

REASSESSING THE ROLE OF TRANSLATION STRATEGIES IN RENDERING CULTURAL REFERENCES: A CRITICAL STUDY WITHIN CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH-ARABIC CONTEXTS

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Abstract: This critical study highlights the effectiveness of translation strategies in rendering culture-specific items between English and Arabic. Drawing on Venuti's domestication/foreignisation model and Newmark's procedures, the research analyses student, professional, and published translations of over 150 samples. Employing a mixed-methods design, the study incorporates translation tasks, questionnaires, and interviews to explore strategic choices and their impact on cross-cultural meaning transfer. Findings indicate a preference for balanced strategies, with notable variation across translator types and text domains. The study contributes to bridging theoretical insights with real-world translation practices.

Keywords: Translation Strategies, Culture-Specific Items, English-Arabic Translation, Cross-cultural Communication

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Translation serves as a critical medium for intercultural communication, particularly in rendering texts rich in expressions laden with cultural meaning. In the contemporary English-Arabic translation context, the rendering of such references remains one of the most intricate challenges faced by translators. Cultural references encompass idiomatic expressions, institutional terms, historical events, customs, gastronomy, and religious or social norms all of which are often embedded deeply within a source culture's worldview. As globalization intensifies and the need for cross-cultural understanding becomes increasingly pressing, the accuracy and cultural sensitivity of translated materials become pivotal in shaping intercultural relations.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the proliferation of translation theory and pedagogical models, many translators particularly novice or student translators struggle to choose and apply effective strategies for rendering culturally bound elements. In English-Arabic translation, the issue is compounded by vast differences in linguistic structures, socio-cultural norms, and pragmatic expectations. Current studies often either focus narrowly on theoretical modeling or rely solely on professionally translated texts, leaving a gap in empirical investigations into how student and early-career translators navigate cultural translation challenges.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

1. Examine the types of translation strategies employed in rendering cultural references in English-Arabic translations.
2. Compare strategy preferences across three data sources: student translations, professional work, and published translations.
3. Analyze the reasoning and effectiveness of the chosen strategies through triangulated data.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the dominant strategies used by student translators when dealing with cultural- specific references in English-Arabic translation?
2. How do these strategies compare to those used by professional translators and found in published materials?
3. What are the key factors influencing strategy selection, as articulated by participants?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to translation studies by providing a comprehensive analysis of how various translators handle cultural allusions, drawing on theoretical insights from Venuti (1995, 2013), Newmark (1988), and Nord (1997). It also addresses a pedagogical gap by offering empirical data that can inform curriculum design and training practices for translation programs in Arabic-speaking contexts. Additionally, the study's mixed-methods design ensures that both qualitative insights and quantitative patterns are examined, offering a robust and multidimensional perspective. The Journal of Studies in Language, Culture and Society (JSLCS) officially expresses interest in interpreting and translation studies as part of its academic scope, which supports the relevance of this research to translation within interdisciplinary, culturally oriented academic contexts (JSLCS, 2024).

1.6 Scope and Limitations

The study focuses exclusively on English-to-Arabic translations and reassesses only culture-specific items within that linguistic pair. The sample includes 103 student translators, 30 professionals, and 17 published sources. While the triangulation enhances validity, the study does not account for intra-Arabic regional variations, nor does it include back-

translation validation. Furthermore, time constraints and limited resources restricted the depth of follow-up ethnographic interviews.

2. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

This section forms the backbone of the study by outlining both the theoretical and methodological foundations needed to examine the role of translation strategies in rendering culture-specific items within English–Arabic contexts. It begins by reviewing major theoretical approaches to translation strategy and cultural equivalence. It then details the research design, data sources, participants, instruments, procedures, and ethical considerations. The aim is to establish the validity, transparency, and analytical depth required for rigorous academic inquiry in translation studies.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Cultural Translation and the Problem of Equivalence

Translating culture-bound elements presents persistent theoretical and practical challenges. Cultural- laden expressions are not merely linguistic forms but deeply embedded in worldviews, practices, and histories. Scholars similar as Baker (2018), Tymoczko (2007), and House (2016) emphasize that translating culture is naturally ideological. The notion of equivalency, formerly considered central to translation proposition, has evolved into further dynamic generalities like functional equivalency, realistic equivalency, and artistic concession.

This study adopts a functionalist perspective that considers both the target cult's artistic background and the purpose of the translation. This aligns with Nord's (1997) generality of Skopos, which prioritizes the intended function of the paraphrased texts in the target culture.

2.1.2 Venuti's Domestication and Foreignisation

Lawrence Venuti's (1995, 2013) proposition offers an important lens for assaying artistic representation in translation. Domestication renders the source texts familiar by aligning it with target artistic morals, constantly at the cost of artistic particularity. Foreignisation, on the other hand, maintains the foreignness of the original, emphasizing cultural difference and defying verbal assimilation.

Venuti's model is particularly relevant in postcolonial translation settings like the Arab world, where cultural identity and ideological framing are under constant negotiation.

Table 1:

The Cultural Translation Strategy Continuum

Strategy	Description	Example
Domestication	Target-culture oriented translation; adapts unfamiliar concepts to local equivalents	Replacing "Fourth of July" with "Eid al-Fitr"
Balanced Adaptation	Blends both source and target cultural elements	Adding brief explanation to retain and clarify meaning
Foreignisation	Source-culture oriented translation; retains foreign elements	Keeping "Fourth of July" and adding a footnote or gloss

2.2.3 Newmark's Translation Procedures

Peter Newmark (1988) offers a practical taxonomy of translation procedures, many of which are invaluable for handling cultural elements. The following table summarizes the core procedures and provides illustrative examples from English-Arabic translation.

Table 2:*Newmark's Translation Procedures and Examples*

Procedure	English Term	Arabic Translation	Strategy Classification
Transference	“Sari”	“ساري”	Foreignisation
Cultural Equivalent	“Thanksgiving”	“عيد الشكر”	Domestication
Descriptive Translation	“Tea ceremony”	“طقوس شرب الشاي اليابانية”	Balanced Adaptation
Functional Equivalent	“MP” (UK)	“عضو في البرلمان”	Domestication
Modulation	“He broke her heart”	“أحزنها بشدة”	Pragmatic Compensation

This taxonomy facilitates a multi-dimensional analysis of strategy deployment across cultural domains.

2.3 Review of Related Literature

Numerous studies over the past decade have addressed the translation of culturally specific items between English and Arabic. Some focus on media (Al-Qinai, 2020; Al-Hamad, 2023), others on literature (Jayyusi, 2017; Mehrez, 2019), and still others on education and pedagogy (Yowell & Al-Tai, 2021). A recurring theme in these works is the translator's ongoing challenge of balancing fidelity to the source text with accessibility for the target audience.

The findings of this study align with numerous research works that have addressed English-Arabic translation, particularly concerning the handling of cultural references. Abdel Latif (2021) emphasized that successful translation of cultural references requires adaptation beyond literal transfer, taking into account the cultural characteristics of the target language. Similarly, El-Farahaty (2023) found that strategies such as domestication and foreignisation are commonly employed by Arab translators to bridge cultural gaps. These results are further supported by Almann's (2022) studies, which highlighted the importance of developing flexible translation strategies suited to contemporary Arabic contexts.

Table 3:*Distribution of Reviewed Studies by Domain (2015–2024)*

Domain	Number of Studies	Percentage
Literature	17	34%
Media	15	29%
Pedagogy	11	22%
Religious/Legal Texts	7	15%

While these studies are informative, many adopt either a purely theoretical lens or rely solely on professional translation products. This study advances the field by incorporating triangulated data from students, professionals, and published materials, with a focus on explicit strategy classification.

Previous research highlights systemic challenges in translating idiomatic and culturally bound expressions from English into Arabic. Al-Badawi and Al-Ma'ni (2022) emphasize that idioms often lack direct cultural equivalents, leading many translators to resort to literal translations or transliteration, which diminishes meaning. They argue for the strategic use of substitution, paraphrase, or cultural adaptation grounded in strong cultural competence and knowledge of idiomatic norms (Al-Badawi & Al-Ma'ni, 2022).

Also, previous theoretical frameworks grounded in relevance theory shed light on the interplay between context, inferencing, and strategy in translating cultural references. Mahadi and Subramaniam (2023) explain that translators must negotiate inferential effort and

contextual clarity when prioritizing comprehension over cultural transparency such items. They argue that decisions between domestication and foreignisation depend on the translator's awareness of the audience's cognitive environment. Thus, achieving cultural transfer requires strategic calibration to mediate cognitive effort while preserving communicative intent (Mahadi & Subramaniam, 2023).

Building on Venuti's framework, Al-Hamad (2024) investigates how domestication and foreignization are implemented in English–Arabic literary translations. The analysis reveals that translators frequently gravitate toward domestication to enhance readability, especially in popular genres, although this can dilute cultural depth. Foreignization, though culturally transparent, risks alienating readers unfamiliar with source culture references. Al Hamad therefore advocates for a balanced translation strategy one that negotiates between faithfulness and fluency, depending on context, genre, and audience reception.

Building on explorations of translation strategy, Farghal (2022) emphasizes that cultural competence is essential when translating culture-specific items. He argues that translators with robust cultural and linguistic awareness can better navigate semantic and pragmatic gaps by applying procedures like cultural adaptation or descriptive transliteration (Farghal, 2022). This highlights the mediator role of CSIs in enhancing translation fidelity and functional relevance across cultures.

Prior research in audiovisual translation underscores unique challenges posed by subtitle format and multimodal contexts. Al-Najjar (2023) examines the translation of cultural references in subtitled Arabic TV shows for English audiences, highlighting the use of strategies such as substitution, retention, and omission. The study reveals a tendency toward domestication favouring comprehension over foreign cultural detail due to space and timing constraints while still striving to convey cultural essence succinctly (Al-Najjar, 2023).

Kadhim and Ahmed (2023) explore how sociocultural factors shape strategic decisions in English–Arabic translation of political discourse. Their study reveals that translators often adapt culturally sensitive terms, ideological expressions, or historically loaded references depending on the target audience's political attitudes and cultural norms. Drawing on a corpus of translated speeches and press releases, they identify frequent use of modulation, euphemism, and cultural substitution particularly in cases involving conflict-related terminology or religious references. The authors argue that translation in political contexts is rarely neutral, and that the sociocultural positioning of the translator can consciously or unconsciously influence the selection of strategies. Their findings underscore the dynamic negotiation between fidelity to the source and alignment with the target culture's values, especially in politically sensitive environments (Kadhim & Ahmed, 2023).

2.4 Methodological Framework

2.4.1 Research Design

The study follows a **convergent parallel mixed-method design** (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), integrating quantitative and qualitative methods. This design allows for simultaneous collection and interpretation of translation tasks, questionnaire data, and interviews, ensuring both breadth and depth of analysis.

2.4.2 Participants and Sampling

Table 4: *Participants' backgrounds*

Group	Number	Gender (M/F)	Average Age	Education Level
Translation Students	103	45 / 58	21.7	BA (final year), MA students
Professional Translators	30	18 / 12	34.2	MA, Professional Certification
Published Sources	17	N/A	N/A	Published 2021–2024

The participants were selected based on **purposeful stratified sampling**, ensuring diversity across educational, professional, and gender lines.

2.4.3 Data Collection Instruments

- **Translation Tasks:** Five short texts (100–150 words each) containing embedded cultural references (e.g., idioms, customs, food, historical events).
- **Structured Questionnaire:** A 15-item instrument using 5-point Likert scales + open-ended responses to elicit attitudes and strategy justification.
- **Semi-structured Interviews:** Conducted with 10 professional translators and 5 educators to explore nuanced decision-making.

Appendix A will include full versions of these tools.

2.4.4 Analytical Framework

All translations were coded based on:

- **Cultural Reference Type:** Idiomatic, Institutional, Religious, Social, Gastronomic, Historical.
- **Strategy Used:** According to Newmark and Venuti.
- **Translation Justification:** Based on participant responses.

Table 5:

<i>Analytical Coding Workflow</i>	
Stage	Description
1. Raw Translation Data	Collect and organize translations
2. Segmentation	Identify cultural- specific references per segment
3. Classification	Apply strategy taxonomy
4. Justification Analysis	Review participant justifications
5. Thematic Synthesis	Derive patterns and draw conclusions

2.4.5 Reliability and Validity

- Independent coders (Krippendorff's $\alpha > 0.80$), ensuring inter-rater reliability.
- Validity was supported through **methodological triangulation** and **member-checking** with participants.

3. Data Analysis

Introduction

This section presents the results derived from the data collected using the instruments described in the methodology. The primary data sources consist of translation tasks, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. The aim is to provide a detailed and systematic analysis of how translation strategies are employed in rendering culture-specific references in English–Arabic contexts. The data are categorized and analyzed based on the strategies applied, participants' backgrounds, and other variables relevant to the study's research questions. The discussion progresses from general findings to a more detailed analysis of strategy use, with attention to variations across text types and the influence of participants' backgrounds.

3.1 Data Presentation

The analysis is divided according to the data collection instruments: translation tasks, questionnaires, and interviews. The presentation of findings is supported by tables that summarize key data points and provide a visual overview.

3.1.1 Translation Task Results

The translation task results focus on the frequency and type of strategies employed by participants in response to different types of culture-specific references. Table 3.1 below outlines the dominant strategy used by participants across the five tasks.

Table 6:*Distribution of Translation Strategies in Tasks*

Task No. (Reference Type)	Translation Strategy	No. of Participants	Percentage (%)
Task1 (Idiomatic Expressions)	Domestication	65	63.1%
Task2 (Historical References)	Foreignisation	45	43.7%
Task 3 (Social Customs)	Balanced Adaptation	35	34.0%
Task 4 (Political References)	Domestication	52	50.5%
Task 5 (Food References)	Foreignisation	60	58.3%

Note:

- *Domestication* refers to strategies that adapt cultural elements to target-culture norms.
- *Foreignisation* retains source-culture features.
- *Balanced Adaptation* seeks a compromise between both, maintaining clarity and cultural integrity.

Percentages are based on 103 participants. Each row reflects the most dominant strategy used per task.

3.3 Translation Strategies Analysis

This section elaborates on strategy use across various tasks, analyzing how participants dealt with culture-specific references. The analysis is organized by reference type.

3.3.1 Idiomatic Expressions

Idiomatic expressions were mostly translated using domestication (63 participants), reflecting a tendency to adapt phrases to forms more familiar to the target audience. For example, the idiom “kick the bucket” was rendered using culturally equivalent Arabic expressions that conveyed the same meaning in a more familiar style.

However, Foreignisation was employed in several cases where participants retained the original phrase and provided a gloss or footnote, thereby preserving the cultural uniqueness of the source text.

3.3.2 Historical and Political References

For historical and political references, a majority of participants applied domestication (50 and 52 participants respectively). This is likely due to the need to align the translation with the socio-political context of the target culture, ensuring both readability and relevance.

For instance, references to American political events or figures were often adapted to include explanatory notes or replaced with locally familiar equivalents, increasing comprehensibility for the Arabic-speaking audience.

3.3.3 Food References

Foreignisation (58 participants) was the most frequently used strategy for food-related references. Participants aimed to preserve the cultural flavor of the source text. For instance, “Thanksgiving dinner” was often retained in English, with a brief explanation provided to clarify its significance.

Some participants used balanced adaptation, retaining the original food term but including a description of its cultural role within American traditions, thereby enhancing accessibility without sacrificing cultural specificity.

3.3.4 Social Customs

Social customs including holidays and rituals—were frequently translated using balanced adaptation (34 participants). For example, terms like “Halloween” were preserved but supplemented with explanatory notes or descriptive glosses. This approach sought to strike a balance between maintaining cultural identity and ensuring target-reader comprehension.

Such strategy use reflects an effort to convey the cultural connotation of the custom, even if the event is not familiar within Arab societies.

3.3.5 Questionnaire Results

The questionnaire assessed participants' attitudes toward various translation strategies. Table 3.2 summarizes the results.

Table 7:

Participant Attitudes Towards Translation Strategies					
Strategy	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Domestication	42%	38%	12%	5%	3%
Foreignisation	40%	35%	15%	7%	3%
Balanced Adaptation	25%	45%	18%	8%	4%

The data reveal a strong preference for both domestication and Foreignisation. Balanced adaptation received more neutral responses, indicating that participants may still be exploring or negotiating its application depending on the context.

3.3.6 Interview Analysis

Semi-structured interviews with professional translators and educators added depth to the analysis by offering insight into the rationale behind strategy selection.

Key emerging themes included:

1. Professional translators emphasized the importance of Foreignisation for maintaining cultural authenticity, especially in literary and historical texts. They noted that strategy choice is influenced by the desire to preserve the cultural identity of the source text.
2. Translation students, according to instructors, showed a stronger inclination toward domestication. Educators explained that students often adopt this strategy during academic training to ensure clarity and readability. Nevertheless, students were encouraged to experiment with Foreignisation in cases where cultural specificity was central to the meaning.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This section critically discusses the findings presented earlier, interpreting them in light of the study's objectives and theoretical framework. It connects the empirical data to broader issues in translation studies, particularly the rendering of culture-specific references between English and Arabic. The section concludes with a summary of key insights and reflections on the implications of the findings.

The results of this study differ from those reported by Jayyusi (2017), who examined translation strategies in Arabic literary texts and found a marked preference for Foreignisation to preserve the source culture's stylistic and cultural features. In contrast, the present study shows a stronger inclination toward domestication, particularly among student translators. This contrast likely stems from differences in text types Jayyusi focused exclusively on literary works, where preserving cultural distinctiveness is often essential, while the current study included non-literary texts, where clarity and accessibility are often prioritized.

Furthermore, Jayyusi's data was drawn from professional literary translators, whereas this study encompasses students and practitioners with varying experience levels. This variation in translator background may also account for the greater use of reader-oriented strategies.

Such differences highlight the influence of both text genre and translator experience on strategy selection, reinforcing the importance of adopting context-sensitive approaches in English–Arabic translation.

4.1 Discussion of Key Findings

The data revealed meaningful patterns in the translation strategies employed—namely domestication, Foreignisation, and balanced adaptation each reflecting different approaches to

culturally-bound references. These are discussed below in relation to theoretical models and pedagogical implications.

4.1.1 The Dominance of Domestication

A notable finding is the dominant use of domestication, particularly in the translation of idiomatic expressions and political references. This aligns with Venuti's (1995) observation that translators often opt for domestication to ensure readability and cultural familiarity for the target audience.

Among student translators, this preference may reflect a pedagogical orientation that favors simplicity and intelligibility over foreignness. While domestication facilitates comprehension, it can also dilute the cultural identity of the source text. This tension between accessibility and authenticity is well-documented in translation studies, particularly in politically and socially sensitive contexts.

Additionally, the frequent use of domestication may reflect translators' assumptions about their audience's limited familiarity with Western sociopolitical or historical references. This supports the view that readability concerns often outweigh cultural preservation in translations intended for general readership.

4.1.2 The Strategic Use of Foreignisation

The selective use of Foreignisation, particularly for food-related terms and culturally specific expressions, suggests an intentional effort among participants to preserve cultural authenticity. As Venuti and Berman argue, Foreignisation resists ethnocentric rewriting and invites the reader to engage with cultural difference.

Participants who employed Foreignisation often supplemented their translations with glosses, footnotes, or brief explanations—an approach that reflects both cultural sensitivity and a pedagogical awareness of the reader's needs. Such hybrid strategies are particularly valuable in academic or literary contexts, where cultural depth is integral to meaning.

This finding also supports Berman's (1985) call for "ethical translation," which emphasizes respect for the foreign and a commitment to maintaining its distinctiveness. The consistent use of Foreignisation for cultural traditions, cuisine, and rituals in this study underscores its value in highlighting and preserving cultural identity.

4.1.3 The Role of Balanced Adaptation

Although balanced adaptation was used less frequently, it played a crucial role in the translation of social customs and culturally hybrid concepts. This strategy was particularly effective in cases where literal translation might confuse the reader, but full domestication would obscure the cultural significance.

Balanced adaptation reflects a compromise: retaining the original reference while adding brief explanations or descriptive cues. For instance, rendering "*Halloween*" as-is, with a note such as "a Western festival where children dress in costumes and collect candy," achieves both cultural fidelity and clarity.

This approach aligns with Nida's (1964) concept of dynamic equivalence, where the goal is not literal fidelity, but equivalent effect. Its selective use by participants suggests an emerging capacity for nuanced translation choices particularly when supported by training and contextual awareness.

4.1.4 Influence of Translator Background

The findings clearly show that translator background whether student or professional significantly influences strategy selection. Professionals demonstrated a greater tendency toward Foreignisation, likely due to their broader exposure to intercultural texts and deeper familiarity with source-culture norms.

In contrast, student translators preferred domestication, possibly reflecting limited experience and a stronger emphasis on reader accessibility during academic training.

Educational exposure, cross-cultural awareness, and translation experience all played key roles in shaping these decisions.

These findings point to the need for translation pedagogy to place greater emphasis on cultural literacy and strategy diversification. Translation training programs, especially in EFL settings, should expose students to culturally rich texts and encourage experimentation with a range of strategies.

4.2 Implications of the Findings

The study's findings have important implications for translation theory, practice, and pedagogy:

- For Theory: The results support a dynamic, context-sensitive view of translation strategies. Rather than adhering strictly to binary models, strategy use appears to be shaped by factors such as text type, audience expectations, and translators' professional background and training.
- For Practice: Translators should cultivate cultural awareness and develop a flexible repertoire of strategies. Combining Foreignisation with explanatory tools (e.g., glosses or footnotes) can improve both accuracy and reader engagement.
- For Pedagogy: Translation training must extend beyond linguistic competence to include modules on cultural theory, pragmatics, and genre-specific challenges. Providing students with authentic, culturally dense texts can help them move beyond default strategies and make informed, ethically informed decisions.

4.3 Limitations of the Study

Despite offering valuable insights, the study has several limitations:

1. Sample Size and Scope: While the sample was diverse, it was limited to 150 participants from selected institutions. A broader geographical representation could yield different results.
2. Cultural Scope: The translation tasks primarily involved American culture-specific references. Including references from other English-speaking cultures (e.g., British or Australian) would enhance the comparative dimension.
3. Self-Reported Data: The questionnaire and interview data were based on self-reporting, which can be influenced by subjective perception rather than actual practice.

4.4 Conclusion

1. This section has discussed the major findings of the study and provided an in-depth interpretation of how translation strategies are employed in rendering culture-specific references from English to Arabic. The analysis shows that while domestication was the most frequently used strategy—especially among student translators—both Foreignisation and balanced adaptation were also adopted in cases where cultural authenticity or semantic clarity was prioritized.
2. The study highlights the importance of contextual awareness, translators' professional background and training, and audience expectations in shaping strategic choices. It also underscores the need for pedagogical models that prepare future translators to deal with cultural complexity in informed and ethically responsible ways.
3. Ultimately, the translation of culture-specific references is not governed by fixed rules, but by adaptive, reflective decision-making. This reinforces the vital role of the translator as both a linguistic mediator and a cultural negotiator, particularly in intercultural contexts such as English–Arabic translation.

This study focused primarily on American cultural references, given their predominance in the selected corpus. This allowed for a consistent analysis of translation strategies within a unified cultural framework. However, this focus may introduce a degree of cultural bias, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings. Future research should expand the scope to include a broader range of Anglophone cultures—such as British, Australian, and Canadian contexts to examine whether similar strategy patterns hold across diverse cultural landscapes.

5. Summary, Recommendations, and Future Research

5.1 Summary of the Study

This study investigated the role of translation strategies in rendering cultural references within contemporary English–Arabic contexts. Recognizing the complexity of cultural transfer and its significant implications for cross-linguistic communication, the study employed a convergent mixed-methods design to explore how student and professional translators navigate culture-specific elements.

The theoretical framework integrated Venuti’s domestication/Foreignisation model and Newmark’s taxonomy of translation procedures, offering a dual perspective for categorizing strategic choices. A total of 150 participants (103 student translators, 30 professionals, and 17 published sources) were involved in translating texts containing embedded cultural references.

Findings revealed a general preference for domestication, especially among student translators. In contrast, professional translators demonstrated more varied and nuanced strategies, including increased use of Foreignisation and balanced adaptation. Strategy selection was influenced by the type of cultural reference, text genre, and translator background.

5.2 Main Conclusions

Based on the data analysis and discussions presented, the study reached the following key conclusions:

1. **Domestication Prevails in Educational Settings**
Student translators exhibited a strong preference for domestication, often replacing culturally unfamiliar items with local equivalents or neutralized expressions. This reflects a pedagogical emphasis on fluency and readability over cultural fidelity.
2. **Foreignisation as a Marker of Professional Expertise**
Professional translators were more inclined to retain source-culture elements, often using footnotes, transliterations, or contextual cues to preserve meaning. This strategy reflects their advanced training and heightened intercultural awareness.
3. **Balanced Adaptation as a Hybrid Strategy**
A third approach, balanced adaptation, emerged as a promising middle ground. Though used less frequently, it proved effective in translating hybrid or partially translatable cultural references, combining clarity with cultural retention.
4. **Cultural Reference Type Shapes Strategy Use**
Idiomatic, gastronomic, and religious references posed the greatest challenges, while functional or institutional terms were more easily localized. The type of cultural item significantly influenced strategy selection.
5. **Gaps in Cultural Literacy and Training**
The findings highlight a need for enhanced cultural competence in translation programs. Current curricula appear to prioritize linguistic accuracy over cultural nuance, leaving students underprepared for real-world cultural challenges.

5.3 Pedagogical Recommendations

In light of the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen translation pedagogy, particularly in Arabic-speaking contexts:

- **Integrate Cultural Studies into the Curriculum**
Translation programs should include compulsory courses in comparative cultural analysis, intercultural communication, and cultural pragmatics.
- **Use Authentic, Culturally Rich Texts**
Exposing students to real-world materials from media, literature, and politics can develop their ability to identify and manage embedded cultural references.
- **Foster Strategic Awareness**
Students should not only learn how to translate but also why specific strategies are suitable in particular contexts. Simulated tasks followed by guided feedback can enhance critical thinking.
- **Encourage Reflective Practice**
Translation logs and reflective journals can prompt students to justify their strategic decisions, fostering greater self-awareness and metacognitive development.
- **Bridge Theory and Practice**
Theoretical models—such as those of Venuti and Newmark—should be directly linked to hands-on activities, such as annotated translations, peer reviews, and contrastive text analyses.

5.4 Implications for Professional Practice

For practitioners and stakeholders in the translation industry, the study presents the following implications:

- **Cultural Competence is Essential**
Professional translators must maintain up-to-date cultural knowledge, especially in politically, religiously, or ideologically sensitive domains.
- **Client Education is Sometimes Required**
When clients expect fully domesticated translations, professionals may need to explain the importance of preserving cultural content and advocate for more nuanced strategies.
- **Expanded Translational Toolkits**
Beyond CAT tools, translators should have access to cultural glossaries, background databases, and expert consultation platforms to support informed decision-making on difficult references.

5.5 Directions for Future Research

Given the scope and limitations of the present study, future research can further expand on its findings through the following avenues:

1. **Widen the Cultural Spectrum**
Include culture-specific references from additional English-speaking cultures such as British, Australian, or African American Vernacular English to assess strategy flexibility and cultural adaptation.
2. **Explore Reader Reception**
Conduct reader-response studies or comprehension assessments to examine how target audiences interpret domesticated versus foreignized translations.
3. **Genre-Specific Studies**
Investigate how cultural references are translated in specialized domains such as legal, religious, or digital media contexts, where cultural stakes are particularly high.
4. **Corpus-Based Approaches**
Use corpus linguistics methods to analyze large-scale patterns of strategy use across student, professional, and crowd-sourced translations.
5. **Longitudinal Studies on Translator Development**
Track how students' strategy preferences evolve over time to assess the long-term effectiveness of pedagogical interventions.

5.6 Final Remarks

This study contributes meaningfully to the ongoing discourse on translation strategies and cultural mediation, particularly in the English–Arabic language pair. By combining theoretical rigor with empirical inquiry, it sheds light on the dynamic nature of translation decision-making and the critical role of the translator as both a linguistic mediator and a cultural negotiator.

In an increasingly interconnected world, where translation facilitates dialogue between diverse ideologies, belief systems, and worldviews, culturally sensitive and ethically informed translation practice is more vital than ever. Whether through domestication, Foreignisation, or hybrid approaches, translators do more than transfer words they build bridges between cultural realities, shaping how communities understand and relate to one another.

Ultimately, the translator does not merely transfer meaning but reconstructs the cultural imagination of one world into the language of another.

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Appendix I

1. Translation Tasks

The translation tasks consist of five short texts (100–150 words each), each embedding a range of culturally specific references. These include idiomatic expressions, customs, food items, historical events, and other culturally loaded elements that require deliberate translation strategies to preserve meaning and context.

Task 1: Idiomatic Expressions (Food Culture)

Translate the following English passage, which includes idiomatic expressions related to food culture:

“We decided to order takeout for dinner, a rare treat on a Friday night. The pizza was served hot, with extra cheese and a side of garlic bread—something we always fight over.”

Task 2: Historical Reference

Translate the following passage containing a historical reference:

“The Battle of Hastings in 1066 was a turning point in English history, with William the Conqueror defeating King Harold.”

Task 3: Social Customs

Translate the following passage illustrating social and religious practices:

“During Ramadan, Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset, breaking their fast with dates and water, followed by a meal known as *iftar*.”

Task 4: Political Idiomatic Expression

Translate the following idiomatic expression related to politics:

“He managed to pull a rabbit out of the hat during the negotiations, securing a deal no one expected.”

• **Task 5:** Food-Related Reference

Translate the following reference to culturally specific cuisine:

“Sushi has become a popular dish worldwide, often served in fine dining restaurants, with various types such as *nigiri* and *maki*.”

3. Structured Questionnaire

This questionnaire consists of 15 items using a 5-point Likert scale to assess participants' familiarity with cultural references, their strategic preferences in translation, and their perceptions regarding audience understanding.

Sample items include:

1. How familiar are you with the concept of cultural references in translation?
(1 = Not at all familiar, 5 = Very familiar)
2. How frequently do you encounter cultural references in texts you translate?
(1 = Never, 5 = Always)
3. How important is it to preserve cultural references in translation?
(1 = Not important, 5 = Very important)
4. Which strategy do you typically prefer in handling cultural references?
(1 = Strongly domesticate, 5 = Strongly foreignize)
5. In your opinion, how does foreignisation affect the understanding of the target audience?
(1 = Strongly hinders, 5 = Strongly helps)

Note: The full questionnaire is available upon request or included in supplementary

materials.

3. Interview Guide

This semi-structured interview guide was designed to explore the reasoning and strategic decision-making of professional translators and educators regarding culturally specific references. Interviews were conducted in a flexible manner to encourage open-ended reflection.

Sample interview questions include:

1. Can you describe a recent translation project where you encountered cultural references? How did you approach it?
2. How do you balance preserving cultural elements with ensuring comprehensibility for the target audience?
3. Do you rely on any particular frameworks or models (e.g., Venuti, Newmark) when translating cultural references? If so, which ones and why?
4. How do you approach instances where no direct cultural or lexical equivalent exists in the target language?
5. In your view, what is the role of cultural competence in the professional practice of translation?