being culture, is defined by (Eliot, 1948) who summarized its meaning as “a way of life of a people living in one place” (pp. 30–32). Accordingly, the concept of cultural identity refers to the degree of belonging of an individual or group to both an immaterial and material entity which is exactly highlighted by Milne, who states that: “Cultural or ethnic identity refers to the degree to which a person feels connected with a racial or cultural group (Bennett, 2004, p. 862).” (Milne, 2017, p. 48), that is, cultural or ethnic identity refers to “the degree to which a person feels connected with an ethnic or cultural group.”

Furthermore, “ethnic identity is described by Phinney (1996, cited in Bennett, 2004) as a complex cluster of factors, including self-labelling, a sense of belonging, positive evaluation, preference for the group, ethnic interest and knowledge, and involvement in activities associated with the group” (Milne, 2017, p. 48).

2- Multiculturalism and national identity

There is no doubt that cultural plurality or diversity is one of the natural laws of human existence. The differences between peoples and societies are what confer an actual sense of belonging to a specific and distinctive social entity (Al-Dawai, 2013). Such differences even exist among members of the same community, producing a fluid relationship between multiple cultural identities and national identity. This gave rise to the beginnings of modern cultural and social studies in the late 1960s and early 1970s, accompanied by a proliferation of critical terms used to denote the phenomenon of cultural plurality.

Some use cultural diversity, others use interculturalism, multiculturalism, or even pluriculturalism to express the concept, which the Collins Dictionary of Sociology defines as: “the acknowledgement and promotion of cultural pluralism... multiculturalism both celebrates and seeks to protect cultural variety.” (Collins Dictionary of Sociology, 2005, p. 399), That is in other words; the recognition and promotion of cultural plurality... multiculturalism celebrates cultural diversity and seeks to protect it at the same time.

As for national identity, Smith (1991) defines it as :

“National identity represents a specific cultural community, whose members are united by common historical memories, values, beliefs, customs, conventions, habits, languages and practices, myths, symbols and traditions. It denotes such elements as ‘historic territory, legal-political community, legal-political equality of members, and common civic culture and ideology’.” (p. 11)

Accordingly, cultural pluralism and national identity may either conflict or complement one another. In fact, cultural pluralism major task is focusing on recognizing diverse cultural groups and minority rights and incorporating them, while national identity traditionally emphasizes on both unity and shared values to achieve social cohesion. Although multiculturalism is sometimes regarded as a challenge to national unity by highlighting and bringing out implied differences, it can also reshape national identity to embrace diversity as an essential component, thus, in the purpose of fostering an inclusive “multicultural national identity”.

This approach seeks to reduce ethnocentrism and reinforce the feeling of national belonging by integrating ethnic identities into a broader shared identity, as is the case in multicultural societies such as Canada, Australia, and Indonesia. The relationship depends on real context, policies, and a society’s

readiness to adapt with all these parameters, yet multiculturalism can serve sometimes as a vital mediator that supports national unity by valuing diversity rather than merely tolerating it.

3- The origin of translation studies

The phenomenon of cultural pluralism has always been accompanied by linguistic plurality, which in turn, arises from the diversity of peoples' and societies' languages. Some perspectives even argue that linguistic plurality and the diversity of tongues form the very basis of cultural diversity, and that it constitutes a burden that hinders mutual understanding and comprehension. The tradition of "Babel" attributes this plurality to the idea of confusion, misunderstanding, and dispersion.

Translation thus arose in an effort to bring people's tongues closer together, to gather their scattered voices, and to overcome their differences. The translator's mission, therefore, became an eternal one: reconstructing Babel in an attempt to "ascend" toward an original language (Benabdallah, 2016, p. 501). The earliest steps in this task were traditional, revolving mainly around literal versus free translation. The principles of this debate were discussed by Cicero and Horace, and later developed by St. Jerome, who emphasized on meaning in his translation of the Bible. Then emerged the Toledo School of translation in medieval Spain which focused on translating scientific and philosophical texts from Arabic, Hebrew, and Greek into Latin.

Following these traditional approaches came a strong focus on translation studies, particularly since the early nineteenth century, giving rise to several theoretical schools of thought:

- The **Linguistic Approach**, represented by scholars such as Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet, emphasizes particularly on structural and lexical equivalence between languages. It regards relatively also J. C. Catford who introduced the concept of translation shifts, and Eugene Nida who developed the notion of dynamic equivalence.

- The **Functionalist Approach (Skopos Theory)** which stresses chiefly on the purpose and function of translation for the target audience. It was advanced mainly by Hans J. Vermeer, Katharina Reiss (text types and communicative functions), and Christiane Nord (with her focus on loyalty and trimming/expansion strategies).

- The **Descriptive and Polysystem Approach**, which was almost spear-headed by Gideon Toury, a professor of Poetics, Comparative Literature and Translation Studies, who examined how translations operate within literary and cultural systems.

- The **Sociological Approach** which regards translation in terms of social context, ideology, and power, one of its major pioneers is Pierre Bourdieu being particularly influential.

- The **Cultural Studies Approach**, with Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere as its most prominent figures, pioneered theories of cultural trans-formation and rewriting in translation. This school also drew on broad cultural theorists such as Edward Said and postcolonial thinkers.

- The **Hermeneutic/Philosophical Approach** included early hermeneutics by Friedrich Schleiermacher, George Steiner's hermeneutic motion, Lawrence Venuti's domestication/foreignization strategies, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Jacques Derrida's deconstruction also influenced this orientation.

- The **Literary Approach** viewed translation as a literary and creative act. George Steiner and André Lefevere were among the leading advocates for the creative dimension of literary translation.

- The **Semiotic Approach**, with scholars such as Juri Lotman and Umberto Eco, treated translation as a semiotic process of signs and meanings across cultural systems.

What unites these various approaches, despite their divergent perspectives, are attempts to resolve the dialectic between fidelity to the source language and fidelity to the target language, in order to find the most appropriate means of transfer. This enables the translator to truly mediate between the original author and the reader, facilitating proper comprehension and enjoyment of the work without requiring the reader to leave the domain of their native language.

As Schleiermacher (in Venuti, 1995) argues that, there are solely two options in the hands of the translator: "Either he leaves the writer as much as possible in peace and brings the reader to him, or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and brings the writer to him." (pp. 19–20) Schleiermacher right here explicitly rejects any probable middle ground issue; he rather insists that the translator must strive as possible to compensate the reader for their lack of knowledge of the source language. The translator must stick to convey the same impression of the work as if the reader had direct access to the source language itself, and draw them toward the foreign world of the text, however strange it may seem.

He further illustrates, if translation seeks "to make a Latin writer speak and write for Germans as if he were himself German, then this move not only brings the writer into the translator's world, but also places him directly within the world of the German readers, making him appear like one of them" (p. 39).

Thus, the interplay between translation and cultural identity becomes evident when translation ceases to be merely a linguistic operation and instead becomes a primary arena for the reproduction or reshaping of cultural identities. On the one hand, it transmits the components of identity embedded in the whole source language and culture into the target language; while on the other hand, it reformulates and reconfigures those same components in ways that align perfectly with the contexts and expectations of new readers. This constant tension makes translation process a space if not a medium of negotiation between openness to the Other and the preservation of the Self. Translation is not an innocent mediator but a cultural practice that generates new images of identity, which may either bring it closer to the recipient or, conversely, render it more foreign and distant.

Translation can also be viewed as a mechanism for cultural dialogue when it reveals specificities and enables knowledge exchange among communities, thereby enhancing mutual understanding and strengthening bridges of communication. Yet, it may also become an instrument of cultural conflict when

practiced within a framework of power, as in cases of colonial or ideo-logical translation that reproduce the Other in a distorted or reductive manner. From this perspective, it becomes clear that translation holds a decisive role in shaping identity within the discourse of globalization: it may either open horizons for encounter and interaction, or contribute to the exclusion of difference and the dissolution of identity into a more dominant cultural system.

4- Theory of Foreignization in Translation

The theory of foreignization in translation stresses chiefly on preserving the foreignness of the target text rather than erasing or adapting its essence to the target culture, for the purpose of maintaining the linguistic and cultural intrinsic differences of the original text. Foreignization is defined as a translation strategy that sends the reader toward the "Other" and makes them experience the strangeness of the text. This contrasts with the domestication strategy, which seeks to make the text adequately natural and familiar along within the target culture. The intellectual roots of this theory date back to the German Romanticism, especially to the ideas of Friedrich Schleiermacher, who initially introduced the concept of moving the reader towards the author, or moving the author towards the reader.

In the modern time, Lawrence Venuti emerged as a leading advocate who brought a new reshape of the foreignization theory to the forefront of contemporary translation studies. He has the merit to have connected and readdressed it to a contemporary cultural awareness which rejects ethnocentrism and the cultural self-centeredness of the English language, considering foreignization a certain form of cultural and political resistance against the stream of imperialism, racism, and cultural narcissism.

In fact, the foreignization strategy aims fundamentally to make the translator visible if not present by preserving that "strangeness" nuance of the text through the use of unfamiliar linguistic structures and terms that try to reflect and embody the specificity of the source language. This approach enhances cultural pluralism and offers the recipient a distinct cognitive experience. Among the advantages of foreignization are its role in revealing the Other and enhancing intercultural interaction rather than cultural assimilation. However, this approach faces some practical and social challenges such as audience resistance and difficulty to achieve the desired effects.

One of the key criticisms pointed toward the foreignization approach is the potential risk of cultural marginalization or excessive emphasis on cultural strangeness, which may isolate the text aside and also hinder its engagement with the target culture. Venuti's ideas themselves have not been spared from criticism, especially by European linguistic schools, which accused him of reducing Schleiermacher's original approach into a mere ethnocentric framework adjusted to with Anglo-American cultural contexts. This makes Venuti's model of foreignization seem more as a rearticulation of older ideas rather than a new paradigm.

The analysis then concludes that foreignization cannot pretend to be the sole solution to the challenges of translation process and cultural communication in the era of globalization, as Schleiermacher's early ideas are almost if not insufficient to explain translation in contemporary contexts.

This humble overview shows at least how the foreignization approach in translation represents an intellectual evolution from German Romantic philosophical roots through contemporary critical perspectives. It also tried to demonstrate approximately its vital role as a critical and ethical tool in confronting cultural dominance, while simultaneously it points out the need for ongoing critical reassessment that accounts for new developments in translation and intercultural communication.

5- Theory of Domestication in Translation

The theory of domestication, also known as taming or adaptation, concerns making the translated text more coherent, fluent, and transparent to reduce the strangeness perceived by the target text reader by adapting it to the cultural and linguistic values of the target language, so that the text appears as if it originally belonged to that culture rather than being a mere translation. Venuti also derived the roots of this term from Schleiermacher's well-known idea, which urges "preserving the reader's calm and tranquillity as much as possible, while moving the writer towards him" in translation (Venuti, 1995, pp. 19-20). Schleiermacher consistently emphasized the translator's choice between attracting the reader to the author (foreignization) or attracting the author to the reader (domestication).

In the modern age, Lawrence Venuti formulated genuinely this concept as the taming of the foreign text to conform to the norms of the dominant culture in its new language, resulting in fluent translation and smooth reading. However, this can deeply overshadow the original text and render the translator's presence invisible.

The domestication strategy is then, widely used in translating works served to broad audiences or requiring a certain ease of comprehension, such as popular literature or educational and media content, where publishers and readers play a significant role in pushing translations towards this approach to maximize dissemination. Domestication seeks to remove cultural strangeness from the text and translate it transparently and fluidly.

Yet, Venuti views domestication negatively, linking it to the policies of dominant cultures that not only disregard but actively oppose all things foreign. These cultures have normalized fluent translations that obscure or deliberately hide the foreignness of the original texts, offering readers a narcissistic experience of recognizing their own culture in the cultural Other (Venuti, 1995, p. 15). This marginalizes the source culture and erases its plurality, turning translation into a familiar text that lacks the authentic cultural identity inherent in the source text, thereby reducing the chances of genuine cultural communication.

Venuti argues also that the best solution is to acknowledge and preserve estrangement rather than erase it through foreignization. This highlights the importance of the translator as a visible cultural mediator, not an invisible one, who should expose cultural contradictions and differences rather than erase them, so that translation contributes to a cultural dialogue that conveys difference instead of eliminating it.

6- Methods

This study then, examines the translation of some selected excerpts from Edward Said's book *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (1997) by Mohamed Annani, in the scope of Venuti's translation theory which revolve around domestication and foreignization strategies. The analysis focuses chiefly on key thematic phraseologies: "Communities of Interpretation," "Coercive Labels," "Orthodox Knowledge and Antithetical Knowledge," and "Apparatus." Each expression is compared between the original English and Arabic translations to identify linguistic and cultural transfer strategies. Then an additional attention is dedicated to analyse cultural and semiotic dimensions; to evaluate how ideological constructs and cultural identities are carefully mediated in translation. References include Said's original text and Annani's Arabic translation (2005).

7- Findings

In Edward Said's texts translated by Mohamed Annani, the latter shows a nuanced use of domestication and foreignization strategies. In fact, Annani's choices vary alternatively across contexts, so sometimes he retains the distinctiveness of Said's English style, and at other times he adapts the source to increase accessibility and understanding for Arabic readers .

Below is a comparative analysis for four segments;

I. Communities of Interpretation

- Source text: "Communities of interpretation" (Said, 1997, p. 9)
- Annani's Arabic translation:

جماعات التفسير (سعيد، 2005، ص. 68)

Annani prefers to recourse for a literal translation, he opts for foreignization by keeping the structure and term "communities" (جماعات) close to the English source. This legitimate choice maintains the semiotic weight of Said's concept avoiding to smooth into more domesticated and appropriate Arabic alternatives; thus, he tried to preserve the original cultural and ideological specificities.

II. Coercive Labels

- Source text: "Perhaps it is too much to hope that some people here and in the Islamic world may discover the deplorable limits of coercive labels like 'the West' and 'Islam.'" (Said, 1997, p. 151)
- Annani's Arabic translation:

قد يكتشفون الحدود المؤسفة التي تفرضها بطاقات العناوين وربما نكون مُبالغين إذا توقعنا أن يؤدي ذلك إلى تفقد هذه العناوين، والأطر التي تدعمها، قدرتها على تكبيل الناس بما القسرية مثل «الإسلام» والغرب» (سعيد، 2005، ص. 104)

In this regard, Annani moves away from a direct translation, instead, he prefers to introduce an explanatory translation which domesticates the English phraseology, by combining its semiotic meaning to culturally resonant concepts referring to labels and power.

III. Orthodox Knowledge and Antithetical Knowledge

- Original: "By antithetical knowledge I mean the kind of knowledge produced by people who quite consciously consider themselves to be writing in opposition to the prevailing orthodoxy." (Said, 1997, p. 230)
- Annani's Arabic translation:

المعرفة الصحيحة / المعرفة المضادة (سعيد، 2005، ص. 156)

Annani uses literal translated terms to preserve the conceptual polarity which relates to Said's critique of dominant and imposed knowledge systems. This foreignizing process is a relevant choice to a necessary semiotic, he tries to keep clear the ideological oppositions which Said foregrounds, and thereby

it invites the Arabic reader to engage with these oppositions in a culturally resonant yet intellectually foreign framework.

VI. Apparatus

- Original: “cultural apparatus” delivering ‘Islam’ to most Americans includes TV, radio, newspapers, cinema, etc. (Said, 1997, p. 120)
- Annani’s Arabic translation:

فرع الجهاز الثقافي الذي يقوم بنقل الإسلام إلى معظم الأمريكيين ... يعتمد بصفة رئيسية على شبكات التلفزيون والراديو والصحف اليومية والمجلات الإخبارية الواسعة الانتشار وتلعب الأفلام السينمائية دورًا هنا ... يمكننا أن نقول إن هذا التركيز القوي لأجهزة الإعلام الجماعية يُشكّل في مجموعته جوهرًا مشتركًا للتفسيرات التي تُقدّم صورةً معيّنة للإسلام وتكشف أيضًا (سعيد، 2005، ص. 78)

In this last sample, Annani goes for a close foreignization of the word “apparatus” as *الجهاز الثقافي*, in an effort to maintain the term’s semiotic load which relates to institutional power and ideological production.

7.1- Cultural and Semiotic Reflection

Through the previous samples, Annani’s translation in one hand, shows a mixture of cultural and semiotic dialectic where foreignization signs the boundaries of ideological and cultural difference, in order to retain and vehicle the critical and intellectual depth of Said’s critique in the target language. While on the other hand, domestication interferes to tie up culturally the foreign ideological constructs into the Arab reader’s conceptual and sociopolitical understanding. A such approach handles the process of translation as a ground of cultural negotiation, where semiotic signs are sometimes preserved or adapted to bring up comprehension, ideological engagement, and identity affirmation without rubbing out particularities.

8- Conclusion

As discussed, this article emphasizes on the vital role that translation plays chiefly as a dynamic mediator in the ongoing dialogue between cultures and identities. Translation in that mere sense, represents a solid intellectual bridge which connects peoples and bridges cultural distances. The results of this humble analysis demonstrate clearly that adopting balanced strategies between foreignization and domestication is not merely an aesthetic choice as it would be naively thought, but rather a justified epistemological and ethical necessary process to ensure a minimal accurate and effective transmission of meaning and cultural context. Translation, especially when it comes to consider the contexts and ideological implications of texts, does contribute effectively to enrich the receiving culture and broaden the horizons of multi-backgrounds readers. It also enables the translator even the erudite one to play the role of a critical actor whose aspiration is to convey parallelly privacy and preserve diversity.

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