

Investigating Domestication and Foreignization Strategies in Translating Sinbad of the Arabian Nights

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Abstract

Over the centuries translators have faced, and continue to face, linguistic and cultural challenges between different languages and cultures. Such challenges have put forth many translation theories and strategies to minimize these linguistic/cultural differences. The most debated translation strategies are Domestication and Foreignization. Recent studies have argued that in order to achieve equivalence and a successful translation, both strategies should work together. These studies have concluded that Domestication and Foreignization complement each other. However, no study so far has discussed how both strategies can complement each other in a translated text especially from a linguistic perspective. This research examines the use of these two strategies in four English translations of one of the world's most famous cultural collections, The Arabian Nights. The study specifically investigates the use of Domestication and Foreignization in the tale of Sinbad and how the translators achieve cultural equivalence through these two methods and to what extent. The study concludes that translating a cultural text successfully is achieved when both strategies are used in parallel. Cultural equivalence is better accomplished when a translator domesticates the form and foreignizes the content in order to have a balanced outcome.

Keywords: domestication, equivalence, foreignization, the Arabian Nights.

Introduction

Translation theories have developed over the centuries a number of strategies to help the translator overcome various linguistic and cultural obstacles that arise in any intercultural exchange between different languages and cultures. Idioms and culturally-bound expressions are among prominent translation problems, especially when the translation is between two completely different languages, like Arabic and English, which diverge both linguistically and culturally. Translators have debated over two major elements: form and content. Their theories and practices conclude that both form and meaning are crucial, but stress the importance of transmitting the sense of the content to the target reader in order to achieve equivalence in translation. They also argued whether the translator should take the reader abroad to the target culture (Foreignization) or should bring the foreign culture home to the reader (Domestication) Venuti (1995).

Domestication and Foreignization strategies have occupied a great deal of translation literature and practice. Many researchers argue in favor of one strategy while others favor the other. Venuti (1995) strongly defends the foreignization approach and supports that by arguing that a translator's mission is to retain the cultural values of the source language and not manipulate it into the target language. Before that, scholars such as Nida (1964) had strongly argued for the domestication strategy. Nida stresses that a successful translation is created when the target text meets the cultural expectations of the receivers, and this can be achieved by minimizing the foreignness and strangeness of the origin text. Other studies such as by Jianghua (2006) call for the use of both strategies together.

The Thousand and One Nights in the West

The popularity of the Arabian Nights in the West began with a French Orientalist named Antonie Galland. His translation of the work into French in 1704 received great welcome by the European audience and gave rise to a new industry of translations and imitations to feed Europe's appetite for the Orient (Al-Musawi: 2007). Galland's translation was appreciated for being the first faithful translation of The Arabian Nights in Europe; he selected his materials and crafted them to contemporary European taste. It took a while after Galland's work before another attempt to render a direct translation from the original text was made. Some of these works either did not contain all the stories including the most popular stories known to European readers like Aladdin and Ali Baba or the translations were not based on an original manuscript. The first complete translation in the 19th century was by John Payne (1882- 1884), followed by the translation of Sir Edward Burton (1884- 1886). Other modern and complete translations of the Arabian Nights in the 20th century are by N.J Dawood (1954) and Husain Haddawy (1991).

Equivalence in Translation Theory

Languages are unfortunately not unified; the concepts encoded in one language may radically differ from those encoded in another language. These differences and overlaps are caused by the variety of cultures between languages of the world, which create difficulties in translation. Translation theorists have long debated and discussed theories and methods to adopt in translation practice in order to overcome the language

and cultural differences between source language and target language. Equivalence in meaning and cultural concepts has been and still is translators' main issue in translation process.

Scholars conceptualized and discussed equivalence differently; Jakobson (1959) states that "Equivalence in difference is the cardinal problem of language and the pivotal concern of linguistics." (p. 233). He also adds that there can be no full equivalence between two words in different languages. He gives the example of *cheese* in English by stating that it is not identical to the Russian *syr* – the concept of cottage cheese not being included in the latter. He stresses that an array of linguistic signs is needed to introduce an unfamiliar word. Jacobson emphasizes equivalence differences in the structure and terminology of languages. Nida (1964) points out that translation consists of reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of source-language message, first in terms of meaning and second in terms of style. He stresses the importance that a translator should strive for equivalence rather than identity. Baker (2011) argues that in order for a translator to translate he/she needs to decode the language starting from its smallest meaningful unit, the word. Based on this she discusses equivalence by dividing it into: equivalence at word level, equivalence above word level, grammatical equivalence, textual equivalence (thematic and information structures), textual equivalence (cohesion), pragmatic equivalence, and beyond equivalence (ethics and morality).

Pym (2010) views equivalence as a relation of "equal value" between a source text segment and a target text segment; this can be established on any linguistic level from form to function.

Domestication and Foreignization as Translation Strategies

Domestication and Foreignization are two major translation strategies that provide both linguistic and cultural guidance. They were first introduced and given names by American translation theorist Venuti (1995). According to Venuti, Domestication refers to "an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, bringing the author back home," whereas Foreignization is "an ethnodeviant pressure on those (cultural) values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad." (Venuti, 1995: 20). In other words, Domestication aims to minimize the strangeness of the source text for target readers while Foreignization helps retain something of the foreignness of the original. Both strategies are deeply rooted in specific social and cultural circumstances where the choice of Domestication and Foreignization is not only made by the translator, but more importantly, by the specific social situations and cultural traditions. (Wang 2013).

Venuti (1995) highly favors the principle of Foreignization as a strategy for translation: "[I]t is highly desirable today, a strategic cultural intervention in the current state of world affairs," and adds "Foreignization translation in English can be a form of resistance against ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism, in the interests of democratic geopolitical relations." (p. 20). He argues that a translated text

should be a work that presents a different culture to the reader where s/he gets a glimpse of the other's culture.

Nida (1964), unlike Venuti, supports the Domestication method and argues that the source text language should not interfere with the target text language, and that this is done by minimizing the foreignness of the source text setting. Nida strongly recommends producing a similar response in the target text and this is the very basis of his principle of equivalent effect. His perspective of a successful translation lies when the target text meets the cultural expectations of the receivers (Sharifbad, Yaqubi, & Mahdi: 2013). Robinson (2007) also criticizes Venuti's views, he disagrees with Venuti's claim that Foreignization and Domestication are different in their impact on the target culture due to the fact that every interpretation differs from one translator to the other. Robinson adds "the quaintness of foreignized texts could make their authors, and the source culture in general, seem childish, backward, primitive, precisely the reaction foreignization is supposed to counteract." (Hedger, 2006: 60).

Other studies encouraged the presence of both strategies alongside each other. A study by Jianghua (2006), analyzes two English translated versions of *Hong Lou Meng*, one translated by Yang Xianyi, and the other by David Hawkes. The study concludes that the two translators resorted to different strategies: the former was strictly guided by literal translation and believed that a translator ought to be faithful to the original text so that the cultural heritage could be passed and spread, whereas the latter mainly adopted Domestication in his work but also applied Foreignization in some areas of his translation in efforts to bridge the cultural gap between source text and target text. According to Jianghua, both translations are successful, and therefore, he concludes that "domestication and foreignization are supplemented to each other rather than a pair of conflict. We cannot discard either absolutely." (p. 59)

The debate between the two methods can be regarded as cultural, social, and sometimes political rather than linguistic. Scholars agree that finding linguistic equivalence between two languages is not enough to achieve good translation: translation has to contend with more than just language differences. The source text has been written (created) in a certain cultural, social, historical, and political context; thus, the translator ought to take into consideration these factors while transmitting the content and information from source text to target text. It is the cultural gap between original text and target text that translators in both theory and practice are struggling with nowadays.

It is the nature of the source text and its content that determines for the translator which strategy s/he should adopt for his translation; or it could be the translator's belief and attitude towards the source text and the goal s/he has set for the target reader. Either way, neither Domestication nor Foreignization can be considered solely the best translation strategy to be adopted: "Foreignization and domestication are indispensable and supplementary to each other and the idea that truly successful translation will depend on the unity of the two methods should be kept as a golden mean in every translator's mind." (Sun, 2011: 163)

Based on the theoretical discussion on Domestication and Foreignization in achieving equivalence in translation, the following presents the study's framework and investigates the combination of these two methods in the English translation of *Sinbad*.

The Study

For this research the translated text examined is a literary one: *The Tale of Sinbad The Sailor* from *Alf Layla wa Layla* (2008). Since literary texts are representations of their source- language's social, cultural, and religious beliefs, it is imperative then that a reader should read these texts in their social and cultural frame, and hence, a translator should also translate a literary text with its entire cultural heritage.

There have been many translations of Sinbad and the Arabian Nights throughout the centuries. These translations have been both praised and criticized on different levels: word choice, grammatical form, faithfulness to the source text, and ideological and religious context. This study aims to analyze four English translations of Sinbad by four different translators of two different centuries: John Payne and Sir Richard Burton from the 19th century, N. J Dawood and Husain Haddawy from the 20th century. According to critics and Arab scholars such as Irwin (2009) and Borges (1981), Haddawy's translation is considered the best version and the closest to the original text. Based on that, the study examines how Haddawy, compared to the other three translations, achieved such success and what strategy/ies did he use, and if both methods were used, to what extent and on what language level (lexical, grammatical, semantic, pragmatic).

Since many stories in the Arabian Nights, especially Sinbad, are constructed in an Islamic context, the methodology for this study will be to analyze specific religious and cultural words and phrases. The data is then categorized by grouping the words under one title: culturally- specific concepts. As for the above word-level, the data is divided into two groups: idioms & fixed expressions and proverbs. These categorizations were based on Baker's (2011) classification of the types of equivalence in translation theory and practice. The data is first presented in Arabic with an explanation of its cultural connotations and meanings in the context of the story accompanied by a literal translation to give the reader a detailed translation of each single word of a phrase/sentence to later help with comparing how the translators put these details together in a meaningful and equivalent form. Lastly, the four translations are presented and discussed separately in terms of Domestication and Foreignization.

Cultural Specific Concepts:

سعى (*saʔa*)

Context can be a crucial asset to the translator in bringing the cultural foreign word into familiarity and comprehension in the target text. It is the translator who makes a decision whether to take advantage of the word's context in shaping it into an equivalent sense. The following word has a cultural/religious connotation in Arabic. Sinbad the sailor, in the sixth voyage, is fighting for his life alone on an island. He finds a river and decides to build a raft:

ثم إني قمت وسعيت فجمعت خشباً

(*thumma inni qumtu wa saʔeitu fa gamaʔtu akhshaben*)

Lit. trans. then I stood up and **pursued** so collected woods
(Sixth Voyage: 31)

The verb in bold is a cultural word that is religiously rooted. It has several meanings in Qur'an according to context. There are three major meanings to this word. The first is a physical meaning:

"وَجَاءَ مِنْ أَفْصَى الْمَدِينَةِ رَجُلٌ يَسْعَى قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اتَّبِعُوا الْمُرْسَلِينَ"

"And from the farthest part of the town there came a man **running**. He said, 'O my people, follow the Messengers'" (Chapter 36, Ya Sin: 20)

The verb from the verse indicates a physical action: to run or to walk. The first and most common example in Islam is the pursuit- in between Al-Safah and Al-Marwah. Al-Safa and Al-Marwah are two small mountains located in the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca, Saudi Arabia between which Muslims travel back and forth seven times during the ritual pilgrimages of Hajj and Umrah. The first to travel back and forth between these two mountains was Hager, wife of Ibrahim. According to Islamic text, Hager was alone with her child Ismail in the desert and when her supplies were exhausted, she went in search for water and help by walking back and forth between the two mountains in hopes to find someone to help her. This religious ritual is a cornerstone in Islamic pilgrimage. From this text two meanings can be derived of the verb سعى (saʿa): to walk or to run, and to seek. The following verse demonstrates another meaning, different from the physical one:

"يا أيها الذين آمنوا إذا نودي للصلاة من يوم الجمعة فاسعوا إلى ذكر الله وذروا البيع ذلكم خير لكم إن كنتم تعلمون"
"O ye who believe! when the call is made for prayer on Friday, **hasten to the remembrance** of Allah, and leave all business. That is better for you, if you only knew"
(Chapter 62, Al-Jumuʿa: 10)

In the above verse the meaning of سعى (saʿa) is intention and determination. By intention here I mean initiating the call upon God's name and praising his blessings, in addition to getting prepared in heart and mind for prayer. It is a psychological process that means one should have the intention to make an action, and with will and determination he/she achieves this action. One last notion of the verb is the pursuit and the endeavor to reach a goal. Consider the following verse:

"وَأَنْ لَيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَى"

"And there is nothing for the man but the fruits of his **endeavors**" (Chapter 53, Al-Najm: 40)

Hard work and attaining an aim is the verb's most common meaning and the most used in Arabic texts. From the example above, we may sum up the meanings of سعى (saʿa) as the intention and determination to accomplish a goal, and with planning: one makes this action to pursue his/her goal. I would like to point out here that, even though my explanation of the word was through religious texts, this does not imply that سعى (saʿa) is only specific to religious contexts; it is also used in daily language and is considered a cultural word as well. For example:

سعت ان أحصل على عمل شركة النفط

I **tried/worked hard** to get a job at the oil company

The example shows that the verb indicates hard work and effort to accomplish a goal. By applying the meaning of the verb, as discussed above, to our context in Sinbad, we understand that the verb means that Sinbad thought of a solution to find an exit from the island by planning to build a raft; to turn this thought into action he decided to look and collect pieces of wood in order to build his raft. We may consider his decision as intention and determination and his action of collecting the wood as pursuit. Let us now consider the presentation of this meaning in translation:

So I gathered a number of pieces of aloes-wood (Payne: 205)

I set to work collecting a number of pieces of ... wood (Burton: 51)

I collected some large branches of... aloe wood (Dawood: 154)

I got up and proceeded to gather pieces of... aloe wood (Haddawy: 340)

Payne and Dawood present the verb in a domestic way. They simplified it to the target reader's understanding by settling for saying that he just gathered/collected pieces of wood. According to the narrative, this is accurate. However, as previously explained, the verb implies more than just a physical action. Burton and Haddawy chose to foreignize their translation of the verb by indicating the deeper dimension of it. They highlighted the elements of determination and planning in سعى (saʔa). Burton expressed the cultural notion of the word with a verbal phrase: *set to work*, whereas Haddawy presented that connotation with *I got up and proceeded to gather*. Both phrases point out that Sinbad had the willpower to solve his problem and upon that will he initiated his action to collect wood for the raft. سعى (saʔa) is not merely a verb of action, it is a whole process of desire, determination, action, and achievement. Sinbad's main tool in the story is his wit and faith, therefore, it is crucial to indicate that characteristic of the hero to the target reader as part of the story's theme.

Idioms and Fixed Expressions

Baker (2011) defines idioms and fixed expressions as “frozen patterns of language which allow little or no variation in form and, in the case of idioms, often carry meanings which cannot be deduced from their individual components.” (p. 67). Idioms and fixed expressions cannot be formally translated because their forms are misleading. It is the content and the cultural background that matter. A translator in such case needs to understand the meaning of the cultural expression then transfer it in the target language with the same cultural package. This can only be achieved with a translation that is semantically foreignized, which means preserving the cultural message, but structurally domesticized, i.e restructuring the form. The domestication of the form can be a somewhat difficult task: each word in the structure should carry a meaning that would contribute in building up the overall message of the expression. The following expression was used in the sixth voyage. In this part of the story Sinbad is living in a land ruled by a kind and generous king. Sinbad, after hearing about a ship that would sail to his homeland Baghdad, decides to bid the king farewell. The king invites Sinbad to stay and stresses that if he wishes so, then:

فعلى الرأس والعين

(fa`alla arr`as walain)

Lit. trans. then on the head and the eye

(Sixth Voyage: 33)

This expression is very common in all Arabic societies. It is used as a way to express generosity and welcoming, and sometimes obedience.

In the context of the story, it is clear that the expression connotes welcoming. Therefore, it is necessary that the translation carries this key concept in order to achieve a successful equivalence. Let us now examine the translations:

“on our head and eyes be it” (Payne: 208)

“on our head and eyes be it” (Burton: 54)

We will be very glad (Haddawy: 342)

Payne and Burton presented the expression in quotations. This could be seen as a way to keep the expression foreignized. The question is what level of Foreignization does it serve? Translating the cultural expression in form literally does not facilitate Foreignization at all. The purpose of this strategy, according to Venuti (1995), is to take the reader abroad, closer to the target culture. The first two translations have foreignized the form which led to complete strangeness in meaning. In other words, Payne and Burton's translations make no sense. Even the quotation makes no sense in the context. The target reader cannot elicit the meaning from the narrative itself. Another explanation could be avoidance. Such strategy is used several times by Dawood who finds it more convenient to drop any cultural challenges in his translated text.

Haddawy, on the other hand, eliminates the strangeness of the form and substitutes it with words that would make more sense and serve the cultural meaning. The Arabic expression has a positive connotation and carries a sense of joy. It reflects, as I demonstrated earlier, welcoming feelings, hospitality, generosity, and kindness. Hence, it can only be understandable to the target reader when the translation embraces these notions. The first impression a foreign reader should get is a positive feeling. Haddawy brought this sense of positivity and specifically joy with the word: *glad*. In the narrative the king is trying to persuade Sinbad to extend his stay; he conveys to him that if he insists on returning home, then he (the king) would not prevent him, but if he wishes to stay then he is more than welcome and that would please him as king. Haddawy's translation fits very well with the narrative; it shows the target reader that the king is offering his hospitality with gladness, and this is the main message.

Proverbs

Proverbs are valuable literature to every society because they reflect a culture and a way of life; some even consider them as a form of philosophy. Arabic language is very rich with proverbs, whether it is Standard Arabic or Colloquial Arabic. They play a powerful role in transmitting a message. Aldebyan (2008) points out that proverbs "... are fraught with cultural, social, religious, political, historical and anthropological information and details about any nation." (p. 101). The following proverb appeared in the third voyage:

والنفس أمانة بالسوء

(*wannafso ammaratu bissu`*)

Lit.trans. and the self is prone to evil

(Third Voyage: 12)

This saying is taken from the Holy Qur`an: verse 53 in the chapter of Yousif (Joseph). It is commonly used in Arabic culture in a way that it is almost considered a proverb. The verse explains how one`s soul can be easily drawn to evil. It is contextually used to express weakness in fighting seductions and desires in life. This is how the proverb was translated:

for the heart is naturally prone to evil (Payne: 169)

for that the human heart is naturally prone to evil (Burton: 21)

the soul is naturally prone to evil (Haddawy: 316)

Sinbad, after returning safely to Baghdad from his second voyage, feels a desire to set sail and pursue trade on another voyage. He expresses at the beginning of the voyage how he misses travel and trade overseas. He explains and supports his urge with the proverb as an excuse for gambling his life again. The translations above are almost the same except for the translation of the Arabic word النفس (*annafs*) which literarily means *the self*. Payne and Burton translated the word as *heart*, whereas Haddawy used the word *soul*. Both words express the same meaning, because a man`s desire lies in his heart and/or soul. In Western culture one would express such a phrase with the word *heart*. The case in Arabic culture might be slightly different. It is true that the heart is where emotions and desires are; however, in Islam, specifically in the Qur`an, desires are expressed through the soul. The word النفس (*annafs*) is used elsewhere in the Qur`an in verse 28: chapter of Al-Fajr (The Dawn) in the same manner that it was used in the previously mentioned verse. The verse goes "راضية ربك الى أرجعي 28 المطمئنة النفس بإيتها" "راضية 29 مرضية" [And thou, **O soul at peace** 28 Return to thy Lord well pleased with Him and He well pleased with thee 29] (Sher `Ali: 735). As seen from the bold words, النفس (*annafs*) is translated into *the soul*. The soul at peace is considered the opposite of the soul that is in unrest, that is, the soul which is prone to evil. So the concept of humans being weak in fighting evil desires is usually exemplified through the soul in Islamic religion and hence in Islamic culture as well.

When looking again at the translations, we notice that Haddawy foreignized the meaning of the saying as it is used in the religious text. On the word level, he translated the word as closely as possible to its original meaning, unlike Payne and Burton who domesticated the word and brought it closer to the target culture with the word *heart*.

Conclusion

Views on Haddawy`s translation of the Arabian Nights were positive and his translation was highly recommended. Irwin, for example, considered it "...the authentic flavor of those tales" (Irwin, 2009:7). However, and throughout my readings on Haddawy`s work, no secondary literature reflected on how Haddawy achieved such a successful translated version of *The Arabian Nights*. This led to my study`s question: what method did he follow, and how? My research question was also based on the

ongoing debate about Venuti's Domestication and Foreignization strategies of translation. From my data analysis, my findings showed that Haddawy mostly used the Foreignization strategy, but he also used Domestication.

The analysis shows that Haddawy's intention as a translator is clearly to take the foreign reader to *The Arabian Nights*' world and not to mold the original text into a Western style. As you read his text, you can sense the strong presence of culture and Islamic religion. I do not argue here that the Islamic context was absent in the other three translations, but it was either not strongly presented like in Dawood's text or so foreignized that it crossed the borders of the target reader's comprehension, and most importantly, his/her appreciation of the literary work as a cultural/Islamic piece as in Payne and Burton's translations.

Haddawy combined Domestication and Foreignization in his translation of sense and form. He negotiated sense and form by transmitting the meaning through a foreignized method and transforming that meaning into a domesticated form. Haddawy often manages to preserve the effect of a foreign word by constructing all its cultural meanings together in a form familiar to the target audience. Haddawy, conversely, finds middle ground to bring the cultural sense and meaning in a domesticated form to avoid strangeness. This is seen in his translation of *سعى* (saʿa), where Haddawy brings to his readers the religious concept of the verb and what it means in Islamic culture. Unlike Dawood and Payne, Haddawy explains in his text that Sinbad's action was preceded by intention, determination, planning, before he sets to gathering the wood to build the raft as his way out of the island. This sort of detail, and I also call it loyalty, in translating such a verb contributes not only in presenting to the audience a foreign culture, but also in translating to the reader the structure of the character, that is, how Sinbad uses his faith and wit as his weapons for survival. Haddawy's limits for equivalence extend beyond the limits of culture and aim to transmit the theme of the narrative as well.

Haddawy achieved equivalence in translating *The Tale of Sinbad The Sailor* by preserving the cultural heritage of the classical collection through maintaining the Islamic sense and effect in content and meaning, whereas avoiding strangeness and distasteful structure by reforming these cultural and religious concepts in a familiar form easy for the reader to understand. This combination of Foreignization in content and Domestication in form is accomplished through his successful method of semantic building blocks. When Haddawy meets an un-equivalent concept in the original text, he breaks down its meaning and then re-collects all the universal norms that concept has into a form in the target language that carries almost all the similar universal norms, and by that creates the same effect of the word/phrase in the translated text.

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