



**TRANSLATOR INVISIBILITY AND ITS IMPACT ON
READER AWARENESS IN WORLD LITERATURE:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH
TRANSLATIONS FROM URDU,
PERSIAN, AND ARABIC**

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Abstract

World literature spreads across linguistic and national boundaries mostly through translation, the main way it finds its manner into other languages. Although central, translation is often practiced in the pretense of being transparent, which makes the translator remain unnoticed by the readers. The current paper explores the role of invisibility of a translator in creating awareness and cultural sense of the reader in world literature. The analysis of the selected literary excerpts translated into English of Urdu, Persian and Arabic text using the theoretical ideas of invisibility, domestication, and foreignization by Lawrence Venuti became the approach to the study. It deals with culture-related ideas, some symbolic images, and social stereotypes and explores the impact of translational strategy of fluency on ideological expression. Translator invisibility greatly minimizes the attentiveness of the reader to the mediation of cultures, such that the non-Western cultures are simplified and distorted to some extent. On the other hand, the foreignizing strategies and some paratextual elements increase the ethical approaches of engaging the source cultures without compromising readability. The paper arrives at the conclusion that translator visibility is the key to responsible reading and ethical circulation of world literature.

Keywords: *Awareness of the Reader, Domestication, Foreignization, Invisibility of the Translator, Translation Morality, World Literature.*

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1. Introduction

Translation cannot be separated from world literature. The worldliness of text is not inherent within text but is brought into existence by the crossing of linguistic and even cultural boundaries. To most readers across the globe, these other literary cultures may be read in English translations, including Urdu, Persian, and Arabic literature. So, translation becomes not only a linguistic mediating tool but an influential mediating tool that has an impact on the representation and interpretation of cultures (Bassnett, 2016).

It is common in the overseas publishing culture of the English speaking translations to sound natural, fluent and smooth. This preference of fluency promotes the formulation of writings which seem to have been originally composed in English. Such translations make more people more accessible but they also hide the role of a translator as an interpreter and mediator of cultures. Translating is then seen as a clear movement of meaning and not an interpretive, ideological and ethically laden act (Venuti, 1995).

Translator invisibility has been theorized critically by Lawrence Venuti. Venuti believes that invisibility does not represent a naive style choice but a cultural and ideological state of affairs that is determined by power dynamics in the process of exchange in world literature. Making translators invisible, the cultural difference is de-emphasized, and the hegemony of values, specifically western norms of individualism, secularism, and psychological realism are upheld.

The paper discusses the influence of translator invisibility on the perception of the reader in world literature. Using a sample set of literary excerpts translated out of Urdu, Persian and Arabic literature into English, the paper determines how the processes of translation can influence the perception of the reader, cultural sensitivity and moral interaction with otherness.

1.1. Research Questions

The research questions for this study are:

1. How does the invisibility of the translator shape readers' awareness of world literature translated into English?
2. What are the effects of domestication strategies on the entrenchment of cultural specificity?
3. To what extent can foreignizing strategies and paratextual elements contribute to increasing the awareness of readers about translation as mediation?
4. What are potential ethical and ideological implications of the translations of non-Western literature through fluency?

1.2. Scope of the Study

This study adopts a theoretical qualitative approach. It is confined to English-language interpretations of literary works and examines texts that were originally compiled in Arabic, Urdu and Persian, disseminated through English translations. For focused

analysis, short textual passages were selected, and the analytical emphasis was placed on the English translations of these selected excerpts. This research study aims to probe deeply in the analysis to investigate the way of looking at the perception of the readers and their understanding of the culture in translation strategies.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Translator Invisibility

According to **Lawrence Venuti (1995)**, *translator invisibility* refers to the dominant expectation that translated texts should read so fluently and naturally in the target language that readers are unaware they are reading a translation. In this approach, the translator's presence, choices, and interpretative role remain hidden behind a smooth and transparent style. The ideal translation is often judged by its readability and linguistic fluency rather than by its ability to preserve the foreign cultural and linguistic characteristics of the source text. As a result, translations are expected to conform to the norms, conventions, and expectations of the target culture.

Venuti argues that translator invisibility is not merely a stylistic preference but a cultural and ideological phenomenon. It is reinforced by publishing industries, market demands, editorial practices, and reader expectations, all of which tend to value translations that appear “natural” and effortless. Publishers often prefer fluent translations because they are more commercially successful and accessible to a wider audience. Consequently, translators are encouraged to produce texts that conceal the complexity of the translation process and minimize traces of foreignness.

Furthermore, Venuti maintains that invisibility can have significant cultural consequences. By adapting foreign texts to fit the linguistic and cultural norms of the target audience, translators may suppress important differences and reduce opportunities for intercultural understanding. This process often domesticates the source text, making it conform to dominant cultural values while marginalizing alternative perspectives, identities, and worldviews. In this sense, translation becomes a site where power relations operate subtly through language and stylistic conventions.

Venuti therefore emphasizes that translator invisibility is deeply ideological because it promotes the illusion of transparency while masking the translator's active role in shaping meaning. Every translation involves interpretation, selection, and cultural negotiation, yet the norm of invisibility obscures these processes. By highlighting the translator's agency and encouraging greater awareness of cultural differences, Venuti challenges the traditional notion that a successful translation should completely hide the translator's presence. Instead, he advocates for translation practices that acknowledge and respect the foreignness of the source text, thereby fostering greater cultural diversity and cross-cultural dialogue.

2.2. Reader Awareness

Reader awareness is an important concept in translation studies that emphasizes the reader's recognition that a text is a translation and, therefore, a culturally and linguistically mediated product. Rather than perceiving a translated text as a transparent reproduction of the source text, reader awareness encourages readers to acknowledge the translator's role in shaping meaning and transferring cultural values across linguistic boundaries. This perspective challenges the assumption that translations provide direct access to the original work without modification or interpretation.

Bassnett (2014) argues that readers often overlook the complex processes involved in translation and tend to assume equivalence between the source and target texts. Such assumptions may obscure the cultural, ideological, and linguistic transformations that occur during the translation process. As a result, readers may fail to recognize how translation decisions influence the representation of foreign cultures, identities, and perspectives.

Furthermore, reader awareness is closely linked to the ethical consumption of world literature. According to Bassnett (2014), an informed reader should critically engage with translated texts by questioning how meanings have been constructed and what factors may have influenced the translator's choices. This critical approach enables readers to identify potential ideological shifts, cultural adaptations, and interpretive interventions embedded within the translation. Consequently, reader awareness promotes a deeper understanding of translation as an act of cultural mediation rather than a simple linguistic transfer.

Scholars in translation studies maintain that increased reader awareness contributes to greater appreciation of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue. By recognizing the translated nature of a text, readers become more sensitive to the complexities of cross-cultural communication and more capable of evaluating the relationship between the source and target cultures. Therefore, reader awareness remains a significant concept in contemporary translation theory, particularly in discussions concerning translator visibility, cultural representation, and the ethics of translation.

2.3. Domestication and Foreignization

The concepts of **domestication** and **foreignization**, introduced and extensively discussed by Venuti (1995), remain central to contemporary translation theory. These two translation strategies represent contrasting approaches to dealing with linguistic and cultural differences between the source and target texts. The debate surrounding domestication and foreignization has significantly influenced discussions on translator visibility, cultural representation, and the ethics of translation.

Domestication refers to a translation strategy that adapts the source text to the linguistic norms, cultural values, and expectations of the target audience. The primary objective of domestication is to produce a text that reads fluently and naturally in the target

language, thereby minimizing elements that may appear unfamiliar or foreign to readers. Through this approach, cultural references, idioms, and stylistic features of the source text are often modified to ensure readability and accessibility. While domestication facilitates comprehension, critics argue that it may reduce cultural diversity by assimilating foreign texts into the dominant norms of the target culture.

In contrast, foreignization is a translation strategy that deliberately preserves aspects of the source culture and language within the translated text. Rather than concealing cultural differences, foreignization highlights them, reminding readers that they are engaging with a text originating from a different linguistic and cultural context. This approach may involve retaining foreign terms, cultural references, stylistic peculiarities, and unfamiliar expressions that reflect the distinctiveness of the source text. As a result, readers are encouraged to recognize and engage with cultural differences rather than encountering a fully assimilated version of the original work.

Venuti (1995) advocates foreignization as a more ethical translation practice because it challenges the cultural dominance often associated with domesticated translations. He argues that domestication can reinforce cultural hegemony by making foreign texts conform to the values and expectations of the target culture, thereby obscuring the uniqueness of the source culture. Foreignization, on the other hand, resists this tendency by preserving cultural otherness and encouraging readers to confront linguistic and cultural differences. In this way, foreignization promotes greater intercultural awareness and critical engagement with translated texts.

Furthermore, the domestication–foreignization dichotomy has become an important framework for examining the ideological dimensions of translation. Scholars have used these concepts to investigate how translation strategies shape cultural representation, influence reader perceptions, and reflect broader power relations between languages and cultures. Consequently, the debate continues to occupy a prominent position in translation studies, particularly in discussions concerning translator visibility, reader awareness, and the ethical responsibilities of translators in cross-cultural communication.

2.4. Paratexts and Visibility of Translator

The concept of **paratexts**, developed by Genette (1997), has become an important framework in translation studies for understanding the relationship between texts and their readers. Paratexts refer to supplementary materials surrounding a text, including prefaces, introductions, footnotes, endnotes, glossaries, and translator's notes. These elements function as mediating devices that influence how readers interpret and engage with a text.

In translation, paratexts serve as significant sites of **translator visibility**. Through paratextual interventions, translators can explain cultural references, clarify linguistic ambiguities, and provide contextual information that may not be readily accessible to target readers. Such additions make the translator's presence more explicit and reveal the

interpretive decisions involved in the translation process. As a result, paratexts challenge the notion of translator invisibility by highlighting translation as an act of cultural and textual mediation.

Furthermore, scholars argue that paratexts contribute to reader awareness by encouraging readers to recognize the translated nature of a text and the cultural negotiations underlying its production. Consequently, paratexts play a crucial role in facilitating cross-cultural understanding and promoting transparency in translation practices (Genette, 1997).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The research uses a qualitative textual analysis, which is a well-known methodology of the translation studies. It is interpretive and not evaluative and puts a lot of focus on meaning, ideology, and cultural representation.

3.2. Data Selection

Three literary traditions were chosen:

- Urdu short story (Saadat Hasan Manto).
- Persian poetry (Hafez or Rumi)
- The Arabic prose fiction (Naguib Mahfouz)

Each of the texts was analyzed with one published English translation.

3.3. Analytical Criteria

The analysis was done based on the uniform criteria:

- Semantic shift
- Cultural mediation
- Translation strategy
- Translator visibility
- Reader impact

4. Findings

The qualitative examination of the chosen English translations of Urdu, Persian, and Arabic language shows stable relevance and theoretically substantial tendencies as to the invisibility of the translators in world literature. These results illustrate that translation strategies are not dialectically and linguistically neutral practices but rather culturally and ideologically encumbered practices that define the perception of the foreign literatures by the readers.

4.1. Fluency as a Mechanism of Translator Invisibility

Among the most noticeable results of the research, it can be mentioned that fluency-oriented translation is also a leading process with the help of which the invisibility of translators can be achieved. Throughout analyzed texts, the translated texts flow with

ease and are in accordance to the usual English literature standards. Such fluency gives an illusion that the text is a unique piece of English literary work and thus hides the role of translation.

Consequently, the readers are put in the situation of being consumers of a seemingly transparent text and not the interpreters of mediated cultural artifact. The lack of linguistic resistance does not leave anybody wanting to know how the meaning has been made or distorted during the translation process.

4.2. Defocusing of Culture-Specific Meanings

It is analyzed that in translation the ideas that are specific to culture get often downsized, generalized, or de-neutralized. The ghairat and symbolic systems like Sufi wine imagery are then deprived of their cultural density when translated into English counterparts that do not have the same social, religious or philosophical appeal.

This shrinkage results in semantic flattening whereby the sophisticated cultural meanings are condensed into condensed categories, which are familiar. This simplification enhances the readability of the work; however, the accessibility of the epistemological and ethical complexities of the source culture is restricted too.

4.3. Domestication as an Ideological Reframing

One area that has been of great importance relates to the fact that domestication tends to have more ideological reframing as opposed to a situation that involved linguistic adaptation. The collective social values are re-constructed on the prism of individual psychology in the identified Arabic prose, which fits the narrative into the Western literary standards.

It is this change which implies that domestication is not necessarily a translation, rather it is a reorganization based on the prevailing ideological presumption especially individualism and secular humanism. World literature is, therefore, depicted in the homogenized frame that gives the predominance to the Western ways of thinking.

4.4. Lack of Paratexts and Reader Paranoia

In the studies being analyzed, the close lack of any paratextual element, whether it is notes by the translator or glossaries or prefrontes, severely restricts the awareness of the reader. In the absence of such guidance, the readers will have little reason to identify cultural gaps, intra languages concepts that cannot be translated or choices that the translator might have made in his interpretation.

According to the results, even slight paratextual intervention may positively impact the reader awareness without the interruption in the story development. The fact that such intervention is absent thus shows not that it would be necessary but a cultural desire to remain unspoken.

4.5. Foreignization as a Push towards Moral Reading

Despite the fact that the examined translations select much in favor of domestication, the inquiry concludes that instances of preserved foreignness, including in-translated words or marked metaphors culturally, can disrupt complacency in the reader. These events make readers understand that difference exists and translation is mediation.

Accordingly, foreignization appears not as a stumbling block in the process of understanding but as the stimulus to an ethical and critically active perception of the reading work.

5. Discussion

The research in the presented study firmly supports and supplements the theoretical statements made by Lawrence Venuti on the concept of translator invisibility, cultural power and ethics in translation. Nevertheless, these findings are discussed in the context of the world literature, the reader, and pedagogical responsibility as well.

5.1. Invisibility of the Translator as an Ideological Situation.

It should be noted that the analysis proves the invisibility of translators not just a figurative choice of style but the ideological situation that was created by the dominant literary and cultural rules. When the translations are introduced into the world as clear and non-dense, the translator and his or her interpretative act slips into the background. It is this invisibility that favors the illusion of the crossing of meaning in undamaged languages, cultures and histories.

Within the framework of world literature, this illusion is especially challenging since more powerful and less dominant cultures are covered in the disguise of equality. Non-Western texts are imported into an international literacy marketplace on conditions prescribed by Anglophone principles of readability and familiarity to a significant extent.

5.2. Awareness in Reading and the Ethics of Representation

The results indicate that there is a direct interaction between the visibility of translators and awareness about the readers. In the case that translators will go unidentified, they will not encourage a reader to identify among the cultural mediation and the ideological change. Because of this, readers are subjected to adopting deformed or incomplete portrayals of foreign cultures without their knowing it.

This brings serious ethical issues to bear. World literature has a tendency of being introduced as the vehicle to encourage cross-cultural awareness but invisibility cancels this objective by providing the comfort as opposed to confrontation. Ethical reading does not just mean the availability of foreign texts but it also means the understanding of how the foreign texts have been restructured to circulate globally.

5.3. Domestication and Cultural Homogenization

The discussion also indicates that domestication is one of the factors that contribute to cultural homogenization of world literature. Translations are also posing a threat that the epistemological diversity will disappear by matching the divergent literary traditions

with the Western narrative conventions. Secularized traditions made mystical, societal collectivism transformed into impressive personal psychologies, as well as the moral systems inherent in culture, into an abstract definition.

His is not merely a process of misrepresenting individual texts, but of redefining what world literature really is, as a solid, readily digestible set of canons instead of a difference, tension, and translation.

5.4. Re-considering Accessibility and Readability

One of the implications of the discussion is the necessity to reconsider the correlation existing between the readability and accessibility. The results dispel the belief that foreignization is a sure cause of alienation of readers. By the opposite, the more the foreign elements and explanatory paratexts are strategically located, the more it may be possible to involve the engagement and the critical reflection.

The idea of accessibility is, thus, not to be compared to cultural erasure. Ethical translation strives to find a mediocre where the readers are aided to experience the difference instead of being screened out of it.

5.5. Consequences on Pedagogy of World Literature

This discussion indicates that there is a strong need to foreground translation during teaching of world literature. The translation is considered as transparent originals; this makes the students deprived of the instruments on critical reading. The change in making translation visible enables the teaching of world literature not as a colorless anthology of world masterpieces but as a dynamic process, which is characterized by intervention and force and interpretation.

Awareness among students and their culture to a certain extent, encouraging students to compare translations, analyze paratexts, consider translation strategies can dramatically raise awareness among students.

6. Conclusion

This paper has indicated that translator invisibility plays a vital role in comprehending how readers become aware and understanding the world literature on a culture. Though there is also an increase in both fluency and access, it is more likely to obscure cultural complexity and translator agency. The presence of the foreignizing strategies and the paratextual advice will make translators more visible to promote ethical translation and the educated reading habit. The world literature should then be perceived to be less like the seamless world canon but as a system of translated and culturally mediated texts.

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Appendix

Excerpt 1: Urdu Short Fiction (Saadat Hasan Manto)

Source Text (Urdu – transliterated)

“Us ne ghairat ke naam par khamoshi ikhtiyar ki.”

(From Urdu social-realist narrative tradition)

Published English Translation (Fluent / Domesticated)

“He remained silent in the name of honor.”

Excerpt 2: Persian Sufi Poetry (Rumi / Hafez)

Source Text (Persian – transliterated)

“May-e ishq ra benosh ke in ja joz mastī nist.”

(Literally referring to divine love through wine imagery)

Published English Translation (Domesticated)

“Drink deeply of love’s wine, for only passion matters here.”

Excerpt 3: Arabic Prose Fiction (Naguib Mahfouz)

Source Text (Arabic – transliterated)

“Kāna yakhshā kalām an-nās qabla ayyi shay’.”

(Literally: fear of communal judgment)

Published English Translation (Domesticated)

“He was haunted by his own inner fears.”