

**THE INVISIBLE CONFLICT: DOMESTICATION VERSUS
FOREIGNIZATION IN THE TRANSLATION OF CULTURAL IDIOMS**

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Abstract

This article examines the dichotomy between domesticating and foreignizing strategies in literary translation. Drawing on Lawrence Venuti's theories, the paper analyzes how translators navigate the "cultural gap" when transferring idiomatic expressions from a source language (SL) to a target language (TL). It argues that while domestication aids readability, foreignization is essential for maintaining the cultural "otherness" of the text.

Keywords: Domestication, Foreignization, Lawrence Venuti, Translation Ethics, Cultural Idioms, The Cultural Turn, Translator's Invisibility, Thick Translation.

1. Introduction

Translation is never a purely linguistic act; it is a cultural negotiation. When a translator encounters an idiom—a phrase whose meaning cannot be deduced from its individual words—they face a choice: do they adapt the phrase to make it sound natural to the target reader, or do they preserve the original structure to highlight the source culture? This debate was famously formalized by Lawrence Venuti in 1995, who critiqued the trend of "transparency" in Anglo-American translation.

2. The Domestication Strategy

Domestication involves an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values. The goal is to make the translation feel as though it were originally written in the target language.

* Pros: High readability, immediate emotional resonance, and commercial viability.

* Cons: Loss of cultural nuance and the risk of "linguistic imperialism," where the source culture is erased to satisfy the comfort of the reader.

3. The Foreignization Strategy

Foreignization, conversely, entails choosing a translation method that breaks target-language conventions to retain the "flavor" of the foreign. This might involve literal translations of metaphors or keeping specific cultural terms (e.g., sushi or shadenfreude) untranslated.

* Pros: Educates the reader about a new culture and preserves the author's original voice.

* Cons: May result in a "clunky" or difficult reading experience that requires footnotes or a glossary.

4. Comparative Analysis: Idiomatic Transfer

Consider the Russian idiom "Делать из мухи слона" (to make an elephant out of a fly).

* A domesticated translation into English would be: "To make a mountain out of a molehill." The meaning is clear, but the Russian cultural imagery is lost.

* A foreignized translation would be: "To make an elephant out of a fly." While the English reader understands the logic, the imagery feels "alien," forcing the reader to acknowledge the foreign origin of the thought.

5. The Role of the "Cultural Turn"

Since the 1970s, Translation Studies has moved toward the "Cultural Turn," emphasizing that the translator is not a machine but a cultural mediator. The choice between domestication and foreignization often depends on the power dynamics between the two languages. Translating from a "minor" language to a "major" one (like English) often requires more foreignization to prevent the minor culture from being swallowed.

6. Conclusion

The modern translator should not choose one strategy exclusively. Instead, a balanced approach—often called "thick translation"—incorporates foreignizing elements while providing enough domestic context to ensure the text remains accessible. Ultimately, the goal of translation in the 21st century is to act as a bridge that respects the architecture of both shores.

References

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